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Week 5

Mark Weiser's vision of ubiquitous computing is sadly nowhere near fruition. Too much of ubicomp today focuses on putting computing on PDAs or other handheld devices. This is antithetical to the Weiser version of ubicomp. How is a PDA a "calm" technology? How does it help move information from the periphery to the center? I believe much work goes into making the PDA "attractive", exactly opposite of the Weiser ubicomp: "Attractiveness is the opposite of invisible."

Also, the use of agents seems counter to Weiser ubicomp. The goal is not to make computers more human; the goal is make our interaction with computers more natural. A subtle difference, yes, but in this vision of ubicomp, computers become like everyday objects, things for which we have natural affordances. Computers today require too much training to use. When was the last time you needed training to use a vegetable peeler? Weiser ubicomp aims to make computing as easy to use as a vegetable peeler.

I would like to make a few notes about issues that people should keep in mind when working on ubicomp:

Computers are not magic. Too much of ubicomp, of agent research, focuses on how to make the computer know what I'm interested in, to tell me what I want to know (but don't know already). Only a brain interface would be able to do this, and then, maybe not so well. Ubicomp should focus on creating computers that are wonderful tools, that do the job that we tell them to do well, rather than on computers that try and second-guess what we do.

...the ubiquitous computer leaves you feeling as though you did it yourself. This is vital to successful ubicomp. Computers should make us feel in control, not the other way around. We created the computer; why should we cede control to it? Some may question this, saying, "Well, the computer did the work, so why should you feel like you did it yourself?" Yet we don't say this when we talk about other objects; a kitchen knife does not control us, a piece of wood for use in a table does not control us. We need to reconsider our relationship, our interactions, with computers and change the paradigm of control.

Attractiveness is the opposite of invisible. I wonder about this statement of Mark Weiser's. What form of "attractiveness" is he speaking of? Does he mean attractiveness for attractiveness' sake? Or does he mean ubicomp items should be completely functional? I question this, as even everyday household objects, when designed attractively, can become more of a joy to use.