

The New Material Humanism

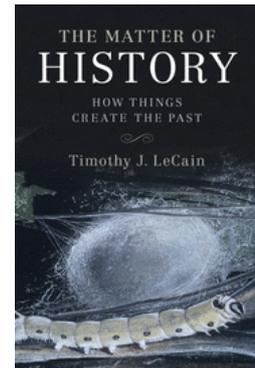
89. Minisymposium des Zentrums für Umweltgeschichte 10th Rachel Carson Center Lecture

Presentation:

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Abstract:

Our understanding of what it means to be human has changed radically in recent years, yet we “humanists” have scarcely begun to grapple with the profound consequences for our disciplines. Humanists have long taken it for granted that their subjects of study (which is to say, themselves) were special and largely *immaterial* creatures who were entirely distinguished and distinct from other organisms and things in the environments around them. Yet in recent years such an unapologetic anthropocentrism has suffered one crushing blow after another. We now know, for example, that there is more non-human than human DNA in our bodies, courtesy of the one to two kilos of microbiotic organisms that live within and on us. Are we then solitary organisms or rather symbiotic amalgams of many living creatures? Likewise, almost weekly the results from another animal (or even plant) investigation challenge the once proud claims of a human monopoly on intelligence, consciousness, morality, and even a capacity to create and appreciate beauty. Most broadly, we’re now discovering just how deeply embedded humans are in a vibrantly creative material world, whether through the myriad synthetic chemicals that affect our basic physiology or the countless new technological environments that shape our brains and minds. We humans, it appears, do not *use* a passive material world so much as we think and act *through* a creative material world that both shapes us and often simply *is* us. Now, as the old immaterial humanism falters and fades, the challenge and opportunity we face is to discover and create the theories, methods, and philosophies that will guide us in the emerging post-anthropocentric age: a New Material Humanism.

SAVE THE DATE:

29.11.2018: Julia Le Noë “Carbon dynamics in French cropland: a bio-political history”