The End of the User – The Computer as a Thing

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We may all agree on the importance of end users, as in end user programming, human centred design or user driven innovation. But are there theoretical limits with political implications to this anthropocentric understanding of our engagement with users, technology and the artifacts we call computers? Has the end user been patronised by contemporary progressive design and taken hostage by neo-liberal capitalism? In sociology it is becoming clear that society is not just social, but also material. The neglected objects strike back. Just think of global environmental crises. With design research it might be just the same. We know design cannot be reduced to the shaping of dead objects, as in object oriented programming, but humans are neither users living external to objects. Where sociology have had to acknowledge that society is a collective of humans and non-humans, design might have to do away with both users and objects to remain socially and politically relevant. This talk explores the consequences of replacing the object and the user with the *thing*. Etymologically the thing was originally not an objective matter, but a political assembly dealing with matters of concern. Which humans and non-humans should be invited to participate in contemporary design things? Who invites? Who is marginalised or excluded? What issues should be dealt with? Which designarly and parliamentary technologies should be invoked in prototyping futures? If the computer is to become a controversial thing, is that a well-grounded end of the user?