



Advancing
Art&Design

Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life

Author(s): Anna Dezeuze

Source: *Art Journal*, Spring, 2008, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring, 2008), pp. 31-37

Published by: CAA

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20068580>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

CAA is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Art Journal*

Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life

Anna Dezeuze

Certain art-historical terms, the French artist Jean Dubuffet explained to William Seitz in 1961, are determined by a period- and context-specific “spirit” or “mood.”¹ While Dubuffet was in fact discussing the example of collage, it is tempting to apply his insight to Seitz’s 1961 *Art of Assemblage* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which marked, in many ways, the simultaneous culmination and demise of a specific spirit of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The word

“assemblage” itself would be quickly superseded—by the end of the decade—by new terms such as environment, performance, and Conceptual art, and this moment in the history of twentieth-century art remains to this day largely eclipsed by these subsequent developments. In order to excavate this early history of the 1960s and to demonstrate its relevance for our understanding of contemporary art,

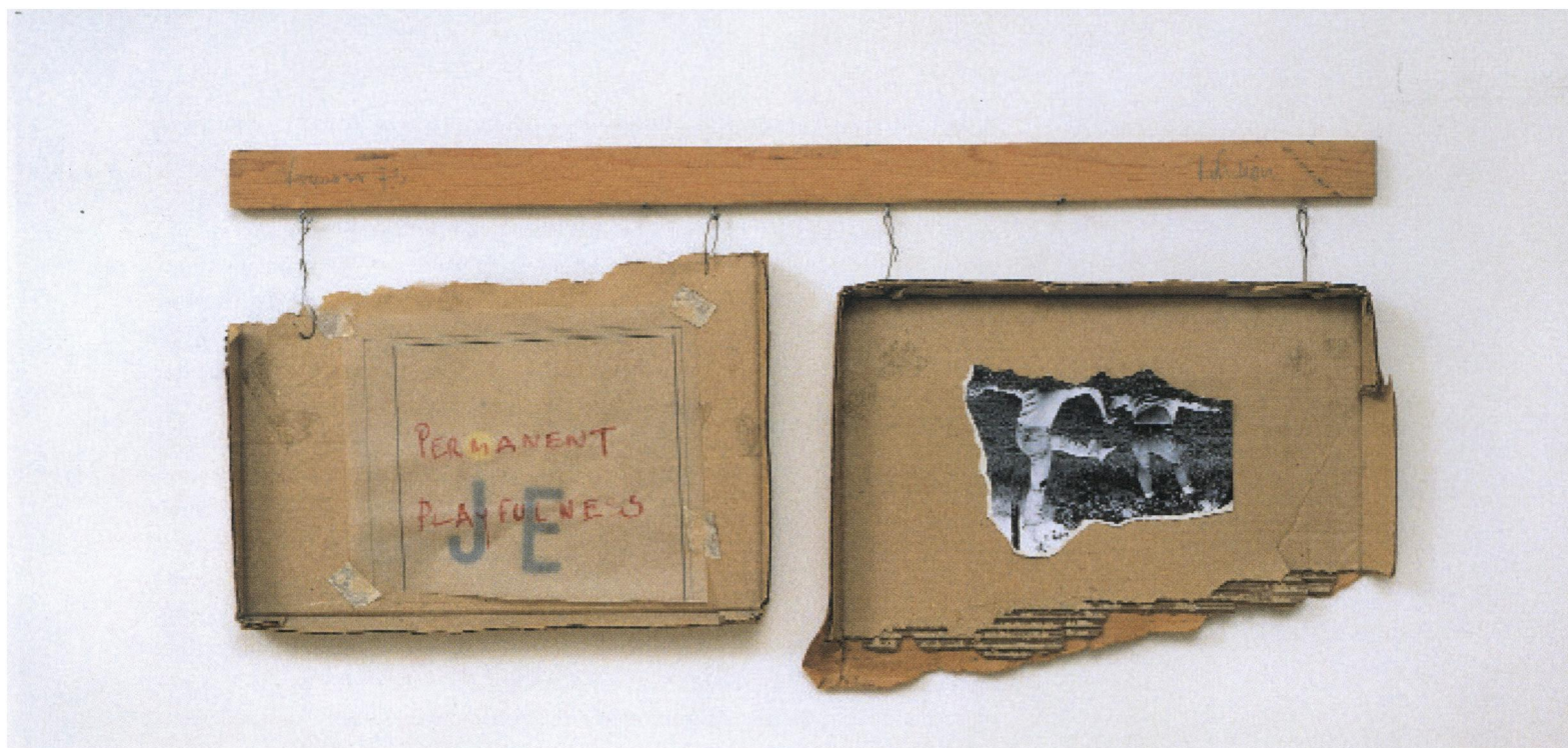
this thematic cluster of essays will focus on Seitz’s description of assemblage as an activity involving “the fitting together of parts and pieces.”² This definition evokes the do-it-yourself process of constructing objects from odds and ends, described by the French word *bricolage* and most famously theorized in 1962 by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. Examining the relations between assemblage and *bricolage* will bring to light a trajectory of process-based practices in contemporary art since the late 1950s, while demonstrating the value of conceiving assemblage as a model of engagement with the world rather than as a formal category. This introductory essay will address one feature of the assemblage-*bricolage* nexus in particular: its relation to the two opposing fields of work and leisure.

Process/Object

In his correspondence about *The Art of Assemblage*, Seitz emphasized that the works in the exhibition should not only juxtapose at least two different materials, but that these materials should be “discarded or purloined” “rather than new”—just like the residues from which the *bricoleur*, according to Lévi-Strauss, draws for his constructions.³ Seitz seemed insistent that these heterogeneous materials remain “identifiable.” In a letter to David Smith, in which he sought to justify the inclusion of only one of the American sculptor’s works in the exhibition, he explained: “You so often obliterate the sources of the things you use, that I did not regard you as essentially an assembler but as a sculptor.”⁴ The most interesting critical debates on assemblage practices in the early 1960s certainly hinged on this very nexus of recognizability and transformation, which related to more general discussions of the artists’ approach to their materials.⁵ Similarly, Lévi-Strauss’s definition of *bricolage* as a “science of the concrete” describes above all an attitude to the material world. For Lévi-Strauss, the *bricoleur* “‘speaks,’ not only with things . . . but also through things.”⁶ This dialogue with objects, in which assemblage artists were also engaged, was interpreted at the time as a break from the autonomy of Abstract Expressionist painting. In his landmark essay “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” Allan Kaprow hailed the arrival of a “new concrete art” which would embrace everyday materials.⁷ This “new concrete art,” which would expand into assemblage, environments, and Happenings, calls to mind, of course, the *bricoleur*’s “science of the concrete.”

The fact that the *bricoleur* speaks through things, as well as with them, points,

1. Jean Dubuffet, letter to William Seitz, April 21, 1961, Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. #695, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (my translation).
2. Seitz’s use of this definition is referred to in Helen Franc, letter to Peter Selz and William Seitz, March 30, 1961, René d’Harnoncourt Papers, IV, 179, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
3. This was the wording of a standard letter that Seitz sent to a number of American museums during the summer 1960, when he was looking for works to include in the exhibition. See CUR, Exh. #695, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
4. William Seitz, letter to David Smith, undated, Registrar Exhibition Files, Exh. #695, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York.
5. I develop this point in my “‘Neo-dada,’ ‘Junk Aesthetic,’ and Spectator Participation,” in *Neo-Avant-Garde*, ed. David Hopkins (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 200), 49–71.
6. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962), 32 (my translation).
7. Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock” (1958), in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9. On this “concrete” turn in early 1960s art, see also my forthcoming “‘Open Work,’ ‘Do-it-yourself Artwork,’ and Bricolage,” in *The Do-it-yourself Artwork: Spectator Participation in Contemporary Art*, ed. Anna Dezeuze.



Robert Filliou, *Permanent Playfulness*, 1973, wood, hooks, steel wire, pastel on tracing paper, photograph, and pastel on cardboard box torn in two, 13¼ x 29½ x 1¼ in. (35 x 75 x 3 cm) (artwork © Marianne Filliou; photograph by Florian Kleinfenn, Paris, provided by Galerie Nelson, Paris)

furthermore, to the sociopolitical ramifications of assemblage in early 1960s Europe and America. As Jaimey Hamilton's essay on Arman (in this issue of *Art Journal*) demonstrates, assemblage presented itself as the privileged expression of a new consumer subject whose very identity was defined through an increasingly accelerated cycle of acquisition and disposal of objects. While the concrete nature of assemblage allowed it to underscore the new dominance of the commodity, it was its emphasis on process that suggested the ways in which subjects are formed through this changing set of relations. Through suggestions of transformation, loss, or reinvention, assemblage effected a temporalization of the object that articulated new forms of late-capitalist subjectivity. When Helen Franc, editorial consultant to the MoMA director, complained to Seitz that the exhibition's title placed "emphasis on the act rather than on the finished product," she in fact provided one of the most lucid insights into the implicit performative dimension of assemblage—a dimension that would be obscured by Seitz's own largely formalist reading.⁸

As Conceptual artists sought to dematerialize the art object as a commodity in the later 1960s, assemblage's deliberate focus on objects was seen as regressive at best and, at worst, complicit with the ever more dominant forces of capitalism. The figure of the *bricoleur*, however, did not disappear: rather, his tools changed. Instead of glue or nails, the conceptual *bricoleur* used words and documentation in works privileging process, performance, and language over the object. Lucy Lippard's 1969 distinction among different conceptual practices according to their "acceptance or rejection"—and their "degree of acceptance"—"of the multiplicity of non-art subject-matter" points to different approaches to concrete reality.⁹ While some Conceptual artists privileged self-referential explorations of the definition of art, others turned to "non-art subject-matter," like the *bricoleur* drawing on a stash of available odds and ends. Similarly, Jack Burnham's 1968 analysis of a new "systems aesthetics" reflecting a "transition from an object-oriented to a systems-oriented culture" revolves around the definition of

8. Franc, letter to Peter Selz and William Seitz, n. p.

9. Lucy Lippard, "Interview with Ursula Meyer" (1969), repr. in Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (London and New York: Studio Vista, 1973), 7.

the system as “a complex of components in interaction” reminiscent of the set of artifacts assembled by the *bricoleur*.¹⁰ Just as the *bricoleur*’s means are not predetermined by a specific project, Burnham points out that often in systems aesthetics “the traditional priority of end results over technique breaks down.”¹¹ Thus, I would suggest, it is above all among conceptual practices premised on an “acceptance of the multiplicity of non-art subject-matter,” and on an emphasis on processes as well as on finished objects, that the legacies of assemblage can be found.

Three examples, drawn from very different contexts, can point to the scope of this conceptual *bricolage*. As is well known, the innovative premise of Bruce Nauman’s early work was that if he was an artist and he spent time in his studio, then “whatever it was” that he was doing in the studio “must be art”—whether it involved arranging flour in patterns on the floor, pacing around the room, or simply drinking coffee.¹² The way in which Nauman took stock of the remainders of the failed traditions of sculpture and studio practice, only to redefine the very parameters of art, invokes one of the defining features of *bricolage*: the tension between constraints and possibilities.¹³ Like Nauman, the French artist Robert Filliou used *bricolage* to redefine the boundaries of art. A self-described *bricoleur* (one of his passports apparently cited this as his profession),¹⁴ Filliou created from the late 1960s a number of assemblages which consist of words and drawings scribbled onto bits of cardboard roughly hung together with hooks and strings. The casualness and slightness of his constructions embody his 1968 “principle of equivalence,” which posited a mathematical equation between the “well-made,” the “badly made,” and the “not-made” in order to encourage a new conception of art as an activity in which anyone can engage.¹⁵ This liberatory discourse, with its celebration of spontaneity, was also shared by the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. His *Parangolé* capes, begun in 1964 and made from heterogeneous materials such as cotton, plastic, or jute bags or squares loosely stitched together,¹⁶ were inspired by the improvisatory styles of samba dancing as well the architecture of the Rio de Janeiro shantytowns, which, as Paola Berenstein Jacques has pointed out, is a spatialized form of *bricolage*.¹⁷ Conceived as a means through which to awaken a new freedom in their wearers, the *Parangolés*, like Filliou’s constructions, sought to hand the *bricoleur*’s tools directly over to the viewer-participant.¹⁸

Thus, on three different continents, and independently from each other, these highly original artists adopted a *bricolage* model to set up open systems in which new relations between art and the everyday could be articulated. These conceptual practices took the temporalization of the object suggested by early 1960s assemblage one step further, to the point where the boundaries between object and process, between artwork and viewer participation, became blurred. A third shift in this trajectory of assemblage-*bricolage*, I would like to argue, occurred in the 1990s, as everyday life itself came to be conceived as a practice analogous to *bricolage*. In his 1980 book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau used the verb *bricoler* to describe the ways in which we engage in the most common activities, including shopping, walking, or cooking. Through these activities, de Certeau explains, people “tinker” (*bricolent*) “with and within the dominant cultural economy to obtain innumerable and infinitesimal metamorphoses of its law into their interests and their own rules.”¹⁹ Just as Lévi-Strauss challenged the hierarchies between *bricolage* and scientific thought, de Certeau sought to define everyday life as a complex field of study requiring new methodologies. It was precisely de

10. Jack Burnham, “Systems Aesthetics” (1968), repr. in *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c. 1970*, exh. cat., ed. Donna de Salvo (London: Tate Modern, 2005), 165–66.

11. *Ibid.*, 167.

12. Ian Wallace and Russel Keziere, “Bruce Nauman Interviewed, 1979 (October 1978),” repr. in *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman’s Words; Writings and Interviews*, ed. Janet Kraynak (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 194.

13. See Anne Wagner, “Nauman’s Body of Sculpture,” *October* 120 (Spring 2007): 53–70.

14. According to Pierre Tillman, *Robert Filliou: Nationalité poète* (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2006), 176.

15. Filliou’s “principle of equivalence” and other key terms of his theory of art can be found in his *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* (Cologne and New York: Kasper Koenig, 1970).

16. See my “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Hélio Oiticica’s *Parangolés*,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 58–71.

17. Paola Berenstein Jacques, *Estética da ginga: A arquitetura das favelas através da obra de Hélio Oiticica* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra and Rioarte, 2001), 24–26.

18. See Hélio Oiticica, “Fundamental Bases for the Definition of the *Parangolé*,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, 1997), 87–88.

19. Michel de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien*, vol. 1: *Arts de faire*, new edition, ed. Luce Giard (1980; Paris: Gallimard, 1990), xxxvii (my translation).

Certeau's elaboration of a new "science of the concrete" that appealed to the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s as he tried to theorize the preoccupations of certain forms of contemporary art. Bourriaud posited a crucial distinction between 1960s practices and a 1990s "relational aesthetics" that "no longer seeks to present utopias."²⁰ Contemporary artists, according to Bourriaud, are concerned instead with the construction of "concrete spaces," as well as the "practice of everyday life" and "practices that tinker with and recycle cultural givens" ("*pratiques de bricolage et de recyclage du donné culturel*").²¹

While 1960s works by Filliou and Oiticica clearly contradict Bourriaud's recurrent opposition between utopia and *bricolage* practices, the basic assumption of a shift away from utopian practices in the 1990s is justified, and de Certeau's model accurately captures the methodological approach of contemporary *bricoleurs*. While this turn to the concrete can be read as a general rejection of the semiotic preoccupations with allegory and deconstruction that had preoccupied art in the 1980s, it also reflects wider shifts in political thought as a whole. The guiding model for the most political art of the last decade, according to Gregory Sholette, can be found in nongovernmental organizations, "which stress pragmatic and tactical action over ideology."²² Contemporary "interventionist" artists, according to Nato Thompson, use tactics that "can be thought of as a set of tools. Like a hammer, a glue gun, or a screwdriver, they are means for building and deconstructing a given situation."²³ The *bricoleur*, it seems, is back with a new tool kit, which now includes street interventions, the internet, and product prototypes.

In a varied landscape ranging from relational aesthetics to interventionist art, contemporary practices of *bricolage* tend to focus on one of two central themes: *bricolage* as a studio practice for artists revisiting the failed utopias of past avant-garde movements on the one hand and, on the other hand, *bricolage* as an everyday model of activism, often closely related to the very concept of survival in developing economies.²⁴ The former tendency, exemplified by the work of Tom Friedman discussed by Jo Applin in this issue, could be situated in the lineage of Bruce Nauman's rethinking of the studio as a space of *bricolage*. The second direction can be more easily traced back to Oiticica's own work: the architectural projects discussed by Patricio del Real in this issue share with Oiticica an interest in shantytown architecture as a space of resistance. These two tendencies represent extreme polarities of the spectrum of *bricolage* practices, as one is resolutely directed toward self-reflexive explorations, and the other is more obviously engaged with wider social and political concerns.

Both tendencies, however, also share a concern with the current situation of sculpture and with the subversive potential of everyday life, and the best *bricolage* today combines a rethinking of the ontological status of art with wider sociopolitical questions of value and agency. Thomas Hirschhorn's work, which deliberately weaves together the legacies of Filliou and Oiticica, among other artists, embodies a crucial synthesis of these different strands. Similarly, artists such as Gabriel Orozco have transposed Nauman's explorations of the artistic process onto a globalized stage, in which the nomadic artist creates works out of remainders found in the streets of the world's cities as well as in the studio. This relation to the remainder, Applin suggests, establishes a set of fragmented and entropic temporalities. Shantytown architecture also articulates complex temporalities, as it recycles remainders of modernity according to the nonlinear and repetitive

20. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Presses du réel, 1998), 48 (my translation).

21. *Ibid.*, 14.

22. Gregory Sholette, "Interventionism and the Historical Uncanny; or, Can There Be a Revolutionary Art without the Revolution?" in *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*, exh. cat., ed. Nato Thompson and Gregory Sholette (North Adams: Mass MoCA, 2004), 139.

23. Nato Thompson, "Trespassing Relevance," in *The Interventionists*, 14.

24. On the latter trend, see my "Thriving on Adversity: The Art of Precariousness," *Mute* 2, no. 3, special issue on "Naked Cities: Struggle in the Global Slums" (October 2006): 74–87, also online at www.metamute.org/en/Thriving-On-Adversity.

processes of addition, expansion, and substitution characteristic of *bricolage*. Because of its complex relations to objects, processes, and time, *bricolage* has been the privileged site for the exploration of wider issues of materiality, commodification, and consumerism in capitalist—and increasingly globalized—societies.

Work/Leisure

More specifically, these concerns coalesce within *bricolage* around the opposition between work and leisure, already suggested by Lévi-Strauss, as he explained that industrial societies only tolerate *bricolage* as a hobby. This very field of hobbies had become a focus of 1950s French sociology, in particular Henri Lefebvre's study of leisure in the new postwar era of consumerism.²⁵ As long as leisure was conceived as a set of compensatory activities which reinforced the centrality of work rather than provide a true means of self-development, Lefebvre argued, this increasingly visible sphere of everyday life would remain subject to the same alienation as the workplace. Passive forms of escapism and entertainment, according to Lefebvre, only increase the dissatisfaction of the alienated worker by offering a momentary satisfaction that always falls short of true fulfillment. These kinds of leisure generally shun any association with work or duty—"doing odd jobs around the house" or engaging in educational activities is no longer deemed entertaining enough.²⁶ Other forms of leisure, however, may contain a critique of this alienating everyday life even as they are embedded in it. One example suggested by Lefebvre was the boom of Sunday painting, a form of leisure that "involves an original search—whether clumsy or skilful is unimportant—for a style of living."²⁷ Discussions of this form of leisure had taken a specific direction in the United States, as the new craze for paint-by-numbers kits swept the country in the 1950s. The debates about this hobby, which appealed above all to would-be Sunday painters, hinged on whether it constituted a democratization of high art or rather acted as a "stifling" form of control over real expressivity.²⁸ The relation between this duality and the political climate of a 1950s America characterized by stability, conformity, and repression was compounded by the fact that the most prominent member of the expanding group of enthusiastic paint-by-number hobbyists was none other than the president of the United States himself, Dwight Eisenhower. Jasper Johns's take on the paint-by-number theme, in his 1960 *Target* (also known as *Target (Do-it-yourself)* or *Jasper Johns and . . .*) should be interpreted within this context. By inviting the viewer of this work to color in a target drawn in pencil, using the provided paintbrush and three colors presented in a paint set, Johns seemed to suggest an unwillingness or inability to "express" himself. Yet at the same time, there is little for the viewer to fill in, and any desire to be "creative" will be as constrained as in a paint-by-number set. *Target* thus seems to reflect the "stifling" environment of 1950s America, in which deviations from an increasingly restrictive sociopolitical norm were strictly monitored. As Jonathan D. Katz demonstrates in his essay, gay artists such as Johns and Rauschenberg played a crucial role in 1950s American art because they explored contemporary conditions of expressivity and by extension the very definition of subjectivity at the time. Within a context where opposition began to be perceived as an illusion of freedom "within a system of utter constraint," as Katz aptly describes it, Rauschenberg used assemblage as a means to convey signifieds of his own sexual difference through signifiers whose

25. Henri Lefebvre's monumental *Critique de la vie quotidienne* was published in three volumes in 1947, 1961, and 1981.

26. Henri Lefebvre, "Work and Leisure in Everyday Life" (1958), repr. in *The Everyday Life Reader*, ed. Ben Highmore (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 229. This text is the introduction to the second edition of *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1.

27. *Ibid.*, 235.

28. See Arthur L. Guttill, "Amateur Page," *American Artist*, December 17, 1953, quoted by William L. Bird, Jr., *Paint by Number*, exh. cat. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution and National Museum of American History, 2001), 12.

matter-of-factness and apparent randomness would discourage any symbolic interpretation. In this sense, Rauschenberg's *bricolage*—like Johns's do-it-yourself *Target*—operates within the boundaries of Lefebvre's conception of leisure: it is both a manifestation and a critique of alienation.

The reason the *bricoleur* in industrial societies inhabits this ambivalent sphere is that he occupies what Jaimey Hamilton describes as an ambiguous position between production and consumption. Like Rauschenberg's combines, Arman's assemblages dynamically oscillate between the two fields. Since consumption was traditionally considered to be a feminine activity, the rise of the artist-as-consumer marked a significant shift in the gendering of the artist in this period. As Katz's essay demonstrates, *bricolage*, like assemblage, lends itself to a range of productive queering and feminizing tactics. In the later 1960s, I would suggest, this ambivalence between production and consumption became more closely identified with the figure of the amateur, distinct from both the passive consumer and the professional specialist. Nauman, Filliou, and Oiticica each adopted the role of the amateur in a different way, in order to question the limits of art (Nauman) or abolish the specialized status of art altogether (Filliou, Oiticica).²⁹ Just as Lefebvre acknowledged that certain forms of leisure contained the seeds of a revolutionary social change, Filliou firmly believed that art, as "a form of organization of leisure," could become the very site in which a new form of unalienated existence could develop.³⁰

De Certeau's study of everyday life, as Ben Highmore has suggested, also invoked the figure of the amateur engaged in activities as diverse as cooking, gardening, and making home movies.³¹ While Lefebvre brought to light what he called the "work-leisure" unit, references to work are almost entirely absent from de Certeau's account: the figure of the amateur has become the sole model for understanding everyday life. The fact that many contemporary artists adopt a similar starting point is related both to a return to the concreteness of the everyday, mentioned earlier, and to a shift away from the working class as the locus for revolutionary change. Tactically, the figure of the amateur can serve two purposes in this context. On the one hand, he or she embodies a form of love or passion no longer present in the field of work. This is why Hirschhorn is drawn to the role of the fan in his *Monuments and Altars* to major figures of modern art and thought. The way fans can decide on their attachments and remain committed to their adulation without having to justify it appeals to Hirschhorn as a form of resistance in its demarcation of a shrinking realm of agency driven by something other than market forces, a tiny kernel of autonomous subjectivity that is not entirely reducible to flows of capital. Artists such as Hirschhorn and Friedman invest their *bricolage* activities with an irreducibly personal drive, which lends their work a sense of inner necessity previously discredited by postmodern critiques of authorship and autonomy. On the other hand, the amateur persona is adopted by artists who are more politically engaged in exploring the forces of global capitalism. Del Real shows, for example, how the Slovenian artist Marjetica Potrč has adopted the roles of both an ethnographer and an engineer in her work in the slums. In this context, the appeal of the amateur, as the Critical Art Ensemble has explained, lies in the fact that "amateurs are not invested in institutionalized systems of knowledge production and policy construction, and hence do not have irresistible forces guiding the outcome of their efforts, such as maintaining a place in the funding hierarchy or maintaining prestige-capital."³²

29. I develop this discussion of Nauman's "amateurism" in "'Bound to Fail': Constraints and Constrictions in Bruce Nauman's Early Work," in *Bruce Nauman: Make Me Think Me*, exh. cat., ed. Laurence Sillars (Liverpool: Tate Liverpool, 2006), 46–55.

30. "Interview with Robert Filliou," in *Robert Filliou: Commemor*, exh. cat. (Aachen: Neue Galerie im Alten Kurhaus, 1970), n. p.

31. See Ben Highmore, *Michel de Certeau: Analysing Culture* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006), 154–57.

32. Critical Art Ensemble, "The Amateur," in *The Interventionists*, 147.

If the amateur-as-fan is motivated by passion, the amateur-as-subverter operates at times within contexts of necessity or urgency, like the *favelado* building and restoring his house in response to basic needs for shelter and protection. Both categories, however, are permeable, as Hirschhorn's precariously positioned *Altars* suggest the urgency of street commemorations after an accident, while Potrč celebrates shantytown architecture as a triumph of human creativity against adversity. This space between pleasure and necessity is perhaps where the true potential of *bricolage* lies. It runs through the economies of desire and obsolescence explored in Arman's assemblages, as well as Friedman's rereadings of early avant-gardes through the everyday, and the tactics for "living on adversity" (to use Oiticica's well-known phrase) explored by artists in the developing world. It is precisely this productive ambivalence that fails to conform to traditional political models of oppositionality. The relevance of assemblage today is that it was the first medium to propose ways of operating outside this binary model, in response to a "system of utter constraint" (to use Katz's phrase again) similar to the international framework of global capitalism today. As del Real demonstrates in his essay, contemporary *bricolage* practices can only escape the totalizing drive of capitalism by rejecting oppositional models of criticality in favor of a Derridean "free-play" resisting productivity and homogenization.

Highmore has astutely pointed out that de Certeau's model of tactics, which has often been mobilized by cultural critics eager to spot acts of subversion within the field of consumption, offers only a one-sided view of the French theorist's conception of everyday life's political potential. Terms indicating subversive practices (such as "devious," "guileful," "tricky," "clandestine," or "cunning") certainly figure in de Certeau's account of everyday life, but those implying stubbornness ("tenacious," "obstinate," "inert," or "persistent") are equally if not more important to his perspective.³³ These two fields, I would argue, also operate within *bricolage*, as the very act of "making do" analyzed by de Certeau can be interpreted both as a fatalistic acceptance of the status quo and as a set of ruses to defeat it. Just as Highmore situates the crux of de Certeau's analysis in the "multiple speeds" and "varied rhythms" of everyday life, it is the inherent performativity and layered temporalities of *bricolage* that hold the key to its complex operations. The "stubbornness" of everyday life, according to de Certeau, lies in its natural recalcitrance in the face of the ineluctable speed of progress and modernization. Everyday life is "inert" in its slowness and repetitiveness, or in its purposelessness and lack of efficiency; it is "persistent" in its repeated appeal to ancient traditions, in the ways of doing and being that are mobilized for example every time somebody cooks a meal. This is a kind of resistance that relies neither on a future utopian vision nor on a nostalgic primitivism. It is situated in the specific rather than the general, and in an accumulated mass of collective activities rather than in individual agency. *Bricolage* articulates these very tensions through assemblage, process, and the concrete. As such, it acts as a seismograph registering the forces that have been shaping art and society since the second half of the twentieth century.

Anna Dezeuze is a postdoctoral research fellow in art history and visual studies at the University of Manchester. She is currently editing two books: one on the topic of spectator participation in contemporary art, and the other (with Julia Kelly) on the concept of "involuntary sculpture." Her own book project is entitled *The Almost Nothing: Dematerialisation and the Politics of Precariousness*.

33. Highmore, *Michel de Certeau*, 108-10.