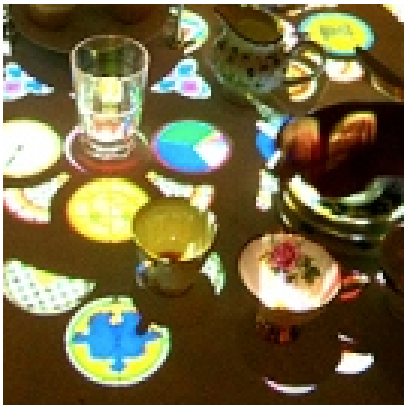


No-thing as it seems

Description

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You can treat things as â??mere objects,â?• but *things* canâ??t be â??mere things.â?• *Thing* already carries connotations of significance, history, meaning, memory.

At least this is how I understand philosopher Martin Heideggerâ??s essay *The Thing*. According to Heidegger, *thing* means a gathering.â?•



The serviceable milk jug as heirloom is a thing around which family and friends gather at the tea table, but as a thing the jug also gathers together meanings and memories. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) concurs. Its first definition for the word â??thingâ?• is as a meeting or assembly, a gathering of sorts.

Contrary to things, *objects* are there for science, to be dissected and analysed, commoditized and sold, and perhaps represented in computer databases. *Things* on the other hand carry the aura of authenticity.

Iâ??ve always had trouble dividing the universe into objects and things. Perhaps cheap, mass-produced jugs are just objects, whereas a thing needs to be of hand-made, hand-me-down, glazed and crazed china to be a thing. Perhaps one can become the other, through use, or misuse.

Heidegger was disparaging about typewriters, so computers, mobile phones, digital displays and interactive art might have difficulty entering the realm of things according to this simple classification.

Lest we think Heidegger was content with a comfortable characterisation of things as drawing together meanings, stories, craft processes and communities note his reference to dispute.

> â?¦ the Old High German word thing means a gathering, and specifically a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter. (Martin Heidegger, *The Thing*, p. 174.)

The OED concurs. A thing is a judicial assembly, and in Scandinavian countries the Thing is the Parliament. Later in the essay Heidegger says

> Whatever becomes a thing occurs out of the worldâ??s mirror play (p.182).

Whatever things are, they are individual, situated, contextual, and born of unresolved contest. No thing is quite as it seems, or perhaps more as it seems than we think.

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Reference

Heidegger, M., â??The thingâ??, *Poetry, Language, Thought,* New York: Harper and Row, 1971, 165-186.

Category

1. Artificial Intelligence

Tags

1. aura
2. Heidegger
3. technology
4. things

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