



Panel's title : The political economy/ecology of animal labour in Asia

Coordinator (Affiliation, University...) : 1- Lainé Nicolas (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale, Collège de France, Paris)

2- Maan Barua (School of Geography and the Environment University of Oxford, UK).

Language : English

Topics : Environnement

Panel presentation :

Labour has been an enduring concept in the critical social sciences and environmental studies. A dynamic process mediating nature and society (Marx, 1976), it has been a key analytic for thinking about value (Rubin, 2000 [1928]), work (Harriss-White, 2003), as well as nature (Smith, 1996) in political economies. In recent years, following reworking divisions between human and nonhuman productive activity (Ingold, 2000), and work (Porcher, 2015), a more expanded understanding of labour emerged.

A nascent body of research seeks to rethink how bodily capacities of animals qualify as labour (Lainé 2016), and explore how such labour is enrolled into processes of expropriation in both living and 'dead' forms (Perkins, 2007). Others emphasize the dynamics and logics of commodifying nonhuman labour in the form of 'lively commodities' (Collard, 2013), the differential forms of value it generates (Barua, 2016), besides tracking how its sensibilities manifest in capitalist practices of accumulation (Blanchette, 2015).

By acknowledging animal labour, contributions of this panel will aim at reorienting political economic and ecological approaches to nature in Asia. More specifically, it will ask how accounting for animal labour might enable other definitions of the conservation paradigm that has emerged from global crisis and responses to the Anthropocene (Bonneuil, Fressoz 2012). To this end, themes of interest include:

- Histories of animal labour in Asian context, with a focus on colonial and postcolonial period
- Non-human working activity and its role in co-producing political economies of conservation (zoos, parks, ecosystem services)
- Partnership between human-animal communities and their role in shaping landscapes
- Understandings of commodities produced through animal labour/ animal body parts.

Key words :

nonhuman labour ; human-animal relations ; political economy ; ecology ; commodities ; conservation

Participants :

1) **Name(s) (Affiliation, University...) :** Lainé Nicolas (Laboratoire d'Anthropologie Sociale, Collège de France, Paris)

Communication's title : Animal Labour as an Ecosophy: humans, elephants and ecosystems in Laos

Language : English :



Presentation :

This paper wish to engage a discussion promoting animal labour as a mean for biodiversity conservation. It does so in relation with ethnographic insights collected among mahouts and elephants working communities in North-West Laos.

It shows how, throughout the year, elephants provide many domestic services to their owners and the whole village community which, in return, give them respect, protection and well-being. In addition, by accompanying human activities, these animals have access to different natural environments (mountain, plain, paddy field, village border, etc.) which give them opportunity to select among a rich diversity of plants for food and medicine. Such elephants' circulations contribute to the regeneration of the forest through seed dispersal. This way, the presence of elephants in villages maintains the delicate balance of the forest-village ecosystem.

By recalling the notion of ecosophy as envisaged by Guattari (1989), the conclusion argue that animal labour cannot be reduced to the question of subjectivity/ individual agency (emancipation vs. exploitation), neither to interspecies relations of care, but should be apprehended as a co-production on, with, and within an ecosystem as a whole.

Key words : conservation ; interspecies labour ; elephant ; Laos

2) Name(s) (Affiliation, University...): Maan Barua (School of Geography and the Environment University of Oxford, UK).

Communication's title : Nonhuman labour, encounter value, spectacular accumulation: the geographies of a lively commodity

Language : English

Presentation :

This paper maps into geographies of 'lively commodities', commodities whose value derives from their status as living beings. In an era where life itself has become a locus of capitalist accumulation, picking apart the category of 'liveliness' underpinning commodification has important analytical and geographical stakes. To this end, by tracking historical geographies of commodifying lions in political economies of ecotourism in India, this paper shows how more-than-human labour and lively potentials affect commodification and influence accumulation, not simply through recalcitrance, but as active participants within political economic organization. The paper advances and develops a triad of relational concepts – nonhuman labour, encounter value, spectacular accumulation – through which the political economic potency of lively commodities might be articulated and grasped. It concludes by discussing the analytical potential of this approach and its future purchase for rethinking commodity geographies.

Key words : commodities; nonhuman labour ; encounter value ; India

3) Name(s) (Affiliation): Michael J. Hathaway (Simon Fraser University)

Communication's title : Fungal Capacities: A Mushroom's Role in Shaping Asian Commodity Chains

Language : English



Presentation :

What happens when we look at a commodity not just as a passive object of human interest and manipulation, but as a living organism that has its own biological capacities, affinities, and actions? In this paper, I suggest that two positions are helpful in exploring the liveliness of commodities. First, we can question the typical notion that humans are masterful subjects that control the world around them. Second, we can explore how other beings are themselves world-making subjects. This paper explores these issues through a study of the matsutake mushroom, a valuable wild fungus that is now gathered in over a dozen countries and shipped to Japan. Based on long-term fieldwork in China and Japan, I show how more than half a million people in rural and urban China hunt this mushroom in high mountain forests. In partial and diverse ways, they learn about and negotiate some of the multispecies assemblages that this mushroom generates, such as its mutualistic relations to trees and active engagements with a variety of insect species. This paper examines the mushroom's active world making, and how such attention provides different accounts of the international trade, where the mushroom itself shapes the tempo and action of the commodity chain, from forest to plate.

Key words : living commodity; mushroom ;Japan; China

4) Name(s) (Affiliation) : Kelsi Nagy ((School of Geography and the Environment University of Oxford, UK)

Communication's title Where the Cows Come Home: Mysore's urban cattle and the co-production of labour

Language : Français / English :

Presentation :

Many cattle seen wandering the streets of India's busy cities are kept as dairy animals, who return to their cowsheds to be fed, milked, and tended to at the end of the day. Based on my PhD fieldwork in Mysore, Karnataka, where I conducted a multispecies ethnography (Kirskey & Helmreich, 2010) on an urban dairy cow, this paper examines the co-production (Porcher & Schmitt, 2012) of labour by urban cattle, who display cooperative behaviors in the trans-action (Haraway, 2008) of exchanging milk for care. The city also emerged as a "safe" landscape for cows to roam autonomously, unlike in nearby villages where more cattle were minded by herders. This kind of urban pastoralism was possible largely because of cow's amenable nature and made her a preferred dairy animal to the willful buffalo, a more lucrative dairy animal.

Key words : urban cattle; trans-action ; cow; India