

# The Actuated Workbench: 2D Actuation in Tabletop Tangible Interfaces

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B.A. Sociology 1999  
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Submitted to the Department of Media Arts and Sciences,  
School of Architecture and Planning,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Media Arts and Sciences at the  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
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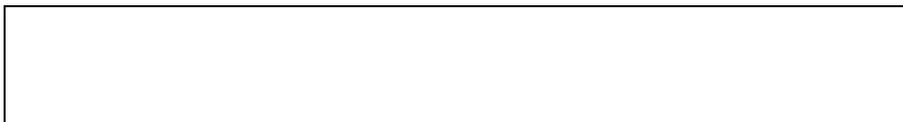
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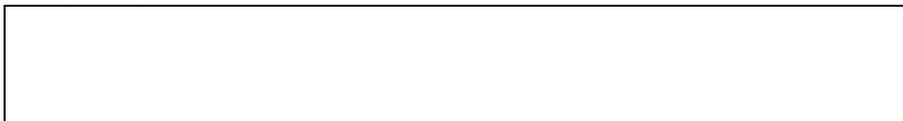
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## Abstract

The Actuated Workbench is a new actuation mechanism that uses magnetic forces to control the two-dimensional movement of physical objects on flat surfaces. This mechanism is intended for use with existing tabletop Tangible User Interfaces, providing computer-controlled movement of the physical objects on the table, and creating an additional feedback layer for Human Computer Interaction (HCI). Use of this actuation technique makes possible new kinds of physical interactions with tabletop interfaces, and allows the computer to maintain consistency between the physical and digital states of data objects in the interface. This thesis focuses on the design and implementation of the actuation mechanism as an enabling technology, introduces new techniques for motion control, and discusses practical and theoretical implications of computer-controlled movement of physical objects in tabletop tangible interfaces.

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# 1. Introduction

At the inception of the Tangible Interface realm of Human Computer Interaction (HCI), a research vision called “Tangible Bits” [19] sought to leverage people’s existing skills for interacting with the physical world toward improving their interactions with computers. The stated research goal was to extend computation beyond traditional Graphical User Interfaces (GUIs) to interfaces that use physical objects and the physical world as tangible embodiments of digital information. Such interfaces allow users direct control of computation through the manipulation of physical objects. These stand in contrast to the traditional Graphical User Interface, which usually consists of a computer monitor (graphical display), keyboard, and pointing device, such as a mouse or trackball. Instead, Tangible User Interfaces (TUIs) aim to provide users with means to directly manipulate electronic media by manipulating physical objects that represent the data itself, rather than pointers to it. The physical objects in tangible interfaces can take on many forms. Some are simple knobs and levers, while more advanced interfaces include physical models of buildings [52] or lumps of clay [36]. As electronic sensing technologies continue to advance, the possibilities continue to grow for designing physical input devices for computers.

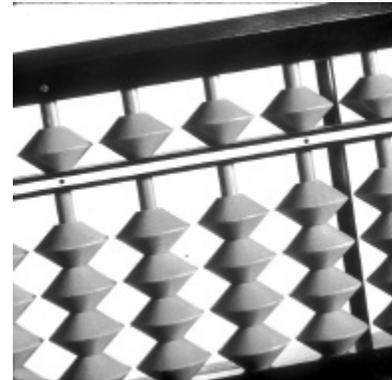


Figure 1.1 An abacus, longtime icon of the Tangible Bits concept. The abacus is an interface containing a physical instantiation of every bit, and the physical state of the system represents a logical state that can be both seen and felt by the user..

## 1.1 Tabletop Tangible Interfaces

Recent tangible interface research has given rise to a class of systems based on physical interaction with interactive tabletop surfaces. These systems, which I will refer to as ‘tabletop tangible interfaces’ (or ‘tabletop TUIs’ for short), track the position and movement of objects on a flat surface and respond to users’ physical manipulation of these objects with graphical output. In most tabletop tangible interfaces, as the user physically interacts with the system, graphical feedback is usually projected on and around the objects on the table. The objects are treated as physical instantiations of digital data: users make adjustments to the digital state of a data item by 1) moving (translating, rotating, etc.) or 2) modifying

the physical object (pressing a button on it, placing another object on top of it, etc.). Both of these actions not only change the object's state relative to absolute X and Y position on the table, but also in relation to other objects on the table. The distance between physical objects is often mapped to some aspect of data in the digital realm, and therefore the user can easily tell relationships in the digital part of the interface from the physical relationship of the objects.

### **Advantages of Tabletop Tangible Interfaces**

Tabletop tangible interfaces offer many advantages over interaction with purely graphical computer interfaces. Users can organize objects spatially in the physical area around them, providing a kinesthetic sense of the location of each data item [34]. Tabletop interfaces allow users to perform two-handed interactions with data, making it possible to adjust several different parameters of a simulation or application simultaneously. These interfaces also foster ease of collaboration between multiple collocated users, since the work area is expanded from a small computer monitor to a large tabletop area. Since there is no need for an intermediary tool or pointing device, such as a mouse, any user around the table can reach out and adjust parameters in the application simply by moving associated physical objects.

### **Limitations of Current Tabletop Tangible Interfaces**

Current tabletop tangible interface systems share a common weakness. While users provide input by manipulating of physical objects, computer output occurs only through sound or graphical projection. This discrepancy between input and output can make the objects feel more like pointers to digital data and less like physical manifestations of the data itself. Links between physical objects and digital data can also break down when changes occur in the underlying computation that are not reflected in physical changes of associated objects on the table. Since the computer system cannot physically move objects on the table surface, the computer cannot correct physical inconsistencies in the layouts of the objects, and such corrections are left to the user. In addition, tabletop tangible interfaces cannot provide users with *physi-*

cal versions of functionality commonly found in graphical user interfaces. Only graphically can the computer system express common interactive functions such as 1) undoing physical input, 2) saving and restoring physical positions of objects in a simulation, or 3) guiding users in manipulation of objects. Most tabletop tangible interfaces respond to users' physical input with output that is not physical, such as sound, light, or graphical displays. For these tangible interfaces, physical interaction between human and computer remains one-directional.

## 1.2 Thesis Goal

This thesis describes the design and development of the Actuated Workbench, a system that provides a hardware and software infrastructure for a computer to move objects horizontally on a table surface. The mechanism for moving objects on the table is a technological innovation using electromagnetic forces to move objects in the manner of a linear induction motor (LIM) expanded to two dimensions. As a Research Assistant in the Tangible Media Group at the MIT Media Lab, I developed this actuation system for use with pre-existing tabletop tangible interfaces, providing a general actuation platform for moving objects in two dimensions.

Actuation can be defined as:

1. A bringing into action; movement [*Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, © 1996, 1998 MICRA, Inc]
2. the act of propelling [*WordNet* ® 1.6, © 1997 Princeton University]

In this thesis, I use the term 'actuation' to describe the two-dimensional movement of objects on a flat surface. The attraction and repulsion of an electromagnetic array propels magnetic objects on top of a tabletop tangible interface, allowing both the user and computer to move the objects for physical interaction.

The Actuated Workbench represents one attempt to "close the loop" in the interactive tabletop realm of tangible inter-

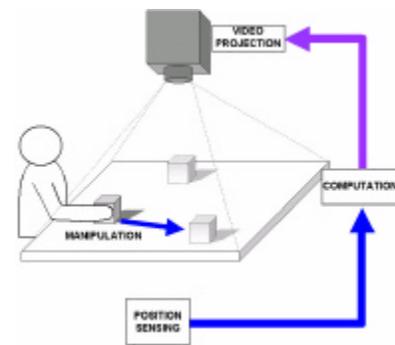


Figure 1.2 Traditional Tabletop Tangible Interfaces track multiple objects on a tabletop and respond to user's physical input with graphical output from projection overhead.

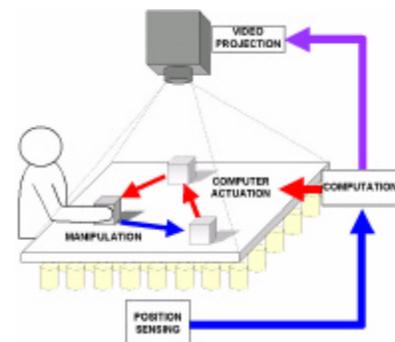


Figure 1.3 The Actuated Workbench uses magnetic movement of objects on the table as an additional layer of feedback between the computer and the user.

faces, matching physical input with physical output. It is one of only a few projects in tangible interfaces research that attempt to match physical input with physical output [7, 16, 45]. In this thesis, I will situate the system in the context of past related work and supporting theory, discuss some theoretical implications of actuation in tangible interface design, discuss the variety of hardware and software design decisions involved in its construction, describe the underlying technology of the Actuated Workbench and evaluate its performance in light of my design criteria, and finally suggest preliminary applications of this actuation technology. Several of these applications were implemented in collaboration with Dan Maynes-Aminzade, another research assistant in the Tangible Media Group. The Actuated Workbench was developed under the guidance of my advisor, Professor Hiroshi Ishii. The term “we” in this thesis refers to myself, Dan Maynes-Aminzade, and Professor Hiroshi Ishii, as this was truly a collaborative project throughout most of its design and development.

## 2. Theory: Space, Movement, and Haptics for Input Devices

Tangible User Interface design finds support in early HCI research and psychological studies of kinetics and spatial reasoning. This section discusses work that has been used in the past as supporting arguments for advantages of both graphical interfaces and tangible interfaces. Much of this work has been discussed at length in other publications related to Tangible User Interfaces (TUIs) as well as tabletop TUIs. Since this thesis is primarily about *actuation* in Tabletop TUIs, its agenda already assumes the benefits of tabletop TUIs as input devices. Therefore, I will not go into great detail discussing this work. Extensive discussion of these and other supporting works can be found in: Fitzmaurice's Ph.D. Thesis [13], Ishii and Ullmer's *Tangible Bits* paper [19], and Patten's MS thesis [34]. However, since much of this work also has implications supporting actuated tabletop TUI, I will touch on some key supporting concepts of this work and discuss how they can be used to argue the benefits of actuated TUI.

### **Manipulation: GUI to Graspable UI to TUI**

Since 1986, the concept of Direct Manipulation [17] has been at the core of both Graphical and Tangible User Interface research. Much published research has demonstrated how tabletop tangible interface design furthers the cause of direct manipulation, providing 1) "a continuous representation of the object of interest," 2) commands effected through physical action rather than complex syntax, and 3) "rapid incremental reversible operations whose impact on the object of interest is immediately visible" [43,44]. In his 1996 thesis on graspable user interfaces, Fitzmaurice argues that "improving the 'directness' and the 'manipulability' of the interface can be achieved by improving the input mechanisms for graphical user interfaces" [13]. He goes on to show how the Bricks interface furthers the cause of direct manipulation by providing users a more physical means of interacting with computer graphics through graspable handles.

Since that publication, tabletop tangible interfaces have further improved the “directness” of manipulation by integrating physical input in the same space as graphical output, often projecting directly onto the objects themselves. This implies to users that they are manipulating physical manifestations of digital data itself, not just physical handles to digital graphics.



Figure 2.1 A subject performing a LEGO sorting task in a study on people's use of spatial arrangement and two-handed manipulation.

### **Kirsh: The Intelligent Use of Space**

Kirsh's research on people's use of physical space shows that the use of physical objects and spatial organization can reduce cognitive load in task performance. Kirsch's experiments [24, 25] have shown that subjects who were provided with a means of physically offloading a computational task onto physical objects in front of them were able to perform tasks (such as counting coins) with improved completion times and reduced error rates. Experiments conducted elsewhere involve similar tasks such as sorting small LEGO parts by color [13] (Figure 2.1). What is interesting is the number of these experiments that note improved performance results in conditions involving the use of *multiple hand-sized objects resting on tabletops*. These results suggest that a computer interface using objects on a tabletop would provide similar reductions in cognitive load and increased performance.

A prime example of such results is an experiment conducted by James Patten during his preliminary work on the Sensetable project [35]. The experiment measured subjects' performance in a memory task, comparing the use of graphical objects, displayed on a screen and manipulated by a mouse, with the use of electronically tagged physical objects. He found that subjects who adopted specific strategies involving the spatial layout of objects performed better on the memory recall task. Patten attributes some of these results to subjects' ability to use their bodies as references to the positions of individual objects. From this and other observations, he speculates that the objects people use for such tasks must be large enough to prompt a visceral association with users, yet small enough that many objects can be laid out within arms reach for easy manipulation by a single user.

### Input Devices: Time Multiplexing vs. Space Multiplexing

Fitzmaurice and Buxton have created a taxonomy of input devices for computer functions. Since there are often many different logical functions that can be performed in a computer application, user input must be multiplexed between these functions. Buxton and Fitzmaurice describe input devices as either “time-multiplexing” or “space-multiplexing” [14]. With a traditional mouse and keyboard GUI, the mouse is time-multiplexed between logical functions, meaning that the user repeatedly attaches and detaches the mouse to on-screen tools in order to perform different functions. For example, to switch between a pencil tool and an eraser tool in a GUI drawing program, the user clicks with the mouse on either tool to attach the logical function to the mouse pointer, and then proceeds to use that new function. The keyboard, on the other hand, is space-multiplexed for the input of characters to the computer, providing a discrete physical location for each letter of the alphabet as well as other commands. This layout makes touch-typing possible, as the user can remember the persistent location of each letter and can learn to access each letter quite quickly using muscle memory. TUI allows several physical input devices to be simultaneously attached to logical functions, allowing users to access different tools simply by grabbing different physical objects in front of them. TUI input devices are said to be space-multiplexed because they are persistently bound to logical functions and the user’s input is swapped between physical devices. Fitzmaurice and Buxton argue that space-multiplexed input devices have fewer stages of acquisition before interaction, allowing faster computer input from the user (Figure 2.3).

Snibbe et al. also argue that systems having multiple “modes” for input devices (time-multiplexed input) require that the user keep track of the mode in which the input device was last used, and whether that device’s mode must be switched to a new mode before it can be used for another task [47]. Such mode switching increases workload and user error, since the user is charged with the task of monitoring both the physical and digital state of the input device. Snibbe et al. argue for removing as much mode-switching from input

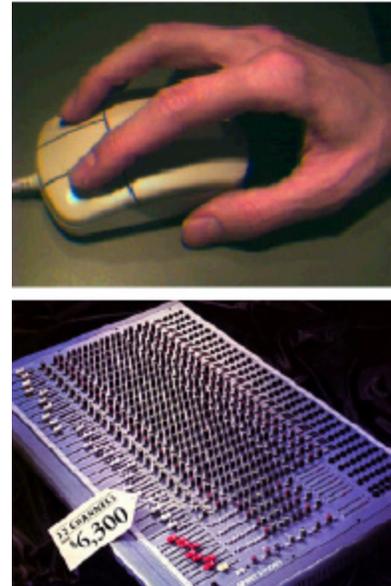


Figure 2.2 According to Buxton and Fitzmaurice’s taxonomy, the mouse (top) is a time-multiplexed input device, while the mixing board (bottom) is a space-multiplexed input device.

### GUI (Time-Multiplexed)

1. Acquire physical device
2. Acquire logical device
3. Manipulate logical device

### TUI (Space-Multiplexed)

1. Acquire physical device
2. Manipulate logical device

Figure 2.3 Fitzmaurice and Buxton’s acquisition stages for interaction with logical devices. The space multiplexed condition contains one fewer phases of preparatory action for manipulating logical devices.

devices as possible, saying that modeless interaction provides the user with a “consistent and trustworthy physical behavior, like that of a car steering wheel.” In modeless interaction, the behavior of a particular input device is predictable, and the user can take advantage of this predictability by anticipating how the device will react given a certain input. Space-multiplexed input devices exhibit modeless interaction through persistent mappings to logical functions and through their consistent physical behavior.

Fitzmaurice and Buxton conducted an experiment comparing space-multiplexed input devices with time-multiplexed input devices in an on-screen target tracking task [14]. They found that subjects performed the task with less error (i.e. more accurate and constant tracking) in the space-multiplexed condition than in the time-multiplexed condition. They also noted that in the time-multiplexed condition, subjects spent almost 50% of device manipulation time acquiring new logical functions for the input device, indicating the large cost of switching the function of the input device. Their results suggest that computer interfaces consisting of multiple, space-multiplexed input devices on a tabletop offer significant time and error improvements over time-multiplexed input devices such as a mouse.

Their experiment also contained separate conditions for space-multiplexed devices with specific physical form (such as a ruler) vs. generic physical form (puck-like objects). The condition with specific physical form yielded better performance results than the condition of generic physical form, which they attribute to the physical form reminding users of the function of each input device. However, *both* of the space-multiplexed conditions outperformed the time-multiplexed input condition, suggesting that even TUIs with generic physical form provide a clear advantage to users. These results support a subsequent step in tabletop TUI design toward generic form factors and the use of both space and time-multiplexing interaction techniques. In a complex application running on a tabletop tangible interface, problems of space, organization, and cost make it difficult or impractical

to have a devoted physical input device for every logical function available in a computer application. Tabletop TUIs involving objects with generic physical form, such as Sensetable, can offer a combination of both space-multiplexing and time-multiplexing input techniques. The Sensetable system tracks multiple, space-multiplexed physical input devices, built with a generic shape that indicates little about a device's logical function. Devices can be dynamically attached and detached to logical functions, and the functions or parameters to which devices are attached are indicated by projection on and around the objects. Users can use these devices in a space-multiplexed-only scenario, or if they desire fewer objects on the table (to reduce clutter, for example), they can use the objects as time-multiplexed input devices.

These and other arguments have been made supporting the development of tabletop TUIs and their progression toward the generic form factors commonly used today. The next section describes past work in tabletop tangible interfaces, and the development of interaction techniques using physical objects.

### 3. Related Technologies 1: Tabletop Tracking Technologies

One cannot discuss the evolution of interactive tabletop interfaces without charting the evolution of technologies associated with them. In this chapter I describe various techniques used in tabletop systems to track objects on flat surfaces, the types of interactions afforded by such technologies at the time, and the limitations inherent in the tracking technologies. Many of the interaction techniques developed in these systems inspired as many questions as they did answers, and I will mention some of these questions as they arise.

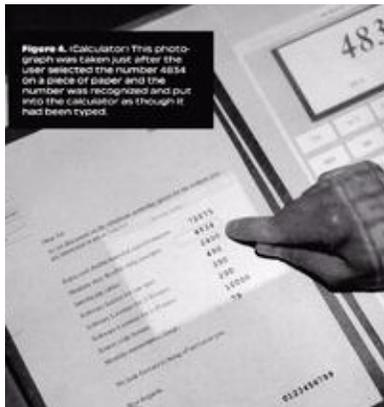


Figure 3.1 Wellner's Digital Desk combines graphical projection with a computer vision system that recognizes users' gestures as well as paper documents on the table.

#### The Digital Desk (1993): Computer Vision.

One of the pioneering works in Interactive physical/digital desktops is Wellner's Digital Desk [53] (Figure 3.1). This system turned a desk surface into a virtual 'touchscreen', allowing users to manipulate digital graphics projected on a tabletop by touching the tabletop and dragging the graphics around. The system captured these gestures with an overhead camera and picked up commands such as pointing and tapping on the table with a microphone attached to the desk. Example applications included a virtual calculator where the buttons were projected onto the tabletop, and a document scanner that created projected digital versions of papers on the table and allowed the user to manipulate the digital documents by pointing and dragging with a fingertip. Wellner's dream for the system also included the use of physical objects, such as paper and pens, so that users could add content to the system through handwriting or through optical character recognition of typed papers. Computer vision could theoretically provide the system with the ability to identify and track any object on the table without the need for tagging or pre-programming the system. However, at the time of the Digital Desk's publication, computer vision technology had not matured sufficiently to provide such functionality.

### **Bricks (1995): Flock of Birds Magnetic Tracker.**

Fitzmaurice, Buxton, and Ishii's "Bricks" [12] are perhaps the first published example of tabletop tangible interfaces, then called 'graspable' interfaces, providing physical objects as 'handles' for manipulating digital graphics projected on a tabletop. Here, a Polhemus "flock of birds" 6D magnetic tracking system [37] was used to track users' movements of two graspable objects on a table. These objects were used as handles to virtual objects which were rear-projected onto the surface of the table. The handles allowed the user to move the projection by repositioning the objects on the table. This system suffered limitations because it included only two tracked physical objects (though capable of accommodating more objects, the Flock of Birds system was then prohibitively expensive), and because the objects were tethered (connected with wires to the computer), making it somewhat awkward to manipulate them, especially if more objects were added.

### **metaDESK (1997): IR Vision**

The metaDESK [51] system extended ideas introduced by the Bricks system, moving from generic physical handles for information to specific physical instantiations -- "phicons" or "physical icons" -- of data in tabletop interfaces. In this case, two or three physical models of buildings were tracked on a tabletop by an infrared camera under the table. These models were associated with specific buildings on a map rear-projected on the table. Users could manipulate these models to pan, rotate, or zoom the map, and the system would then update the graphical projection on the table, as well as the graphical output on a movable 'magic lens' display.

### **Urp (1999): Advanced Vision Tagging**

The Urp [52] system used advanced computer vision tagging techniques, based on creating unique patterns of reflective colored dots, to simultaneously track the position and orientation of multiple physical objects on a table. Though the technique of tagging objects optically for computer vision tracking was highly advanced for the time, the system still suffered from classic limitations inherent in computer vision systems,



Figure 3.2 Bricks uses a Flock-Of-Birds 6DoF tracker and a rear-projected desktop to allow users to manipulate graphics with the tracked objects. A "paintbucket" at the top of the desk allows the user to change modes by "dipping" a brick into one of the wells.



Figure 3.3 One of the Flock-Of-Birds tethered handles.



Figure 3.4 The MetaDESK system, including two phicons and several lenses to provide additional views of objects on the map.

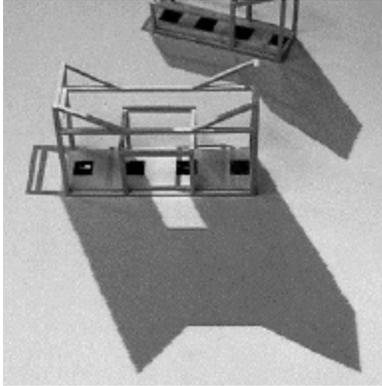


Figure 3.5 The Urp system uses vision tracking and special reflectors to locate models of buildings on the table. A digital shadow of the building is then projected around the model.

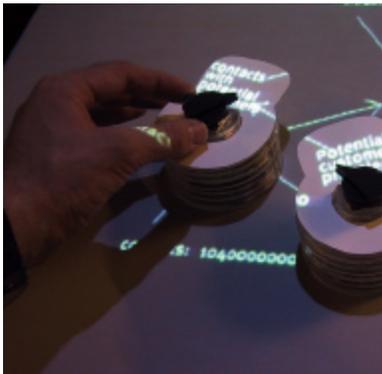


Figure 3.6 Sensetable 1.0. Wacom Intuos Wireless Mice were used inside the pucks, with dials on top that could be used to manipulate variables associated with each parameter in the application.

such as slow tracking speed, jitter, large size of objects (limited by the size of the reflective dots) and occlusion by users' hands.

### **Sensetable (2001): Electromagnetic Tagging**

#### Sensetable 1.0: Wacom Tablets

The advent of commercial electromagnetic tracking technologies provided new levels of functionality and robustness for tabletop interfaces. James Patten's MS thesis, Sensetable, was one of the first systems to take advantage of these technologies and bring new levels of flexibility to tabletop tangible interfaces. The first Sensetable system used Wacom Intuos™ tablets and hacked versions of wireless Wacom computer mice as the technology built into "pucks" on the tabletop. The Wacom system, then state of the art, provided high-precision, extremely fast tracking of two objects on one tablet. Sensetable's designers (at the time, Patten and I) added circuitry to the mice that allowed the system to track twice as many objects with only slightly increased latency. Since the system used radio frequency signals transmitted inductively between the pucks and antennas in the tablet, it suffered none of the stability problems present in computer vision systems. This fast and robust tracking provided the ability to introduce interactions based on users' real-time gestures with pucks on the table. In addition to speed, accuracy, and robustness improvements, the Wacom system provided sensing for rotation of the puck, three separate button presses and the manipulation of a potentiometer (a dial on top of each puck). Sensetable's designers used this additional functionality to develop new interaction techniques, such as the use of physical modifiers (tokens) that could be added to the pucks to change their state, and the inclusion of dials on top of the pucks that allowed users to manipulate variables associated with the pucks.

#### Sensetable 1.5: Zowie

In 2000, Zowie Entertainment™, which later became part of the LEGO Group, developed a new multi-object tracking technology licensed from a patent held by the Scientific Generics corporation [15]. This technology was developed

and cost-reduced enough that it could be built into an affordable toy playset for use with a PC to play interactive games. The playset consisted of movable figurines on a flat plastic surface, which children could move and view interactive graphics on a computer monitor. The tracking technology included passive tags made of LC “tank” circuits, and a flexible antenna array built into the flat surface of the playset. The system measures the amplitude of the tag resonances with several specially shaped antennas. The amplitude of the tag’s resonance with each antenna varies as a function of its position on top of the antenna array. This method gives very stable 2D position data, accurate to within 2 millimeters, of up to nine different tags at refresh rates of up to 10 milliseconds. Since each tag on the table resonates at a different frequency, their positions can be determined independently.

Unlike the Wacom tablet system, Zowie technology is not capable of sensing rotation of these tags. This tracking technology was later modified and used by Patten in final prototypes of the Sensetable 1.5 system. Puck rotation was sensed using two LC tags at opposite ends of a puck.

#### Sensetable 2: Capacitive Sensing

Also included in development plans for the Sensetable system was the design of a new custom tracking platform based on capacitive transfer of radio frequency signals between pucks and the table. This system would provide a hardware infrastructure for tracking as many objects as could fit on the table, and for sensing up to five modifiers and three analog input devices, such as dials, as well as capacitively sensing users’ touch. A prototype of this system was designed by Media Lab graduate Matt Reynolds in the fall of 2000, but was never fully implemented by Patten and myself due to the superior flexibility of the Zowie-based tracking technology.

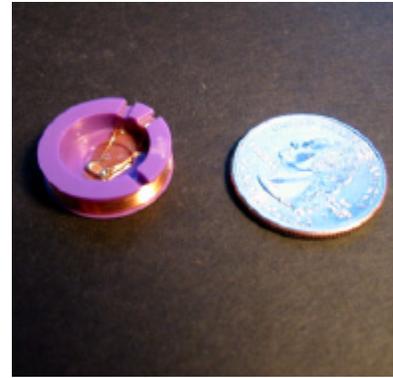


Figure 3.8 A Zowie LC radio frequency tag. US Quarter shown for size.



Figure 3.7 The Ellie's Enchanted Garden playset, which contains the Zowie tracking technology used in the Sensetable 1.5 system.

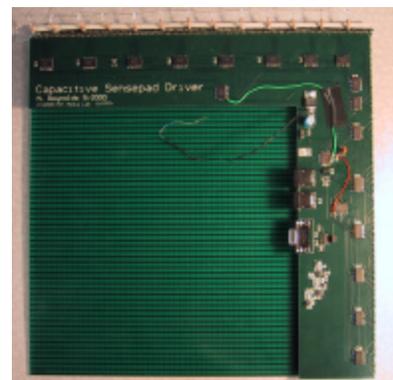


Figure 3.9 Sensetable 2.0 capacitive sensing board, designed by Matt Reynolds.

## 4. TUI Inconsistency and Input Device Design

This chapter describes common problems of consistency among tangible interfaces, especially among the tabletop TUIs described above. As a user interacts with a tabletop tangible interface, there are many ways inconsistencies between physical and digital states can arise. Previously, designers have had to design interfaces so that as few of these inconsistencies arise as possible. The long term goals that inspired this thesis project include a vision for seamless *bi-directional* interaction with physical objects, which might involve the creation of completely new interaction techniques. However, the problem of consistency alone has long called for an actuation technology to address these problems in existing tabletop interfaces. In this chapter, I discuss specific examples of such design techniques and introduce new approaches to resolving inconsistencies through actuation.

### 4.1 TUI Interactions that can lead to Inconsistencies

#### Remote Collaboration

Tangible interfaces have been used in research on remote collaboration and Community Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) for years [52, 26], but the technical challenge of synchronizing remote physical objects has limited the usefulness of such interfaces in spatially distributed applications. For remote collaboration applications of tabletop TUIs, when there are multiple instantiations of a work table, the physical states of objects on the tables can become inconsistent whenever a user moves an object on one table, but the remote user does not move the corresponding object on the other table. Though the graphical projections on top of the tables can be synchronized, discrepancies between the positions of the multiple sets of physical objects on the tables make it difficult to determine which is the “correct” version to be projected on all workbenches. Even if the system could

determine a correct version and project it on the table, users would still have to manually move the objects to the correct positions. Furthermore, the fact that objects can be even temporarily in positions that disagree with corresponding graphical projections tends to break the metaphor that they are in fact two instantiations of the same data item, and the user must mentally accommodate this inconsistency.

### **Parametric Simulation**

A software simulation running in real-time may compute that the digital value associated with a puck on the table has changed. The puck's position or orientation may be inconsistent with the new value of its corresponding software parameter. This can happen if the puck represents a variable dependent on another variable that is adjusted by the user. Without actuation, the computer can only attempt to maintain consistency through graphical projection, either changing the projection to display the change, or perhaps prompting the user to correct this problem by changing the physical state of the object until it is consistent with the digital state.

### **Constraints**

An application may contain pre-programmed constraints on the spatial arrangement of objects on the table, such as zoning laws that apply to the placement of buildings in an urban planning application. Constraints in the simulation can improve functionality in an application, helping to make sure the simulated layout is actually possible in the real world. If the user moves an object to the wrong part of the table, some of these constraints may be violated. Existing systems can provide graphical feedback to let the user know a constraint has been violated, but cannot fix the problem for the user in both the digital and physical representations. Giving the computer the ability to physically move the objects on the table can correct the problem once it has occurred, moving the physical object to a new position that does not violate the constraint. In addition, the use of force feedback can help guide the user away from violating constraints in the first place. If an actuation mechanism has enough force, it could physically inhibit users from moving objects to the wrong

place on the table, but even if the system is not strong enough to physically fight a user's movement of an object, it could still draw users' attention to the violated constraint by lightly tugging on the object, or by making it vibrate in the user's hand. In the case of tabletop TUIs, haptic feedback can be more effective than graphical feedback because the user may be looking elsewhere on the table and not at the object in hand, or because the graphical projection may be occluded by the user's hand grasping the object.

### **Navigation**

On tabletop tangible interfaces, applications with graphical navigation features, such as those using a map [51], have introduced fluid interaction techniques based on the rotation, translation, or scaling of the map by moving physical objects on top of it. For example, physical objects on the table, such as models of a buildings, can be permanently associated with specific positions on the map. A user can move one of the models, and the map displayed on the table changes to follow the user's rotation or translation of the model.

In the design of the MetaDesk system, such map manipulation techniques introduced the question of what happens when there are multiple models of buildings on the same map and a user moves only one model to change the map view. With several models associated with positions of the map, and the displayed map changing to follow the movement of only one model, the physical position of other models on the table will no longer be correct on the new map. In the case of only two models, MetaDESK's designers chose to "ignore the offending rotation," but did not provide a scheme for determining which was the correct or intended rotation. They speculated as to whether the map should be warped to accommodate *all* rotations of the models, but felt that such a display might not make sense or be useful to the user. Moreover, it becomes even more difficult to resort to such a solution when more than two physical objects are used in the interface. Other solutions suggested by MetaDESK's designers include: 1) accommodating as many of the physical positions of objects on the table as possible while ignoring and

highlighting outliers, 2) graphically displaying a suggested “best fit” position for all objects on the table and leaving it to the user to move the objects to their appropriate positions, and 3) providing discrete views of the map in the area immediately surrounding each object (Figure 4.1). As a solution to the case of rotation and zooming by manipulating two objects on the table, the metaDESK designers used a “rotation constraint instrument,” consisting of two physical pucks that slide along an acrylic rod (Figure 4.2). The rod constrains the transformations expressible through the two physical objects by ensuring that their rotations always match each other. Such a solution maintains consistency in the interaction, but becomes increasingly cumbersome as more physical objects are added to the interface. In the original metaDESK system, perhaps the only way of avoiding many large inconsistencies in this type of interaction is to limit the number of physical objects on the table. A computer-controlled system that can simultaneously move multiple objects on the table could easily prevent the rotational consistency dilemma by constantly updating the positions of physical objects on the table, moving them to the correction place as the user moves one or more objects.

### The Nulling Problem

In 1986, Bill Buxton coined this phrase to describe inconsistencies that arise with input devices that are time-multiplexed between multiple parameters in an application [8]. Here, a limited number of input devices (“transducers”) are used to control multiple digital parameters, such that there are more parameters than transducers and the transducers must be swapped between parameters. Often these transducers are ‘absolute’, not ‘relative’ input devices. That is, they put out a discrete value based on their position, not based on relative *changes* to their position. Examples of such transducers are physically directional dials and linear sliders (Figure 4.3). The nulling problem occurs when absolute transducers are swapped (multiplexed) between digital parameters, and the physical state of the transducer must be reset by the user to match each parameter’s preset digital state before further adjustments can be made. Buxton says of the nulling prob-

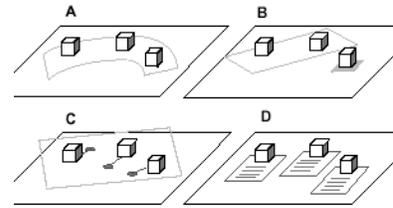


Figure 4.1 MetaDesk alternatives for accommodating multiple rotations of phicons: A) warp to fit; B) flag and ignore outlier; C) best fit with error display; D) discrete views for each phicon.



Figure 4.2 MetaDesk’s designers created a rotation constraint instrument to prevent inconsistent rotations of multiple phicons

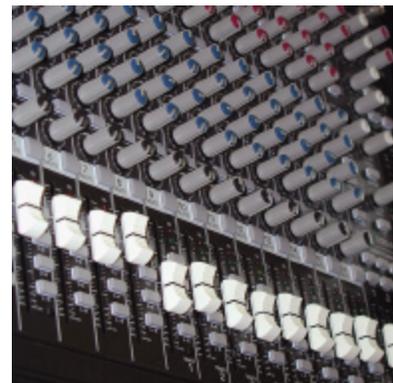


Figure 4.3 This audio mixing board has both physically directional dials and linear sliders, both examples of absolute transducers.

lem: “It is common, takes time to carry out, time to learn, and is a common source of error. Most importantly, it can be totally eliminated if we simply choose a different transducer.”

In his master’s thesis, Patten encountered a nulling problem in the first prototype of the Sensetable system [34]. Here, as pucks in the system were dynamically bound to different parameters, dials on the pucks (Figure 4.4) would be in positions that did not correspond to the preset digital state of the new parameters. Patten resolved this inconsistency by automatically setting the digital value of the new parameter to the current physical position of the dial on the puck. In his user studies, Patten found that this practice confused and frustrated users, since the puck was “supposed to be a physically manipulable representation of the data, rather than solely a tool for changing simulation parameters.” Users wanted the positions of the dials on the pucks to be automatically controlled by the computer. In later versions of the Sensetable system, Patten designed around this problem by using a perfectly round puck as the transducer and mapping relative rotation of the puck to relative changes in the value of its associated parameter. The user received feedback about the current value of the parameter through projection of an arrow or a slider bar next to the puck (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.4 Physical, directional dials on top of pucks in the Sensetable 1.0 system.

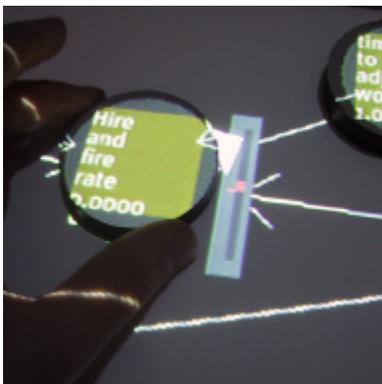


Figure 4.5 Perfectly round pucks with projected graphical arrows and slider bars in the Sensetable 2.0 system.

Buxton recommends avoiding the nulling problem in exactly this way -- by choosing input devices whose physical positions do not correspond absolutely to specific numerical values, and instead whose relative motion (rotation, etc.) corresponds to relative changes relative of the parameter’s digital state. However, Buxton’s argument omits a discussion of the benefits of absolute transducers. The fact that a slider has a limited amount of travel, that a dial has a physical pointer on it, that there are limits to the range and speed of movement of an input device can be of great benefit to interaction. Absolute positioning in input devices provides users with a kinesthetic sense of the current and last input states of the device, as its digital state is a physically persistent quality of the device. Designers such as Snibbe et al. have argued that absolute input transducers allow users to rely on their

muscle memory when returning to a particular input device without the need for another sensory input, such as vision, which may be busily engaged with another task, “as we do when operating a radio dial without looking: specific destinations are stationary relative to the device's base” [47].

If the input device is also actuated, the computer can automatically reset the position of a multiplexed input device to the preset digital state of the new parameter to which it is attached. Moreover, in many interactive workbench applications, the absolute position of objects on the table corresponds to a specific value of a parameter, making it difficult to design “relative” controllers such as those recommended by Buxton. Actuation as a solution to the nulling problem allows workbench application designers to retain the functionality of absolute position controllers where they may be more appropriate to the application than relative controllers. Actuated absolute transducers have already become common in audio mixing boards, in which motorized sliders automatically move to preset positions to set the volume on audio tracks which are mixed together. Automating slider movement allows computer control of the audio mix, while also allowing human override or alteration of the audio mix with the same input transducer.

In addition to his use of pucks as relative transducers in the Sensetable platform, Patten has suggested use of actuation in motorized sliders to control variables in the simulation [34]. Here, sliders (motorized linear slide potentiometers) are bound dynamically to a parameters in a simulation. As a user binds sliders to new parameters, the computer moves each slider to the appropriate position corresponding with the preset digital state of its new associated variable. Patten's sliders were tethered devices, due to the power requirements of the motors in the sliders. The Actuated Workbench makes it possible for such techniques to be applied to controlling the positions of untethered, unmotorized pucks on a table surface, allowing more flexible design of tabletop interfaces, and providing actuated rotation as well as translation of objects.

## 4.2 Haptic Input Devices as Physical Output for Digital Media

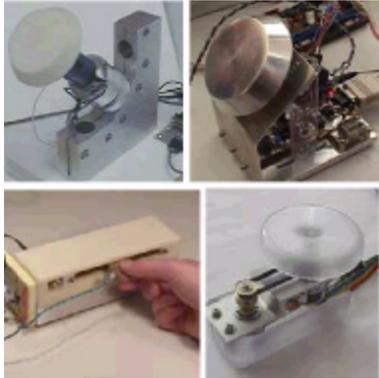


Figure 4.6 Some of Snibbe et al.'s haptic media control devices.

The tactile feedback a user receives from the physical shape and motion of a transducer can be very effective for off-loading the cognitive load of monitoring the state of a changing parameter through some other sensory input, such as vision (watching the projection) or audio (monitoring volume). As multiple aspects of visual interfaces compete for a user's visual attention, and aspects of audio interfaces compete for aural attention, maximizing information delivery through a media-independent channel such as touch can reduce sensory noise, increasing accuracy and ease of control. Snibbe et al. have made such arguments in the design of haptic physical devices for navigating digital media [47]. For example, devices such as scroll wheels or even mice have been augmented with actuation to indicate a user's proximity to graphical targets. Snibbe et al. use similar principles to build specialized devices with relative or absolute transducers, designed specifically for certain types of media (Figure 4.6). In addition to the careful selection of input device form-factor and physical behavior, they use "haptic landmarks such as bumps or textures further "anchor" locations" of digital media on the input device itself. One of Snibbe et al.'s devices maps the absolute position of a slider to the current position in a digital media stream, such as a movie. As the movie advances, the slider slowly moves from one end point to the other, and the user can reposition the current display by grabbing and manipulating the slider, feeling a springy resistance trying to return the slider to its proper position.

The Immersion company has worked with Logitech, a leading producer of computer mice, to develop products that use haptic feedback to enhance interaction with digital media in the traditional GUI environment. The iFeel™ mouse uses a simple partial-rotation motor built into the mouse to provide the user with 'clicks' and other small sensations while navigating over icons in a windows environment. The Wingman Force-Feedback Mouse™ is a mouse attached to two mechanical arms which are attached to linear motors built

into a special base underneath the mouse. The Wingman gives strong haptic feedback, as it is capable of physically moving the mouse while it is in the user's hand. However, it has only about a three-inch range of motion and has a rather bulky base underneath the mouse which holds the mechanical arm (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 The Logitech Wingman™ mouse is a fully-haptic device for GUI interaction.

Building on research that demonstrated the effectiveness of haptic displays in aiding object selection in 3D virtual environments, researchers involved in a project called the Haptic Workbench [31] used a force feedback device called the PHANTOM™ [29] (Figure 4.8), to experiment mapping abstract data to haptic modalities. They mapped a quantitative attribute of the data to the motion of a PHANTOM device in 3D space, attempting to create a “multi-sensory” interface that would allow users to “assimilate information more effectively by mapping different attributes of data to the different human senses” [31]. However, their results did not support the hypothesis that such mappings would reduce cognitive load. They found that instead of decreasing cognitive load by lowering visual sensory overload, haptic displays of abstract information actually *increased* cognitive load and frustrated users in situations where there was no clear metaphor for mapping the behavior of mathematical data onto the movement of the PHANTOM. This amounts to what Buxton has called “cross-modality mapping” [8], in this case meaning that changes in an abstract form of data (temperature) were mapped to the linear motion of the PHANTOM pointer in 3D space. Buxton criticizes cross-modality mappings, saying they “require learning and impede achieving optimal human performance”. This is especially true in the case of this experiment, since there was no clear metaphorical link between the changing data and the moving physical object.



Figure 4.8 The Phantom™ is a haptic device that uses servo motors and encoders attached to the device's arm to provide six degrees of freedom for haptic input and output.

### **Actuation Brings Haptic Techniques to Tabletop TUI**

The use of actuation in a tabletop tangible interface allows designers to build many of the benefits of absolute input transducers to the free-form spatial organization inherent in tabletop interfaces. The objects in a tabletop TUI are untethered and usually have no physical boundaries limiting their

movement, but such physical boundaries can be simulated with magnetic fields that inhibit or enhance a puck's movement on the table. In addition to recreating the properties of absolute transducers, actuation could introduce haptic response to the behavior of pucks on the table. Such haptic behaviors could allow users to off-load much of the cognitive work associated with visually monitoring graphical feedback about the state of many objects on the table. In the following chapter on applications for the Actuated Workbench I discuss several techniques for introducing these behaviors to table-top TUIs.

## 5. Related Technologies 2: Tabletop Actuation Technologies

Thus far I have tried to present an argument for introducing actuation to tabletop tangible interfaces. For tabletop TUI, actuation constitutes computer-controlled movement of objects on flat surfaces, a subject that has been studied for many years in both the HCI domain and in the realm of industrial mechanics. This chapter charts some of the evolution of 2D actuation from pre-HCI eras through past attempts at providing an actuation solution for interactive computer systems. The next chapter outlines the design criteria I used in developing my own tabletop actuation system for tabletop tangible interfaces.

### Mechanical Systems: Robotic Arms

#### Seek (1970)

A project by Media Lab founder Nicholas Negroponte, Seek [30] used a robotic arm to arrange objects on a table. In the case of seek, a hamster was placed inside a maze on the table and left to navigate the maze in search of a piece of cheese. A robotic arm would then rearrange the walls of the maze and the hamster would be made to run the maze again. It is said that the robotic arm tended to pick up and crush the hamster about as often as it managed to pick up one of the walls of the maze, but this was probably due to technological limitations at the time.

#### Talking Robotic Chess (2003)

Excalibur Electronics is scheduled to introduce a new robotic chess set to the consumer market in September 2003. This chess set retails for \$499, and contains a large robotic arm that mechanically manipulates pieces on the chess board and a 500-word speaking vocabulary for interaction while playing or teaching a human opponent. The system has been



Figure 5.1 Talking Robotic Chess set from Excalibur Electronics, available in September 2003.

developed “after years of research and a partnership with the University of Hong Kong” [11]. Excalibur’s advertisements for the product suggest that the physicality of the robotic arm, combined with the speech interaction, will emulate a human opponent. As a general actuation system, the robotic arm is of course limited to moving one object at a time, but it is encouraging to see the use of sophisticated mechanical manipulation of physical parts in the entertainment industry.

Though an effective and dexterous method for computer control, the use of robotic arms would likely be distracting for interactive workbench systems. Moreover, it would be complicated and expensive to implement the multiple arms that would be required to move multiple objects simultaneously.

## Mechanical Systems: Motorized Objects

### LEGO robots (2001)

Researchers at the National Institute of Standards and Technology addressed the lack of actuation in tabletop tangible interfaces with a project that used motorized LEGO™ robots in a computer-vision tracking system [39]. Their work departs from tabletop tangible interfaces in two ways: 1) The robots they built were rather large compared to the manipulable objects found in most tabletop tangible interfaces. This limits the number of objects that could fit on one tabletop and be easily manipulated by a user’s hand. 2) The form factor of the robots did not lend itself to the projection commonly used in tabletop tangible interfaces. Graphical feedback was instead displayed on a computer screen behind the table surface.

### Planar Manipulator Display (2003)

A project at NYU, the Planar Manipulator Display [42] uses motorized objects on a table to maintain constraints in a tabletop tangible interface. These objects contain two wheels, motors, batteries, inexpensive microprocessors, and infrared LEDs which they use to send signals between the table and each object. The objects are tracked through the time-multiplexed illumination of the infrared LED’s on each



Figure 5.3 The PMD at NYU is a tabletop tangible interface that maintains constraints on the placement of objects through the computer-controlled movement of motors in the objects.

object, which are captured with a lateral-effect photodiode, giving accurate 2D position tracking at rates of about 160Hz. This system is designed as a scalable interface that maintains computer-controlled constraints on the locations of physical objects on the table. Though the PMD's designers do not use projection on the objects, instead using specific physical representations (their example application moves models of furniture around a room), the system is compatible with projection from above to achieve a generic tabletop tangible interface. The use of motorized objects departs from the design criteria of the Actuated Workbench, listed in Chapter 6, but it is interesting to note the similarity of the PMD interface and its applications with that of existing tabletop tangible interfaces.

## **Mechanical Systems: Vibration, Belts, and Wheels**

Outside the realm of HCI, recent robotics research has focused on the problem of actuation in two dimensions, targeting applications such as part feeding in factories, parcel sorting in distribution warehouses, and luggage sorting in airports.

### **Universal Planar Manipulator (1999)**

The Universal Planar Manipulator (UPM) [40,41] at UC Berkeley uses the horizontal vibration of a rigid flat plate to move multiple objects simultaneously. The UPM system presents an effective way to manipulate many small parts without the need for motors or magnets, and its designers successfully use it in a closed-loop vision-tracking system. Four voice coil actuators simultaneously vibrate a rigid flat plate horizontally. The average of friction forces over the complete horizontal vibration of the plate work together to move specific objects in a particular direction. At each point on the surface of the table there is only one specific integral of vibration, creating one specific coefficient of friction and therefore one type of motion for each object on the table. The UPM offers an advantage over magnetic actuation systems in that the friction forces on the surface of the table can move any type of object placed

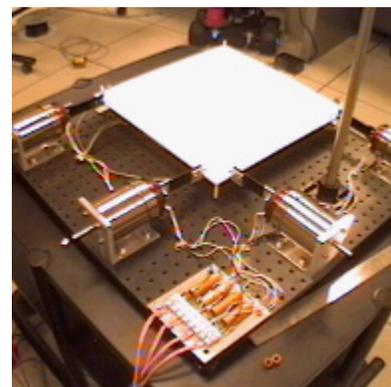


Figure 5.4 The Universal Planar Manipulator at UC Berkeley. Horizontal vibrations of the plate combine to move multiple objects on

on the table, without the need to attach magnets to objects or limit moveable objects to ferromagnetic materials. This allows the simultaneous, independent movement of multiple objects on the table (published experiments show the independent movement of about 10 objects at a time). Several aspects of the UPM's design detract from its usefulness in interactive workbench interfaces. The original prototype of the system was only capable of object translations and rotations too slow for HCI; its feed rates were on the order of millimeters per second but the system was later updated to tens of centimeters per second, on par with the Actuated Workbench. Second, the mechanism for vibrating the surface occupies space around the edges, preventing the easy tiling of multiple surfaces. The UPM's creator, Dan Reznick, has suggested to me that this limitation could be overcome with a different linkage between the driving coils and the surface of the table. Third, the system is noisy due to the mechanism needed to vibrate the flat surface and the sound of the vibrating objects. While not a problem in a factory assembly-line setting, this noise might be distracting for typical HCI applications in office or academic environments. Reznick has told me that in later versions of the UPM, vibration noise has been sufficiently reduced to make the system usable for HCI.

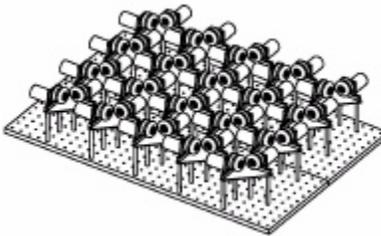


Figure 5.5 The Modular Distributed Manipulator uses orthogonally oriented rollers to rotate and translate objects.

### Modular Distributed Manipulator System (1997)

Another system, the Modular Distributed Manipulator System (MDMS) [28] consists of an array of orthogonally oriented wheels that support and move objects through combined vector forces created by the rotating wheels. This actuation method presents a clever solution to the problem of friction between objects and the table. Instead of dragging or sliding objects on a continuous flat surface, the system moves objects by rolling them along the tops of the wheels, doing away with the friction between two flat surfaces. Because it is an array-based actuation mechanism, the MDMS is scalable to larger areas, requiring only that more actuators be set up next to the existing array. The MDMS is intended for manipulating large parcels, factory materials, or pieces of luggage in a conveyor belt situation. Creating and controlling similar actuators on the small scale required for the small pucks

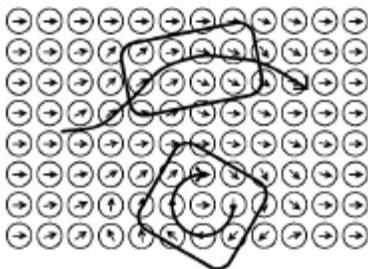


Figure 5.6 Using a variety of wheel movements to achieve part translation and rotation in the MDMS

used in HCI would present many challenges for mechanical design. More significantly, the surface upon which objects rest is neither flat nor continuous (because it is made up of many small wheels), making it unsuitable for the projection often used in tabletop tangible interfaces.

## Magnetism: X-Y Plotters and Electromagnets

### Claude Shannon's Theseus (1952)

One of the first actuation systems that used magnetism to move an object on a table was Claude Shannon's robotic mouse, Theseus, developed in the 1950's [46]. Here, a robotic mouse was equipped with sensors on its whiskers, enabling it to sense contact with one of the walls of the maze, at which point it would rotate ninety degrees and attempt to move forward again. In this manner the mouse constructed a map of the maze and could then run the maze a second time without hitting a wall. This was perhaps one of the first "learning circuits" of its type, and this type of artificial intelligence was the main thrust of Shannon's research with the project. The actuation mechanism was also a novel introduction: electromagnets were mounted on an XY plotter under the surface of the (aluminum) table, and magnetic forces grabbed the metal mouse in order to move it on the table. Multiple electromagnets were used, allowing the system to rotate the mouse on the table. Theseus seems to be the first documented instance of this XY-plotter and electromagnet actuation system, used extensively in later HCI work as well as in commercial toy chess sets.

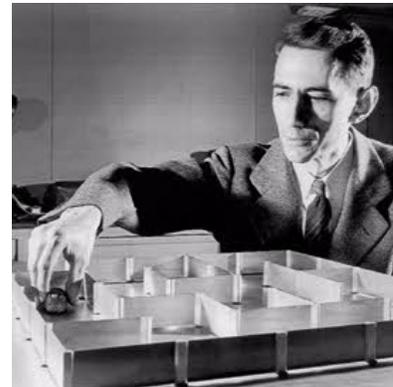


Figure 5.7 Claude Shannon and the Theseus project, a robotic mouse controlled by an electromagnet mounted on an XY plotter under the table.

### Fitzmaurice's "Self-Propelled Bricks" (1996):

In his Ph.D. thesis, Fitzmaurice describes a vision for Bricks acting as both physical input and *output* devices, providing not only "visual or tactile feedback but also position and motion feedback" [13]. He suggests preliminary applications for such technology, such as a desktop "cleanup" function akin to the cleanup command then popular on the Macintosh GUI operating system.



Figure 5.8 Milton Bradley's Phantom Chess Set used an electromagnet mounted on an XY plotter to position chess pieces on the board.

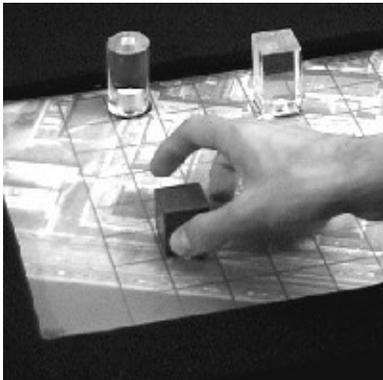


Figure 5.9 The psyBench system, an XY-plotter electromagnetic system intended for remote collaboration applications in HCI..

Fitzmaurice gives an example technology that could be used for such self-propelled bricks, Milton Bradley's "Phantom Chess Set." Here, "chess pieces can be grabbed by the computer due to embedded magnets in the pieces and a hidden mechanical arm housed inside the playing board." Such technology works for the manipulation of one object at a time, but it does not provide adequate functionality to match the input capability of the Bricks system with similar output: it cannot move more than one object at a time, and it is incapable of controlling the rotation of objects on the table. Fitzmaurice's description of the Phantom chess set also mentions several ideas for physical functions executed by the computer that could be useful for HCI: highlighting (wiggling to get attention); valid move (demonstrating valid physical movements of pieces on the table); jump over (path planning to move pieces out of the way); and centering on squares (cleanup function).

### PsyBench (1998)

At the MIT Media Lab, the psyBench [6] system prototype used parts from Milton Bradley's Phantom Chess Set and controlled them from a separate computer and microcontroller. The psyBench system presented one of the first obvious applications of actuation technology for tangible interfaces. It was intended for use with the Urp [52] system, a tabletop tangible interface for urban planning, extending Urp's spatial layout application to the synchronization of the position of objects in two distributed workspaces. PsyBench introduced the concepts of remote tangible collaboration and "ghostly presence" [6] that would follow tangible interface literature in the years to come. Though it presents a more advanced application of this actuation technology for HCI, the psyBench's actuation suffered from the same limitations as Fitzmaurice's Phantom chess set. It was unable to control the orientation of the moving objects, and it could only move one object at a time. In addition, the PsyBench was only capable of inaccurate, teetering movements of the objects, and it was limited to straight-line, right angle motion, due to the pro-

gramming of the mechanism. Positioning of the objects was limited to a grid of 10 x 8 discrete 1" square cells, corresponding to the positions of the square cells found in a chess set. The system could only sense the position of the objects on the table if the user pressed down on one of the chess pieces, closing a membrane switch built into the surface of the table. Even in 1998, tabletop tangible interfaces used faster, less obtrusive object tracking technology than this membrane switch.

## **Magnetism: Linear Induction Motor Concepts**

### **Sumi-Nagashi and the Proactive Desk (2003)**

Finally, at SIGGRAPH 2003 this year, an emerging technology called the "Proactive Desk" will be presented [55] by Japan's ATR Media Information Science Lab. This system is an array of electromagnets much like the Actuated Workbench, and provides force feedback to objects on top of a table using the same principles of magnetic induction. After the Actuated Workbench, first published in 2002 [32], this system is the second "2D Linear Induction Motor" actuation system I have seen (Linear Induction Motors are explained in Appendix A). The system's designers use the Proactive Desk in a haptic interface designed for interactive digital painting in the manner of the traditional Japanese art form "Sumi-Nagashi." Users move a stylus around on a tabletop while interactive graphics are projected on the table around the stylus. Magnetic forces from the table provide haptic feedback based on the surrounding graphics in order to simulate the real materials of the traditional art form. In addition to haptic feedback for a stylus, the Proactive Desk's designers use the system to move a single "ink bottle" (an untethered object) around on the table, creating even more similarities between this work and the Actuated Workbench.

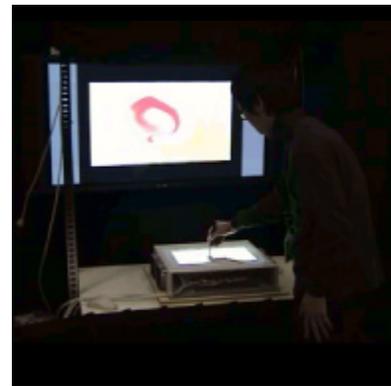


Figure 5.10 Sumi-Nagashi uses an array of electromagnets called the Proactive Desk to provide haptic feedback in a digital painting application.

## 6. Design and Development

Several design criteria govern my choice of materials and mechanisms in designing the Actuated Workbench. Since the goal of this project is to provide an actuation mechanism for existing Tabletop Tangible Interfaces, it is important to keep in mind what designs will and will not work with these interfaces for HCI. The following section describes some qualities that seem desirable for a tabletop actuation mechanism for use in Human-Computer Interaction, and includes a discussion of the elements I used in attempting to achieve these qualities in the Actuated Workbench.

### 6.1 Design Criteria

Desirable qualities of a tabletop actuation mechanism for HCI include the following:

1. **Actuation in multiple areas at once:** A key interaction technique in most interactive workbench interfaces is users' ability to manipulate multiple objects at the same time using both hands. The computer actuation technology should be able to move multiple objects at the same time. This way, it can maintain digital-physical consistency with every object the user manipulates on the table simultaneously.
2. **Ability to recreate human gesture:** The system should be able to recreate users' gestural movement (translation and rotation) with the objects on the table with similar speed and resolution. This ability is useful both for rewinding and replaying movements as well as for remote collaboration. In general, to achieve a "bi-directional" interface, the actuation should be able to keep up with users' movements, matching them for speed and resolution.
3. **Compatibility with existing workbench architec-**

**ture:** Since tabletop tracking technologies are rapidly evolving to provide better sensing resolution and speed, the actuation mechanism should work with existing tabletop tracking systems. It would be difficult and time consuming to design a new tracking technology from scratch solely for use with this actuation mechanism.

**4. Size of physical objects and power consumption:**

The physical objects should be comparable in size to those in existing tabletop tangible interfaces. This criterion limits the type of mechanism that can be built into the objects. I originally considered designing wheeled, motorized pucks that drive themselves around the tabletop, but felt these would be unnecessarily large compared to the latest tagging technology. In addition, designing a puck capable of both translating and rotating itself on a surface might prove to be quite challenging. Finally, motorized pucks require batteries that might need to be changed or recharged frequently due to the motors' power requirements. Since many tagging technologies used today are passive devices, I sought to keep the actuation technology passive as well. See Appendix C for discussion of an emerging technology that contradicts this assumption.

**5. Projection:** Existing tabletop tangible interfaces use projection on and around the objects in order to integrate physical input and graphical output in the same space. Since the actuation mechanism is intended for use with existing tabletop tangible interfaces, the mechanism's design should incorporate this projection. The objects and the surface of the tabletop should therefore have flat, continuous, opaque surfaces suited to displaying graphical projection from above.

**6. Silent or near-silent operation:** The actuation mechanism should be as un-obtrusive as possible. No

noise or unnecessary movement generated by the interface should distract from users' interaction with the interface.

7. **Scalability:** The design should allow for expansion of the actuation area for larger interactive surfaces.

## 6.2 Final Design Scheme

After considering many design options, including actuation mechanisms similar to those described in chapter 2 (XY plotters, wheeled pucks, robotic arms, and vibration), I decided that magnetic actuation seemed the best approach for moving objects quickly and silently. Research into MagLev trains and other magnetic technologies such as linear induction motors suggested that a fixed configuration of magnets under the table would be able to move magnetic objects on top of the table. In order to move multiple objects simultaneously in two dimensions, it seemed that a two dimensional array of electromagnets would be necessary. The evolution of this array and some explanation of MagLev and other technology is described below in Appendix A.

Based on early experiments and on the above design criteria, the Actuated Workbench's hardware design uses a fixed array of electromagnets that generate magnetic forces to attract or repel permanent magnets built into each of the moveable objects. The table surface and the objects on the table are similar in size and shape to those used in existing workbench interfaces, such as Sensetable [33], and the system uses the same Zowie-based radio frequency technology for tracking objects on the table. Though the electromagnet array consists of discrete electromagnets, and therefore discrete points of magnetic force, we have developed special techniques for interpolating points of force between electromagnets. The system can control the strength of individual electromagnets through pulse-width-modulation, a common technique for driving DC electric motors at different speeds by sending them pulses of various duty cycles depending on the speed at which one wants the motor to turn. This makes it possible to perform a physical "anti-aliasing" to create smooth

travel paths along the table between the discrete positions of the electromagnets. This anti-aliasing is akin to graphical anti-aliasing, in which the contour of a curved shape is mapped onto the discrete pixels of a computer display screen, and pixel color and brightness is computed based on the overlap of the object's shape with a pixel's area.

The Actuated Workbench design also includes custom electronics to independently set the strength and polarity of each individual electromagnet in the array simultaneously, making it possible to move multiple objects on the table by setting up multiple moving magnetic fields in the array. The entire system is addressed via a microcontroller that communicates via Ethernet packets with any controlling computer running the application program.

In practice, we decided not to incorporate a mapping for rotation in our early applications, and therefore did not build rotational control into the puck design of our first prototypes. Our experiments show that the electromagnetic mechanism of the Actuated Workbench can be used to control the pucks' orientation if we design larger pucks containing multiple magnets. We can rotate objects using multiple magnetic fields to control two permanent magnets built into each object. A description and suggested uses for prototype rotational pucks appears in Chapter 10.

In the following chapter, I describe technical details of the Actuated Workbench system, including special techniques for motion control.

## 7. Technical Details

The design and implementation of the Actuated Workbench has set forth two significant innovations in computer-controlled movement of objects. The first is the creation of a two-dimensional array of electromagnets in order to move multiple objects in two dimensions using magnetic induction. The second innovation is the technique of modulating the electromagnetic array to achieve object motion that is interpolated between the discrete positions of the electromagnets in the array. This chapter contains a detailed description of the prototypes we implemented between September 2001 and January 2003. It discusses the electronic components used and the data handling sequence between computer and these electronics. In addition to a detailed description of the Actuated Workbench's hardware, this chapter describes the motion control techniques that, combined with this particular arrangement of electromagnets, provides an innovative method for achieving interpolated motion on top of the electromagnet array. Appendix A charts the evolution of the 2D electromagnet array from my early research into magnetic propulsion technologies.



Figure 7.1 The original Actuated Workbench prototype, with 1/4" acrylic surface.



Figure 7.2 The 8 x 8 array of electromagnets, measuring 6.5" sq.

### 7.1 System Description

#### Mechanical Details

The original Actuated Workbench prototype consisted of a 16.5 cm (6.5") fixed array of 64 electromagnets arranged in an 8 x 8 grid under a layer of 0.63 cm (1/4") acrylic (Figure 7.1). These electromagnets are held in place by a printed circuit board to which they were bolted and to which the leads from the electromagnets are soldered (see Appendix D for pcb layouts). Though this square array provides only a limited area for actuation, its design to allows the tiling of several arrays to create larger actuation areas. In the fall of 2002, we expanded the array to 16 x 8, for a total of 128 electromagnets and an actuated area of 33 cm x 16.5 cm. The total size of such a tiled-array actuation surface is limited only by the

complexity of electronically addressing the arrays (a software problem), and the power requirements of running such a large number of electromagnets (a problem of finding a large enough power supply). The power supply we currently use with the Actuated Workbench system is a 27VDC 30A supply, capable of powering twenty of these 8 x 8 arrays, which would provide an actuation area of 845 square inches.

The electromagnets in the array are custom ordered from the APW coil winding company [1], each measuring 1.9 cm (0.75") diameter x 3.8 cm (1.5") length. They are wound with 32 gauge copper wire with a total length resistance of 120-122 ohms. Using these custom-wound magnets provides two advantages over most commercially available electromagnets, which are often designed with metal housings intended to make the electromagnet easier to mount, and to focus magnetic flux within a small area around the electromagnet. First, our electromagnets can be mounted closer together than electromagnets with housings surrounding them. Second, the uncontained fields of our electromagnets make it easier to create combinational flux patterns between individual electromagnets, the important for the anti-aliased motion mentioned above. Each electromagnet is driven with 27VDC and draws about 250mA. In most of our applications, each electromagnet is only active for a few milliseconds at a time, so significant heating of the electromagnets does not occur. However, if many electromagnets were activated for a long period of time, cooling of the array might be necessary.

The electromagnets used in the system were a serendipitous find: my early research into electromagnetic arrays led me to read Tom White's master's thesis [54], a haptic device that used an 8 x 8 array of electromagnets to control the viscosity of magnetorheological fluid sealed in a plastic bladder. The electronics in this system were implemented by Paul Yarin, former Research Assistant in the Tangible Media Group. Tom was no longer using the hardware from his (then two year old) thesis, and he let me cannibalize the project to use the parts in my experiments. The magnets he used (identical to the ones described above) turned out to be the ideal size and

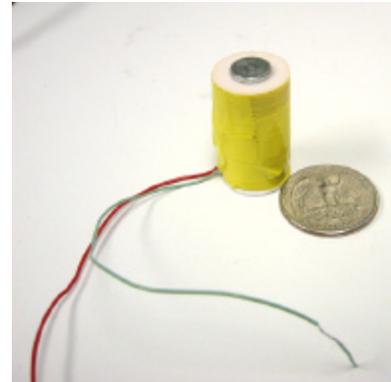


Figure 7.3 A single electromagnet from the Actuated Workbench system, 0.75" dia. x 1.5" h.

power for my needs. They were strong enough to move metallic and magnetic objects, yet small enough to be arranged next to each other in a grid with a minimum separation between them. Furthermore, their cost was much lower per electromagnet than any other commercially available coil I could find. Tom's contact information for the APW company was several years out of date, and it seemed at first as if the company was no longer in business, making it impossible to find more coils. After months of searching, a random web link led me to APW's new site, and I was able to order more of the same electromagnets the same day.

## **Electronics Details**

The digital circuitry used to drive each 8 x 8 electromagnet array went through several design iterations. The final design includes custom circuit boards to drive each electromagnet in the array bi-directionally, making it possible to set the polarity of each magnet's field, as well as turn individual magnets on and off. The electronics are designed to set the state of each electromagnet in the array at approximately the same time. This makes moving multiple objects simultaneously a simple matter of setting up separate magnetic fields in different areas of the array. Of course, care must be taken that these magnetic fields do not overlap when moving objects that are close to each other, as this could cause one object to move in the direction of a magnetic field intended for a different object. Because a minimum distance of about 1/4" is needed between objects in order to avoid crosstalk between electromagnetic fields, this consideration limits the number of objects that can be moved simultaneously. In practice, we have found that objects on the table do not come close enough to each other due to the repulsion of the permanent magnets built into each puck.

The electromagnet array is controlled by a software application running on the PC. This software, an integral part of the application with which the user interacts, determines which objects on the table must be moved and sends the state of every magnet in the array over Ethernet to a microcontroller board. The microcontroller then parses the data and updates

the logic on the motor-driver circuit boards. The logic on the circuit board connects to motor-driver IC's which then connect to the electromagnets. The following describes details and evolution of this system.

### Microcontroller

A SaJe board made by the Systronix company [48] handles the transfer of data from the computer to the motor-driver circuit board. This microcontroller runs Java natively, at clock rates of over 100MHz and provides 20 pins of I/O. The fact that this microcontroller runs Java natively makes it extremely well suited to setting up an Ethernet server to receive data from the control computer. We developed a Java program to run on the SaJe board that receives UDP packets sent via Ethernet from the control computer, in this case, an IBM running windows. The Java program processes these packets and converts the data for output on two parallel 8-bit data buses. See Appendix E for microcontroller code.

### Daughterboard

When we began tiling these 8 x 8 arrays to create larger actuation areas, an intermediate layer of circuitry had to be designed in order to multiplex the limited number of I/O pins on the SaJe board to the 32 input pins needed to set the polarity, enable (on/off) status, and clocks on the motor-driver circuit boards. Therefore, I designed a daughterboard to sit on top of the SaJe board, containing two additional octal flops, and two 74HC138 demultiplexer chips. This circuit board made it possible for the SaJe board to address four coil-driver circuit boards, or two 8 x 8 arrays of electromagnets. See Appendix D for a schematic and PCB layout of this circuit.

### Coil-Driver Circuit Boards

Four 8-pin data buses then connect via ribbon cable from the daughterboard to custom-designed printed circuit boards containing eight octal D-type flip-flops and sixteen Texas Instruments SN754410NE half-H motor driver chips. Each of these circuit boards can drive 32 electromagnets independently. The octal flops divide these 32 magnets into four

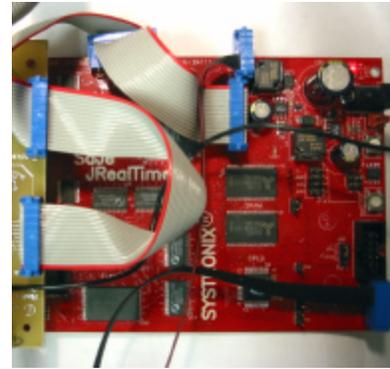


Figure 7.4 The SaJe real-time Java microcontroller board by Systronix. Also pictured is the daughterboard which I designed to sit on top of it.

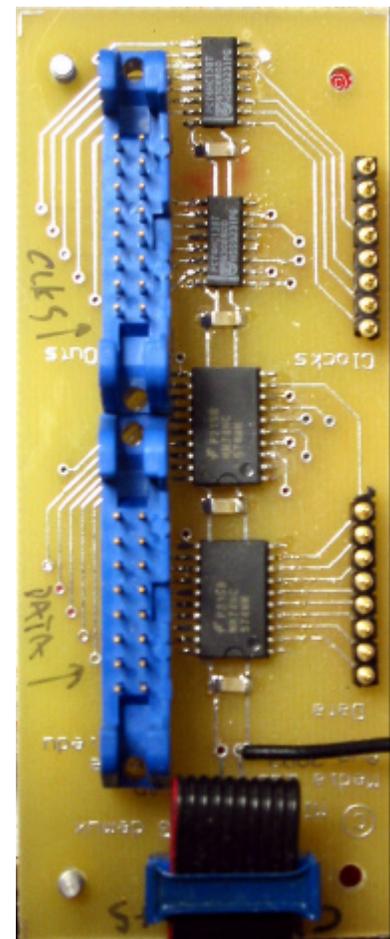


Figure 7.5 A daughterboard designed to demultiplex signals from the SaJe microcontroller board before sending them to the Coil-Driver circuit boards (Figure 7.6).

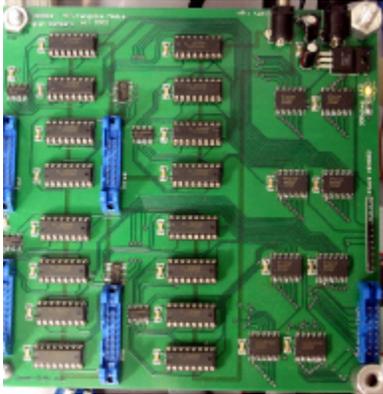


Figure 7.6 A motor-driver circuit board, each of which can drive 32 coils independently.

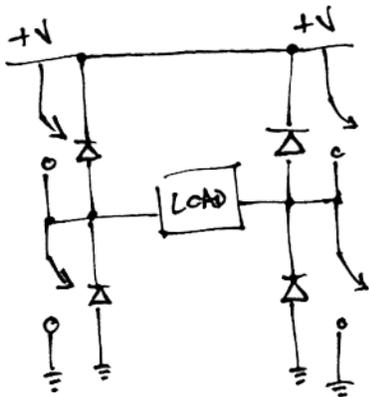


Figure 7.7 An H-Bridge configuration of mechanical switches allows a load (such as a motor) to be driven in either direction. Note “flyback” diodes to protect against inductive kick from the load.

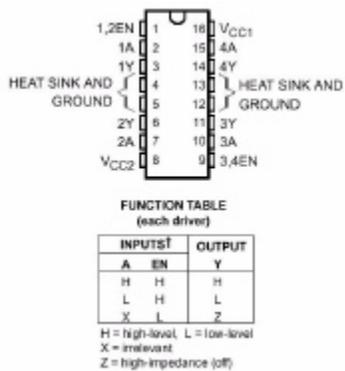


Figure 7.8 Pinout for the SN754410NE, including logic table for H-Bridge outputs.

groups of eight magnets, so two of these circuit boards are needed to drive one 8 x 8 array of magnets. The circuit boards measure 6.25" square are stackable so that a “tower” of coil-driver boards can be set up to save space.

Originally, my driver electronics used simple darlington transistor arrays to sink current through the electromagnets in only one direction. These arrays included seven transistors on one integrated circuit (IC), and were an inexpensive solution to the electronics needed by the system. Their usefulness was limited by their slow switching speeds, and the fact that they could not be configured to drive the electromagnets bi-directionally in the manner of an H-Bridge array (Figure 7.7), as the transistor arrays shared a common emitter on each IC. An H-bridge transistor configuration was crucial to driving the electromagnets in the array bi-directionally, which is required for some of the advanced movement control techniques described below.

While I considered making 64 H-bridges out of discrete power transistors, the search for an IC led me to find Texas Instruments’ SN754410NE quad half-H motor driver IC (Figure 7.8). Each of these 16 pin IC’s contains four half H-bridges, allowing the configuration of two independent H-bridges per chip. They are capable of driving up to 36VDC at 1A through a load, and contain internal diodes to provide protection from the kickback inherent in driving inductive loads (Figure 7.7). There are of course many other motor-driver chips available on the market today, such as National Semiconductor’s LMD series.

## Data Handling

The data handling sequence with this daughterboard looks like this:

1. The Saje microcontroller board receives packets from a control computer running a software application. This can happen as often as once every 15 microseconds.
2. The polarity of a row of magnets is clocked off the

SaJe board into an octal register on the daughter-board.

3. The enable status of the same row is clocked into another register.
4. Both the enable and polarity status for the entire row are clocked into octal registers on the motor driver board, which immediately outputs them to the electromagnets.

The low propagation delay of the digital logic on the motor-driver boards allows us to use pulse-width-modulation (PWM) to vary the strength of each electromagnet's field. PWM is a common technique for driving electric motors at different speeds by sending them pulses of various duty cycles depending on the speed at which one wants the motor to turn (Figure 7.9). PWM drives the coils with an average current without the need to waste power or circuit board space on a linear power element (which would vary the current based on an analog voltage level or a variable current source).

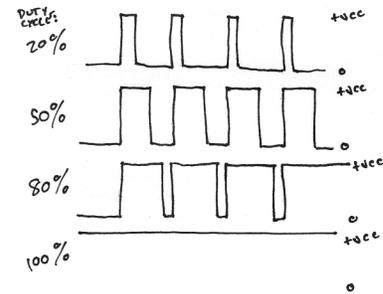


Figure 7.9 Pulse-Width Modulation (PWM) signals representing varying duty cycles of a load. PWM is an effective means of driving motors at varying speeds with digital circuitry.

## Movable Objects

The magnetic forces of the Actuated Workbench system is capable of moving any lightweight ferromagnetic object, such as a paperclip or steel bolt.

Since the Actuated Workbench is to be integrated with existing tabletop tangible interfaces, we chose to use “pucks” as the basic objects to be manipulated by users and the computer in our interface, modeling our design on a smaller version of the puck used in the Sensetable system. Our pucks are made of layered pieces of  $\frac{1}{4}$ ” clear acrylic. Each holds a powerful (1.1 Tesla) neodymium magnet  $1.26\text{ cm} \times 1.26\text{ cm} \times 0.63\text{ cm}$  ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ”  $\times$   $\frac{1}{2}$ ”  $\times$   $\frac{1}{4}$ ”) that provides the strong attractive forces needed to drag the 14g (0.5oz) pucks around on the Active Workbench’s acrylic surface.

In order to harness more force for moving objects, we built a permanent magnet into each puck, providing not only more magnetic attraction between the puck and each electromagnet’s field, but also making it possible to use repulsive as well

as attractive forces for moving objects on the table. A 'push-pull' technique can be used to move heavier objects or overcome problems of friction between the puck and the table. Care must be taken to ensure that the repulsive forces do not accidentally flip the pucks over, though this type of motion might be desirable for other interactions (see Chapter 10).

## Puck Tracking Technology

### Vision Tracking

The original puck design incorporated elements from a vision-based tracking system. These pucks measured 2.54 cm (1") diameter x 2.54 cm (1") height, and in addition to the permanent magnets contained a coin-cell battery, an IR led for vision tracking and a switch to save the battery when not in use (Figure 7.10). The inclusion of a battery violated the design goal of keeping the pucks passive, but it was a necessary solution, as we encountered preliminary difficulties with electromagnetic sensing. We embedded each puck with a small battery and an infrared LED, and suspend a camera directly above the Actuated Workbench. Adding an infrared filter to the camera blocks out ambient fluorescent light, making the video signal easy to process (Figure 7.11). We used an inexpensive Intel PC Camera Pro USB CCD camera and were able to achieve a tracking rate of 30 updates per second. This frame rate, though high from a human interaction standpoint, is somewhat slow from a control systems perspective. However, since this is a limitation of the capture rate of the device, we could have improved tracking speed by replacing the USB web cam with a high-end frame grabber.

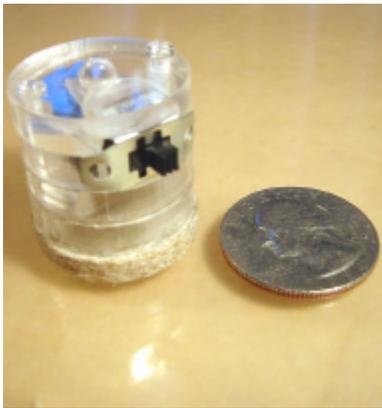


Figure 7.10 The original Actuated Workbench puck, containing an IR LED, battery, and switch for Vision Tracking,



Figure 7.11 The Actuated Workbench as viewed by the computer vision system, left, and the same image with an IR filter placed over the camera.

The vision-based puck tracking software, written by Dan Maynes-Aminzade, tracked the infrared LEDs in the pucks by detecting bright regions within the image captured by the web cam. The image histogram was used to compute a threshold value on startup, and the threshold is used to divide the grayscale image into zeros and ones. We then employed standard blob-analysis techniques [22] to determine the longest horizontal segments. Simultaneous real-time tracking of multiple pucks was accomplished using an association method

[2] to distinguish the pucks between frames. In every frame, the software associated each observed location with the closest puck location in the previous frame. This association method is not wholly reliable, since puck paths that cross each other can interchange identities, but since the permanent magnets inside of the pucks tend to repel each other, pucks rarely get close enough for this method to break down.

### LC Tag Tracking

Our difficulty in using the Actuated Workbench system with the electromagnetic tracking technology was due to distortions created by the strong magnetic fields of our electromagnets. These magnetic distortions caused our tracking data in the Zowie-based system to be very inaccurate, since the magnetic fields changed the inductance of the coils in the LC circuits of the tags, changing their resonant frequencies. We later overcame this problem through automatic frequency calibration in the tracking system's API. Six months later, we had successfully integrated the Sensetable tracking platform with the magnetic actuation platform and could track and move objects without the two technologies interfering with each other.

The final version of our pucks measures 3 cm diameter x 1.25 cm height (1.2 cm shorter than the initial prototype), and holds a permanent neodymium magnet and an LC radio frequency tags from the Zowie tracking system (Figure 7.12). Each puck also contains a small momentary pushbutton switch that shorts out the LC tag when pressed. This pushbutton provides an additional method of input over the simple positioning of objects on the table. For example, in one application, pushing the button allows the user to toggle in and out of interaction modes (scroll, zoom, rotate) when navigating a map with the object. The user pushes the button on the puck once in order to “lock down” that puck onto a position on the map, and then pushes the button again in order to release the puck. This and other interactions are described in Chapter 9.



Figure 7.12 The final Actuated Workbench puck design (exploded). Visible are the Zowie LC tag and the round permanent magnet.

## Mechanical Detail: Friction

The surface of the first Actuated Workbench prototype was a polished piece of clear acrylic mounted directly on top of the electromagnetic array. We attached a felt pad to the bottom of each puck to provide the necessary kinetic friction to keep the object from sliding around uncontrollably on the table's surface -- bare acrylic-on-acrylic is too slippery, resulting in oscillations as the puck slides past its goal and is then attracted back to it. The damping quality of the felt pad also helps to smooth the motion of the puck on the table surface as it passes between discrete positions of electromagnets in the array. In this way, the felt pad acted kind of like a low-pass filter on the somewhat jagged edges created by discrete points of force of the electromagnets. Such filters are frequently found on the output stages of digital-to-analog converters such as those in compact disc players. They too help to anti-alias the motion the pucks.

The 0.63 cm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " ) thickness of the felt pad, combined with the 0.63 cm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " ) bottommost acrylic layer of the puck, results in the permanent magnet being about 1.26 cm ( $\frac{1}{2}$ " ) from the surface of the table, which is itself a piece of 0.63 cm ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " ) acrylic. This positions the permanent magnet about 1.89 cm ( $\frac{3}{4}$ " ) above the tops of the electromagnets. The height of the permanent magnet in the puck has significant effects on the performance of the system, since the neodymium magnet is strong enough to be attracted to the ferrous cores of the underlying electromagnets even when they are not activated. This attraction increases friction on the object, which affects the puck's ability to slide on the surface. We found the amount of friction between the pucks and the table to be a critical element in the system's ability to create smooth 2D motion. In general, we observed that static friction (the friction between the object and the surface when the object is at rest) inhibited smooth motion of the pucks, while kinetic friction facilitated smooth motion by controlling oscillations. After trying a variety of materials, we initially found that felt-on-acrylic gave adequate frictional characteristics, but later moved to a piece of white card stock for the table surface and polished acrylic for the bottom of the pucks. This provides a better sur-

face for viewing the graphical projection around the objects while maintaining a coefficient of friction similar to that of the felt-on-acrylic.

## 7.2 Motion Control and Interpolation

### Manhattan Motion

Moving the puck across the table in a linear “Manhattan” fashion (in straight lines at right angles to each other) is a straightforward process. The puck can be moved to any grid cell on the table by consecutively activating the electromagnets in neighboring cells at full strength (Figure 7.13). Using Manhattan motion, objects can be moved across the table at rates on the order of 25 cm/sec. (10in/sec.).

### Smooth Motion

Though Manhattan motion can move the pucks rapidly across the table, it is not so useful for recreating the smooth gestural motions with which a user moves objects on an interactive workbench’s surface. The use of our anti-aliasing techniques allows us to recreate user’s gestures with pucks between the discrete positions of the electromagnets. In this section we describe our mathematical model of the Actuated Workbench and present the equations we used in our software to produce smooth motion along arbitrary paths.

A single puck on the surface of the Actuated Workbench is subject to gravitational force, frictional force, the magnetic forces of attraction between the puck and the activated electromagnets, and the force of attraction between the permanent magnet in the puck and the iron cores of the electromagnets beneath. Figure 7.14 is a vector diagram showing our force model.

We estimate these forces based on the duty cycles of the magnets and add them to determine the total force on the puck, the total force of magnetic attraction, and the net friction between the puck and the table surface. In reality, the magnetic fields of the activated electromagnets interact in a somewhat more complex manner (Figure 7.15), and the

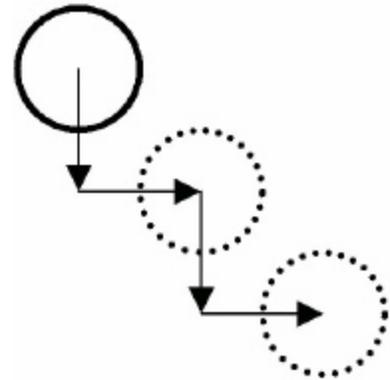


Figure 7.13 Manhattan Motion: straight lines and right angles. just like the big city.

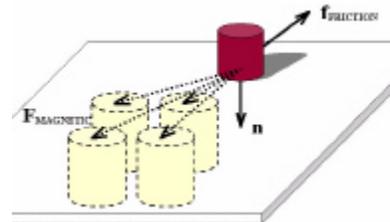


Figure 7.14 Force Model: Attraction of underlying electromagnets, friction, and the normal force on the puck.

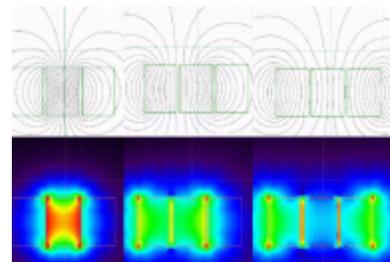


Figure 7.15 Magnetic field interactions between electromagnets. The top images show magnetic flux lines and the bottom images map flux density to brightness. The three image pairs show the fields resulting from a single center magnet turned on (left), the left and center magnets turned on (center), and all three magnets turned on (right). The effect of this field-shifting behavior can be modeled approximately using force summation. These images were generated with the VisiMag software

nearby ferrous cores of neighboring electromagnets return much of the flux from the activated electromagnets, reducing the range of force. In addition, the normal force on the puck changes as it moves over the center of each electromagnet on the table and the permanent magnet in the puck is attracted to the iron core of the underlying electromagnet, so the friction acting on the puck is constantly changing as well. Since both of these forces are close magnetic fields, the force between the puck and the electromagnets falls off at a rate of  $1/r^2$ , not linearly as in the simple force model we use. Nonetheless, the force-summing model just described, in which electromagnetic forces are treated independently of one another and then summed, is a reasonable method of approximating the more complicated underlying physics, since the summation of multiple forces due to individual magnets parallels the summation of multiple magnetic fields to produce a single force.

There are many ways in which we could activate the electromagnets so that the resulting forces are summed to a vector of desired magnitude and direction. In the next section, we describe several different methods for choosing the magnet values.

## **Anti-Aliasing Techniques**

In computer graphics, the mathematical model of an image is a continuous analog signal that is sampled at discrete points called pixels. Aliasing occurs when the sampling frequency (here, the number of pixels in a given area) is too low for the signal frequency, resulting in a coarse image in which smooth curves are converted to steps and jagged outcrops. The anti-aliasing technique of prefiltering combats this problem by treating each pixel as an area, and computing pixel color based on the overlap of the scene's objects with a pixel's area.

With the Actuated Workbench, we are faced with a similar problem: we wish to render an analog signal (in this case, a force of a particular direction and magnitude) using a discrete

array of cells (variable-duty electromagnets). To do so, we can employ a similar technique: the strength of each electromagnet is determined by the “overlap” of its magnetic flux lines with the location of the point force. Figure 7.16 shows a configuration in which the forces of four neighboring electromagnets of different duty cycles combine to create a single force of a new magnitude and direction.

### “Dot”-based Anti-aliasing

The simplest algorithm for anti-aliasing draws the computer graphics equivalent of a smoothed dot centered at the location of desired travel. Given a desired force vector with head at point  $(X, Y)$ , we compute the distance from each electromagnet to  $(X, Y)$ , and set its duty cycle in inverse proportion to this distance. As in computer graphics, we can choose any number of falloff metrics. We experimented with Gaussian falloff, but found that in practice it was no better than a simple linear falloff metric.

### “Jet”-based Anti-aliasing

A drawback of the dot-based method is that it limits the puck’s top speed of travel to about 15 cm/sec. (6in/sec.). In order to produce enough force to move the puck, the center of the dot must be positioned close to the puck, and the forces produced by some of the activated electromagnets will pull the puck backwards against the desired direction of travel (Figure 7.17).

If we know the position of the puck and the direction of travel that we hope to produce, we can pull the puck using only the electromagnets located in this direction relative to the puck. To do so, we first compute the vector from each electromagnet to the target  $(X, Y)$ , and then compute the scalar projection of this vector onto the direction-of-travel vector. Taking the set of vectors of positive magnitude produces a collection of forces resembling a “jet” in fluid mechanics (Figure 7.18). Jet-based movement can move pucks across the table almost as fast as Manhattan motion.

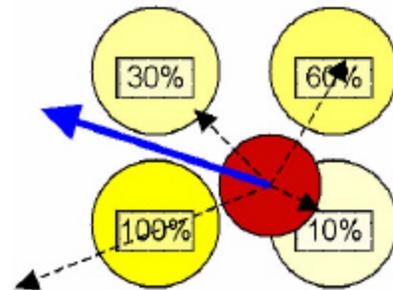


Figure 7.16 Different duty cycles in four neighboring electromagnets combine to create a single force vector for the object’s movement

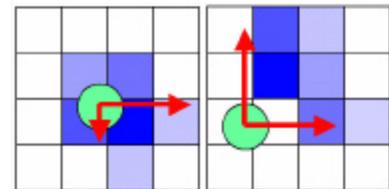


Figure 7.17 “Dot-” vs. “Jet” based anti-aliasing. Magnet duty cycle is displayed as the darkness of squares next to the pucks.

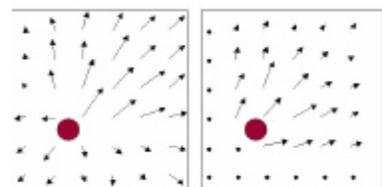


Figure 7.18 Another visualization of “Dot-” and “Jet”-based anti-aliasing.

We determine the strength of each electromagnet by drawing a line between the current position of the puck and the desired position, then mapping that line onto the discrete positions of the underlying electromagnets, as one might do in a graphical anti-aliasing situation. If the line does not fall directly onto the exact position of an electromagnet, the neighboring electromagnets are activated at lower strengths so that the vector summation of all the magnets produces a force along the direction of the line.

The location and strength of magnetic forces are constantly updated by the software program when it receives position data from the tracking system. This closed-loop feedback system allows for dynamic changes in object movement, and also provides a means for the computer to determine whether its attempts at moving objects are successful. If the magnet strength is not enough to move a puck on the table, the computer can change the settings of the electromagnets to produce more force.

### **Stronger Movement**

We also employ a “push-pull” method for moving pucks, in which we simultaneously attract a puck to one point using one magnetic polarity, while repelling it from behind using the opposite polarity. This provides more force for overcoming friction on the table. In practice, we have found this method to produce faster motion, but the motion is not always so smooth because it is difficult to control the direction in which the puck will tend to move when presented with a repulsive force

**Table 7.19: Performance Metrics for the Actuated Workbench**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Value</b>
Number of trackable objects	9
Number of movable objects	~ 5 pucks for every 16 cm of table
Actuation area	16 cm sq min., scalable to larger areas
Max velocity	~ 10 cm / second
Accuracy of tracking	~2 mm
Resolution of positioning	~1 cm
Minimum distance between pucks	~1 cm
Power consumption	750 mA avg., 5 A max.

## 8. Evaluation

The task of evaluating an interface has several components, including a review of its technical performance under any conditions and a look at its overall interactive performance when in use by a human. Using what measurements and empirical observations we have at the time of this writing, I will evaluate the Actuated Workbench prototype as implemented in the latest revision of January 2003. My evaluation focuses mainly on the Actuated Workbench's technical performance and its ability to satisfy my original design criteria, and I discuss specific issues that impede the actuation system in its attempt to create a bi-directional physical interface for Human Computer Interaction. Finally, I outline a preliminary user study for the Actuated Workbench.

### 8.1 Original Design Criteria

In Chapter 6, I set forth seven design criteria with which I felt one could judge an actuation mechanism's suitability for tabletop tangible interfaces. The Actuated Workbench's ability to meet these criteria is reviewed here:

1. **Actuation in multiple areas at once:** The prototype system is an array based mechanism capable of moving multiple objects on the table at the same time. This simultaneous movement is produced by setting up multiple magnetic fields in different areas of the array. Details of controlling this movement are discussed in section 7.1.
2. **Ability to recreate human gesture:** Basic motion control techniques, such as the 'Manhattan motion' discussed in section 7.2, can move objects on the table at rates on the order of 10 cm/sec. However, these speeds do not apply to the interpolated motion of our 'anti-aliasing' techniques, in which feed rates are about half as fast. The trade-off between fast motion and high-resolution motion (a

smooth curved trajectory rather than a jagged one) is inherent in the fact that the mechanism is made from an array of discrete elements. If different electromagnets and stronger coil-driving circuitry were used, the system would have more force to move objects at faster accelerations, and yet might still have the linearity needed to perform high-resolution movements with our anti-aliasing motion techniques. This remains to be seen in future revisions of the system.

3. **Compatibility with existing workbench architecture:** As discussed at the end of section 7.1, we have developed automatic frequency recalibration to overcome the interference between the Zowie tracking technology and the Actuated Workbench's magnetic field. The Actuated Workbench is now fully compatible with the high-resolution, low-latency tracking of Sensetable 1.5.
4. **Size of physical objects and power consumption:** Because our pucks are passive, containing only a small LC tag and a small but powerful permanent magnet, they are only 3 cm in diameter and 1.2 cm in height. These measurements are smaller than the pucks used in the Sensetable 1.5 system, satisfying our original design criteria.
5. **Projection:** The size and materials of the pucks and the materials used on the table surface are quite similar to those built into Sensetable 1.5, so projection on and around the pucks is highly visible.
6. **Silent or near-silent operation:** The only noise created by the actuation system is the sound of the acrylic pucks sliding over the paper surface of the table, which is not audible during normal conversation around the table, and barely audible when interacting silently with the interface. The sliding noise of the pucks might actually be useful for calling the user's attention to the movement of pucks

she might not be watching, and for most interactions would probably not be any more distracting than the visual perception of the pucks moving themselves.

7. **Scalability:** Because the basic 8 x 8 grid is tile-able, it is relatively simple to expand the hardware to provide larger, seamless actuation areas. Of course, the complexity of addressing this hardware from a computer application increases as more tiles are added. The ethernet addressability of the SaJe microcontrollers mean that as more tiles and electronics are added, the number of cables between computer and microcontroller need not increase, as would be the case if they were addressed through serial or other means. One can simply connect a SaJe board to any ethernet hub and send ethernet packets to the Actuated Workbench from any computer.

## 8.2 Design Limitations

### Friction and Strength

At the time of this writing, the major detractors to the Actuated Workbench's ability to move objects quickly smoothly on the surface are 1) friction between the pucks and the table surface and 2) the limited strength of the electromagnets. Static friction between the pucks and the table makes it difficult to start objects moving, and once pucks begin to slow down or change direction, friction starts to take over again and pucks tend to get stuck in the middle of a trajectory on the table. Any irregularities or foreign objects on the table surface make it even more likely that a puck will get stuck mid-motion. At the moment, we have not developed a sophisticated method for dealing with this problem. As I will discuss in Chapter 10, new types of motion control, such as the use of repulsive forces to lower friction between pucks and the table, could help overcome this problem. In addition, stronger electromagnetic forces, either through coils with lower total resistance or through driving the existing coils at higher-volt-

age, could help the system overcome the problem of friction through brute force.

### **Coil-Drivers**

The SN74410E half-H motor driver chips I used in my design for the Coil-Driver circuit boards offer a convenient design for incorporating 32 H-bridge circuits onto one circuit board. Though these chips are capable of handling a large amount of power for their small size, they can only switch a maximum of 36VDC, and can source/sink maximum currents of 1A per H-bridge. In my experiments to make the Actuated Workbench stronger, I ran into these maximum values as a limit on the current I could pass through each electromagnet. Since the internal resistance of each electromagnet is about 122 ohms, running 27VDC through each magnet only sinks about 225mA through each magnet. As the electromagnet's coil heats up (since current is passing through it), its internal resistance rises and even less current flows through it, resulting in an even weaker magnetic field. A future redesign of the coil-driver circuit boards using more powerful, higher-voltage H-Bridge ICs would provide greater flexibility in choice of power supply for driving the electromagnets. As the Actuated Workbench is made stronger in future designs, care must be taken to ensure the safety of users in the presence of such strong magnetic fields, and to ensure that users' credit cards are not erased as they interact with the system.

### **SaJe Microcontroller**

Although the Systronix SaJe microcontroller board's native Java J2me runtime environment makes it easy to set up Ethernet-addressable I/O pins for controlling the coil-driver circuit boards, it suffers from a classic pitfall of Java environments: garbage collection. This factor can cause unpredictable interruptions in the execution of the microcontroller's data parsing routine, causing the puck's motion to be halted mid-trajectory. I describe this garbage collection problem in detail in Appendix B. At the moment the SaJe board is still the simplest microcontroller unit for us to use with the system, but in the future we may have to move to a different microcontroller in order to avoid this unpredictable problem. Other ether-

net equipped microcontroller boards, such as the Rabbit boards made by Rabbit Semiconductor, might be easily substituted for the SaJe board.

### **Cost**

At the time of this writing, each 8 x 8 electromagnet array, including all driving electronics components, printed circuit boards, and SaJe microcontroller board, costs just under \$1000 US to make. Much of this cost comes from the price of the electromagnets (\$4-6 US each, depending on quantity ordered), and the cost of the SaJe microcontroller board (\$500), which is intended as a development board and therefore contains additional hardware not required for the Actuated Workbench. Both of these factors could be cost reduced by fabricating custom parts (magnets and microcontroller boards) in-house or finding a manufacturer that could provide large-quantity discounts. I estimate that the cost of each 8 x 8 electromagnet array and its electronics could be brought to a few hundred dollars. As mentioned above, the Zowie tracking technology used with the Actuated Workbench was sufficiently cost-reduced by the company that they could sell each toy playset for under \$50, suggesting that tabletop TUIs might be less expensive and more common in the future. One suggestion for a less expensive actuation mechanism is put forth in Appendix C.

## **8.3 User Testing**

We have not yet performed any formal user studies with the Actuated Workbench system. We have outlined a preliminary user study to test the benefits of actuation when applied to the problem of maintaining consistency in tabletop tangible interfaces. This study will measure subjects' reaction times when inconsistencies arise in a task performed on the Actuated Workbench, and compare the cost of the user having to correct the inconsistency manually (in a condition with no actuation) with the benefit of having the system automatically correct the inconsistency (in a condition with magnetic actuation). It may turn out that the overhead manually correcting inconsistencies amounts to very little increase in task com-

pletion times. It may also turn out that users subjectively assess the cost of manually correcting physical inconsistencies as being very low.

Nevertheless, we anticipate the large benefits in the use actuation for remote collaboration applications, and hope to test this hypothesis in our user study as well. In addition to a scenario in which inconsistencies arise locally, we will also conduct a user study that measures the same quantitative and qualitative costs of inconsistencies in a remote collaboration scenario. Here, the need to manually correct an inconsistency on the table may interrupt the flow of dialogue between remote collaborators.

In either case, it is my hypothesis that the conditions in which actuation automatically maintains consistency between the physical and digital states on the table will show improved task completion times and will score better with subjects' qualitative ratings of the interface. The results of this experiment will help guide future work in actuation in tangible interfaces, and might point to unexpected applications for generic actuation platforms such as the Actuated Workbench. At the time of this writing, user studies are scheduled for the end of May 2003.

## 9. Applications for the Actuated Workbench

In this section, I describe how the Actuated Workbench supports novel interaction techniques and new applications for tabletop tangible interfaces. The section describes the extension of some basic GUI functions into the physical domain, and then goes on to describe some higher-level applications, including some solutions classic problems in tabletop tangible interfaces. We implemented some of these applications in the winter of 2003, and details of the actual implementation are discussed where relevant. Some applications mentioned below require further development of the Actuated Workbench to address limitations of speed, magnetic strength, scale, and resolution. These and other future developments of the Actuated Workbench system are discussed in Chapter 10

### 9.1 Basic GUI Functions

One obvious application of the Actuated Workbench mechanism is that of recreating activities in the GUI world with the movement of objects in the physical world. We have not yet implemented these functions in our current applications on the Actuated Workbench, but they are listed here to introduce the actuation's potential for making tabletop TUIs as functional as the generic GUI.

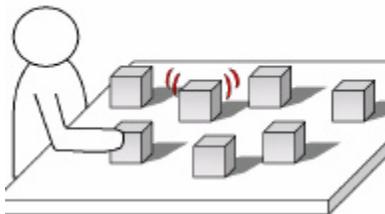


Figure 9.1 Calling user attention to a physical object on the table by “highlighting” it with a wiggling motion.

1. **Search and retrieve:** As the number of pucks increases in an interactive workbench system, it becomes more difficult for a user to keep track of every data item on the table, just as it is difficult to keep track of many graphical icons on a computer desktop. A search and retrieve function could *physically* display the results of a user query, finding matching data items and either moving them to another place on the tabletop or wiggling them to get the user's attention (Figure 9.1). The use of physical

motion to grab user attention has been mentioned by Fitzmaurice in his description of the Phantom Chess Set, which draws the human player's attention to a specific chess piece by "highlighting" it with a wiggling or shaking movement [13].

2. **Sort:** A more powerful function would be one in which the computer could physically sort and arrange pucks on the table according to user-specified parameters. This could help the user organize a large number of data items before manually interacting with them (Figure 9.2).

3. **History and Undo:** As a user makes changes to data through physical input, she may wish to undo some changes. A physical undo in this system could move the pucks back to their positions before the last change. It could also show the user the exact sequence of movements she had performed. In this sense, both "undo" and "rewind" commands are possible.

4. **Save and Restore:** Different arrangements of pucks could be saved and physically restored by the computer system. Much of the overhead in using tabletop TUIs lies in the re-binding of pucks to computational parameters when a saved application is run again. Actuation allows the computer system to automatically reattach pucks to parameters they were last used to control.

5. **Teaching and Guiding:** Because the Actuated Workbench gives the computer the ability to recreate users' gestures with the pucks, it becomes possible for the computer to teach the user something about interacting with the system through physical gestures. If certain gestures are used in the interface to trigger certain commands (such as a shaking gesture to unbind a puck from a data item, implemented in the Sensetable 1.0 system), then the computer can show a novice or a forgetful user how to make that

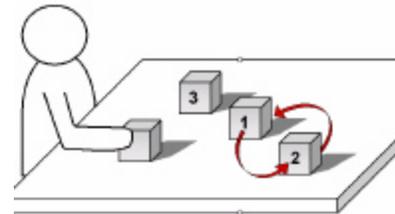


Figure 9.2 A GUI-style function of physically sorting pucks on the table.

gesture with the puck. This way, many of an application designer's commands can be taught to users without the need for intensive human coaching. In addition, if a user is uncertain how to proceed while using a problem-solving or simulation system, the computer could suggest a physical configuration of the pucks. Fitzmaurice praises the Phantom Chess Set's ability to teach users to play chess by providing "hint" moves and physical demonstrating valid moves through the actual physical movement of the pieces.

## **9.2 High-Level Tabletop Interactions**

### **Remote Collaboration**

One advantage that tabletop tangible interfaces offer is the ease with which multiple users can make simultaneous changes to the system. Users can observe each other's changes as they are made, and any user can reach out and physically change the layout of objects in the shared workspace without having to grab a mouse or other pointing device. In this regard, tabletop TUIs surpass mouse-based graphical interfaces, in which there is only one input device and therefore usually only one user actively controlling the input, and in which the display area is a small-sized computer monitor designed for viewing by only one person. Some GUI applications support synchronous remote collaboration by displaying multiple cursors or pointers for both the local user and the remote user. The shared workspace exists only in the digital world, making it easy to have multiple displays of a workspace simply by having multiple GUI workstations. As tabletop TUIs become more popular and common as computer interfaces, one can imagine multiple users interaction with a shared workspace through multiple tabletop TUIs. Here, since both sets of physical objects represent an instantiation of the same digital data, the physical states of the objects must always be synchronized with the data and with each other. Otherwise, the two users would be interacting with two separate environments instead of one shared workspace. In this scenario, a mechanism for physical actuation of

the pucks becomes valuable for synchronizing multiple physically separated tabletop TUIs.

One example of a system that could benefit from physical synchronization is the Urp system [52], in which users manipulate physical models of buildings on a table and the computer displays simulation information in the form of projected “digital shadows” around the buildings. “Distributed Urp” (Durp) attempted to create distributed workspaces for collaboration between multiple remote users. Identical Urp systems were set up in two separate locations, and the two systems were synchronized through identical graphical projections onto the workbench. However, if a user in one location moved a building, only the “digital shadow” of the building, and not the physical model, would move in the remote location. Durp’s creators designed around this problem by having only one physical model of any building in either space. Users in one location had control of half the model buildings tracked in the shared workspace. That is, they had half the total number of physical models in one location, while users in the remote location had control of the other half of model buildings. In addition to avoiding inconsistencies between multiple physical models, this technique solved any problems of turn-taking or ownership that could arise from two users in different locations trying to move the physical model of the same building in two different locations.

Though I would prefer to avoid military applications for this technology, it should also be noted that the synchronization of remote physical objects on a tabletop would also have great benefits for remote collaboration with ‘situation room’ displays for military and defense applications. Many of the interaction techniques used in these displays are quite similar to those used in the Urp application.

### **Actuation in Remote Collaboration**

The Actuated Workbench provides another solution to the design problem described above. Synchronization of the models on the two remote tables becomes a simple matter of putting permanent magnets inside the model buildings and

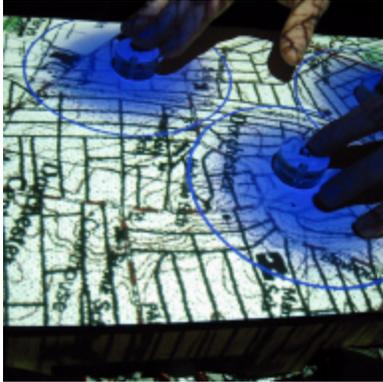


Figure 9.3 A detail of our cellular tower layout application. A tower's coverage on the map is indicated by the blue projection.

using the workbench's electromagnetic forces to translate and rotate the models. In addition to facilitating simple synchronization of these models, the Actuated Workbench could recreate remote users' actual gestures with objects on the table, adding greatly to the "ghostly presence" [6] sought in remote collaboration interfaces. In early 2003, Dan Maynes-Aminzade and myself developed a remote collaboration application on the Actuated Workbench in order to demonstrate the system's performance in these tasks. We built two actuated tables, each with a 16 x 8 array of electromagnets (an actuation area of 33 cm x 16.5 cm), in the manner of the final prototype system described Chapter 4. We then designed a remote collaboration application around the task of cellular tower layout. Here, users position pucks representing cellular towers on a map and are shown the coverage area of each tower through projection on and around the pucks (Figure 9.3). This scenario emulates the simplest aspects of the Urp's graphical shadows projected around model buildings on the table.

Our two tables are synchronized in real time through their actuation mechanisms. The system can handle multiple object movements at the same time, and at present we are using up to four pucks at once on each table, though we are capable of tracking and actuating up to nine on each table. The system also provides a small amount of haptic feedback to remote users as they interact with the system. If two users attempt to move the same cell tower at the same time on the two different tables, they feel the magnetic pull of the actuation mechanism trying to move the pucks to a synchronized position on the table (the average of the two pucks' positions).

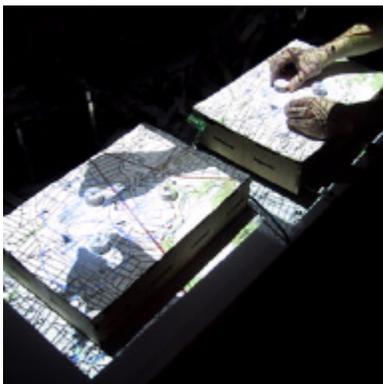


Figure 9.4 A remote collaboration application on the Actuated Workbench. Shadows of the user's hands are displayed on the adjacent table (left) which is synchronized with the table on the right.

We also incorporated the projection of the remote users' hands around the pucks. We use two USB web-cams to capture real-time images of the users' hands manipulating pucks on the table, perform some thresholding and background extraction (in order to only project users hands and not the background) and project "shadows" of the users' hands around the pucks (Figure 9.4). These projections allow local

users to see remote users' gestures along with physical movements of the pucks. This way, it becomes less likely that two remote users will reach for the same physical puck at the same time, and helps prevent inconsistencies from arising between the positions of the two pucks on the two tables. The projection of users' hands in remote collaboration environments has been used extensively in CSCW research, beginning with VideoDraw [49] and TeamWorkstation[18], and most recently with remote collaboration functions for the Designer's Outpost[10].

## Map Navigation in Tabletop TUI

In addition to the simple positioning of cellular towers on the map, we expanded the design of this application to include several map-based navigation techniques based on the metaDESK project [51]. We use the pushbutton on each puck to change modes in the interaction. Before a button press, the pucks are in positioning mode, and the user can place them anywhere on the map. If the user presses and releases the pushbutton on one of the pucks, it "locks-down" the position of that puck's cellular tower to the current position on the map. The user can then move that puck on the table and the map will translate to follow the puck (Figure 9.5). The user can then press and release the pushbutton again to unlock the puck from the map and return from navigation mode to positioning mode. In order to rotate or scale the map, the user presses and holds down the pushbutton on one puck while moving another puck with her other hand. If the other puck is moved radially around the button-pressed puck, the map rotates to maintain consistency between the map and the two pucks' positions on the table. If the other puck is moved closer to or farther from the puck whose button is pressed, the map will scale to ensure that the positions of the two pucks are always consistent with the map (Figure 9.6). For any map rotation or translation, the positions of the remaining cellular towers on the map move to follow their corresponding positions on the map. The actuation system moves the physical pucks to follow the positions of the cell towers, maintaining consistency between the physical and digital state of each cell tower in the interface.

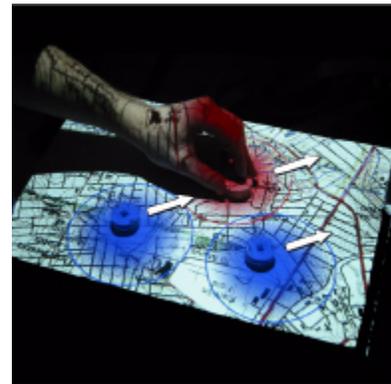


Figure 9.5 After pressing the pushbutton on the puck to toggle map navigation modes, the user can translate the puck on the table to pan the map. The actuation system automatically moves the other pucks to their new correct positions on the map.



Figure 9.6 If the user moves two pucks together, the map zooms and rotates to accommodate the positions of both pucks. Actuation moves the other pucks to their correct positions on the map.

Zooming of the map is limited to physical limitations of the pucks' positions on the table. The pucks can only be brought together to the point that they touch, so this imposes the maximum zoom-out of the map. Since the pucks are only detectable within the bounds of the tabletop's surface area, this imposes the maximum zoom-in possible for the map. In practice, since cellular towers have a large coverage area, there is little need to zoom in past this maximum. In both cases, actuation moves the remaining pucks to the appropriate positions on the map.

### Simulation and Display for Interacting Objects

The Actuated Workbench could be helpful in the scientific visualization of complex mechanical systems. For example, a solar system model in the manner of an orrery (Figure 9.7) could be created on a tabletop interface with full actuated movement of pucks representing planetary orbits. By grabbing the pucks, users could change the physical properties of the planets or teach the computer new orbit paths, and then watch the resulting motions of the planets.

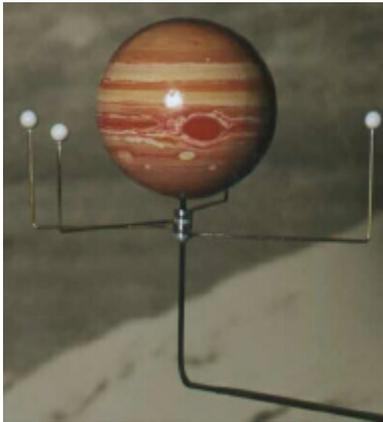


Figure 9.7 An orrery showing the orbit of four moons around the planet Jupiter.

Similarly, the Actuated Workbench could be used to teach students about physics by demonstrating the attraction and repulsion of charged particles represented by pucks on the table. As a student moves pucks around on the table, the system could make the pucks rush together or fly apart to illustrate forces between the objects.

### Entertainment

In addition to these more practical applications, the Actuated Workbench could be used to add a physical dimension to computer entertainment. Though motorized chess sets have existed for many years, they operate using a single electromagnet mounted on an x-y plotter mechanism, which are limited to moving one object at a time. The Actuated Workbench could provide a significant improvement to these devices, making them more flexible for a variety of games. Classic computer games like Pong could now be played using a physical puck and two physical paddles manipulated by the

users. Distributed Pong could be played with a local user moving one paddle and the computer moving the puck and a remote user's paddle on the table. As I will discuss in Chapter 10, the Actuated Workbench can be used to flip over thin, polarized magnetic pucks by rapidly reversing the polarity of the electromagnets. This could be used to play a physical game of Reversi with the computer. Finally, one could create painting or drawing programs in which a pen or brush was attached to the puck. The computer's movement of the puck could then be used to teach the user certain artistic gestures, or even handwriting movements.

### **9.3 Haptic applications**

Moving beyond GUI emulation, synchronization, and other applications based only on the movement of objects, we can design interactive functionality based on force-feedback and physical objects whose physical behaviors are determined as much by the computational state of the system as they are by the objects' shape and size. In this way, the physical properties of the objects in users' hands can be as compelling a medium for computer display as the graphics projected around them or sound cues.

#### **Simulating limits**

As demonstrated by Snibbe [47], actuation in conjunction with absolute input transducers can provide an effective means of indicating the computational state of the system to users, and allow users to rely on muscle memory when returning to the input device. In the case of common tabletop tangible interfaces, such as Sensetable, input devices are physically generic round pucks, lending themselves more readily to relative input than absolute input (at least this is true in the case of rotation, if not position on the table). However, should we decide that an absolute transducer is appropriate for a specific input device, we can use actuation to simulate limits through tactile feedback. For example, rotation of a puck on the table could be limited to a certain number of degrees, after which the computer activates magnetic forces that resist users' rotation of the puck. Similar constraints

could be used to limit the translatable positions of the puck, making it act like a linear slider. In addition to physical limits, “detentes” in the rotation of the puck could be simulated through magnetic forces. Such detentes are common in knob-based input devices such as audio mixers, where a center detente indicates that an effect or filter is at its zero point, halfway through the rotation of the knob. Furthermore, physical qualities simulated by magnetic actuation of a puck could change from parameter to parameter. A single input device (puck) could have many different physical behaviors as it is multiplexed among different parameters, each behavior specific and appropriate for the parameter it is controlling. For the user, such a design frees the interface from the clutter of many different input devices for many tasks, while maintaining the advantages provided by different physical behaviors for each input device. For the interface designer, the Actuated Workbench could reduce the overhead of designing and physically fabricating multiple input device qualities, and prototyping of the interface becomes more rapid and less costly.



Figure 9.8 Two inTouch units, physically synchronized rollers separated by a distance.



Figure 9.9 The RobotPHONE haptically links two remote teddy bears in the manner of inTouch.

### Getting in touch with real and virtual resistance

In the inTouch system (Figure 9.8), as the user manipulates a set of three rollers in front of her, she also rotates three identical rollers on a remote unit. If a remote user resists her motion by manipulating the remote inTouch unit, the user feels resistance in the movement of her roller. The rotational positions of the corresponding rollers are always synchronized, and the use of strong motors for force feedback allow each user to feel how much the remote user is resisting the movement of the roller. According to inTouch’s creators, these qualities contribute to the feeling that the two users are manipulating the same roller, creating “the illusion of a shared physical object across distance by physically synchronizing the states of distant, identical copies of an object, using telemanipulation technology” [6].

Similar concepts have been used to link other distributed objects such as motorized teddy bears (Figure 9.9) [45],

showing that the transmission of physical gesture over distance can occur through a variety of form factors.

These use of force feedback from tangible telepresence theory [6] can extend beyond interpersonal haptic communication to haptic communication between user and data. If the resistance of the movement of an object were not indicating a remote user grabbing the remote object, but instead indicated a computational constraint such as the difficulty in changing a variable linked to the object, the object's physical behavior roller could impart this constraint physically to the user. For example, a costly change in business practice could be displayed as resistance to the movement of a puck, while an inexpensive change could be displayed as uninhibited movement of the puck. In tabletop TUI, providing the pucks with such haptic behavior could help users develop more intuitive understandings of the behaviors and associations of interdependent variables in a system.

## 10. Future Development

The final prototype of the Actuated Workbench satisfies most of the basic design considerations established earlier in this thesis. The system has been built with small passive pucks; it can move multiple pucks at the same time; it can recreate a range of user gestures with the pucks; it is silent because its actuation mechanism has no moving parts. However, there are still design refinements and implementation details that need to be improved in order for the system to fully achieve our goals of a truly bi-directional tabletop tangible interface.

### 10.1 Tiling of Arrays for Larger Surfaces

Since the current actuation area is only 6.5" x 13", we plan to tile four to six 8 x 8 arrays to form an actuation surface 13" sq. to 13" x 19", which should be large enough for use with most interactive workbench interface systems. We also hope to explore the use of different sizes of electromagnets. Smaller electromagnets may yield higher resolution of object movement on the table, while larger or more powerful electromagnets may provide more force for moving objects, making it possible to provide stronger force feedback for tabletop TUIs. Furthermore, using larger electromagnets would mean fewer electromagnets per square inch of tabletop, perhaps resulting in reductions in cost and complexity of the system.

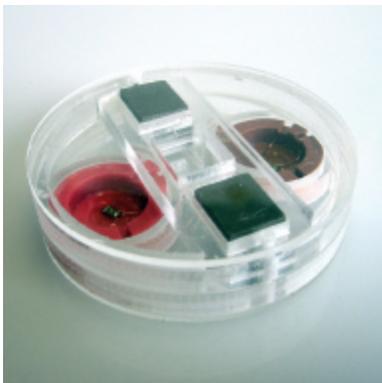


Figure 10.1 A prototype rotational puck containing two Zowie tags for rotation tracking and two magnets, oriented with opposite polarities facing downward to control rotation with the Actuated Workbench

### 10.2 New Types of Motion

#### Rotation

As mentioned in Chapter 7, experiments with different puck designs have shown that we can use the Actuated Workbench to achieve puck rotation as well as translation. Our prototype rotatable pucks consist of a 2" diameter puck containing two zowie tags and two permanent magnets. We mount the magnets inside the puck with opposite polarities facing downwards (Figure 10.1). This magnet orientation allows us to address each side of the puck independently,

and perhaps could be used to achieve simultaneous rotation and translation. Rotation of round pucks is not often used as an input motion in tabletop tangible interfaces. It is possible that this is due to the difficulty of rotating an unconstrained puck quickly. The dials and knobs that we usually rotate as input for devices such as stereos are constrained, or 'pinned' at the center of the dial, allowing us to make quick rotations without having to worry about moving the whole dial. Jog shuttles even provide an indentation for the user's finger, allowing multiple rapid rotations with just one finger. In his Ph.D. Thesis, Brygg Ullmer argues that similar benefits are provided by physical constraints for user input in TUI [50]. Tabletop TUIs do not have these physical constraints built in, but it may be possible to use actuation to mimic such constraints in the motion of pucks on the table. For example, magnetic attraction and repulsion could be used to allow the user to spin a puck rapidly around its center while preventing the accidental translation of the puck. A third magnet could be built into the center of the puck, and could be used as a virtual "pin" to hold the center of the puck still while the user rotates it. In this way, the benefits of physical constraints for physical interaction could be dynamically applied to objects in an actuated tabletop TUI.

### Flipping Pucks

In addition to controlling orientation, the Actuated Workbench is also capable of flipping over magnetic objects or launching them into the air by reversing the polarity of the electromagnets underneath the objects. If the polarities of the electromagnet and the permanent magnet in the object have opposite orientations (such that the two north poles face each other, for example), a strong repulsion results. This repulsion could be used to flip over a double-sided object, so that the opposite side is attracted downward. In his Ph.D. thesis [13], Fitzmaurice also discusses "FlipBricks," which use all six sides of a Brick to implement different commands, saving space by eliminating the need for a separate brick for each command (Figure 10.2). Similar interactions were implemented in the ToolStone project [38]. Similarly, the flipping of

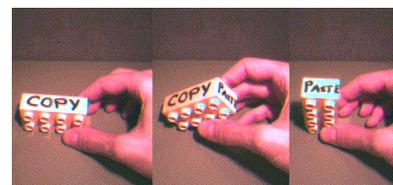


Figure 10.2 FlipBricks mockup by George Fitzmaurice. The user can turn different sides of a brick upwards to impose various commands with the same Brick.

pucks or Bricks through magnetic actuation could be used as a display for showing different states of parameters.

### Magnetic Levitation

Since the strength of the magnetic field can be quickly controlled in any part of the table, the Actuated Workbench is theoretically capable of levitating magnetic objects above the table. This type of motion could be useful for indicating the activity of digital variables associated with physical objects, or it could enable smoother motion not limited by friction between the object and the table. Levitation could also provide another degree of freedom for movement in a haptic interface on a tabletop. Magnetic levitation has already been shown to be an effective technique for creating haptic interfaces in work such as Berkelman and Hollis's at Carnegie Mellon University [4] (Figure 10.3).



Figure 10.3 The Magnetic Levitation Haptic Device designed by researchers at CMU.

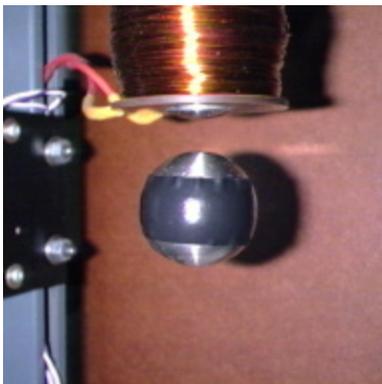


Figure 10.4 Magnetic levitation demos usually suspend objects from above and use a light sensor to measure vertical displacement.

Levitation on the Actuated Workbench would require constant object monitoring and rapid adjustments in configuration of the magnetic field, since a stable configuration of static magnetic forces is incapable of maintaining levitation, as stated by Earnshaw's Theorem [9]. At the moment, we do not have a tracking technology sophisticated enough to rapidly measure X, Y, and Z-axis height of several objects above a tabletop. The Zowie tracking technology *is* capable of providing a small amount of Z-axis data based on the signal strength of a tag, but we have not yet looked into developing this method for tracking vertical height. Most magnetic levitation mechanisms suspend the levitated object from above using an electromagnet and measuring the object's height with a light sensor below the electromagnet (Figure 10.4). This helps to avoid an inherent problem in magnetic levitation: an object's tendency to fly off unpredictably to either side of a magnetically repulsive field. For this reason using the Actuated Workbench to levitate objects would necessitate extremely low latency tracking and careful control of not only the object's Z-axis displacement, but also its X and Y position to prevent it from flying off the table.

Even if full levitation is not possible (or useful) in the future, small repulsive forces could be used to provide greater control over the friction between pucks and the table surface. Giving the pucks a small “kick” to help them overcome static friction, or using repulsion as well as attraction to create a push-pull actuation system could result in new motion possibilities. As mentioned in Chapter 7, friction between the puck and the table surface plays a large role in the smoothness of objects’ motion on the table. The selective attraction and repulsion of pucks could be used not only to control X and Y motion, but also the friction between the object and the table surface selectively damping motion by dynamically adjusting the coefficient of friction. Controlling the friction between objects and the table is actually the basis for the movement of objects in the Universal Planar Manipulator [40], so friction rather than magnetic inductance could be used as the main force of movement in future motion techniques on the Actuated Workbench.

# 11. Conclusion

## **The Actuated Workbench's Contribution: A Patch or an Innovation?**

Since the Actuated Workbench was designed for use with existing tabletop tangible interfaces, many of the preliminary application ideas described above focus on its ability to resolve inconsistencies commonly found in interactions with tabletop tangible interfaces. There is clear value in a technology that can solve such problems. However, these applications raise the question whether a tabletop actuation mechanism such as the Actuated Workbench exists only to solve problems created by the advent of tabletop tangible interfaces in the first place, or whether its technology has further reaching implications. I believe the latter to be true, as I have implied in some of the suggested applications for haptics as well as in some of the background theory advocating tabletop actuation. The Actuated Workbench represents a step along the way toward bi-directional physical interaction between user and computer, and hopefully other projects will take us far beyond the Actuated Workbench's contribution toward this goal.

## **Trends in TUI Input and Output**

The trend in TUI input devices has been movement from specific, non-reconfigurable, tethered objects that are separated from the graphical output space, toward generic, highly reconfigurable, untethered objects, collocated with graphical output. This trend has made tangible interfaces more flexible, such that objects with specific form factors are not required for each application running on the table, and a variety of user input gestures can be sensed and used in interaction. Furthermore, this trend has reduced the obtrusiveness of the technology built into the interface, making for a more "seamless" [19] transition between the physical and digital worlds. My vision for physical *output* devices follows much of this same trend. Previous work with haptic output devices such as the PHANTOM™[29] or Snibbe's et al.'s 'Haptic Tech-

niques for Media Control' [47] use specific, non-reconfigurable form factors, tethered objects, and have been located away from graphical output. Tabletop actuation systems like the Actuated Workbench provide a mechanism that supports the evolution of even actuated tabletop tangible interfaces toward generic, reconfigurable, untethered devices collocated with graphical output. The actuation system, like the sensing system, is designed to be as un-obtrusive as possible: it requires no batteries, can be built into objects of many form-factors, and is silent. The actuation system's ability to maintain consistency between physical and digital states helps maintain the seamlessness of tabletop TUI systems, in some cases even restoring seamlessness where it breaks down during inconsistencies between digital and physical states.

It is my hope that new actuation mechanisms will continue to develop alongside new sensing technology, such that physical input and output can be further integrated into seamless, flexible interfaces. As time goes on, new electronic sensing technology will allow computer interface designers to recognize more and more types of human gesture, either through the manipulation of physical objects or free movement in thin air. The physical-digital bottleneck will continue to widen, and users' intentions will be flow without inhibition into computer actions.

The opposite transition, the flow from computer to human, has evolved more slowly. Graphical output has been identified as the richest mode of information transfer between computer and human, and as such has suffered a glut of overuse by interface designers. Users' visual senses are suffering from visual over-stimulation, both in the foreground of their computer interaction and in their periphery, as in interface techniques such as 'ambient media' [20] vie for attention (Figure 11.1). Fully immersive, "virtual reality" graphical environments have been around for decades, but have not caught on as the dominant computer interface, perhaps because so much human work still happens in the real physical world. Augmented reality, a blending of the real world with the virtual

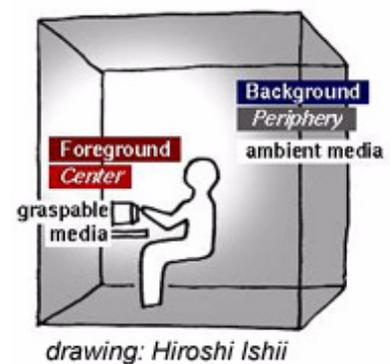


Figure 11.1 Hiroshi Ishii's sketch of foreground and background user attention shows GUIs and TUIs in as the main focus of user attention, and ambient media at the periphery of user attention.

world, has become increasingly popular in HCI research, and it is even arguable that, because of their blending of digital projection and physical objects, tabletop tangible interfaces lie close to augmented reality in the interface spectrum. The blending of real and virtual, physical and digital in these interfaces has brought us closer to a seamless interaction with computation, but it has been a one-directional interaction. I believe that systems for the computer-controlled movement of physical objects will become one of the most fruitful areas for HCI research in the coming years. This trend has already shown itself in the increasing number of papers presented on haptic devices for HCI at conferences each year such as CHI, UIST, and SIGGRAPH.

### **What will the future look like?**

My vision for the near future includes a mechanism that allows any object to have behaviors beyond its physical properties. Tangible interface designers could use this device to simulate gravity, lightness, inertia, and defy the natural physics of physical objects in order to provide users with a visualization of digital state through physical objects. Magnetism seems to be the most promising technology for such a mechanism, as it can achieve large, dynamic, and invisible forces with small objects.

As more actuation technologies continue to be invented, we may be able to create environments unlike any physical environment we now know. Perhaps one day we will find ourselves in environments whose physical properties are entirely governed by computer control. We might find ourselves living with force-fields in the air around us that simulate gravity or that allow us to feel simulated resistance of our movements with our bare hands rather than through intermediary physical objects. Alternatively, users could hold small computer-controlled gyros that spin themselves in different directions to provide haptic feedback. Finally, direct neural input could be used to provide haptic sensations without the need for complicated actuation, but the invasive procedures required for such input might drive some users away from this option. The

interfaces of the future may be entirely haptic, while our visual attention is used for other non-computer interactions.

In the meantime, tangible interface design can further emphasize the importance of physical objects in TUI by including actuation as an output path. Graphical output is a rich medium for feedback, and its place will probably always be secure in tabletop TUI design. As actuation becomes more prevalent in tangible interfaces, it will further secure the importance of physical feedback and physical interaction in computer interfaces. The Actuated Workbench represents another step furthering the cause of tangible interfaces, closing a previously open loop for physical interaction. As work in actuated interfaces continues in the future, I believe we will see more progress toward truly *bi-directional* tangible interfaces.

## Appendix A. Explanation of Electromag- netic Array

The design of the Actuated Workbench's magnetic array came about after many months of research into magnetic actuation technology. Having eliminated most mechanical options for reasons described extensively above, I pursued magnetic actuation as a preferred means of moving objects on the table. The problem then became how to move multiple objects with maximum strength and resolution and the minimum number of parts. I immediately disqualified XY-plotter technology from my designs because it was limited to moving only one object at a time. The only other magnetic actuation technology I knew of at the time was that of MagLev train systems.

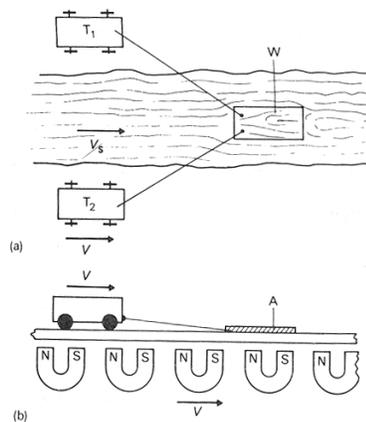


Figure 11.2 The 'magnetic river' analogy of linear induction motors: wooden block *W* in a) is replaced by a piece of conducting material *A* in b) [23].

MagLev stands for Magnetic Levitation, a technology that caused a great buzz in the late 1970's and early 1980's. The advent of superconducting magnets made it possible to create strong enough electromagnetic fields to levitate large objects. Furthermore, superconducting electromagnets are much stronger and smaller in size than previous electromagnet designs, allowing many high-powered electromagnets to be built into a vehicle such as a train. Researchers found they could set up a track of superconducting magnets in the manner of a train track, and modulate the magnetic field to propel a train along the track at high speeds with no friction between the train and the track because the train was levitating. Reading about this technology, I learned about modulating the magnetic field in a line of electromagnets in a sequence known as the "magnetic river" (Figure 11.2) [23]. Here, the magnetic field for any electromagnet is constantly changing, and the change in magnetic field strength for one electromagnet is slightly out of phase with adjacent electromagnets, such that it appears that a magnetic field is travelling down the line of electromagnets in the manner of a raft floating down a stream. This is the basic concept used to attract and repel a train car in a MagLev train system, and these princi-

ples have also been applied to rail guns and particle accelerators.

Other research into magnets and motors taught me about Linear Induction Motors (LIMs), which function in a very similar manner to MagLev trains, only without any levitation. A linear induction motor is basically a rotary motor, such as a squirrel-cage motor unwrapped and laid flat (Figure 11.3), such that the electromagnetic coils are mounted in a straight line, rather than radially in a circle. Instead of a magnetic rotor that is attracted to the activated coils in a sequence such that it spins quickly, a magnetic object is attracted along the sequence of electromagnets in a straight line. As is the case with rotary motors, the rotor or puck need not be magnetic, but can also be a piece of conductive metal such as copper or aluminum, due to the eddy currents that build up in the metal due to the rapid modulation of the electromagnets' fields. The Linear Induction Motor is the basic building block of the Actuated Workbench's electromagnetic array. Each 8 x 8 grid contains 8 rows of Linear Induction Motors, made up of 8 electromagnets each. This arrangement creates two sets of eight orthogonally oriented linear induction motors, or a two-dimensional linear induction motor. To my knowledge, this is the first 2D linear induction motor, or more accurately, the first "planar induction motor" in existence.

### Coil designs

The coils in a linear induction motor are usually mounted in an overlapping configuration (Figure 11.4) so that there is no dead space between coils. This arrangement tends to smooth the motion between adjacent coils, keeping the rotor (the moving object) at a more or less constant velocity. My early designs for the coil array in the Actuated Workbench used overlapping coils in two dimensions (Figure 11.5). This turned out to be a difficult configuration to make, and I experimented with custom-made bobbins around which to wind the coils so they could overlap. The biggest problem I encountered was the difficulty in getting enough windings on the bobbins to generate a magnetic field of enough strength to move anything. My homemade coils did not have enough

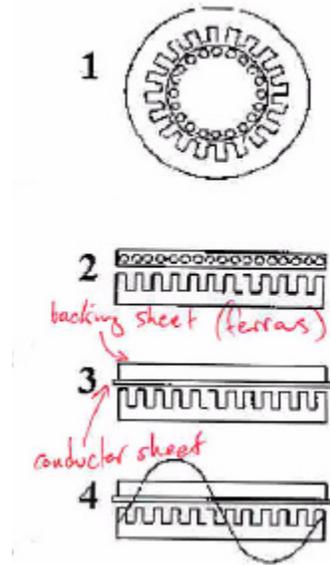


Figure 11.3 Explanation of a Linear Induction Motor (LIM) as an unwrapped version of a rotary squirrel cage motor.

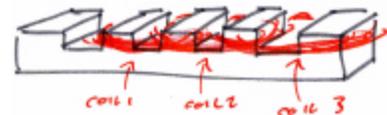


Figure 11.4 The overlapping coil configuration of a linear induction motor.

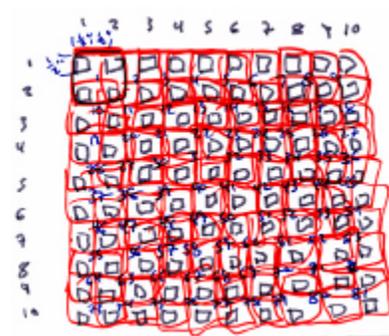
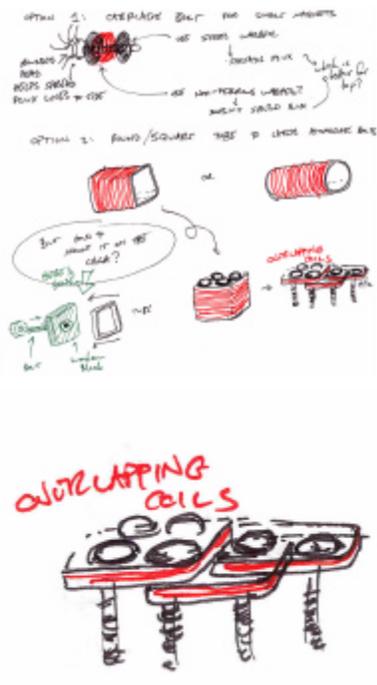


Figure 11.5 My original 2d overlapping coil scheme for the Actuated Workbench.

turns and therefore were very weak. I also attempted to increase the flux density of my coils by adding an iron core in between them. The difficulty here was in creating a design where coils could be rapidly wound around a bobbin and then an iron core inserted afterwards in the open spaces between overlapping coils. I went through several design iterations here (see Figure 11.6) but in the end, I had to abandon the overlapping coil scheme due to the difficulty of winding coils consistently enough with a minimum of open air in between them, which also detracted from the flux density.



The final design, using store-bought (though custom wound) electromagnets with iron cores, seemed limited at first because of the discrete positions of the electromagnets and the inherent dead space in between them. Eventually, as the circuitry for driving these coils became more sophisticated and efficient, we developed the anti-aliasing techniques that smoothed over the discrete positions between the coils. The rest is, well, history.

It may be useful to revisit the overlapping coil scheme, as it may lead to a higher resolution positioning system. It may also be able to handle larger actuation areas with the same number of coils. Further research into motors and coil-winding technology and theory could yield some interesting ideas for future coil arrangements on the Actuated Workbench. I believe that we have only begun to unlock the potential for computer controlled movement using magnetic forces, and I am excited to see the results that come about from future work.

Figure 11.6 Designs for bobbins on which to wind coils for the overlapping coil scheme in Figure 11.5.

# Appendix B

## Limitations of SaJe microcontroller

### SaJe microcontroller

Though running Java natively on a microcontroller makes it extremely simple to set up Ethernet-addressable hardware I/O devices, the Java virtual machine running on these boards suffers from one pitfall: garbage collection. The Java programming language allows for the dynamic allocation of memory as variables are created and destroyed within a program. This allows the program's writer to declare variables as they are needed within a program, instead of having to declare them (and allocate memory for them) at the beginning of the program. The Java virtual machine then periodically checks on the memory allocated for these variables, and 'cleans up' the memory allocated for objects no longer in use so the memory can be used for future variables. This cleanup, referred to as "garbage collection", occurs at a time determined by the program, and not by the programmer. Garbage collection creates a problem for us when we try to recreate a long gestures made by users moving objects on the table. The duration of the motion requires many data packets to be sent to the microcontroller, each of which the Java application then stores in a single static array and overwrites whenever a new data packet (containing the state of every electromagnet in the array) is received. Though the array is static in the program (it is pre-defined and should not require allocation of additional memory after its first creation and initialization), a bug in the UDP interface we use causes the program to create a new array (and allocate more memory) each time a data packet is received, rather than simply overwriting the old data in the existing array. The available memory is quickly eaten up by the creation of these arrays, causing the Java program to perform a garbage collection approximately once every two seconds, during which all other processes on the microcontroller stop -- along with the motion of all objects on the table. This garbage collection problem makes it very difficult to create extended sequences

of smooth motion on the table. After many hours of careful debugging, we have determined that the problem lies in the Java interface and not in our code. However, even at the time of this writing, another datagram (UDP) interface is still not available for the SaJe board, and we are still stuck with the garbage collection problem. It turns out not to be very noticeable during most interactions with the system, only limiting the system's ability to record and replay long gestures.

## Appendix C

# Other Actuation Technologies

### ZipZaps

Late in 2002, the Radio Shack company released a line of new battery-powered toy remote control cars called ZipZaps (Figure 11.7). These four-wheeled cars measured less than 2" in length and only 1" wide, were radio controlled, had top speeds of feet per second, used a pager-motor for an engine, and could drive around on a flat surface for up to five minutes on a single rechargeable coin-cell battery. Such miniaturization calls some of my original design choices into question. When designing the first Actuated Workbench prototype in the spring of 2001, I made the assumption that motor-based technology could not be sufficiently miniaturized to build into a puck approximately 2" wide, the size of Sensetable pucks at the time. ZipZip technology clearly proves me wrong, though the noise that the small cars make while screeching around on a tabletop would probably still prove to be prohibitively distracting for HCI applications. Still, ZipZaps could easily be equipped with the small LC tags used in the Zowie tracking system and could be used to immediately create an ad-hoc actuated workbench system, without the need for a specially built, heavy table full of electromagnets. Since the cars are radio-controlled, it would be relatively simple to create a computer controller for these radio signals and have the computer directly control the motion of each Zip Zap car on the table. At the moment, Zip Zaps only provide two different frequencies for radio transmission, limiting the number of cars that can be operated in a specific area to two, but this could be overcome with some simple circuit modification.

At the time of this writing, ZipZip cars sell for about \$20 each, meaning that it would cost approximately \$200-300 (including the cost of microcontrollers and additional electronics) to equip a Sensetable system with an ad-hoc actuation mechanism.

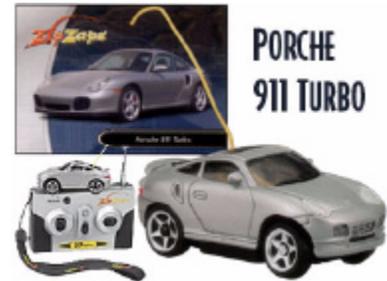


Figure 11.7 ZipZip remote control cars could provide an alternate technology for the movement of objects in an actuated tabletop TUI.



Figure 11.8 An air hockey table



Figure 11.9 Xerox PARC's AirJet Paper Mover uses MEMs technology to control a large array of air jets to move pieces of paper in two dimensions.

### Air Jets

One of the most frequent comments made by people seeing the Actuated Workbench for the first time is, "you could use it to play air hockey," pointing out the system's similarity to air hockey tables in the entertainment industry. Air hockey tables (Figure 11.8) emit jets of air from holes in the table surface in order to levitate a lightweight puck above the table surface, eliminating friction so that the puck can be knocked about on the table with high velocity. More sophisticated control of these air jets could allow precise positioning of multiple objects on the table. A system at Xerox PARC, the AirJet Paper Mover uses MEMs-printed air jets to control the 2D position of a piece of paper with up to micron accuracy and high feed rates. At the moment, this technology requires that air jets be mounted both above and below the object being moved (Figure 11.9), making such a system unsuitable for tabletop TUI, but it is possible that similar technologies could be developed to create a distributed air-jet actuator system for 2D tabletop movement.

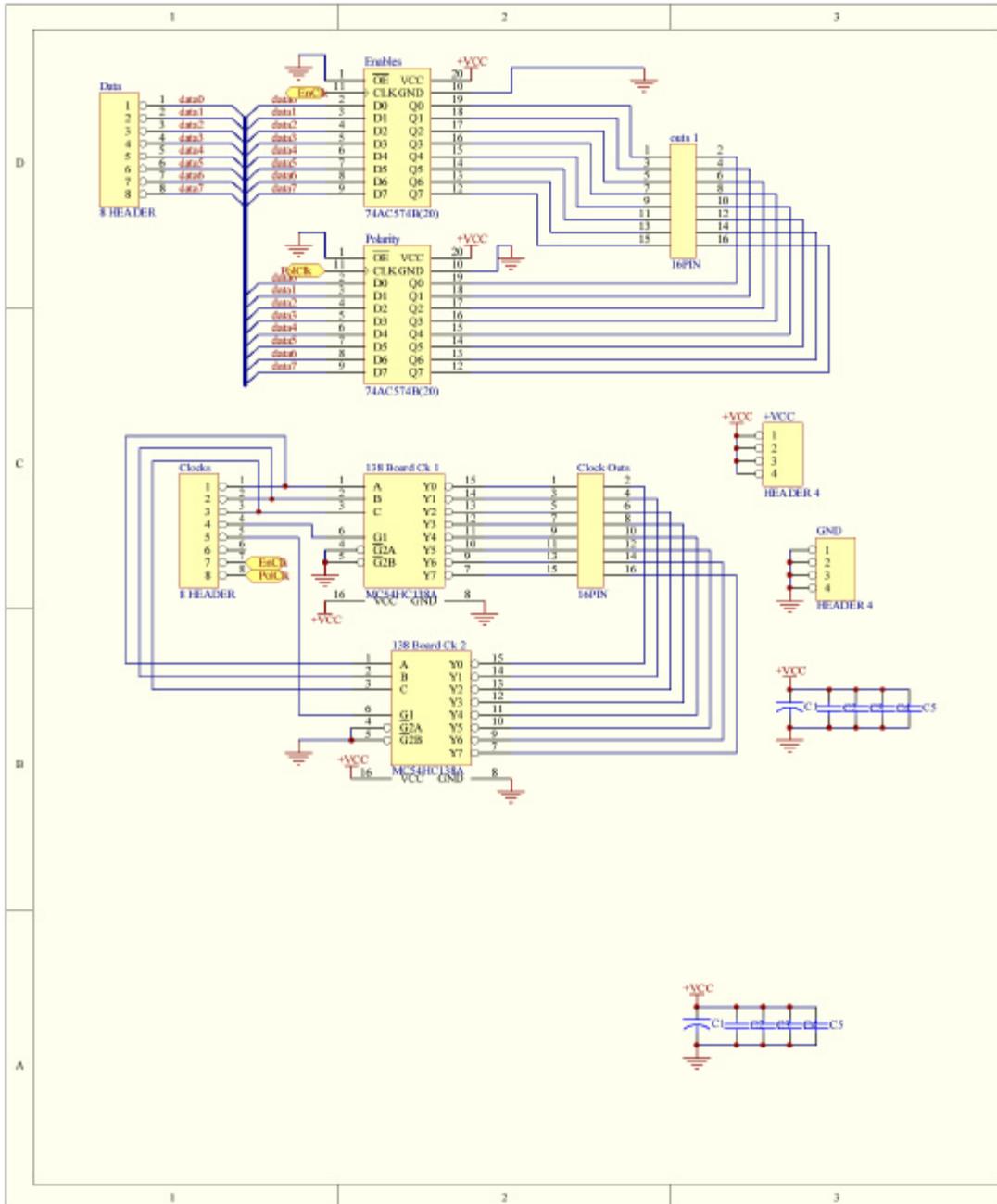
## **Appendix D. Schematics**

This section contains schematics and images of printed circuit board (PCB) layouts for the electronics I designed for the Actuated Workbench system. All schematics and PCB files were created using Protel 99 SE software.

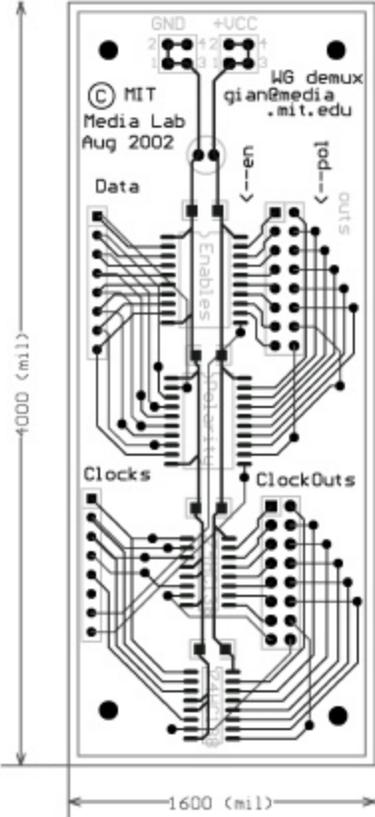




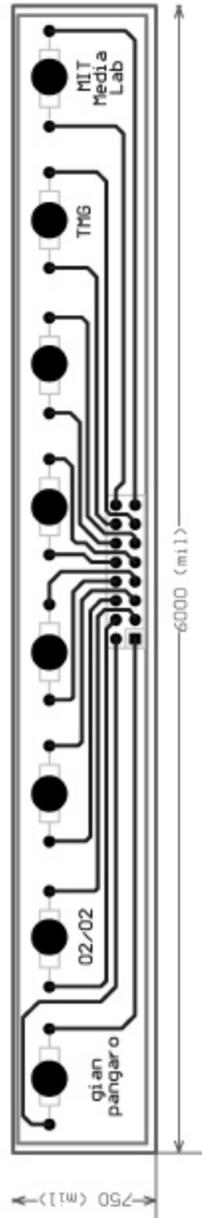
## Daughterboard Schematic



Daughterboard PCB



# Electromagnet Mounting PCB



## **Appendix E**

### **Microcontroller Code**

The following is microcontroller code written by Dan Maynes-Aminzade and I to run on the Systronix SaJe board. It is a multi-threaded Java Program that acts as an Ethernet server, receiving UDP packets from the computer running the application and then parsing them for output on the SaJe board's I/O pins.

## WG\_pwm\_Server\_polarity.java

```
import java.io.IOException;
import java.io.InputStream;
import java.io.OutputStream;
import javax.microedition.io.Connection;
import javax.microedition.io.Connector;
import javax.microedition.io.DatagramConnection;
import javax.microedition.io.StreamConnectionNotifier;
import javax.microedition.io.Datagram;

/**
 * Title: WG_pwm_Server_polarity.java
 * Description: New WeeGee_server for Saje board, incorporates polarity.
 * Copyright: 29 aug 2002
 * Company: MIT Media Lab
 * @author: gian Pangaro
 * @version 1.0
 */

public class WG_pwm_Server_polarity extends Thread{
    static DatagramConnection dgc;
    static Datagram dg;
    static WG_pwm_polarity pwmController = null;
    static byte[] buffer;
    private boolean packetFlag = false;

    // =====

    public void WG_pwm_Server_polarity() {

    }

    public void setController(WG_pwm_polarity wc) {
        pwmController = wc;
    }

    public void run() {

        String connURL = "datagram://:6969";
        System.out.println("Construct.");

        try {
            dgc = (DatagramConnection) Connector.open(connURL, Connector.READ);
            // opens the datagram connection
            System.out.println(dgc);
        } catch (Exception e) {
            System.out.println("Failed to open sock");
            return;
        }
    }
}
```

```

// the buffer is 128 bytes long plus one start byte
// each byte contains the polarity and strength of one
// magnet on the grid. -127 to 0 is negative polarity,
// 0 to +127 is positive polarity

try {
    buffer = new byte[129];
    dg = dgc.newDatagram(buffer, buffer.length);
} catch (Throwable t) {
    t.printStackTrace();
    System.out.println("Someone threw something, but I caught it.");
}
System.gc();           // a forced garbage collection to help lower the
                       // rate of future garbage collections
System.out.println("collecting garbage");
System.out.println("starting run");

while (true) {
    try {
        dgc.receive(dg);      // upon receiving a datagram packet
        handleData(dg.getData()); // call the handledata method in WG_pwm_polarity
    }
    catch (Exception e) {
        System.out.println(e);
    }
}
} // end run

void handleData(byte[] dat) {

    pwmController.handleData(dat);
}
} // end WG_pwm_Server_polarity

```

## WG\_pwm\_polarity.java

```
import com.ajile.drivers.gpio.GpioPin;
import com.ajile.drivers.gpio.GpioField;
import java.lang.System;
import java.util.*;

/**
 * Title: WG_pwm_polarity.java
 * Description: New WeeGee for Saje board, incorporates polarity.
 * Copyright: 29 aug 2002
 * Company: MIT Media Lab
 * @author: gian Pangaro
 * @version 1.0
 *
 * This code is written to update two full 8x8 WeeGee grids, using
 * the new WGdemux board, which holds two octal flops and two hc138's.
 * The Saje board receives UDP packets, then parses them for polarity and intensity of
 * each magnet. The Polarity (rowPolarity*) and Enable status (rowState*) then get clocked
 * one-by-one into the octal flops on the demux board, and then both are clocked simultaneously
 * into one of the four WeeGee driver boards. So, basically it demuxes one 8pin data bus
 * onto two 8pin buses
 */

public class WG_pwm_polarity extends Thread{
    // =====
    // output port and variable declarations
    // =====

    static GpioPin pwm_wiggle;
    static GpioField rowOutputPort;
    static GpioField rowClockPort;

    static int[][] rowEnableOne;
    static int[][] rowEnableTwo;
    static int[] rowClockOne;
    static int[] rowClockTwo;

    static byte[] rowPolarityOne;
    static byte[] rowPolarityTwo;

    static byte[] rowStateOne = new byte[8];
    static byte[] rowStateTwo = new byte[8];

    static int timer;

    // =====
    // OUTPUT PORT SETUP.
    // =====
}
```

```

public WG_pwm_polarity() {

    //temp
    pwm_wiggle = new GpioPin(GpioPin.GPIOA_BIT3);
    pwm_wiggle.setOutputPin(true);
    // end temp

    // initialize some important ports
    // IO port C is the output for rowClock
    // IO port E is the output for rowEnable
    rowOutputPort = new GpioField(GpioPin.GPIOE_BIT0, 8);
    rowOutputPort.setOutputField(true);
    rowClockPort = new GpioField(GpioPin.GPIOC_BIT0, 8);
    rowClockPort.setOutputField(true);

    timer = 0;

    // rowPolarityPort = new Parallel();

    // initialize important variables.
    rowEnableOne = new int[8][8];      // holds a generic register for 8 magnets
    rowEnableTwo = new int[8][8];     // holds a generic register for 8 magnets
    rowClockOne = new int[8];
    rowClockTwo = new int[8];
    rowClockOne[0] = 0x08;           // rowClockOne array is the clock for the left.
    rowClockOne[1] = 0x09;           // side of the board
    rowClockOne[2] = 0x0A;
    rowClockOne[3] = 0x0B;
    rowClockOne[4] = 0x0C;
    rowClockOne[5] = 0x0D;
    rowClockOne[6] = 0x0E;
    rowClockOne[7] = 0x0F;
    //
    rowClockTwo[0] = 0x10;           // rowClockTwo array is the clock for right side.
    rowClockTwo[1] = 0x11;
    rowClockTwo[2] = 0x12;
    rowClockTwo[3] = 0x13;
    rowClockTwo[4] = 0x14;
    rowClockTwo[5] = 0x15;
    rowClockTwo[6] = 0x16;
    rowClockTwo[7] = 0x17;

    for(int x = 0; x < 8; x++){
        for(int y = 0; y < 8; y++){
            rowEnableOne[x][y] = 0;    // start Enables all off
        }
    }
    for(int x = 0; x < 8; x++){
        for(int y = 0; y < 8; y++){
            rowEnableTwo[x][y] = 0;    // start Enables all off
        }
    }
}

```

```

    }
}

rowPolarityOne = new byte[8];
rowPolarityTwo = new byte[8];
for(int i = 0; i < 7; i++){ // initialize rowPolarity*
    rowPolarityOne[i] = 0; // we'll only use attraction for now.
    rowPolarityTwo[i] = 0; // we'll only use attraction for now.
}

System.out.println("board initialized");
sendOutRows(); // clear everything on the board
System.gc();
}

// =====
// delay_us() - microsecond delay method
// =====

public void delay_us(int num){
    num = 2 * num;
    for(int i = 0; i < num; i++){ // 1 time through this loop takes ~0.569uS
        // nop
    }
}

// =====
// handleData()
// =====
public static void handleData(byte[] b) {

    timer = (timer + 10) % 127;

    if(b[0] != -1) { return; }

    for(int x = 0; x < 8; x++){
        rowStateOne[x] = 0;
        rowPolarityOne[x] = 0;
        rowStateTwo[x] = 0;
        rowPolarityTwo[x] = 0;
        for(int y = 0; y < 8; y++){
            if(b[8*y+x+1] < -(timer)) { // if it's less than zero, then it's of the opposite polarity
                rowPolarityOne[x] |= (0x01 << y); // polarity: 0 == attraction, 1 == repulsion.
                rowStateOne[x] |= (0x01 << y); // enable state: 1 == on, 0 == off.
            }
            else if (b[8*y+x+1] > timer) { // checking against the timer to determine PWM duty cycle.
                rowStateOne[x] |= (0x01 << y); // enable state: 1 == on, 0 == off.
            }
        }
        if(b[8*y+x+65] < -(timer)) {
            rowPolarityTwo[x] |= (0x01 << y);
        }
    }
}

```

```

        rowStateTwo[x] |= (0x01 << y);    // enable state: 1 == on, 0 == off.
    }
    else if (b[8*y+x+65] > timer) {
        rowStateTwo[x] |= (0x01 << y);
    }
}
} // end handleData

// =====
// "clearRows"
// =====

public void clearRows(){
    for(int x = 0; x < 8; x++){
        for(int y = 0; y < 8; y++){
            rowEnableOne[x][y] = 0;    // start Enables all off
            rowEnableTwo[x][y] = 0;    // start Enables all off
        }
    }
}

// =====
// "sendOUtRows"
// =====

// =====
// The folloing sets up the enable and polarity states for two side-by-side
// grids of 64 magnets. it clocks them into an intermediate demux board (WGdemux)
// and then finally out to each of the four WeeGee boards that hold the magnet drivers.
// The format is complex, but the important thing to note is how the clock lines now work
// (via an hc138).
//     1)The upper two clock lines are used to clock the polarty and enable status
//        into the demux board (Clk7 is polarity, and Clk6 is Enable).
//     2) Clk5,4 are used to enable the '138 that will clock each WeeGee driver board.
//     3) Clk2,1,0 are used to select which clock line (0...7) goes low on the '138.
//        this is set up as a 3-bit number in binary.
//
// =====
public static void sendOutRows() {

    rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00);    // make sure clock lines are clear
    for(int i = 0; i < 8; i++){
        rowOutputPort.setFieldState(rowPolarityOne[i] & 0xFF); // setup polarityOne on output lines
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x80); // clock it into the polartiy flop on demux board
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00);    // make sure clock lines are clear
        rowOutputPort.setFieldState((rowStateOne[i]) & 0xFF);
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x40); // clock it into the enable flop on demux board
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00);
    }
}

```

```

        rowClockPort.setFieldState(rowClockOne[i] & 0xFF); // clock both the polarity and
                                                    //enable into driver board one
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00); // clear clock lines at end.
        rowOutputPort.setFieldState(rowPolarityTwo[i] & 0xFF); // setup polarityTwo on output lines
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x80); // clock it into the polartiy flop on demux board
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00); // make sure clock lines are clear
        rowOutputPort.setFieldState((rowStateTwo[i]) & 0xFF);
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x40); // clock it into the enable flop on demux board
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00);
        rowClockPort.setFieldState(rowClockTwo[i] & 0xFF); // clock both the polarity and
                                                    // enable into driver board two

        rowClockPort.setFieldState(0x00); // clear clock lines at end.
    }

} // end sendOutRows();

public void run() {
    clearRows();
    while (true) {
        //long ms_one;
        //long ms_two;
        //ms_one = System.currentTimeMillis();
        pwm_wiggle.setPinState(true);
        sendOutRows();
        pwm_wiggle.setPinState(false);
        //ms_two = System.currentTimeMillis();
        //System.out.println("pwm period is" + (ms_two - ms_one));
        //System.out.println("sent out tha rows!");
        yield();
    }
}

// =====
// Main method
// =====

public static void main (String [] args) {
    System.out.println("WG_pwm_Server_polarity version 1.2");
    WG_pwm_polarity pwmController = new WG_pwm_polarity();
    WG_pwm_Server_polarity wServer = new WG_pwm_Server_polarity();
    wServer.setController(pwmController);

    Thread serverThread = new Thread(wServer);
    Thread pwmThread = new Thread(pwmController);

    serverThread.start();
    pwmThread.start();

} // end main
} // end WG_pwm_polarity.java

```

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