

ON
OFF

New Electronic Products By Mel Byars

ON/OFF

New Electronic Products

Mel Byars

Research by

Brice d'Antras

Cinzia Anguissola d'Altoé

Sarah Lynch

Laurent Müller



Laurence King

Published in 2001 by Laurence King Publishing
an imprint of Calmann & King Ltd
71 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3BP
Tel: +44 020 7430 8850
Fax: +44 020 7430 8880
e-mail: enquiries@laurenceking.co.uk
www.laurenceking.co.uk

Copyright © 2001 Mel Byars

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, record-
ing or any information storage and retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publisher.

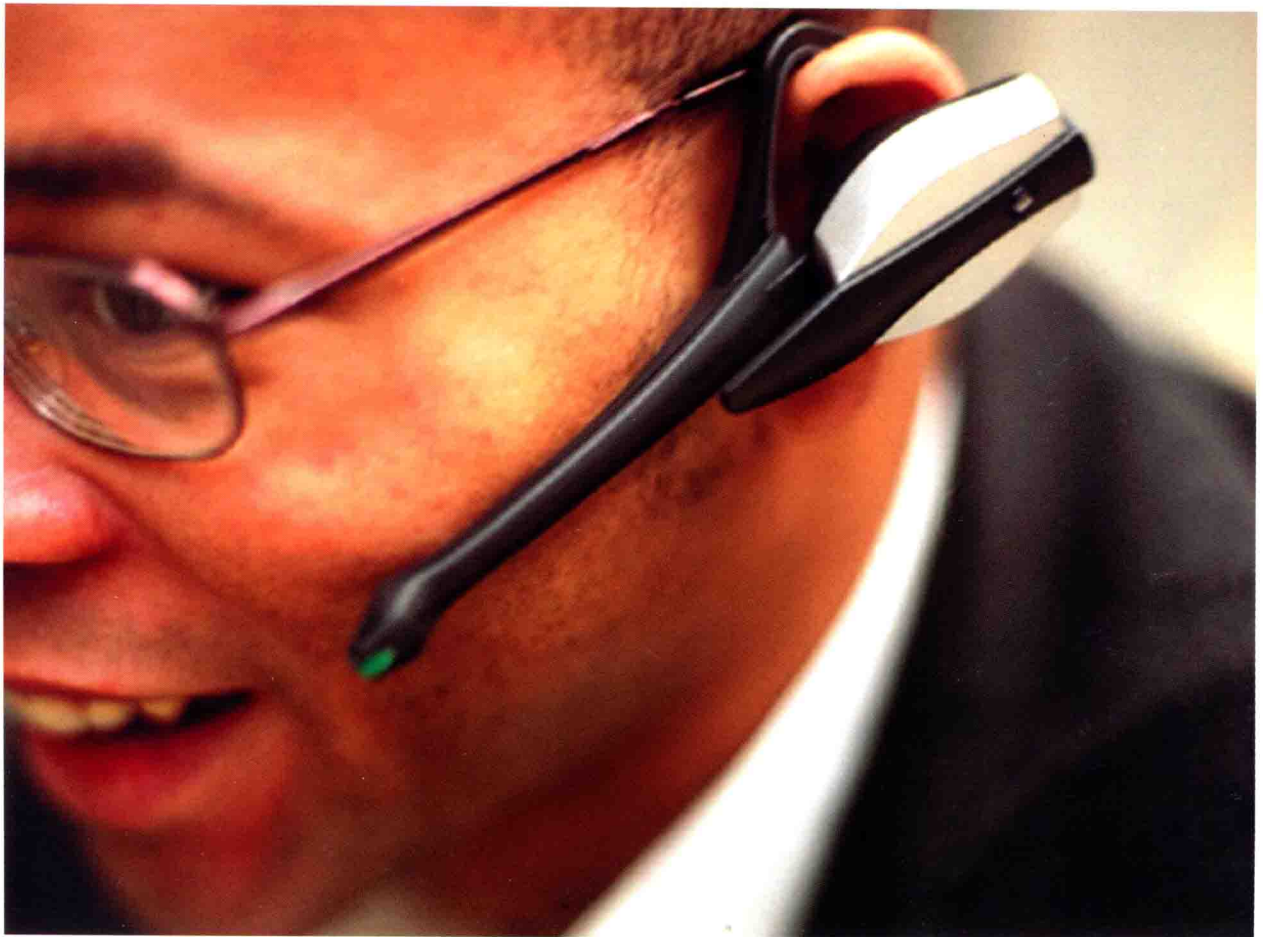
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British
Library.

ISBN 1 85669 249 3

Printed in Singapore

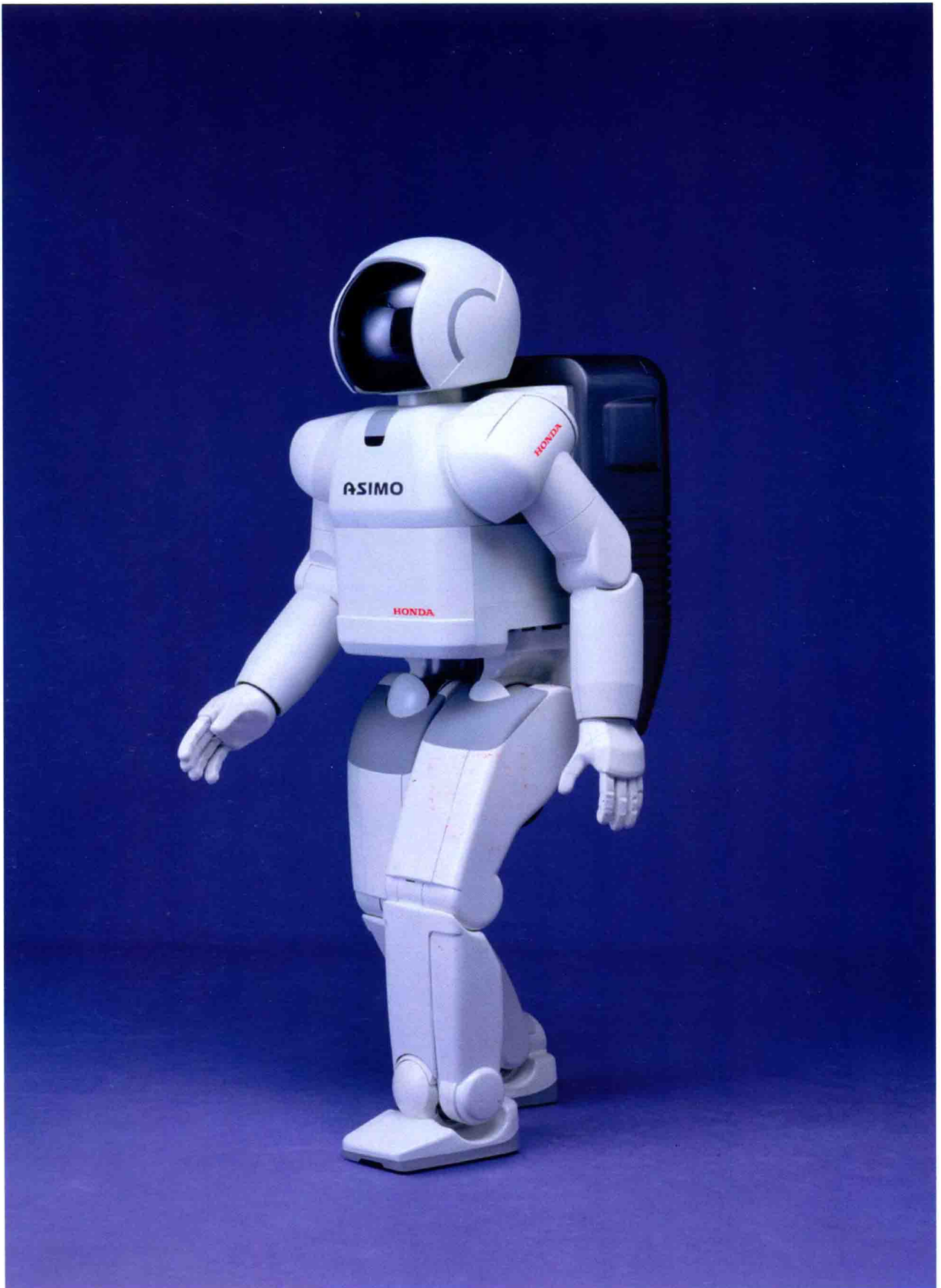
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES	13
LIGHTING	43
ROBOTS	49
TELEPHONES AND COMPONENTS	55
TELEVISIONS AND COMPONENTS	73
CAMERAS AND PHOTOGRAPHY	83
MUSIC PLAYERS AND COMPONENTS	89
WRIST-HELD AND WEARABLE DEVICES	105
HAND-HELD DEVICES AND ORGANIZERS	113
COMPUTERS	127
COMPUTER PERIPHERALS	143
TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND ACRONYMS	155
INDEX	157



ON/OFF

New Electronic Products



ON/OFF

New Electronic Products

Mel Byars

Research by

Brice d'Antras

Cinzia Anguissola d'Altoé

Sarah Lynch

Laurent Müller



Laurence King

Published in 2001 by Laurence King Publishing
an imprint of Calmann & King Ltd
71 Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3BP
Tel: +44 020 7430 8850
Fax: +44 020 7430 8880
e-mail: enquiries@laurenceking.co.uk
www.laurenceking.co.uk

Copyright © 2001 Mel Byars

All rights reserved. No part of this publication
may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any
means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, record-
ing or any information storage and retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the publisher.

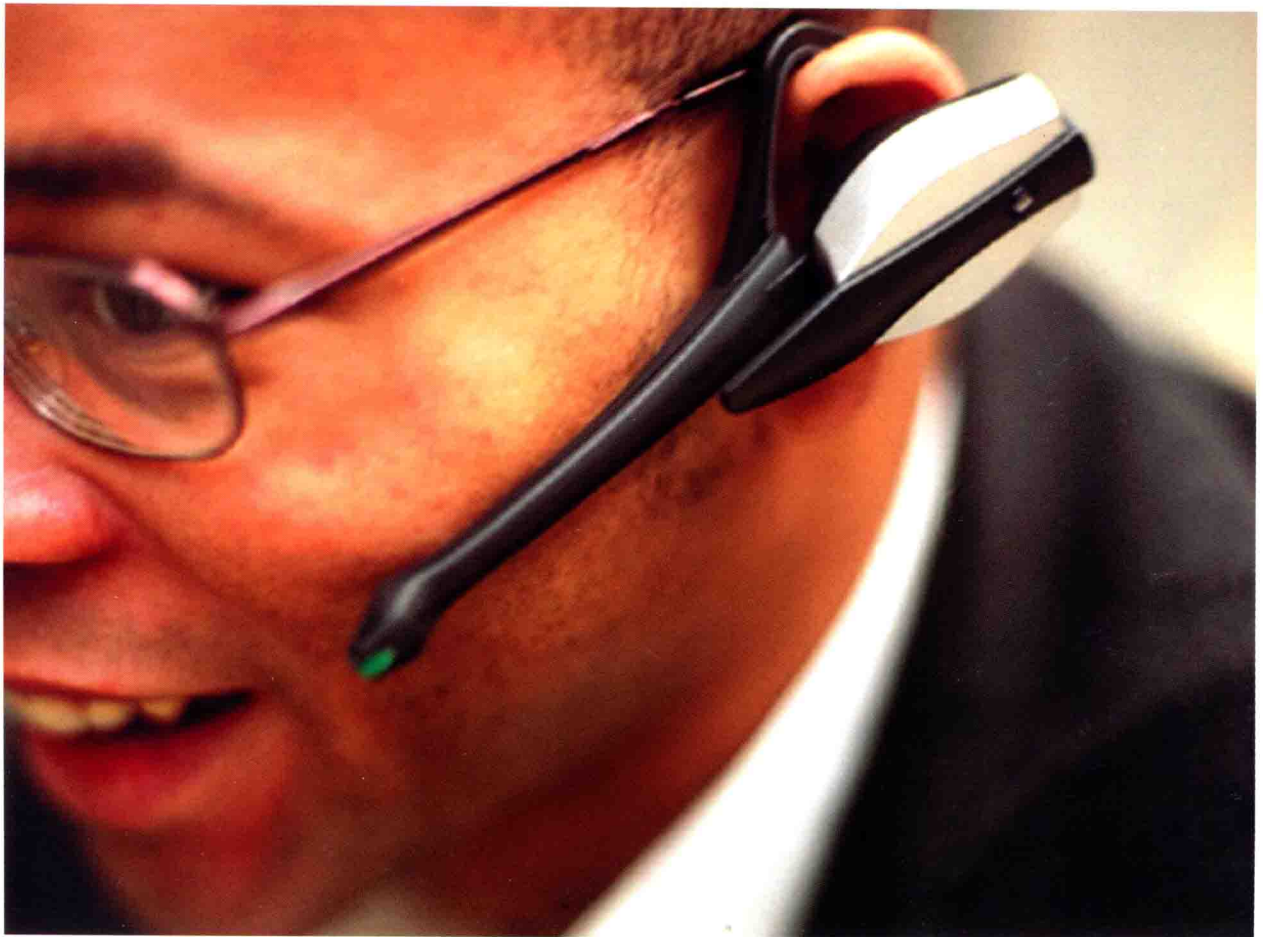
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British
Library.

ISBN 1 85669 249 3

Printed in Singapore

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES	13
LIGHTING	43
ROBOTS	49
TELEPHONES AND COMPONENTS	55
TELEVISIONS AND COMPONENTS	73
CAMERAS AND PHOTOGRAPHY	83
MUSIC PLAYERS AND COMPONENTS	89
WRIST-HELD AND WEARABLE DEVICES	105
HAND-HELD DEVICES AND ORGANIZERS	113
COMPUTERS	127
COMPUTER PERIPHERALS	143
TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS, AND ACRONYMS	155
INDEX	157



INTRODUCTION

I have organized this book based on how I have observed that people use books, not on how publishers and maybe other authors think that they ought to be used. And some books are used, not just read. I sneak around bookstores and watch how milling customers handle books, and, for the most part, at least in stores, how they inspect them, which is primarily from the front to the back. And they rarely read the dust-jacket flap text or information on the authors. Furthermore, if they are inspecting design books that have few or no pictures, most people will quickly close them and return them to the shelves.

And, so it is with this book, I have organized it so that you do not have to know much about electronics to appreciate the products, even though there is a great deal of technical information here. At least, I hope I have created it so. I want you to be able to get value from the book on the three levels I have intended, and none but the first really matters: (1) to peruse it, get a smattering of what is here, and be entertained by the intriguing products; (2) to come back again, linger on the pages where there are items that interest you, and look more closely; and (3) to read the text and description thoroughly.

Please do not think that the book is in any way an advertising medium, even though it may seem so. Do not assume that you should buy or that you need any of these products. No one person or manufacturer paid a fee to be included, and, if anyone attempted to influence my decisions concerning what to include or exclude, it had no effect; at least, I do not think so.

If the collection of objects has a symbiosis, it is that they are all electronic or electrical and are intended to simplify or improve life while, of course, making money for the manufacturers and designers. And I know the influence on us to have them is insidious. However, as a colleague pointed out, all the 20th-century time-and-labor-saving devices—vacuum cleaners, self-cleaning ovens, frost-free refrigerators, clothes- and dish-washing machines, and others—have actually created more, not less, work at home and necessitated more work at the office or plant in order to pay for them. This is or was because they changed our consciousness about cleanliness and efficiency. Before these appliances, people were

more patient with or unconscious about dust and dirt in their houses and workplaces and on their clothes.

The problem with the intriguing electronic devices of today is that, even though they may be expensive or at least expensive in their collectivity, they hook us. We think we need them. Well, my goodness, while we were all well and good before they came along, now they are indispensable; are they not?

I am not sure how you feel about computers and e-mail technology, but I cannot do without e-mail and can no longer write anything of any length by hand. The happy aspect of e-mail is that it has encouraged people to write letters again—maybe illiterately, but write nevertheless. Something happened to letter writing; it dried up. I am not sure why it disappeared, but it has been resurrected from the dead. My guess is that its demise may have been due to its taking a long time to write a letter by hand, even in many ways by typewriter. And, if you wanted to make a typewritten copy in the past, there was that nasty carbon paper. When you finished the letter, typed or handwritten, there may have been mistakes in it because of the absence of computer spell-checkers. (My spelling is not good.) And then there was the annoyance of unsightly erasures. And what about the process of having to insert a letter into an envelope, stamp it, and then do something about getting it to the post office or letter box? When I grew up in South Carolina in the U.S., we had the same postman for my entire childhood. He picked up and delivered the mail—twice a



The "Weekly Dinner" computer keyboard is part of Hella Jongerius's project "My Soft Office," commissioned by New York's Museum of Modern Art. (See page 147.)

day—from the box on our porch. I knew his name; it was Mr Jeffcoat. Unfortunately, when dogs chased him, delivery was postponed to another day.

Then personal computers came along. (Thank you, God, for computers.) I worked on the IBM personal-computer advertising campaign in 1982 when I was an art director. Soon afterward, along came the fax machine. Even though fax machines had been developed a long time before, they were widely used in the 1990s. Now, they are passé, gone, fini. Oh, yes, you can buy them, but they need special features now to make them worthwhile, and, even so, who cares? A scanner and a PC can send a fax. Electronic equipment, like these fax devices, has recently been appearing and disappearing as fast as the power and size of personal computers has been increasing.

I remember writing *The Design Encyclopedia* from 1990 to 1993 on one of the little square Macintoshes. I could not see an entire page at one time on the screen and had to divide the text into many parts in order to be able to transport it to the publisher on floppy disks that held only one megabyte or so each. Then a year or so after I finished the *Encyclopedia*, I bought a new SyQuest machine that housed 44 megabytes, and it was expensive—over \$400 (about £285 or 360 euros). Wow, what a great device it was then! Now, I use a drive that accommodates 100/250-megabyte Iomega disks as well as a 20-gigabyte drive with removable disks. I also have a 60-gigabyte external hard drive for storage should I lose my files somehow. This book, for example, is almost 2 gigabytes large with text and all the images, many of which were given to me in a digital format.

“Gigabyte”—or 1,000 megabytes—was not a word in anyone’s vocabulary when I bought the 44-megabyte SyQuest. New technology is running so fast that it is difficult to keep pace with it. In fact, the 2004 class of university graduates, who were born in 1982:

- are too young to remember the space-shuttle explosion
- are not aware that bottle caps did not always screw off
- know nothing about Atari or vinyl record albums
- do not understand what “You sound like a broken record” means
- have never owned record players or vinyl-record albums
- do not know what “8-track” means
- were one year old when the compact disk was introduced
- never played Pac Man or know about Pong
- have always had answering machines
- never saw a black-and-white TV set or watched one with 13 channels or less
- have always had cable TV
- are unaware of a time when there were no VCRs
- never heard of Beta Max
- cannot imagine being without a remote controller
- do not know what a cloth baby diaper is
- were born the year the Walkman was introduced
- have always understood that “inline” means roller skating
- think that popcorn can only be cooked in a microwave oven
- have no consciousness of hard contact lenses
- do not remember McDonald’s burgers in styrofoam boxes or why they were discontinued
- think there has always been MTV
- know little, if anything, about a typewriter.

If you are one of these future graduates or someone else who identifies with their awareness, please do not think that I am trying to insult you. I myself was no different as a graduate of 1960. I am offering the list to illustrate how the passage of technological developments is quick and breeds obsolescence, and that it is absurd how the electronic-device graveyard is being piled high with aged equipment. The development and introduction of magic machines and products is both dismaying and enervating. Have you ever looked at a box of clothes detergent that claimed it was “new and improved” and wondered why it was not improved before?

Many of these magic machines and a number of products both new and also improved—some inexpensive, but others not so—appear on the pages that follow.

A large number are about interconnectivity, the kind of interconnectivity that may have been best expressed by the author, Douglas Adams, who wrote *The Hitch Hiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*. On the CNN TV network recently, shortly before he died, he was asked to describe the digital age in a single word. He suggested, “The one word that best defines the digital age is ‘interconnectivity.’ The dominating forms of communication of the 20th century—TV, radio, CDs, and so forth—were not interconnective.” In other words, they gave us information, entertainers, and experts or famous people who told us what they thought (insinuating they were smarter or somehow better than us). And it all came to us in one direction.

But this is another century, and we have begun to think differently, or as the Apple advertisement says, different. While there are devices in this book that continue the time-saving, efficiency syndrome, many do indeed offer interconnectivity. However, if these tools for keeping us in touch, back and forth, obviates our distinct national and cultural differences, we will have sadly created a worldwide sameness in our human beingness.

My colleagues—Brice d’Antras in Paris, Cinzia Anguissola d’Altoé in Milan, and Sarah Lynch in New York—helped me to collect everything here. And these “helpers” are as qualified as I to write this book.

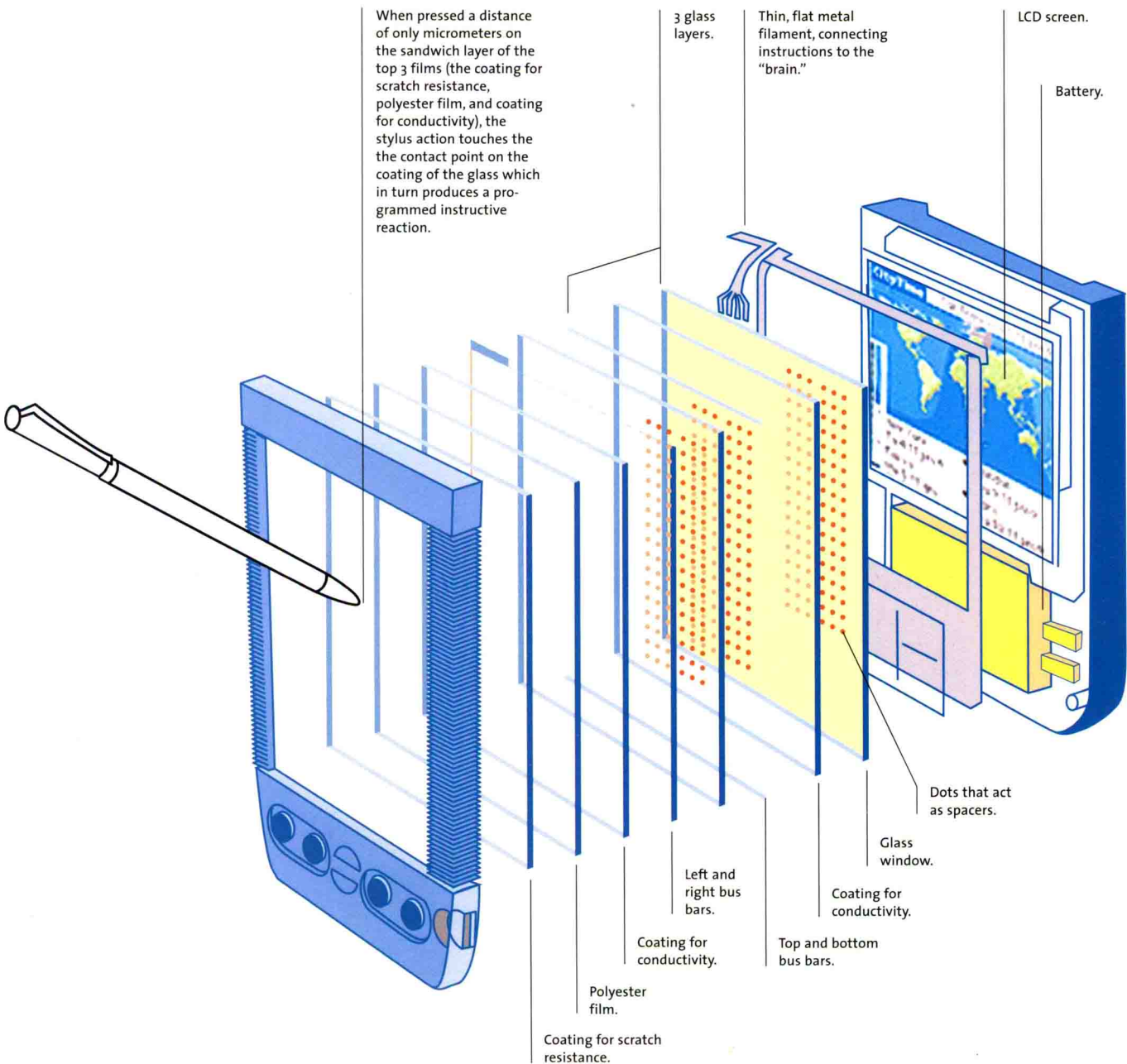
In addition to all the gadgets, some of the products make true contributions to betterment. There are, for example, fiber-optic eyeglasses for people with light-deprivation maladies, and a wristband to lessen motion and pregnancy sicknesses. There is a windup flashlight, or torch, that should be in every household, and a windup radio, produced by the same people, that was originally developed so that South Africans, lacking electricity and the money for batteries, could get information on Aids prevention. There are wireless jogging devices that monitor your health. There is a new dog tag, essentially an electronic card to hang around the neck of soldiers, that can contain their complete medical histories including X-rays thumbnails. And a GSM-and-GPS-combination phone will help the lost to be found, especially in remote areas, outside GSM areas, and even under snow.

So, you see, everything here is not of the gee-whiz ilk, though much of it is.

—Mel Byars

Because the technology of the hand-held organizer and interactive-screen device is a frequent feature of many of the products here, this drawing serves to illustrate how an organizer, as the example here shows, and certain computer screens are constructed. The science is also similar to that of money-withdrawal machines and point-of-sale terminals that respond to a finger rather than a stylus. These types of display screens, unlike but similar to those of television sets or computer monitors, call on four different reactors to recognize the touch of a finger or stylus. The screen appears to be flat, solid, and rigid, but it is not; it gives way in the area where pressed. The screen is a

sandwich of two conductive surfaces that are very, very slightly separated, in most systems, by very small insulating particles. When a finger or stylus presses on the malleable top layer, it in turn touches the layer beneath and then an electrical contact is made. For example, on Palm™-type organizers, a finger, not only a stylus, can be used for a reaction. The drawing here by Marvin Klein of the Handspring Visor was adapted from one rendered by Frank O'Connell of *The New York Times*, details and information for which were provided by the staff of Handspring MicroTouch Systems Inc., Palo Alto, California, U.S.A. (Adapted art by permission.)



ON/OFF

New Electronic Products

HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES