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John Thackara

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IN THE BUBBLE DESIGNING IN A COMPLEX WORLD



JOHN THACKARA

"I eagerly devoured every last page of John Thackara's lofty, captivating book."
—Bruce Sterling, author of *The Hacker Crackdown* and *Tomorrow Now: Envisioning the Next Fifty Years*

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John Thackara : In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World (MIT Press) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World (MIT Press):

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. A freestyle design symposium echoing many voices By Rolf Dobelli John Thackara calls himself a "symposiarch," someone who puts together groups of creative people, assigns them a lofty theme and then observes the colloquy. This book is a little like a classical Greek symposium. It's a loosely structured conversation with many voices, a freestyle rush into 10 clusters of ideas on how designers - architects, industrial designers, artists, engineers, urban planners and others - should be thinking about today's big design issues, including sustainability, needless complexity, and the frenetic pace of the social and business worlds. Does Thackara

have answers? Not really. His flamboyantly expressed suggestions would probably collapse if examined carefully. But, surprisingly, the book is no weaker for that. It is not a design manual or manifesto. Rather, we find that it's a work designed to get you to free-associate and open your mind to new possibilities. If your creativity is cooling, this book may do what Kafka suggested all literary creations should do: break up the frozen sea inside you.³³ of 36 people found the following review helpful. Technology or people? By Ickx Michel In the Bubble This is a very intelligent book written by a remarkable designer who is fascinated by the impact of technology on our lives. The author is neither a technophobe, nor a technophile. Techno wise would be a better description. The title of the book comes from an expression used by air traffic controllers when there are in the flow and in control of all the surrounding instruments. Throughout the 10 chapters which cover as many aspects of, or approaches to technology, John Thackara shows a constant capacity to think "out of the box" about our complex artefacts and technical prosthesis. He never loses sight of what should be the centre of progress, namely the user. His concern is clearly expressed in every angle from which he develops his observation. Using both the microscope and the macroscope, under criteria such as lightness, conviviality, smartness or flow, he maintains the interest of the reader through a fascinating journey of increased awareness into our everyday experiences. If all designers and producers were able to listen to people as he does, we would indeed feel the full benefits of a more humane technology. It is not surprising that "Doors of Perception" where John gets people to share many intuitions reflected in the book, is a yearly conference held at the crossroad of different cultures. This book is an absolute must for all of us who are deeply frustrated by an ever more complex world which so often fails to bring this feeling of being "in the Bubble" and yet who cannot put our fingers on how to change it for the better. Perhaps the most important lesson learned is that most of those frustrations are not so much caused by the perversity of our fellow citizen, experts and leaders, than by initial flaws in the design of those systems and processes which we accept as normal and unavoidable. The good news of this very positive book is that, if we put ourselves in trouble by bad design, the damage can be easily repaired by better design. This is of course a lot easier than to expect people to abandon their legitimate desire to obtain maximum benefits from our social tools. This is the most challenging, thought-provoking and convincing of all the recent publications and "best sellers" about our technological civilization that this reviewer has read. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. fantastic By Patrick Romeo Top 10 books i've ever read

We're filling up the world with technology and devices, but we've lost sight of an important question: What is this stuff for? What value does it add to our lives? So asks author John Thackara in his new book, *In the Bubble: Designing for a Complex World*. These are tough questions for the pushers of technology to answer. Our economic system is centered on technology, so it would be no small matter if "tech" ceased to be an end-in-itself in our daily lives. Technology is not going to go away, but the time to discuss the end it will serve is before we deploy it, not after. We need to ask what purpose will be served by the broadband communications, smart materials, wearable computing, and connected appliances that we're unleashing upon the world. We need to ask what impact all this stuff will have on our daily lives. Who will look after it, and how? *In the Bubble* is about a world based less on stuff and more on people. Thackara describes a transformation that is taking place now -- not in a remote science fiction future; it's not about, as he puts it, "the schlock of the new" but about radical innovation already emerging in daily life. We are regaining respect for what people can do that technology can't. *In the Bubble* describes services designed to help people carry out daily activities in new ways. Many of these services involve technology -- ranging from body implants to wide-bodied jets. But objects and systems play a supporting role in a people-centered world. The design focus is on services, not things. And new principles -- above all, lightness -- inform the way these services are designed and used. At the heart of *In the Bubble* is a belief, informed by a wealth of real-world examples, that ethics and responsibility can inform design decisions without impeding social and technical innovation.