Abstracts

Annette Schnabel

Materiality and the definition of the situation – emphasising an underrated distinction within the rational choice-framework

Theories of rational choice (RC-theories) are by now integral part of canonical pool of socio-logical theories. This gives raise to the question of whether these theories are able to include social phenomena high-lightened by the so called "material turn" of the social sciences. The research programme of RC-theories is comprehensive enough to incorporate diverse forms of social phenomena but material and materiality may cause a different kind of challenges. They evoke questions concerning the two sides of materiality of how people do something with and about things and how things "fabricate" people in return. In order to sound out the possibilities of RC-theories to cope with materiality the article starts with a brief summary of important RC-components (mainly drawing on the most popular SEU-theory as one of many RC-theo-ries) and continues by analysing possible explanations of ideas and queries raised by the mate-rial turn. The article aims at the abilities of RC-theories to meet these challenges and at showing which topics are hard to include into the particular RC-focus. It will be argued that the latter mainly comprises of social sense-making processes that involve the fabrication of "objective realities". These will require an enlargement of the theory-related assumptions.

Gregor Bongaerts

Action as a Procedural Reality

Traditional sociological theories of action understand action and acting usually as symptoms of conscious intentions or rules, norms and stocks of knowledge. Those theories do not cap-ture action as a procedural reality within which action is focused as a temporal and material process. Thus, the article argues that traditional theories of action miss the phenomenon of action. As a thesis, it is assumed that traditional as well as contemporary theories of action have not made fruitful the descriptions of the procedural reality of action for building up the theoretical concepts. Referring to the rather marginal theoretical approaches of Bubner and Frese, an alternative vocabulary of action which focuses on procedural reality is suggested.

Henning Laux

The materiality of the social: Four solutions for a sociological problem in the work of Bruno Latour

The problem of materiality is the pivot of Bruno Latour's sociology. There are four different solution strategies in his work: the erosion of a symbolically halved society in the early science and technology studies ("materialization"), the time-diagnostic identification of risky contra-dictions at the nature-culture divide of modern societies ("hybridization"), the balancing out of sociological concepts by actor network theory ("symmetrization") and finally the theoretical foundation of different modes of existence in the multiversum of modernity with an operational concept of meaning ("ontologization"). The systematic reconstruction of Latour's thinking

shows four divergent answers to the question of materiality. It could be productive for sociology to reflect upon these opportunities because the discipline is apparently very interested in the materiality of the social in view of anthropogenic climate change and the digitalization of society.

Christian Fritz-Hoffmann

Basic elements for an alternative concept of touch. On the Materiality of physical contact and beyond.

This article explores the concept of touch as a tool in analyzing materiality. A critical discussion of the interdisciplinary research field about touch shows that an array of very different entities is being treated as the materiality of touch. If touch is commonly assumed to be the same entity within this research field, then this points to a consensus that stems from a cultural history. If this cultural-historical consensus is disregarded, an opportunity emerges, to understand touch as a diverse and convertible element of social practices. Instead of limiting touch to simply the physical contact between bodies, there are now many different types of touch. These include touch by gods, through curse words, gestures, gazes and personal fates, technologies as well as electromagnetically charged fields. The article shows that the concept of touch can be modified following Helmuth Plessner's principle of mediated immediacy. This principle suggests a way in which the experiences within the space of social practices can be analyzed: How do experiences of touch affect the course of a social practice? How do they unfold urgency? How are actions, communications, and knowledge related to these experiences? These questions will be discussed and illustrated through the example of feeling shamefully touched by stares and gazes in an official space of resonance.

Michaela Pfadenhauer and Tilo Genz

From Objects to Objectivation. Locating technological Materiality within Communicative Constructivism

Recent developments in social theory which indicate a shift from social to communicative constructivism (ref. Keller et al. 2012; Knoblauch 2017) brought questions about the significance of materiality for the constitution of sociality to the fore which shall be the focus of this article. That is, the present article explicitly is located within social theory. Since social constructivism has been repeatedly accused of being blind for the material dimension of sociality, it is exactly this theoretical position that serves as a point of reference in order to bring out the implication of materiality for social theory. Because of its emphasis on the communicative character of the social construction of reality sociology-of-knowledge's theory promises a certain sensitivity for materiality, claiming that body and materiality are both recognized as substantial dimensions of sociality. As a consequence, an understanding of sociality is taken that rests on a spatiotemporal coordination of – communicatively – performed actions between subjects which are always conceived as being embodied and rely on immaterial as well as material objectivations. However, if such a perspective lives up to its claim, it also has to take an adequate theorization of the dynamics of materiality into account. The ever-changing, unfinished state of digital technology, for example, challenges those social theories in which object permanence and structural stability is taken for granted. The article follows a long-

standing tradition within the sociology-of-knowledge in its relationship with social theory. Scrutinizing the concept of materiality within a social constructivist framework which is modified by insights of communicative constructivism further modifications of social constructivism are encouraged by taking empirical phenomena into account: technology as it is developed in so called Social Robotics will be used as an example. The technological visions behind the development of Social Robotics raise questions about the specific relation of materiality and sociality.

Boris Traue

Relational social theory and the materiality of the social. "Contact media" as an instance between infrastructure and lifeworld

Relational social theory can contribute the contemporary debate on materialities, by providing an understanding of the stratifications and structures they afford in contemporary societies. However, relationality must be linked to materiality more clearly. In the paper, shortcomings of the new materialisms in sociology such as actor network theory will be discussed prior to presenting the alternative frame of reference of relational social theory: the interweaving of infrastructure and lifeworld. On the backdrop of this theoretical framework, a concept of "contact media" will be proposed to grasp the relation between infrastructure and lifeworld analytically. In the discussion, I specify the value of this proposition for social theory and sketch a research field it opens up.

Gesa Lindemann

The recursive automation of communicative steering

Technology is usually understood as a means to substitute the body or even to outperform it. Contrary to that, I propose that technology is not only an ersatz-body, but also functions as a substitute of communication. Within this framework even tools are described not only as a substitute of the body, but also as an institutionalized communicative symbol of how it ought to be used. Development of technology is understood in two ways: it is a way to more and more substitute the body and it is a way to automatize communicative forms of steering technology. This leads to a theory of a recursive development of technology, which displays important advantages compared to actor-network-theory and the theory of distributed agency. Both of them take into account the subjective aspect of embodied action, respectively the aspect of ersatz-body, but both fail to analyze the specifics of digital steering technologies, which function mainly as a substitute of communication. The theory of recursive development of technology has the advantage to take both aspects into account. It analyzes the subjective aspect of embodied action, including technology as ersatz-body, and it includes also the aspect of automatizing communicative forms of steering.

Anna Henkel

The materiality of society. Development of a social theory perspective towards materiality based on Luhmann's systems theory

Modern society is characterized by individualization, bureaucratization and functional differentiation. This contribution is based on the assumption that modern society is additionally characterized by a specific, namely, reified, access to materiality. While social science analyses mainly take materiality into account on the level of interaction, this paper suggests focusing on materiality from a sociological perspective. This approach will be developed in four steps: Systems theory has so far mainly focused on linguistic communication. Against the background of the key concept of meaning, however, the theoretical framework can be extended by distinguishing analytically between a symbolic-linguistic and a physical meaning and assuming their mutual constitution. By using two empirical cases, the pharmaceutical and terra, it will be shown how the evolution of society can be observed when taking into account a changing access to materiality. Finally, it will be discussed how such a social theory perspective towards materiality can contribute to the sociological debate on materiality.

Isabel Kusche

Structure as Generalization – Systems Theory and Conventions of Justification in Relation to Digital File Sharing

Using an illustrative example, the article discusses parallels and conjunctions between Luhmann's understanding of social expectations as structures and Boltanski's and Thévenot's concept of conventions of justification. Both approaches share the notion of social structures as generalizations. The article does not come to this conclusion by way of a comprehensive comparison of the two theoretical perspectives. It focuses instead on the theoretical description of consequences that arise from the violation of copyrights for digital cultural products, which has become a mass phenomenon on the internet since the turn of the millennium. The argument points out weaknesses that Luhmann's focus on symbolically generalized media of communication and other mechanisms generating acceptance for communications has. They are revealed when it comes to analyzing a case in which established structures of expectation, specialized towards specific function systems, are suddenly undermined by new technological options. As a consequence, the article proposes to understand conventions of justification as societal structures of expectations that cut across different function systems. They become especially relevant as premises for action or communication once function systems and their generalizing effects encounter frequent problems of acceptance.

Heiko Beyer

On the Reification of the Social and the Animation of Things. Dimensions of Materiality in Marx

In the recent sociological debate about the theoretical integration of the dimension of materiality surprisingly little attention is paid to the works of Karl Marx. The present paper addresses this problem and shows solutions by distilling a theory of materiality from the Marxian writ-

ings. It is not the historical materialism of the early work I focus on as could be expected but the commodity form analysis of the later works. The article argues that those by definition external objects such as matter, nature, and the individual can be social-theoretically integrated via the category of commodity and its double character to function both as use value and value. This analysis is embedded by a preceding chronology of the Marxian concept of materialism as well as cursory concluding remarks on present social developments.