Weaving Information into Our Lives

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Information has long been understood as a separate world, whether the parallel realm of Platonic ideals or the sovereign nation of cyberspace. Computer technology itself has reinforced this understanding of information by compelling us to interact with it while sitting still in front of a glass screen. But this is changing. Computing is rapidly becoming portable, wearable, and generally woven into the activities, relationships, and institutions that organize our lives. How can we understand this complicated new "interface", and how can we design for it? I will present several concepts that may help. In particular, I will argue that this new realm of information systems design cannot be dissociated with the much larger process of redesigning, or at least evolving, the most basic workings of society for a networked world.

CV: Philip E. Agre is an associate professor of information studies at UCLA. He received his PhD in computer science from MIT in 1989, having conducted dissertation research in the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory on computational models of improvised activities. Before arriving at UCLA he taught at the University of Sussex and UC San Diego, and has been a visiting professor at the University of Chicago and the University of Paris. He is the author of "Computation and Human Experience" (Cambridge University Press, 1997), and the coeditor of "Technology and Privacy: The New Landscape" (with Marc Rotenberg, MIT Press, 1997), "Reinventing Technology, Rediscovering Community: Critical Studies in Computing as a Social Practice" (with Douglas Schuler, Ablex, 1997), and "Computational Theories of Interaction and Agency" (with Stanley J. Rosenschein, MIT Press, 1996). His current research concerns the role of emerging information technologies in institutional change; applications include privacy policy and the networked university. He edits an Internet mailing list called the Red Rock Eater News Service that distributes useful information on the social and political aspects of networking and computing to 5000 people in 60 countries.