On the ascription of value in social and ritual practices – The Idea

Many objects and things are made for specific purposes and thus receive an initial or primary practical value in fulfilling those primary aims. Once they are removed from their original context or fall into desuetude, objects or things can undergo a process of new ascription. This “reascriptive process” is not necessarily accompanied by a respective devaluation. Whereas putting the objects to waste may be the most extreme form of disuse, recycling or secondary sometimes even tertiary use may result in new forms of value, which might constitute a higher, sometimes even a secondary value contrary to the primary one. Ritualising, staging and reframing are exemplar social practices in which not only objects, but also places or acts can receive a redefinition of value – connotating devaluation, revaluation or upvaluation.

Following the cross-disciplinary structure of the Frankfurt Research Training Group, the 2017 conference intends to open various perspectives onto this phenomenon from archaeological and ethnological points of view.