
From bridges, water mains, and large dams to railways, electrical grids, and internet cables – infrastructures are socio-technical systems for which long-lasting material installations are central. They provide social functions such as mobility, exchange, and communication, and they keep human societies, economic systems, and political entities running. They structure everyday life on the most basic level.

This Herrenhausen Symposium explores the materiality of infrastructure, which is a fundamental yet understudied dimension for understanding the human condition. Viewing infrastructure as a “material assemblage,” the Symposium highlights its various relational interactions with humans and non-humans. This adds to ongoing efforts to decentralize human agency.

The focus of the Symposium is directed, but not limited, to the following set of questions:

What kinds of construction materials gave rise to new infrastructures? What kind of knowledge have humans developed for the material texture of infrastructure? How have humans adapted to the use and experience of certain materials, and what role did material perceptions and emotions play in this? How have people responded to collapse and material decay? What sources should we analyze and how can we read them against the grain? What theories should we use to analyze the materiality of infrastructure? How can the material history of infrastructures enter into a dialogue with other approaches and disciplines, such as science and technology studies, anthropology, archaeology, and sociology?

Conveners

Jan Hansen, Los Angeles (jeh_645@usc.edu)
Frederik Schulze, Bielefeld (frederik.schulze@uni-bielefeld.de)

Venue

Xplanatorium Schloss Herrenhausen
Herrenhäuser Straße 5
30419 Hannover
Germany

Directions

Tram 4 or 5, Stop "Herrenhäuser Gärten"



Materiality and the History of Infrastructure

HERRENHAUSEN SYMPOSIUM

July 20–21, 2022 |

Schloss Herrenhausen | Hannover, Germany



Wednesday, July 20, 2022

1:00 – 2:00 PM Welcome Lunch

2:00 – 2:15 PM Introduction

Jan Hansen (University of Southern California, Los Angeles), Frederik Schulze (Bielefeld University):
Materiality and the History of Infrastructure

2:15 – 3:15 PM

M. Luísa Sousa (NOVA University Lisbon): The Portuguese Intra-Imperial Research on the Use of Laterite in Road Construction in Angola and Mozambique

Discussant: Robert Heinze (German Historical Institute, Paris)

3:15 – 3:45 PM Coffee Break

3:45 – 4:45 PM

Martin Meiske (Deutsches Museum Munich): Materialities of Maintenance: An Envirotechnical Analysis of Knowledge, Labor, and Toxicity in Railway Infrastructures

Discussant: Aybike Alkan (Technical University of Berlin)

4:45 – 5:45 PM

María Ignacia Jeldes, Paul Sprute, Monika Motylinska (Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space, Erkner): The Materiality and Constructability of the Subway in Buenos Aires (1933–1944)

Discussant: Georg Fischer (Aarhus University)

5:45 – 6:15 PM Break

6:15 – 7:15 PM Keynote Lecture

Mikael Hård (Technical University of Darmstadt): Technological Landscapes

7:15 – 9:00 PM Dinner

Thursday, July 21, 2022

9:00 – 10:00 AM

Vincent Lagendijk (Maastricht University): Materializing Racism: Roadbuilding, Urban Reconstruction and Race Relations in Baltimore, 1910–2018

Discussant: Sophie Gerber (Technical Museum Vienna)

10:00 – 11:00 AM

Laura Meneghello (University of Siegen): Assembling the City: Pneumatic Tubes and Urban Space (ca. 1860s–1980s)

Discussant: Antonia von Schöning (Humboldt

11:00 – 11:30 AM Coffee Break

11:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Daqing Yang (George Washington University, Washington, D.C.): Materiality of Void: Wireless Spectrum and Communications Infrastructure in Japan, 1902–1945

Discussant: Barbara Orland (University of Basel)

12:30 – 1:30 PM

Ellan F. Spero, Christine Ortiz (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA): Technological Models as ‘Object Lessons’ of Agitation: Multiscale Materiality of a Demonstration Sand Filter for Water Purification in an Industrial City in the United States at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Discussant: Christian Zumbärgel (Technical University of Berlin)

1:30 – 1:45 PM Concluding remarks

Jan Hansen (University of Southern California, Los Angeles), Frederik Schulze (Bielefeld University)

1:45 – 2:30 PM Farewell Lunch