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Conversations with Strangers

Performing
the broom &
the bricoleur

Malcolm Doidge





ABSTRACT

Conversations with strangers

Within a workshop or studio, Bricolage is a process where the artist-as-bricoleur finds *ad hoc* collections of items and recombines them in unusual ways. A bricoluer uses simple tools for many tasks. This thesis considers how a contemporary bricoleur might step away from the workshop and into the everyday, taking only a broom as a familiar tool.

“*Conversations with strangers*” performs the bricoleur at five sites, where the broom is a device that collects fragments of memories from conversations recorded there. These conversations form an inventory or collection that is a palimpsest merging human dialogue with a layer of sound from the sites as the broom sweeps. Together with the broom, these fragments are repurposed within a sculptural installation and post-studio performance of the Bricoleur.

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In memory of my father: Arthur Bailey Doidge

Bricoleur *and* Engineer.

1923 - 2013

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Preface:

This broom was one amongst many in-store, but together we became the Bricoleur¹: using ready-mades and recycling second treasures, I have performed the Bricoleur in a post-studio era. By introducing a dialogical method I propose new ways to consider sculpture and installation.

Introduction: To have Conversations with Strangers

My research this year was with a broom (Go Pro cameras attached) traveling to five sites, each specifically selected for their historical and cultural significance. SWEEP(ing)² at each site developed a dialogical method through performance of the bricoleur within a post-studio context that was new to me.

We can come to understand sites in various ways. So, I took my broom with Go Pro cameras mounted on its shaft and, with some prior knowledge of these sites, went in search of conversations with strangers.

Here, strangers³ must be understood not just as people, but also as conversations with things, surfaces, and objects that represent ties to the past and perhaps gesture towards the future. Where people, places and things are connected, everything becomes an object with a connection to the past.

At each site I recorded an inventory of images, as a digital collage, and re-purposed these as creatively gained knowledge within an installation.

This means that both recordings at sites and my agency are understood as creative research. Throughout this exegesis, visual images, maps and are used not as documentation but to shed light on the method.

These on site performances are works in themselves, but it is through a shared agency with the broom, that sculpture and installation exists as a result. That process enlists a methodology of both the bricoleur and bricolage⁴ as being manifest in the treatment and use of objects in the installation.

Keywords: Bricoleur, Bricolage, Repurposing, Post-studio Site, SWEEP(ing), Ontology, Conversations, Palimpsest, Ready-made, The everyday, Consumer.

¹ Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss introduced the bricoleur as a metaphor to English language humanities. The Bricoleur, “spoke with things and through the medium of things” (Levi-Strauss, 1966) and “throughout my description of the Bricoleur” its agent the artist “is not very far away” (Wiseman, 1998).

² NB: “SWEEP(ing)” is used in this exegesis to denote the performed action, distinguishing it from the verb “sweeping”.

³ Timothy Morton uses the phrase “Strange strangers” to describe the strangeness of human encounters with other entities such as animals and objects as being uncanny. For Morton, the distinction between object and subject is irrelevant. Everything is an object (Morton, 2010).

⁴ Bricolage is a combinatorial process bringing together ad hoc collections of items, in unusual combinations, all within a workshop environment that was a defining habitat for the bricoleur (Johnson, 2012, p. 361.).