ENCHANTED OBJECTS INNOVATION DESIGN AND THE FUTURE OF TECHNOLOGY pdf

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It is years into the future. All the wonderful everyday objects we once treasured have disappeared, gobbled up by an unstoppable interface: Books, calculators, clocks, compasses, maps, musical instruments, pencils, and paintbrushes, all are gone. The artifacts, tools, toys, and appliances we love and rely on today have converged into this slice of shiny glass, its face filled with tiny, inscrutable icons that now define and control our lives. In my nightmare the landscape beyond the slab is barren. Desks are decluttered and paperless. Pens are nowhere to be found. We no longer carry wallets or keys or wear watches. Heirloom objects have been digitized and then atomized. Framed photos, sports trophies, lovely cameras with leather straps, creased maps, spinning globes and compasses, even binoculars and booksâ€”the signifiers of our past and triggers of our memoryâ€”have been consumed by the cold glass interface and blinking search field. Future life looks like a Dwell magazine photo shoot. Rectilinear spaces, devoid of people. The lack of objects has had an icy effect on us. Human relationships, too, have become more transactional, sharply punctuated, thin and curt. Fewer objects exist to trigger storytellingâ€”no old photo albums or clumsy watercolors made while traveling someplace in the Caribbean. In my nightmare, the cold, black slab has re-architected everythingâ€”our living and working spaces, our schools, airports, even bars and restaurants. We interact with screens 90 percent of our waking hours. The result is a colder, more isolated, less humane world. Perhaps it is more efficient, but we are less happy. Grandfather was a meticulous architect and woodworker. His basement workshop had many more tools than a typical iPad has apps. He owned power tools: Clamps hung from every rafter. Strewn around his architectural drawings were T squares, transparent triangles, hundreds of pencils and pens, stencils for complex curves, compasses, and protractors of every size. This debunks the myth of technology convergence. Or dreaming of tool convergenceâ€”wishing some singular mother-of-all-tools would come along to replace them. When carving, he would lay out a line of chisels that, to my untrained eye, looked pretty much the same. He would switch rapidly from tool to tool, this one for a smaller-radius cut, this one to take out more material, this one for a V-shaped cut. As a five-year-old, my job was to brush the wonderful-smelling wood shavings off the worktable and sweep sawdust into piles on the floor. Just as important as the suitability of the tool to the job was its relationship to the worker. Tools were practical, but they also told stories. They each possessed a lineage. Hanging from the rafters were hundreds of specialized jigs he had made to hold a particular part of a clock as it passed through the table saw or to route dovetail joints. As tools summoned memories, he would glance up from his work. He would point to the bow in his hand. They fit human bodies and minds. They were a pleasure to work with and to display. They made us feel powerful, more skilled and capable than we were without them. They hung or nestled quietly, each in its place, and never made us feel stupid or overwhelmed. They were, in a word, enchanting. I want the computer-human interface to be an empowering and positive experienceâ€”to minimize the interruption, annoyance, and distraction of our so-called smartphones and glass-faced tablets. Over millennia, as humans worked with textiles, wood, and metal to craft clothing, furniture, homes, and cathedrals, we developed specialized tools for specific jobs. He and I share a view of the needs and opportunities for human-technology interaction that are not currently being answered by the smartphone and its kin. For one, we need to connect the billions of legacy objects that already make up our infrastructureâ€”thermostats, doorknobs and locks, buses and bridges and electric power meters. We also need devices that can manipulate real material, such as 3-D printers that can translate electronic designs into physical objects, into food, and, eventually, into aromas. And we need tangible interfaces that make the human body smarter. Technology can enhance our five senses and optimize our physical abilities by accommodating and responding to the way we already operate in the world: What if screens atomize into a smaller, tangible, and more siftable material like sand? This is the vision of the innovative game company Sifteo. Each of these

blocks is a screen that knows its orientation to the others. These are just a few of the hundreds, thousands, possibly millions of possibilities for objects to interact with us in ways that glass slabs cannot. This book will uncover, analyze, and celebrate those objects and new forms of interaction. Technology, I believe, should help make human beings, and the world we live in, more captivating and more enchanting. You and I can help illuminate the way toward that future. It is a town known for both its easygoing liberalism and its excellent selection of cheeses. The forecast suffused the opening of almost any conversation. We regularly consulted our antique brass barometer, which hung proudly on the wall in the upstairs hall of our house throughout my boyhood and is still there today. Given to my parents as a wedding gift, the barometer is encased in brass, set in mahogany, with a white dial and two hands. You might mistake it for a clock, but if you look closer, you see that the numbers signify millibars, rather than minutes. Inscribed on the face are the words Stormy. Every morning my father, on his way from bedroom to bathroom, would stop at the barometer, tap it, and gaze at the face as if it were a crystal ball. It never needs an upgrade or recharging. There are no little buttons to confuse or exasperate you. The old-fashioned barometer has come to represent for me a new and radically simpler way to think about our relationship with technology interfaces. The information the barometer had to offer could be ascertained with a quick look—it was glanceable. The device was polite, Zen-simple, and never intimidating. The object was dedicated to a single task of information delivery, located in one never-changing place in the house, quietly waiting to do its job. And it did so without the need for updates or upgrades or maintenance or a service plan. Our family barometer still faithfully serves my parents, nearly five decades later. The barometer came to serve as a model for me as a young interface designer, a fantastic exemplar for future interfaces. How could I make technology interactions that were this simple and convenient and useful and long-lasting? I have always loved objects of measurement and display such as our family barometer, both real and imagined. Not only is it perfectly made for its task—well-balanced, attractive, and sharp—it has an additional and amazing ability: When danger approaches, Sting glows blue, anticipating its own need and use. It is a trusty weapon, an infallible warning system, a handsome object, and a fantastic companion—for a hobbit. Sting, the barometer, and so many other steampunk-era objects—vintage car and boat dashboards, analog dials, and stereo interfaces—have material qualities that I respond to. Not only are they delightful to operate and live with, they have a knowingness about them, a possession of knowledge that they convey, an ability to amplify human abilities. Like a vintage clock, such instruments seem to carry the weight of experience. Even as a kid, I imagined creating objects that were as handy as Sting and as mystical as the barometer. In those hours I spent in the workshop with my grandfather avoiding the Thanksgiving or Christmas hubbub taking place upstairs , we would turn bowls on the lathe, take apart clocks, build stereo speakers and bike rollers, dream up and draw fantasy homes or airports. My curiosity carried through my childhood: In college, computing opened my eyes to a new world of possibilities for what objects could already do and what they might eventually be able to do. A double major, I found that both physics and fine art had their own thrilling languages for characterizing the physical world, each with revelations and enlightenments. My graduate work at Harvard included the building of software-learning simulations like SimCity. There, I had another revelation: There can and will be real flying carpets and should be and already are Dick Tracy wrist communicators. The smartphone is a confusing and feature-crammed techno-version of the Swiss Army knife, impressive only because it is so compact. The smartphone is a jealous companion, turning us into blue-faced zombies, as we incessantly stare into its screen every waking minute of the day. It took some time for me to understand why the smartphone, while convenient and useful for some tasks, is a dead end as the human-computer interface. The reason, once I saw it, is blindingly obvious: Frodo does not value Sting simply because it has a good grip and a sharp edge; he values it for safety and protection, perhaps the most primal drive. Dick Tracy was not a guy prone to wasting time and money on expensive personal accessories such as wristwatches, but he valued his two-way wrist communicator because it granted him a degree of telepathy—with it, he could instantly connect with others and do his work better. The humanistic approach to computing that I propose in this book is not about fanciful, ephemeral wishes, but rather persistent, essential human ones—omniscience, telepathy, safekeeping,

immortality, teleportation, and expression. To prioritize what new technologies to explore and which new devices to develop, companies and product makers must fundamentally start with human desire in its most basic forms. In doing so they can focus on creating products that can have a meaningful and positive impact in the world. His death came too soon, in part because of behavioral health issues: He was hardly alone. But, even though Pop Rose was a doctor himself and knew very well that he was at risk, would he have used a smartphone app to help him with his medication regimen? Would he have been able to find the tiny icon on the screen and use it to log his behavior?

2: Enchanted Objects by David Rose

Instead, future technology will inevitably spread out, combining itself with the objects that make up the very fabric of daily living. Such technology, says Rose, can be woven into the background of our environment--enhancing human relationships, channeling desires for powers like omniscience, immortality and creative expression, and ushering the enchanted objects of fairy tales, scifi, and fantasies into real life.

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