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User Interface Metaphors for Augmented Reality — part 1

According to the Oxford English dictionary:

metaphor

/ˈmetəfə, 'metəfɔː/

noun

a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable.

It's the art of describing something in terms of another thing. As a writer, sometimes I would use a metaphor to heighten a concept — “she is a galaxy and all of its stars”. Sometimes I would simplify it. Either way, I am deploying metaphors for effect.

When dealing with a technology that people are still trying to reconcile with, it pays to use metaphors for simplification. You can make a technology and the applications that use it that much more inviting. You lower the barrier of entry.

I recently took Google's [Introduction to Augmented Reality and ARCore](#) course and there is one module that specifically addresses this — the lack of UI metaphors for augmented reality. When you think of VR/AR, the clearest image that might come to your head is that of a clunky VR headset and everything else you think of feels full of potential but it's messy and abstract.



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But, as designers (I'm not a designer yet but I'm studying to be one), we would then need to look at populating an AR device's UI with more metaphors. Some of this is down to the user. These technologies haven't been used enough for people to know how to interact with them. They're not sure what gestures are involved. It will take a lot of communication between designers and users to establish a new lingo for the technology and for the tech to start speaking for itself.

This is part of a series of (short) blogposts where I first wrangle with the concept of UI metaphors and then make educated guesses as to what they could be in the context of AR.

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