

# The Political Life of Things

The Imperial War Museum  
3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010

## Program

With the exception of registration, all sessions and refreshments are in the conference room, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, Imperial War Museum

### **09.30 - 10.00: Registration and Coffee, Atrium**

### **10.00 - 11.30: Keynote**

Jane Bennett (Johns Hopkins): *Powers of the Hoard: Notes on Material Agency*

Discussant: Christine Sylvester (Lancaster University/University of Gothenburg)

### **11.30 - 12.00: Coffee**

### **12.00 - 13.00: Panel 1: Do things matter?**

Cindy Weber (Sussex University): *Materializing Violence: Terror and Horror and War and Citizenship*

Louise Amoore (Durham University): *Making Things Secure: On Objects of Violence and Things of Beauty*

Chair: Emily Jackson (Durham University)

### **13.00 - 14.00: Lunch**

### **14.00 - 15.00: Panel 2: Art Matters**

Roger Tolson (Head of Collections, Imperial War Museum)

Adam Broomberg ([www.choppedliver.info](http://www.choppedliver.info))

In conversation with Bernadette Buckley (Goldsmiths)

### **15.00 - 15.20: Coffee**

### **15.20 - 17.00: Panel 3: Security Matters**

Lisa Smirl & Beth Lister (Sussex University): *Drive-By Development: Thinking Through the Sports Utility Vehicle in Humanitarian Assistance*

Claudia Aradau (Open University): *'Crowded Places Are Everywhere You Go': Materialities of Terrorism and Unexpected Events*

Jairus Grove (Johns Hopkins): *Improvised Explosive Devices and The New Ecology Of War*

Nick Vaughan-Williams (Warwick) & Tom Lundborg (Swedish Institute of International Affairs): *There's More to Life than Biopolitics: Critical Infrastructure, Resilience Planning, and Molecular Security*

Chair: Martin Coward (Newcastle University)

### **17.00 - 17.30: Roundtable and closing comments.**

Debbie Lisle (Queens University Belfast)

Alex Danchev (University of Nottingham)

Chair: Angharad Closs Stephens (Durham University)

## About the event

This event starts from the assumption that the subject of politics is always already embodied and exists in the context of a multitude of material objects. Politics thus comprises complex assemblages in which things play a constitutive role. Despite often speaking of the role of things - from ballot papers to missiles - scholars of politics and international relations have largely overlooked their constitutive power. Indeed, the classical agenda of politics scholarship is dominated by an anthropocentrism that locates politics in the figure of the human individual. It is an agenda defined by ideas of agency and rationality that regards things as mere equipment. Despite this seeming neglect, the intersection of materiality and politics has recently become the focus of a number of innovative strands of thought. From Appadurai's *Social Life of Things* to Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, via Deleuzian notions of affect and notions of non-representational geographies, new perspectives on what things are and do are re-problematising the constitutive materiality of politics.

Artists and art practitioners, of course, have long been engaged with questions of materiality. Whether it is the embodiment of performance, the tactility of sculpture or the physical nature of imaging media, artists have probed the materiality of the assemblages they create. As such, the intersection between such artistic practice and scholarship on materiality provides a fertile ground for exploring the question of what things are and do in politics.

This one-day event brings together scholars engaged in thinking about materiality to explore the nature, role and power of things in the assemblages of politics. In the context of the material culture collected and displayed by the Imperial War Museum, the event will explore how we can understand the role of things in war, conflict, violence and everyday practices of resistance.

This event will be interdisciplinary - bringing artists, art practitioners, museum curators, art historians, geographers, anthropologists and international relations scholars together to discuss questions of the political life of things.

This event is sponsored by BISA Poststructural Politics Working Group, PSA/BISA Art and Politics Working Group, Durham University Geography Department, School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy at Queens University Belfast University, School of Geography Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University, and Newcastle Institute for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities.

This event was organised by Martin Coward (Newcastle University) with help from Debbie Lisle (Queens University Belfast), Angharad Closs Stephens (Durham University) and Emily Jackson (Durham University). The organisers would like to thank the staff at the IWM -particularly Roger Tolson and Susannah Behr - for their support and assistance. The organisers would also like to thank all the speakers for their generosity and engagement.