I think AR technology like that used in the knickknack project will become popular, but I’d imagine it would gain popularity first in the world of gaming and advertising. The ability to project animated scenes in 3d over any object holds a lot of potential, but the desire for the technology does not exist in every discipline.

The world of gaming already uses AR with apps like Pokémon Go! and it is not far fetched to imagine some day you would be able to download a template that allows a 3D gaming projection wherever you are. Games could simulate spells coming from your own hands, zombies breaking into your home, or fictional characters that can sit in your living room and talk to you. These applications are currently quite difficult as it is hard to map an entire space with AR and may not seem worth the effort when you can just simulate a space with current VR technology, but as the medium improves it is difficult to imagine people will not want to interact with fictional worlds in a tangible way that are placed within their own world.

Advertising is the other big field where this might take off. Advertising already attempts some amount of VR in certain building wrap-around electronic billboards that give the illusion of some 3D effect off a building, but with widespread AR they could do significantly more. The key here is that an advertisement does not need an immense amount of story, it just needs to be eye-catching which AR certainly has the potential to be. AR allows for fast moving 3D effects that “pop out” at you, and while these effects, at least early on, are likely to be somewhat jittery depending on the users’ movements but a short scene for an advertisement could easily catch the eye without any of the shortcomings of the medium showing.

Beyond 3D billboards, advertisers could also allow people to do things like test a piece of furniture in their home, simulate what it would look like if they painted their house, even “try on” clothing online. The interpersonal aspect of AR, the fact that you and your things interact with the virtual, makes it a likely target for advertisements because advertisements will no longer have to get you to imagine what life would be like with their product, they will show you.

Beyond gaming and advertising, if the hardware is commonplace AR will likely take off as the cost of AR production extremely low (relative to other visual-aid options). The product only must be made once and then the software can be distributed and duplicated at next to no cost. As with anything in software, upkeep cost is non-trivial, but for large companies keeping one piece of software up to date is far more cost effective than producing millions of physical things. Artwork could jump off the page and watches could display mini clock-towers without needing to have a watch mechanism inside them at all. The list of objects that could be enhanced by AR is endless, and the monetary cost is quite low.

AR does have its drawbacks too. Obstruction of reality could easily be abused: things like real-time censorship and illusions to hide or enhance objects has bone-chilling implications. These negatives will not be enough to stop the tide of technology, however. If the hardware for AR becomes commonplace, then the software will inevitably follow both good and bad.