

Hidden Histories of Things

Monday 26th January 2015

9am – 5.30pm



Are you interested in the fascinating hidden histories of things as diverse as turpentine, pesticides, seaweed, apples and red squirrels?

This event, co-organised by the Open University's Commodity Histories Project and the Institute of Making, brings together an international group of researchers who focus on peoples' relationships with the non-human throughout history. Discussion will focus on methods for interrogating the non-human and will explore what histories of materials, objects, animals and plants can reveal about their contemporary workings and future potentialities.

Overwhelmingly, research on the non-human, whether stressing collaborative relationships between things and humans or conversely the intractability and resistance of certain properties of the non-human to human will and control, tends to focus on the contemporary world. This one-day workshop takes a step back and aims to explore how the histories of materials and non-human phenomena might inform our understanding of their present workings and future potentialities. It views history as a creative process, capable of suggesting new possibilities by revealing hidden stories and episodes from the past drawing on multi-disciplinary perspectives.

The Institute of Making is a creative space for those interested in materials and the made world, providing a location for investigation, research and play with an enormous variety of materials. Commodity Histories focuses on the histories of a wide range of commodities that have become an indispensable aspect of people's daily lives throughout the world, providing a forum for new research in the field, and focusing on their histories beyond Europe and North America.

This event is free, but spaces are limited. Book online through the Institute of Making website.

Location: Institute of Making, Malet Place, University College London, WC1E 7JE.

Contact: research@instituteofmaking.org.uk

Programme

9am - Start

9.15 - 9.30 **Welcome** - Sandip Hazareesingh (Open University) and Sarah Wilkes (UCL)

9.30 - 11.00 **Session One - Plant Agencies**

Lewis Daly (University of Oxford): “Plant Perspectivism? Bina Charm Plants in Makushi Ethnoecology”

Joanna Crosby, (University of Essex): “Comfort Me with Apples: The Hidden Cultural and Material Histories of Apples”

Lucy Davis (Nanyang Technological University): “Stories of Wood and the Migrant Ecologies Project”

11am - Coffee break

11.15 – 12.45 **Session Two - Plants into Commodities**

Wouter Klein (Utrecht University): “Bringing the Bark: the Introduction of Peruvian Bark on the Medical Market of the Low Countries (c. 1640-1720)”

Sophia Efstathiou (Norwegian University of Science and Technology): “Weeding Out the Sea: Adding ‘Value’ to Norwegian Seaweed”

Marcin Krasnodębski (University of Bordeaux): “The Secret History of Turpentine”

12.45pm - Lunch

1.45 - 3.15 **Session Three - Materials and Modernities**

Tom Widger (Durham University): “Pesticides and Modernity”

Jane Wess (University of Edinburgh/RGS-IBG): “The Mobilisation of Modernity: Diary of an Instrument at the Royal Geographical Society”

Mat Paskins (Open University): “National Rosehips”

3.15pm - Coffee break

3.30 - 4.30 **Session Four - Animal Environments**

Matthew Holmes (University of Leeds): “The Perfect Pest: Natural History and the Red Squirrel in Nineteenth Century Scotland”

Monika Baár (University of Groningen): “Eyes that Lead: The History of Guide Dogs for the Blind”

4.30 - 5.30 **Concluding remarks, drinks and exploration of the Materials Library**