



ONE-TO-ONE

Even as the questions and controversies inherent in today's scientific and technological world become more important to our future, they often remain frustratingly difficult to grasp. Increasingly, there is an appeal to prioritize the human dimension, and recognize the role of the individual, in our interactions with science and technology. Designers and scientists are teaming up in ways that simplify those interactions, elucidate the human dimension of scientific research and also recast abstract and complex ideas at human scale, and for human consumption.

THE SIMPLER LIFE

John Maeda is the president-elect of the Rhode Island School of Design, a position he will assume in June 2008.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO DESIGN AN OBJECT AT "HUMAN-SCALE?"

If you *have* to use something, it changes your whole perception of whether it's hard to use. I think companies are realizing that humans need help and that selling them things that are more complex doesn't help them. Helping them to buy simpler things, things that are easier to wield or control, might be the next step. Good design helps us teach ourselves how to take control of things.

HOW DOES, OR CAN, THAT DESIGN ETHIC GET APPLIED TO SCIENCE?

Sometimes design is clarity and sometimes it's also a good kind of confusion. Knowing what is "right-sized" in design is always the

key to a good solution. This might mean the right size conceptually for your mind or ergonomically for your body. In science, the great problems to solve are the ones that are right-sized for humanity.

SCIENCE IS OFTEN ACCUSED OF DEHUMANIZING US—SO YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT DESIGN THAT CAN COUNTER THAT?

Well I think that bad design dehumanizes us just as bad science might. Whoever imagined that we would someday spend most of our work lives peeking into tiny screens while most anywhere (such as seat 4C on a transatlantic flight) is certainly guilty of a form of dehumanization. Great science is enlightened, just as is great design.

—Interviewed by Jon Bardin



1 THE RESTAURANT GAME BY JEFF ORKIN, DEB ROY, AND THE MIT MEDIA LAB Traditionally, game designers have trusted computers to generate human behavior, often with less-than-convincing results. The Restaurant Game (www.therestaurantgame.net) flips that paradigm by using real actions as the source for artificial behavior. Orkin and his team are analyzing every action taken by thousands of players in a virtual restaurant, and plan to eventually apply the information to the development of more realistic AI systems.

2 DNA COLLECTION KIT BY 23ANDME Less than a year old, start-up 23andMe has immediately made a name for itself by becoming the first company to offer an affordable and individualized genetic profile. Customers send in a cheek swab, and, once it's been analyzed, gain access to a whole online suite of information about their own DNA. The considered design of both the process and the product anticipates people's desire to engage with science on a more personal level.

3 BACKGROUND STORIES: CHOCOLATE BY ARLENE BIRT The lack of production information available to shoppers can make socially conscious consumption a tricky game. Arlene Birt's Background Stories represents an alternative, demonstrating how savvy companies can begin to change that equation by providing consumers with the information necessary to make enlightened choices. The design brings a number of production factors to light, including the carbon footprint of your chocolate bar.



4 WATER-LEVEL INTERFACE BY OKI SATO OF NENDO It's about time the laws of physics were applied to electronics. Designed in Flash, Sato's gestural interface plays with gravitational forces by filling your phone with virtual water that behaves just like real water would. When tilted, the acceleration sensor detects the angle, and the surface of the liquid changes accordingly. It has a practical purpose too: The amount of liquid indicates the battery level.

