

EASA 2012 PARIS

Date : November 10, 2011

Daniel Miller, UCL

Readers, Please note there are several sessions on material culture proposed at EASA including the following two, papers should be proposed by end November 28th

1) Safe as houses? Turbulence, doubt and disquiet in contemporary domestic spheres IW08
Convenors

Tom McDonald (University College London)

Razvan Nicolescu (University College London)

Sabina Stan (Dublin City University)

Anthropology has long employed the concept of the house to expound upon themes of cohesion, social order and stability. For example, Lévi-Strauss argued 'house-based societies' achieve social cohesion by materializing unity through the home. Bourdieu posited that domestic spaces are made meaningful through structured configurations of practice.

More recently, domesticity itself has become a major research area. Issues such as the moral economy of households, household routines (Shove), comfort (Miller), and care (Drazin) came under anthropological scrutiny, although still essentially focusing on stability and continuity.

These developments are mirrored by a growing anthropological interest in emotions, uncertainty, and risk. This workshop will critically engage with both domestic spaces and uncertainty, by challenging notions of homes as sites of self-assurance and comfort, and asking whether domestic spaces are also socially constructed through uncertainty and disquiet.

Papers are invited that engage with how new threats interact with contemporary global forces to unsettle domestic environments. Possible themes include: conflicts between concepts of home, household and family; the impact of changes in ownership regimes, planning and credit policies, or real estate speculation on home-making practices; homes and vulnerability (in areas affected by migration, disasters or foreclosures). How are homes considered as sites of decay and dirt, rather than comfort and cleanliness, with increasing concerns over energy waste and underuse of space? How do hazards such as infectious diseases, pollution, global warming and the world financial crisis create 'unseen uncertainties' in the home?

2) MATERIALITY AND POVERTY W038

Convenors

Erin Taylor (Universidade de Lisboa)

Daniel Miller (University College, London)

A problem with ethnographies of poverty is that they may reduce the relationship of low income people with material culture largely to the expression of inequality as seen in their lack of income and possessions. Inadvertently this only serves to impoverish them further as we pay less attention to their cultural engagement with the material world than we would for less impoverished populations. But just like everyone else, 'poor' people use material forms to creatively construct their social identities and communities, and transform their socioeconomic situations. Indeed their relationship to homes, clothes and other material goods may be more complex and nuanced

precisely because the range is more constrained.

This workshop recognizes the stratifying effects of materiality, while rethinking how poverty and the poor are defined and encouraging new ways of viewing poverty and materiality. We suggest that a more balanced view can achieve three things: 1) illustrate the actual relationships that poor people have with material forms on their own terms, not just in relation to poverty; 2) demonstrate some of the capacities that material forms provide to poor people to combat their social stratification; 3) taking these capacities into account, illuminate the limits that poverty places on the use of material forms for sociocultural production. Taking both capacities and limitations into account, we explore the possibility that materiality may have a heightened importance for poor people because, in possession of fewer resources, they may value them more highly, and depend upon them more heavily, than wealthier social groups.