

Assemblage, bricolage and the obsolete (Leeds, Nov 18 06)

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CALL FOR PAPERS

Assemblage, Bricolage and the Obsolete: A Symposium

November 18 2006, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, UK

In modern sculpture studies the term assemblage serves as a descriptive label for a heterogeneous moment of artistic practice in North America and Europe around the early 1960s, culminating in William Seitz's blockbuster show at MoMA The Art of Assemblage in 1961. The term assemblage, however, can be useful to approach a wide range of practices ranging from Dada and Surrealist constructions to contemporary art practices drawing upon the impoverished, found, constructed, assembled and temporary conditions of display and production. This symposium seeks to explore the category of assemblage as both a descriptive and an analytic tool.

The original technical definition of assemblage that served as Seitz's starting point - 'the fitting together of parts and pieces' - evokes the do-it-yourself process of constructing objects using odds and ends, described by another French word: bricolage. Most famously discussed by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss as a description of what he called 'savage thought,' bricolage embodies an attitude to the world as much as a method for creating works. It relates to histories of technology and industry, and could even be compared to the unconscious workings of dreams. As a set of articulations of opposing terms such as whole/parts or art/ junk, bricolage, could thus present itself as one of the fruitful terms to approach assemblage.

The politics of assemblage have tended to be associated primarily with the use of junk and outmoded objects or materials. Constructions made of such 'poor' materials and detritus are often perceived as comments on the planned obsolescence of capitalism, and its reliance on accelerated cycles of consumption and destruction. This symposium sets itself the task of evaluating these claims and of suggesting other possible ways of assessing the social, psychic and political significance of assemblage. Whether bricolage is an adaptive or subversive practice could be one of the starting points for such explorations. Other directions of enquiry could

include body politics and economies of desire; labour and leisure; hybrid identities and globalisation.

Abstracts of up to 400 words are welcomed. Please send with a brief c.v. to Jo Applin (ja520@york.ac.uk), Anna Dezeuze (anna.dezeuze@manchester.ac.uk) or Julia Kelly (julia.a.kelly@manchester.ac.uk).

Deadline for proposals 28 April.

A collaboration between the AHRC Research Centre for Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies at the University of Manchester, the University of York and the Henry Moore Institute.

Reference:

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