From bridges, water mains, and large dams to railways, electrical grids, and internet cables – infrastructures are socio-technical systems for which long-lasting material installments 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, Berlin/Los Angeles (jeh_645@usc.edu)
Frederik Schulze, Cologne (frederik.schulze@uni-muenster.de)

Venue
Xplanatorium Schloss Herrenhausen
Herrenhäuser Straße 5
30419 Hannover
Germany

How to get there
Tram 4 or 5, Stop “Herrenhäuser Gärten”

Zoom access
The event will be accessible via Zoom. Please contact the conveners for the Zoom link.

Material Assemblages
Toward a New History of Infrastructure
HERRENHAUSEN SYMPOSIUM
Dec. 15–17, 2021 | Schloss Herrenhausen | Hannover, Germany
Dec. 15, 2021*

13:30–14:30: Reception and Lunch
14:30–15:00: Introduction
Jan Hansen (Berlin/Los Angeles) and Frederik Schulze (Cologne): Infrastructures as Material Assemblages

15:00–16:15: Panel 1: Infrastructure and the Making of the “Modern” City
Vincent Lagendijk (Maastricht): Concrete Racism: Road-Building, Urban Reconstruction, and Race Relations in Baltimore, 1910–2018
Laura Meneghello (Siegen): Assembling the City: Pneumatic Tubes and the Social Space
Discussant: Timothy Moss (Berlin)

16:15–16:45: Coffee Break

16:45–18:00: Panel 2: Infrastructure, Empires, and Questions of Power
Alicia Maggard (Auburn): Steam Power and State Power: The United States, New Granada, and the Panama Route
Aaron Hall (Minneapolis): Bad Roads: Slavery and Public Ways in the Antebellum South
Discussant: Ute Hasenöhrl (Innsbruck)

18:00–18:30: Coffee Break

18:30–19:30: Keynote Lecture
Anke Ortlepp (Cologne): Putting Things into Perspective: Reflections on the History of Materials and Materiality

* All times local

Dec. 16, 2021

9:30–10:00: Welcome Coffee

10:00–11:15: Panel 3: Material Networks of Circulation
Tiina Männistö-Funk (Turku): What a Curbstone Does: A Century of Material Entanglements in Street Space
Marie Huber (Berlin): The Social Life of Planes: Approaching the Materiality of 20th Century Air Travel through Object Biographies of Passenger Planes
Discussant: Daqing Yang (Washington, D.C.)

11:15–11:30: Coffee Break

11:30–12:45: Panel 4: Roads: One Infrastructure, Different Materials
Maria Luisa Sousa (Lisbon): The Portuguese Intra-Imperial Research on the Use of Laterite in Road Construction in Angola and Mozambique
Martin Meiske (Munich): Toxic Traces of Maintenance and Repair: Exploring the Rise of Creosote and its Precarious Legacy in Europe
Discussant: Julia Obertreis (Erlangen-Nuremberg)

12:45–14:15: Lunch Break

14:15–15:30: Panel 5: Materials between Stability and Fluidity
Gretchen Bakke (Berlin): Refrigerator as Lynchpin: A Short History of the Fossil Fuelled Electricity System
Ellan F. Spero (Cambridge, MA): Sand, Microbes, and Machinery: The Materiality of Potable Water in a Manufacturing City
Discussant: Kenny Cupers (Basel)

15:30–16:00: Coffee Break

16:00–17:45: Panel 6: Invisible Materialities
Jeanne Féaux de la Croix (Tübingen): “Phantom-Infrastructure:” Efficacy and Political Emotions in Planning
Marina Peterson (Austin): Cloud Seeding Los Angeles: The Poetics of Aerial Infrastructure
Daqing Yang (Washington, D.C.): The Materiality and Agency of Void: Wireless Spectrum and the Communications Infrastructure in the Asia Pacific, 1900–1941
Discussant: Gretchen Bakke (Berlin)

17:45–18:15: Coffee Break

18:15–19:30: Keynote Lecture
Kenny Cupers (Basel), Prita Meier (New York), and Zandi Sherman (New Brunswick): Coloniality of Infrastructure

19:30: Dinner

Dec. 17, 2021

9:00–9:30: Welcome Coffee

9:30–10:45: Panel 7: Concrete as a Medium of Power: Corporate History Perspectives
Sadia Amin and Monika Motylnska (both Erkner): (Dis-)Connecting Elements: A Vivisection of Ebute-Ero in Lagos
Discussant: Vincent Lagendijk (Maastricht)

10:45–11:00: Coffee Break

11:00–12:30: Round Table
Kenny Cupers (Basel), Ute Hasenöhrl (Innsbruck), Timothy Moss (Berlin)

12:30–14:00: Farewell Lunch