The Culture of Information: Ubiquitous Computing and Representations of Reality

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Keynote session

In the late 1980s, Weiser suggested that the ages of mainframe and personal computing would give way to a third wave of "ubiquitous computing" -- a confluence of embedded physical computing and pervasive wireless networking. Indeed, ubiquitous computing has become a dominant paradigm for computing research, and an increasingly prevalent form for the delivery of information services.

Ubiquitous computing reconfigures the relationship between people and the world around them. It does this by interpreting that world in terms of information. This is not a new phenomenon. Information systems research has, since its inception, been built upon a model of information as commodity, to be extracted, exchanged, moved, stored, and processed. The idea that the world is populated with information objects and artifacts is at the heart of the technological enterprise. However, in the context of ubiquitous computing, this model privileges certain models of spatial and environmental knowing while obscuring or devaluing others.

In this talk, I will use ubiquitous computing as a lens through which to examine these concerns, and explore the consequences of the model of information as commodity.