



Design and the Elastic Mind

19 Johan Liden and aruliden. Motorola Sparrow RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) scanning device. Concept. 2006–ongoing. Injection-molded plastic, glass, and aluminum, 2 3/4 × 2 3/4 × 1/2" (7 × 7 × 103 cm)

The time has come to take control of the dozens of features available for portable devices. Getting more information on the surrounding context—whether commercial, cultural, or geographic—is a function that will presumably become more and more important.



of singular design creativity that introduce new areas of study and influence as well as the new types of functional gradients that designers are trying to endow objects with, taking their cues from sources as varied as nanostructures, biological systems, topography, and cosmology. The goal is to facilitate as seamless a movement as possible from fast to slow, virtual to physical, cerebral to sensual, automatic to manual, dynamic to static, mass to niche, global to local, organic to inorganic, and proprietary to common, to mention just a few extreme couplings. Some examples are by bona fide designers, others by scientists and artists who have turned to design to give method to their productive tinkering, what John Seely Brown has called “thinkering.”⁶ They all belong to a new culture in which experimentation is guided by engagement with the world and open, constructive collaboration with colleagues and other specialists.

Design 1:1

Today, many designers have turned several late twentieth-century infatuations on their heads, for instance with speed, dematerialization, miniaturization, and a romantic and exaggerated formal expression of complexity. After all, there is a limit beyond which micro-keyboards are too small for a person’s fingers and complexity simply becomes too overwhelming. Examples abound in all fields of people’s desire to return to what is perceived as a human dimension, including gastronomy (the Slow Food movement), agriculture (organic produce), travel (ecotourism), production of energy (distributed generation), economic aid (microinvestment), and politics (the town hall meeting), to name just a few.⁷ These all revolve around the idea that global issues should be tackled bottom-up and that an individual or local spark can start a powerful chain reaction with global implications.

The most contemporary of design theory is devoted to the quest for an environment, whether virtual