



# Evocative Objects: Things We Think with

*Sherry Turkle (Editor)*

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### Evocative Objects: Things We Think with Sherry Turkle (Editor)

For Sherry Turkle, "We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with." In *Evocative Objects*, Turkle collects writings by scientists, humanists, artists, and designers that trace the power of everyday things. These essays reveal objects as emotional and intellectual companions that anchor memory, sustain relationships, and provoke new ideas. These days, scholars show new interest in the importance of the concrete. This volume's special contribution is its focus on everyday riches: the simplest of objects--an apple, a datebook, a laptop computer--are shown to bring philosophy down to earth. The poet contends, "No ideas but in things." The notion of evocative objects goes further: objects carry both ideas and passions. In our relations to things, thought and feeling are inseparable. Whether it's a student's beloved 1964 Ford Falcon (left behind for a station wagon and motherhood), or a cello that inspires a meditation on fatherhood, the intimate objects in this collection are used to reflect on larger themes--the role of objects in design and play, discipline and desire, history and exchange, mourning and memory, transition and passage, meditation and new vision. In the interest of enriching these connections, Turkle pairs each autobiographical essay with a text from philosophy, history, literature, or theory, creating juxtapositions at once playful and profound. So we have Howard Gardner's keyboards and Lev Vygotsky's hobbyhorses; William Mitchell's Melbourne train and Roland Barthes' pleasures of text; Joseph Cevetello's glucometer and Donna Haraway's cyborgs. Each essay is framed by images that are themselves evocative. Essays by Turkle begin and end the collection, inviting us to look more closely at the everyday objects of our lives, the familiar objects that drive our routines, hold our affections, and open out our world in unexpected ways.

### Evocative Objects: Things We Think with Details

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## From Reader Review Evocative Objects: Things We Think with for online ebook

### Margaret Sankey says

In another compilation by technology sociologist Sherry Turkle, people reflect on the way they interact with objects, yielding essays on a diverse range of subjects--embracing a cello, using piano and computer keyboards, dependence and resentment of a blood glucose monitor, building a home made radio, sensei-made karate liniment, children and stuffed animals, curating a collection of mummies, toddlers afraid of vacuum cleaners, a lost datebook, a grandmother's rolling pin and a beloved old car.

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### Linda says

I love this book of essays for its terrific merging of science and the humanities. Turkle, an MIT prof, asked a range of mostly scientists to pen essays around an "evocative object" in their lives, something that connects in very primary ways with their lives and careers. She links the project to Claude Levi-Strauss's idea of bricolage (thinking through objects, in brief). She then added small jewels of philosophical wisdom to each essay (from Marx to Baudrillard). One of my favorites is about a yellow raincoat, a kind of protective "spacesuit" that allowed the writer to live in what too often seemed a challenging world. He went on to study the neurobiology of autism! I used the idea for a set of student essays once. It produced wonderful results. I suggest writing your own when you've finished the collection.

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### Cyndie says

A fascinating collection of ~10 page short stories centered around objects that play central roles in the lives of individuals. What does a glucometer have to say about whether or not we are cyborgs? How does a train embody life transition? An interesting look at what objects that is more talismanic than consumeristic. Mind opening and good to read in fits and starts.

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### Jaime says

I got this book at a book-swap I hosted several years ago, and it's taken me about that long to finish it. It's a book to linger over. Love the collection of essays, the explorations of the "evocative" through the objects we carry or remember, and the editor's presentation of the material. Especially, from my own editor's point of view, I love that Turkle holds her thoughts until the end, rather than presenting them as an introduction, as editors tend to do.

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### Elizabeth says

This book is one of a number recently published, all of which justify themselves as providing needed voices for material objects in our culture. In a way, it makes good sense that this type of analysis was ignored by scholars so often. In an academic climate where technological determinism is practically taboo, scholarship turned away from object-specific histories. However, as Turkle's collection both shows and tells, it did so at the expense of fully illuminating the vast meanings objects evoke for users and scholars alike. I like how this book manages to be a hybrid of theoretical insights into the importance of objects (from a number of different fields) and just beautifully told stories about particular things. Turkle's introduction provides just enough background to let the essays speak for themselves, however her conclusion limits the strengths of the contributions by attempting to pigeonhole their meanings in ways that the collection otherwise evades. In its space, I would have loved for Turkle herself, whose scholarship is so concerned with identity formation in a digital age, to write about her own evocative object.

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### **Christine Henry says**

This collection of essays about the meaning of objects is both provocative and meditative. Introduced by the Sherry Turkle, best known for her work in the digital world, these essays focus on the role that the tangible world plays in understanding our own feelings as well as the perspectives of others. Particularly poignant for me was the essay about the silver pin, an object that defined the author's image of her mother. Imbued with both the pain of loss and the beauty of youth, the pin evokes stories of family history and the challenges of parent-child relationships.

These essays provided me with a myriad of perspectives on how important our physical world is in understanding the cultures around us. Though none of the objects described is inherently valuable, each of the authors shares how they have infused their own object with a meaning that is both very personal and universal. It gave me pause to think about museums as places that hold tangible objects in stewardship for everyone. In museums focus has traditionally been on the meaning of the collections both to the individuals associated with the object as well the culture in which they were a part. But these essays got me thinking that shared authorship, a new buzz word, is increasingly important because the power of objects is not just in the original interpretation, but in each viewer's individual interpretation as well. Imagination allows people to make a personal connection to an object, which then continues the cultural significance of that object beyond its initial meaning. Layers of understanding allow ownership of collections by the greater community, which means the objects continue to live while in protective custody of museums.

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### **Phoenix says**

#### **On our connections to everyday things**

My own experiences echoes that of the previous reviewer David Block. Turkle opens up an interesting subject for discussion but I was expecting a deeper analysis. The closing essay by Turkle indicates and reviews points of interest but but doesn't satisfy. I was expecting Turkle to say more to tie the ideas together.

The bulk of the book is a collection of essays by researchers at MIT about particular objects that they have imbued with personal meaning. Most of these are quite enjoyable, the ones that stood out for me include Carole Strohecker on "Knots", Judith Donath on her "1964 Ford Falcon" (I was the last owner of a 1964 Ford Fairlane and can relate) and Howard Gardiner on "Keyboards" (I'm reading him in another book)... as I review the index every single essay except Turkle's is memorable.

Initially I tried to read the book in a single setting, and then got bored - it was good, but not all at once. I then finished it bit by bit, sipping the experiences. I'd recommend this as a gift book for someone who is a collector or who someone like myself just likes to browse in antique and craft shops for interesting items. I'd also recommend this book for writing teachers as a jumping off point for student essays.

Perhaps the best response to reading this book is to write your own personal chapter about similar objects in your own life, perhaps one that connects you to a previous generation. For example I have a scalloped bowl designed to look like a leaf of lettuce that belonged to my mother and before that my grandmother. Its slightly chipped, but I use it carefully once a year in memory of them.

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### Misssharice says

Again, like many books I read, I saw this at work and decided I'd give it a go. I wasn't sure why but I think it appealed to the hoarder in me who can't get rid of objects. Everything I own has an emotional value for me, which makes it hard to let go of possessions, no matter how meaningless or trivial they seem. This book made me realise that I'm not alone, that others too put so much value on basic objects. Some aspects of the theory was a bit beyond me however.

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### Jeff says

Sherry Turkle is best known for writing about the impact of the internet on identity. This book is an anthology of people writing about things that are important or significant to them. The range is enormous here, and many of the pieces are quite poignant. If you want to get a better understanding of the human relationship with "stuff" - all those products and objects that clutter and inhabit our lives - then this collection is a wonderful way to access that. Each original essay is preceded by a quote from a well-known writer or philosopher or theorist, and some of those are pretty swell, too. And because each essay is relatively short, the book is easy to pick up and put down, if you tend to be pressed for time to read (as I sometimes am).

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### S. says

Before I start, may I say that I love the jacket on this? Beautiful snow blue lettering on black - rich and ethereal at the same time.

Content-wise, this collection was better than I expected. I was very interested in reading it but when it arrived and I saw that most of the essays were written by MIT professors/associates, I got cold feet.

Some of the essays were *evocative*, whereas others failed to convey much beyond an intellectualized symbol. To evoke, for me, is to awaken emotion and memory and the essays that failed in my eyes ignored the former. Some of the essays may touch readers although the object being examined may be outside their usual haunts, like ballet slippers or the glucometer. Other objects don't seem to leave the hands of the writers pondering them - the writer of the essay on the Polaroid camera, for example, didn't reach out to me at all.

But maybe I'm just an emotional lush - the essay on the rolling pin was my favorite. 5 stars for that one!

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### **David Metcalfe says**

Likely one of the worst books I've ever read. Essentially it's a collection of stories from other people more concerned with sounding smart and obfuscating the core points of their realizations than communicating with the reader. Incredibly dull, very little personality, and a slow read as you strain to find much of any substance, or meaning in the stories.

Unless assigned as class reading material, I recommend avoiding this one.

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### **ChromaticRat says**

Sherry Turkle's *Life on the Screen* was a central text for my unfinished master's thesis about gendered communication in an online community. It's been more than a decade since I moved on to other interests and I was curious to read about what Dr. Turkle is looking into these days. A lovely collection of thoughtful, languid essays about evocative objects in each of the contributors' lives, this book was not quite captivating enough to speed all the way though before it was due back at the library.

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### **Cheryl says**

I set this book aside, in June. This what I do when I know that I am going to love a book and want to have it hovering around just in case I need solace and something to dive in to. I picked it up a week ago. Photography, combined with memoir writing, combined with excerpts from scholarly essays: the visual, the intellectual, the emotional -- all together provide a great reading experience. This book deepened my perspective on many objects and notions.

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### **Robert says**

I liked Sherry Turkle's introductory essay, but can't say that the essays by the various contributors really did much for me. Maybe this book was just a chance for her to collect and publish pieces by her academic friends rather than some committed discussion of objects and how we think with them...

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### **Caroline says**

This is a series of very short essays describing the objects (very loosely defined) that the authors used to negotiate identity, family, loss, career and abilities. The Subtitle is 'Things to think with' but most of the authors describe their feelings, and mostly in terms that suggested that the subtle and immersive shifts of sensory memory cannot be adequately put into words. Which might be true, but made for tedious and repetitive reading. And many of them felt the need to quote Proust and his inevitable Madeline, it does not seem possible to write about memory without bringing that up. Also almost all the authors were academics,

which again made for repetition in lifestyle, writing style and priorities, and they took the opportunity to promote their research, even when it wasn't relevant. I'm sure it would have been a more interesting book if the editor had made an effort to speak to people less like her, with a broader variety of experience.

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