The energy transition of the last century involved new fuels, networks and technologies. Alongside, energy has also changed its meaning and representation. Throughout the project, **Material Cultures of Energy** has paid attention to the transformation in the **values, feelings and knowledge** about energy and its use. This is a story of twists and turns. In advanced societies, people today can flick a switch instead of having to haul coal up the stairs. In the 1960s and 70s, the electric meter disappeared from the entrance hall and moved to the basement or outdoors, hidden from view. At the same time, 5 million households in Britain continued to feed their pre-payment gas meter, and disruptions and disputed bills were a frequent reminder of the precious and precarious place that energy has in our lives. Today, smart meters, solar panels and electric cars are transforming once again how we interact with energy.

**Material Cultures of Energy** has engaged with a range of stakeholders and communities to explore the **changing meanings of energy** – past, present and future. In addition to study workshops in Britain and Japan, we organised an art competition for 6–18 year olds in Saijo City, Japan, with 500 entries. School children drew pictures of how they saw energy in their daily lives and how they imagined the future. At the Junior Guildhall School of Music, London, workshops gave young musicians an opportunity to communicate and channel energy through music.

At the Science Museum, London, the project held a conference for museum curators, social scientists and historians to exchange new knowledge and methods about the material culture of energy, its analysis and display. With the British Film Institute (BFI), we have examined the changing role of energy in films. We have presented research findings to the World Energy Council (WEC) and contributed a history of the oldest international organisation in the field. And we have collaborated with international bodies and partners in conferences and publications, including Électricité de France (EDF), the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), the Rachel Carson Center and the Deutsches Museum (Munich), and the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (Potsdam).
MCE Project Activities (Selected)

- ‘Domesticating Energy’ workshop organised with the Energy History group at the University of Cambridge/Harvard University, 25-26 May 2017.
- ‘Futures Past: Experts, Development and Sustainability’ conference co-organised with the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies, Potsdam, Germany, 28–29 Apr. 2016.

Selected Publications


Wright, R. ‘The Economics of Aesthetics in Southern California Edison’, *Environment, Space, Place* (forthcoming).

**MATERIAL CULTURES OF ENERGY**

**Material Cultures of Energy** has investigated energy transitions in daily life in the twentieth century. Our research seeks to understand better the roles played by people, households and communities in transformations in the past and the light they shed on the challenging task of transitions in the future. Research has investigated case studies in the United Kingdom, North America, Germany, Japan and India.

**Material Cultures of Energy** explores how:

- Networks and grids changed communities and their sense of space
- Transitions worked themselves out in people’s homes
- Societies managed at times of shortages and disruption
- Energy futures were imagined and contested
Material Cultures of Energy (2014-17) has been funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in its ‘Care for the Future: Thinking Forward through the Past’ initiative. The project is based at Birkbeck College, University of London, and consists of Prof Frank Trentmann (Principal Investigator), Dr Hiroki Shin (Co-Investigator), Dr Vanessa Taylor (University of Greenwich), Dr Heather Chappells (University of British Columbia, Canada) and Dr Rebecca Wright (University of Sussex).

**Project Partners**

British Film Institute (BFI), UK  
California Institute of Technology (Caltech), USA  
Centre for Development and the Environment, University of Oslo, Norway  
Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), UK  
Électricité de France (EDF), France  
Center for History and Economics, Cambridge, UK, and Harvard University, USA  
Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies (IASS), Potsdam, Germany  
Institute of Economic Research, Hitotsubashi University, Japan  
Kyōritsu sha, Coop Yamagata, Japan  
Museum Strom und Leben, Recklinghausen, Germany  
National Consumer Research Center (NCRC), Finland  
Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany  
RWE AG, Germany  
Saijo City, Japan  
Science Museum, London, UK  
Sustainable Consumption Institute, University of Manchester, UK  
Universidade Federal Rural do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil  
University of the West of England, UK  
World Energy Council

For further details take a look at our website [http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mce](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mce) or contact

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