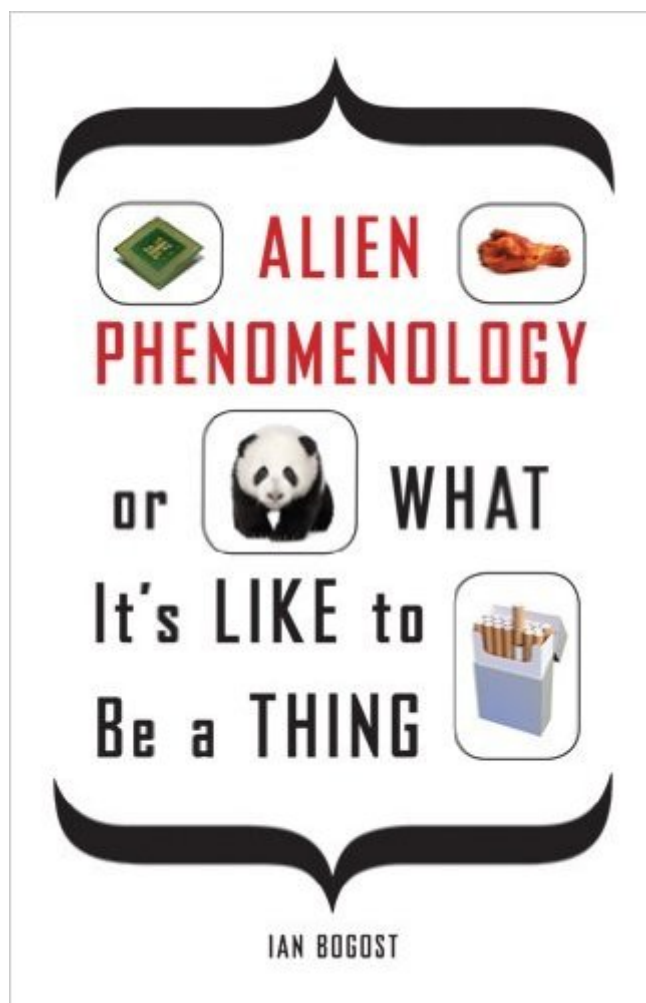


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Alien Phenomenology, Or What It's Like To Be A Thing (Posthumanities)



Synopsis

Humanity has sat at the center of philosophical thinking for too long. The recent advent of environmental philosophy and posthuman studies has widened our scope of inquiry to include ecosystems, animals, and artificial intelligence. Yet the vast majority of the stuff in our universe, and even in our lives, remains beyond serious philosophical concern. In *Alien Phenomenology, or What Itâ™s Like to Be a Thing*, Ian Bogost develops an object-oriented ontology that puts things at the center of beingâ”a philosophy in which nothing exists any more or less than anything else, in which humans are elements but not the sole or even primary elements of philosophical interest. And unlike experimental phenomenology or the philosophy of technology, Bogostâ™s alien phenomenology takes for granted that all beings interact with and perceive one another. This experience, however, withdraws from human comprehension and becomes accessible only through a speculative philosophy based on metaphor. Providing a new approach for understanding the experience of things as things, Bogost also calls on philosophers to rethink their craft. Drawing on his own background as a videogame designer, Bogost encourages professional thinkers to become makers as well, engineers who construct things as much as they think and write about them.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

An entertaining rollercoaster of incoherence and contradiction. Don't pay too much attention. But then again; do. It's thoughtless, incoherent fun. Bogost admits as much himself: `..speculative realism must also make good on the first term of its epithet: metaphysics need not seek verification,

whether from experience, physics, mathematics, formal logic, or even reason.' And so he doesn't concern himself with these. Like John Law, whom he quotes, Bogost promotes 'mess to a methodological concept.' Stripping his text [as he does objects] of relationality even to itself, structure and coherence over a larger scale can be disavowed. He teases such pedants: 'Among the consequences of semiotic obsession is an overabundant fixation on argumentation, such that pedantry replaces curiosity.' This is an in joke running through the book, to catch out anyone who imagines this might be other than a jaunting romp. Bogost grants all objects the same ontological status - as objects! And so demonstrates the ridiculousness of presumptive, self serving definitions. The book is a deliberately profuse bricolage, a random pile of gewgaws like the lists of things he fetishizes and pretends have nothing to do with him or his particular social environment and political context or personality. He is rife and undisciplined in his own speculations, going wherever his objects [whatever they are] take him; one moment apparently siding with things, the next abusing them as dumb, but always as a winking paraphrase of someone else he has skimmed and taken on board perversely. He evidences philosophers like CP Snow in a parody of appealing to authority to justify what he's saying. What he's actually saying doesn't matter because, 'Things are independent from their constitutive parts while remaining dependent on them.

Philosophy has always been a field I admired from afar, and this book was my first entry into the subject. I chose it because as a video game programmer I was interested to hear Bogost's unique perspective on the topic. It addresses (in the most general way possible) the problem of experience, from the viewpoint that humans must occupy no special place in the order of things, and they are simply one of an infinite number of objects capable of 'experiencing' the world. How then does the coffee cup, camera, or chile pepper's experience compare to our own? 'In ways impossible to understand', Bogost argues, and it is taken for granted that these objects do indeed 'experience' in some sense of the word. He asserts that the only way we can approach an understanding of this experience is through the blunt instrument of metaphor, as blunt as describing to a blind man that the color red yields a sensation like fire. What drew me to this book was the idea of addressing the problems that will be posed by artificial intelligence in the (surely) not too distant future, specifically how we might construct a sense of meaning such that AI beings could be regarded on the same level as their human counterparts. I found what I was looking for in this book, albeit indirectly as Bogost doesn't touch on the subject of AI at all. Perhaps more correctly, he instead focuses on the much lower-fidelity objects of our universe: houses, cameras, the microchips of the Atari, etc.

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