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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

Revealed world

By Tim Folger

The regular world presented to us by our five senses – you could call it reality 1.0 – is not always the most user-friendly of places. We get lost in unfamiliar cities; we meet people whose language we don’t understand. So why not try the improved version: augmented reality (AR) or reality 2.0? AR technology superimposes computer-generated images on the real world, via a mobile phone camera or special video glasses.

Early forms of AR are already here. With the right downloads, smart phones can deliver information about nearby ATMs and restaurants and other points of interest. But that’s just the beginning. A few years from now the quantity of information available will have increased enormously. You will not only see that there’s a Chinese restaurant on the next block, you will be able to see the menu and prices, read reviews of it and even find out how busy it is at the time.

This is where the next revolution in computing will take place: not in ever-more sophisticated games that exist in a virtual reality world, but rather in the interface between the real world and the information brought to us via the Internet. Imagine bubbles floating before your eyes, filled with cool information about anything and everything that you see in front of you. Information overload? Perhaps not.

Let’s jump ahead to ten years from now. A person trying to fix their car won’t be looking at a repair manual online or a book with illustrations; they will be wearing a device that projects animated 3-D computer graphics onto the equipment under repair, labelling parts and giving step-by-step guidance. Such technology is already being used by trainee mechanics in the US marines.

The window onto the AR world can be a smart phone or special video glasses that look like wraparound sunglasses. But in ten years’ time these will have been replaced by contact lenses etched with tiny LEDs, which display text and images at a readable distance in front of the eye. So a deaf person wearing these inconspicuous lenses will be able to see a real-time transcript of what people are saying as they speak.

The question is: while we are all absorbed in our new augmented reality worlds, how will we be interacting with each other?

ATM (automatic telling machine) (n) /ˌeɪ tiː ˈem/ a place for withdrawing money also a ‘cash-point’ or ‘hole in the wall’

float (v) /fləʊt/ to hang, supported, in the air or on water

inconspicuous (adj) /ˌɪkənˈspɪkjuəs/ not easily noticed

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