

Posthumanist Design: How Technologies Metamediate Self-styling

I propose to look at the relationship between design and human self-understanding as reciprocal: design is structured by how it understands the human being, and in turn reproduces a particular idea of the position of humans in the world. This suggests that, if our current conditions of global crises ask for a revised, relational, self-understanding, design can be complicit or a potential ally. I will explore both, building on postphenomenology.

The phenomenon of technological mediation challenges the humanist idea of an autonomous self. In order to remain "autonomous", influences such as mediations would need to be minimised or at least allow to be resisted. Postphenomenology and posthumanism offer an alternative self-understanding, compatible with being influenced. The self-styling subject finds freedom not in resisting technological influence, but being deliberately influenced by it. This requires a certain awareness of how things influence you, and in effect, a self-understanding as an influenced, or relational being.

Yet for some things self-styling is easier than for others. If technology is so influential, why does it often feel so neutral? Many modernist and user-centered design conventions effectively obscure mediations.

I propose to understand the influence of things on self-styling as metamediation: design metamediates the reflexive relation to its own mediation.

In analysing the neutralising features of modernist design that inhibit self-styling I identify how it is complicit in reproducing an autonomous self-understanding. This critique opens up potential for design that invites self-styling, confronting the user with its mediations and contributing to a relational self-understanding.