

KENOTE LECTURE by Dr Ludovic Coupaye (UCL)

“Beyond Agency: Tools, Instruments and Machines revisited through their Technicity”

Friday 14th May, 18.00-19.00, French Institute of Scotland, West Parliament Square, Edinburgh EH1 1RN (conference delegates only, upon registration)

Abstract: In this work-in-progress presentation, I propose investigating technical objects (tools, instruments, and machines) by shifting the focus from an agency commonly understood as deriving from what they are designed to do (their function, roles or even usages) to how they operate as part of a wider field of relations. Drawing on the category of technicity, understood as a regime of relations between humans and their milieus, actualised during technical activity, I explore how their technical functioning, that is, their material, mechanical, and sensorial features actively shape the relations that form in their vicinity.

Building on my previous work on decorated yams as “relations-made-things,” I extend this relational analytic to technical objects whose functioning coordinates and socialises human action whilst also actualising particular logics (production, extraction, transformation) of engagement with their material environment. I invite the audience to explore whether the functioning of technical objects such as quarry equipment, that is their modes of operation, rhythms, and constraints, participates in shaping how material landscapes are perceived, valued and represented - as resource, obstacle, partner, or terrain of care.

Analysing technicity, I argue, helps unpack how the functioning of technical objects actively shapes, generates and/or stabilises material and social milieus.



Ludovic Coupaye is Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology at UCL. His work explores technicity, material practices, and the relational processes through which technical activities and objects shape sociality and relations with environments. His research spans Melanesian ethnography, theories of materiality, digital anthropology and the anthropology of technics, with a particular focus on how technicity contributes to the stabilisation, transformation, or emergence of social, ecological, and institutional worlds. He is one of the founders and co-director of the Centre for the Anthropology of Technics and Technodiversity (CATT).