



The Electronic as Post-optimal Object

Anthony Dunne



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Critical designer

Educator

Founder of “Dunne and Raby”

Born: May 3, 1964 (age 55 years),

Place: England, United Kingdom

Education: Royal College of Art

- Author of Hertzian Tales (CRD Research, 1999, MIT Press, 2005)

Intelligent object - No reference

Material - reference.

Designers of electronic objects - accepting a role as a semiotician

E. Manzini(Italian design), THE MATERIAL OF INVENTION

Intelligent object (no prior cultural references)

Physical aspects (within the world of materials)

Information exchange than with form

Designers of electronic objects - accepting a role as a semiotician

The electronic object - same linguistic discipline as package design

Three perspectives on the electronic object:

- The Electronic as Lost Object (briefly discusses theoretical perspectives)
- The Electronic as Object (focuses on design approaches)
- The Electronic as Post-optimal Object (introduces the idea of the “post-optimal” object)



The Electronic as Lost Object



A Technological Perspective

- Theories of Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio - stimulating source of ideas
- If seduced - designs become mere illustrations of descriptions
- Building on what is already understood, rather than illustrating it.
- Computer merges with other industries - strives optimization
- Writing on electronic art - technology-driven - only aesthetic expression

A Semiotic Perspective

- Design writers - objects can be “written” and “read” as visual signs
- Study of consumerism - semiological analysis of objects as commodities

A Material Culture Perspective

- Material - between anthropology, sociology, and ethnology
- Value of material culture - Complex nature of our relationship to ordinary objects
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A Design Perspective

- very narrow form of semiotic analysis has dominated design thinking
- Susani - We are lacking a discipline, perhaps an 'objectology,' or an 'object ethology,'
- Exploring the overlap between the material and immaterial world
- He suggests that material culture could offer useful insights to this problem.

A Literary Perspective

- Fruitful reflection - literature concerned poetry of everyday objects
- Gaston Bachelard (1969) - poetic dimension of humble furniture such as wardrobes and chests of drawers
- View of objects by literary writers - reveals a poetry of material culture that offers a fresh alternative



The Electronic as Object



Four design approaches to the electronic object:

- Packages
- Fusions
- Dematerialization
- Juxtaposition

Design is viewed here as a strategy for linking the immaterial and the material.

Packages

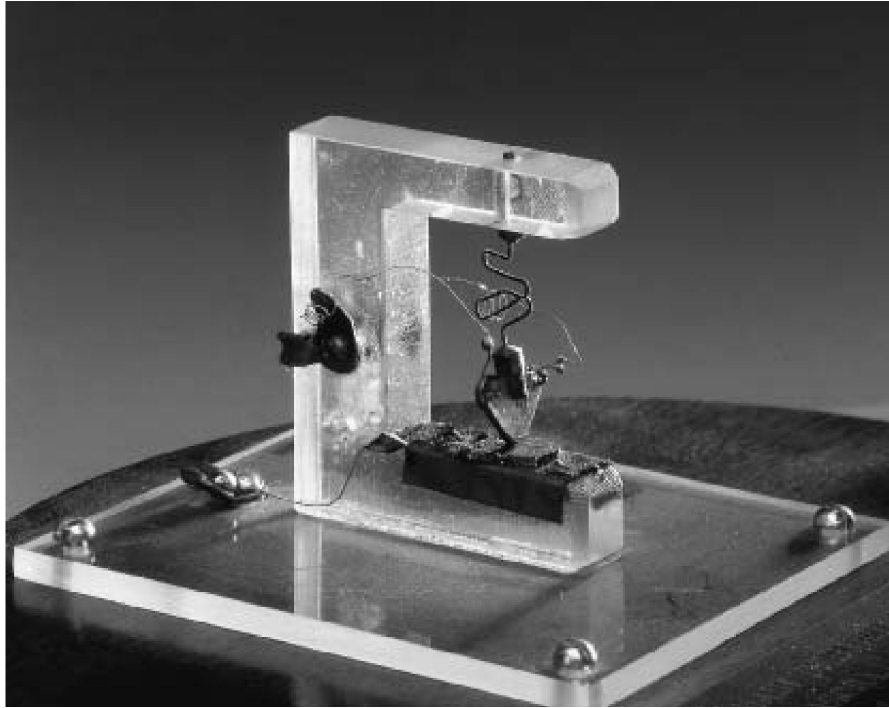
Daniel Weil's Radio in a Bag - designer's role as a packager of technology to the extreme.

- Playful approach to package design
- Liberating it from product semantics
- Packaging of electronics can yield interesting results
- critical success - treatment as a thing rather than an image

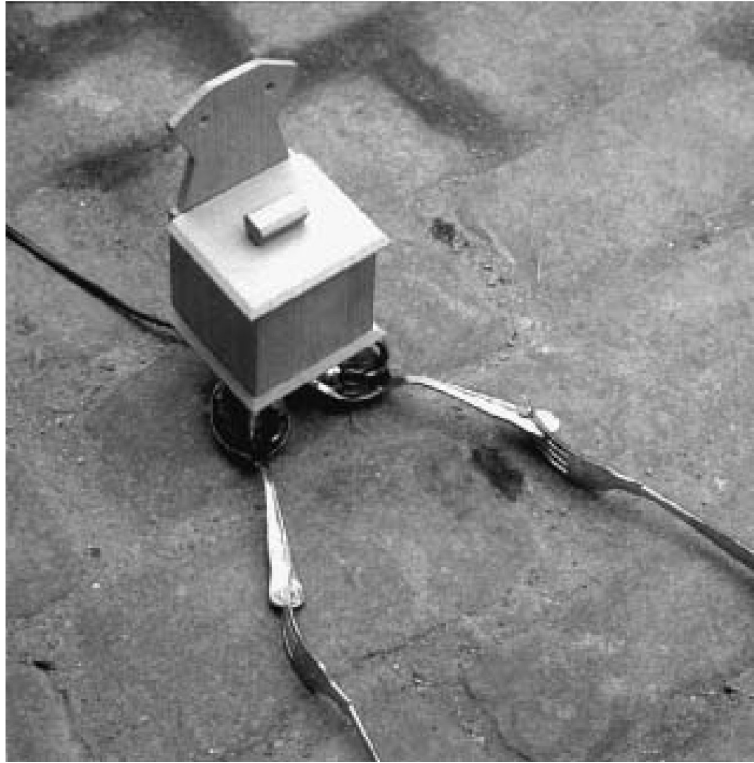


Fusion

- The electronic object - confusion of conceptual models, symbolic logic, algorithms, software, electrons, and matter.
- Architect Neil Denari
 - overcoming of the symbolic
 - connection between electromagnetism and spatial inhabitation
- Reconciling the scales that separate the worlds of electrons and space
- Subject to mass production - truth to materials, is lost
- Smart materials - gap between the electronic and material is being closed



The first transistor: a test-rig for a key electronic component created by inventors working at the level of both electrons and matter.



- Approach - Electricity in delightfully poetic ways
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Daniel Weil's Clock (1983), based on the largest circuit boards available in the early 1980s, is a reaction against miniaturization.

Manzini (1986)

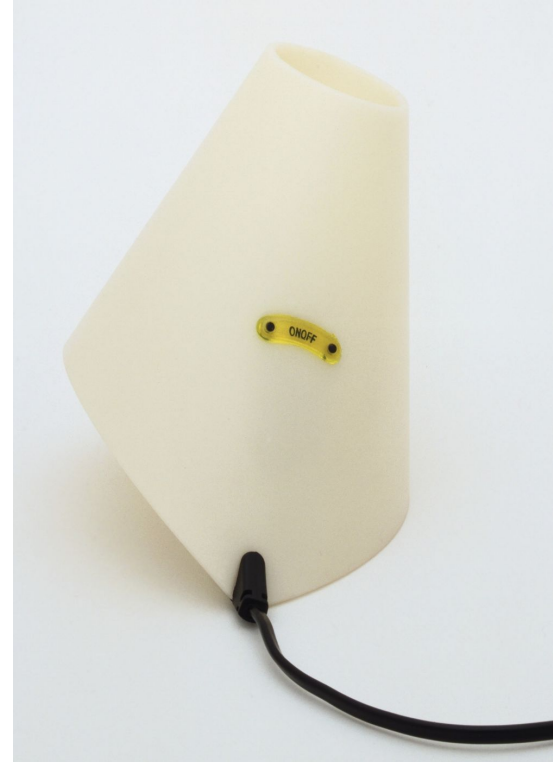
- The design of this skin - interactivity with the environment
- Miniaturization - integrating previously separate mechanisms
- But do not demonstrate the radical aesthetic potential of these materials

Alberto Meda and Denis Santachiara's Stroke Lamp

- New relationships between people and machines - new reactive materials
- Controlled by stroking the surface



Andrea Branzi's Leaf Electroluminescent
Lamp (1988) for Memphis



Alberto Meda and Denis Santachiara's
Stroke Lamp

Designers - not exploited the aesthetic dimension of new materials as functional possibilities

(to backlight LCD screens in laptop, reducing their bulk and weight, illuminate escape routes in aircraft so they can be seen through smoke).

- Most work - does not encourage poetic and cultural possibilities
- Outcome - unimaginative proposals
- Smart materials - under development, expensive, use large energy to operate.
- Interesting materials - not available for design, experiments
either use simulations - less sophisticated materials

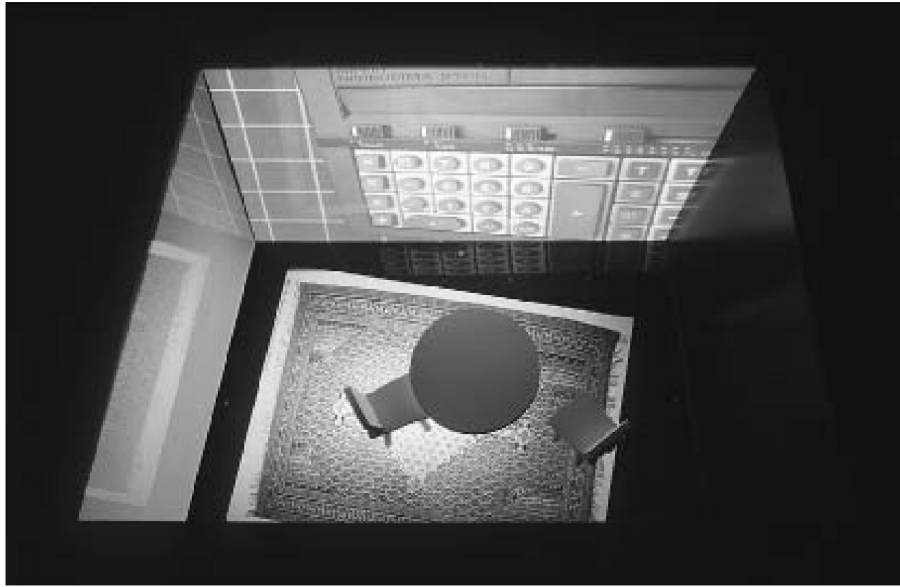
Dematerialization

The electronic object - threshold of materiality

- Means different things depending on what it is defined in relation to:
 - immaterial/material
 - invisible/visible
 - energy/matter
 - software/hardware
 - virtual/real

The physical can never be completely dismissed

Design Today Exhibition, German Museum of Architecture(1988) - Kunstflug



The Electronic Room: Programmable
Appearances



Electronic Hand Calculator: design
without an object

Ideas of Manzini, Susani, and Thackara - Argue focusing on experiences rather than objects

Weibel: intelligent ambience - an environment based on machine intelligence

Two form of dematerialization:

Design Primario - design effort shifts from hardware to software controls levels of light, sound, and temperature to provide sensual environmental qualities.

Electronic objects - interface is everything

Juxtaposition

- analogue complexity in digital phenomena?
superimposing the known and comfortable onto the new and alien?
- The electronic - regarded only in terms of its new functional and aesthetic possibilities; its supporting hardware plays no significant part.
- Juxtaposition allows the best qualities of both to coexist, each with its own aesthetic and functional potential
- They can simply coexist in one object.



Fiona Raby's telematic Balcony (1995) is an example of an approach to electronic objects where no effort is made to reconcile the different scales of the electronic and the material.

The Electronic as Post-optimal Object

Challenges for designers - realms of metaphysics, poetry, and aesthetics

The aesthetics of the post-optimal object - provide new experiences of everyday life, new poetic dimensions.