

AWK WARD

Ethnographic Drafts
for a Modular Curriculum

ARCH IVES

Margareta von Oswald & Jonas Tinius

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ARCHIVES**

Ethnographic Drafts for a Modular Curriculum

The Nomadic Curriculum – A Manual Series,
edited by Stefan Aue and Lama El Khatib /
Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW)

Awkward Archives.
Ethnographic Drafts for a Modular Curriculum (Volume 1),
edited by Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius

Archives on Show. Revoicing, Shapeshifting,
Displacing – A Curatorial Glossary (Volume 2),
edited by Beatrice von Bismarck

Howdunnit (Volume 3),
edited by Kayfa ta (Maha Maamoun and Ala Younis)

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Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius (eds.)

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THE NOMADIC CURRICULUM – A MANUAL SERIES

Stefan Aue and Lama El Khatib

The conceptual and practical basis of this series is the notion of the nomadic curriculum, developed and practiced within the *Whole Life Academy*—an experimental, collaborative research initiative that is developed within the framework of the long-term program *The Whole Life. An Archive Project* (2018–2022). The interdisciplinary, international *Whole Life Academy* is a network for ongoing collective research and reflection on archival positions, infrastructures and materialities.

The practice of the nomadic curriculum takes form in the movements, connections, and networks between, within and around the archival contexts that continue to shape our present. The nomadic movement relates different methodologies of knowledge production with situated archival contexts. This form of activation functions as a meta-mobilization of the archival material: By applying a specific toolbox in diverse archival environments, the objects are set in motion and their status, conditions, and milieu are correlated. This is the guiding principle of the *Whole Life Academy* in both its long-term approach and its small-scale methods. Understanding archives as central instruments for the canonization of knowledge formations and worldviews and for the establishment and continuation of power relations, this nomadic curriculum takes up the archive as the space in which the material and non-material foundations of the present are created. The methods of the Academy destabilize the fixed archival structures using an approach that is in constant development, adaptation, and flux. As nomadic thought gives primacy to the spatial and temporal specificity of a research matter, the nomadic curriculum seeks to produce adjusted and localized tools that can critique inherent hegemonic relations of archival knowledge, objects, and institutional structures. At the same time, it becomes possible to productively imagine and derive the possibilities of future alternative frameworks for collective research and sharing.

It is particularly in the context of this constructive rendering of future alternatives that *The Nomadic Curriculum – A Manual Series* was conceived. How can this nomadic curriculum be expanded into other existing and potential pedagogical settings? What can this series propose in terms of a how-to for archival research? What are the common elements of collective research and practice that form the foundation of such a curriculum? Such archival pedagogy encounters three different yet interconnected spaces of knowledge production.

In the first volume, *Awkward Archives. Ethnographic Drafts for a Modular Curriculum*, Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius propose a manual for academic teaching and learning contexts. An ethnographic research approach is confronted with the demands of archival research as both disciplines challenge their inner logics and epistemologies. Through fieldwork and ethnographic tools and methods, both analogue and digital, the editors take various contemporary archival sites in Berlin as case studies to elaborate on controversial concepts in Western thought. Presenting as such a modular curriculum on archives in their *awkwardness*—with the tensions, discomfort, and antagonisms they pose.

Beatrice von Bismarck unfolds her specific approach to the curatorial in dialogue with questions on the archival. Bringing together a variety of approaches and positions, the second volume, *Archives on Show. Revoicing, Shapeshifting, Displacing – A Curatorial Glossary*, looks into curatorial practices that take up the archive in its contemporary relevance against its social and political potentialities. The book itself can be read as a curatorial exercise, forming constellations of texts, images and keywords in a printed exhibition format.

The third volume, *Howdunnit*, takes the literary as a space from which to think, practice, oppose, produce, unfold, and contest archives. Within the narrative form of the “detective story,” Maha Maamoun and Ala Younis locate a site in which an archival approach can develop between documentary and fiction. Through investi-

gative methods, *Howdunnit* offers a series of stories that bring the subjectivities of those who encounter archives to the forefront.

Together the three volumes offer a blueprint for archival thinking as a social practice inside, outside and between archives and their institutions.

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AWK WARD ARCH IVES

AWKWARD ARCHIVES

INTRODUCTION

Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius

LOCATING
AWKWARD ARCHIVES

Archives do not just preserve the past, they allow for new questions about the present to emerge. They contain remnants of specific places and times, and they are the ground for new relations to spring and new connections to be made. This book is about tracing paths between independent archives, and perhaps inspiring further research trajectories. After all, archives are about “the work of the imagination, about some sort of social project” (Appadurai 2003, p. 25). Our ethnographic drafts for a modular curriculum look towards pedagogic exchange and research by being recontextualized and reshuffled. We ask: Why archiving and for whom? How do archives shape societies and constitute knowledge? Archives contribute to narrations of the here and now, craft canons, and influence values. They also refuse and overwrite narratives, and can be difficult to deal with; they intervene. Sometimes they leave traces that are uncomfortable, ones that we don’t (yet) know how to sort, show, or deal with in the present. Moving from archives as repositories to archives as subjects, this book opens up methodological questions of documentation and pedagogy, but also of activation and intervention. This is also, at its core, what we understand by ethnographic drafts: documentations that remain open to be analyzed, which share material to be worked with, for theories or interpretations to emerge. An anthology, a fieldwork diary, a snapshot, a stack of situated problems, a teaching aid, a sketchbook.

Awkward Archives focuses on Berlin-based organizations and the institutions they serve, and within which they function. We were originally invited in 2019 to conduct an ethnography of the second edition of the *Whole Life Academy*, but shifted to an ethnography of archiving practices in Berlin, moving thus outwards to encompass HKW as one archive among several in the city. In the process, this planned ethnography turned into a draft, an imagined teaching

curriculum. The archives we chose sit amidst a vast constellation of archiving practices that do not, and could not, all feature in this curriculum. As ethnographers, we attend to the undergirding structures and habituated ways of doing archives; the nitty-gritty making and the everyday; archival self-narratives and archival dead-ends. Due to the COVID pandemic, we were restricted to listening to the people working in archives, rather than observing their doing, seeking thus to let them situate each archive in conversation.

Berlin is an archival city. In the twentieth century alone, European imperialism, National-Socialism, and Soviet Socialism left some of the most resilient marks. In this city, two states watched over each other and stubbornly archived their own citizens. The archives of the collapsed German Democratic Republic (GDR) remain a source to question some of the most walled-in ideologies of the Cold War, and embody the dynamics of German-German paranoia. Each Germany—that of the former East and the former West—sought to universalize their respective ideologies in (post-)colonial settings in Asia and Africa, creating yet further, and eventually, dispersed and fragmented collections and archives of the modern-colonial nexus. The archives and collections we work with are shaped by these dynamics of modern Germany. The histories of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and its collections and archives (Lange 2019, Schneider 2020), Haus der Kulturen der Welt (Bhagwati 2020, Franke et al. 2021), the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (Bauche 2016), as well as colonial collections of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Zimmerman 2001, Penny 2002, von Oswald 2022) cannot be told without an understanding of the turbulent history of the city of Berlin. The emergence of post-migrant, post-socialist, and post-colonial archives in Berlin, of disappeared illicit subcultures, as well as historical avant-gardes, inform how we situate our modules in the city.

DEFINING AWKWARD ARCHIVES

These drafts for a modular curriculum focus on what we call “awkward archives”, that is, archives posing problems and causing disquieting frictions. The frictions—“awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (Tsing 2005, p. 4)—arise because the archives we chose reveal some of the pervasive mechanisms of modern ideologies that sit uncomfortably in the contemporary world.

In our modules, we unfold some of the manifold entanglements of the archives in this book with the construction of humanity, ethnicities and social justice, the heterosexual norm and the domestic, the relation of culture to nature and taxonomies, technology and progress, coloniality and modernity, exploration and loot. Continuing a concern of our collective fieldwork, we articulate the ways in which these modern ideologies pertain to the organizational histories and “constellations of difference” in the city of Berlin (Macdonald 2015). In this former Prussian metropole, remnants of modernity permeate the fabric of everyday life: in its urban planning and grand avenues, architecture, museums, scientific institutes, symbols of power and memorials, ruins, and distribution of wealth. In our respective research, we investigate the co-constitution of modernity and coloniality, and the reverberations and specters of this process in the present (von Oswald, Tinius 2020). The disruption of long unquestioned structures of colonial possession and subjugation triggered many reflections on unease and normativity that are central to this book. We build our inquiry into awkwardness on the understanding that modernity is:

“a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, ‘coloniality’. Coloniality, in other words, is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality.” (Mignolo 2011a, pp. 2-3)

The interrogation of colonial legacies cannot be untangled from the narratives of Western modernity (Chakrabarty 2000, Stoler 2009, Hofmann and Messling 2021). We base our inquiry into awkward archives on writings about “difficult heritage” (Macdonald 2009), “critical discomfort” (Modest 2020), archival hauntings (Demos 2013), and “sensitive collections” (Lange 2011). These have brought to the fore a troubling of taken-for-granted and celebratory narratives about heritage, museums, collections, and archives. The awkwardness we address unsettles political lines and social divisions of what is good or bad, worthy to keep, valuable to present. The archives we discuss in this curriculum form part of the heritage of German and Berlin public life as part of university collections, public museums, academic research, activist initiatives, and art spaces.

They are in use, and in the making, and our interlocutors ask questions about their function; letting their own discomfort with these archives become a productive, troubling heuristic. We let their own engagement inform the modules in central ways, and we highlight their implicatedness in the making of these archives. In some interviews, awkwardness turned into *Unbehagen* (discontent) and *unheimlich*, evoking Freud’s engagement with the uncanny, and the strangeness and anxiety of dealing with what seems ordinary. Our curriculum highlights the archiving troubles, the awkward labor that “archivists” invest when working against normative categories, shifting across binary taxonomies, translating analog into digital data, analyzing photographs that go against their politics, or storing objects they find appalling.

Awkward Archives implicates archive-makers and users in moral and political questions about their modes of operation, presentation, preservation, and analysis. They are difficult to deal with because the tensions they provoke depend on the positionality of the persons or communities that confront and use them. What may seem dumb and funny to some, may be violent for others. What may seem deviant is someone’s lived reality. What is unknown to one

person is another person's canon. Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock, when describing the Colonial Neighbours Archive Project at SAVVY Contemporary featured in one of the modules, referred to the items in their collection as *Schrott* (garbage), by which she raised the question of how to curate everyday racist commodities from the German colonial era (Tinius 2018). These items thus implicate spectators and users in moral dilemmas of judgment and responsibility (Rothberg 2019, Lehrer 2020). These go beyond the objects themselves and the way in which they "entrap" users (Gell 1998, Corsín Jiménez and Nahum-Claudel 2019), but rather fold them into questions over their own role and relation to the problematic histories—and thus contemporary use—of these objects. They beg the question: How do archives enable "the quiet perpetuation of colonial disquiet in the present day?" (Riggs 2020, p. 294)

When something becomes morally demanding depends on positionality, but also on particular moments in time. Moral consensus changes over time and forms ideologies—things we take for granted as natural, normal, given. Ideologies are pervasive in the sense that they influence our *habitus*, and we recognize them as internal and natural to the way things are. Ideologies say:

"this is who you are: you are Peter! This is your origin, you were created by God... ! This is your place in the world! This is what you must do! (Althusser 1971 [1969], p. 177)

The mechanisms and systems that render certain things as sayable, the kinds of words that are mobilized, the ways we show or expose things, can alter from one moment to another—and not necessarily in a line of linear and liberal progress. Rather, ideologies overwrite, erupt, and have ripple effects that are not always easily noticeable (Yurchak 2005, Haeckel 2021). The loops and resistances to German reckoning with its colonial past, to return to our fields, challenged deeply-ingrained assumptions over Germany as an enlightened

modern nation, and the uncomfortable satisfaction with its own self-chastizing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. It is no surprise that the towering doubt over Germany's future was replaced with a confident gesture of return to past glory and world (Ndikung 2018, Tinius and von Zinnenburg Carroll 2020).

Disruptions of such standards and norms create anxiety, and often question long-held beliefs and standard operating procedures. Such disruptions render visible the invented-ness of normative traditions and genealogies (Hobsbawm 1983, Foucault 1977). "Modernity is not an ontological unfolding of history but the hegemonic narrative of Western civilization" (Mignolo 2011b). Such a perspective opens up the possibility of refusal and creative re-writing of these narratives. After all, as the poet Mary Cappello puts it:

"Awkward can also mean 'untoward' To be untoward is to be hard to manage, to be unseemly, and again, like a belch in the middle of the sermon, perverse, where 'toward' means docile, compliant, tractable, educable." (2007, p. 19)

When ideology becomes graspable as ideology, normality is recalibrated. Recognizing something as "awkward" exposes us to the mechanisms and faux dualities of normal and deviant, *Volks* and *Fremde*, minor and dominant, nature and culture, white and non-white, mine and yours. In this sense, the archives we work with all problematize these narratives of modern ideologies. Their awkwardness is in the eye of the beholder, but it is precisely for that reason they are telling of what, at a certain point, was considered the norm.

"As an ontological state, to be awkward is to be clumsy, unnatural, embarrassed, shy. It is a sign – 'awk' – posted by an old-fashioned English teacher in the margin of your prose. It is a reminder of impending disorder, the object awkwardly placed or awkwardly

posed that throws off the arrangement. It is precariousness, and danger.” (Cappello 2007, p. 25)

The archives we selected in this book are not easily categorized into alternative or mainstream, private or public, hegemonic or counter-hegemonic. Awkwardness is not a quality of an archive, an object, or a constellation, but of its context—how it moves and shifts across social, temporal, and cultural value regimes. Taking inspiration from Cappello, we don’t “correct” awkwardness by creating new order, like the old-fashioned teacher; instead we observe thrown-off arrangements, the stabilization of impending disorder, and mobilize embarrassment—the “awk” in archives—as an analytic.

TEACHING MODULAR ARCHIVES

This book is devised as a draft for a modular curriculum. It is modular insofar as the chosen archives form the basis of seven modules that introduce and address central modern ideologies through the lens of awkward archives: freedom, colonialism, *Vol/k*, property, nature, sexuality. In total, the book allows for a semester-long course with the introduction outlining the overall conceptual take, and each module offering a double seminar session. Every module emerges from a conversation, followed by working material in the form of references, visual constellations, and methodological exercises for the seminars. Interviews form part of fieldwork methods, and we encourage teachers and students to use these conversations as methodological exercises in eliciting a practice and understanding the subjective dimensions of archiving processes. These methods, while chosen to correspond with the particular problematics of each archive, can serve as a basis for learning how to study other archiving, collection, and research contexts more broadly.

In each module, we pay attention to the difficult aspects of fieldwork with awkward archives: How do you approach the boredom and tediousness of endless lists of facts and numbers on objects that background the contexts of their violent appropriation? How does one reveal the normative violence hidden in seemingly harmonic photographs of festive rituals of togetherness? How can we work on racist and sexist materials in careful ways that neither reproduce their difficult content nor confront users with materials they did not choose to see?

We refer to the curriculum as modular, since we take our choice and selection—as well as order and focus—as a suggestion, a draft. Likewise, the way we frame each module—our writing about them, the style of our arrangement, the materials chosen, the quotes selected—remains itself an ethnographic choice; embedded in our specific and subjective mode of anthropological inquiry. In each context, other archives can be added or compared, or modules exchanged. It is our wish and hope that the module can serve as the basis for analyses and projects on awkward archives elsewhere, and other understandings of awkwardness, not just in other languages. What types of awkwardness are relevant to different archives, or how do they overlap and compare?

How these modules are arranged and added to depend on where, but also on how, this curriculum is put to use. We envisage the curriculum to be used in university seminars, but hope that it speaks across different disciplinary contexts. Furthermore, we propose the curriculum as a possible toolkit in practice-based situations, or other learning contexts, beyond the university, such as exhibition-making processes and curatorial contexts, practices of archiving or reflections on how to approach, study, or even create an archive or a collection. We deliberately underline the draftiness of these modules to incite further collective exploration of awkward archives by students, teachers, practitioners, and artists. The curriculum therefore also exists in open-access form to be downloaded,

printed, and distributed with potentially reshuffled and remixed content and order—allowing authorship to be distributed through teaching.

By offering anthropological approaches for an inquiry into awkward archives—rather than an authoritative or conclusive guide to archive theories or histories—we seek to bring ethnographic practice to bear on contexts beyond the confines of the discipline. This directly continues a concern initiated in our book *Across Anthropology* (2020), which developed an argument about the trans-anthropological fields of art, activism, and the curatorial, in which anthropology has long become a subject of contestation and imagination. In this sense, we do not understand this curriculum as a device merely to teach content, but to mediate across fields of cultural production, curatorial practice, and anthropological research. It is perhaps an act of *Vermittlung* in the sense espoused by Nora Sternfeld (2014, p. 9), that is, as a move that considers the prefix “Ver-” in “*Vermittlung*” (un-mediation or un-education). This facilitates a shift away from education and mediation as the mere act of “transmitting sedimented knowledge” and helps us “reflect on and stir up the very processes of mediation” (ibidem). The questions of “what, how, and why we mediate?” then come more into focus.

THE MODULES IN SHORT

The module “Awkward Archives” serves as an introduction to the curriculum. It introduces the context of the project, discusses the theoretical and ethnographic departure points, and provides an overview of the teaching setup. It sets up a definition of “awkwardness” that allows each archive to be seen in its situated problematics and relation to modern ideologies.

The module “Freedom” features an interview with Bernd Scherer, director of Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW). It introduces

an institution (almost) without an archive, which is nonetheless in the process of archiving itself and reflecting on what it means to create an archive, or whether some of its documentation can be considered as archival practices.

The module “Colonialism” focuses on the Colonial Neighbours Archive project of the art space SAVVY Contemporary, founded in 2009. We speak with archive curator Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock, who describes the archive as a participatory assemblage that collects everyday items from Germany’s colonial era. These are donated by members of the public. The archive invites artists-in-residence to respond to its objects and their problematic legacies and depictions, and it organizes educational workshops with schools and universities.

The module “Volk” concerns the photo collection that constitutes the Hahne-Niehoff Archive of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. We are in conversation with anthropologist Franka Schneider, who worked on the research project *Foto-Objekte*. These photographs were collected between 1920 and 1945 as part of a prototypical photographic form of ethnological (*volkskundlich*) knowledge production. The archive pursued an explicit *völkisch* perspective and strategy by providing evidence for the apparent continuity of the Nordic-Germanic *Volk* in affirmative but often innocent visual material. We discuss how to see the absence as a trace of violence, and how to read the materiality of photographic archives.

The module “Property” highlights the work of *The Restitution of Knowledge* research group, which analyses the narratives and actions of the German punitive expeditions in colonial Africa. Cultural historian Yann LeGall tells of the gaps in the archives and collections of museums, from which he and the research team put together traces to reassemble the paths of the expeditions. The archive is in-the-making and consists, among other things, of long Excel lists putting together the scarce information on objects purchased, looted, or stolen for German ethnological museums.

The module “Nature” brings into focus the processes of digitizing the collections of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. Anthropologist Tahani Nadim, director of the Humanities of Nature department of the museum, discusses her inquiry into the new troubles that emerge and gaps that persist when translating analogue specimen into “zeros and ones.”

The module “Sexuality” traces the emergence of the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection and its transition from Miami Beach in Florida to become part of the collections of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Anthropologist Hannes Hacke, who oversees the process, speaks to us about the creation of new queer taxonomies.

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**FREE
DOOM**

FREEDOM

Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW)

with Bernd Scherer

EDITORIAL NOTE

Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) was founded in 1989. Since 2002, HKW has been part of the Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH (KBB), which is funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. It is housed in the Congress Hall, gifted to West Germany by the United States of America and constructed between 1956–7. The HKW was conceived as "not only a symbol but an instrument to serve the cause of liberty", as President Eisenhower put it during the cornerstone ceremony in 1956 (quoted in Miller Lane 1984, p.133). On July 6 1919, the sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and other physicians opened the world's first Institute of Sexual Research on a section of the site of today's HKW. During the seizure of power by the National Socialists in 1933, the institute was looted, closed, and then destroyed during the Second World War. In 2001, the new Federal Chancellery of Germany was erected right beside it. From 2006 until 2023, the philosopher Bernd Scherer directed HKW. He initiated several long-term projects that examine larger transformation processes in contemporary societies, such as *The Anthropocene Project*, *100 Years of Now*, and *The New Alphabet*. Under his directorship, HKW has also increasingly focused on a shift from the representation of "non-European cultures" to problematizing modernity, freedom, and world. For our conversation, we spoke with Bernd Scherer from the offices of the Institute of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, where he has been an honorary professor since 2011. In our interview, we put *The Whole Life. An Archive Project* into the context of broader questions of archiving, and discuss how an institution can begin to archive its own activities.

FREEDOM

FURTHER MATERIAL

Website

www.hkw.de

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Scherer, "Wir müssen lernen, die Welt neu zu sehen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 January 2020, p. 9.

Bernd Scherer, Anselm Franke, "Die Zivilisationsfälle," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 23 January 2022, p. 37.

Exhibitions

"Wohnungsfrage" (Part of *100 Years of Now*), concept and program by Jesko Fezer, Nikolaus Hirsch, Wilfried Kuehn, Hila Peleg, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), 23 October 2015 – 14 December 2015.

"Parapolitics: Cultural Freedom and the Cold War," curated by Anselm Franke, Nida Ghouse, Paz Guevara, Antonia Majaca, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), 3 November 2017 – 8 January 2018.

*“we attend
to ideas*

A conversation *with*

Bernd Scherer

*in the
making”*

*How and where is archiving
done at HKW?*

All the projects we're doing are being archived right now—digitally. Alongside that, of course, there's all the event and project publications we create, which then also become a part of the archive. Almost all the productions get archived. And with some of the productions, we even begin thinking of the character of their archives right from the start. Especially during Covid, a lot of films are being produced for our projects—such as our collaboration with the Villa Romana in Florence, *The Broken Archive*. These are already archives in and of themselves. In the past, many of the projects involved live events that were then recorded and went into the archive afterwards; but it was the live aspect of the event that was more in the foreground, rather than the archive part.

*The difference between these two types
of archiving practice is that one is
about archiving after the event, while
the other is a practice already thought
of as an archiving process.*

Exactly. In the context of the *Whole Life Academy*—which you're a part of—we realized how important it is to build our own archive. This involves external materials too, available as reference points for thinking and working collaboratively; but it also involves making it possible for everything we produce to be reflected on again in the future. In that sense, it's important for all the productions to be archived. So that when you look at our work, you actually see a continual archival process. Things can be animated again and again.

What's the history of archiving at HKW?

There were two phases. The first phase was 2006–07, when HKW was closed for a year of renovations. After being in existence for about fifteen, sixteen years, this was the first time we, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, had a moment of thinking not just about new projects, of working and reflecting in a future-oriented ways, but instead began to archive all the programs and projects that were still available in recorded form and so on. So after fifteen years of work, that was the first time we looked back and asked, “What has actually been happening here?”

If you look at the timeline up until 2007–08, HKW had only really ever worked on new projects and had never actually dealt with its own history. That changed in 2007–08. That’s when we really began to create the first archives—to make an archival record of the visual material that had been produced up until that point. We also began to exchange texts on how projects had come into being—that got archived too back then, and it was from this that the House first became genuinely aware that it has its own history, and that this history is a key reference point for future work.

The second decisive point was 2015–16, when we were launching our second large long-term project, *100 Years of Now*. When we were thinking about this idea, we arrived at the essential approach that the past, and in this case the past of the twentieth century, is not a finished object; it’s rather a space of possibility that we can head back into at particular moments, rethinking them imaginatively in a different direction. One thing that’s obvious is how digitalization, which was opening up substantially in the 90s and was then associated with hopes of democracy, was actually translated via capitalist, economic forms into this platform capitalism that we have now. The potential that was contained within this technology has been developed in a very specific direction. It’s interesting to think about what other approaches could have been possible and how we could have

worked with it differently. And to think about the past as a space where potentialities reign, ones that can be rethought from within the present and with a view to the future.

In this context, with this line of questioning, the idea of an archive for Haus der Kulturen der Welt grew in importance as a basis for our work, as a material that can be used in the future for developing projects. With that, we began to think about building up our own archive. What could it look like? It became clear to us that, on the one hand, we had to archive our own work more systematically. How could our projects be archived? What kind of thesaurus would we need? What approaches do we need for seeing the latent potentials, too? On the other hand, these considerations involved archives or materials that go beyond the projects we'd created at HKW and it became evident that we would need to build a network with institutions engaged in questions of the archiving in the present.

*How exactly should we understand
these systematic, archiving practices at
HKW? How does HKW understand
archiving?*

This is something we're working on at the moment. Our projects are diverse, and we have diverse materials for them. We have text materials, we have catalogs, we have our own library in which we've collected the books and objects we need for developing individual projects, and we try to place everything together coherently, so that we can develop new projects from these archives later on. There's a creative potential lying within the archive—namely, the potential to establish connections between things that have been developed in separate projects, both within and outside Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

What infrastructures of archiving are there at HKW? Who archives?

There is, of course, one main infrastructure: the website. Then there are special digital filing systems and the library. Normally, it's the individual projects themselves that archive or file their materials. The aim now, and what we're working on as a group right now, is to network up these projects that have been archived or filed in different ways. It's only now that an infrastructure for an archive of Haus der Kulturen der Welt is being developed.

It's with email correspondence in particular that one problem becomes clear. In contrast to letters, which can be traced, emails often aren't archived at all. Is archiving something that mostly takes place in digital space at HKW? Where is the border between the physical and the digital at HKW?

Everything we're producing now is digital. And it isn't transferred to paper anymore either. That's how it was in the past, but it's not how it's done anymore. All the written material we have comes either from catalogs we have produced, from media developed in the context of projects, or from research materials we purchased—books, catalogs, and so forth. But email correspondence isn't put onto paper and stored in analogue form anymore.

This, of course, directly raises the question of transparency. Does this

mean that a decentralized, project-by-project decision is made about what is archived and stored?

Exactly. The archives are project-based. So not *everything* is archived.

Is there any kind of manual that provides a system or information about what has to be archived from particular projects? Often the problem is that when that's not the case, there's no archive.

No, not yet, but it's something we're working on.

Who is the archive accessible to and who is the archive intended for?

Right now, these archives are only intended for internal use, just like the library is internal. This also has to do with the issue of rights, obviously. But what we're planning with the systematization is—alongside the digital space—to also have a physical space in HKW, where people like yourself can come, borrow books, and go into the digital spaces of the archive on the intranet. We still have to work out which parts of the archive can be made available online to the wider public.

How far does this building process raise questions relating to HKW's historical and ideological context,

*and especially questions
of modernity?*

In this respect, archiving is closely linked to the core substance of what we do. If you take a ten-year view of our work on certain concepts, you see a substantial questioning of the classical institutions and organizational modes of modernity. The sciences on the one hand, the arts on the other. And one of the foundational problems in the sciences is still—even if it seems to have been resolved to a degree—the problem of work being divided into distinct disciplines. This leads to certain phenomena just not coming into view at all, because they don't correspond with the conceptual frameworks that govern these disciplines. This is why our work, for instance the *Anthropocene Curriculum*, aims to go beyond those lacunae that emerge because the humanities and the sciences don't work together.

Archiving these processes is an attempt to provide objects that enable a counter-reading of those discipline-based practices. When you look at what's happening in the *Anthropocene Project*, there's a whole range of those kinds of materials. One nice example is for sure the project *Mississippi. An Anthropocene River*, where you can look at what it really means to develop new forms of knowledge production from artifacts. Our archive is very important in this. The same applies to artistic processes in the context of exhibitions, where projects like *Parapolitics* and even *Neolithic Childhood* are set up to expand upon the field of visual art in the narrow sense, and include its connection to social processes—the transformation processes that take place in society—and thus, to question the segmentation, the detachment of art from broader social contexts. These are exactly the kinds of strategies that are legible in the archives. And to that degree, you can understand HKW as a place that doesn't just see itself in critical, reflective terms; it also thinks of itself as a place that establishes new knowledge-production practices, going beyond the existing ones. The archives provide the material reference points for this.

HKW—as a building and as an institution—represents an aspect of Western modernity, but at the same time, in the processes and projects you’ve just described, it also represents a rupture with those forms of modernity. Where does HKW stand now and what should we understand HKW to be right now?

Just to be even more explicit: the building is a symbol of Western modernity. And that was the intention behind building it in the post-war period after 1945. For the first few years, concepts like multiculturalism were still very much part of this Western modernity, wherein other cultures were ultimately defined from the perspective of a Western modern standpoint. And that’s how HKW largely understood itself in the 1990s, too; as a place which had the defining authority to invite what’s important and what isn’t, and with this defining authority it was able to present “other” cultures in Berlin. This is something I’d say has changed fundamentally, as the work we do now—with artists, intellectuals, scientists, and academics from all over the world, both the Western and the non-Western worlds—questions Western modernity’s framing, its basic categories. These categories no longer give an adequate account of the transformation processes of the present. To that degree, the work we do now is essentially to showcase knowledge production forms that are adequate to the transformation processes of our societies. You could maybe summarize by saying, “we attend to ideas in the making.” It’s the curation of emerging ideas, and curation has this very precise sense of attending to ideas. Of attending to notions and forms of articulation not yet established, ones that are still in the process of becoming—that you produce yourself through the work. With the *Anthropocene Project*, we produced a new framework for thought and work, seeking

to establish forms of work that engage with these processes. And in this processual sense—that we supervise emerging ideas—it’s also necessary, I feel, to understand the archive as an instrument. As an instrument that repeatedly facilitates sedimentations. Sedimentations that, again, function as starting points for further thought and work. It’s always about creating working materials for continuing the process further down the line.

On the one hand, HKW criticizes the modern, universal understanding of how other cultures are looked at, of the problems involved in saying, “here, we present the whole world.” At the same time, it does so from a very specific context—still from Berlin, still from the West, still from within specific epistemological and university-based knowledge-production. How far do you look into whether these questions might not be bound to that very specific context?

I don’t reject universalism. It’s more that you have to be very clear about how universalisms function. The kind of universalisms we’ve been familiar with up until now—value systems like freedom, equality, justice, and so forth, for example—in the form they emerged in the West, they emerged against the backdrop of specific experiences and specific historic constellations that led to abstraction processes, which then generated those universals. This means that universalism is always a procedure of abstraction tied to very tangible historical processes, a procedure which also makes sense in and of itself, of course—as it’s an attempt to establish a way of framing specific

contexts, so to speak. Against that backdrop, it's important to incorporate reflections on how Haus der Kulturen der Welt, as we are positioned, works in a very specific context. This specific context is the city of Berlin, it's Germany, it's Europe. So that's the starting point.

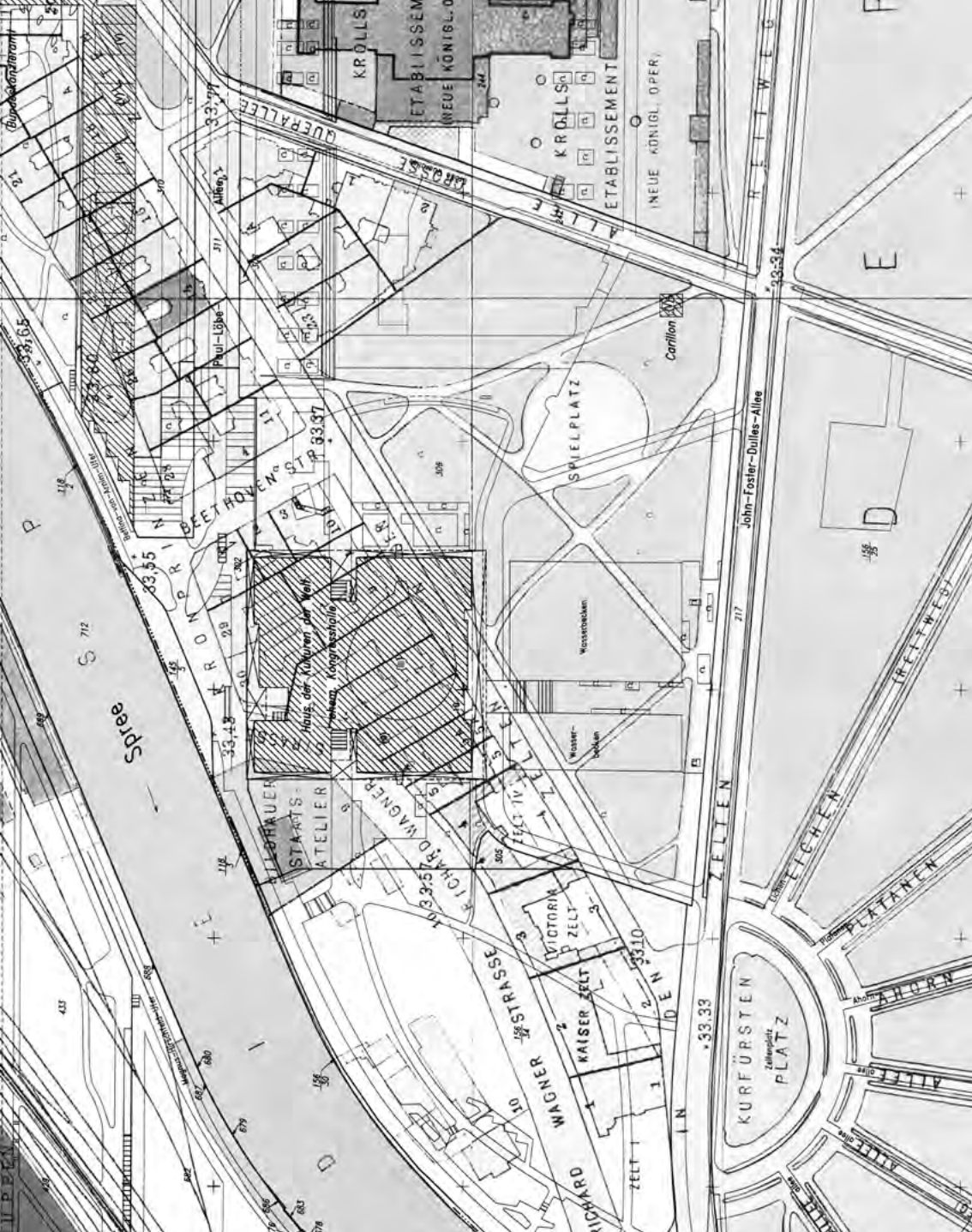
But if you also think about it reflectively, you will try to come up with methods for transcending this frame of reference, and there are an amazing number of procedures for this right now. This actually began with the *Anthropocene Project* where, around the world, we and others built up a community of over three-hundred scientists and academics, social stakeholders, and artists, who are beginning to develop projects in their own contexts. So you can think of the *Anthropocene* network as having a huge variety of local topographical developments, all in discursive relation with one another—a relation which is mapped out on the website. And we're doing similar work now with the *New Alphabet School*, based on this exact observation that on the one hand we're operating in a global context, but on the other we articulate the modes of framing problems, the lines of questioning that we deal with in local contexts, in different ways. What we're attempting here is to develop forms of collaboration that allow this specificity of local contexts to be articulated in the conversation. This is the direction we began taking in the last six or seven years, and one that's now set to be expanded further and further. So from that point of view, in the future it's going to be about the ability of people within each of these contexts, local contexts, to make interconnecting and more general statements from their own positions—and about the impulse to make them too. But we refer to universalistic, foundational ideas in a way that does not imply that they are valid worldwide. Rather that they are valid from the perspective of the particular, local, regional constellation. I think that the work—the way we understand it—lies in questioning how we can conceive of the processes of conversation and exchange within this network of relations. To think in relations. The points between the relations are the local contexts.

Ruptures are especially interesting in archives; moments in which something changes. You discussed different times, eras, and changes at HKW. How far do you see it as necessary, or as a problem, for a rupture to emerge, or for things to continue as they are?

HKW is different to a museum or a German theater in that it doesn't have any identity of its own—beyond its projects. Theaters in Germany usually work with ensembles that provide a certain basic identity. Museums have objects. We don't have any of that, and I think that to make sure the institutional character isn't just a pure shell and is actually reflected in the substance of what the institution produces, you need an archive. That's the material reference point of our work. I think that's helpful for any future team, however it's going to do its work. It might work in a completely different way to us, in which case it would still be helpful to distance yourself from a certain position, and this distancing will then obviously be possible via the archive. In the same way that the archive will make it possible to continue forging ahead with this work.

**VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD**

Excerpt from real estate cadaster on historical map, created as part of Maria Eichhorn's work *In den Zelten 4/5/5a/6/7/8/9/9a/10, Kronprinzenufer 29/30, Beethovenstraße 1/2/3 (1832 bis 1959) > John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10 (since 1959), Berlin* within the framework of HKW's project *Wohnungsfrage* (2015).



Bundesbank
KROLLS
ETABLISSEMENT
NEUE KÖNIGL. OPER.

BEETHOVEN-STR.
Roonplatz
Kurfürstenplatz
Zelten-Platz

Allee 1
Allee 2
Allee 3

Spree
Haus der Kulturen der Welt
Staats-Atelier
Richard Wagner

Kurfürstenplatz
Zelten-Platz
John-Foster-Düres-Allee

Allee 1
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Allee 1
Allee 2
Allee 3

Announcement, opening ceremony, Congress Hall Berlin, 19 September 1957.

CONGRESS HALL BERLIN

OPENING CEREMONY, SEPTEMBER 19, 1957

God grant that not only the love of liberty, but a thorough knowledge of the rights of men may pervade all the nations of the earth, so that a philosopher may set his foot anywhere on its surface and say, this is my country.

A cursive signature of Benjamin Franklin, written in dark ink. The signature is highly stylized, with the first letter 'B' being particularly large and ornate, and the name 'Franklin' following in a fluid, connected script.

Gebe Gott, daß nicht nur die Liebe zur Freiheit, sondern auch ein tiefes Bewußtsein von den Rechten der Menschen alle Völker der Erde durchdringe, so daß ein Philosoph, wohin immer er seinen Fuß auch setzen möge, sagen kann: „Dies ist mein Vaterland.“

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

KONGRESSHALLE BERLIN

FEIER ZUR ERÖFFNUNG AM 19. SEPTEMBER 1957

Program, opening ceremony, and symposia, "Europe and America.
The Strength of the Unfettered Mind," 20 September-24 September 1957.

SYMPOSIA

EUROPE AND AMERICA

THE STRENGTH OF THE UNFETTERED MIND

VON DER STÄRKE DES FREIEN GEISTES

I

Music and Fine Arts

Musik und bildende Künste

Friday, September 20, 1957. Theatre, 3 P.M.

Freitag, 20. September 1957. Theatersaal, 15 Uhr

II

Science and Education

Wissenschaft und Volksbildung

Saturday, September 21, 1957. Theatre, 10:30 A.M.

Samstag, 21. Sept. 1957. Theatersaal, 10.30 Uhr

III

Theatre

Theater

*Monday, September 23, 1957.
Auditorium, 3 P.M.*

*Montag, 23. September 1957.
Auditorium, 15 Uhr*

IV

Final Session

Schlussitzung

THE OLD WORLD AND THE NEW

DIE ALTE UND DIE NEUE WELT

*Tuesday, September 24, 1957.
Auditorium, 8 P.M.*

*Dienstag, 24. September 1957.
Auditorium, 20 Uhr*

General Chairman

Allgemeiner Vorsitzender

MELVIN J. LASKY

Editor

Redakteur

Der Monat und Anchor Review

Der Monat und Anchor Review

As a demonstration of the multi-lingual translation system in the Congress Hall, translations will be given in German, English and French.

Als Demonstration für das Mehrsprach-Übersetzungssystem der Kongresshalle werden Übersetzungen in Deutsch, Englisch und Französisch gegeben.

Stamp, Deutsche Bundespost, Berlin, Interbau 6 July–29 September 1957.

INTERBAU 6.7.-29.9.1957

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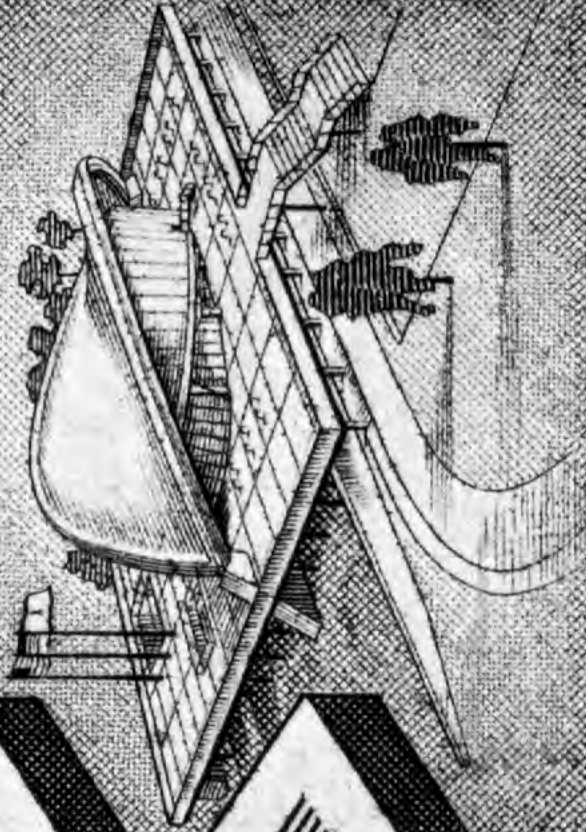
BERLIN

DEUTSCHE BUNDESPOST

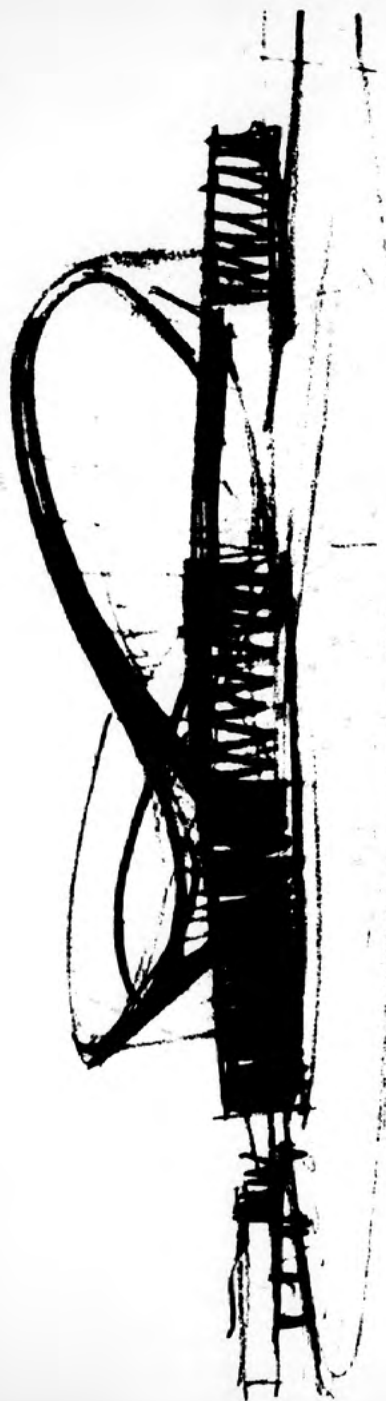
ROTHMANN

KONGRESSHALLE

EFALZ



Early sketch of the Congress Hall by Hugh A. Stubbins, 1955, © Hugh A. Stubbins Jr. Archives, courtesy Michael Stubbins/The Stubbins Family.



METHOD

Fieldwork takes place in situated contexts—sites, places, settings—which may be online or offline. In any dimension, it involves our bodies relating to other types of spaces, and how these spaces allow or inhibit our movement. As ethnographers, we have to learn to navigate such environments and appreciate their affordances, understanding their limits. In relating to space, phenomenology is coupled with affect theory, and urban anthropology links with the anthropology of space and history. In this exercise, we want to ask: How do we witness the relation of architecture, empowerment, and freedom that inspired the creation of buildings such as HKW today? How is past violence sedimented in architecture and space—and how does space transmit past political violence? How do we encounter the ruins of the past in present-day environments? To what extent is space itself situated and, therefore, specific—and how is the experience of space universal? How do we experience transgression of norms of navigation—how do space and architecture guide us, control us—or give us a sense of freedom, autonomy, openness? In this exercise, we couple the embodied experience of walking with sketching as a way to help us see space differently.

EXERCISE

Before you go to Haus der Kulturen der Welt, choose the material for sketching. Pay attention to the materials you choose: pen, pencil, or maybe an iPad. Make a decision: Do you walk alone or with someone else? How do you approach Haus der Kulturen der Welt? From the river Spree or from the Tiergarten public park? What signs of the previous built-environment can you identify? Where does the space of HKW begin and where does it end? Which parts can you identify as belonging together? Navigate the space and think about how you feel in it. Guided, free, constricted? Sit down at any particular moment and begin to draw the space and environment. Try to include in your drawings how you feel. Maybe mark in other colors certain areas which made you feel unprotected or unsafe. Don't worry about the precision or aesthetic quality of your sketch. It doesn't have to be perfect or to scale. At the heart of the matter is the way you look at things. "A line, an area of tone, is not really important because it records what you have seen, but because of what it will lead you on to see" (Berger 1953). Compare and share your sketches with others. Explain and exchange your choices.

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**COLO
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COLONIALISM

Colonial Neighbours Archive (SAVVY Contemporary)

with Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock

EDITORIAL NOTE

The Colonial Neighbours Archive is a project of the independent art space SAVVY Contemporary, founded in Berlin-Neukölln in 2009 by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung. It has since moved several times: in 2013 into a former electrical substation (*Umspannwerk*), to the Silent Green Kulturquartier in 2015, and again in 2019 to a former casino located at the intersection of Reinickendorferstraße 17 opposite Nettelbeckplatz. The archive used to be housed in a side-tract in the underground exhibition space of the Silent Green Kulturquartier, which was a former crematorium. It comments on exhibitions by adding, like a footnote, a position founded in the neglected history and traces left by German colonialism in Berlin. The city plays an important role for the archive, not least due to its role as host of the Berlin-Congo Conference of 1884/5, which witnessed the division of the African continent among European imperial powers. For the archive, the legacies of colonialism articulate themselves in the racism that still haunts German society today. The archive was created as part of a joint project with students from the Institute of European Ethnology and focused initially on a family album about colonial Cameroon. Around the archive, SAVVY Contemporary organizes exhibitions and conferences and invites researchers and artists to work with it. In 2021, the artist Henrike Naumann activated the archive by creating an installation called *Toxic Cultural Heritage Collection* in which visitors can re-arrange objects from the collection in a quotidian interior setting, relating and repositioning objects differently. She also built a digital platform, which allows for users to access items and descriptions and to add new ones. She has been one of many artists invited to work with the archive, and the curators regard the project as one of education and outreach. School classes and university seminars are invited to engage with the archive and share experiences of their education (or lack thereof) about Germany's colonial past. At its heart, it is a relational and participatory archive. The archive exists through donated objects. Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock is one of the curators of the archive. We met her

on Zoom while she sat in the office of the arts space SAVVY, showing us several objects from the archive that were stored in boxes surrounding her.

FURTHER MATERIAL

Website

<https://savvy-contemporary.com/en/pillars/colonial-neighbours/>

Exhibitions and interventions

"Demythologize that history and put it to rest" (Colonial Neighbours Fragments No. 3), with Nathalie Anguezomo Mba Bikoro in front of the Otto von Bismarck Memorial, Berlin-Tiergarten, curated by Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock, Jorinde Splettstößer, Marcio Carvalho, 17 June 2018.

"You don't know my name," Guest room and workshop at *Doing Things with Words*, Kunstverein Braunschweig, 2 June – 19 August 2018.

"Colonial Neighbours Fragments No 6" (with Lizza May David), Maxim Gorki Theater (PostHeimat Festival), Berlin, 5 March – 8 March 2020

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*“sites
of*

A conversation *with*

Lynhan Balatbat-Helbock

*unwell
–being”*

What do you understand by archiving?

There are pluralities of what an archive can be. The project Colonial Neighbours Archive tries to go beyond the conventional structures of archives. We do so because our archive contains things that are sites of, how can I put it, “unwell-being.”

The very nature of these objects forces you to rethink how you want to place them, how you want to make them accessible, and how also to layer the gaze on the object in order not to perpetuate the object’s inherent violence. We had to rethink the whole concept of what archiving is. What we’re archiving is not only physical material, but also objects that point to the immaterial, like song-lyrics. And it’s not per se about collecting objects and creating an archive with them, but about the story behind the object and the connectivity between the object and the donor. It would not be an honest engagement with these objects otherwise.

There is not a definition of what archiving is within the project. We constantly try to rethink, reshape, deconstruct the norms of who is archiving what. We ask: Who oversees making this archive accessible? What are the opening hours of a normal archive? Who can even go physically to these archives? And what’s the content? What’s on display? The hierarchies of objects interest us, too. The hierarchies in displaying things. So, for us, what archiving is, is not only an open question, but a question that is constantly challenging the forms and formats of our archive. How do we engage with the archive and how do we make it accessible?

Where and how is the archiving done?

The process of archiving is not the most important thing. The most important thing is processing the connections of the objects. In a very blunt way, I would say: We get things. We place them somewhere,

ideally in a box that says: “colonial neighbours.” But you know, this whole process of archiving should also carry,—I don’t know how to translate the word—a certain kind of *Liebllosigkeit* (unkindness, carelessness). To have *Liebllosigkeit* as a method, is a way to say, “hey, these are objects that may not be, may not have the right to exist anymore.” Not all objects are made to last. Through this very lieblos, unkind, or also deliberately careless handling, we already establish a form of interaction with violent objects. It is like saying, “they don’t even deserve this careful handling, they don’t deserve our taking care of them.”

In Neukölln, in our old SAVVY space, we had an overhead projector. We used different transparent foils and invited the audience to make a sketch of their ideal structure of our archive. How would they feel towards these objects from their bodily experience? How would they feel comfortable in displaying them? We also had a modular object that you could move around and within which you could place the objects, to choose whether you can see them or not, and also to distance them, put them away, push them away, or render them more (or less) visible. In other words, we were searching for ways to invite people to recognize this as a participatory archive process, an archiving process in-the-making.

Your archive used to function as a commentary on each exhibition at SAVVY Contemporary. This was also due to the former location of the archive in a side-tract, parallel to the main exhibition hall. Is this still the case?

The size of our old space was about four-hundred square meters. The new one is about one-thousand sqm, roughly. But the Colonial Neigh-

bour's corridor shifted from twelve square meters to one. It's basically just one wall now. The reason I am saying this is to say that we are not a museum. We don't have to fulfill all the bureaucratic expectations of how to deal with objects even if you want to dismantle them or get rid of them. Even if you want to unfold problematic layers of an object, you still put it first on a pedestal and thereby give it monumentality, aura. We want to break this down. Also on the physical level, we want to say, "it's not about the archive per se, but about the engagement between people and objects." And it's about the collective mapping regarding our relationships with these objects, and not simply to use the objects to cast a look back in time at this grand evil of colonialism. We want to move forward in time, instead, and look at how people might relate to the objects in a different context, today, or in the future. These are all entanglements that we want to hint at. We wish to go away from the fetish of objects, and ask instead: What are the personal layers attached to an object? What are the gaps in the relationships to these objects?

Could you elaborate on what the archive contains?

Everything started with a journal with the word "Cameroon" on the front. It was found by the grandmother of the wife of Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, the founder of SAVVY Contemporary. She knew Bonaventure was from Cameroon. She knew that it belonged to her grand uncle, who was in Cameroon for a year. It's unclear if he was a soldier stationed in Cameroon or if he was also from the German colonial Schutztruppe (lit. protection force), which was called in to ensure forced labor. The album is composed of images with short descriptions. And it is very innocent in its language. It would state things like: "tropical fruit," "These are the people," "These are landscapes," But then clearly in the background, you see places and acts of vio-

lence. You see people helping other people involuntarily or maybe you recognize chains or an act of appropriation. In response to this gift, Bonaventure both acknowledged and found it fascinating that it came randomly to him, and he was puzzled about what to do with an object that is tied up with family memories but clearly holds a trace of the violence of German colonialism in Cameroon. It was clearly an object to him that needed to be fragmented in its content to understand what was going on. And so he initiated this project. That's why we also say it's a project by SAVVY Contemporary. We asked people via an open call to contribute objects, memorabilia, songs, material, immaterial fragments, all connected to the colonial past. And these form the archive.

*How do people engage
with the archive?*

People who visit our exhibition usually stumble across the corridor where it is on display, when they are on the way to the kitchen, or the library, or the toilet. They often walk through and many recount how they started thinking, "Wait, do I have memorabilia like that at home?" We don't explicitly invite people to bring their things. It's more impulsive. But of course we also have an open call, so we are officially welcoming donations.

While talking to us, you see how layers of peoples' relations to their objects unfold. That's memory-in-the-making. But you see how people's memories often don't match the past. They might just have a very secluded idea that this or that necklace was given to their great-grandma. And then they realize: "Maybe it's from Namibia. It is made of ivory. Maybe I don't want to keep it anymore?" Often, they just dump it on us. For some people it's very clear what the history behind an object is. And they might tell us saying that they don't want

to be named. That they don't want to be connected to it. Which is also a story, right?

In workshops where we talk about the African quarter here in Berlin or about street renaming, children aged twelve or thirteen have clear positions about the process of having to rename something because of its violent past. The older the participants are, the more confused they get about all these different entanglements. It's quite fascinating.

We have stamps, albums, games, books. We have memorabilia from Namibia that people would give us. We have a crazy diary which was something like a calendar by a boy scout and on the first page you see an image of Hitler. I think it is from the '50s but is from Namibia. There are so many entangled confusing narratives that need to be unpacked. But we say we are not historians, we are not psychologists. We can just have this process together and work with artistic interventions.

Do you record the histories which come with these objects?

One form of archiving them are interviews, which we sometimes conduct and then record. And we have an internal database, so to say, where we write down when an object came to the archive, who donated it, in which condition it arrived. We gather all kinds of information, which is constantly changing and shifting. But to be fair, this is not really our focus. We don't want to label things so that people can no longer establish their own connection to the objects. I say this, because it happens sometimes that someone would come and say: "Wow. I remember this tin. At my aunt's house I used to drink chocolate out of it. I loved it and I have warm feelings." And someone else would say, in reaction to the same object: "This is horrible! As a person of color, I walk into this so-called archive and I feel stripped off

my dignity.” Both connections, both stories, are a valid statement in regard to the objects. We try not to judge which is right, or to give a kind of pre-halo of what the objects are; we seek to have a shifting ground, which can change. That’s why it is not about the collection of these violent objects per se, or the precise stories, but more about how we connect, how different bodies connect to these objects.

*Who uses the archive? To whom do you
make it accessible?*

It is a participatory archive project, therefore we say it’s for the many. Someone who donates an object is giving something to this community, and the community can access it for research purposes. Sometimes university classes, seminars, or schools want to work with the archive. We always try to put emphasis on the idea that the objects are not the central focus or the only important things in the archive, but rather these entanglements, the narratives behind them. A lot of people read and learn about postcolonial cultures, decolonizing, un-learning, and so on. And they approach us to work with the archive. I always try to rephrase their interest by asking: “Why are you actually interested? Because you need to do the seminar?” It should also be part of the discussion that there are still people who love antiquities, who love war trinkets, who love items related to violent pasts. And these people are also part of the community, right? And we need to face it: it’s not only the “woke” art bubble that engages with these topics, but the community or civic society here in Wedding or in Berlin is composed of many voices that have different connections to these things. And not all are ok, not all we tolerate. So, ideally it is for the community to understand how schizophrenic we are in the way we live. On the one hand, you think, “decolonizing is amazing” but on the other hand, you refuse to sit in the subway besides someone who looks unlike you. That’s what we try to disentangle.

*Which roles do affect and emotion play
in working with the archive?*

To understand the different forms of embeddedness, we need to understand different bodies and take into consideration that different bodies hold different traumas and relations. When we talk about affect, we can't leave aside that trauma *sits* in bodies; it is embodied. Some things trigger different traumas.

We try to encompass this in workshops. We do breathing exercises that ask people how they are situating themselves, because your emotional fabric is different today than it is tomorrow. Different communities hold different collective traumas. We need to take into consideration that affect is a completely different terminology for you or me. Some people cannot even close their eyes, because the images that come to their heads are too excruciating. I talk about people who have post-traumatic syndrome or are suffering from traumas. So when we talk not only about awkward objects, but objects that are racist and violent, affect is a massive problem. But you cannot just simply fold it into this fashionable word. It's a whole process.

We often say that the body is a site of archives. It's a site of learning, unlearning. Knowledge and experience are embedded in your body. They are given to you via generations that you are not even aware of. There is fear, there is connectivity inscribed in your body that you might not even be able to understand or articulate—but on a somatic level, you might experience them when you are exposed to something like the awkward objects in our archive.

**VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD**

Detail of "Kamerun" photo album, 1919. Captions read (clockwise from left): *Haussah-Leute* (Haussah people), *Ruete-Faktorei-Mbua...*, *Tropische-Früchte* (tropical fruit). Reinickendorfer Straße, Berlin-Wedding, 2022. Photographer: Jonas Tinius.



Ruete - Enkorei - Mbuga...



(1) (Aussage) - Leute.



Tropische — Früchte.

Installation *Toxic Cultural Heritage Collection* by Henrike Naumann using objects from the Colonial Neighbours Archive (books from the SAVVY Contemporary library in the background), SAVVY Contemporary, Reinickendorfer Straße, Berlin-Wedding, 2022. Photographer: Jonas Tinius.



Margaret Courtney-Clarke
DIE FARBEN AFRIKAS
Vorgeschichte und Naturvölker

"Colonial Neighbours" Display, SAVVY Contemporary, Silent Green Kulturquartier, 2016. Photograph: SAVVY Contemporary.



"Colonial Neighbours" Display, SAVVY Contemporary, Silent Green Kulturquartier, 2016. Photographer: India Roper-Evans.



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Das Vorbild der Bier

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METHOD

Each fieldwork experience is mediated by our own histories and biographies. Each body is an archive in itself. Our judgements and how we write reflect our dispositions and bias. How does this body-as-archive react when encountering other archives and objects? Why do certain objects trigger our emotional and affective response more than others? In this exercise, we want to relate affect and autoethnography as ways of encountering and describing collections of problematic objects. Autoethnography is a research method that works with our own autobiographical experiences, our narratives, and our assumptions. We can use narratives of self—of our family histories, our paths and biographical steps, family experiences, mentors, and memories—as material through which to understand the situated significance of awkward objects.

EXERCISE

If possible, visit the Colonial Neighbours Archive at SAVVY Contemporary. Choose the first three objects that speak to you in one way or another. This doesn't have to be a reflected choice. If you cannot visit, or prefer not to encounter these remnants of Germany's colonial past, think of three objects that are significant to your family experience, or the extended community in which you grew up. In both contexts, think about the following questions. You can audio-record the answers (on your phone, recording device, etc.), or write them down: What does this object *do* to you? How does your personal life relate to the object at hand? Is your relation to this object marked by an experience you have made in the past? How does this object affect you today? Could these objects be awkward for someone else—or are they perhaps uncomfortable for you as well? How and why?

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VOLK

Hahne-Niehoff Archive (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

with Franka Schneider

EDITORIAL NOTE

In 2021, the members of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde e.V. (German Association for *Volkskunde*) voted to rename their association as “Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft” (German Association for Empirical Cultural Studies). Unchanged since 1904, the German association dropped the name “Volk” from its official denomination. The term Volk has been the defining problematic of imagination about ethnic Germanness. During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the term became central in *völkisch* projections of unity and spirit of a hitherto rather disparate fragmentation of people. The Hahne–Niehoff Archive was assembled between 1920–1945 as part of the ideological attempt to create evidence of a supposed racialized continuity of a Nordic–Germanic Volk. It documented quotidian habits and rituals. They are remarkable in what they don’t show. The archive contains some 39,000 negatives in 35 mm format on 1100 uncut rolls. Franka Schneider is curator at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin and anthropologist based at the Institute of European Ethnology, which hosts some of the archive’s photographs. She made these photographs accessible as part of her research in the project *Foto-Objekte*, funded between 2015–2018 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. In our Zoom interview, she pondered the awkwardness of working with “objects” that form a direct part of, and constitute, racist propaganda and science during the NS regime.

FURTHER MATERIAL

Website

<https://fotobjekt.hypotheses.org/ifee>

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*“it is the
unmarked*

A conversation *with*

Franka Schneider

*that goes
unad-
dressed”*

*How and where is the Hahne-Niehoff
Archive archived?*

This is a complicated question. The Hahne-Niehoff Archive has a turbulent history, throughout which it has been heavily fragmented and dispersed. And that is why the Archive does not exist in the sense of a unified archival body. It's not as you would imagine it. You wouldn't be able to say, "Here is the archive. These are the shelves. And that's where you can conduct research." Instead, it is spread across different places. The Department of European Ethnology at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin is one of these places. And there are additional things kept in the Institute's office spaces. Parts of the archive are inventoried at the Landesstelle für Berlin-Brandenburgische Volkskunde, another part lies uninventoried in the office spaces of the Institute. To be precise, both are part of the Landesstelle für Berlin-Brandenburgische Volkskunde. That's one location, so to speak. The second main location is at the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (Museum of European Cultures), in their photography collection. And then there are offshoots in other places. In archives in Halle, Marbach, and also at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. In that sense, due to the complicated history of the archive, there isn't a place where you can say, "This is where the archive is archived."

How is the archive archived?

When speaking of the Hahne-Niehoff Archive, we are talking about a photographic archive, with related written resources. The largest share of this archive is in boxes for negatives and index cards. In other words, in storage boxes for picture archives. But there's also a degree of dispersion in how it is organized. You can find the archive in folders, files, library boxes. There are mostly positives in the Mu-

seum Europäischer Kulturen. They are stored in archival boxes, in a very traditional way. And inside these boxes, they are kept in these typical protective sleeves. That's how they are stored. And in all the other places, they're treated a bit like leftovers; kept in boxes that are sorted out at the edges of the archives, or inside some sort of administrative binder.

What does the archive hold?

The Hahne-Niehoff Archive is a photographic archive. The archive was created in the early 1920s, by Hans Hahne and Heinz-Julius Niehoff, hence its name. So it goes back to these main figures who worked at the Landesmuseum für Vorgeschichte (State Museum of Prehistory) in Halle in the early 1920s. And there, as a complement to the prehistoric collections, they founded a *Volkskundliche Abteilung* (*Volkskunde* department). In the department, they not only collected objects, but they also documented contemporary customs, especially festivities through photography. To do this, they traveled with their cameras around the surrounding regions, especially around Halle. A large part of the archive consists of photographs of festivities between the early 1920s and the beginning of the 1940s. That is to say, the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany. And you could describe them as photographs of local customs in the broadest sense. But among these, there are also pictures of more everyday scenes that were taken in Halle. There are personal photographs. There are pictures of clouds. So there are other themes in the archive that don't really belong to it in the traditional sense. But on a fundamental level, it is an archive of photographs of local customs. The whole model comes from these ethnographic picture archives, which had the idea of recording culture by visual means and connecting it to space. It's this idea of representing the self, or what is specific to a people, through visual means. And since this also originated in a museum context, it is

definitely also a self-designation. It's what people have called a cultural inventory. It was about a kind of inventory of temporary events. Today you would call it "intangible cultural heritage."

What questions or problems does this archive raise for you?

Intangible cultural heritage is a very good reference point here. We would have to start with the history of the archive. Otherwise it can be hard to explain what the difficulties are. The archive was created with an ethno-nationalist intention. Hans Hahne was an early member of the Nazi Party. Very early on, he organized lectures and exhibitions with an ethno-nationalist underpinning, where the aim was to combine prehistory, racial science, and ethnology. And that is, in a way, also one of the central difficulties that the archive raises. How can we deal with this ethno-nationalist heritage? The recording of festivities is the starting point, as it were, and one of the key issues that I find should be discussed. When you talk about inventories, you're talking about recordings of local festivities that took place at a certain time, including in the early 1920s. They can often be seen as a historical resource for these festivities. And they are often used or could be used, for example, as part of *in situ* cultural heritage research. For instance, we are talking about photographs of festivities that have already been used, where people sought to have something recognized on official cultural heritage lists. "Questenfest," for example, is working towards inclusion in the intangible cultural heritage list. "Lichtmeß Spergau" has already been admitted. And in this archive, there are photographs that belong to these contemporary heritage efforts. This is the crux of the matter as far as this archive goes. If you label the archive as ethno-nationalist photographic heritage, the question that ensues is: How do you deal with it today? What is the status of these photographs as a historical resource? We have to

address that the idea or the representation of self, in an ethno-nationalist photographic heritage, has the German people in mind. With a racially deterministic definition of Germanness. And so the alleged “others” were excluded and not archived. That is what I call a “programmatically gap.” They were not archived because they didn’t adhere to the archiving principle, which was to represent Germanness. And especially with regard to the late ‘20s and, of course, the National Socialist ‘30s, this is about the whole cosmos of what has not been archived. This is where the violence against these supposed others is expressed. This results in a certain tension.

Which key modern ideologies are addressed by this archive?

When you first told me that you had thought this module might problematize the ideology of race, I was a bit disturbed. Well, not disturbed. I was irritated. Because I thought there were better archives for that, especially when it comes to ethnographic research in archives. “The Lautarchiv” (Sound Archives) in Berlin, for example, or anthropometric recordings, meaning the representation of the “other” and the critical re-evaluation of racism. I thought that the Hahne-Niehoff Archive was much weaker in that sense. But actually, it’s precisely this problem that I think might be interesting. Following a critical-whiteness study approach, it is the unmarked that goes unaddressed. It is crucial, when speaking about racism or the concept of race, to take into consideration precisely those archives where there are supposedly no anthropometric records or those related to racial science. In the case of the Hahne-Niehoff Archive, this is justifiable, in a way. These photographs are embedded in the racial science discourse of the period between the 1920s, and ‘40s, and Hahne was a prominent representative and promoter of these ideas through his museum. That is why the Hahne-Niehoff Archive fits well, because it opens up

precisely these two directions. Historically, protagonists like Hahne operated with the concept of race. And then there's a field of research that has received too little attention, or an object that has received too little attention: the visual representation of the self, in cheerful guise (*im fröhlichen Gewande*). That is the difficulty concerning this archive. As is usually the case with photographs of festivities, especially processions; we see happy people, people in costumes, people who are interacting with each other. At first glance, racism doesn't come up at all. There are photographs, individual series, where this was or can be addressed more explicitly, including by us. But all in all, the whole collection only talks about it in a mediated way. Postcolonial theories are very helpful in this respect because they identify these very gaps. And they also address these difficulties. Ann Stoler was important for me not only to look *against* but also *along the grain*. The category of Germanness is not only biologically formulated here, but also culturally embedded in this archive. The idea was to show that, in those festivals, we can still recognize the prehistoric Volk, which here means the Germanic or Nordic people. These ideas are quite central in this archive. And I find it exciting to use this as a toolset, so that postcolonial archive theories can question what is actually being collected here as "the German." And to ask: What or who *doesn't* fit this intention?

Modern ideologies. I can only attempt to break this down. What is the nation in this archive actually supposed to be? And to what extent has this archive also helped to produce the cult of tradition—the German people embedded in its traditions—which must be preserved? You can also see in this archive how ethnological ideas develop over time; they help produce what they want to describe.

This archive primarily depicts happy people, while the violence underlying the archive is not visible. What is the

affective dimension of working in this archive? What does the discomfort experienced as part of your engagement with the archive say about it? How and when can awkwardness also become productive? And why does confronting the archive make me feel awkward—when I look at the depiction of joyful festivities, for example?

I should start by saying that I have always had this feeling of awkwardness when researching this archive. It is the result of a very critical stance—or a stance that has reflected critically on the history of one's field of research. I know that the production of such photographs during the Nazi regime was not only a good fit (*passförmig*), so to speak, and conforming, but was an integral part of the Nazi ideology of a people—of German ethnicity—of this whole peasant, blood-and-soil ideology. Archiving and photographing helped to produce ideology.

What is interesting about the work in this archive is the affective dimension of these festivities. I would like to expand on that, because it's not just the festivities. It's also the photographs. The photographs themselves have their own performative quality, which makes you feel that you are not being addressed in the same way as you would be by architecture or landscape photography. And a process of identification ensues, which can be quite mundane. Thinking, "What are they wearing? What kind of place is this? Do I know it? Did my grandparents look or dance like that?" There is an affective dimension that is a form of social memory or identification, which I wouldn't like to have when working in such an archive.

It's not just that you smile while looking at people laughing during these festivities. It's that you start to wonder; you get curious,

you try to understand what is happening there. In other words, you become involved in these events on a very immediate level and try to make sense of them. This produces a feeling of proximity, rather than maintaining the distance that you would actually prefer.

We didn't just research these archives, we also tried to organize them, to somewhat restore a logic that they no longer had on their fragmented surfaces. To a certain extent, we were also involved in working on the archive the whole time. So that we could also give the whole archive a new sense of legitimacy. Which raises the whole question of: "Why do we need to preserve such archives? If in so doing we always repeat this representation of the self, founded on categories of violence?" And in a performative way, we also reproduce it, as it were, right down to the labeling that we then carry out.

So, I know that this really isn't necessary in terms of the historical dimension of memory, but from an activist stance, you could also say that these archives should actually be destroyed. We have to create a different visual repertoire. It should be possible to create something different, something that disrupts that. And then the awkwardness can become productive when I realize that it's actually also about using these images to create different ones, or to make these images useful in a different way. Because we all have seen enough of these Nazi images of Hitler salutes and so on. And we are very quick to look past them because we know them. And that is the problem with this archive, in a way. How is it possible to see them anew? What do we see there? Awkwardness is productive because it forces me to think more carefully about what they really are.

This feeling of awkwardness is also a result of knowing that the photographs address us too. We can't help being implicated in this future. There are particular contemporary movements today that still work with such ethno-nationalist concepts. They haven't gone away. In a sense, it is a finalized archive—historically speaking. But it is updated all the time as a consequence of particular movements. And also, who is this archive for? These ethno-nationalist

collections still serve as resources for movements that refer back to what is supposedly Germanic, or “ancient traditions.” This also creates awkwardness.

You can't say that this archive merely illustrated or documented an ideology. Rather, it helped to produce it. Or it might have been a crucial element in the coproduction of such ideologies.

That's a good way of putting it. A significant aspect of this archive is that Hahne's aim was not only to link past and present; he was also clearly addressing the future. The archive, particularly these ethnological photographs and the ethnology department, wanted to convey what was propagated at the museum as the ideal German people, or German ethnicity, and to archive it for the future as a way of maintaining this ethnicity; to save it for the future in such a way that it could always be reused.

You just said that this archive should actually be destroyed. Perhaps you could elaborate again on this tension between showing and not showing. How can working with this archive be productive, also for the public? Can these images be shown? How can they be shown?

The great challenge presented by these photographs or photographic series is that they depict what are assumed to be everyday, fun events, and that you often become emotionally involved. You just

can't avoid that. It just happens. You become affected or even bored. I think the real challenge of showing them to the public is not just to comment on them, but also to challenge them.

Before we started working on it, the Hahne-Niehoff Archive had already been shown in an exhibition in the 1990s titled, *Das unheimliche Idyll. Fotografien aus Mitteldeutschland 1928-43* [The Uncanny Idyll. Photographs from Central Germany 1928-1943]. It was primarily concerned with everyday life and the idea of the commonplace under National Socialism. This kind of exhibition work, I believe, is something that needs to be done again and again. But today that's a very standard format. You only have to turn on the TV and you can see everyday life under National Socialism everywhere. The challenge as I see it is: How can we stop and take a closer look when faced with these very common narratives? In television programs, for example, they can juxtapose other photos, mostly violent images. How do you operate when you only have this archive at your disposal? So that's the question: How can we show both the archived and the non-archived, what is present and what is absent, in a way that makes them a topic of discussion and allows them to comment on one another?

*To what extent can such images be
shown or reproduced without
commentary?*

These photographs—I don't mean the actual ones in the Hahne-Niehoff Archive, but similar ones—are constantly on view. They are in circulation. Showing them is not the problem. I think that our sole responsibility is to provide a set of tools or a commentary that can make other things possible as well. That's the main task now. Sure, you can show them without a text. I find that the challenge then is to show them in a way that they can comment on one another—that's

also what we tried to do to some extent. Can I make these images also become part of a different discourse? For example, what is the impact of photographs from Nazi Germany on colonial photographs? Or what do these colonial photographs that circulated in the German Reich or even then in the Weimar Republic... What can come from juxtaposing them with such festivities? What does that mean in terms of the representation of the self? I find that there's much more to be gained by seeing them together.

**VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD**

Photo Record Sheet, Schrebergartenanlage am Galgenberg (allotment garden at Galgenberg), Halle (Saale), Easter 1937, after 1960 cutted and reused as separation sheet. Cardboard, silver gelatin paper, ca. 8.5 x 14 cm (photo), ca. 29.2 x 22.4 cm (cardboard), LBBVA: B.I.2.2.6.3.5-Trennblatt Nr. 1, Landesstelle für Berlin-Brandenburgische Volkskunde – Archiv, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Photographer: Heinz Julius Niehoff.

10. Urheber

9. Zeit der Aufnahme



8. Platten-Nr.

125

12-54-11

9. Zeit der Aufnahme

1933

10. Urheber

H. J. Niehoff

1. Was

2. Wo

*Jalla-Park,
Pferdengarten
Lage am Galgen-
berg.*

3. Wann

Oktober 1933

4. Wer

5. Wie

6. Wozu

7. Warum

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"Querfurt," after 1933. Detail of 35mm film (Perutz), black and white negative, IfEE-HNN: Kb-film 04/037-36, Hahne-Niehoff Archive, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Photographer: Heinz Julius Niehoff (presumed).

PERUTZ

13



35



30



3

"Steckreiterfest" (hobby-horse festival), Molschleben, near Gotha, pentecost 1930, printed ca. 1995. Silver gelatin paper, 13 x 18 cm, IfEE-HNN: Print of Kb-Film 07/091-03, Hahne-Niehoff Archive, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Photographer: Heinz Julius Niehoff (presumed).



Traditional Costume Festival Eisenach, presumably 1936. Detail of 35mm film (AGFA), black and white negative, inverted, IfEE-HNN: Kb-film 03/067-19, Hahne-Niehoff Archive, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Photographer: Heinz Julius Niehoff (presumed).

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G F A

A G F A

METHOD

Exhibitions are complex systems of signification and representation, in which artifacts, light, captions, para-texts, inscriptions, display, sound, media, spatial composition form part of a hierarchical arrangement of experience. Exhibitions are therefore particular forms of discursive narratives, in which culturally coded systems work to create significance. They ascribe and negotiate scientific neutrality and objectivity on the one hand, and create perspectives of observation and interpretative subjectivity on the other. Modes of display variously empower or disempower. We can ask of every exhibition: Who decides how and what to display? Who assigns authority and expertise, whose voices are paternalized and silenced? What has stakes in telling a story in particular ways and whom does it serve? Exhibitions create hierarchies of knowledge production and reception. Is there any space for the story to be told differently? Does the exhibition invite critique or gaps to be addressed? In the case of online exhibitions, the affordances and limits of each platform and the choice of how something can be seen or studied play a crucial role. Critical exhibition and source analysis brings these fields of inquiry together.

EXERCISE

Consult the visual constellation of the archive as a field for this module. Imagine you are confronted as curator with the difficult heritage of the photographs. As part of an exhibition, it is your task to work with the archive that contains these images. How would you go about exhibiting them? How would you describe them? What would your caption say? Would you choose to display them in a vitrine, on a wall, or projected? Would you display them at all, or instead hide certain aspects of them? Which material would accompany the selection? Once you have decided on a display, which you can either describe or sketch, please consult the following exhibitions, which include parts of the Hahne-Niehoff Archive:

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 Archiven* (see full reference on the right)
- "After Nature," The Humboldt Lab's
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**PRO
PE
RY**

PROPERTY

Database of German colonial punitive expeditions

with Yann LeGall

EDITORIAL NOTE

Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, European imperial powers transferred thousands of objects from their colonies to European museums. Many, if not most, of these items have now become part of inalienable European national heritage. They have become, in effect, European property. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) states in its “Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums,” signed by leading Western museum directors, including the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, that:

“Objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of that earlier era. The objects and monumental works that were installed decades and even centuries ago in museums throughout Europe and America were acquired under conditions that are not comparable with current ones. Over time, objects so acquired – whether by purchase, gift, or partage – have become part of the museums that have cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them.”(*ICOM News Magazine* 2004, 57 (1): 4)

European colonialisms were marked by the asymmetrical appropriation and subjugation of things and beings, knowledge and land. The public debate over the restitution and repatriation of goods and human remains, taken in unjust colonial contexts, has shaken what is understood as national property and cultural heritage today. *The Restitution of Knowledge. Artefacts as archives in the (post)colonial museum* is a project funded by the AHRC and German Research Foundation, and links researchers from Berlin’s Technical University and Oxford University. Cultural historian Yann LeGall is one of the researchers on the team led by Bénédicte Savoy and Dan Hicks, who investigates the appropriation and acquisition of objects, artworks, and human remains during the so-called punitive expeditions in former German colonies between 1884 and 1919. The project documents and analyses networks of expeditions, geneal-

ogies of appropriation, and location of loot in museum inventories and archives. It seeks to uncover and document stories of spoliation. In our conversation, LeGall explores the challenges of creating an archive of dispersed cultural heritage, loot, and colonial violence.

FURTHER MATERIAL

Website

https://www.kuk.tu-berlin.de/menue/forschung/einzelne_forschungsprojekte/the_restitution_of_knowledge/parameter/en/

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*“away from
taxonomy,*

A conversation *with*

Yann LeGall

*towards
stories”*

What do you understand by archiving?

I approached this question first in my work as an activist. With Berlin Postkolonial and Postcolonial Potsdam, we sought to bring a platform for those voices that had remained unheard for decades, even centuries. In my academic work, I concentrated on anything that had not been archived yet. The gaps, things that had remained unsaid, undocumented, unrecorded, unarchived. My question was: What has not been yet added to the bulk of colonial historiography? The borders between activism and academic work in my case are porous.

The process of archiving means to have these multiple perspectives collide with each other, but also complement each other. In the case of my Ph.D. thesis, it was important for me to have a digital platform, alongside the written thesis, *Remembering the Dismembered* (2021). How can academic work translate into something public and accessible—stories in different languages, for instance? The blog that I developed hosts recordings of the interviews that I conducted during my research. Photos and hyperlinks help to connect different histories of colonial violence that might not seem related at first sight. To me, this was a work of multidirectional memory following Michael Rothberg. I translated postcolonial ethnography into a multidirectional archive—allowing artistic or political ways of remembering violent pasts to coexist.

Which archiving infrastructures do you work with?

I've got a problem with the word "infrastructure." I hear it all the time, especially in working groups on colonial provenance research. There is talk of *Dateninfrastruktur* (data infrastructure). Our research data needs to be structured in some way, of course. But sometimes I think

that it's better to have this structure being born organically, and not to be doing taxonomy over and over again. Not classifying things *again*. In search of colonial plunder, there is so much visual, audio, textual material, but also spreadsheets, that often do not really fit in with each other. The challenge is therefore to move away from taxonomy, towards stories, by building a narrative. The structure of my research is rather the narrative than the different digital infrastructures that I use.

What kind of archives are you trying to build?

In our research project, *The Restitution of Knowledge*, we aspire to build an archive of so-called punitive expeditions. What is missing in today's research is a kind of macrohistorical view of colonial violence: What were those so-called punitive expeditions? Why, where, and how were they undertaken? We went through 240 military reports in the *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, the public organ of German colonial propaganda. We wanted to find out what defines a "punitive expedition" in German colonial contexts, how many can be recorded, and which kind of terminology is used. How often are words like *Strafzug* or *Strafexpedition* used? What is hidden behind colonial notions like *Unterwerfung* (subjugation) or *Züchtigung* (chastisement)? We're developing a critical semiotics of colonial propaganda inspired by the work of Kuassi Akakpo and Victor Klemperer, among others.

The next step is to link these expeditions to museum collections. Colonial historiography has for too long ignored museum collections as potential archives of violence and loss. With our colleagues in Oxford we try to bridge this gap. We reveal to what extent soldiers and colonial administrators looted and plundered during those expeditions. The confiscation of cattle is often mentioned in reports,

but objects, doorposts, or human remains are seldom referred to. These gaps can be filled to some extent thanks to museum archives. Yet, linking colonial expeditions and museum collections is never absolute. It's sometimes pure speculation. Very often, you have the name of the expedition, its beginning and end, you have the places that were attacked, the colonialist(s) who took part in the expedition, but you lack the names of African leaders and clear remarks on the appropriation of artifacts, deities, or royal insignia. Either you depart from colonial archives and try to link them to museum collections, or you depart from museum collections and museum archives, mapping activities of so-called collectors, and try to find out whether officers that sent objects to museums took part in military expeditions at the same time, in the same places. The intricate part of postcolonial provenance research is to retrace the routes of colonial regiments, and the violence exerted during those military expeditions. Whenever you find a precise geographical location in a museum collection, it's a blessing! Yet, it is the exception, rather than the rule.

In provenance research, you deal with the recording and understanding of indigenous languages. Not only did officers often write the names of the localities erroneously, but museum professionals, stenographers, and geographers reproduced those mistakes. You are therefore left with layers of flawed archives. To bypass such a thankless search for traces, we also sometimes depart from the museum database and see which objects we can straightforwardly link to a given expedition. This enables us to cluster related objects that might have been taken away during the same expedition, despite lacking or erroneous data.

*Who archives? For whom is
the archive?*

We have two types of interlocutors in the case of our research on expeditions in German Togo.

The first interlocutors are a dozen Togolese researchers, some from the University of Lomé, the rest in Germany, or in France. German Togo was advertised as a “model colony,” and colonial propaganda was so strong that military reports on colonial violence were willingly kept secret. The German administration did not want to publish anything on military undertakings, despite clear evidence that colonial violence was ubiquitous. Considering this myth on the history of German Togo, Togolese researchers told us that they wish for this history of colonial violence to be finally excavated and put in the spotlight. If we can find evidence of this history in museum collections, it’s even better.

The second interlocutor is obviously German museums. We also work with people that belong to both groups, such as Ohini Mawussé Toffa who works at the Grassi Museum in Leipzig. I am honestly indebted to museums. Without their cooperation and their databases, this research on colonial violence could not take place. Therefore, I wish to share the information we harvest from their archives. Coming back to your question, “Who archives?” Well, when you lead a research project, you build your own archive. Sometimes this archive doesn’t make sense to others, and sometimes, it cannot be accepted by others. For example, we use the word “colonialist” in our spreadsheets, rather than “collector.” We willingly change the language of museum databases for critical purposes. When sharing our research data with museum custodians, we heard comments such as, “these men were collectors” (*Sammler*). We would retort: “No, they weren’t, they were chiefly administrators and officers.” Besides, this terminology has for too long covered up the colonialists’ criminal actions. So, we de- and reconstruct the archive, and get

this kind of feedback. But the feedback that matters most is that of Togolese researchers.

At some point in this research, I will step out, because I think there's only so much you can explain, there's only so much you can tell about colonial violence with a positionality such as mine. My perspective is not the one that should be in the forefront in this debate. Before that, I will make those different archives accessible—museum archives, colonial archives, objects, photos, photographs. They must be accessible for further research and for the greater public.

*What does it mean for modernity to
bring this dark side of modernity—
coloniality—into the foreground?*

I believe in modernities, and not modernity. I think that there are many ways of being modern, many hybrid versions of what we often understand as monolithic European modernity.

When I mentioned special interlocutors, it doesn't mean that I ignore the German public, for example, or white male military historians. This research is also based on their work. But there is a need for a shift in language to tackle the omnipresence of coloniality in the modern European project. There's one key problem with the kind of research we are conducting: by listing all these expeditions, you can almost lose the preset that colonialism was an unjust regime. The danger is that a macrohistory of "punitive expeditions" can always be interpreted like: "There were all these moments of sheer violence, and the rest was okay." Besides, some Africans worked hands in hands with the colonialists. Some African nations also traded with colonialists and asked them to attack their neighbors. So, the problem with building clusters of expeditions and listing communities who suffered from those, is that you risk reproducing the notion of "divide and rule" in postcolonial historiography, singularizing those

who were the recipients of this violence and rubbing out the omnipresent state of colonial oppression. When I presented the project at the University of Hamburg, historian Jürgen Zimmerer criticized our macrohistorical approach for downplaying the fact that colonialism was an unjust regime, that it allowed Europeans to exploit, oppress, extract, and take advantage from the African continent as they saw fit. I still haven't found a way of reconciling both visions in one term or concept. My colleagues, Richard Tsogang Fossi, Sebastian Sprute, and Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, all speak of a state of permanent war, which caters to this predicament. I still fear that, whenever we publish this list of expeditions, it might be interpreted in a wrong way.

One of the aspects that comes out quite a bit, and especially in your position, is this line between fighting for a particular form of reckoning with the past, but at the same time doing incredibly detailed, factual, almost positivist kind of research. This is an incredibly difficult balance that you are dealing with, because it raises the question of how to deal with archives that are problematic or awkward.

I have this metaphor of body or an organ in my head, a metabolic metaphor that has been often used in the museum context, such as by Clémentine Deliss in her *Metabolic Museum–University*. By compiling this list of expeditions and plundered collections, you pinpoint all the tumors, working like a surgeon. Yet, can we find all of them? Is it at all possible to eradicate these metastases? We address them one after the other, but perhaps what's most important is to realize and recognize the fact that cancer has been there all the time. Was it the result

of something bigger than a single event—such as stress or trauma—something that has taken its toll on the whole body since its birth? By building a repertoire of bounded events, you might eclipse the history of the disease “colonialism”—and its manifestations elsewhere in the bodies of museums. Consider this: “between the twentieth and the thirtieth March 1901, Hermann Kersting led an expedition against the town of Ssiu.” What about the neighboring towns? How has this expedition affected them in the long term? How has this event—its preparation, proceedings and aftermath, the violence, the killings, but also the subsequent displacement of populations, symbols, objects—impacted local, national, and transnational history, until today? By focusing on the single tumors—expeditions—you should not forget to broaden the scope and address coloniality in its entirety.

Awkwardness is always there when dealing with colonial texts. Military reports are fraught with oppressive language, mostly racist and patriarchal views. The passive voice is also very problematic since it erases the agent from the syntax, hiding the oppressor, the one who looted what we like to call “belongings,” a term Priya Basil uses. This also relates to the kind of property archives speak about, namely to whom these artifacts belong, and, by extension, to whom this history belongs. For instance, it has been now widely recognized that ancestral remains were human victims of physical and epistemic violence and not “anthropological material,” though this shift in scientific language took a while to become standard practice. As far as material culture is concerned, the difference between *Eigentum* and *Besitz* plays a role. Emil Angehrn makes the distinction between *Besitz* as a kind of relation of power over things (decision-making power over property), while *Eigentum* refers to a legal or legitimate relation to things (for example, ethical ownership). So thinking about to whom these collections righteously belong, who is entitled to claim them and welcome them back, is different than asking who controls/retains/possesses them. A museum might hold an item and believe

it has the right to decide what will happen with it, yet this museum might not be the rightful owner of this item.

This relates back to awkwardness. If you find out that something has been plundered, but you cannot say to whom it genuinely belongs, it becomes delicate. Colonial archives have erased the names of local leaders and spiritual caretakers ante appropriation. In addition, some colonialists also swindled and acquired objects through extortion. Not all objects were robbed. So retracing ownership is always troublesome, and talking about “translocations,” “plunder”, or “confiscation” is never satisfactory, since none of these terms encompass all nuances of colonial practices of extraction.

When I work with visual material, such as maps, other issues arise. We often use colonial maps of German Togo to retrace the steps of colonialists who fed gluttonous museums with ethnographic objects. With my research assistants, Jeanne–Ange Wagne and Elias Aguijah, we worked on the 1898 expedition against the Kabiye and Lamba, during which three different colonial officers (Valentin von Massow, Hermann Kersting, and Gaston Thierry) took three different routes and all recorded the events differently. Their paths overlap but the names they ascribed to the same localities often differ. We used color to superimpose those paths, but the picture remains incomplete, especially because two of them failed to send military reports to the colonial government. Besides, Gaston Thierry segmented entire regions of German Togo in a map he sent to the museum in Leipzig to help ethnographers to assess roughly where the objects he had appropriated came from, but did not mention whether he acquired the different belongings during the aforementioned expedition. Add, on top of these incomplete reports, maps from colonial publications (such as the *Mittheilungen der deutschen Schutzgebiete*) and you end up with even more names and routes sketching military expeditions. That complicates the matter. Different mappings of the same region and the process of deciphering them spawn an awkward aloofness, a sense of being located so remotely from what happened in those

towns and villages at the time. This bird's eye view from a colonial standpoint lacks the tangible experience of being on the ground, of speaking with descendants of these communities on site, of connecting with sites of memory in Togo and Ghana today that relate to those historical events. Maps, reports, photographs, labels, and objects themselves can only be tools to ask questions about the violent history of museum collections; they can never tell the whole story. This brings us back full circle to the importance of stepping back and letting other voices occupy the stage.

**VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD**

Map of punitive expeditions in German Togo, marked by Yann LeGall. In: Peter Sebald (ed.), *Die Eroberung von Nordtogo 1896 - 1899: Tagebücher und Briefe. Valentin von Massow*. Cognoscere Historias, vol. 21, Bremen: Edition Falkenberg, 2014, p. 525.

Project pinboard (Cameroon), chalkboard with a list of punitive expeditions (in the background), 2021. Photographer: Yann LeGall

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Project pinboard (Togo) at different stages of research, 2021.
Photographer: Yann LeGall

METHOD

Anthropological provenance research builds on the study of the history and social life of objects. For anthropologist Larissa Förster (2019), there are five components that characterize provenance research as anthropological. Firstly, it concerns the questioning of museal categories, such as “original” or “copy.” It aims not to underscore the originality or fakeness of objects but to study the ascription and construction of meaning and value. Secondly, anthropological provenance research moves beyond a mere “chain of ownership” and seeks to attend to divergent understandings of ownership and property. It doesn’t look for the owner of an object, but considers a whole network of claims that have emerged around an object and whose transmission therefore relies on legal practices, discussions of rights, and norms. Thirdly, anthropological provenance research focuses on spaces of negotiation, resistance, and self-empowerment of local actors in colonial situations. It highlights ambivalent strategies, roles, and figures. Fourthly, essentializing ascriptions of objects to so-called source communities are dissolved to move away from the assumption that objects could simply be placed back in an unchanged context of origin. Lastly, anthropological provenance research recognizes local imaginaries of the subjecthood of things according to which objects may be alive, possess a soul, or embody ancestors and gods. Henceforth, objects can be understood as actants and subjects. Methodologically, this implies that such provenance research takes into account oral history and performatively transmitted knowledge about the past of an object, which considers possible contradictions to archival knowledge from European colonial institutions. Anthropological provenance research operates through a transnational perspective. Research

questions and strategies are worked out together and from the outset with implicated stakeholders and institutions. The inclusion of “indigenous voices” through singular consultations is replaced through long-term professional partnerships.

EXERCISE

We invite you to attempt provenance research, which can be done with or without physical access to archives. Not having such access echoes pandemic scholarly working conditions, but it also points out the asymmetrical access to resources and archives. Therefore, consider the question of who has access to what kinds of information in archives and collections. The focus of this task is specific object-, person-, or event-based traces in museum collections.

Visit a publicly accessible museum database. If you want to focus on German museums, this list of databases of German museums holding collections from colonial contexts might be helpful (https://www.cp3c.org/3-road-strategy/link_collection.php). You can also choose to work with one of the two German pilot projects which conglomerate information from different museums, a database devoted to collections from colonial contexts (<https://ccc.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/?lang=en>), or the database devoted to Benin Bronzes held in German museums (<https://www.cp3c.org/benin-bronzes/>).

When doing research on an object, please bear in mind the following questions: How are the objects named and categorized? Which questions can you answer about an object based on the information you have? Which questions remain open that you wish to ask? Please take notes on the objects you research.

Compare your findings with entries in other museum databases, such as those of the Musée du Louvre, the Musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac, or the British Museum. How do the grids differ in their taxonomies and structure?

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**NATU
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NATURE

Museum für Naturkunde Berlin

with Tahani Nadim

EDITORIAL NOTE

The distinction between nature and culture is one of the most pervasive dual categorizations of the humanities and social sciences, and has affected the way we study and classify the world in which we live. Historically established taxonomies continue to affect the order of museums and the location of artifacts and specimen. The Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (Museum of Natural History Berlin) is one of the largest of its kinds and has continuously emphasized research in and on its collections as part of the museum work. It is an institute of the Leibniz-society and visited by more than 700,000 people every year. It comprises more than thirty million objects drawn from zoology, paleontology, geology, and mineralogy. The museum emerged from three museums, which were founded in the year 1810 alongside Berlin's Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (today: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). Roughly around 1880, the collections had already filled two thirds of the central building of the university and a new building was inaugurated by Kaiser Wilhelm II on Invalidenstraße in Berlin-Mitte. Tahani Nadim, sociologist of science, is Junior Professor of Socio-Cultural Anthropology at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage in a joint appointment between the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin. There, she manages the Humanities of Nature department. She is also director of the unofficial research section bureau for troubles at the museum. We met her in the gardens of the museum, where we recorded our conversation, which addresses the troubles that emerge when digitizing a collection of analogue specimen.

NATURE

FURTHER MATERIAL

Website

<https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/de/wissenschaft/bureau-troubles>

<https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/science/humanities-nature>

Exhibition

"digitize!" Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, 27 October 2021–present.

<https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/museum/exhibitions/digitize>

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*“doubling
the
troubles”*

A conversation

with Tahani Nadim

*What do you understand
by archiving?*

Firstly, archiving is a matter of capturing something and preserving it, committing it to a specific state that can be accessed and used again. Of course, the question is: What's the object of the archiving of this practice? When it comes to the object of *nature*, it becomes interesting to ask what a record is. Is the record a salamander, or is it maybe a piece of a feather, or is it a sheet of a dried plant? When you look at these kinds of records, then the process of archiving is a very involved process that requires all kinds of expertise and instruments and skills. It is not just a translation of something into a state that is then accessible in the future, but it's also a transformation. And in terms of nature, it always involves killing. Although, of course, the next question is "Are there archives of nature where the records are alive? Zoos might like to think of themselves as archives of records that are still living, or perhaps barely living. And maybe it's also a process that never ends. Once you commit something to an archive, the process of archiving continues in the maintenance of the records and the objects, and in the making and guaranteeing of access. That's something that continuously requires a lot of labor and work. It is a transformative process. It is something that doesn't end or it doesn't end easily.

*Which archiving infrastructures exist
in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin?
In other words, how and where is
archiving done?*

There are two ways of answering this question. The first way would be the professional answer, which would go as follows: In relation to objects, we are not archiving. There are collections, but these are

not archives. Therefore, there's a distinct pathway to the archiving of documents, and archives, and the collection of objects. These are different practices. I think it's important to think these two relationally, or to think them together. Where else do you draw the line between an archival record, such as a document, and for example, the labels that are created to go with the objects? These items all become integrated with the object into a single unit that goes into the collections.

But, of course, there is also a "proper" archive here, the *Historische Arbeitsstelle*. This is the institutional archive of the museum. It fulfills the legal requirements of a public institution to have an institutional archive that documents or preserves correspondences including those about the running of the museum, the management of collections, and the scientific work. This might include, for example, the papers of curators and scientists, comprising, among other things, laboratory protocols and correspondences from the scientific activities in the collections. The infrastructures, then, are very basic. You have a site and, of course, you have too few people to do the archiving and to take care of the archive and provide access.

Then, even though I don't know whether we can see them as part of the archiving apparatus, there are all the systems in place for all staff members to document their achievements for auditing purposes. That is also an interesting archiving mechanism. Everyone is asked to record their professional appearances in, for example, conferences, their teaching, etc. So there's an archive of the *Leistungskriterien* (performance criteria) of research staff here. There are very idiosyncratic kinds of archiving structures in the different collections and departments. While you have a collection catalog that covers most of the collections, each collection has its own archiving infrastructure. Our department, Humanities of Nature, archives its projects and activities using a shared drive on the Museum's server. Maybe infrastructure is too large a word for this: mechanisms, perhaps. This also includes collections, and all the subject-specific

publications for each collection. But again, this is not a standardized archival infrastructure.

What is the relation between the archives here and the digital database systems?

Specify is the main collection catalog in use. The historical archive is currently in the process of acquiring a new archival software system. Then, of course, you will have, again, very idiosyncratic solutions within not just one collection, but even specific sub-collections. You still have Excel spreadsheets, you still have card indexes that are not digitized. Your question I understand as asking: What ontology does the database represent? Does it mirror the way in which things are represented and ordered in the collection? Or does it represent more of a universal logic that doesn't depend on individual institutional expressions? I think it's always a mixture. Of course, with natural history, you have a very dominant framework in which you categorize objects, and that's Linnaean taxonomy. It remains the primary mode of ordering. Most of the collections are ordered according to taxonomy. Paleobotany isn't. Paleobotany is, on the primary level, organized according to where it was found.

What's more interesting is the negotiation over which fields are deemed necessary and which fields are not necessary. It's a very sensitive process, because it is then that you decide what gets recorded and what doesn't get recorded. It is a very politically charged question, especially for people like us who are interested in the sociohistorical context of objects.

Who archives in the museum?

It is always a negotiation between the individuals, such as the curators of collections. Often this has to do with certain subjective affinities or fears over what gets recorded and what doesn't get recorded. It also has to do with practicalities. Oftentimes, it's a matter of pragmatics. But of course, pragmatics don't mean that it's not in any way without consequence – pragmatic questions can have huge political consequences. And for natural history, there's a very strong sense of staying true to "the science," staying true to what's understood as scientific accuracy, the scientific order of the world, and specific expertise that comes with that. It becomes interesting once different types of expertise come in. We see this, for example, with provenance research. There's a different kind of expertise coming in with different data requirements. It is often not so much a question of curators not wanting a certain kind of information in the database, but rather that they don't feel like they have the expertise to maintain this information in a good way. So, it's more of a systemic question: What institutional provisions are put in place to ensure that this expertise is really integrated into the knowledge production? That is when it becomes a much more interesting debate. Because then it becomes a matter of committing funds and resources to have this expertise.

*For whom is this archiving done?
What's the horizon of use that is
envisaged?*

Again, this is currently being negotiated and debated in relation to the digitization of the collections. This debate takes place against the backdrop of a very dominant narrative of the democratization of access, and the idea that digitization will extend reach and impact.

The idea is that this will open it up to anyone, anywhere at any time. I attended several meetings of international digitization efforts. When it comes to putting the work into imagining its uses and users, it stays extremely limited to the kinds of people with whom those who do the digitization are working. The users are therefore usually other scientists. A favorite user figure is of course the creative industries. But this also has to do with public institutions needing to appeal to certain governmental priorities, like branding Berlin as the “Brain City” and start-up haven.

Which key questions or problems does the archive raise?

For my work, one of the most interesting moments is the ongoing digitization. On the one hand, we can say it's doubling the collection. You don't have just a physical collection anymore, but you suddenly have another collection of digital specimens. And they require an equal amount of labor and logistics, not the kind of logistics that we might associate with physical specimens, but they do require all kinds of material infrastructures. If we're doubling the collection, we are then also reproducing the kinds of gaps and absences that we have in the physical collection. Will the absence that's currently making it impossible, for example, to produce a list of the objects that were retrieved from German East Africa, remain the same in the digital collection?

This is not just a translation of a physical item into a digital item, but a transformation. You're creating something new. So the second problem is: We are doubling the troubles. Is this qualitatively changing the kind of problem that we have? Does it change from a blind spot to an active refusal? And then the third question is: What new troubles do we invite by creating dependencies on new kinds of hardware and new kinds of software and their legal regimes? These troubles are also interesting to investigate through archival moments

or technologies, because archival mechanisms like classifications and categorizations are performative. They are world-making. And so it also becomes a question of what kinds of new categories are introduced in the digitization effort? And what kinds of worlds do they create?

Could you give an example for the “turning from a blind spot into active refusal” and the idea of the introduction of new worlds through new categories?

Most of the collections are inherited. This means that the people who are managing collections now are not necessarily the people who have collected them and, therefore, they've inherited generations of absences. We are at a moment of transformation during which a decision needs to be taken as to what information we record. And so, rather than inheriting it, it's now a matter of saying, “No, we're not recording this,” or “Yes, we are recording only this,” or, “We are recording it in this and not that way.” That is what I mean by changing from blind spots to active refusals. I'm not saying that blind spots are in any way less troublesome than active refusal. It's just a different mode.

In terms of world-making categories, I find it fascinating how, through digitization, insect bodies are transformed into digital patterns: based on hi-res digitized images, algorithms are trained to extract relevant features for identification, like size, ratios, outlines. In automated taxonomic identification, algorithms are used to calculate and compare these patterns and then make inferences about what species a newly collected specimen might belong to. So, it's a logic of recognition that's being built through digitization, not just in the exhibition hall where we can witness the mass digitization of

insects from the collections but also on much larger scales, such as in the monitoring of global biodiversity.

Does this process differ from other processes of digitization in collections and archives?

Yes and no. In my work I'm interested in the continuities and the breaks with other domains, other times. Different object types are currently being digitized and for each type, the exact process varies. Nevertheless, they are connected, not least through a shared imaginary of access and openness, as well as technical standards. I'm interested in how and when things converge and diverge. These are not merely technical processes, but algorithmic modes of processing the world that are not exclusive to natural history museums and natural history objects. These are modes of processing the world that we also have for the recognition of human faces, for example, and for securitization regimes, border regimes, and so on. On the infrastructural level or the sub-infrastructure level, we see a convergence of specific technologies and their quantifications. In the end, it's all about quantifications—turning things into numbers that make the world governable for a specific rationale. One of the things that I'd like to think about is how the museum is not this closed unit where only dead salamanders get processed. It is also a machine that's in the world and then makes the world in certain ways, and vice versa.

Would you describe this tension between specimens and their data equivalents as an awkward one?

Data is always awkward because it's fraught with, what Paul Edwards has called, "data frictions." The making of data is a process with continuous trade-offs and frictions. In the nature of data, there's awkwardness. Genetic barcodes are meant to represent or even *are* the definitive representation of a species in many policy contexts. It is already an awkward moment that a string of four letters represents a breathing, living organism out there, and more than that – all living breathing organisms of the same kind. There are a lot of mental and affective hoops one has to jump through to make this work.

Awkwardness is not a quality of the data, but a quality of the relations between the data formations. I can also see awkwardness in the encounters between collection and curatorial concerns, and the concerns of the people who are organizing and managing the digitization. Very different priorities, different emotional attachments, are at play here, including affective and emotional attachments to how data is meant to look. Here aesthetics comes into play, but also the imperative of a spreadsheet that is to be filled, and the unhappiness if you leave something blank.

Do you have to work against these tensions?

I think it's important to retain the awkwardness because it keeps you on your toes, and maybe you must account for yourself and for your investments or attachments. You have to articulate at least what it is that you want. It demands something of you, this awkwardness. And, of course, this place is filled with fraught objects of all kinds.

A key term, if you want to talk about archives, is value. It is curious that the first thing many museums are digitizing are insect collections. Nothing signals mass digitization, and a digitization at an industrial scale, like insects. At the same time, I find it almost moving; the incredible technological investment, and not just

socio-technological investment, that is, the detail and the precision, by which the digitization takes place. We have robotic arms, and conveyor belts; machines purpose-built for some of the smallest beings. You find these tiny leaf bugs, and ants, put on a pole on a little pad and they travel along in this digitization suite. In front of the cameras, for a moment, they're superstars. And then they appear on the screen and are suddenly huge. The digitization company will not tell you that this is what it is about, but it's also an expression of great appreciation for these tiny things that people would normally kill if they ran across the table. So maybe there's an awkwardness in the digitization that comes by switching scales.

In other words, committing something to an archive is also an expression of a certain value of choice. Archiving is also, to come back to your initial question, the process of selection.

VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD

Close-up of insect from the collection of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, 2021,
Photographer: TeamDigitize.



Digitizing station with insect, 2021, Photographer: Taco van der Elb.



Digitizing station with conveyor belt for insects, 2021,
Photographer: Thomas Rosenthal.



METHOD

The field note is perhaps one of the most rudimentary and widely used tools for documenting observations made in a field. It is equally contested, since it variously mixes or separates subjective from scientific remarks, and it is the first construction of a narrative that goes with authorial and editorial decisions. Field notes often are taken on the spot, but may include reflections on experiences. They can also include drawings and often serve as *aides-mémoires* for later write-ups and ethnography. Field notes are the raw material of a narrative yet to be constructed.

EXERCISE

Museums and laboratories are sites in which multiple writing practices overlap: the log book in the lab, the documentation of labor, the diary, scientific journals, minutes of meetings and proceedings, annual and performance reports. Spend one morning or afternoon in the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, if possible. If not, choose another one. Walk through the museum and find a spot—a corner, a bench, a hallway, or a vitrine—as your position. Observe what happens around you. Do people respond to your presence as an observer? Do others observe *you*? How do you feel in the (potentially still) presence of other objects and subjects? Do you feel alone among the vitrines, objects, collections, and specimen, or do they appear as your “company?” Write a diary entry for a fixed time period and don’t move from this location. Reflect on your choices of writing material: Did you choose to write with pen on paper, or do you type into your phone? Perhaps you record voice notes to yourself? Do you take any pictures, or make any sketches to help you remember the situation? What did you choose to observe? What surprised you? Were you bored, scared, embarrassed?

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SEXUALITY

Naomi Wilzig Art Collection (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)
with Hannes Hacke

EDITORIAL NOTE

The archiving of sexuality-related materials has a contested and fraught history. All too often the assumption of a white heterosexual norm informs collections, exhibitions, archives, perspectives, vocabularies, and means of describing relations between things, humans, and animals. The access to sexually explicit materials in public institutions was often heavily regulated. Often, only private collectors assembled these materials. Since 2017, the Research Center for the Cultural History of Sexuality at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin has loaned, indexed, and exhibited objects from The Naomi Wilzig Art Collection based in Miami. Naomi Wilzig (1934–2015) started collecting erotic art in 1983, and in 2005 opened the World Erotic Art Museum (WEAM) in Miami Beach, Florida. She sought to make erotic art publicly available and show how sexuality is a significant aspect of human existence. The collection comprises more than 4000 objects from different centuries, continents, and cultures, and provides a basis for the research into the cultural history of sexuality, gender, love, gendered images, emotions, and desires. The collection conveys insights into sexuality in culturally specific forms and manifestations. It is comparable to the collection which the Jewish sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935) kept in his Institute of Sex Research in Berlin until it was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933. The Research Center for the Cultural History of Sexuality is an interdisciplinary research institute which was founded in 2012 and works on questions of the cultural history of sexuality in the 19th and 20th centuries from a literary, cultural, and historical perspective. The research and exhibition project on the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection places the collection of erotic art in a new context, by looking at the objects as evidence of a cultural history of sexuality from ancient times to the present. The goal is to document the collection for future use and establish a database of the collection for research and teaching, to publicly display objects from the collection in cooperation with other museums, as well as the development of methods of object-based learning on the history of sexuality. The projects are realized in cooperation with different

Berlin museums (Werkbundarchiv—Museum der Dinge, Bode-Museum, Museum Europäischer Kulturen). We spoke with Hannes Hacke, who is research assistant and collection manager at the interdisciplinary Research Center for the Cultural History of Sexuality, who provides insight into the complexities of archiving and documenting a collection of sexually explicit objects and establishing new forms of indexing and description for making such a collection available for public research.

FURTHER MATERIAL

Webside

<https://hu.berlin/naomi-wilzig-collection>

<https://www.weammuseum.com/blog>

Interview with Naomi Wilzig:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X4vZyeawPKw>

Exhibitions

"Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935)", WEAM, Miami Beach, Florida, 2017. <https://www.literatur.hu-berlin.de/de/forschung/archive-forschungsstellen/forschungsstelle-kulturgeschichte-der-sexualitaet/exhibition-magnus-hirschfeld-1868-1935>

"The Eroticism of Things. Collections on the History of Sexuality," curated with the Werkbundarchiv–Museum der Dinge, Berlin, 2018. <http://www.museumderdinge.org/exhibitions/eroticism-things-collections-history-sexuality>

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*“I can’t
use*

A conversation

with Hannes Hacke

*this
system”*

How and where is archiving done in the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection?

The collection was compiled by the private American collector Naomi Wilzig (1934–2015). In the 1980s Wilzig decided to move from New York to Miami and started collecting erotic art or, more broadly speaking, cultural objects connected to sexuality. First, this was a private passion, but at some point, her whole house was filled with thousands of objects. Therefore, in 2005, she decided to found her own private museum, which she called the “World Erotic Art Museum” (Now: “WEAM – Wilzig Erotic Art Museum”) in South Beach, Miami. When she turned 80, she started thinking about what would happen to the collection after her death and approached some universities in Florida to take over this collection. But the universities in Florida declined this offer. She then approached the Research Center for the Cultural History of Sexuality for Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin to take on this collection as a gift, topped with the funding to do research, house, and index the collection. Two weeks before the agreement with Naomi Wilzig was formalized, she unfortunately passed away. The project was then transformed into a research and exhibition project in collaboration with WEAM and the Kinsey Institute in Bloomington, USA.

The collection is comprised of more than 4000 different kinds of objects coming from many different parts of the world, spanning two millennia and covering all different kinds of sexualities and practices: from nineteenth century European paintings, Roman oil lamps, Japanese Shunga prints, twentieth century everyday objects, Ghanaian statues, to contemporary American artists. My tasks have been to research, document, and index the collection, and to curate exhibitions with objects from the collection in Berlin.

How has the collection come about?

Naomi Wilzig was a lay collector and was driven by her interest in erotic artworks and objects. But she soon saw it as her mission to present the collection to a wider audience in order to help liberalize attitudes towards sexuality in the United States. Her intention was to show to the public how pervasive the depiction of sexuality and eroticism has been throughout history and the world for people to realize that sexuality is not something “deviant” or “shameful,” but something “natural” and universal that needs to be celebrated. She encountered several hurdles as a female collector in the field of erotic art. Collecting in general is often connected to wealth and it is often men who have these funds, and who do this collecting. The field of erotic art is an area especially dominated by men—by male collectors and male vendors. In the beginning, she had a lot of problems getting access to this material. Vendors at markets in Europe and the US wouldn’t show these materials to her, wouldn’t sell them to her and sometimes wouldn’t even tell her that they had these materials, even if she asked. She perceived this very much as a matter of being a woman in this field who was not taken seriously and deemed unfit to collect explicit sexual materials. She challenged these notions.

How was the collection documented?

WEAM is a private museum, which was run by herself and a few employees. Naomi Wilzig spent most of her days in the museum itself, greeting visitors, and giving tours. There was no systematic documentation of the collection, nor was there a systematic archiving of her personal files and museum archive. Nevertheless, there exists some sort of documentation of the collection: there are label texts in the museum, Excel files, folders with information on selected objects, records of her purchases, and she published five catalogs on the collection. For me, the catalogs have been an important source of information about the objects and about her framing and inter-

pretation of the objects and artworks. In part because of the Covid-19 pandemic and missing customs clearances, most of the objects have had to stay in the USA and I have had to work mostly with digital images and the catalogs.

How do you do documentation and archiving work? Which infrastructures exist?

The Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin has an online database for the university collections. But the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection differs in many ways from the other university collections. Most of the collections arrive from within a discipline. They've been collected as part of teaching or excursions or research projects, or are even part of the teaching itself, for example, in biology and medicine. The collection management system is set up for these types of collections of materials that are embedded within a discipline. The art collection of these erotic, sexually explicit images doesn't fit into the taxonomy or the system of this collection management system. Additionally, the collection management system is only in German, which is why I was not able to use it for the English documentation of the Naomi Wilzig Collection. I simply can't use this system. I have therefore been mostly working with excel files and using the media repository of the university to present the collection online.

How do you go about the process of developing a taxonomy for the collection?

I've been working intensely on the revision of the documentation of the collection in order to produce an online database of the collec-

tion. For that purpose, all the objects have had to be assessed and a data management plan set up, and all the metadata had to be standardized. This also included checking if the information on each object is correct. This process of revising the existing documentation and classification has produced a range of practical, theoretical, political, and ethical questions and is still ongoing. On the one hand, I am digitally documenting the collection: First converting the analogue information from labels, files, and catalogs into a digital format.

On the other hand, one main task has been looking critically at the collection documentation as a way of making sense or producing knowledge about sexuality. The ethical and political questions include how objects are named, how they are classified, which keywords are applied to them, and to find ways to describe sexuality related artworks and objects in a discrimination-aware manner. This task of revising the documentation of the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection has necessitated me to mine different thesauri, vocabularies, word lists, and references in order to develop a critical terminology for documenting sexuality related objects and artworks. This was necessary because the existing thesauri and classifications, such as AAT or Iconclass, either have huge gaps when it comes to sexuality and/or are laden with discriminatory and outdated terms, definitions, and relationships. Therefore, it was necessary to start developing a critical vocabulary for describing and documenting sexualities, bodies, and practices that tries to counter patriarchal values, heteronormative framings, colonial erasure, and ableist notions.

A critical examination of the collection itself was at the start of this project. One of the major concerns—and that's not only my own thinking—is the universalisation of a Western notion of sexuality or eroticism, in relation to the colonial endeavors of “collecting the world.” Wilzig saw a purpose in collecting the artworks and objects from around the world and subsumed a lot of materials and objects under this Western rubric of “eroticism.” This epistemology frames these objects. Although the objects may not fit into this framework

and have different meanings and epistemologies connected to them, especially if they are from a non-Western context. Naomi Wilzig's collecting was centred on the fact that, if there's a naked body, if people are having sex, or it has to do with "fertility" (and the artwork appealed to her), then it became part of her erotic art collection. But framing the objects as "erotic art" was also a strategic choice influenced by her struggle to fund her museum in the USA. The term "erotic art" or "erotica" is an established art historical term and was useful for her mission to present her collection as something respectful, valuable, and tasteful, and to distance herself from "pornography". For that reason, she also did not collect photography, because photographs in her opinion were too easily identified as pornography. For the Western classification of these materials in the twentieth and twenty-first century, the differentiation between erotic art/Erotica and pornography have been and still are fraught and contested. The juridical, cultural, and political dimensions of these categories have shifted over time and are still being debated—we just have to think about the censorship of female nipples on social media platforms. Naomi Wilzig faced a lot of hurdles in finding a space for the museum and being able to advertise it. A lot of municipalities in Florida said, "No, we don't want this type of museum" or would not let her advertise it in the city. These discussions about which categorization is respectable and permissible, and the legal and political consequences stemming from this, are an integral part of the framing of the collection.

*Which taxonomies were applied
in the museum?*

Naomi Wilzig pursued personal interests and themes, such as “Leda and the Swan,” “Adam and Eve,” “Lady Godiva”, and collected established, as well as unknown artists that she was interested in. But especially in the beginning she also collected quite randomly any erotic material that she could find. She was driven by the desire to collect as much as possible and to create a universal collection. The taxonomy of the museum, and the layout of the permanent collection, shows this very well. The organization of the permanent exhibition in the WEAM was an eclectic mixture of geographical, temporal, subject, and identity related factors, as well as object types and size, art styles, and sexual practices. There was not necessarily a serendipity to it, but more of a mixing of personal taste, established art historical taxonomies of showcasing art and practical concerns of the museum layout.

Naomi Wilzig was not too interested in distinguishing between what is a copy and what is an original, between artworks, design objects, “high art,” folk art, unknown artists, everyday objects, dolls, archeological artifacts, etc. She was also not very much interested in the actual history or context of the objects. Some of the objects were not deemed “erotic” in their original context in the sense that we use the word today; or they were not seen as artworks at all.

Naomi Wilzig’s taxonomy also transpired into the descriptions of objects, the interpretations in the catalogs or into the label texts in the museum. Especially the way non-Western objects are described, often reflects Western values or even a racist or colonial language. Katherine Sender has analyzed the progression narrative in the permanent exhibition of WEAM, which starts with Adam and Eve, then Greek and Roman culture, then Africa, Asia, and on to Western modernity and contemporary art. This progression narrative is pervasive in museums in general, but also in the field of sexuality, where themes of repression and liberation of sexuality are infused by notions of Western universal values. Another defining element is the pervasive heteronormativity, whiteness, and patriarchal framing

of sexuality. This reflects the wider art historical canon and historical limitations that characterize most museum collections in the Western world. Most of the images in the collection are of nude white women and/or nude white heterosexual couples having sex that were produced by men for men. The male and patriarchal gaze on female bodies is very dominant. There are exceptions, of course, but the main bulk of the collection reflects power structures within wider society. One example of this is that often in history, Greek mythology has been used to address sexual or erotic themes in art. But often, these are violent stories of women being raped, kidnapped, ravished, and so forth. Although the painting or drawing or statue itself might not depict this as a violent act, the story behind it is about sexual violence. But this is seldom addressed.

So, there are three main problems that I have been dealing with whilst revising the documentation: the colonial aspect of how to frame non-Western objects, the pervasive heteronormativity, patriarchal gaze inherent in these objects and the types of depictions, titles and descriptions of bodies, sexual identities, practices and sexual violence. And finally, questions related to the origin and context of use: Where is this from? Who produced this as an artwork? What is this object intended for?

What kind of theoretical stance with regard to archiving do you draw upon when archiving?

On the one hand, there are questions related to the data infrastructure. The goal of revising the documentation is to make the collection more accessible to other researchers, but also for a general public through more thorough and correct descriptions, by assigning key words and standardizing the documentation. The other question is how to do that without reproducing racist, sexist, heteronorma-

tive language that is used in some of the descriptions and framings of the collection. To counter heteronormative ways of talking about sexuality, for example, finding phrases that don't reproduce the binary of activity/passivity as male/female especially in the depiction of heterosexual sex. How do we counter this in the descriptions and taggings of objects and artworks? There are no easy solutions for this, but I have been guided by approaches from Queer Museology and Queer Museum Studies, which analyse formations of sexuality and gender in the museum and question categorization processes in the museum. I also draw on approaches of *radical cataloging* or *radical librarianship*, which tackle discriminations and exclusions in library catalogs and strive for fundamental changes in library catalogs. *Radical cataloging* criticizes inequalities and hierarchies inscribed in cataloging rules and classifications, and also looks at the terms and the language used as keywords. The goal is to improve access to collections for users and at the same time use cataloging as a strategic political intervention in power relations. I therefore sought to find new terminology and searched for different sources for discrimination-aware terminology on sexuality. I first looked at established thesauri, such as the Arts and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), as well as Iconclass, and the German Authority File (GND), but these thesauri have unsurprisingly proven to be very reductive, normative, and patchy when it comes to sexuality, and they lack nuance and diversity.

I therefore turned to other sources, such as the Homosaurus, which is a thesaurus developed by IHLIA a Dutch LGBTI Archive, and the US-based "Digital Transgender Archive," which includes terminology from around the world when it comes to gender and sexuality. This thesaurus was very helpful for addressing LGBTIQ content. But as eighty percent of the objects in the collection are about heterosexuality, I had to look further. I therefore also drew on the thesaurus of the Kinsey Institute, which they developed for the cataloguing of their own collection of sexual materials and artworks. But this thesaurus

also has its limitations, as it is framed by a sexological view on sexuality. Sexological language often doesn't do justice to the diversity of sexualities and has been complicit in the normative and violent history of naming, dissecting, pathologizing, and discrimination of non-normative sexualities. I therefore also took other resources into account, coming from feminist and queer sex education and gender studies. Sex education has developed resources and terminology to talk about sexuality to a wide range of audiences in a respectful, meaningful, and accessible way, and feminist linguistics have produced critical scholarship on the history of the gendered body, and the classification and naming of body parts.

Together with interns and international students I have been mining these different thesauruses for different kinds of descriptions and terms, and we developed a long list of terms with sources, definitions, and scope notes on the usage. We also listed terms that we do not want to use and why this is so. Beyond the critical reassessment of existing terminology, we also included colloquial terms, because users would maybe rather search for the term "blowjob" and not "fellatio". But then again "blowjob" isn't the word that we find most adequate for what's happening because the term "job" carries a lot of bias. But if we use "fellatio," will people find it if they're looking for this kind of sexual act? I have different audiences in mind in terms of what terminology to use. Ideally, a relational database could connect those terms but, as I pointed out, there have been infrastructural hurdles to jump.

*What roles do affect and emotion play
when working with and in the archive?*

They play a large role! This is because the production, presentation, and viewing of explicit images of sexuality is something that is highly

regulated in Western culture and is often cordoned off into a private space, and still carries stigma, and, in some parts, is also criminalized. The first emotions one might think of are desire, lust, or arousal. But actually, this has rarely happened for me, I have to say. It is rather boredom that has been a prevailing affective response. In light of the abundance and dominance of heterosexual images, you just get so bored of seeing another heterosexual sex scene or another white nude woman. The poses, positions, and scenes are very repetitive and the artistic repertoire is limited. This is, of course, also related to the difficult means of production and circulation. Another emotion is discomfort, or even annoyance. Especially regarding images of sexuality that dehumanize and objectify women, or have racist tropes. Another feeling might be amusement, because these artworks also reflect Western sexual repressive culture and the dominance of the Church. It can be amusing at times, the ideas people that have come up with in order to share hidden sexual images. Looking at this from a historical perspective, repression and obfuscation are such a big part of the construction of sexuality.

There is also awkwardness that comes with working with explicit images of sexuality. While researching I often come across sites which state, "not safe for work." There can be an awkwardness in looking at explicit images on your computer at work when that is usually shunned, because sexuality is still not a topic like any other, whether in a museum setting or the university. The reactions that I get when I talk about what I do just speak volumes. There's either an anxiety or a sensationalism about it or it is not taken seriously. It's perceived as a special interest topic, although, I would say that sexuality is quite pervasive and central to human life. There's still a great lack of knowledge around sexuality. People are unaccustomed to talking about sexuality, which words to use, especially in a professional setting. It can be awkward, and it is then often my job to lead the way by being explicit and using explicit terms in spaces where they are normally not uttered.

How can the awkwardness become useful or productive? What are the central questions that this awkwardness and the archive raise for you?

I think art and objects can bridge the awkwardness many experience when talking about sexuality and it's an untapped potential for museums to investigate sexuality in relation to material culture. It is productive to think of museums as spaces to engage people with that topic. Sexuality is a relevant social issue, and museums should strive to become spaces that explicitly address it. Museums and their collections of artifacts and artworks addressing sexuality have played an important role in the production of sexual knowledge. But the public display of these collections has always been contentious. There is a lack of educational concepts and methods for talking about sexuality in a museum setting, as well as still deeply held restrictive notions of talking about sex. At the same time, museums have often excluded sexualities and perspectives of women, people of color, queer people, disabled people, sex workers, indigenous people, and people from other marginalized communities. Collections of artifacts and artworks addressing sexuality could have a special role for investigating how to exhibit sexuality and find compelling critical narratives and ways of exhibiting and taxonomies of sexuality. Exhibition spaces engaging communities of different sorts, educating about sexuality, questioning histories of sexuality and the role of sexualities in history. The problem is that most "sex museums" don't do a very good job at this, but I think there would be a potential for museums that focus on sexuality as larger institutions are often afraid of addressing this topic, and also don't have the knowledge and the training to do that kind of critical work around sexuality. The Naomi Wilzig Art Collection has interesting objects and artworks that speak of different sexual practices, depictions, identities, com-

munities, and life worlds. Pornography, or erotic images, were used to voice social criticism, for example, to question class boundaries. I think sexually explicit images have had, and still have, various functions. It is productive to think about the categorization of something as “explicit,” “obscene,” “pornographic,” “high art,” “erotic,” and how these kinds of boundaries have shifted over time.

The relevant social issues that the collection raises, I think, are the enduring regulation, criminalization, pathologizing, damnation, and discrimination of diverse sexualities, of sex work, kink, and LGBTQ, and the struggle of marginalized people for representation, access, and livelihood, the fight for reproductive rights and access to sex education, contraception, and abortion, and, of course, also the norms governing the representation, archiving, documentation, and description of sexuality. The latter involves the development of discrimination-aware, trans-inclusive, pro-feminist, queer language around sexualities and bodies of which I talked earlier.

Another concern are the effects of the categorization and classification of sexuality. In my work I have been thinking about queer ways of archiving and searching for new archival representations, and relations that go beyond the kind of taxonomy and systematization of language and representations. A queer theoretical approach that questions the normative power of clearly identifiable identities, such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, trans, or cis. For me, the issue is how to engage with this on a collective level because I think that's a social concern for archiving in general: What does it mean to make non-normative sexuality visible? People might look at the collection, wanting to find depictions of, for example, bisexual, gay or lesbian sexualities. But tagging objects with “lesbianism,” “homosexuality,” or “heterosexuality” reinforces a binary system of easily identifiable categories and strengthens a taxonomic system that has historically excluded non-normative sexualities. It's a continuation of a problematic naming process of sexualities that has been used to discriminate against them. But on the other hand, it is also important

to make these objects visible because if they're not tagged it is hard to find them, to engage with them, and to exhibit them. There is no easy solution to the dilemma of wanting to bring visibility on the one hand, and stabilizing binaries on the other.

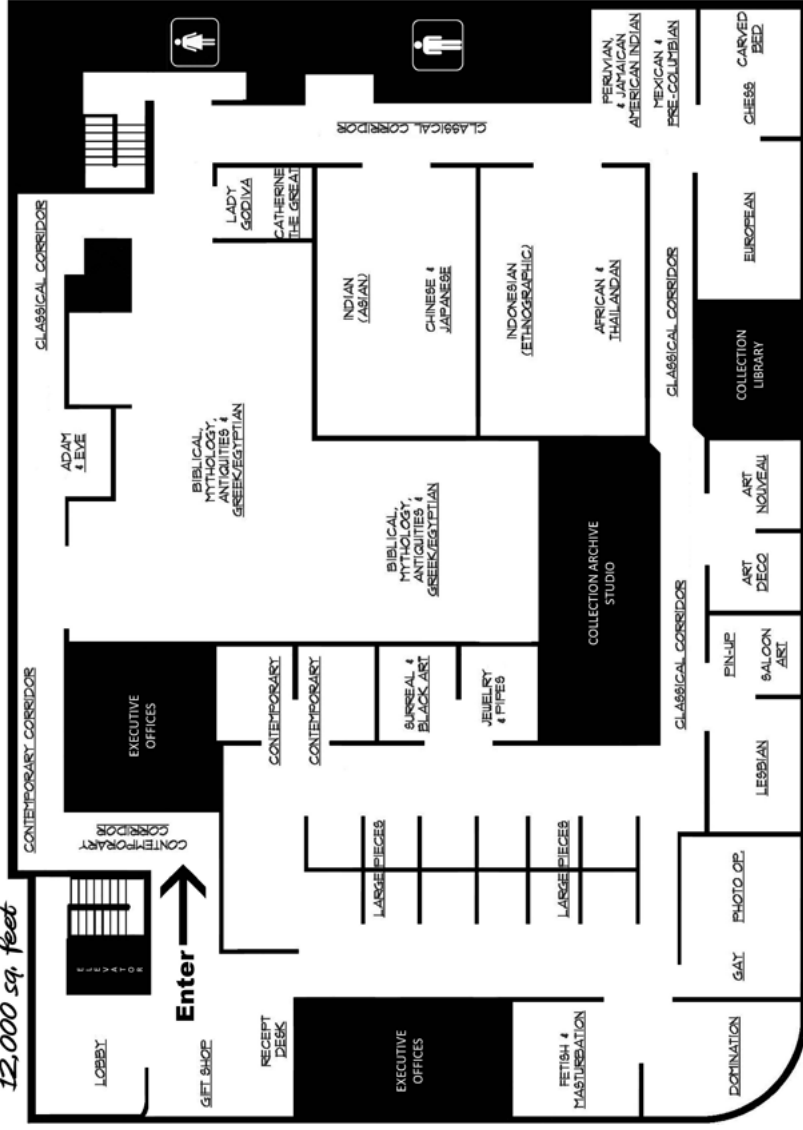
Another relevant social issue is the question of traveling collections and traveling language. I'm documenting the collection in Germany, using English terminology. At one time, a student from the USA and one student from France were working on the project and we had interesting discussions about language and sexuality and the differences in the three languages. There are quite specific naming practices and epistemologies connected to certain language cultures, which get overlooked when English is the internationally dominant language when documenting and archiving. That's an important issue the collection raises.

**VISUAL CONSTELLATION OF
THE ARCHIVE AS FIELD**

Floorplan World Erotic Art Museum (WEAM), Miami Beach, Florida, 2012.

world erotic art museum

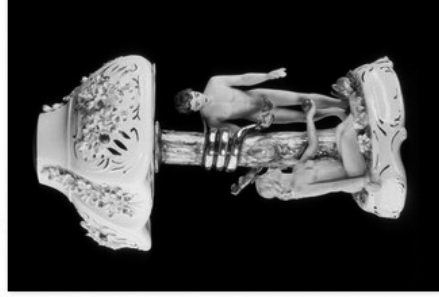
Downloaded from <http://ajphaphysocpharm.sagepub.com/> at 11:06 11 November 2014



Collection entry in the media repository of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2022.

Lamp in the Shape of the Tree of Knowledge with Eve Offering the Apple to Adam

← alle Ergebnisse anzeigen →



Ressourcen-Details

RESSOURCE (ID) **9** ZUGRIFF **Offen** BEIGETRAGEN VON **Hannes Hacke** WORK TYPE **lamp** INVENTORY NR. **CA-0821** SIGNED **Roceram**

DESCRIPTION

A porcelain lamp in the shape of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and a white naked Eve and Adam as the former offers the latter the apple as the serpent coils around the tree.

STICHWÖRTE

Adam and Eve; Forbidden Fruit; serpent; Tree of Knowledge porcelain 17" x 8"

CATALOG

MATERIALS **porcelain** MEASUREMENTS **17" x 8"** LAND **Romania** DATE **ca. 1950** WILZIG, Naomi (2005): Erotic Secrets 9

DEPICTED ON PAGE

NEGATIVE NR. **O529_025** QUELLE **Scanned Negative**

Exhibition view, revised permanent exhibition, World Erotic Art Museum (WEAM), section Gay Art, Miami Beach, Florida. 2017, Photographer: Robert Harbour.



METHOD

Categorization, grouping, and organization are fundamental human practices. We order books, pens, but we also categorize people based on our prejudices. Categorizations imply norms, orders of danger, ideas of purity, classificatory logics that may pervade our unconscious habits. Fieldwork is a complex practice in which the presuppositions of the ethnographer are meant to be questioned, troubled, and challenged—but they likewise inform what is considered strange, different, or noteworthy. “Each standard and each category valorizes some point of view and silences another. This is not inherently a bad thing—indeed it is inescapable. But it is an ethical choice, and as such it is dangerous—not bad, but dangerous.” (Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star 1999, p. 5).

EXERCISE

Visit a public museum database, for example that of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin. Start your own search for objects related to sexuality. Think about which keywords you use to search, and note the results. Do you find anything? If so, what? How is the object described and categorized? What is left out and where do categories feel awkward or incomplete? Note your observations. Now go to one of the following thesauri:

<https://www.getty.edu/research/tools/vocabularies/aat/>

<https://iconclass.org/>

<https://homosaurus.org/>

Compare how the thesauri frame sexuality and sexual practices. Go back to the original object from your first search: How would you tag the object? Which keywords would you use and why? Try to give the object a new description and keywords using the thesauri. Discuss.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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YANN LEGALL is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute for Art Studies at TU Berlin. His current research project, *The Restitution of Knowledge*, in partnership with the University of Oxford, investigates colonial war booty from so-called punitive expeditions found in European museum collections. He wrote his PhD thesis on memory cultures arising from the return of ancestral remains to African states and communities. Yann LeGall is also a member of Berlin Postkolonial e.V. and the initiative Potsdam Postkolonial. Together with Anna von Rath, he developed an audio guide on traces of colonial history in Potsdam, a city where he leads critical guided tours.

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NEU
START
KULTUR

This book offers a modular, teachable curriculum about awkward archives. It works with archives that cause disquieting frictions and sit uncomfortably in the contemporary world; whose archivists let their unease with them become a productive, troubling heuristic. Every module departs from a conversation, followed by working material, visual constellations, and methodological exercises about modalities of anthropological fieldwork.

Featured archives: Haus der Kulturen der Welt, SAVVY Contemporary's Colonial Neighbours Archive, the Hahne-Niehoff Archive of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, the database of German colonial punitive expeditions, the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, and the Naomi Wilzig Art Collection of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.