

The Political Life of Things

A One Day Workshop

The Imperial War Museum, London, UK

3rd December 2010

Keynote 1: Jeremy Deller (Turner Prize Winner, 2004)

Keynote 2: Jane Bennett (Johns Hopkins, author of *Vibrant Matter*)

The BISA Poststructural Politics Working Group and BISA/PSA Art and Politics Group are jointly organising a one day workshop at the Imperial War Museum London, 3rd December 2010.

Confirmed speakers include:

Cindy Weber (Sussex University): TBC

Louise Amoore (Durham University): Security That Matters: Critical Infrastructure and Objects of Protection

Lisa Smirl (Sussex University): Drive-by Development: Thinking through the Sports Utility Vehicle in humanitarian assistance

Claudia Aradau (Open University): Security That Matters: Critical Infrastructure and Objects of Protection

Jairus Grove (Johns Hopkins): Improvised Explosive Devices and the New Ecology of War

Andrew Baldwin (Durham University): Environmental citizenship and turbulent materialism: the problem of carbon in an era of climate security

About the workshop

This workshop starts from the assumption that the subject of politics is always already embodied and exists in the context of a multitude of material objects. Politics thus comprises complex assemblages in which things play a constitutive role. Despite often speaking of the role of things - from ballot papers to missiles – scholars of politics and international relations have largely overlooked their constitutive power. Indeed, the classical agenda of politics scholarship is dominated by an anthropocentrism that locates politics in the figure of the human individual. It is an agenda defined by ideas of agency and rationality that regards things as mere equipment. Despite this seeming neglect, the intersection of materiality and politics has recently become the focus of a number of innovative strands of thought. From Appadurai's *Social Life of Things* to Bennett's *Vibrant*

Matter, via Deleuzian notions of affect and notions of non-representational geographies, new perspectives on what things are and do are re-problematizing the constitutive materiality of politics.

Artists and art practitioners, of course, have long been engaged with questions of materiality. Whether it is the embodiment of performance, the tactility of sculpture or the physical nature of imaging media, artists have probed the materiality of the assemblages they create. As such, the intersection between such artistic practice and scholarship on materiality provides a fertile ground for exploring the question of what things are and do in politics.

This one-day workshop brings together scholars engaged in thinking about materiality to explore the nature, role and power of things in the assemblages of politics. In the context of the material culture collected and displayed by the Imperial War Museum, the workshop will explore how we can understand the role of things in war, conflict, violence and everyday practices of resistance.

This workshop will be an interdisciplinary event bringing artists, art practitioners, museum curators, art historians, geographers, anthropologists and international relations scholars together to discuss questions of the political life of things.

Attending the workshop

Attendance at the workshop is free. Light lunch and refreshments will be provided. Due to the costs associated with organising a workshop in London there will unfortunately be no support for travel or accommodation costs.

Places at this workshop are limited. Please contact Emily Jackson (emily.jackson@durham.ac.uk) if you wish to attend.

This workshop is sponsored by BISA, PSA, Durham University, Queens Belfast University and Newcastle University