

**MatteReality:  
Historical Trajectories and Conceptual Futures  
for Material Culture Studies**

A Junior Researcher Conference  
Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies  
**23-25 March 2017**

**Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk, Ingrid Gessner, and Miriam Nandi**

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Thursday, 23 March 2017

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| 300          | <b>Conference Opening &amp; Welcome</b>  |
| 330          | Keynote Lecture<br>Chair: <b>Ingrid Gessner, Regensburg</b><br><b>Erika Doss, University of Notre Dame, USA:</b><br>“American Art Matters: Rethinking Materiality in American Studies”   |
| Coffee Break |  |
| 500          | Panel I – Citing Things<br>Chair: <b>Miriam Nandi, Freiburg</b><br><b>Katharina Boehm, Regensburg:</b><br>“From Archive to Repertoire: The Material Reenactments of Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism”<br><b>Kerstin Fest, Freiburg:</b><br>“Behind/Before the Curtain: Theatrical Things in Eighteenth-Century Theatre Spaces”<br><b>Nikolina Hatton, Freiburg:</b><br>“‘A happy day for booksellers, music-sellers, and print shops!’: Consumerism and the Sociability of Things in Jane Austen” |
| 700          | Welcome Reception (FRIAS)  |

Friday, 24 March 2017

- 930                      Panel II – Siting Things I  
Chair: **Kerstin Fest, Freiburg**  
**Klara Stephanie Szlezák, Passau:**  
“‘Nearly 30,000 Objects Reflecting Global Jewish Identity’: On the Art and Facts of Artifacts at the Jewish Museum at New York”  
**Veronika Hofstätter, Stuttgart:**  
“Materialized Bodies”: 19th Century Captive Memorials”
- Coffee Break
- 1100                     Panel III – Siting Things II  
Chair: **Heidi Liedke, Freiburg**  
**Ulrike Zimmermann, Freiburg:**  
“On Things from Sea and Shore: British Naval Heroism in Memory and Material Culture”  
**Ines Detmers, Regensburg/Konstanz:**  
“Bloomsbury Objects: Reading Charleston as a Memorial Chronotope”
- 1230                     Lunch
- 200                      Excursion: Augustinermuseum, Augustinerplatz
- Coffee Break
- 430                      Panel IV – Sighting Things  
Chair: **Johannes Fehrle, Mannheim**  
**Pia Masurczak, Freiburg:**  
“‘The real, true, original native way’—Colonial Photography as Material Reality”  
**Katharina Fackler, Graz:**  
“From Polaroid to Instagram: Reconceptualizing Photographs’ Materiality in the Digital Age”

**Nicole Falkenhayner, Freiburg:**

“The Materiality of Distant Communication Dreams: *Dreams Rewired* (2015)”

700

Conference Dinner

Saturday, 25 March 2017
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930

Panel V – Eco-/Geopolitics of Things/Materialities

Chairs: **Katharina Fackler, Graz, and Eva von Contzen, Freiburg**

**Susanne Leikam, Regensburg:**

“American Visions of the Arctic’s Perennial Ice: Glaciers, Material Ecocriticism, and Transnational American Studies”

**Kylie Crane, Mainz:**

“Plastic Preservation”

**Gerd Bayer, Erlangen:**

“When Earth Matters: Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*”

Coffee Break

1130

Concluding Plenary

Chair: **Juliane Schwarz-Bierschenk, Freiburg**

**Tina Brüderlin, Museum Natur und Mensch, Freiburg**

**Gerd Bayer, Erlangen**

**Kylie Crane, Mainz**

**Erika Doss, University of Notre Dame, USA**

**Winfried Fluck, Berlin**

115

Lunch (optional)

**ABSTRACTS:**

**Panel I – Citing Things:**

**Katharina Boehm, Regensburg:**

“From Archive to Repertoire: The Material Reenactments of Eighteenth-Century Antiquarianism”

**Abstract:** My paper uses Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as a case study to think about the role of objects and of mimetic procedures – such as simulation and reenactment – in mid-eighteenth century debates about history and historical experience. Sterne was immersed in contemporary antiquarian debates about object-oriented approaches to historical research. However, unlike the antiquaries who studied antiquities as authentic traces of a lost past Sterne’s primary interest lies with the uses to which antiquarian knowledge can be put in the construction of modern *imitations* of artefacts and historical environments. In *Tristram Shandy*, the past never ossifies into an ‘object’ capable of providing reliable evidence about what a former epoch in history was really like. Instead, Sterne asks what the past is *to* – and how it can be perceived *in* – the present. In conceptualizing the relationship between past and present, Sterne suggest that the past’s continued presence is most easily glimpsed in the way in which it brings new material and social spaces into being. Sterne’s portrayal of the simulation of past battles on the bowling green, for instance, highlights how Uncle Toby’s and Trim’s inventive appropriation of antiquarianism restructures their material and social environment, carving out spaces in which they restage as theatrical spectacle what might otherwise be treated as historical matters of fact. While these spaces are rendered in almost excessive detail, they constantly challenge then-contemporary notions of verisimilitude, and thereby prompt us to reassess received understandings of the nexus between the mid-eighteenth-century novel’s historical consciousness and its nascent realism.

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**Kerstin Fest, Freiburg:**

“Behind/Before the Curtain: Theatrical Things in Eighteenth-Century Theatre Spaces”

**Abstract:** This paper investigates the role of things in the changing and volatile theatrical spaces of the eighteenth century. While theatre spaces are often talked about in relation to the bodies that move and perform in them, I propose to look at the things that inhabit and 'act' in eighteenth-century theatre. The focus will be on the theatre curtain as an object of undeniable materiality that is literally positioned between the material and the textual spaces of theatre.

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**Nikolina Hatton, Freiburg:**

“‘A happy day for booksellers, music-sellers, and print shops!’: Consumerism and the Sociability of Things in Jane Austen”

**Abstract:** Using Bruno Latour's insight into the construction of social collectives, this essay looks at how objects in Austen often work together with her human protagonists to build social networks, reinforcing old bonds, but also (un)wittingly encouraging new ones. As they do this, new and old commodities move in and out of what Bill Brown would call 'thinghood,' revealing their

otherness at the moment they reveal human dependency upon them. Austen's depictions of such object-relations reveal a cautiously optimistic attitude to the emerging consumption and increasing materialism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, highlighting not only the new dangers to the social order but also the possibilities emerging with a populace increasingly attuned to the power of things in everyday life.

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## **Panel II – Siting Things I:**

### **Klara Stephanie Szlezák, Passau:**

“‘Nearly 30,000 Objects Reflecting Global Jewish Identity’: On the Art and Facts of Artifacts at the Jewish Museum at New York”

**Abstract:** The collections held by the Jewish Museum at New York City have grown from originally 26 artifacts in 1904 to currently over 30,000, making the museum home to “one of the largest and most important [collections] of its kind in the world” (thejewishmuseum.org). These sheer numbers bespeak not only the significance ascribed to objects, but also their utter profusion and diversity. The issues that this paper projects to explore include: the role of objects at the intersection of history and art, and of documentary and aesthetic value, at the Jewish Museum; the “reality” that is shown to matter in the context of global Jewish history via the selective assemblage and display of objects; and, finally, the role of materiality and objects in “reflecting,” or representing—and ultimately contributing to the formulation of—a “global Jewish identity” that builds on diasporic transnational as well as local experiences and narratives.

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### **Veronika Hofstätter, Stuttgart:**

“Materialized Bodies: 19th Century Captive Memorials”

**Abstract:** This presentation seeks to explore the appropriation of captivity narratives and specific captives in particular through the 19th-century design, installation, and dedication of such statues and memorials. The memorials’ materiality and the visually portrayed interpretations of the linked, often 17th- or 18th-century captivity narratives in the context of their use in public space illustrate attempts of creating a “usable past” and, as Barbara Cutter writes, “the allegorical representations of the nation” (2008). The presentation will discuss the memorials’ textual and contextual background and focus on how these artifacts of material culture can be read as a—often racist, gendered, and discriminating—manifestations of the production of “historical knowledge” and as cultural self-conceptions, intended to last due to their sheer materiality.

## **Panel III – Siting Things II:**

### **Ulrike Zimmermann, Freiburg:**

“On Things from Sea and Shore: British Naval Heroism in Memory and Material Culture”

**Abstract:** In the course of the eighteenth century, the British Empire expanded and consolidated its global influence, heavily relying on the British Navy in the process. Public interest in the Navy –

and in its prominent figures – increased, and, as a consequence, elements of maritime culture were taken up and adapted in everyday culture. Nautically inspired artefacts became the fashion, and the new possibilities of mass production contributed to their proliferation.

This paper will use case studies to look at social participation and the dissemination of cultural knowledge through artefacts, and will analyse how the unspectacular and mundane in everyday objects manage to convey ideas of the exceptional and heroic, as, for example, is the case with Admiral Nelson and the souvenir culture surrounding him and his victories.

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### **Ines Detmers, Regensburg/Konstanz:**

“Bloomsbury Objects: Reading Charleston as a Memorial Chronotope”

**Abstract:** In her essay “The Psychometry of Books,” the British novelist Jeanette Winterson has written about her fascination for the Bloomsbury Group and her joyous possession of Bloomsbury drawings and rare books. One volume in particular, *Twelve Woodcuts* by Roger Fry, gives her “immediate bodily delight” in the sense that “the deep passages of the woodcuts” open up “[p]assages into other places. A smuggler’s route into what is past and what can never be past” (123).

However, taking its cue from Winterson, this paper looks at Bloomsbury objects and items collected at Charleston Farmhouse. Set in Sussex, Charleston is both the last intact lieu de mémoire of the Bloomsbury Group and the most memorable location of Bloomsbury decorative arts and wares, created by the painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant. When Quentin Bell, the artists’ son, died in 1996 his final project, a memoir about Charleston, was left incomplete. Carrying out the last will of her father, encouraged by the publishers, family and friends, his daughter Virginia Nicholson took on the task and finished the book. Published under the title *Charleston: A Bloomsbury House and Garden* (1997), partly ego-document, partly museum catalogue and thus itself a Bloomsbury object, Quentin Bell’s intermedial memory project in book-form seems particularly apt to investigate the ‘passages’ Charleston opens up through which “the public can examine a world which has vanished” (Bell/Nicholson 1997, 24).

This paper will then examine Charleston House as what is called here a ‘memorial chronotope’. Using Michail Bakhtin’s concept of the ‘chronotope’, expanding its conventional employment as a specifically literary notion to the field of material culture, exemplary close readings of individual rooms, i.e. their underlying ‘it-narratives’ and/or ‘object tales’ (sensu Jonathan Lamb), aim at describing the time-reflexive functions of Bloomsbury interiors. These analyses, conceived as part of my ongoing inquiries into the research field of ‘Aesthetic Proper Times’ (‘Ästhetische Eigenzeiten’), will thus provide a firm basis for an understanding of how and in what sense one may feel justified to speak of a unique Bloomsbury aesthetic architecture of temporality.

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**Panel IV – Sighting Things:**

**Pia Masurczak, Freiburg:**

“The real, true, original native way’ —Colonial Photography as Material Reality”

**Abstract:** Photographs were among the most potent objects that helped the British public to make sense of its fast increasing colonial territories. As glued-on images in private travelogues, cartes-de-visite, trading cards, postcards, and in other forms, colonial photography was crucial in the imperial ambitions of the nineteenth century. That is not only the case for those images that circulated in the metropolis, but also for those that were produced for the Anglo-Indian society and which helped to continually define their place in the colony. Visual culture, including the so-called ‘colonial gaze’, shaped the depiction of the colonies and their people for an ever-increasing audience, and played a crucial role in the popularisation of the imperial project, especially with regard to the institutionalisation of the British colonial presence in India.

The presentation takes a closer look at how colonial photography from India produced the notion of ‘authenticity’ – both in terms of what is depicted and its materiality. The social uses to which such claims of authenticity and realism are put, I argue, lay the foundation for the triumph of colonialist pictorial conventions and the central place colonial photography holds in the mass spectacle of the nineteenth century.

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**Katharina Fackler, Graz:**

“From Polaroid to Instagram: Reconceptualizing Photographs’ Materiality in the Digital Age”

**Abstract:** This presentation explores how the digitization of photographic practice has changed photographs’ status as material objects. Scholars from Roland Barthes to Geoffrey Batchen and Elizabeth Edwards have emphasized the status of (analog) photographs as three-dimensional objects that exist in time and space and have a tactile, physical presence whose materiality shapes processes of intention, production, consumption, and usage. Focusing on the new infrastructure created through digital photography, omnipresent smartphone cameras, online social media (cf. Mitchell Schwartz), and their transnational implications, the presentation analyzes how new technologies have and have not changed photographs’ material and presentational forms and social uses.

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**Nicole Falkenhayner, Freiburg:**

“The Materiality of Distant Communication Dreams: *Dreams Rewired* (2015)”

**Abstract:** The art film *Dreams Rewired* (2015), created by the German-Austrian team of Manu Luksch, Martin Reinhart and Thomas Tode, and narrated by Tilda Swinton, establishes a simile of a specific kind: While the voice-over narrative seemingly presents us with stock-phrases of the

time of the internet, all about being ever connected, by communications technology that becomes ever more ephemeral, we are presented with a rich host of archive material of innovations in communications technology from the first decades of the 20th century – and sometimes earlier. The strategic split that the movie develops between what we see – the heavy, very material machinery of early distant communications technology – and what we hear – the dream vision that lies behind the internet age – prompts questions concerning the status of materiality in a concept of distant communication that envisions the successive abolition of the frictions of time and space, and the material technologies that we need for world-wide communication. My talk will discuss such question in conjunction with material gathered from an interview with the artist Manu Luksch as to what exactly the status of the archive material was for the film, and how the material and dreams to overcome that materiality interact.

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### Panel V – Eco-/Geopolitics of Things/Materialities

**Susanne Leikam, Regensburg:**

“American Visions of the Arctic’s Perennial Ice: Glaciers, Material Ecocriticism, and Transnational American Studies”

**Abstract:** In this talk, I will explore James Balog’s 2012 film documentary *Chasing Ice*, which sets out to collect visual proof for the progressing climate change-induced disappearance of the Arctic’s glaciers, at the nexus of material ecocriticism and Transnational American Studies. Following scholars such as Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, I read glaciers—which have often been described as frozen time themselves—as texts that possess the “‘narrative’ power of creating configurations of meaning and substances, which enter with human lives into a field of co-emerging interactions” (79-80). This investigation of the materiality of glaciers is then complicated by the materialities of their visual representations, i.e. the material contexts and practices of photography and film. It is from this perspective of material ecocriticism that my talk delves into the question to what extent this angle complicates (or supports) prevalent American discourses on climate change in their transnational entanglements.

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**Kylie Crane, Mainz:**

“Plastic Preservation”

**Abstract:** Taking the material of plastic to query the diverse discourses and uses of plastic, this contribution draws on theories of modernities and the anthropocene (in particular) to develop a material cultural studies approach that takes the materials of our worlds seriously as materials. Processes and objects can be thought together as materials; the plasticity of plastic, if you like, emerges thus as shape (object) and form (process).

The utility of plastic is based on its capacity to preserve: Preserving, in particular, boundaries between biological matter (as food wrapping, as surgical gloves, as sewerage pipes, etc), is an unquestionable mainstay of modern sanitation practices. However, the agencies and affects of



plastic assert themselves most readily after the object phase, when they desintegrate and release endocrine disruptors or pollute the oceans. Reservations about plastic are therefore predicated on the lack of preservation; the utility of plastic continues only as long as the objects remain clearly discernable and, importantly, intact: that is, as long as they preserve their forms.

Whilst critique of plastic has become almost as ubiquitous as the material itself, this contribution will also look to preserve the positive qualities of plastic as a material of modernity, as well as a material that shapes and forms modernity and the future.

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**Gerd Bayer, Erlangen:**

“When Earth Matters: Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather*”

**Abstract:** This presentation discusses Bessie Head’s *When Rain Clouds Gather* from an ecocritical perspective, asking how her late 1960s’ novel already anticipated some of the politics of early twenty-first-century environmental thinking in the postcolonial sphere. The alliance of various marginalized characters who, one way or another, violate against existing hegemonic structures replaces the ideological and cultural conflict over territory, which derived directly from the colonialist past, with an agricultural revolution that aims to empower those who most closely resemble the subaltern classes variously theorized in postcolonial theory. This re-turn to the physical or even Real, to the materiality of the earth, opens up an alternative to the cultural essentialism that, from its beginning, created numerous stumbling stones on the path towards decolonization.