

# **Conference: Rethinking the Thing in the 21st Century**

## **Call for Proposals**

**Host Institution:** Seoul National University, Seoul, South Korea

**Dates:** October 17-19, 2019

**Deadline for Submission: June 30, 2019**

Questions about the status and nature of what we call “things” go back to the very origins of philosophy in most traditions, linked as these questions are to basic philosophical problems regarding being, essence, perception, and the relation of mind or thought to the so-called “external” world. In design, discourse about things has tended to follow a familiar historical trajectory of aesthetics and function, with its focus on the immediate future as demanded by the market. Nonetheless, in the 21st Century both technological advances and the geo-political structures with which these advances are intimately connected have had radical effects on the nature of things, raising challenges for both the ways we think about things, and the ways we approach their design, production and exhibition in these rapidly emerging circumstances.

While technology has enabled a vast increase in the production and proliferation of things, it has also created a new category of thing, the “virtual,” and has even contributed to the disappearance of things taken in the traditional sense through both the introduction of multi-use objects like the smartphone and the connection of things through the Internet of Things (IoT). At the same time environmental degradation, increased commodification, and globalized communication technologies have deeply affected our relation to “things,” while exacerbating on-going tensions around those that are already invested with deep ethical, cultural and/or artistic significance. Museums and other cultural institutions, for example, are challenged to adapt curatorial and collections practices to new genres of art that eschew materiality even as the colonial legacy of other objects must be renegotiated.

The outset of the 21st Century would thus seem to present not only an occasion but even a demand to rethink the “thing” from a number of perspectives and orientations. In the spirit of collective inter-disciplinary scholarly enquiry, this conference proposes as a first step of this rethinking a workshop bringing together an international group of thinkers and practitioners from the fields of philosophy, design, aesthetics, cultural theory and the arts around this problem of “Rethinking the Thing in the 21st Century.” In keeping with the workshop structure, we are

seeking proposals from individuals or groups for workshops related to any theme consistent with this problem, including but not confined to the following:

What is a thing?

The being or existence of things

Appearances and disappearances of things

Responsibilities of/toward things

The making/production of things

The thing as sacred and profane

The thing and its affect(s)

World(s) of things

Economies of things

The thing in de-/postcoloniality

Participants will not present traditional papers but will be asked to make a short presentation about a problem or enquiry they are working on relevant to the conference theme, and then to facilitate a workshop session of an hour to an hour and a half on their chosen topics.

Proposals of **no more than 300 words** may be submitted by email to [pwmilne@snu.ac.kr](mailto:pwmilne@snu.ac.kr).

Questions or queries may be directed to Peter Milne: [pwmilne@snu.ac.kr](mailto:pwmilne@snu.ac.kr).