The idea for Scalable Interactive Modulable System (SIMS) first came to me when I was building the DXnet in 1998, based on the idea that the future of design lies in creating systems that allow people to personalize and co-create designs for themselves.

I was able to test this idea when I designed furniture for a gallery that I opened after I left the Design Exchange and before I began my role as Director of the School of Design at George Brown College. This generative furnishing system that could be modified to create environments was first used at the Real Time Gallery and Incubator, which I founded with Alice Lee in 2002. Originally executed in recycled Ontario Fir reclaimed from the Distillery District site where the gallery was located, the furniture was used to create retail displays, seating, office furniture, and gallery partitions. Most of the furniture, with the exception of the soft wood piece on display in this exhibit, was sold when the gallery closed in 2004.

The theory of a new interactive generative design system had long been in gestation in my mind but in 2006 at my students’ request I finally created a presentation to describe this theory for them. Since then, I have been using the idea of SIMS as a paradigm for a number of projects where I need to design furnishings, under the brand of Systemateks. The line in this book is named Benchmark, after its archetypal bench components, but this way of thinking has been used to generate a number of other projects including the Open Lattice, the Canuhome and the newly renovated School of Design.

The concept of a SIMS is design as a system for generating design rather than design as an end product. Working closely with a number of designer craftsmen such as Fernando Lopez and Marc Littlejohn, I have designed and fabricated examples of SIMS furnishings some of which can be seen in this exhibit. Most recently, with the assistance of colleague Jean Paul Amore and students Nick Crampton, Tom Short, and Jun Haeyong Cho, I have been able to demonstrate how such a SIMS would work for the Benchmark Line as an interactive application, which becomes the tool that contains the system. The benches have become talismans of the spirit of this new design and have been used and reused in different ways over time by their owners, just as I had imagined.

Luigi Ferrara
EVERYTHING BEGINS SOMEWHERE
DESIGN GENERATES REALITY
02 EXTENSION
IT GATHERS MOMENTUM
03 EXPANSION
IT SPREADS TILL WE NOTICE
04 SUBSTANTIATION
IT BECOMES SOMETHING WE RECOGNIZE
WHERE EVER TWO OR MORE ARE GATHERED IN MY NAME
AND THEN WE DO IT AGAIN AND AGAIN
07 FIXATION
UNTIL WE STOP AND FIND OURSELVES THERE
EVERYTHING BEGINS SOMEWHERE AND ENDS HERE
09 STACK
WE PUT ONE THING ON TOP OF ANOTHER
Stack
We put one thing on top of another
Bench Shelf
10 INTERPRET
WE MAKE MEANING FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS
BENCH WALL
11  ROTATE
WE REVERSE HOW WE SEE AND FEEL THINGS
WE CHANGE WHAT WE DO
Bench Stair
ARRANGE
WE TRY AND BRING IT TOGETHER
14  RESET
BREAK BREAD WITH EACH OTHER
BENCH TABLE
15 REFLECT
SLOW IT ALL DOWN
BENCH SOFA
16 AGITATE
SHAKE IT ALL UP
BENCH OFFICE
ADMINISTRATE
PUT IT ALL IN ORDER
MATERIALIZE
GIVE IT SUBSTANCE AND WEIGHT
MAKE SURE IT FITS IN
BENCH SIZING
SIMS AT THE CANÜHOME
“DESIGN MUST TRANSFORM ITSELF FROM ITS CURRENT STATE OF STANDARDIZED END PRODUCTS OF ABUNDANCE INTO A TRANSFIGURATIVE PROCESS OF INTERACTION AND CO-CREATION THAT GENERATES DESIRED EFFECTS FOR INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES AND THE PLANET. SIMS CAN LEAD US IN THIS NEW DIRECTION.”

LUIGI FERRARA
This book is a reflection some of the thoughts and ideas about design that I have developed over the last two decades of practicing, teaching and researching. It reflects theories that I have evolved on how to create designs and touch on subjects such as the nature of space, the re-imagining of products and services, new aesthetics and cultural messages, the nature of interaction design and systems thinking.

This project would not have been possible without the time and creativity of the following individuals — long-time collaborators Fernando Lopez and Marc Littlejohn, who have helped me realize a number of projects using the Scalable Interactive Modular Systems methodology. Jean-Paul Amore, Jun Haeyong Cho, Nick Crampton, Brian Hoang, and Tom Short for bringing this idea to life through the development of a seed-funded research project. Atanas Bazdarov and Hannah Carriere for their collaborative editorial work, and Priscilla Li for her leadership, project management, and art direction. The work that they have helped bring to life is dear to me and form part of the material I continue to share with students, colleagues and friends, some of which dates back to over a decade ago. All of the work reflects the stimulation I receive from working with talented and thoughtful collaborators including those who have worked on this book, and whom I hope to continue working with. Thank you all for your creativity and energy.

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