## The Analyst
# Robert Matthews

**There's a technology revolution just around the corner – and your hands are at the centre of it**

There was a time when the word 'revolution' conjured up images of mobs storming palaces. Happily, these days it's usually placed alongside words like 'technological' and is much more genteel. Indeed, one could break out right under your nose and it would still pass you by.

I remember reading a piece back in the 1980s about a lunatic idea called 'hypertext', which the author hailed as a "new way of reading", allowing us to jump seamlessly from one concept to another at the click of a 'mouse'. I decided the writer was clearly under the influence of LSD, and forgot all about it. Then a few years later, some geek put hypertext at the core of a new way of accessing information on computer networks. And before you could

say "Tim Berners-Lee, you should get out more", the World Wide Web had sparked the greatest revolution in information since the invention of the printing press.

Ever since, I've tried to be a bit more receptive to revolutions-in-the-making. And now I think I've spotted one. Well, actually, my 14-year-old, technology-guru son spotted it. He thinks it is brilliant, which is a bit of a surprise, as its inventor, PhD student Pranav Mistry of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, calls it a "wearable gesture interface". Hardly the sort of thing that usually excites teenage kids.

Such gizmo-talk usually has an effect on me akin to inhaling large amounts of carbon monoxide. But check out the demos of Mistry's SixthSense technology

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on the web (http://bit.ly/gestureinterface), and you too may get the feeling you're seeing a glimpse of life circa 2020.

It's got a lot in common with Berners-Lee's brilliant idea. First, it addresses an issue everyone understands. At the moment, if we want mobile access to our digital world, we have to cart around stuff like laptops, smartphones and eReaders. Mistry has come up with a way of doing it all using something we've carried with us for millions of years – our hands.

Like Berners-Lee, he's based it on simple technology that already exists. All that hardware we now lug around is replaced by a small wearable device containing a projector, a camera, wireless technology and sensors on your hands able to interpret simple gestures. Want to take a photo? Just frame the subject with your fingers and make a click gesture with your thumb. The sensors understand that you want to take a picture, so the camera snaps the shot and then stores it online via the wireless link. Want to read a book while waiting for a bus? Just hold out your palm, and the device projects the pages on to it. No more fumbling around for the right gadget: quite literally, they've all become part of you.

Mistry's prototype can do all this and more – and for an estimated cost of less than a netbook. But will it take off? This ageing techno-cynic thinks so, for three reasons. First – and again, like Berners-Lee – Mistry has opted to put the success of the revolution before personal gain by making all the software secrets of his invention freely available. Second, electronics companies are already talking to Mistry about it. And third, which for me is the clincher, is that my teenage son wants one of these gadgets right now, this instant. And these days, that's all you need to spark a revolution.