

Comments for Week 8

I have been noticing something recently, and this hit me particularly clearly when I started thinking about AR. It seems as if a lot of us are in search of the Magic Hammer of UI Justice, which will smash down all the problems of yesteryears and produce this new UI archetype that will be able to solve all those problems. Unfortunately, AR is not it. Having worked with it, I am perhaps more acutely aware of it, because I recall how much work it took to get each little tiny bit of the system to do anything at all. 3D seems to suggest that things will be more real, more interactive, more a part of the real world. However, the sad truth is that AR has nowhere near the level of infrastructure and technology necessary to really make it happen. Even the cutting edge gear used today is simply too clunky and jury-rigged to anything close to everyday use. AR is a good tool, and when well used, it can be a great asset. However, it is generally a solution to a few very specific problems.

Having said that, I think it is a revolution waiting to happen. This paper is not the first to describe such things. These ideas have existed since the 60's. Luckily, by the time we get our hands on the equipment to make it happen, we will have a pretty good idea of how to make things happen. Right now, things are still down at that phase, and much of the work (despite the rosy picture of the article) remains the down-in-the-trenches pick-and-shovel sort of work. Regardless, I am uncertain that I would like all aspects of life to be really augmented. I for one, despite my interests, do enjoy my own view of the world. While having the augmented view might make be better/faster/smarter/timelier/etc, the more pervasive a technology gets, the worse its negative impacts become, and I feel that AR can have many such impacts as well, once it comes to fruition. Just as an example, we no longer bother to remember phone numbers thanks to the ubiquitous cell phones (a conjunction of a mobile phone book with a mobile phone). That is not so bad. I have better uses for my memory. However, if I started not to bother to think on my feet because my augmented glasses tell me things, I think that would bother me. At this point, it's all vaporware, and this is pure speculation. However, at some point, we will have to decide as a society what we are willing to trade in for these advantages. A lot of UI design is a social commentary, and this is no different. At the end of the day, the truth is that people are insecure about themselves, and so they will embrace this technology, and they will not (I will say this with conviction and a guarantee) know where to draw the line, even when the capabilities have crossed the line. AR might be a new way to see the world, however, each of these shifts in technology and the ensuing rise in ability also require a new way to look at ourselves, and this is something that I feel we have consistently failed to do, and in some ways fear that we will fail to do in the future.
