

# Resource Event Practice

Interdisciplinary Perspectives  
on New Materialism

## Abstracts

22 June – 24 June 2023  
FernUniversität in Hagen  
Gebäude 2 (KSW), Raum 1– 3



**ReForm**  
Resources in Transformation

*Leibniz*  
Gemeinschaft



FernUniversität in Hagen



# Content

## Keynote

<i>Ian Hodder: Towards a More Materialist New Materialism</i>	4
---------------------------------------------------------------	---

## Session 1: Materiality from a Sociological and Archaeological Perspective

<i>Frank Hillebrand: Socialized Material in Practice</i>	5
<i>Oliver J. T. Harris: Memories of Another World</i>	6
<i>Herbert Kalthoff: Materialities and Human Life</i>	7

## Session 2: Corporeality, Sensuality, Affectivity and Perception

<i>Christiane Schürkmann: From the Materiality of Practice to the Practice of Matter</i>	9
<i>Tina Asmussen: Spirited Metals and Resource Affect</i>	11
<i>Franka Schäfer: Entangled Resources in Utopian Design Spaces</i>	12

## Session 3: Material Entanglements

<i>Constance von Rüden &amp; Johannes Jungfleisch: Eventful Histories</i>	15
<i>Mariko Jacoby: Water, Practices, and the Law</i>	17
<i>Stefan Schreiber: Beyond the Separation of Matter and Practice:</i>	19

## Keynote

# Towards a More Materialist New Materialism

**Ian Hodder**  
**Stanford University**

The various contemporary trends towards posthumanism and new materiality are indeed fragmented into numerous concentrations around a variety of terms such as assemblage, Actor Networks, ontologies, relationality, symmetry, engagement, co-respondence... In this paper this fragmentation is discussed and its historical development described. Despite the diversity it is argued that many approaches are influenced by a non-radical concern with self-constitution and being/becoming rather than with the material conditions of existence. This undermines the potential contribution of archaeology to the debate and suggests the need to seek a truly new materialism.

## Session 1

# Socialized Material in Practice: What Kind of Materialism Does Social Theory Need?

**Frank Hillebrandt**  
University of Hagen

Since its inception, sociology has defined its object beyond the materiality of practice. In distinction from other disciplines, it is concerned with social facts, social actions, emergent communication, which, according to Durkheim's dictum, must be treated like things, but which are anything but materialistically defined as the very own objects of sociology. Thus, the material is inevitably marginalized. Sociology is the science of cultural form and symbols, of interpersonal relations und strctures. Materiality appears primarily as technology, which is single-minded either instrumentally - in institutionalist and action-theoretical approaches - or deterministically - in Marxist sociology. The new materialism breaks with this kind of science. Karan Barad sums up this break very pointedly with the following statement: „In an agential realist account, materiality is an active factor in processes of materialisation.“ (Barad 2007: 183) The lecture will then show which parts of the sociological tradition can be made fruitful for a new sociological definition of its object. For if sociality is consistently conceived in material terms, sociology must clarify how socialized material situationally occurs. According to the lecture's thesis, this can be grasped with Erving Goffman's methodological Situationism, which must, however, be turned materialistically.

## Session 1

# Memories of Another World: Deleuze, Leibniz and the Object's Point of View

**Oliver J. T. Harris**  
University of Leicester

In this paper I want to explore what happens when we think of material objects as “monads”, quoting Gottfried Leibniz: that is something that expresses an entire world. From this starting point, we can map how within the folds of each object lie a host of interlinked relations, affective capacities and memories which actualise unique perspectives. Working through this via a new materialist engagement with archaeological science, I suggest, opens cracks and fissures in our comfortable assumptions about the boundaries between subjects and objects, and people and things, as well as amongst our material taxonomies. Blending Gilles Deleuze’s reading of Leibniz with materials analysis, I will draw on several examples emerging from my team’s recent research to suggest that this approach can have a profound impact on how we collectively assemble worlds past, and worlds present.

## Session 1

# Materialities and Human Life: The Perspective of a Theoretical Empiricism

**Herbert Kalthoff**  
**Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz**

In their self-understanding, the social and cultural sciences have always been a science of human life with a clear focus on human beings, its existence, activity, and culture. The certainty that human life can only be understood from a humanistic perspective has been irritated, if not shaken, in recent decades by research that proposes and implements a reorientation: sociality or human life cannot be explained by itself, but only with regard to its embeddedness in material settings or to its material becoming with objects. This materiality-theoretical shift has in turn given rise to various concepts or theories that conceptualize the relation of the material and human life quite differently: for instance, as a practice with objects, as rhizome-like networks, or as socio-material becoming. This presentation outlines some of these approaches and sketches a perspective on how the social and cultural sciences can empirically explore and theorize material phenomena of the social. Empirical examples will illustrate this perspective.



## Session 2

# From the Materiality of Practice to the Practice of Matter:

## Reflections on Corporeality, Affectivity and Perception in Dealing with Active Materials

**Christiane Schürkmann**  
**Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz**

Accounts of practice theory focus on materiality as a dimension, or even quasi-ontological part of practices that is, inter alia, constitutive to generate a “sense experience” (Schatzki 2014, pp. 26-29), or a “bodily feeling” (Reckwitz 2016, p. 171, i.O.: “leibliches Fühlen”). In this way, they center practices beyond dualistic perspectives on cultural and material spheres and emphasize the connectivity, involvement and entanglement between perceivers and perceived, materiality and corporeality, affectivity and cognition. Hereafter, practices do not only rely on functional relationships between artefacts and practitioners, who acquire practical skills and embodied knowledge through participating in practices. They also become relevant by interrelating affected, perceiving bodies and affecting, perceivable materials, objects and things with regard to their practical affordances (Gibson 1979, p. 127, Hutchby 2001, p. 26), phenomenal qualities (Merleau-Ponty 1962), or aesthetic implications (Boehme 2001). Thus, materials are able to ‘touch’, inspire and surprise embodied, situated and involved practitioners. More than that, they can be addressed as resources for mobilizing practices beyond their routinized structures and relatively stable accomplishments. In this way, social, cultural and at the same time material practices always imply anthropogenic

relations referring to human bodies as participants in practices. While analytical approaches of practice theory are centered on social, cultural, and at the same time material practices, neo-materialistic perspectives in turn tend to center a kind of matter that seems to constitute and enable all kinds of practical events and entanglements (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). Neo-materialistic approaches basically assume a kind of forceful matter in its potentials for practical activity and agency, performativity and more (Bennett) or less (Barad) vitality. Hereafter, matter provides for perceptibility, evokes affects, constitutes embodied beings, and unfolds performative qualities. From such a perspective, material-discursive practices do not inevitably depend on anthropogenic bodies in the sense of perceiving practitioners or practical perceivers. They also include material processes outside anthropogenic relations, while at the same time human bodies become relevant in their material states.

The contribution discusses this observed change of perspectives on materiality in practice theoretical and neo-materialistic approaches with a particular interest in the role of corporeality, affectivity and perception. Referring to two ethnographic fields (visual art and nuclear waste management), in which materials are frequently addressed as being active, the paper illustrates possible empirical consequences of this shift from centering practices to centering matter.

## Session 2

# Spirited Metals and Resource Affect: Perspectives from Early Modern Mining

**Tina Asmussen**  
**Ruhr University Bochum/German Mining Museum**

In this presentation I will examine the entanglement of raw materials, landscapes, bodies and believe systems in early modern mining. While concentrating on pre-industrial resource practices and rationalities, I aim to critically review utilitarian and anthropocentric views of mining and mineral resource production, circulation and consumption that is shaped by a long tradition of economic history and history of technology. My investigation of visual, material and literary sources from the 16th and 17th centuries aim to connect material and immaterial, affective and symbolic dimensions of human-nature entanglement in early modern mining. Far from understanding metals as inorganic and finite, I understand them as animate and vibrant matter. Unlike Jane Bennett, however, I adopt a historicizing approach and do not attribute the vibrancy of materials to a modern science-oriented theory of matter.

## Session 2

# Entangled Resources in Utopian Design Spaces: Generating and/or Analyzing UDS in the Field of Sustainable Food Practices

**Franka Schäfer**  
University of Siegen

The talk will be about the exploration of affected and affecting bodies, artefacts, discourses and symbolic forms in their materializations in so-called Utopian Design Spaces (UDS) of sustainable food practices.

The focus will be on entanglements of physical-material resources in these spaces, as the presented UDS are produced by bringing together superfluous resources and the performance of redistribution with the rule of „no exchange of things or food for money“. In the field of tension between innovative and orthodox economic practices, socio-ecological transformations towards sustainable practices become observable, experienceable, analyzable, designable and diffuse through the membrane of the UDS into other fields of practice.

This happens, according to my thesis, among other things, through processes of affectation, in which practices of sensual perception of material relations are relevant. In the context of the redistribution of superfluous resources, UDSs provide fields of application for action research in the form of engaged participation in a communally shared sensuously perceptible and therefore affecting space of experience, research, and design for socioecological transformation.

A performative sociology of public action (Jende 2018) informed by

practice theory serves as the theoretical base for the argument, considering practice as an aesthetic consummation of public structuring, as conceived, among others, in Butler's understanding of a performative theory of assembly (Butler 2016). Starting from performativity as a reality-constituting force that produces new, unpredictable realities, research becomes an aesthetic and public event (collaborative self-objectification), participatory researchers become agents of transgression and co-creators of transformative innovation spaces. Borrowings from the theoretical current of New Materialism emphasize the physical material dimension of the social and its relevance in practices of affecting body-artefact associations through discourses and symbolic forms (Schäfer 2017). In the sense of postnormal science (D'Alisa/Kallis 2016), the authorship of the transformation deliberately lies only partly with the researchers, since the inherent logic of the practice is taken seriously (Hillebrandt 2014). UDS are thus experimental fields that turn the public sphere into an epistemological object. Through the shared experience of acts of co-creation, temporary ruptures in the hegemonic logic of practice can be generated that are tied to local resources. The participatory sensory perception of performative utopias releases affordances that become effective incorporated outside the membrane of utopian design spaces, so that other actor-networks put into effect sustainable fair supply practices through afforded resources (Latour 2007).

In the talk, therefore, the theoretical base of a theory of performative assembly informed by praxis theory and oriented towards events will be laid in a first step, in order to theoretically derive the role of physical-material in practices of affectation from it in a second step. Thirdly, the field of tension between transformative sociology and social change is exemplified by the realization of sustainable nutrition in UDS and the theoretical concepts are brought into a dynamic relationship in confrontation with empirical data.



## Session 3

# Eventful Histories: Thoughts on the Material-discursive and Corporeal Becoming of 'Aegean' Wall- paintings in Tell el-Dab<sup>c</sup>a/Egypt

**Constance von Rüden & Johannes Jungfleisch**  
Ruhr University Bochum

During the 2nd millennium B.C.E., a notable change occurred at the site of Tell el-Dabca in Egypt's eastern Nile delta: Within a New Kingdom palace complex, lime-based wall paintings suddenly emerged, showcasing a craft tradition and iconography that were familiar in the Aegean region but previously unknown in Egypt. The making of these paintings can be undoubtedly described as an event whose meaning was effective beyond the actual situation. Not only the performance of the craft itself but also the lasting visual and haptic experience had a massive impact, resonating within different visual media of the following centuries. This influence was particularly evident in the palatial architecture, which served as political centers of New Kingdom Egypt.

Drawing on Deleuze's event theory and different practice-theoretical approaches, this paper attempts to describe and analyze, on the one hand, the emergence of this event that appears to have arisen out of nowhere. In doing so, it traces the event as a situational assemblage involving diverse bodies, things, and resources, which, at the same, was thoroughly permeated by the past. On the other hand, it will follow the ways these paintings formed a sensual entity with different visitors of the building after its finishing until the murals decayed and

fell into oblivion and were finally rediscovered at the end of the last millennium. The case study aims not only to integrate the empirical data with practice-theoretical approaches but also to discuss the different qualities of assemblages depending on how the various particles assemble and become an entity.

## Session 3

# Water, Practices, and the Law:

## Material Entanglements of Water Disputes in Early Modern Japan

**Mariko Jacoby**  
University Duisburg Essen

Water disputes and their settlements in early modern Japan cannot be thought without their material dimension. On the one hand, conflicts were fought with practices involving the direct engagement of villagers with water and irrigation infrastructure – they destroyed or removed them, or threw their opponents into the water. On the other hand, conflict settlements and distribution regulations were written into materials, for example through the construction of irrigation channels or reservoirs or distribution points that literally inscribed regulations into stone.

In early modern Japan, a predominantly rice-cultivating agricultural society, rural lives revolved around procuring water resources for agricultural production, and organized communities around the management of river and irrigation systems. The Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1868), the feudally organized government, left water governance and dispute settlements mostly to the local communities, merely providing legal frameworks and places for conflict settlements. Thus, water disputes were material-discursive practices that constantly reconfigured turning water into a resource (or *yōsui* “useful water” in Japanese), relationships and material entanglements between villagers and villages, as well with the regulating authorities.

Using water disputes along the Ni River in the Settsu Province near Osaka from the 17th to the 19th century as an example, this paper analyzes water disputes as material-discursive practices. It explores the manifold entanglements between water as a resource, peasants and village communities, authorities, practices of conflict, legal practices, practices of conflict settlement, seasonality, building and construction, and water infrastructure. Special attention is given to the material dimension of the entanglements and the forms of cultural expressions involved. The paper also touches on the question how historians should engage with materiality while predominantly working with written materials, and the challenges faced along the process.

## Session 3

# Beyond the Separation of Matter and Practice: Archaeological Thoughts on Resources as Material-discursive Apparatuses

**Stefan Schreiber**  
**Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie**

Resources are commonly regarded in archaeology as means to an end. They are usually distinguished on the basis of their origin, properties, purpose, or availability. This distinction relies on dualistic attributions such as natural or artificial, environmental or social, material or ideal. Such attributions are based on the nature/culture separation of humanist tradition. However, if resources are not exclusively seen as the material means available to people for carrying out practices but as generative nodes of transformation, then their key characteristic lies in the capacities for change they bring about. But this characteristic is not essentialist but relational. Therefore, I propose conceptualizing resources not solely in terms of stable matter or human practices but as material-discursive apparatuses. Following Donna Haraway and Karen Barad, these material-discursive apparatuses are entanglements of more-than-human practices and material-in-becoming. In my lecture, I aim to shed light on aspects that such a change in perspective entails.