

The Big Deal
Dzelde Mierkalne
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The Philosophy of Feasting and Emptiness
Ainārs Kamoliņš

Every day I approach a seemingly different table. These small changes that I notice every day are in a way inevitable: the color is affected by light, the distance from it by shape. That is why the “real” table is unknowable. It is not for nothing that Bertrand Russell, writing in his introduction to philosophy, points out: “What we see is constantly changing as we move through space, so that here too our senses give us the truth not about the table as such, but about its appearance.” Similarly, the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl tried to understand how we know that a table is the same table. He also observed it from different perspectives and this revealed different shades of color, shapes, and the like. He pointed out that the “real” table is transcendent and constitutes itself in our consciousness thanks to memory. Each moment of observing the table connects with the previous one, memories of the table merge with the present observation. However, the unknowability of the “real” table does not yet distinguish it from other physical objects. One can ask in a Heideggerian vein: what is the table-ness of a table? Heidegger himself liked to recall Eddington's statement that every table has a double - his childhood table and the "scientifically understood" table. The childhood table is not just a simple surface that can be scientifically described - its material, shape, color. You can see various streaks, prints, or stains on the childhood table. Through it, you can remember the games that were played on it. In short, it can reveal the childhood lifeworld. This is an aspect of the table that cannot be scientifically described. Therefore, when entering a room, the table is not perceived simply as an object, but as something at which you can sit down and work. The table is either convenient or inconvenient for the task I have chosen.

Even now, when I sit down at the table, it temporarily forms my lifeworld. Gamblers, on the other hand, probably don't see anything at all outside of what's happening on the roulette or card table at that moment. Of course, the table also has a shady side. Namely, cheating, dirty dealings take place under the table. There you can sometimes find those who have fallen under the table - those who can no longer participate in the table conversations and celebrations.

The table in the world creates certain lines of demarcation. Not everyone is invited to the table. The invitation separates friends from those who are not. However, the table itself creates an even more significant ontological boundary. The human lifeworld is realized at the table, while the animal world is realized in the pen. Of course, the table can also become a pen at any time. Therefore, the boundaries between the table and the pen are not stable and can easily change depending on the situation.

The table also creates a distinction between Western rationalism and Soviet or post-Soviet hopelessness. It is formed by the attitude towards an empty table. Ilya Kabakov points to the Western attitude: “Empty is a table on which nothing has yet been placed, but on which

something could be placed; land that has not yet been cultivated, but which could be cultivated." Emptiness for Western rationalists is an opportunity, a potential for creation and change. For Kabakov, on the other hand, the Soviet emptiness on the table transforms active being into active non-being. Sitting at the table causes Kabakov special stress, powerlessness, apathy and causeless horror. Even if he had set the table, the emptiness would still be present and nothing could fill it. It is not for nothing that tableiness appears in language when we ask about life: how are things? This question, as one might guess, does not always refer to whether the table is actually set.

Sources:

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Dzelde Mierkalne (1997) is a multidisciplinary artist with a background in printmaking. Based in Riga, Latvia, she has finished studies in the MA program POST at the Art Academy of Latvia. With great reverence for technique and process, Dzelde aims to overthrow technique-related artistic standards to create something new and find its place in today's context. While reflecting on the existential fears of "world destruction", mortality salience, and death anxiety through the lens of today's post-irony and humour, she likes to play around with the syntheses of drawing and form.

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