



Making germs real: creating, performing and learning about a dangerous invisible thing in the public sphere, c.1860-1930

Fully-funded AHRC PhD studentship

Applications are invited for an AHRC-funded PhD working on how germs were made real to different groups and individuals. During the late 19th century and early 20th centuries germs became entities to be widely feared and respected, even though very few people had ever seen them. This studentship is one of eight fully-funded awards made by the newly-established Collaborative Doctoral Partnership managed by the Science Museum Group. The project will be supervised by Dr Anna Maerker (King's College London) and Robert Bud (Science Museum, London). The studentship, which is funded for three years full-time equivalent, will begin in September 2013.

The Studentship

The acceptance of the germ theory depended on more than the publication of experimental results in academic journals – germs were made real through images, objects, practices, and spaces, from micro-photographs and three-dimensional models to new methods of washing hands and hospital designs.

The student will be encouraged to explore rich and under-researched parts of the Science Museum's collection which have been central to the experience of germs. These include the collection of educational microscopes, illustrated books, and professional medical clothing (e.g. nurses' uniforms). Objects such as the collection of soaps and cleaning materials can be used to provide links to other sections of the museum.

The student will have an opportunity to contribute to the new medical gallery planned by the Science Museum. The doctoral researcher will create new object interpretations and identify relevant themes for the development of storylines for the new gallery. More generally, this project will provide an opportunity to interrogate our models of public engagement in historical and contemporary perspective, to investigate the roles of images, objects, and interactive practices for knowledge creation at the museum, and to reflect critically on our understanding of lay knowledge versus expert knowledge.

Questions may include: How did practices of making germs real shape relationships between people? How did such practices change understandings of disease? How did commercial interests influence the development of new techniques and technologies for the lab, the operating theatre, the ward, the practice, and the home? What were the moral implications of the performance of germs, and how did they change attributions of responsibility and authority?

The source base for the project is available locally, at the Science Museum itself, at the Wellcome Library, the British Library, and in the archives of local hospitals and medical associations. The student will be helped to be a member of an active community of scholars in the public and material culture of science.

Methodological approaches will be based on a solid historical understanding of the history of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century medicine. We would especially expect the student to bring or to develop a sound familiarity with recent work in the history of Science, Technology and Medicine which engages with the role of objects, performative practices and with gestural knowledge. We would also expect the student to engage with important scholarship in Science & Technology Studies on the role of technologies for “configuring the user”, and for the relationship between experts and publics. Depending on the student’s background, additional approaches may include user studies in contemporary museology, or work on performance and gesture from medical anthropology.

How to Apply

Applicants should have a good undergraduate degree in history, the history of science or other relevant discipline, and will need to satisfy AHRC academic and residency eligibility criteria, including Masters level advanced research training or equivalent. Preference may be given to candidates with prior experience in working with historical scientific instruments and objects, though others are encouraged to apply.

Applicants should submit a short curriculum vitae and a brief letter outlining qualifications for the studentship in the form of a single Word file no more than three pages in total. The names and contact details of two academic referees should also be supplied. Applications should be sent to Anna Maerker (anna.maerker@kcl.ac.uk) no later than **5 June 2013**.

Interviews are scheduled to be held in the Science Museum, London, in the week of **17-21 June 2013**.

For further information concerning the project, please contact to Anna Maerker (anna.maerker@kcl.ac.uk).