

# Things We Could Design: For More Than Human-Centered Worlds by Ron Wakkary



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Ron Wakkary's *Things We Could Design: For More Than Human-Centered Worlds* (MIT Press, 2021) aims to rethink the direction of design practice using a posthumanist approach. This book is the result of years of professional and theoretical experience gained by the author in both academia and practice ([Everyday Design Studio](#)). Posthumanist exploration of design stands in opposition to the prevailing "art of human design of the last thirty years," in which human values have been in the service of a "behavioral understanding of what is human" (p. 1). It represents an exploration of the possibilities for a new understanding of human-technology relations and posthumanism, while also addressing issues of accountability, sustainability, and equality.

Leaving behind the human-centred approach, Wakkary presents several integrative strategies for creating new values and a new ethos. These alternatives aim to answer the question, "What does it mean to design for more than human-centered worlds?" (p. 3). Through design speculation, Wakkary follows the path of Donna Haraway (*Stay-*

*ing with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, 2016) in aligning the practices and possibilities of what might come after the Anthropocene on the basis of kinship between humans and nonhumans. Firmly anchored in the philosophical posthumanism of Francesca Ferrando (*Philosophical Posthumanism*, 2019) and Rosi Braidotti (*The Posthuman*, 2013) as a critical search for various entanglements between species, the author explores autonomy and subjectivity through the adoption of a relational ontology in which beings do not exist prior to relations.

The key idea that Wakkary develops in this book is that of the Thing. Using the concepts of *design design*, *disentanglement*, and *conservation*, Wakkary develops the Heideggerian ontological idea of being toward a new ontological subject, the Thing. Things are "non-humans consisting of both humans and non-humans"; they are "embodied, situated, experientially [...] irrevocably relational." They are also "physical and virtual" (p. 10). Thus, technology is equally digital and material, a "continuum with other constructions such as language, clothing, and shelter"

(ibid.). Through the concept of the Thing, Wakkary reorganises the boundaries of philosophy through practices that challenge the boundaries of humans and non-humans and the practices and experiences that emerge from them. Building on a similar relational ontology, Wakkary develops the concepts of *biography* and *anti-biography*. With biographies, Wakkary redefines the design field not through its functionality and utility, but through relationality and lifeworld, as an important shift from constructions to a process of constant transformation. Biography is a practice located in *intra-action*, where any restriction of design concerns to a design problem leads to the separation of designer, thing, and lifeworld, so that there is no strict accountability (p. 23). Design must be accountable to the life it constructs and ensure that any judgment of the designer's values is not divorced from the lifeworld to which he or she has contributed through design (p. 179).

Borrowing heavily from the writings of Peter-Paul Verbeek, Jane Bennet, Rosi Bruidotti, and Tim Ingold, the author's approach here is a very good introduction for anyone interested in posthumanist design and the general application of posthumanism as a research platform. The book is full of examples from design practice and has a strong and readable theoretical basis, as Wakkary proves to be very efficient in providing the reader with complex theoretical background. Personally, I found that the explanations are given with a care and clarity rarely found in the literature, especially in relation to New Materialism. Nomadic practices as a methodological background are also approached from a contemporary perspective and from a strictly posthumanist point of view, thus

avoiding the often dubious and complex Deleuzian apparatus. This may be negligible for some, but from the point of view of applied empiricism it is absolutely justified. In conclusion, this book can be a stimulus and inspiration not only for those interested in alternative practices in design, but also for those interested in posthumanist practice and what it can offer to the social sciences.

