

Gauge Freedom Field Notes

Shared science, insights, and news from the Gauge Freedom Lab.

Notes From AWE 2026, Part I: The Two Glasses You Can Actually Wear This Year

A user's field guide — why the first division between 2026 smartglasses is social, not technical

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DOI: [10.65323/gf-lab.2026.003](https://doi.org/10.65323/gf-lab.2026.003) • Posted: 2026-06-25 • License: CC BY 4.0

Field Notes / Editorial Report — Not Peer-Reviewed

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Abstract

AWE 2026 made this the first year a person can choose, off the shelf or by preorder, among genuinely different head-worn computers — and the usual spec-sheet sorting (field of view, resolution, degrees of freedom) is the wrong way to choose. This Field Note argues that the first division is *social*: what happens to you, and to the people around you, the moment the glasses go on. By that axis there are two categories — *Augmented Human* glasses that preserve eye contact and presence (Meta Ray-Ban Display, Even Realities G1, Jorjin J9), and *Augmented Reality* glasses that grant simultaneous local and non-local presence at the cost of looking slightly elsewhere (XREAL Aura, Unseen Reality URXR One) — with the Snap Specs as the bridge: Category-2 capability engineered to feel Category 1. The piece reads each device, the input layer (Mudra, KiWear, Prolo, Ganzin, bHaptics), and what AWE actually confirmed against this thesis, with first-person notes from the floor. A second Part follows next week.

1 Picture yourself wearing them

Let me honestly picture the 2026 smartglasses landscape — the devices already on faces, and the prototypes shown at AWE 2026 as promises for later this year — from the only viewpoint that finally matters: yours, the person who is going to wear one.

If you are that person, I want to tell you what exists and, roughly, what it is *for*. The first thing to say is that “smartglasses” is not one product. It is a fabric of overlapping categories, each resting on a particular set of technical choices and a particular intended use. Read the wrong way, that looks like noise. Read the right way, it is freedom — more real options for putting a computer on your face than have ever existed at once. Let's dive in.

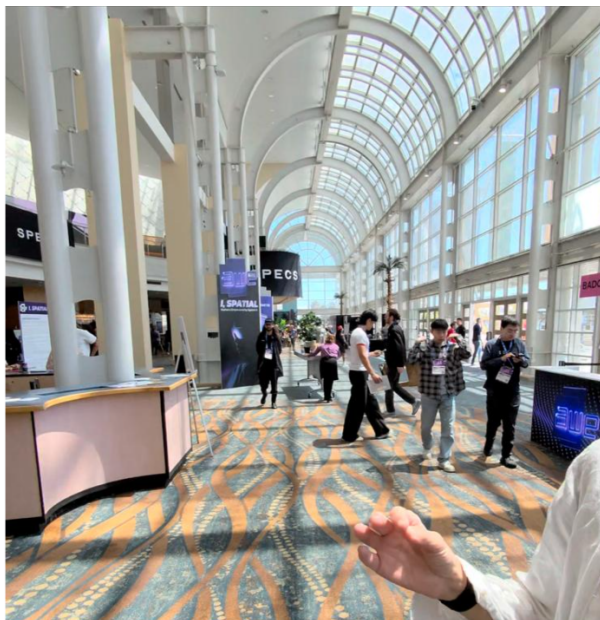


Figure 1: *The AWE 2026 floor in Long Beach (left). Right — two near-identical-size frames from opposite categories: top, the Unseen Reality URXR One (Category 2: 6DoF, tethered display, video passthrough); bottom, the Meta Ray-Ban Display (Category 1: 0DoF/3DoF HUD, wireless, fully transparent).*

2 The division nobody makes first, but should

Every review this year sorts glasses by their spec sheet: field of view, resolution, degrees of freedom. That is the wrong first cut. The honest first division is not the feature pack. It is the **social impact of wearing the thing** — what happens to you, and to the people around you, the moment the glasses go on your face.

By that axis there are two categories and one bridge between them.

3 Category 1 — Augmented Human Glasses

These are the glasses you wear while you are mainly with *people*. Fully transparent (or lightly tinted) frames that preserve continuous eye contact with the humans in front of you. Two flavors live here: AI glasses with **no display** — camera, microphone, audio, an assistant in your ear; and glasses with **one or two displays integrated** into the optics, kept deliberately minimal.

They are light, comfortable, wearable for hours, and they take prescription lenses. Three devices anchor the category at AWE 2026:

- **Meta Ray-Ban Display** — the device that this cycle put a single heads-up display into a frame people will wear all day. By capability it is modest; by social posture it is the breakthrough. (Its photochromic lenses take roughly a minute to darken — a small detail that matters below.)
- **Even Realities G1** — perhaps the purest expression of the idea: a monochrome heads-up display in frames that genuinely pass as ordinary eyewear, available from about \$599 (a \$150 prescription option on top), running notifications, navigation, translation, teleprompter, and

quick notes. Even’s own marketing makes my argument for me — it sells the ability to look at the room and make eye contact instead of looking down at a phone.

- **Jorjin J9** — unveiled at AWE (Booth 851) as an under-50-gram frame with an optional full-color monocular display, prescription *and* electrochromic lenses, and — the part that matters for later — built-in eye tracking driving a gaze-controlled “Look. Select. Done.” interface. Jorjin is showing it as a reference design, with a public announcement slated for Q2 2026.

Here is the reframe the immersion narrative keeps missing: **these are not Augmented Reality glasses. They are Augmented Human glasses.** The user stays fully inside reality and stays reactive to other humans. In fact you are *better* anchored in the real than the smartphone user beside you, because you are not tapping and scrolling a slab and breaking eye contact every few seconds.

The roles invert in a way worth stating plainly. The smartphone stops being the thing that steals your attention and becomes an *accessory display* — the surface you turn around to show someone an image. Meanwhile the distractions, the notifications, the small interactions, the advice from your AI, arrive with discretion *inside the glasses*: a private message, a line of text, a graphic, a clip, a word of private audio. The interruption stops being a public withdrawal from the room and becomes a quiet aside.



Figure 2: A cross-section of the Category-1 field — light AI glasses (no display) and minimal-display frames, lined up on the show floor, all running on Qualcomm Snapdragon silicon.

4 Category 2 — Augmented Reality Glasses

Now the user sees the reality around them *augmented*. This needs much more technology: a see-through XR display — the kind of thing the Apple Vision Pro does in a headset — miniaturized toward the form factor of ordinary glasses. It is real in 2026, but it carries a cost: a genuine loss of direct eye-to-eye contact with your environment, and a presence that still reads as slightly *weird* to the people near you.

What you buy with that cost is genuine: augmented reality multiplies your **simultaneous Local + Non-Local presence** and your ability to act in both at once. That is a superpower, and it is socially *welcomed* in exactly the situations where it visibly helps you discharge a responsibility others value — where everyone immediately reads you as an agent here to accomplish something, made extremely efficient by AI assistance rendered in space. The field-service engineer, the inspector, the technician, the clinician on terrain who needs augmented hands and eyes. So this market is **professional-first**, and in that frame the glasses are socially acceptable almost everywhere — the

same augmented capability the Apple Vision Pro demonstrated for years, but which was never easy to wear into a room.

Two devices define the category's range at AWE 2026:

- **XREAL Aura** — built with Google on Android XR, around 95 grams, a 70-degree field of view, 6DoF, splitting compute between a tethered puck (Qualcomm's Snapdragon Reality Elite) and an on-frame X1S coprocessor, with Gemini and the Play Store behind it, targeting roughly four hours of active use. Reservations opened at AWE: a \$99 refundable deposit (converting to a \$199 launch credit), a \$299 Founder Priority Pass that sold out in 36 hours, and a stated cap — the base model will not exceed \$1,500 before tax. Ships this fall, US first (Best Buy), then UK, Canada, Japan, South Korea.
- **Unseen Reality URXR One** — the lightest full-stack example: a 93-gram frame carrying dual 1.03-inch micro-OLED displays at 2448×2064 per eye, an approximately 90-degree diagonal field of view, sub-10 ms video see-through, 6DoF tracking, and bare-hand gesture control, with an on-glasses spatial processing unit. Public debut at AWE (Booth 1340); a Kickstarter is planned for summer 2026.

Category 2 also quietly covers the traveler and the coffee-shop worker: the person who needs a virtual high-resolution display to work on, a private cinema screen that isn't there, or a game. So it is not only *business* work — it is any work, and a good deal of leisure, that wants a big private screen you can fold into a pocket.



Figure 3: *XREAL Aura, worn on the floor (left). Right — top, Meta Ray-Ban Display; bottom, Unseen Reality URXR One. The optical display is invisible in Category 1, but in Category 2 it is a miniaturized headset with its own lenses, showing the world through front-facing see-through cameras.*

5 The bridge — 6DoF in an ordinary frame

Between Category 1 and Category 2 sits the most interesting design problem of the year: full 6DoF augmented reality in a frame people will actually wear in public. Snap is shipping its answer this fall, and it deserves to be understood precisely, because it is where the whole thesis gets tested.

By *capability*, the Snap Specs are firmly Category 2 — true see-through 6DoF AR that places digital objects in the world, a clear jump beyond a heads-up display. Snap quotes a 7-millisecond motion-to-photon latency, runs the whole thing standalone with no compute puck on two Snapdragon processors (one for vision, one for its “Lenses”), and gets about four hours, rechargeable while worn.

But by *social design*, Specs reach hard for Category 1. The lenses are electrochromic, not photochromic: they go from clear glasses indoors to sunglasses outdoors in about ten seconds — against the roughly one minute a photochromic lens like the Meta Ray-Ban Display’s needs, and they work through a windshield. The silhouette is built to pass as chunky eyewear. Spiegel’s own framing is that Specs are not designed to replace the world but to bring computing into it — which is exactly the bridge position.

The reality check is the price and the model: \$2,195, plus a refundable deposit, expected to ship this fall in the US, UK, and France. And the platform is closed in a telling way — Specs run Snap OS, sandboxed “Lenses” built in Lens Studio, not arbitrary native apps. (One detail worth flagging for builders: Snap is putting agentic Lens development directly inside Claude Code, Codex, and Cursor.)

This is why the social axis beats the spec axis. Two devices can carry near-identical capability and land in completely different social categories depending on whether the engineering bends toward *disappearing on your face* or *announcing itself*. Specs are the cleanest proof of the principle precisely because they are Category-2 hardware engineered to feel Category 1.



Figure 4: *Evan Spiegel unveils the Snap Specs at the AWE 2026 keynote, Long Beach.*

6 What AWE 2026 actually confirmed

Strip away the booth talk and three things became hard facts this week:

1. **The platform layer consolidated under Qualcomm.** Snapdragon Reality Elite turned up under both XREAL Aura and Snap’s silicon story, and Qualcomm paired it with START, a turnkey toolkit meant to let eyewear brands ship AI glasses without designing silicon —

Inspecs signed on as the first partner. The “half-dozen non-Meta glasses arriving over the next eighteen months” now have a reference path to exist.

2. **The named devices are real and dated.** Meta Ray-Ban Display (shipping), Even Realities G1 (on sale), Snap Specs and XREAL Aura (preorder, fall), URXR One (debut, Kickstarter summer), J9 (reference design, Q2 announcement). The category stopped being a someday promise.
3. **Google is playing the patient game** — an expanded Android XR trusted-tester program for display glasses later this year, Gemini as the connective tissue, and fashion-first partners (Warby Parker, Gentle Monster) in the wings.

From the floor

I appreciated the crisp, stable image of the Meta Ray-Ban Display’s 600×600 HUD in every kind of lighting. On the floor I liked the comfort of the URXR One and its high-resolution display — a perfect solution for working in a coffee shop. At the Snap Specs Lounge I tested several applications on the 2024 Spectacles — true augmented-reality games and learning experiences — and saw that Specs have settled into a genuinely finished, wearable form factor. I loved the 6DoF stability and wide field of view of the XREAL Aura, and was very impressed by a live 3D avatar rendered as Gaussian splats locally, on-device, by the Snapdragon Reality Elite at the Qualcomm booth.

I saw the Raven and the J9, each integrating eye tracking and a HUD in a light frame — though both were wired, not wireless like the Meta Ray-Ban Display. For hands-free, voice-free operation, eye tracking is an excellent technology, now made affordable and precise by the Ganzin Aurora.

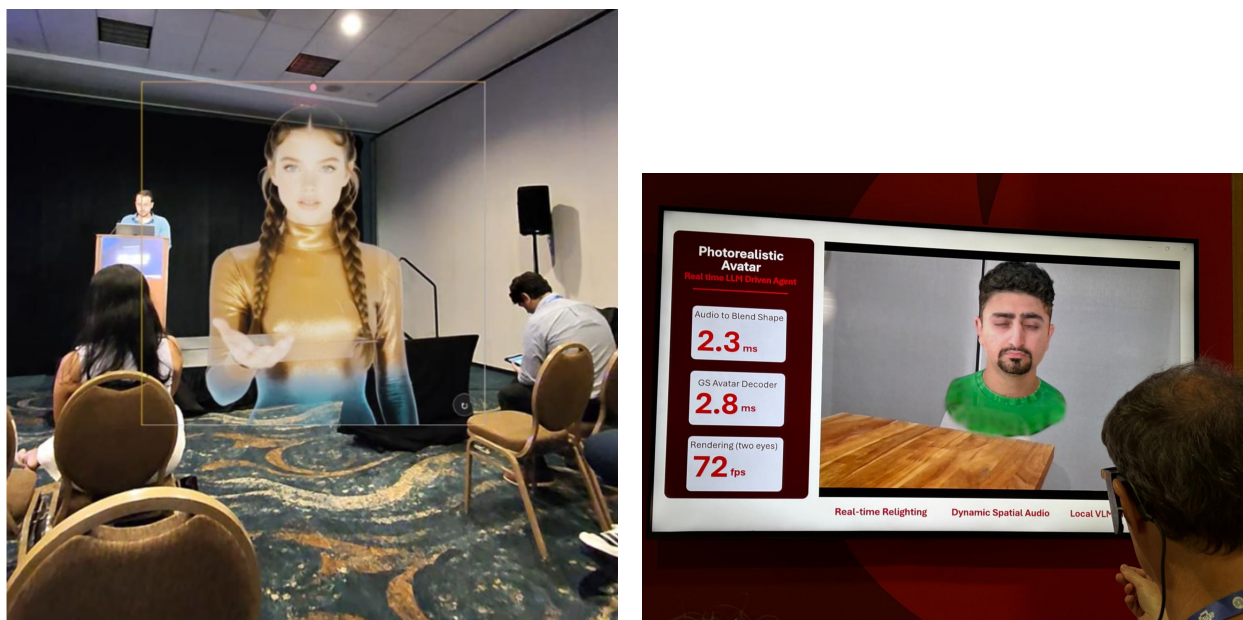


Figure 5: *Left — a hologram-like avatar rendered with Presence technology in the Meta Ray-Ban Display. Right — a live, LLM-driven 3D avatar rendered as Gaussian splats on-device (GS decoder 2.8 ms, 72 fps for two eyes) by the Snapdragon Reality Elite at the Qualcomm booth.*

7 Only after the social choice does the spec sheet matter

Once you have chosen your social posture, the second-order technical axes decide *which* device inside the category fits you:

- **Autonomy.** Full (needs nothing else — Snap Specs), Wireless (tethered over Bluetooth/Wi-Fi to a phone or puck), Wired (over USB — XREAL Aura), or Mixed.
- **Display.** One or two; mono or color; resolution; diagonal angle; form factor; frame rate. (Worked example: URXR One = dual micro-OLED, 2448×2064 per eye, about 90 degrees diagonal, in 93 grams — a Category-2 spec sheet at near-Category-1 weight. Contrast J9 = monocular, 25-degree FOV, under 50 grams — a Category-1 sheet that adds eye tracking instead of pixels.)
- **Augmented reality capability.** 0DoF (a HUD), 3DoF, or 6DoF; plus stability, persistence of anchored objects, and tracking of objects or people.
- **Functionalities.** Features; openness; closed vs open app market (Snap OS Lenses vs Android XR's Play Store is the cleanest contrast on the floor); how easy the foundational features are; and — the question I brought to every booth — what are the ten best experiences this device was actually designed for?

8 How you talk to them

Hardware is half the story. The other half is how the user *interacts* with the glasses, and AWE 2026 put every option on the floor, often in combination:

- **Finger and gesture tracking** via wristband or ring — the busiest fight at the show. Wearable Devices (the Mudra band/ring) reads neural signal at the wrist via sEMG; KiWear showed a touchless smart ring that drives phones, TVs, glasses, even car infotainment by finger gesture; Prolo’s ring took the show’s Startup-to-Watch nod. They are competing for the same job: hands-busy input that ships with the non-Meta glasses, outside Meta’s wristband.
- **Eye tracking** — the input that needs nothing new on your hand. Ganzin showed its Aurora platform running up to 120 Hz at roughly a quarter the power of NPU-based approaches, with Gaze2AI 2.0 fusing voice and gaze (voice for intent, gaze for attention) — and, notably, Ganzin’s eye tracking *is* the reference design inside the Jorjin J9. The Category-1 glasses example and the eye-tracking input example are the same platform.
- **Body tracking with feedback** — gloves and the like. bHaptics showed its TactGlove DK3. Real, but still aimed more at headsets than at glasses for now.
- **Speech recognition** — the quiet default that ties all of the above together.

From the floor

I tested the range of input technologies on offer across most AI glasses. Voice input — “Hi Alexa,” “Hey Meta” — the baseline way to talk to the integrated assistant. Gestures emulating a keyboard, trackpad, or mouse using rings: the KiWear, in the form factor of an Oura-style smart ring but with far more functions and true multi-device universality; and the award-winning Prolo ring, with a luxurious feel and a large integrated touchpad. Spatial gestures via the Wearable Devices band, which offers real openness and extensibility while still covering the simple, necessary navigation actions — much like Meta’s neural band. Haptic gloves, comfortable to wear, from bHaptics. And plain 6DoF interaction with the naked hand on the XREAL Aura and Specs. I also loved eye tracking — it genuinely makes you feel you are controlling the XR with your mind.



Figure 6: *Mudra-band interaction with a spatial display — the gesture layer in everyday use.*



Figure 7: *Ganzin's Aurora IIS and Aurora IIE eye-tracking reference modules.*

9 What this means for the next Field Note

If Part I is right that the real divide is social, then the next questions write themselves, and they are the spine of Part II:

- **Who else needs glasses?** Beyond the able adult buyer: ergonomic variants, child-scale frames, and the glasses-free home-display category (Avalon, notAnImage, Leia, Starport) that nobody puts on the cover but that may be where shared spatial experience actually lands.
- **Does the open layer hold?** A closer read on RP1 / Sneeze and the Open Metaverse Browser Initiative as the answer to distribution — whether spatial computing ships to the URL or gets enclosed in app stores the way mobile did. This is also where I will place the detailed write-ups of my four AWE meetings — Wearable Devices, KiWear, RP1/OMBI, and Unseen Reality — and the test of whether a webapp written for the Meta Ray-Ban Display can run, with adjustments, on URXR One and the rest of the open-runtime devices.
- **And the biggest swings:** Meta, Snap, Qualcomm, and the startups orbiting them, measured not by immersion but by how gracefully they respect the 80% of life the user is already living in.

Part II follows next week.

10 Disclosures

Editorial independence: The author is Lead Editor of *Gauge Freedom Field Notes*. **Affiliations:** The author is CEO and Co-Founder of Gauge Freedom, Inc., a public benefit company. **Commercial**

interest: The author leads mrbd.ai and related Presence work. **Press accreditation:** The author attended AWE USA 2026 as accredited media. **Images and press materials:** Field photographs are by the author except where a manufacturer press image is noted (Figure 6, courtesy of Wearable Devices Ltd., used with permission.); product renders and press materials remain the property of their respective makers. **Funding:** None.

11 Artifacts

Artifacts

- **mrbd.ai marketplace:** <https://mrbd.ai>
- **Live AWE coverage on X:** [@mrbd_ai](https://twitter.com/mrbd_ai)
- **Gauge Freedom Journal:** <https://gaugefreedom.org>
- **Author contact:** ra@gaugefreedom.com

12 Citation

How to cite: Aschheim, R. (2026). *Notes From AWE 2026, Part I: The Two Glasses You Can Actually Wear This Year. Gauge Freedom Field Notes.* <https://doi.org/10.65323/gf-lab.2026.003>

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- XREAL Aura — reservations, \$1,500-before-tax cap, 95 g / 70-degree / 6DoF, Snapdragon Reality Elite + X1S. <https://www.xreal.com/us/aura>; Engadget; 9to5Google; Gizmodo, June 2026.
- Unseen Reality URXR One — 93 g, dual 1.03-inch micro-OLED, sub-10 ms see-through, Booth 1340, Kickstarter summer 2026. Unseen Reality; AWE product-launch coverage, June 2026.
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- Qualcomm — Snapdragon Reality Elite + START toolkit, Inspects first partner. AWE recap coverage, June 16, 2026.

- Wearable Devices Ltd. — Mudra neural input (Mudra Link / Mudra Band): Surface Nerve Conductance (sEMG) sensors plus 6DoF IMU, 14+ gestures, pressure sensing, Bluetooth HID; AWE 2026 demo paired with Meta-Bounds AR glasses; Mudra Studio developer platform (WebXR / WebSocket / MCP). <https://mudra-band.com>
- KiWear, Inc. — KiWear Smart Ring, billed as the industry's first touchless smart-ring controller (air micro-gestures for phones, tablets, glasses, car infotainment); powers Qualcomm's reference-design smart rings (2nd gen on Snapdragon S7+ Gen 1); AWE 2026 Booth 1142 (and Qualcomm Booth 911), Kickstarter July 2026. <https://www.kiwear.com>
- Meta Ray-Ban Display — photochromic (about one minute) vs Specs electrochromic (about ten seconds). UploadVR, June 2026.
- RP1 / Sneeze / Open Metaverse Browser Initiative. Metaverse Standards Forum + RP1 (BusinessWire), June 15, 2026.
- AWE USA 2026 conference programme. <https://www.awexr.com>