UC San Diego Science Studies Program

Presents

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4:00 – 6:00pm
Humanities & Social Sciences Bldg. #3027
Reception prior to talk at 3:30pm in H&SS 3005

Food Chains as Complex Systems: Distance, Scale, Emergence

Over the past couple of decades, various theoretical approaches have been developed to analyze large-scale, materially heterogeneous systems: actor-network theory, assemblage theory, complexity theory and so forth. This talk uses some of the insights from these theories to explore the history of expanding food chains over the last couple of centuries. Its empirical material is taken from research into meat and milk in Britain. It addresses three fundamental ways in which food chains have developed. First, distance and durability. Food chains have, simply put, become longer and foods themselves more durable, through the use of technologies designed to arrest decay: refrigeration, cold storage, preservatives, canning, and wrapping, for example. Second, scale. Modern food systems have often involved the agglomeration of previously dispersed activities like dairying and slaughtering. This “scaling up” of production facilitated greater levels of efficiency and standardization. Third, emergence. Three aspects of emergence will be examined here: the emergence of new forms of animal as the basic units of production, the emergence of new foodborne pathogens (parasites, prions), and the emergence of new dietary disorders.

For more information, please contact the Science Studies Program Office
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