Pretending to See the Future

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The relationship of computers to us humans has changed radically from mainframes to personal computers. From a user's perspective, telephony has long had a more moderate development, but lately the advent of the mobile phone has had profound impact on many people's everyday life and communication. Now the next, third wave of ubiquitous computing is gradually coming upon us, with precursors in the form of embedded and mobile computing.

The mobile multimedia device is one particular result of technical convergence between the telephone and the personal computer. What do you get when you cross a computer with a telephone? Is it a computer you can make calls with? Is it a telephone you can play games with? Or does the resultant hybrid have emergent properties that cannot be traced directly to its parentage? These are examples of present and near-future issues for the user experience of mobile and ubiquitous multimedia, where the mobile multimedia device is in turn an important part of a larger system.

Interaction design is the most recent addition to the design disciplines, claiming ancestry partly from socially oriented computing disciplines, most notably Human-Computer Interaction, and partly from older, more firmly established design disciplines such as architecture, graphic design and industrial design. Interaction design is about design of the intended use of interactive, digital artifacts. As interaction designers we strive for positive innovation where people as well as technology are different from today.

However, history is rife with examples where people's actual use of an artifact goes counter to the intentions of the designer. History is likely to repeat itself in the future as computing is becoming ubiquitous and moves from the office into the everyday social, physical world, especially considering the flexible qualities of the interactive material. This calls for a renewed perspective on the roles of designers and the people formerly known as users. It will further affect interaction design process and practice.

As interaction designers in the mobile multimedia industry, we aim to take advantage of the results produced by the research community and apply it to our daily practice. Although important work is produced by researchers, several constraints inherent in a commercial context prevent much of its application in the daily work of the interaction design practitioner. To bridge the gap between theory and the design of consumer products, we increasingly enter into partnerships with selected research institutes and universities to produce immediately applicable results, recently in the areas of collaborative and inter-disciplinary design. Armed with new ways of working we will be better prepared for upcoming, possible futures.