Re-turns: On Future Art Histories

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N. 16 **December 2023**

Guest edited by Basia Sliwinska & Afonso Dias Ramos

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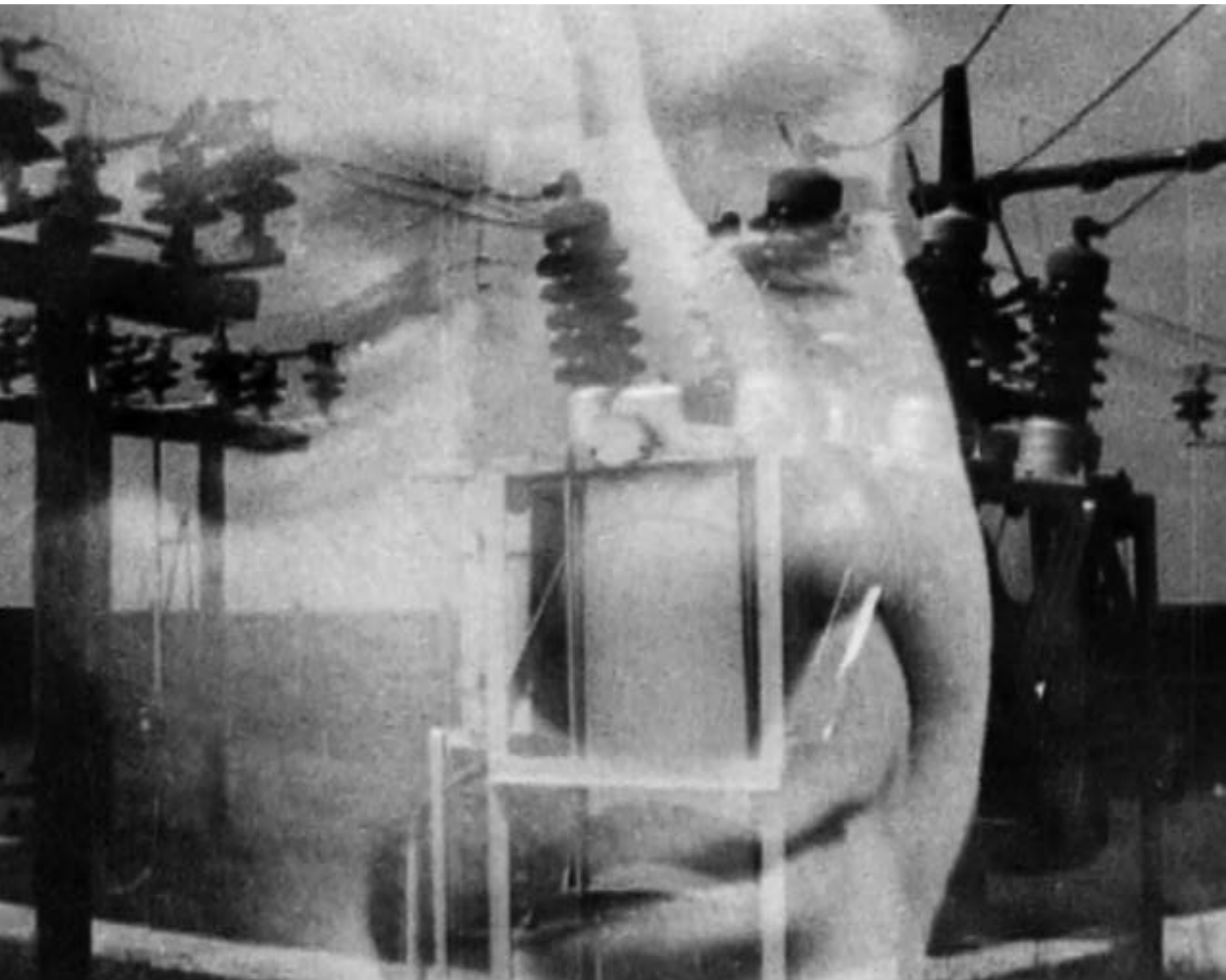

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Contents

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Editorial Introduction

BASIA SLIWINSKA
& AFONSO DIAS RAMOS

Unlearning is, among other things, a method of curating new directions for a future still to be imagined. Yet, in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019: 70), Ariella Azoulay also called for diverse modalities of 'rehearsal, reversal, rewinding, repairing, renewing, reacquiring, redistributing, readjusting, reallocating.' The practice of re-doing, with reparation at its core, not only frames the notion of return, but also those of re-thinking and re-writing. This re-launch issue of *Revista de História da Arte* focuses on the topic of 'Re-turns: on future art histories'. Taking all of those broad conceptual categories into close consideration, re-turn might then be a useful strategy to revisit and unlearn in order to understand anew. Contributors to the issue have sought to mobilise art history to address different chronologies and spatial organisations in order to repair a multiplicity of entangled pasts. In Azoulay's words (2019: 539), '[R]eparation is the right of return and the right to return – return as a reparative modality that rewinds the movement of the forward-thrusting shutter.' Indeed, as Silvina Rodrigues Lopes remarked in *O Nascer do Mundo nas suas Passagens* (Edições do Saguão, 2021), the word 'to repair' (*reparar*) in Portuguese also contains an additional meaning: 'to pay attention'. While Azoulay also makes the case for undoings, the contributions to this themed issue of *Revista de História da Arte* explore returns and reversals, rewritings and renewals, paying attention to how we can learn, analyse, archive, articulate, represent, record and otherwise uncover. This is the beginning of a conversation on art history(-ies) for the future, which we hope to inspire through the digital pages of *Revista de História da Arte*, interrogating the intersections of chronologies,

geographies and methodologies. This re-launch issue marks an important moment for the journal but also for its growing community of contributors and readers, not only in the context of the increasing urgency of the arts and humanities in contemporary life, but also amid the surging development of interdisciplinary and transnational research which often bears artistic practice at its core as a vital element for transformation, be it cultural, social, environmental, economic or otherwise. With this issue we therefore celebrate a diversity of approaches that take re-turn as a particular point of reflection.

Art history may be positioned as a discipline and a practice that frames cultures and identities which can build on (and, conversely, contest) knowledge(s) concerning power relations, inequalities, silencings and invisibilities that still shape the world today. By conflating the arts with histories, it can also spotlight unquestioned assumptions and expose fault lines so as to generate a more complex, responsible, inclusive, and comprehensive landscape of stories towards a future led by social justice and equality. Of course, art history is itself part of discursive formations that have also served to reinforce and/or contribute to current power relations. Nonetheless, it also harbours the potential to think across disciplines such as literary studies, postcolonial theory, indigenous histories, anthropology, and digital humanities, querying the past by paying attention to the ways in which power relations shape culture, relaying dominant values through material, performative, and visual means. In the context of decolonial thinking and making, curatorial approaches, intersectionality, ethics of care, artistic pedagogies and/or feminist politics, to name some of the frameworks that have generated novel approaches to art history, theory, and practice, the discipline has become critically enriched and expanded, re-visiting the past so as to challenge its abiding legacies but also to re-evaluate the transformations that it has enabled.

The re-launch issue of *Revista de História da Arte* includes diverse contributions ranging from academic articles to creative responses exploring the pressing challenges for art history around the issue of 'return', questioning how it can meaningfully engage with the urgency of lives in the contemporary context. How might art history foster thinking across disciplines, timelines, geographies and materialities whilst reckoning with the past, undoing and rewriting histories and discussing what the future holds? This issue signals the increasing need to reshape the critical directions of art history by reflecting on its rich legacies and troubling omissions. Which scholarly trajectories will heed the potential to return to and to re-turn historical consciousness? Our hope is that this conversation will continue in future issues of the journal. Our ambition is to facilitate a publishing platform for a collective and communal imagining of the future of art history as a discipline

but also as a commitment to a practice and a process that may pave the way for more equal, ethical, responsible, and caring communal futures.

The current issue includes five articles and two creative contributions on interrelated topics that interrogate re-turns through their engagement with dissemination platforms, discursive spaces, notions of restitution and countervisuality, and the building of new and/or alternative knowledges via curatorial, oral or visual negotiations. The first article, 'Afterlives: How the Contemporary Art Periodical Shapes the Futures of Art History' by Camilla Salvaneschi, a postdoctoral fellow at the Università Iuav di Venezia (Italy), considers the diversity of strategies employed by dominant art periodicals such as *Afterall*, *Artforum*, *October*, and *Parkett* to outlive their own demise and dismissal. Salvaneschi interrogates these phenomena as part of the ongoing transformation of art periodicals from an ephemeral and precarious material to their acquisition of a newfound status as permanent and historically treasured documents.

The second article shifts the focus to the contested issue of repatriation that is at the heart of the critical agenda today. In 'Yaawo Beadwork in European Ethnographic Museums: A Call to Expand Cultural Repatriation Conversations', Beatriz Madaleno Alves (Leiden University, The Netherlands), a researcher of Eastern African material culture, reassesses contemporary debates surrounding cultural repatriation by highlighting lesser-known African material objects stored in European institutions, namely the Yaawoo beadwork culture that is housed at The British Museum. This case study serves as a springboard to consider a more expanded notion of cultural repatriation, honing in on the complex work that ought to be done by cultural workers and academics in such less-publicised cases, when there is no solid legal case for formal restitution per se. Related to this, the Berlin-based Jewish multidisciplinary artist Hagar Ophir has authored a creative contribution to this themed issue, 'Final (?) DISPOSITION. Restless Objects'. Ophir develops a fictional script surrounding the journey of objects from the Ethnological Museum in Dahlem to the newly created and controversial Humboldt Forum in Berlin, probing ideas of training, rehearsal, and repetition in an attempt to reconceptualise the vexing relationship between imperial institutions as caretakers and the status of artistic objects as plundered items.

The following chapter 'The Bird's Eye From Up Above or From Down Below: Changing Perspectives on Aerial Photography of Indigenous Lands in the Brazilian Amazon', by Marcella Legrand Marer, a curator and PhD candidate at the University of Zurich (Switzerland), carefully attends to the much disseminated visual trope of aerial photography depicting indigenous people reacting to and defending themselves against the aeroplane pointing cameras at them, reviewing it as part of an imperial complex of visuality reproduced in Brazil since the 1940s. In turn,

and conversely, she also investigates how the current popularity of drones enables indigenous communities to reappropriate these photographs and videos from above, subverting this regime of surveillance to fight back against it, as the legal means report and document several environmental crimes and human rights violations. Meanwhile, Martim Ramos, an artist and guest lecturer in visual and media studies at Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (Portugal), presents a visual essay entitled 'a darker, better place', the outcome of an artist's residence at the Centre for Urban History in Lviv, Ukraine, in 2018. Dwelling on their video archives and culling still images from 1960s TV footage, Ramos put together a semi-fictional installation around a peaceful community in Ukraine that decided to evade the hazards of a world on the brink of disaster during the Cold War, both as a commentary on the current state of affairs in that part of the world and as a meditation on the dualisms of fact and fiction, past and present, archive and potential, that is always already inscribed in images.

In 'The Vulnerable Body in the Archive: *Matriculating* Oral Herstories of Art with (Self-)care', interdisciplinary art historian, curator, and activist Zofia Reznik takes into consideration the history of women artists in Wrocław, Poland, during the 1970s, interrogating the ways in which these artists were not assimilated into conventional art historical narratives. This, in turn, leads her to call for a host of renewed methodological approaches, foregrounding issues of personal connection, mutual trust, collective knowledge, and shared agency, all while combining the conceptual tools of cultural anthropology, social history, archival studies, and feminist theory. In the final article of this issue, entitled 'Curating proximities: the parallels of Baltic and Sámi art', Marija Griniuk, a performance artist and the director at Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, Norway and Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania, puts forwards a new set of methodological approaches for curating political performance art from Sámi and Baltic artists, interrogating the curatorial protocols used to address their live art and performances hinged on postcolonial memory when presented before international audiences.

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Contributions

Abstract

It is common practice in art periodical publishing to retrace one's steps, to rethink trajectories, to revise the impact the periodical has had on art, art history, and criticism. Occasionally, going back relates to a mere sense of accomplishment: a celebration offered against the ephemeral and precarious nature of the art periodical. At other times, it has to do with memory, with the untangling of topical stories and a reminder of their influence on the contemporary art field. Ultimately, reflecting on the past is often intertwined with considerations of the future, legacy, immortality, and the enduring impact one leaves behind.

Reading the anthologies and anniversary issues published by two contemporary art periodicals –*October, Afterall* – alongside those of *Artforum, e-flux* and *The Exhibitionist*, the article aims to understand the ways through which periodicals develop their own legacy and review their hegemonic position in Western art histories to produce more inclusive narrations.

keywords

CAMILLA SALVANESCHI
OCTOBER
AFTERALL
ARTFORUM
E-FLUX
THE EXHIBITIONIST
CONTEMPORARY ART
ART PERIODICALS
MEMORY
AFTERLIFE

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Afterlives:

On the Art Periodical's Return through Anthologies and Special Issues

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The term 'afterlife'[1] was first used in the late sixteenth century in reference to 'a later period in one's own life'. Today its meaning also extends to 'an existence after death', and to what may be considered 'a period of continued or renewed use, existence, or popularity beyond what is normally primary or expected'.[2] It often has religious connotations: a continuation of the soul's life in heaven or its reincarnation into other living beings.[3] In this latter case, however, it involves rewards for prior behaviour, with the afterlife representing a way of prolonging one's life after the death of the body, evoking notions of hope, immortality, and return. It may thus be understood as an answer to the transitory nature of life and a way to establish the merits and meaning of one's own existence. All living beings move relentlessly towards death and for this reason often dwell on what will be left after their passing: a new life or another kind of trace of existence? Preparing the afterlife, then, becomes an act of the living: a self-reflexive and self-corrective exercise that helps one forge a path to eternity, if not in body then in memory.

Despite its canonical associations with human life, the soul, and religion, the term has also been related to periodical publishing and archival practices. The most notable study is Janice Radway's 2011 article 'Zines, Half-Zines, and Afterlives: On the Temporalities of Social and Political Change'. Here, the communication studies scholar argues that with their do-it-yourself approach grounded in the idea of challenging mainstream institutions and narratives, zines are a highly ephemeral medium with small print-runs and short lives. However, over the years, zinesters have adopted a number of strategies such as the creation of archives, websites,

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Gabriele Guercio. With the series he curated at Juxta Press (Milan), he drew me towards this fascinating topic and inspired the metaphorical usage that is made of the term 'afterlife' in this article. Feedback from the anonymous reviewers has greatly helped to improve the text.

[2] This definition of the term 'afterlife' comes from Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. See the link: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/afterlife. Accessed May 2023.

[3] For a philosophical elaboration of the term and meaning of 'afterlife', see: Yujin Nagasawa, Benjamin Matheson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

and book collections that have extended their rhetorical and social impacts into the future, often after the publication itself has ceased circulation.

While these ideas have inspired some of the reflections presented here, this article is neither concerned with zines nor with the afterlife proper; rather, its focus lies on the paths taken by the art periodical as a living entity capable of writing its own memory and fighting its own ephemerality.[4] The aim is to understand how preparing for the afterlife, through self-reflection and self-historicisation, has contributed to the periodical's historicisation and its shift from document to monument. Similarly to zines, this passage may take multiple forms: archival collections, websites, exhibitions, anniversary issues, and anthologies. The article will lay greater emphasis on the latter two, both of which serve to oppose the periodical's intrinsic ephemerality – determined by the subsequent coming out of newer issues – and legitimise it as a tool for the recording of art history.

Anniversary issues aim to contrast with a periodical's temporality, slowing down its velocity of publication and moving against contemporary society's forgetfulness. In terms of format, they usually maintain the periodical's typical design and layout. They rarely reprint articles and contributions from the past, and instead privilege an approach that establishes links to the past while engaging with present problematics. Collections of already printed articles are normally repurposed in anthologies, which change the form of the periodical to grant it a more established and memorable aesthetic. This means substituting the 'unprecious formats, flimsy covers, and inexpensive paper stocks' (Allen, 2011: 1) with hardcover, embossed titles, dust jackets and more refined paper. As will be argued, both kinds of publications emerge as a celebration of the enduring versus the precarious nature of the art periodical as such. At other times, they are related to the periodical's memory, untangling topical stories they were able to catch, chronicle and publish, and establishing a trace of their impact on the contemporary art field and its history. And last, but not least in importance, these volumes are often related to the future, providing recurring opportunities – every ten or twenty years, for example – to allow the periodical to revisit its own activity, to adjust it by giving voice to unheard histories, and to adopt more inclusive approaches.

This article begins by analysing the specific temporality of the periodical, which is comprised by both accelerations and suspensions. Indeed, as a way of looking backwards and returning to what has been, these collections help retrace the periodical's steps, rethink its trajectories, and show its impact on art, art history, and criticism. The second part of the article will examine different revisionist approaches adopted by art periodicals to create their own legacy while still extant, considering periodicals like *Artforum* (1967 –), *e-flux* (2008 –) and *The Exhibitionist* (2009-2016), and with a focus on two major cases: *October* (1976 –) and *Afterall*

[4] Throughout the article, and in particular in the first section, I have adopted to term periodical as a neutral definition for both magazine (mainstream) and journal (more academic).

(1998 –). Diverse in editorial mission, structure, and content, these two latter magazines, within a few decades distance from one another, have revisited the editorial practices of the critical art periodical and reconfigured their relationship with contemporaneity and global art more generally. As it will be argued, moments of revisitation and reconfiguration have emerged from these periodicals returning to themselves, both looking back to evaluate their past and examining the future. The two case studies have, in fact, adopted different strategies for the creation of their own legacies, at times choosing introspective approaches, at others monumentalising ones. Since they have both obtained dominant positions in the art system, looking at them comparatively and with respect to other periodicals will encourage reflections on magazines' self-positioning in the power structures of art and on the contradictory roles they play within them.

Art will be touched upon only tangentially, since it is not the primary scope of this article. The analysis of these collections will be bound up with their materiality as printed objects, with their intellectual history, and with the chronological contexts from which they emerged. Rather than providing a comprehensive picture, the examination aims to reflect upon the ways in which these celebratory volumes can contribute to the periodical's shift from ephemera to memory, bringing to light both its successes and its weaknesses.

The art magazine: between document and monument

The contemporary art periodical is 'issued at regular intervals and exists across a span of time' (Allen 2016a: 12). It usually consists of writings about art and reproductions of artists' works. These contents are often preceded by a noticeable number of advertising pages that represent the symbolic and real capital of the publication (Sheikh 2015). Since the 1960s, the contemporary art magazine has been positioned amongst the highest stakeholders of the art system (Esanu and Harutyunyan 2016), on a par with biennials, fairs, galleries and museums, and its power to increase the market value of the artists and works published in its pages has, since then, been widely debated (Buchloh 1976; Walker 1976; Graham 1999; Allen 2020).

As 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu 1984: 365) or gatekeepers of the art system (Eşanu and Haruntyunyan 2016: 3), magazines are able to guide our understanding of art by privileging particular artists or movements within the becoming of art itself. This ability is granted first and foremost by their intrinsically periodic temporality, which makes the periodical a highly ephemeral medium. In essence, each issue is rendered transient by the coming out of a new one, which allows it

both to engage with art's perpetual flux by remaining current and up to date, while also bestowing it with an open form (Beetham 1989). Existing in a consecutive progression, all the issues of a periodical are part of a sequence. Each issue of the magazine may thus be understood as a single episode of a longer serial history. In the case of the art periodical, this is art history.

The art periodical's role in the making of art history was recognised as early as the 1970s by British art critic John A. Walker, who wrote that 'because of their periodicity, [art periodicals] are single issues devoted to contemporary art which provide 'snapshots' of art at particular moments. The back runs of such magazines themselves constitute a history of art, albeit an unrefined one' (1976: 45). Exclusions as well as biases are two fundamental aspects that ought to be considered in such a narrative and are often as important as the snapshots collected. Any history of art provided by an art periodical, as in the cases described here, is a mediated history, for which the periodical becomes the transmitter of certain moments. This is especially the case when that which is being transmitted is a 'best of' collection published by the periodical itself. Nevertheless, returning to Walker, what is being acknowledged by the author is that the sum of the pictures provided by the art periodical, which metaphorically represent its issues, exemplify the periodical's existence as both ephemera (able to crystallise and carry in time the structure of a certain present caught in its contingent ambience) and memory (which contains in its pages the history of art's evolution).[5]

This tension between the document meant to pass and memory was discussed, in historical terms, by Michel Foucault in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which he argued that:

> history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorise' the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments (1972: 7).

One of the main aspects that emerge from this paragraph is the crucial passage that needs to be undertaken for the document to become monument. This is represented either by the passage of time, or by the institution writing a history. With the periodical, as Walker argues, this passage often feels automatic, with its becoming in time granting its durational and historical character. Indeed, thanks to the periodical's temporality, the document is published in the present, but as it is published it becomes part of what philosopher Peter Osborne defined the 'historical present' (2013: 22). This shift occurs when the document becomes the monument.

[5] Even though the reference is to the art magazine, most of the issues debated here may be applied to other types of magazines, in fields as disparate as politics, economics, philosophy and culture.

[6] Translation by the author.

At stake are both immediacy and duration. But if duration transforms the periodical's tense from present to past, then perhaps Foucault's passage of history may be excised in its entirety. Arguably, the periodical's tension between ephemera and memory may be exemplified by the definition given a few years later by Jacques LeGoff, who claimed that 'The document is a monument' (1977: 46). The 'document/monument' is history from the moment at which it is published. If applied to the art periodical, this understanding interprets every issue not through their ephemerality, but through their permanence as printed and material objects.

LeGoff continues, stating that the overlapping of document and monument is the result of 'the effort made by historical societies – whether purposefully or not – to impose on the future that given image of themselves' (1977: 46).[6] This image certainly considers the art periodical's issues under the rubric of Walker's snapshots. But it also involves that of the anthologies, exhibitions, readers, and anniversary issues published by periodicals in order to construct a specific historic and future image for themselves. Often functioning as 'best of' collections, these special publications aim to present the most impactful articles published over previous years, but they also include the collaborations and networks they have activated. As such, they often stage *ad hoc* interventions by artists and invited contributions by the most renowned critics and scholars. These volumes, then, become an instrument to display the periodical's identity, tracing what it has been doing, what trends it has identified, what it has engaged with, and what it has initiated. Specifically, one aim of these celebratory volumes is certainly to provoke a reaction in their readers, one that has to do with community, belief, and agency. They manifest the reasons why the periodical was first entrusted with its gatekeeping and documenting function and articulate how it intends to move into the future. This entails that these volumes are not only about art's chronicling; rather they are about how the periodical has positioned itself as a dominant voice for art, how it has interpreted it and how it will continue moving *with* it. Accordingly, anthologies and special issues, similarly to archives, become simultaneously 'vehicles of memory' and 'visions of the future', through which the periodical revisits its past and moves into a new epoch, adopting processes of mediation, revisionism, and appropriation.

On return, revisionism, and the risks of closure

The preparation of an anniversary issue or anthology volume entails a process of return, revision and re-contextualisation. The difficulty stands in the choice of which histories are more relevant for the periodical and which represent the field

of art as such. Due to the restricted space, not everything that has been published can return in the anniversary issue or anthology. In fact, it would be neither useful nor productive to attempt to do so. Contemporary art periodicals have adopted diverse strategies in response to this problem. Similarly to the archive, they not only look backwards, but also forwards, engaging with multiple temporalities at once (Ernst 2013; Ernst 2015).

Moving from past to future while existing in the present is one of the periodical's temporal peculiarities. It seems to move along a linear trajectory, although as Victoria Horne puts it, there is nothing 'tidy nor linear' about the periodical (2021: 2). Indeed, with the coming out of issues at specific intervals, the periodical is determined by events and pauses and by repetition and difference, bringing more complexity to an otherwise chronological concept of time. This entails that the linear is an insufficient model for representing its temporal connotations. In a 2020 article by W. J. T. Mitchell on the present tense and its implications at the time of the pandemic, the art historian argues that representations of time invoke 'three elementary geometric figures': the line, the circle, and the point (2020: 388). The line represents time's movement towards the future; the circle entails the dimension of repetition and return; the point, the smallest of the three, symbolises that imperceptible instant of the 'now'.

According to Mitchell, if merged, the three figures form the spiral or vortex, which 'combines the properties of line and circle and converges to a point' (2020: 389). That point is a moment of temporal suspension. He posits it between Georg Kubler's metaphor of the 'lighthouse' which 'is dark between flashes: it is the instant between the ticks of the watch: it is a void interval slipping forever through time: the rupture between past and future' (1970: 17), and Walter Benjamin's description of Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920). This figure, standing still at the centre of the painting, is to Benjamin the 'Angel of history', whom, while 'turned towards the past' is catapulted into the future (1969: 249). The instant in which the Angel perceives the truth of history as a single catastrophe, while moving towards the storm of progress, is the centre of Mitchell's vortex, the *epoché*. This is the 'moment of indecision between the light and the darkness, between confusion and revelation' (Mitchell 2020: 387).

Arguably, these three geometric figures may also be associated with the temporality of the periodical. The line represents its trajectory from past to future, the circle epitomises the periodicity and the reoccurrence of the issues, while the dot indicates the issue itself in the moment of its becoming public. These three figures coexist without spiralling until the periodical turns towards itself to prepare its anthological, commemorative volumes. When it does so, it enters its own *epoché*. It is a moment of pause in which the periodical slows down its temporality – that

is otherwise always in acceleration – to look backwards, to return to itself with introspection. With the publication of these volumes at specific historical moments of the periodical's history, whether with round numbered issues – fifty or one hundred – or demarcating a new decade, the periodical is preparing itself for a new epoch. Such anthologies become turning points in its history. Time is stopped for self-examination, revisionism and the writing of its cultural memory. This writing is not intended to become a factual report of the past; rather it is the construction of a 'myth': one which serves the periodical when positioning itself amongst other stakeholders in the art system. It has to justify the reasons why it has been chosen by the audience as an art mediator, and why their community of readers should continue to trust it.

As a consequence, revisionism becomes a rather complicated and dangerous task. Feminist studies scholar Claire Hemmings cautions historians against the use of 'naïve revisionism' which 'helps construct master narratives [. . . with the effect] of closing down and fixing the past' (2007: 72). Indeed, this kind of revisionism poses the risk of reinstating fixed perspectives; an issue which the periodical, with its anthologies and anniversary issues, has inevitably had to circumvent. As milestones in the periodical's history, these celebratory volumes contribute towards reinforcing the art periodical's dominance within the art system's arena, while asserting its function in the communication and sedimentation of art. From its naturally open and continuous temporal form, the periodical, through its celebratory volumes, closes itself in a process of self-definition and legitimisation, and in doing so, becomes a monument, inevitably less flexible and less open to change.

An example of this may be found in Jens Hoffmann's *The Exhibitionist – Journal on Exhibition Making* (2009-2016), a biannual publication with an emphasis on the curatorial and on exhibitions. Its objective was to create a wider platform for the discussion of curatorial concerns, and to actively contribute to the formation of a theory of curating. Accordingly, in its design, *The Exhibitionist* was reminiscent of a student notebook, with a softcover, black and white printing, and staple binding. For the journal's legacy, however, the editor moved in a completely different direction. Instead of proposing a collection of the most important articles or commissioning new ones that would resurrect past perspectives using contemporary approaches, Hoffmann chose to reprint – in a monolithic volume with a softcover and dust jacket – the entire print run of the journal titling it *The Exhibitionist: The First Six Years* [Fig. 1]. The red cover with the white text, while recalling the twelfth issue of the journal, emulated the design of *October Journal*'s first anthology.[7] The dust jacket instead referred to the previous issues' covers, which mirrored, in turn, those of the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1951 –).

[7] Jens Hoffmann, interview with the author, 12 October 2021. For a description of the volume, see 'October: from critical hegemony to potential obsolescence' in the present article.

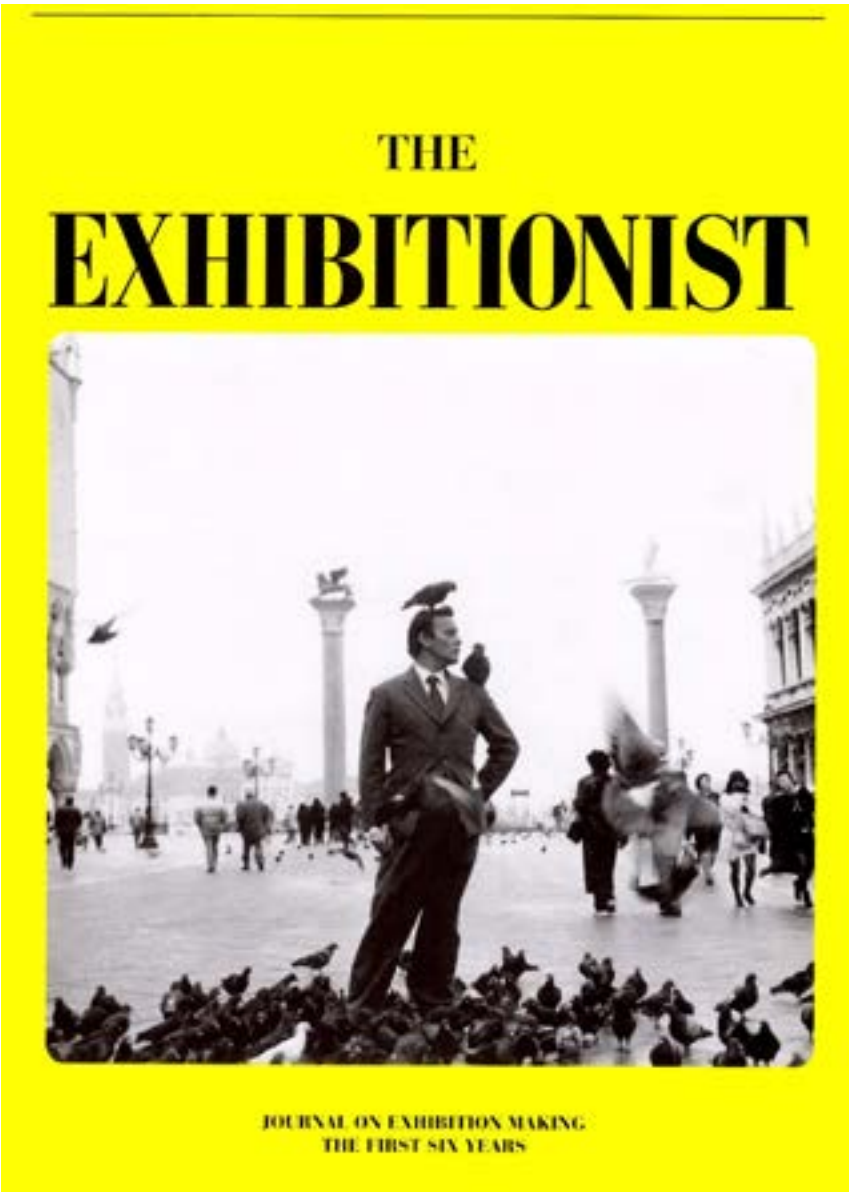

Fig. 1 – *The Exhibitionist. Journal on Exhibition Making*. The First Six Years, ed. Jens Hoffmann (2016). Cover. Courtesy: The Exhibitionist Archive

While the entire reprint of the periodical was possible due to the small number of issues published – in this case twelve – the choice of not revising and selecting proves equally decisive. It is a bold claim regarding the foundational importance of the publication for art history and exhibition studies, offered not through fragments and traces from its archives, but in its entirety. Similar choices have been made by several other art periodicals. In *The Exhibitionist*, in fact, the height, the overall mass, and the encyclopaedic aesthetic of the volume all aim to move against

the precariousness of the periodical publication[8] and reinstate its position amongst the most relevant journals in the field of art.[9] This choice was possibly motivated by the growing number of similar publications, or inspired by the example of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's *The Book of Books* for dOCUMENTA(13), in which the series of *100 Notes* published in the two years preceding the exhibition was collected in a single volume (2010-2012). Uniting single issues in one book defies the periodical's temporality while attempting to find a new practice, for which the anthology simply becomes a binder rather than a way of creating a new narrative. Everything in this case is memory, and nothing should be excluded or left behind. With this monumental publication, however, it is as if the journal ran out of steam. Returning to itself, or better not doing so, seems to have closed it.[10]

Restlessness in the pursuit of memory

Against the naïve revisionism postulated by Hemmings, political theorist Victoria Browne proposes one that is 'restless', meaning *'active, reflexive, and receptive'* (2014: 68).[11] She believes that only such an approach will generate alternative historical narratives and avoid transforming history into a finished product without the possibility of change. This restless revisionism is adopted by other kinds of periodicals, albeit often without the intended results. A particularly interesting case is that of the online art journal *e-flux*, established in 2008 by Julieta Aranda, Anton Vidokle, and Brian Kwon Wood. Coming out 10 times a year, the journal publishes writings and reflections on art, film, history, technology, and politics.[12] As of 2009, one year after its launch, *e-flux* gave rise to the first of a series of *Readers*. The volume, this time in print, aimed to 'highlight the topical thread that ran throughout the first eight issues of *e-flux journal*'. Nevertheless, as stated in the 'Editors' Note':

> While it is our hope that the essays included here can begin to give a sense of how varied the concerns and urgencies being engaged today are, we also expect that certain consistencies and overarching issues will emerge through them, and help us shape the forthcoming editions of the journal (Aranda et al 2009: 6).

While the timeframe of a year is rather short for historical considerations of both art and the journal's developments, it becomes clear that looking at the publications' past, returning to it constantly, almost incessantly, becomes both a monumentalising and research practice for *e-flux*.

[8] Despite the volume's subtitle 'The First Six Years', the journal was discontinued. The volume marks its history and the closure of the publication.

[9] After the first twelve issues of *The Exhibitionist,* Hoffmann considered transforming the journal into an anthological series. Email conversation, 10 April 2019.

[10] After a few years Hoffmann launched a new online periodical titled *Duchamp's Socks*: www.duchampssocks.com. Accessed May 2023.

[11] Italics in original.

[12] 'About', e-flux, www.e-flux.com/about. Accessed April 2023.

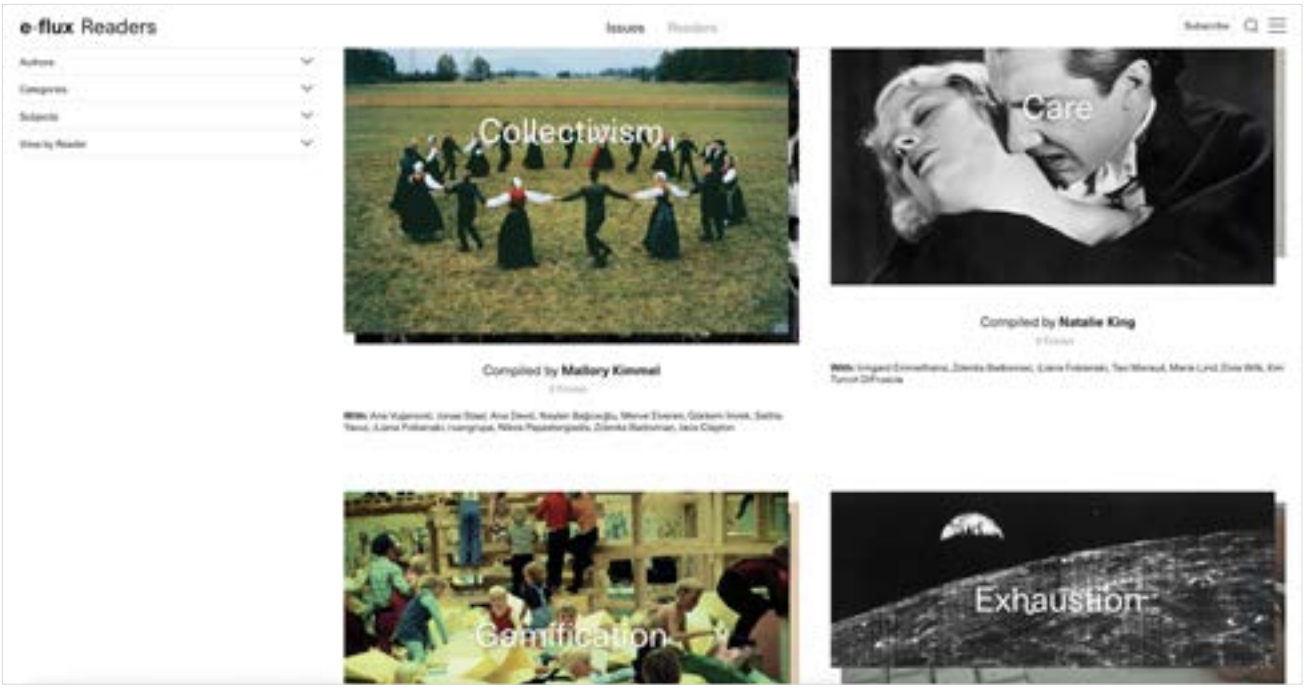

Fig. 2 – *E-flux Readers* Webpage, screenshot (2023). Courtesy: e-flux.

Against its current total of 139 issues (as of October 2023), *e-flux Journal* has collated over eighty online *Readers*. [Fig. 2] These are no longer printed, however, and are proposed directly by readers through open calls[13] that help the editors investigate the most relevant strains of discourse today. This participation of the audience acts on three disparate levels, all three of which are equally crucial. The first has to do with the rhizomatic nature[14] of periodical publication, for which every issue can be accessed, read, and ordered according to the interests of its readers (Beetham 1989). The second, related, plays with the magazine's reception, with the audience becoming the key through which the periodical as ephemera is transformed into memory, showing that monumentalisation can move beyond the materiality of print and exist in the digital. In this case, memory is constructed through a process mediated by readers who are not passively provoked into choosing a certain history, but who rather make it themselves, in collaboration with the journal's editors. The third level, finally, pertains to the periodical and its capacity to act as an anticipatory tool with regards to the main concerns of the present. Each *Reader* collects around seven/eight articles on a specific theme, transforming the collection into a newly edited issue of the journal whose temporality has been mixed and matched, but that remains nonetheless relevant to the present and to the excavation of forgotten and neglected histories. This practice plays with the entire history of the publication simultaneously. Unlike the anniversary

[13] See the Call for Readers published by e-flux on 18 July 2022: https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/479340/call-for-e-flux-journal-readers/. Accessed May 2023.

[14] I have borrowed the term 'rhizomatic' from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a way to engage with the publication from multiple points, emulating the way in which thought can be envisioned. See *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.

issues and anthologies that have a recurring periodicity, *e-flux*'s online format grants it an almost infinite temporality. Through the *Readers*, the journal's chronological ordering of time in the past, present, and future is compressed into what Wolfgang Ernst calls an 'ecstatic temporality', in which the publication continues existing within the website's present, well beyond its temporal reach (2017: 9).

With *e-flux*, like the *Exhibitionist*, there is no suspension of time. Yet this does not mean that the editors never enact a revisionist approach to the construction of their own memory; on the contrary, instead of adopting one that is singular, closed, and institutional (with a series of publications in print that seem to have different durations compared to that found online), the editors choose one that is plural, open, and collective. Through the *Readers* they evidence how the legacy of a periodical is neither exemplified by its materiality nor by the likes of a single editor, but by the memories of the communities that have spent time with it. What emerges is a 'decentralised' and 'networked' form of art historical narration, one that is multiplied and expanded in as many directions as the journal's (and art's) spaces, temporalities and readerships. Promises for the future remain uncontemplated as they would be in more formal periodicals like *Artforum,* which, in its over sixty years of existence, has proved capable of returning to itself to examine its own legacy and purpose, both through anniversary issues and an anthology.

Founded in 1962 in San Francisco by Philip Leider and John Coplans, *Artforum* has since been published ten times per year. Artist Ed Ruscha gave it its distinctive 10½ x 10½ inch (ca. 27 x 27 cm) square format, together with its bold and condensed logo. When it transferred its offices to New York in 1967, it presented itself as a serious and committed platform for art criticism. In its pages, contrary opinions and conversations by critics such as Michael Fried and Rosalind Krauss (influenced by the formalist methods of Clement Greenberg) would take place alongside writings by artists such as Lynda Benglis, Sol Le Witt, and Robert Smithson, creating a dynamic and engaged space for contemporary art. It is this tension that Amy Baker Sandback aimed to highlight in the 1984 anthology *Looking Critically: 21 Years of Artforum Magazine*. The 342-page hardcover volume's dustjacket is a collage of the magazine's covers presenting a selection of articles and reviews from *Artforum*'s first two decades of existence. According to the editor, these stressed the magazine's 'immediacy', its capacity to anticipate artistic trends before they 'had been defined by a body of criticism' (1984: ix). The design of the volume intends to sustain the 'continuity' of the publication.

The decision to leave the republished texts unrevised, to adopt their original layout whenever possible and to contain them within a hardcover, reinstates the articles' as well as the magazine's passage from document to monument, from ephemera to memory, and, of course, from past to present. Articles such as Brian O'Doherty's

'Inside the White Cube', Michael Fried's 'Art and Objecthood', and Rosalind Krauss's 'Sense and Sensibility', were printed alongside several artists' contributions by Daniel Buren, Lucinda Childs, Dan Graham, Joan Jonas, and others, becoming sites for comprehending art's evolution and its current state. Despite displaying a 'rare consensus' between the contributors to the magazine (1984: ix), nothing in the volume's narrative, contents or layout questions its relevance or capacity to represent the contemporary. Revisionism becomes here a selection of the most important moments of the magazine, in remembrance of a myth that led *Artforum* to become one of the most important and contested periodicals in the second half of the last century.

A completely different stance was taken by David Velasco in *Artforum*'s most recent anniversary issue (September 2022), which marked the end of its sixth decade of existence. As stated by Gwen Allen, 'magazines not only embody collective ideals and goals, but also register conflict and schisms' (2011: 28). Some of these, such as Lynda Belglis's infamous dildo advertisement, create internal schisms, while others place the entire nature of the publication in question. At the time of Velasco's special issue, for instance, *Artforum* had been criticised by art critic Jerry Saltz for turning into a 'painfully exclusionary inside-baseball art-world *Vogue*'.[15] While this turn has its roots in the early 1970s, the blame for the magazine's transformation from a 'serious, semi-academic, long-form piety and criticism [...into a] luxury commodity to gallery advertisers' (2018) fell upon the publisher Knight Landesman. In his editorial, Velasco touched upon some of these criticisms, bringing to light negative facets of the publication that rarely emerge in these glorificatory volumes. Perhaps this was something owed to its readers, tired of scandals and overly market-oriented content, or perhaps the tide had changed.

Unlike his predecessors, Velasco adopts both a defensive and revisionist approach. In returning to itself, the magazine was able to actively revise its productive activity, proposing changes not only to its structure but to its very methodology. Remembering an anecdote from the years of Philip Leider's direction – something most of his predecessors had done before him – Velasco discusses the problem of art's autonomy in the wake of the market, which he ascribed to '*love*'[16] rather than money and investment. Departing from what he calls a 'faggot sensibility', and distancing himself from the 'misogynist art world',[17] Velasco opens the curtains to the magazine's backstage, revealing preparatory conversations and introducing Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of 'reparative critique' (2003) as an example of the magazine's new critical approach. The special issue here becomes a way for the magazine to lay itself bare, to rethink its format and structure, and to update its mission in accordance with the current moment. With a series of invited contributions and *ad hoc* interventions by artists, Velasco displays the magazine's strengths

[15] For Jerry Saltz's article 'I Love the New *Artforum*' (2 January 2018), see *Vulture*'s website: https://www.vulture.com/2018/01/wherever-the-new-artforum-is-headed-im-along-for-the-ride.html, accessed October 2023.

[16] Italics in original.

[17] See Rachel Corbett's article 'As Women of the Art World Join Together to Condemn Sexism, Artforum Promises Change', *artnet news* (29 October 2017), https://news.artnet.com/art-world/open-letter-condemning-art-world-sexism-following-allegations-against-artforum-publisher-1132031, accessed October 2023.

through its affiliates, reinstating the magazine's ability to move alongside art, not just in terms of critique, but as a space where art is proposed and presented. The memory the magazine is attempting to construct and monumentalise is not so much about its past as it is about the present and the moment in which the issue is published. Similarly, memory, is not only concerned with the past, but with documenting and monumentalising the exact moment of the now in which the magazine exists.

October: from critical hegemony to potential obsolescence

One periodical publication that in time adopted a similar dual approach to revisionism was undoubtedly *October Journal*, established in 1976 by Rosalind Krauss, Annette Michelson, and Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe. All three were art critics previously affiliated to *Artforum* who had grown tired of that magazine's close association with the market. According to Gwen Allen, '*October* was conceived as a form of counter publicity, which sought to contest the conditions of the mainstream artworld and its main vehicle of publicity, the art magazine' (2016b). This outdistancing was immediately evident in the periodical's materiality and structure. It had a quarterly periodicity, smaller dimensions than *Artforum* (22.8 x 17.6 cm), with a minimal layout privileging text over image, black and white images over colour, uncoated paper, and significantly, no advertisements. The cover mirrored the interiors. Title and index were printed on ivory uncoated paper, rigorously in black, except for the issue's number in red.[18]

At its launch *October*'s editors wanted to associate the journal with the European theories that had been impacting contemporary culture, from poststructuralism to the Frankfurt School and feminisms. As manifested in the journal's subtitle *Art/Theory/Criticism/Politics,* these theories would enter a multidisciplinary arena that aimed to overcome *Artforum*'s specialisms in art and criticism. Concerning art, *October* proposed in its pages new artistic practices that experimented with architecture, cinema, performance, and photography, which found little or no space in the pages of the canonical art press. Further relevance was bestowed through the publication of texts by artists engaged in conceptual and institutional critique like Daniel Buren, Trisha Brown, Lygia Clark, Louise Lawler, and Robert Morris. In many ways, *October*'s approach placed it alongside those artist's periodicals like *Avalanche* (1970-1976) which had been contesting the established art press (Allen 2016). Yet it did not take long for the publication to obtain a hegemonic status itself, not in the artworld as was the case with *Artforum*, but in academia.

[18] For an analysis of the journal's history and origins, see Gwen Allen, 'Art Periodicals and Contemporary Art Worlds, Part I: A Historical Exploration', *ARTMargins* 5, no. 3 (October 2016): 35-61.

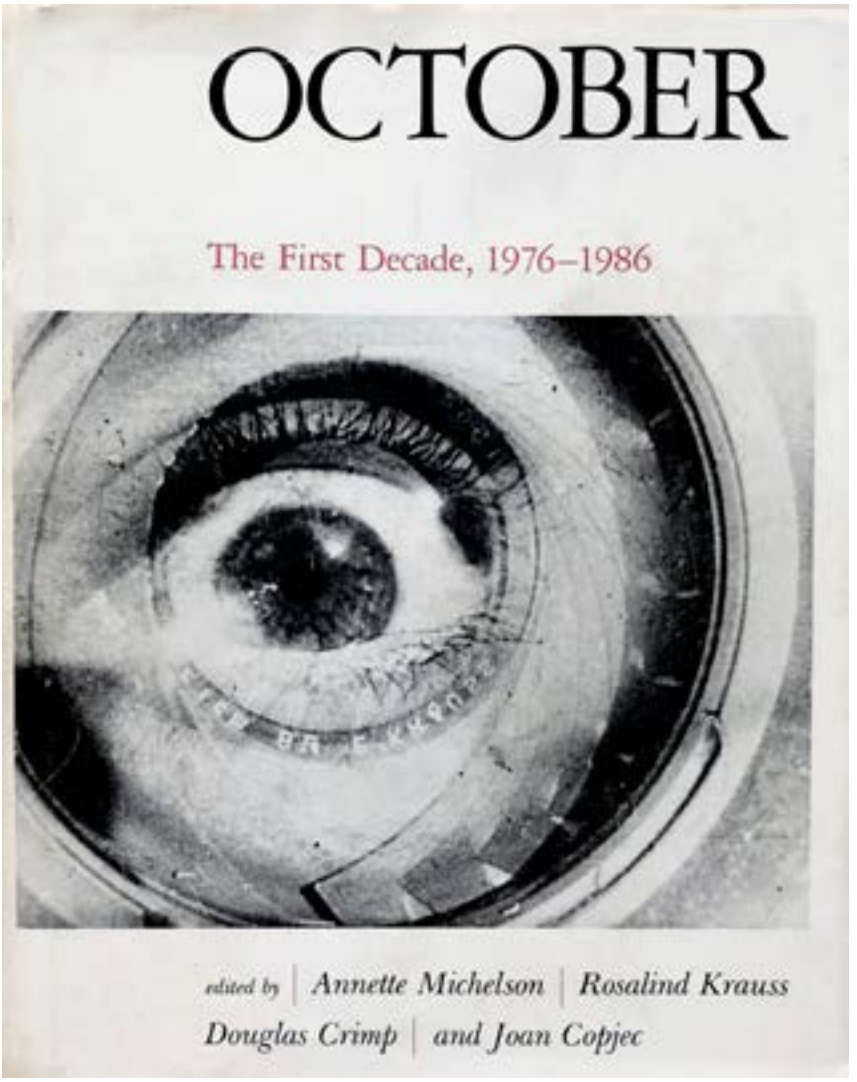

Fig. 3 – *October: The First Decade 1976-1986* (1988), eds. Annette Michelson, Rosalind E. Krauss, Douglas Crimp and John Copjec. Image on the cover: Dziga Vertov, *Man with a movie camera* (1929), still. Courtesy: *October Journal*.

October's dominance over a certain type of art discourse was already clear by the time its first anthology was published by MIT Press. Titled *October: The First Decade 1976-1986*, the volume shows the authors, artists, networks, and themes that had made the journal in its first ten years.[19] In terms of design, the font, the use of black and white images, and the uncoated paper are maintained. The usual soft cover with textual elements is replaced by a lined red hardcover enclosed by an ivory dust jacket which confers a more permanent aesthetic. While on the hardcover the only embossed text is on the spine, the dustjacket displays the title, the names of the editors, and the closing still from Dziga Vertov's film *Man with a movie camera* (1929). [Fig. 3] The image shows the eye of a man reflected in the

[19] The volume became a model for *The Exhibitionist. The first six years*, as Jens Hoffmann recounted in an interview with the author on 12 October 2021.

lens of a camera, a usage with multiple meanings. Firstly, it evokes the journal's link to experimental cinematography and photography; secondly, it becomes a metaphor for the power of the critical medium itself to narrate histories self-reflexively and to create what is now considered contemporary art history; lastly, and related, the image plays with the volume's dual gaze: that of its editors and that of its readers.

As to be expected, the anthology begins with the editors' introduction, which reads partly as a posthumous manifesto that glorifies its practice and overall successes. The opening sentence 'But why *October*? Our readers still inquire' (Michelson et al 1987: ix) reconnects to the dual gaze of the cover image while offering the opportunity to glimpse the rationale behind the journal's birth and choice of nomenclature. A summary of art's evolution from the 1970s to the second half of the 1980s, when the modernist canon was questioned from all perspectives, served to justify the work of the journal as a 'necessary response to what was once again a consolidation of reactionary forces within both the political and cultural spheres'. *October*, then, was 'a forum for the presentation and theoretical elaboration of cultural work that continued the unfinished project of the 1960s' (Michelson et al 1987: ix), with 'unfinished' being the key word here. Indeed, the volume is built through a number of unfinished or developing themes that, according to the editors, need further investigation. Certainly, this thematic openness is one of the prerogatives of the periodical, which thanks to its periodicity enjoys the time to revise interpretations of certain topics while debates around them are still shifting. It is also a strategy to acknowledge absences and exclusions, sparing one's own practice from potential criticism.

Nevertheless, this championing of the periodical's malleability ostensibly opposes the volume's purposes and design. Indeed, while the periodical is meant to pass, the book is here to stay. The anthology becomes a way to monumentalise *October*'s history through the selection and montage of its 'best of' articles, authors, and artists. Many of the texts reprinted in the anthology had run out of print and were thus made available again to the reader. The volume thus represented a means to defy the periodical's intrinsic ephemerality while legitimising it as an authority with art historical relevance. Not by chance were the texts chosen from the journal's most established and renowned contributors, including Georges Bataille, Georges Didi-Hubermann, Trisha Brown and Babette Mangolte, Sergei Eisenstein (whose film about the October revolution inspired the naming of the journal itself), and Yves-Alain Bois (who had been involved in the French theoretical journal *Macula*). Significantly, Bois had two of his texts reprinted in the volume, demonstrating not only *October's* willingness to be associated with the author, but also how close-knit their editorial enterprise really was.

While elitism was one of the main criticisms that had been directed at the journal, another was its Western-centrism (Allen 2016b). An attempt to engage with these critiques was made with the journal's second anthology, titled, in continuation, *October: The Second Decade 1986-1996*. The cover, this time in black, remains enclosed in a softcover with an image of Lygia Clark's 1968 work *Óculos (Goggles)*, engaging with the vision metaphor of the first volume while hinting at the editors' increasing attention towards female artists. With its title, returning thematic threads, and design cementing the first anthology, the editors propose a serialised story summarised over two special episodes. The anthology becomes a recurring narrative structure in which the journal represents itself as a consistent editorial enterprise. Many of themes identified in the first volume return, and within this return are found more avenues for analysis and investigation. Compelled by the geopolitical changes that attended the year 1989, the volume made a feeble attempt to move beyond its usual Western-centric gaze.

Three texts by African authors discussing the continent's philosophical scene were published in the section 'Postcolonial Discourse', introduced for the first time in this second volume. Manthia Diawara opens with a reading of V. Y. Mudimbe's philosophical theories, while V. Y. Mudimbe himself analyses the cultural relativism of Africa's perception through the work of African studies scholar Melville Herskovitz. Despite both texts being originally published together in issue fifty-five (Winter 1990), it becomes clear that, rather than fragments, the editors were attempting to stage the unravelling of a continuative discussion. Somewhat ironically, however, the result proves how confined was the space devoted to these perspectives in the preceding ten or twenty years of the journal's publication. While recognising that both volumes adopt a revisionist approach in which the journal returns to itself to re-evaluate its own doing, this remains on the level of memory preservation and self-historicisation, still contributing towards the construction of what Hemmings called 'master narratives' (2007: 72). As a site of memory, the anthology here becomes a way for the periodical to forge its own past to serve present interests. Memory then is not so much about absence and forgetfulness as about reiterating its power position within the writing and understanding of art.

Arguably, the moment in which the journal dropped its authoritative tone and reached its reflexive climax was with its 100th issue (Spring 2002). [Fig. 4] The artworld had evolved into a global art arena driven by capitalist dynamics, and digitisation had impacted reading habits in unprecedented ways. To this it should be added that a growing number of art periodicals were proliferating in every corner of the globe, with the relevance of the most established ones being questioned as a result. *October*'s 100th issue, titled 'Obsolescence', was a reaction to this moment. The title was connected to a roundtable discussion in which the editors reviewed

Fig. 4 – *October*, Issue 100 (Spring 2002), cover. Courtesy: *October Journal*.

their own history while reflecting on the journal's present and future conditions. What emerged from the conversation was a general dissatisfaction with art criticism and the lack of a coherent public. The first – criticism – seemed to have fallen into an abyss governed by the market and the culture industry. The latter – the public – was no longer identifiable, as with globalisation and digitisation it had spread and expanded in numerous unforeseen directions (Allen 2016; Salvaneschi 2019). Despite the sense of nostalgia that often transpired from the contributions

of generations of art critics participating in the roundtable, this moment of the journal's history would prove as important as its establishment in the 1970s. Indeed, while the issue that followed the roundtable conveys a sense of uncertainty about the future, thereby showcasing the journal's precarity, significantly it was this very moment when the journal chose to monumentalise its history.

With their diverse intents and editorial procedures, the two anthologies and the 100th issue function as lenses through which the journal can look back on itself, consider its accomplishments, and identify its failures. But while the anthology fights against obsolescence, passively marking *October*'s contribution to art history, the issue, as a space for self-questioning, allows it to act. By highlighting its problems, it created awareness of the journal's precarious situation and commenced a collective task to revise, revisit, and repair its focus for the future from an ostensibly global perspective. This might be due to the different nature of the two kinds of publication, one permanent, with the objective of documenting the work done by the journal, the other impermanent, marked by the need to adjust and adapt to art's requests. All three volumes show that much still needs to be done. The first – the anthologies – demonstrate this in terms of art historical research; the most recent – the special issue – for the journal's very existence. What is certain is that the 100th issue marked the end of *October*'s previous life and the beginning of its new one. To survive the crisis in its readership and in the function of art criticism, *October* was obliged to adapt to what is no longer a Western-centred artworld. It has done so feebly, as feebly as its willingness to adapt to these changes. Indeed, in the decade that extended from the second anthology to the 100th issue and beyond, the journal on only rare occasions attempted to provide content related to global histories of art and more often than not, it has chosen to reduce engagement with the contemporary and to focus instead on art history's canonisation.

Afterall's revisitations: An opening to new worlds

The study of these multiple art worlds has become one of the stated aims of *Afterall Journal*. With a shorter and less publicised history when compared to *Artforum, e-flux* or *October, Afterall* has managed to position itself amongst the most influential Western art periodicals today. It was established in London in 1998 by Charles Esche and Mark Lewis as an attempt to free British contemporary art from the grip of the Young British Artists (YBA) and to propose a critical alternative to magazines like *Art Monthly* (1976 –) and *Frieze* (London, 1991 –).[20] Subtitled *Journal*

[20] For a short history of *Afterall Journal*, see Charles Esche, 'Foreword: Twenty Years On', *Afterall Journal*, 48 (Autumn/Winter 2019). See: https://www.afterall.org/article/foreword.48. Accessed May 2023.

of Art, Context and Enquiry, *Afterall*'s glossy design and bold format contributed to its immediate popularity. The journal is neither a critical art magazine – as testified by the adoption of the term journal – nor an academic publication proper. Structurally, it is part of a research and publishing organisation located at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design in London.[21] Its focus is on contemporary art and its relation to the 'wider social, political and philosophical framework within which art is produced' (Esche and Lewis 1999: 4). Articles are a mix between academic writings and essays by artists, curators, critics, educators, and writers. Each issue attends to the works of four or five artists. These are analysed in turn through multiple contributions to provide the reader with diverse perspectives on current artistic practices and their contexts of development.

The journal's approach is nicely explained in the editorial of its fifteenth issue (Spring/Summer 2007), in which it is stated that *Afterall* is 'committed to the work of artists [as the] starting point for a wide-ranging discussion about art' (Esche and Lawson 2007: 3). For the first time in its history, the journal returned to itself to see whether its initial ambition remained relevant for tracing art's shifts and evolutions. But as discussed, these reflective moments are also a demonstration of one's accomplishments and victories, especially in a moment in which social media had not yet modified the way in which news is circulated. In this sense, the issue occasioned the presentation of three new editorial projects through which *Afterall* began expanding its practice: the *One Work* series and the *Afterall Readers*. Both are connected to the journal, expanding its research without being a part of it. The former series offers reflections on a single work of art. The latter, the *Afterall Readers*, collects essays and other contributions around important contemporary art events. To this is added the online platform *Afterall Online*, which makes available the journal's previous publications.

The publication of the fifteenth issue also signalled a moment in which several periodicals, established between the late 1990s and early 2000s, had started expanding their editorial practices. The most obvious expansion, dictated by digital innovations, was that into the online environment (Ludovico 2012). But as this case so fittingly demonstrates, periodicals diversified in other directions too. In two decades, *Afterall* published four book series (2006, 2007, 2010, 2016), organised a wide array of events with international institutions, established one educational programme, and several research projects.[22] While all these activities are not exactly intrinsic to the journal, they have inspired its research activities and enhanced its local and global outreach, proving fundamental for its ability to perform editorial practices within a *plurality* of art worlds.

One book series that has proved particularly inspiring for such considerations is *Exhibition Histories*, which aims to understand the act of exhibiting as that of

[21] 'About', *Afterall*: https://www.afterall.org/about/. Accessed May 2023.

[22] *Afterall* recently launched the 'Afterall Art School platform', https://www.afterallartschool.org; and the research mapping project *Black Atlantic Museum,* https://www.afterall.org/project/black-atlantic-museum/. Both accessed May 2023.

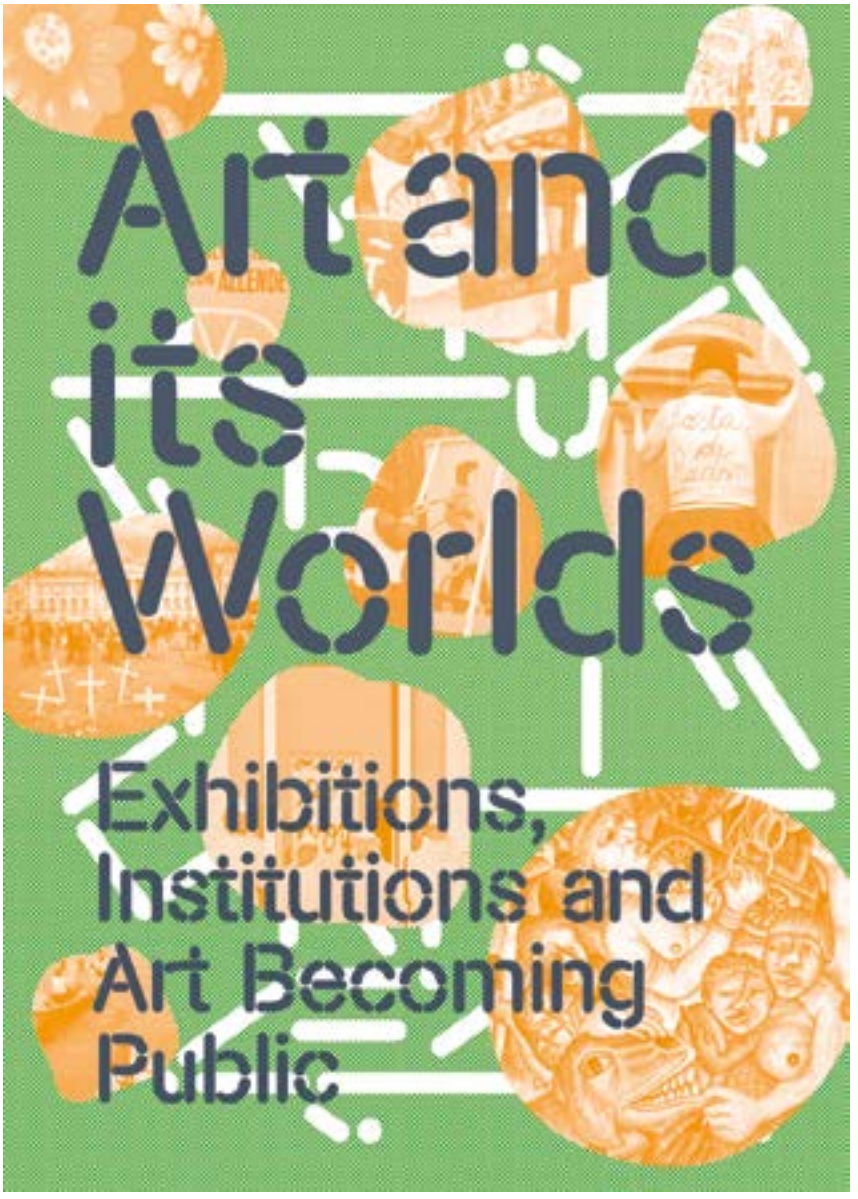

Fig. 5 – *Art and Its Worlds. Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public* (2021). Cover design by Andrew Brash. Courtesy: Afterall.

making art public. It was initiated in 2010, a moment when exhibition studies and curating were flourishing thanks to the publication of innumerable volumes on the subject and periodicals such as *Cura Magazine, The Manifesta Journal, oncurating.org,* and *The Exhibitionist* were founded. But while all of these tended to analyse exhibitions from a single point of view – the curatorial – *Exhibition Histories* adopted multiple perspectives to fragment and reassemble single landmark exhibitions. This approach granted the opportunity to investigate the exhibition's

relation with artworks and the contexts in which they took place and to concurrently connect these to the journal's research practice. In the twelfth volume of the series, *Art and Its Worlds: Exhibitions, Institutions and Art Becoming Public* (2021) [Fig. 5], this connection is made explicit. The volume, in fact, functions also as an anthology of *Afterall Journal*'s history, one in which it is possible to observe the expansion of the artwork's manifestation, not just in one exhibition but in a plurality of different worlds.

Art and Its Worlds presents itself with a sleek design, with a green, orange, and black softcover on uncoated paper. The green appears somewhat pixelated, superimposed by a collage of round orange images representing artworks, performances, and exhibition photos that are connected through a series of lines forming an unreadable pattern. These curated images and their connections seem to represent a sort of art constellation on which the many worlds represented remain disparate yet always joined. The title is embossed on the cover, designed with a logotype reminiscent of the connecting lines. Inside, the book is divided into three sections that resemble smaller self-contained or meta-books connected by underlying factors. The first is thematic and exemplified by the title 'art and its worlds', as described above. It relates to contemporary art after the late 1980s and early 1990s, a moment in which art moved beyond its Western understanding to become global. As such, it presents a proliferation of artworks, practices, and institutions that have opened new ways of thinking about art.

The second is structural and relates to connections between the journal and the volume. This is made clear in the timeframe of the essays anthologised. Seventeen out of thirty-three were previously published by the journal between the fifteenth and the forty-fourth issues, corresponding to the timeframe between 2007 and 2019. Nevertheless, while *Art and Its Worlds* reveals another kind of editorial procedure when compared to the cases analysed above, its practice of selection and addition had already been adopted by the journal for its twentieth anniversary issue (no. forty-eight) published in July 2019. This second aspect, involving the juxtaposition of new and past essays, situates the journal in a revised narrative, one that entails the modification of its temporality. The republished essays, rather than evoking a past time, as *October*'s decade volumes had done, become present. The juxtaposition renews their life and impact, demonstrating their continued relevance for current art developments. It does so by creating new connections through a 'polyvocal' approach. The latter is intended as the 'dispersed agency… assumed in production and reception and through their chiasmus' (Choy et al 2021). This agency is shared between journal and volume, but also between past and present authorial voices.

The third and last factor that emerges within the pages of the anthology is concerned with ideas surrounding sharing and memory. Its introduction begins with a quote by *Chimurenga* which states that 'History is the science of the state, while memory is the art of the stateless' (Marsch 2015). *Chimurenga*, with whom the editors collaborated on multiple occasions,[23] is a 'pan-African platform of writing, art, and politics'[24] founded in Cape Town in 2002 by Ntone Edjabe. Its overall aim is 'to write Africa in the present and into the world at large'.[25] Thus, memory and its cultivation has always been one of *Chimurenga*'s underlying motives. Memory, in *Art and Its Worlds*, contains a dual connotation. On the one hand, it engages with *Chimurenga*'s 'art of the stateless' insofar as it adopts a more inclusive art historical approach, emphasised in the volume's embracing of global histories and its willingness to include as many worlds as possible in its narration; on the other, it is related to the nature of the volume as a mnemonic and historicising device per se. In making the essays present, and reactivating them through other voices, revisitation is no longer a passive process. Instead, it is active and receptive. It brings in new perspectives to revisit and recontextualise memories that are still relevant for comprehending art's becoming, all the while 'enabl[ing] collective study' (Choy et al, 2021).

It is noteworthy that *Afterall*'s expansion and openness towards neglected histories and geographies is a recent phenomenon. As editor Charles Esche acknowledges with the benefit of hindsight in the twentieth anniversary issue *Looking Back, Looking Forward: 20 Years of Afterall* (Autumn/Winter 2019) [Fig. 6], like most periodicals of its generation, the journal had historically traced a Western geography. It was only with the issue's preceding five years, after 2014, that it truly managed to broaden its reach through institutional partnerships with organisations such as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, *Chimurenga* and Asia Art Archive (one of the co-publishers of the anthology). These allowed the editors to broaden their focus to the geographies of Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America, thereby sensitising their practice towards decolonial theory and art's expansion into this constellation of new worlds.

The reflections and methodologies presented in this issue are the direct predecessor to the volume *Art and its Worlds*, showing how the revisionist and polyvocal approach adopted by the journal has become part of its overall editorial practice. As this publication demonstrates, returning to one's own history (even if seeking to monumentalise and historicise one's own position within the writing of art) can foster an orientation towards the present and the future, and in so doing can allow for the adoption of more constructive practices. It is the moment of suspension opened up by the journal when it returns to itself and to the history of art it chronicled, its *epoché*, which grants it a unique opportunity to understand why and how its role has changed.

[23] *Chimurenga* collaborated with *Afterall* on one of the books of the *Exhibition Histories* series about Lagos's 1977 festival of arts and culture: FESTAC' 77. The volume published in 2019 was an attempt to restore a partially lost history through a collage of archival materials and photographs.

[24] About', *Chimurenga*: https://chimurengachronic.co.za/about/. Accessed May 2023.

[25] 'The Chimurenga Chronic: A Future-Forward, Pan African Newspaper': http://chimurengachronic.co.za/. Accessed May 2023.

Fig. 6 – *Afterall. A journal of Art Context and Enquiry*, Issue 48 (Autumn/Winter 2019). Cover Illustration: Babi Badalov, *Art artist animal*, 2018, painting on fabric, 166.5 x 75 cm. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Poggi, Paris. Republished with permission from *Afterall*.

The volumes and editorial practices discussed throughout this article have aimed to highlight the ways editorial groups are revising and renewing their roles and histories. These actions are not only related to memory, to presence, but also to the periodical's afterlife, intended here not as something that moves beyond death but rather as an act of the living. Indeed, these anthologies and anniversary issues

restore the function of past articles, giving them a new life, and evincing a longing for immortality. The cases discussed do not provide a comprehensive survey of the many kinds of memories the periodical attempts to create; rather, they present some of the diverse processes of accumulation, memorisation, and revisitation adopted in the fight against ephemerality. *October* and *Afterall,* alongside *Artforum, e-flux* and *The Exhibitionist*, all chose different paths and media to narrate themselves and their relation to art; nevertheless, they have all engaged in this moment of suspension and revision as essential to their practice, either in terms of thought or through the preparation of a special collection. Some have adopted revisionism as a passive practice, reiterating hegemonic and historical narratives, while others have done so as an active process, constructing new and inclusive histories, keeping in mind art's becoming and the requests of their communities of readers. It can involve the repristination of past glories, the acknowledgment of moments of crisis, or the adoption of expansive and inclusive approaches. The suspended time offered by these specific editorial objects has offered the periodical the chance to move its gaze inwards, to understand its role and what shifts it must undertake to continue moving *with* art. This ability to analyse and detect art's movements is the underlying motive that holds it together, to, as Esche pertinently puts it:

> discuss what art can mean in a world begging for transformation, and how artists can create images and environments that help us imagine a way out of current impasses and apparently immovable power structures. (2019).

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ABSTRACT

Yaawo beadwork culture has a significant presence in the archives of the British Museum. So far, object biographies of John Moir's collection of Yaawo beaded hair combs at the British Museum indicate they were acquired through 'consensual' commercial dealings. By approaching the complexity of cultural repatriation in praxis, this article aims to explore the following: How should we think of seemingly 'consensual' commercial transactions between colonisers and the colonised in the context of cultural repatriation? In what ways can the socio-philosophical boundaries of 'return' be expanded in these cases? This research is further proof that early colonial era trade relations are embedded in ethically ambiguous terms of negotiations that cannot always be clearly judged from a contemporary perspective.

Cultural objects acquired in this manner face multiple legal constraints when they are discussed in relation to cultural repatriation. Lastly, the article calls for expanding cultural repatriation beyond the materiality of cultural objects, with a redirection towards cultural agency.

keywords

BEATRIZ MADALENO ALVES
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Beyond the Material:
A Case Study of the Yaawo Beaded Hair Combs for Repatriating Agency

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Introduction

In 2022, I finalised my master's thesis in African Studies in Leiden University, *Out of Reach: In Search of Yaawo Beadwork in European Ethnographic Museums*. In it, I explored Yaawo beadwork collections present in Dutch, British, and Portuguese ethnographic museums with the aim of answering the following questions: *What can the Yaawo beadwork present in European ethnographic museums say about its cultural significance and usage? How can these pieces uncover the complexities of colonial interactions and African agency?* It had not been my intention to delve on cultural repatriation with my work; however, my curiosity surrounding the topic peaked when I had the opportunity to conduct online interviews with two Yaawo elders from northern Mozambique. Their enthusiasm in sharing their knowledge on Yaawo beadwork culture and their fascination with the fact that some Yaawo beaded items were currently archived in European ethnographic institutions were catalysts for some reflections I had on cultural restitution.

It is undeniable that the topic of cultural repatriation has dominated the Museum Studies field over the last decade, with discussions touching on the legal (Godwin 2020), ethical, moral (Björnberg 2015), and historical-political (Shehade and Fouseki 2016) implications surrounding the restitution of cultural objects. However, the definition of *cultural repatriation* is itself ever-changing through the increasingly vocal participation of diverse interested groups: indigenous peoples from the Americas, Africa, and Asia (and their diasporas), archaeologists, historians,

philosophers, legal scholars, and political thinkers. Although legal frameworks take a considerable amount of time to change, the manner in which all these invested groups engage with the topic has naturally led to reflections on what *repatriation* signifies. Repatriating to whom? For what reasons? To what end? And finally: what to repatriate?

Material cultural restitution generally refers to the return of previously looted or stolen cultural property to its country/group of origin. Yet what defines *cultural property* has changed overtime. The 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property defined it as material 'of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people' (as cited in Godwin 2020: 149). Such material encompassed the areas of architecture, literature, visual art, and archaeology. Sixteen years later, the UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property expanded its definition by including natural specimens and musical instruments (UNESCO 1970). More recently, in 2018, the European Union passed legislation which demanded specific licencing of cultural items in an attempt to prevent illegal trafficking. In this legislation, cultural goods are described as objects older than 250 years and worth, at a minimum, 10,000 euros (Council of the European Union 2018). According to these definitions, cultural goods have a specific age, monetary value, and material form.

Legally, the repatriation of cultural property is considered when 'theft, clandestine excavation and illegal export' of cultural objects have occurred (Prott 2009: 104). The international legal system has attempted to respond to calls of repatriation, on the basis of theft, through the adoption of UNESCO 1970's Convention and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects. Additionally, the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to Countries of Origin or Restitution in Case of Illicit Appropriation has been established as a non-legal mechanism to mediate these discussions (Prott 2009: 104).

Despite these efforts, cultural objects that fall outside strictly defined situations of illicit trafficking are rarely considered. An item being stolen implies an act of violence (physical, emotional, psychological) where a clearly defined oppressive actor has taken material advantage from another. When certain conversations are based on items acquired more than a century ago under very different perceptions of what 'legal' and 'consensual' entailed, what can be considered 'stolen' becomes nebulous.

Discussions on cultural repatriation have focused on cases that attract high levels of media attention, such as the Benin Bronzes in The British Museum (Spero and Adeoye 2022). These debates have highlighted the importance of the objects'

materiality and their accessibility to Western and non-Western publics. Meanwhile, lesser-known African material cultures acquired during the colonial era have not received the same attention. Yaawo beadwork culture, which has a significant presence in the archives of The British Museum, is one such example.

Equally neglected by literature on cultural repatriation is the idea of repatriating agency. In the context of cultural restitution, agency corresponds to the power of autonomously deciding what should happen to one's own cultural heritage. Therefore, repatriating agency means transferring the control of knowledge production to a different party, to the objects' source community. In this article, it will be argued that *agency* should occupy a more central position within discussions on cultural repatriation.

This conceptualisation of cultural restitution as an opportunity to restore indigenous agency over their cultural objects is not a radical or a particularly innovative idea. For instance, in 2017, the Pitt Rivers Museum launched the Living Cultures Initiative, where they formed partnerships with Maasai representatives in Kenya and Tanzania. Throughout this on-going project, Maasai community members have travelled to England to view exhibited and archived cultural objects and have given their perspectives on how these artefacts should be engaged with the public (Zaidi 2020). Nevertheless, I argue that this conceptualisation of repatriation should be extended to other museums which are more legally restricted within cultural repatriation discussions – The British Museum being an example of that.

The Yaawo beadwork pieces present in The British Museum, particularly the beaded hair combs donated by Maitland Moir, daughter of Scottish trader John Moir, add a complex layer to the discussion of cultural agency due to their potential commercial value and/or political symbolism when initially acquired. Therefore, I aim to answer the following questions: *How should cultural objects seemingly acquired through 'consensual' circumstances be approached within agency repatriation? How and why is an agency repatriation approach a suitable way to engage with the Yaawo beaded artefacts currently present at The British Museum?* Based on an object biography conducted in 2021 and 2022, these Yaawo beaded artefacts will serve as an example of how cultural repatriation based on *agency* can be approached.

Object biography: a project in development

Object biography is a qualitative methodology generally used in anthropology, introduced by Igor Kopytoff (1986). The methodology focuses on the 'culturally constructed entity' of an object, approaching its 'culturally specific meanings' and

the classification and multiple reclassifications of its 'culturally constituted categories' (Kopytoff 1986: 68). Kopytoff (1986: 89-90) makes an analogy between individuals and things to show that both have social identities directly influenced by the social spaces, interactions, and times surrounding them. The concept is centred on the idea that an object cannot be disassociated from its context of 'production, use, exchange, and disposal' and the connections it establishes with people through time and space (Carbone 2019: 754).

A biographical approach in analysing Yaawo beaded artefacts within the context of agency repatriation is thus ideal precisely because of this emphasis on studying cultural objects beyond their materiality to cover relations the objects have had with people through time and space. Broader socio-historical realities can be uncovered through the lens of the object's materiality: 'a social history of a particular class of artefact and its changing role and meaning' (Mytum 2003: 111).

Not all movements of objects are recorded and documented. Perhaps this was the most challenging aspect of studying and dialoguing with these Yaawo artefacts: as a researcher, I was restricted in working with often limited surviving material. Furthermore, accessing such material was not always easy, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reflections in this article were based on research conducted for my Master's thesis in 2021 and 2022: access to written documents, archives, and people proved difficult. For instance, some of John Moir's written work (as well as secondary literature about him and the *African Lakes Corporation*) have yet to be analysed. They are currently held at the University of Glasgow; surveying them would likely bring a more detailed insight of the company's activities and relations with the Yaawo communities in the Lake Malawi region, a significant aspect in the biography of the artefacts under discussion. Consequently, the information I have collected throughout my research does not reflect or reconstruct the entire socio-historical movement of the beadwork; it does not represent a path with a clear beginning and end. I collected and engaged with the data available to me at the time. This does not mean that the stories of these artefacts are finished.

On the contrary, I want to view this work as a starting point for a much larger reflection on how future cooperation with Yaawo people, from different walks of life and perspectives, can potentially be enriching to the construction of Yaawo beadwork biography, particularly of the beadwork currently held at European ethnographic museums. Hopefully, other conclusions will be reached with further research in the future, whether they complement my findings or even challenge them. Object biography is not one person's task: it extends across the years and connects other researchers and source community members. It is a continuously fulfilling and enriching process that is not afraid of talking and, most importantly, listening to the objects, though flexibility and cooperation are required to do so.

[1] Despite appearing written in different ways, such as Yao, Wayao, and Ajaua, I have adopted the orthography 'Yaawo' throughout this article. It corresponds to the standardised version established by the African Studies Centre at Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique (Ngunga and Faquir, 2012).

Lastly, the fact that I am a Portuguese academic writing about Yaawo beadwork culture in the context of agency repatriation is not lost on me. Portugal was the main colonial power involved in the colonisation of Mozambique, one of the three African countries with the largest Yaawo populations (alongside Malawi and Tanzania). While this article was prompted by my conversations with Yaawo participants, I was the only one privileged with access to the Yaawo artefacts approached here. I was afforded the possibility, during a pandemic, to visit The British Museum's archives and see, in-person, the items in question. Neither of my Yaawo interviewees had such an opportunity, with their access to the objects limited to photographs on a computer screen. This limitation and the added complexity that my positionality as a researcher brings to the topic further incentivised me to reflect on agency restitution and how restoring agency can be a way to broaden Yaawo people's accessibility to these objects.

Yaawo beaded hair combs in The British Museum

Twenty-two beaded hair combs registered as 'Yao'[1] are held in The British Museum's collection. They were originally acquired by their collectors either in Mozambique or Malawi and were incorporated into the Museum's collection in different years. The two Yaawo beaded hair combs presented in this paper were donated by Maitland Moir in 1957, alongside six other Yaawo combs.

Af1957,01.2 (see fig. 1) is 8.25 centimetres in height, and 6 centimetres in width. On the other hand, *Af1957,01,4* (see fig. 2) is slightly smaller, with 7.50 centimetres in height and 5 centimetres in width. Both objects present the same depth, 0.25 centimetres. They share the same materials: the shafts are adorned with multiple beads, all the same type, strung together with what might be elephant hair. The teeth are long and thin, made of cane. *Af1957,01.4* has the most visible signs of damage: four of its teeth are broken. The beadwork in the comb *Af1957,01.2* forms pale pink and light blue geometrical shapes on a dark red background. The geometrical patterns represent two elephant trunks (the ears are in light blue, and the trunks are in pale pink). On the other hand, the beadwork in *Af1957,01.4* showcases a simpler design: navy blue and ivory white beads form a square on a light pink background.

Their inventory numbers indicate they were donated to The British Museum at the same time, in 1957, and are registered as having been donated by 'Miss Maitland Moir'. Upon archival research in the Museum's correspondence files, I came across a 1956 letter signed by 'M. L. Maitland Moir'. Sent on December 31st, the letter

Fig. 1 – Hair comb *Af1957,01.2*.

states that M. L. Maitland Moir had found a box of 'African curios brought by [her] father about the year 1900' while moving out of her house.[2] She proceeded to explain that she did not know the exact value of the collection and asked the Museum to make a selection of what objects they deemed valuable to keep. At the end of the letter, M. L. Maitland Moir shares her father's name: 'John W. Moir'.[3]

[2] Moir (Maitland), The British Museum, Personal Correspondence, 31 December 1956, British Museum Archives, Uncatalogued collection.

[3] Ibid.

Fig. 2 – Hair comb *Af1957,01.4*

Understanding Yaawo beadwork: interview with two Yaawo elders

European colonial officials and Western researchers have authored most written sources about Yaawo history and culture (see Lacerda e Almeida and Burton 1873; Stannus 1922; Mitchell 1956; Amaral, 1990). Because of this foreign positionality, some aspects of Yaawo culture might have been misconstrued or oversimplified.[4]

[4] One example of possible Western misinterpretation or even fabrication of Yaawo cultural practices comes from Reverend Joseph Thomas Last who, in 1885, travelled to Mozambique to explore the economic viability of the Namuli Mountain region. While describing his findings, Last (1887: 468-69) pointed out: 'The coast Mahommedans have been for many years passing up and down this valley, but their influence seems to have little power to induce the natives [Yaawo] […] to embrace Mahommedanism […]. Cannibalism is but little practiced by the Yaos, still there are some of the great chiefs, as Mtarika and Nyangwali, who indulge in such orgies. I have been frequently told by Yao men, […], that feasts of human flesh are frequently made in secret by the chiefs, […]'. Last confidently stated that the Yaawo chiefs in the Lugenda river region by the mid-1880s had not incorporated any aspects of Arab or Swahili culture. However, this contradicts Livingstone's observations (Livingstone 1874: 68). Additionally, from all the historical sources consulted that referenced Yaawo history and cultural practices, this is the first (and only) one to ever indicate Yaawo's participation in cannibalism (or anthropophagy). Indeed, Last admitted he never witnessed any Yaawo person participating in it: such acts, apparently, were only done by Yaawo chiefs in secret, away from their peoples. As such, one can question the validity of such a claim (see Heintze, 2003).

Therefore, a structural step in the object biography conducted was my recorded conversations with two Yaawo elders from northern Mozambique who volunteered to share their memories from youth. Although they did not witness the actions of their ancestors in the nineteenth century, they can recount oral traditions that have been passed on through generations and which provide testimonies on what Yaawo culture looks like today.

Woman A (who asked to keep her identifying details private) was not fluent in Portuguese or English, only Ciyaawo, therefore, a local interpreter was employed. The same was not needed with the second interviewee, Mr. Chindojo, who spoke fluent Portuguese. Interviewee recruitment was possible through the mediated contact of Dr. Tobias Houston, a research fellow from the University of the Free State. The interview was held at the office of the *Projecto Moçambicano de Tradução Yaawo da Palavra de Deus* (PROMOTYPAD), located in the Nyasa Province, and using Dr. Tobias Houston's Skype account while I was in the Netherlands due to COVID-19 travelling restrictions. The interviewees thus did not have the opportunity to see the two beaded hair combs analysed in this article in-person. Photographs provided by The British Museum's website and others taken by me during my visit to the Museum's archives in November 2021 were shared with the interviewees. The combs *Af1957,01.2* and *Af1957,01.4* have never been exhibited in public since their acquisition by The British Museum. Not only have Woman A and Mr. Chindojo never seen nor touched these objects, it is highly unlikely that other Yaawo people have personally interacted with them. My interviewees' interactions with the objects were, therefore, relegated to the digital format of photographs shared during a Skype conversation.

Having been away from the rural areas for many years, the information both interviewees shared are based on their experiences and knowledge gathered while they were children, teenagers, and young adults.

Both Woman A and Mr. Chindojo are part of the Yaawo Mataka clan. The Mataka, the title given to the clan's headman, possesses limited political influence and is generally restricted in Mwembe, a district of Niassa Province in the north-western region of Mozambique. In Mwembe and other rural areas, traditional elements of Yaawo culture, such as the *unyago* (a general term for initiation rites), are still followed. Nevertheless, according to Woman A, in the Province's big cities, such as Lichinga, more traditional aspects of Yaawo culture are not so closely followed, particularly by the younger generations.[5]

Glass beads came from the coastal areas, bought from Arab and European traders. According to Woman A, these beads were transported to Yaawo villages in glass jars and subsequently sold to the people there. Inside the jars, the beads would come separately and unattached.[6] Purchasing these beads was challenging due to

[5] Woman A, interview by Beatriz Madaleno Alves, 27 April 2022.

[6] Ibid.

their high cost. Families needed to exchange large quantities of corn and potatoes to buy them. Since extensive possession of beads clearly mirrored a higher social position, it influenced the Yaawo perception that interaction with foreign markets was a fundamental first-step towards power ascension. This information converges with work conducted by East African history scholars such as Edward A. Alpers (1969), Fair (2001), and Prestholdt (2012).

My conversation with Woman A and Mr. Chindojo mainly focused on beadwork usage amongst Yaawo women, since glass beads were more regularly used within that demographic. Wearing visually appealing beaded ornaments was significant in a Yaawo women's journey through her femininity, sexuality, and desirability (Alves 2022: 90).

However, it was surprising that Mr. Chindojo and Woman A became puzzled when I showed them pictures of the hair combs in question. Mr. Chindojo revealed that hair combs decorated with beaded patterns would be gifted to the chief, but only very rarely.[7] Hair combs were indeed produced by Yaawo people for daily usage, but without beaded ornamentation – that was solely reserved for the chief as a political gift. It has been documented that the employment of specific types of glass beads or beaded ornaments were reserved for higher status individuals in Yaawo societies. For instance, Amaral (1990: 94) noted that beads denominated as *cilalaka* were exclusively used for the crowns worn by Yaawo chiefs' daughters to distinguish them from the other 'commoner' women. This class-based differentiation in bead usage became a symbol of political and economic power. Alpers (1969: 410) indicated that 'the headman, or chief, seems also to have controlled the distribution of […] beads, which were acquired at the coast. This procedure further enhanced his prestige by enabling him to reserve certain kinds of […] beads […] for his own personal use and that of his relatives'. This link between glass bead possession and political ascension reached a peak during Yaawo communities' involvement with the East African slave trade between the 18th and 19th centuries, with a wide variety of European and Arab glass beads serving as payment to acquire enslaved labour captured by Yaawo raiders (Alpers 1969). Considering that Woman A and Mr. Chindojo have never socialised closely with their Yaawo Mataka chief, their astonishment in witnessing such hair combs (even if just through pictures) was justified.

Although my conversation with Woman A and Mr. Chindojo did not focus on the topic of cultural repatriation, I inquired how they felt about these objects, manufactured by Yaawo people in the nineteenth century, being in a European museum, physically so distant from their home-country. Both expressed their satisfaction that Yaawo beaded hair combs and other beadwork remained materially preserved, even if far away from Eastern Africa. As pointed out previously by Woman A, the

[7] Mr. Chindojo, interview by Beatriz Madaleno Alves, 29 April 2022.

older Yaawo generations seem to feel that younger Yaawo people, particularly those who live in bigger cities, are not engaged in traditional Yaawo cultural expressions, like the employment of beadwork as ornamentation. That generational divide is a cause for concern among older community members, who feel like the work of their ancestors and their practices is slowly fading into obscurity.

The Collector: John Moir and the African Lakes Corporation

David Livingstone's theory of religion and 'legitimate' commerce being vital tools to incentivise slave trafficking in Eastern Africa (see Monk 1858; Livingstone 1865; Livingstone 1874) profoundly influenced British imperialist projects in the region. To spread Christianity, one also needed to possess faith 'in the capitalist system as an instrument of improvement' (Macmillan 1970: 62; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1986: 1). It is in this context that the *African Lakes Corporation* (ALC), founded by the Moir Brothers, appears.

John William Moir was a Scottish trader born in Edinburgh on 26 January 1851. Inspired by the death of the missionary David Livingstone (Moir 1924: 1) and the American evangelical movement of Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, John Moir and his brother Frederick Moir sailed to the African continent in 1877 (Macmillian 1970: 95). In 1878 they became the founding managers of the *Livingstonia Central Africa Company,* which would assume the name *African Lakes Corporation* in 1894. John Moir would continue to live in southern Malawi until 1900, having maintained contact with Yaawo populations for roughly 22 years.

At the height of its activities, the ALC covered the following areas:

> […] the whole of what is now Malawi, and parts of Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania. It formed an approximate rectangle bounded on the south by the river Zambesi flowing down to its delta on the Indian Ocean, on the west by the Luapula river and a line drawn from its source to the Zambesi, on the north by a line drawn from Lake Mweru across the south end of Lake Tanganyika to the north end of Lake Malawi, and on the east by the eastern shores of Lake Malawi and a line south from there including Lake Shirwa and the Shire Highlands (Macmillan 1970: 1).

The company's central role was to provide logistical support to the British missions working in the Lake Malawi region. This included providing, maintaining, and operating steamers on the Zambesi and Shire rivers and on the Lakes Malawi and Tanganyika:

> According to their contract they were to superintend the line of navigation from Quelimane on the Indian Ocean coast to Livingstonia, the Free Church of Scotland Mission which was at that time situated on Cape Maclear, a peninsula at the south end of Lake Malawi. This was about four hundred miles [644 kilometres] from the coast. In addition, they were to organise a service to Tete, a Portuguese settlement some three hundred miles [483 kilometres] up the Zambesi; and to run in cooperation with the mission a steamer service on the lake itself; to carry on the trade with the people and to establish depots at convenient points in connection with this trade (Macmillan 1970: 99-100).

The Moir brothers concluded that ivory was the most valuable commodity in those regions and could effectively steer African communities away from slave trafficking. It turned out to be a good business decision: in 1893, nineteen tons of ivory from Central-Eastern Africa were exported, bringing around £18,300 in profit (Branson 2020: 66).

The Date and location of acquisition: two speculations

With this emphasis on ivory, the ALC first established contact with Yaawo groups in the Nyasa region. One of the most important relations was with the Yaawo chief Mponda, who traded ivory with the company in exchange for European cloth and glass beads. Between 1875 and 1883, the Company distributed around 25 tons of beads: 'The Moirs were attempting to satisfy the certainly pre-existing demand for western products, especially cloth and beads, on the assumption that if these demands could be satisfied through the sale of other commodities, the sale of slaves would be made unnecessary' (Macmillan 1970: 120).[8]

Two possible acquisition places can be pointed to: the first is in Blantyre, where the Blantyre Mission Station from the *Universities' Mission to Central Africa* had been since 1876. The station had good relations with the Yaawo chief Kapeni and had convinced him to stop his involvement in slave trafficking completely. Kapeni was also one of the Yaawo chiefs who signed John Moir's petitions to Queen Victoria in 1885. Such petitions were to demonstrate that certain areas in the Nyasa region effectively possessed a robust British presence, and its local inhabitants were requesting colonial protection. Economic and administrative interests were also at play, as any British protection would be exercised through the *African Lakes Corporation* (Ross 2018: 121), a plan that was ultimately not realised. These objects could have been produced by an artisan in Kapeni's territory and offered as a gift

[8] The bead trade conducted by John Moir and the African Lakes Corporation ties with Livingstone's thesis: '[…] if the slave-market were supplied with articles of European manufacture by legitimate commerce, the trade in slaves would become impossible. It seemed more feasible to give the goods, for which the people now part with their servants, in exchange for ivory and other products of the country and thus prevent the trade at the beginning, than to try to put a stop to it at any of the subsequent steps' (quoted in Monk 1858: 106).

to John Moir in 1885. Considering that beaded hair combs were presumably for the exclusive usage of Yaawo chiefs and their closest relatives, gifting such an object to John Moir would signal allegiance, recognising the *African Lakes Corporation* as an entity which could provide valuable military protection to Kapeni and his community.

Another possibility lies in Mulanje, a town in the southern region of Malawi, close to the border with Mozambique, approximately 69 kilometres southeast of Blantyre. In 1893, John Moir became a tea planter and purchased 4,200 acres of what is now known as the Lauderdale estate, staying there until his retirement (see Hutson 1978). This region had a historical presence of Yaawo groups, corresponding to the territories of Yaawo chiefs Matipwiri and Mkanda (Morris 2014: 6). If trade relations were established between John Moir and the artisans of these two Yaawo chiefs, they most likely date from around 1895 and 1900, the final stages of Harry Johnston's military campaign when British forces subjugated both chiefs (Morris 2014: 13).[9]

[9] For more on Harry Johnston's military campaigns in Malawi and the subsequent military defeat of Yaawo chiefdoms in the area, see Macmillan 1970, and McCracken 2012.

A consensual transaction? Acquiring artefacts in the colonial era

In the written sources consulted, nothing indicates the Yaawo beaded combs were exchanged without consent. Frank J. Garcia (2018: 26) defines consent in commercial transactions as a 'voluntary, bargained-for exchange of value' in which the economic benefit is mutually advantageous for the parties involved. The *African Lakes Corporation*'s relationship with the Yaawo communities in the region appears to have been transactional: both parties involved obtained goods that met their demands – *The African Lakes Corporation*, by exchanging glass beads and cloth with Yaawo populations, would gain access to vast amounts of ivory. Even if these beaded hair combs ended up in John Moir's possession through a gift from a Yaawo sovereign as an allegiance symbol, there is still an exchange of value that is not completely unilateral: the gift giver (the Yaawo ruler) transferred something of economic value to the gift receiver (John Moir) as a grateful reminder of their transactional relationship based on further exchange of goods and services (Garcia 2018: 23).

However, whether the commercial transactions between the *African Lakes Corporation* and Yaawo populations were always mutually beneficial is questionable. The voluntary nature of commercial exchanges between colonial officials and colonised (or later colonised) peoples is a topic of debate among scholars. As Warrior (2008: 14) explains, trade does not merely involve an economic transaction; it encom-

passes a set of relationships where different values and objectives are exchanged and fomented.

The *African Lakes Corporation*, and John Moir's active management of it in its first decades of operation, is intrinsically linked to David Livingstone's colonial project for Britain. Livingstone's belief in Christianity and commerce as instruments to establish British presence in Malawi is embedded in the ALC's commercial activities. While providing logistical support for the various British missions taking place in the Lake Malawi region, the company also established important trading relations with the indigenous peoples of the region to disincentivise the trade of enslaved people (a business practice that was dominated by Yaawo traders throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). ALC's influence in the region and in the establishment of British colonialism in Malawi cannot be understated. The connection between trade and imperialism has been pointed out by scholars such as Arghiri Emmanuel (1972: 186), emphasising how vital commerce was in developing an imperial project in the nineteenth century: 'All imperialisms are, in the last analysis, mercantile in character'. Autonomous agency under a colonial (sub) context may be undermined due to the socio-political discrepancy between the colonial agent (in this case, John Moir) and the colonial targets (the Yaawo communities) (Matthes 2017: 948).

As Ypi (2013: 158) argues, colonialism creates and sustains a political organisation in which members are denied 'equal and reciprocal terms of cooperation'. This lack of reciprocal cooperation touches every aspect of the political system's foundation. According to Ypi (2013: 175), to develop a successful political cooperation, this principle of equal consideration is a foundational aspect: 'the claims granted to one group [must be] proportionally equal to those recognised for another'. Without such terms, relations shift to those of subjugation and exploitation, even if these are not intended.

On the other hand, a complete denial of Yaawo's involvement in these political engagements would mean that they had unknowingly complied with a highly exploitative agreement. The exchange of Yaawo beadwork (whether symbolically, as a gift, or commercially, as a commodity) could reveal a desire from Yaawo leaders to participate in continuous transactional relationships with Europeans, catering to their aesthetic preferences (Hofmeest and de Zwart 2018: 18; see also Prestholdt 2008; Prestholdt 2012; Kingdon 2019). Exclusively viewing John Moir's Yaawo beadwork collection as a consequence of imperialist exploitation takes away the fundamental agency Yaawo traders and leaders had in this process, relegating them to the role of 'passive' spectators of a unilateral transaction. Ultimately, the implementation of Christianity and the promotion of 'legitimate' forms of commerce outside of the slave trade would not be enough to establish a solid British

colonial project in the Malawi region: 'the coloniser had to enter into entangled relations with indigenous elites, and at each step along the way, these groups reshaped each other' (Kingdon 2019).

Revisiting repatriation: an emphasis on agency

Throughout the object biography I conducted in 2021/2022 the topic of repatriation was rarely mentioned and a well-structured biography of these objects has yet to be completed, meaning robust discussions regarding the restitution of these beaded combs to the Yaawo communities have not occurred. It is difficult to ask questions with regard to a possible return of these items when their date and location of acquisition for now remain speculation. Moreover, my conversations with the two Yaawo interviewees did not record any intentions of having these artefacts returned. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm in being a part of the study of their own cultural heritage was palpable. The information they provided about the cultural employment of Yaawo beadwork was crucial in understanding and contextualising the objects archived in The British Museum. Their participation added invaluable insight on the previous lives these objects might have had and added intangible meaning that had not been documented before. For instance, the written sources consulted all fail to mention the exclusive use of beaded hair combs by Yaawo chiefs and how this exclusivity was a visual marker of socio-economic dominance. The interviewees' participation in my initial research made me reflect on how these objects' biography could further be explored if The British Museum established a collaborative approach in the stewardship of its Yaawo beadwork collection.

Significant limitations impede the cultural repatriation of these Yaawo beaded hair combs, however: firstly, Björnberg (2015: 464) points out that cultural repatriation cases normally involve the unlawfully illegitimate acquisition of an object. This means that an illicit act took place (the object was stolen or acquired clandestinely), a deceitful or exploitative contract was signed for its acquisition, or the transfer was agreed by a third party who was not the original owner. Repatriation when one of these three wrongdoings is not explicitly proven is not impossible, it simply cannot be argued on the grounds of a past injustice, which is the legal justification most commonly used in these cases. The Yaawo beaded combs in The British Museum exemplify a case in which cultural repatriation based on past unlawful acquisition would not be suitable. According to the object biography conducted so far, the artefacts were either gifted or perhaps sold to John Moir.

Camille Labadie (2021) further explains that the dubious provenance context of cultural items such as the Yaawo beaded combs would complicate a hypothetical call for their repatriation:

> […] many restitution requests relate to objects acquired decades or centuries ago. […] these claims may […] be […] complicated by the determination of the unlawful nature of the dispossession itself, or by material difficulties relating to the traceability of the artefacts insofar as they have often been subject to multiple transfers of ownership, nationally and internationally, which can obscure the chains of title (Labadie 2021: 139).

Secondly, these objects are currently archived in The British Museum and the British legal system is skewed in favour of the institution, with the current administrative structure of The British Museum unable to presently consider a repatriation call for the Yaawo hair combs. The museum was established from the Last Will and Testament of Sir Hans Sloane, an Anglo-Irish physician and entrepreneur born in 1660. Sloane was a zealous collector of natural history-related items and, upon his death in 1753, his collection encompassed over 71,000 objects. Sloane's will, signed and (re)sealed in 1751, explicitly stated that his vast collection was to be sold to the Parliament for 20,000 pounds and exhibited in a museum to be visited 'by all persons desirous of seeing and viewing' it (quoted in Hamilton 2018: 24). A Board of Trustees would first need to be established to oversee the integral preservation of the museum's collection: '[…] I do Will and de[s]ire that for the promoting of the[s]e noble ends […] my collection in all its branches may be, if po[ss]ible, kept and pre[s]erved together whole and [e]ntire […]' (quoted in Godwin 2020: 158). The British Museum Act of 1963 further clarifies this duty: the Board of Trustees in The British Museum is lawfully bound by fiduciary duty to preserve the Museum's collection (Godwin 2020: 147).

The case of the Yaawo hair combs and their potential 'lawful' acquisition poses a challenge to the current international legal system: should groups revoke the transactions conducted by their ancestors? How to efficiently codify that necessary ancestral connection into law? These are challenging questions that have no easy answer. For instance, one of the ways that international law has attempted to manage these challenges has been through the establishment of the Intergovernmental Committee for Promoting the Return of Cultural Property to Countries of origin or Restitution in case of Illicit Appropriation (ICPRCP). While this Committee offers an opportunity for more complex repatriation cases to be heard and debated, it is confined to inter-state disputes (Hausler and Selter 2022). This restriction becomes particularly limiting in cases of African repatriation where ethnic

groups are rarely delimited by state borders – Yaawo people, in this case, have communities historically based in three different countries: Mozambique, Malawi, and Tanzania.

Ultimately, our current international legal instruments have yet to catch up with the diverse and complex nuances of colonial era collections. As Godwin (2020: 153) notes, 'while international law has sought to alleviate the lack of consent surrounding cultural property acquisition, it has achieved little in inspiring institutions to halt acquisitions or repatriate cultural property'.

In the face of an international legal conjuncture that is currently not adequately meeting the increasing number of repatriation calls, it is urgent to approach cultural restitution in a more dynamic and fluid manner that is not intrinsically dependent on juridical technicalities. If museums intend to preserve and exhibit the material and the immaterial, the tangible and the intangible[10], then the manner in which ethnographic institutions such as The British Museum approach the topic of cultural repatriation must go beyond the idea of physically moving a cultural object. Repatriating an object, in such cases, is not possible, ideal, or even enough: *agency* is what should be repatriated.

Despite their years of academic study and professional experience in their respective fields, curators and material culture experts should not be the sole source of knowledge about non-Western cultural objects at European ethnographic institutions. While the contributions of specialists in Museum and Heritage Studies are valuable and must be considered – I am included in this group, after all – specialists cannot make claims of authority over cultural objects that have gone through a convoluted process of 'aesthetical decontextualisation' (Appadurai 1986: 28). The Yaawo beaded combs in The British Museum are undeniably detached from their original cultural context.

The Yaawo beaded combs in The British Museum have never been exhibited in public. Since their acquisition in 1957 from Maitland Moir, they have been carefully kept and preserved in the museum's archives. When it is time to view, touch, and photograph the combs, all due diligence is put in place to preserve their material form. However, the intangible importance of these objects until my interviews with Yaawo participants had remained practically unexplored. The participation of Yaawo elders in this research was, therefore, crucial in understanding the possible meanings and usages of these objects in Yaawo traditional society. The tools that I had as a researcher in searching for information in archives and secondary literature needed to be supported by the generational knowledge of Yaawo people in order to make sense of the objects I had in front of me. For the first time since their acquisition by The British Museum, the Yaawo beaded combs were being engaged beyond their materiality and their intangible sensibilities were being

[10] In August 2022, the International Council of Museums elaborated a new definition for the concept of museum, stating that it is 'a not-for profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage' (ICOM 2022).

explored and dissected by Yaawo community members kilometres away from the museum. This positive experience of sharing and combining knowledge from diverse backgrounds showcased what repatriating agency in the future could look like: a future where museum workers and source communities share the stewardship of museum collections and both are responsible for their material preservation and immaterial engagement.

Two successful agency restitution cases have been the collaboration between the Cheyenne people and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (Curry 2023) and the Living Cultures Initiative launched by the Pitt Rovers Museum in 2017 in partnership with Maasai communities (Adams 2020; Zaidi 2020). Both initiatives have not always led to the material repatriation of the objects in question. A substantial amount of the cultural artefacts remain in museums' possession, whether because unlawful acquisition of the objects was not proven or because the source communities wished to educate the museum's public through the exhibitions. However, this does not mean that the museums maintain sole control or custody of the objects' fate and presentation. Every decision requires the active participation of museum professionals and source communities in order to reach a mutual agreement.

This more fluid and dynamic approach to cultural repatriation carries a multitude of advantages: first, the museums are held accountable by source communities and have the opportunity to correct past mistakes surrounding the contextual violence of their collections. Indeed, history cannot be modified and colonisation will remain a wound in the historical relations between Europeans and Africans. But repatriating agency proves that there are possibilities for a healing present and transformative future.

Second, through the engaging collaborative effort of indigenous communities, museums will find innovative approaches in displaying, documenting, and preserving cultural objects in their care. Besides providing a space to educate museum visitors about indigenous peoples' efforts to preserve their cultures, it would also serve as an opportunity for reflection: thinking about other museum practices that differ from Western approaches (see Mignolo 2011).

Third, repatriating agency would make restitution conversations increasingly more localised, circumventing the need to open inter-state disputes that necessarily carry legal requirements. This point has been recently emphasised through the Recommendations on Participation in Global Cultural Heritage Governance in 2022, stating that heritage matters should be dealt on a community basis outside of state prerogative (Hausler and Selter 2022). The dialogue conducted by museums would directly engage indigenous members and their requirements without the interference of state officials, who might not understand the specific needs of

ethnic communities. Therefore, the legal constraints imposed by the 1970 UNESCO Convention would be bypassed.

Fourth, anchoring indigenous agency in cultural repatriation conversations diverts attention away from the materiality of cultural heritage. Cultural artefacts' materiality is not the only aspect worth preserving; their immaterial, intangible value must also be respected and such respect essentially takes the form of research, engagement, and communication. To preserve is to understand that cultural heritage goes beyond the physical, 'it also includes knowledge, behaviours, customs, arts, history, experience, languages, legacies, beliefs, values, institutions, philosophical systems, social relations, and other creations handed down from the past' (Peleg 2014: 2). Agency, the power of autonomously deciding what should happen to one's cultural heritage, is a crucial aspect of cultural construction. This must also be preserved alongside the material nature of the object.

Lastly, repatriating agency is a viable solution for restitution calls that are based on what Björnberg (2015: 462) calls 'aesthetic grounds', where restitution is considered for the contextualised integrity and holistic understanding of the cultural artefact. Since the shared stewardship of cultural objects necessarily requires the dynamic involvement of source communities and the integration of their cultural practices and knowledge, the objects become subject to an aesthetical *recontextualisation*. This means that all the socio-cultural meanings they have acquired through their spatial and temporal trajectory are acknowledged and considered in their artefactual interpretation.

Repatriation based on aesthetic grounds does not necessarily require the prior unlawful acquisition of the object. This justification for restitution would be particularly useful for the case of the Yaawo beaded combs in The British Museum. Aesthetic grounds give room for situations where consensual terms of agreement behind the acquisition might have been dubious, and where the justification is not one of unlawfulness but a need to add more context to the cultural objects. This aspect is particularly significant to these beaded hair combs, which were reportedly solely employed by chiefs. Conducting more interviews and establishing collaborative relationships with current Yaawo chiefs to understand their perspective on the matter would not only bring more knowledge to The British Museum's archiving and exhibiting spaces, it would also provide the opportunity for other Yaawo community members to understand the political significance of these artefacts. This possible democratisation of knowledge could lead to a greater engagement of younger Yaawo people in the traditional practices of their ancestors.

Repatriating agency then can be assumed as a more flexible approach to engaging with these Yaawo beaded hair combs. The British Museum's current legal framework does not prevent it from collaborating with Yaawo community mem-

bers in the intangible construction of Yaawo beadwork. Collaborating with Yaawo representatives would shine a light on cultural objects that have not received public attention and it would introduce Yaawo culture and artistry to a wider public. If The British Museum is dedicated in educating the masses and making knowledge of 'mankind's culture' easily available, entering in dialogue with Yaawo people and promoting their archival works is a fundamental step. Moreover, sharing the stewardship of Yaawo beadwork would not only provide an opportunity for Yaawo people to closely engage with the cultural practices of their ancestors (and promote intergenerational cultural renewal), it would also keep with the official internationalist stance The British Museum has held towards the topic of cultural repatriation: the value of their collections is based on their universal importance to the heritage of humankind – therefore, the stakeholders responsible for the care of such heritage also need to be multiple and in constant dialogue with each other (see Matthes 2017).

My conversations with Yaawo people revealed a concern for the issue of cultural renewal. The continual abandonment of Yaawo traditional practices and the participation of Yaawo young people in an increasingly globalised world are two aspects that worried the Yaawo participants in this research because they were seeing essential parts of their cultural fabric being lost in time. Listening to their testimonies and noting them down in written form was one way of solidifying their cultural knowledge; however, the material contributions of Yaawo people in the past require a deeper conversation with museum workers in order to enshrine Yaawo knowledge in The British Museum's museological practices. Repatriating agency and stewardship back to Yaawo people does not equate to 'revitalisation of traditional practices' or 'a return to outdated ways of life that have no relevance in the modern world' (Simpson 2009: 124) to the younger Yaawo generations. It would, however, ensure the 'protection and preservation of cultural heritage' (Simpson 2009: 124) and renew pride in the art and culture of Yaawo artisans.

Conclusion

Cultural repatriation is a heated topic which touches on the sensibilities of multiple entities interested in the appropriate preservation of humankind's cultural heritage: museum workers, cultural heritage scholars, anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, and indigenous community members. Nevertheless, all of these actors are focused on the same objective: preserving the integrity of the cultural objects currently archived in ethnographic institutions. It is around that shared

mission that this article calls for a more sharing, diverse, and transparent approach to cultural restitution.

This article has defended the need to redirect repatriation efforts towards *cultural agency*. Agency corresponds to the power, the responsibility, the duty, and the right to decide the fate of the cultural functioning and legacy of a group. Even at the dawn of colonialism, African peoples had substantial degrees of agency with respect to their own communal, political, and economic matters. African agency in trade relations with Europeans cannot be understated. In East Africa, in particular, African traders could define what was desirable or not in their commercial transactions with Europeans and could as easily adapt their trading offer according to European sensibilities (Prestholdt 2008; Prestholdt 2012). Considering the monopoly Yaawo people had in the trade of enslaved people and ivory throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it is logical to conclude that they had sufficient power and influence to dictate part of the negotiation terms with European colonial agents (Alpers 1969; Alpers 1975). This explains why John Moir's Yaawo combs collection remains such an engaging case study for repatriating agency: it requires an enlarged perspective on what should and can be returned in a case of a 'seemingly' consensual interaction. While John Moir's collection and its hypothetical repatriation would face several barriers from a legal perspective, an agency-oriented standpoint provides a solid case for restitution on aesthetic grounds.

If scholars and museum professionals continue to conceptualise cultural repatriation as a matter of material removal, then cases such as these exemplified Yaawo beaded hair combs will never be adequately explored. There is an urgent need to move cultural repatriation conversations beyond what the international legal systems conceptualise as unlawful and illicit. Repatriation through a purely legal perspective is highly bureaucratic and can sometimes take several years to reach resolution. These conversations necessarily require more local, inter-personal mediations which take into consideration the complexities of cultural construction and identity.

Cultural objects transcend their material form. Their importance in the cultures of the past, present, and future is not confined by their physical characteristics *per se* but in how that physicality gives meaning, guidance, and configuration to a cultural logic. That cultural logic is understood, built, and cherished by the people who live within it; museums will only gain a holistic understanding of the cultural objects they possess in their care if they actively reach out and collaborate with the source communities related to the collections. Culture, and the material realities of it, encompass a set of philosophies, religious beliefs, and business practices that should be taken into consideration when archiving and displaying cultural artefacts in a museum. Culture is not necessarily bound to state borders and it does not accompany the slow changes in legal systems. Culture is personal, com-

munal, localised, ever-changing and evolving, and repatriation talks should follow a similar pattern. Transcending materiality should thus be a focal point in discussions relating to cultural repatriation.

Whether or not future repatriation requests take place, respecting and understanding the original cultural values carried by Yaawo beadwork remains relevant to achieving a holistic state of preservation. This is only possible through the active cooperation of Yaawo community members who share the enthusiasm of preserve the memory and traditions of their ancestors. The passionate participation of Woman A and Mr. Chindojo in our discussions proves that some Yaawo people are indeed eager to share their ancestors' artistic abilities and cultural traditions.

What the museum community gains is much more valuable in a decolonial framework: it is provided with the opportunity of establishing meaningful, productive, and respectful conversations with people who live the cultural reality embedded in those objects. It grounds museum work in reality and detaches it from material possession and authority claims. And that is how the museum can stay alive.

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ABSTRACT

Imagine a group of people joining the art delivery transportation services responsible for moving objects from the old Ethnographic collection house in Dahlem (Berlin) to the new building of the Humboldt Forum. The transportation vehicle suddenly stops and the two drivers ask the people who joined them to step out along with the artefacts in their crates. Imagine those people standing in the middle of the city with the crates in their hands – what would they do now? Where should they take these objects? What are the tools they have to make decisions? In October 2021, I performed one such ritualistic rehearsal towards a possible act of emptying the museum of heritage. My performance, part of the Moving the Forum project – a participatory dance residency programme at the Humboldt Forum Berlin – unfolded in parallel with the long-running and complex operation of transferring thousands of artefacts from the Ethnological Museum of Berlin to their new 'permanent home' inside the reconstructed imperialistic Berlin Palace.

During my performative ritual, which consisted of a series of imaginings towards a counter course of action, the public was invited to witness members of the restoration team and art handlers emptying the display cases in the new exhibition spaces. I conceived this performative act as a pre-enactment, a proposal for physical and mental training in reassessing and unlearning the relationships between caretakers of objects in imperial museums and the future and possible fate of plundered objects.

In this article, I discuss notions of training, imagining, and repetition as ways of reassessing and transforming the relationships between imperial institutions acting as caretakers and violently plundered objects. The article offers a fictional script of this ride from the Ethnological museum in Dahlem to the Humboldt forum, drawing on months of field research conducted in preparation for this ritualistic ceremony, *Restless Objects of emptying the Forum*, during which I closely observed the operational and political aspects of the relocation procedures and examined the structural powers at the basis of imperial collections.

keywords

RE-IMAGINING
TRAINING
UNLEARNING
ART-HANDLING
CARETAKING
PRE-ENACTMENT
EMPTYING THE MUSEUM
EMPTYING IMPERIAL POWER

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Final(?) DISPOSITION (Restless Objects[1])

A Ride from the Storage to the Palace

HAGAR OPHIR

Introduction

Imagine a group of people joining the art transportation services responsible for moving objects from the old Ethnographic collection house in Dahlem (Berlin) to the new building of the
Humboldt Forum.[2] The car suddenly stops, there is a problem, and the driver asks the people who joined the journey to immediately step out of the car and take the artefacts with them. Imagine those people standing in the middle of the city with crates in their hands – what would they do now? Where should they take these objects? What would inform their decisions? What are the tools at their disposal? The events described here – *The Final (?) Disposition* – occurred in October 2021 during a moment in time when the objects were being moved from their old to their new host location in highly technological glass cases in the climate-controlled environment of the Humboldt Forum. Nowadays, all these objects are on display. Among those who joined the *Final (?) DISPOSITION* drive was an anonymous reporter who described the experience as follows:

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

It was a sunny day in October 2021. On my way to the Dahlem Museum, I was talking with a friend about plundered art and its possible restitution, expressing my concern that this issue was merely another fashion of the art and the academic

[1] This is a scripted narrative of an event that was planned but never materialised in its fullest. It is based on fragments of events that took place in various locations, not necessarily those indicated in the text, that for the purpose of this essay were assembled and imagined into a single narrative. A different performative work titled *Restless Object* was developed and presented during a participatory dance residency *Moving the Forum* at the Humboldt Forum Berlin, 20-21. The research carried out for *Restless Object* informs this essay and the scripted performative piece *Final(?) DISPOSITION*.

[2] 'Constructed in 1443, the Berlin historical palace was considered a symbol of the Prussian monarchy, under which German colonialism was placed under state protection by the so-called Congo Conference of 1884. However, the palace was partially destroyed during World War II. These ruins made way for the Palace of the Republic (*Palast der Republik*), the seat of the parliament in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In 2003, the German federal parliament decided to tear down the Palace of the Republic and to reconstruct the old Berlin Palace'. For more, see www.no-humboldt21.de.

Fig. 1 – Back entrance to the Ethnological Museum Dahlem

world. And yet I was curious about this performance, *The Final (?) Disposition*. The time had come to empty state institutions out of their power, empty museums and collections in Europe of objects and goods, and detach collected heritage from its role as diplomatic cards in the hands of European institutions.
We arrived at the back door of the building and signed in. Despite my scepticism, excitement was high. I wasn't sure if we would get close to the objects hidden in storage for more than a hundred years since they were looted or bought in violent circumstances. Did my ancestors loot any of them? I looked at the eight-floor building where the collection is kept and couldn't avoid thinking that time had left its imprint on it.

Ext/The Ethnological Museum entrance at Dahlem

Guard:
[reacting with a sort of cynical tone to the reporter's sceptical gaze at the eight-floor building]
Yes… not the best safe, ha…?
Well, there are almost a million residents, actually prisoners, who remained in that eight-floor building. Can you imagine? The best of 'German inheritance'. [Fig. 2]

Fig. 2 – The Corridors

Fig. 3 – Restoration Street

[3] *100 jahre museum für Völkerkunde zur Geschichte des museums,* Sigrid Westphal-Hellbusch, 1977

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

We entered through a backdoor into corridors leading to the 'restoration street'. Our phones and bags were taken. We learned that this is the third time the objects have been moved to another institution since they arrived in Germany. The museum was first located in Prinz-Albrecht-Straße (today Niederkirchnerstraße) in the same building which served as the headquarters of the Gestapo between May 1933 until its bombing in 1945. I remembered seeing pictures of the old wooden display cases from that old building.[3] [Fig. 3]

We followed our guide, who was dressed in a white robe. We crossed corridors filled with large rolls of packing materials, plastic boxes, and storage cabinets. The guide explained that it takes several months before each object can leave the building.

Indoor/the Ethnological Museum's staff entrance corridors

Guide:

[Talking to the group while walking and leading their way]

The objects that are being transferred must stay in the *whitening* room until it is confirmed that they are not contaminated. We call them 'black' before being cleaned of the dust and toxic chemicals that cover them. A special machine removes all kinds of dust and traces of life from them, and only from then do they count as white.

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

We looked at the conservators at work and how they carefully prepared small beds to fit each patient with little prosthetic legs and robes. We were given gloves and joined the last stage of packing the following objects: a pair of shoes, a knife, a pot, a little cloth with some seeds, and a big wooden mask. We helped pack them into grey boxes and attached coded stickers. We were told these objects were not yet ready to go – they first had to go through isolation in the vacuum room. We were instructed to go to the first floor to get 'our' objects and carry them to the lorry. [Fig. 4]

One hour later, we were in the car, driving from Dahlem, north west Berlin, to the Museum island, at the centre of Berlin. With the grey boxes on our laps, we were not sure what was in them.

Int/transportation car with 8 seats

Fig. 4 – Whitening room

[four passengers sitting in the transportation vehicle each have a grey box on their lap. The lorry starts to move slowly. During the journey, the driver and the art handler in the front seats are busy gossiping about the identity of the new curator of the Islamic collection. The people in the back seat manage to catch some snatches of the conversation.]

Driver:

[talking to his colleague next to them,
unaware that the passengers can hear them]

...they also don't know who will take over the African collection yet. No one wants to deal with the bureaucratic and curatorial aspects of handling the Benin bronzes room and the hassle around restitution ceremonies and artist demonstrations.

Art handler:

[More pragmatically]

I don't care who takes over and where I deliver the art, you know… I can deliver it to Kinshasa right now if they want me to, or back into the salt mines in the centre of Germany for a few more years… I really don't care…

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

They spoke as if no one was listening until the art handler shushed the driver, who immediately tried to rephrase what he had said.

Int/transportation car with 8 seats

Fig. 5 – The Drive

Driver:

Don't get me wrong, I'm just doing my job the best I can, you know. But truly, how many times can they keep postponing this process?! I will not cancel my *Urlaub*[4] again. It's unacceptable! [Fig. 5]

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

At this point, finally, the art handler turned towards us and asked if we knew that in 1941, scientists and soldiers oversaw the transfer of some items of the collection to the famous salt mines to protect them from potential bombs but also from insects and decay. They anointed them with toxic materials, and until today the only way to get rid of it is to whiten them. They showed us a picture of a man in a robe and a mask hugging a human skeleton while anointing it.

[4] The German word for vacation.

Art handler:

[Take the picture back and continue]

This was not the last time these poor objects were moved. The collection was split – half was sent to St. Petersburg and half back to Dahlem. No art handler was there to accompany them while they were transported on military lorries – can you imagine?! Rumour has it that some bored and traumatised soldiers played shooting games with pots from the Americas collection as if they were empty beer cans…

Driver:

[Adding to the information shared by the Art handler]

And even after this long journey back and forth, and all the clay pots that were left behind broken on the side of the road, there are still hundreds of pots in the Americas collection. [Fig. 6]

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

I started to wonder what I had in my box. Is it one of the Inca ceramics that survived? My hand got a bit sweaty from the idea of carrying such responsibility. I was

Fig. 6 – From the collection of the Ethnological Museum Berlin

relieved to see the white gloves on my hands – they would shield this precious and vulnerable survivor from my fingerprints. A few minutes later, the driver lit a cigarette, opened the window, and turned on the radio as if this were a normal taxi ride. A cheesy song by *Passenger* was playing:

Int/transportation car with 8 seats

Radio:

[At first loud and clear and then fading into the background]

Only know you love her when you let her go
And you let her go.…[5]

Int/transportation car with 8 seats

Driver:

[While the car stopes on the traffic light, taking the hand out of the window and pointing in the direction of the Syrian embassy building]

You see, this is where objects like those in your box will probably never be transported… at least not in the current political circumstances,

Driver and Art handler:

Chuckling.

Art handler:

[Continuing in a more neutral way]

To your left, you can see we are passing by the Syrian embassy – so many expeditions were recorded to greater Syria before the Sykes-Picot agreement separated Palestine and Lebanon from Syria. The collections in Europe are filled with bounty looted by soldiers, scholars, artists, folklorists, archaeologists, and architects from Germany, Austria, France, and the United Kingdom.

Reporter:

[Describing the events in retrospect]

I got a bit lost in the story's nuances about which objects would or would not be restituted, but it was clear that objects from the Muslim world were unlikely to be transferred from European institutions through via diplomatic paths. The art handler later mentioned that the sculpted horses of the Brandenburger Tor were looted by Napoleon in 1806 but restituted back to Prussia a couple of years later. I won-

[5] Passenger. 2012, *Let Her Go*, from the album 'All the Little Lights'.

Fig. 7 – Bradenburger Tor

dered what could have happened if Germany had not got them back or if one would question their legal status (arguing, for example, that Germany is not Prussia). Was this story present in the minds of those debating restitution? [Fig. 7]

The driver picked up a call. We heard a worried voice asking the driver to turn off the speaker phone and . We tried to make sense of the situation and picked up the words 'strike' and 'safety'. The driver and the art handler looked at us without saying a word. One could already see the gold cross atop the Berlin Palace[6] when the driver and the art handler suddenly jumped out of the vehicle and ordered us to step out. We suddenly found ourselves standing in the street with those boxes of precious objects in our hands. They both jumped back in the car. The art handler said some kind of security problem mean we could not enter the Humboldt Forum building with the vehicle.

The vehicle quickly tore off, leaving us behind. The art handler and the driver waved to the group of passengers holding boxes in the middle of the street with a look of shock on their faces.

The driver shouted from the window while accelerating off: 'We know you will do the right thing!'

And with that they were gone.

I was furious. How could they just leave us like that? As if we were actors in a bad show, with these 'props' in our hands? What should we do now? So disrespectful and irresponsible, I thought to myself.

[6] The Humboldt Forum sits inside the Berlin Palace. In 2017, a debatable decision was made to place a golden cross on top of the building in contradiction to the original architectural plans of the building and referring to the period when the Dom of the historical Berlin Palace served as a church.

One of the abandoned passengers assumed that our phones were in one of the crates that the driver removed from the transportation vehicle. The passengers placed their boxes on the ground. They seemed lost until they got their phones in their hands. After a few moments of silent staring each on their screen, one began to speak.

I was reminded of something the driver had said: 'There are too many objects and not enough space.' Maybe these objects were not registered. Maybe the Art handlers had lied to us and the objects here actually had been deaccessioned? I was thinking about this option as each documented movement of these little seeds I helped packing or any other object adds to their price and means that all the procedures they went through need to be performed again whenever they get to a new destination.

Outdoor/side of the road/Berlin Museum Island
(the gold cross on top the Berliner Palace in the background)

Reporter:

[Asking aloud without expecting an answer]

What if there are seeds in one of these boxes? Should we plant them in the ground? Mark the flowerbed with little stones and wait to see the future result? Is this an opportunity we shouldn't miss?

Participant 1:

I don't believe these are real objects. [pause] We should just throw them away or take them home. No one will notice they are missing. There is no chance the museum would have let us touch 'real' objects.

Reporter:

What do you mean by 'real'? I helped pack some 500-year-old seeds before we left the Museum in Dahlem. Do you consider that real? Can seeds be fake?

Participant 2:

You are all completely out of your mind. These objects should be taken to their destination immediately. We don't have the skills or professional knowledge to take care of them. We have a responsibility to our heritage.

Reporter:

Our heritage…?

Participant 2:

After all we've heard and what happened just now – I simply don't trust this institution. Shouldn't we do what the institution refuses to and find a way to send them back to South America, Asia and Africa, where they come from? This is our chance to do the right thing and save these objects from these corrupt European institutions.

Participant 4:

Who are we to decide what should happen to these objects? We have no address to mail them to. Can we somehow reach out to people who might have ties to those objects?

Participant 5:

It may be that these objects have no value outside a museum context. They are real only for those who miss them, who are deprived of access to them, or to the life they were part of.

Participant 3:

The museum is a 10-minute walk from here. Let's take them back before the police arrive. We could be accused of stealing German heritage. This is a serious crime! Even if you don't come with me, that is what I am doing.

Fig. 8 – Are they still standing there, debating?

Participant 1:

The guards will think we are a bunch of art activists trying to get access to the building. No chance they know about whatever it is that is happening here. [Fig. 8]
The reporter ended their description there, providing no further details about what happened from that point on.

Are they still standing there, debating? Did they open the crates and perform a series of séances, conjuring ancestors and owners of these very objects in order to figure out what to do next?
We do not know what happened next. Where did the 8 boxes and their contents end up? The institution will never admit to such a scandal.

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ABSTRACT

Aerial photographs in which indigenous people are attempting to defend themselves by pointing their bows and arrows toward the airplane are ingrained in the social imaginary when considering isolated communities. As these people occupy territories from the Brazilian Amazon rainforest that are disputed by many players, the prevailing narrative associated with the aerial images is often warlike, with "the dangerous savages" pitched against "the workers and conquerors victimised by a people who do not work". This article proposes re-examining overhead shots of Brazilian indigenous lands by referencing editorials widely published in both local and international press since the 1940s, thereby transforming these images into visual stigmas that depict peoples in isolation. Conversely, it is analysed how techniques of aerial photography have been employed by indigenous peoples over the last decade and how perceptions are altered when the bird's-eye perspective is used by groups belonging to the regions photographed. By presenting proposals for reconfiguring the relations between spectators, image-makers and photographed subjects, this work fosters counter-narratives to photographic points of view that have historically served a colonial perspective. Thus, it is argued that indigenous aesthetics are yet to be incorporated into the spheres of knowledge, governance, self-representation and cultural production.

keywords

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY
DECOLONIAL NARRATIVES
INDIGENOUS RESISTANCE
ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE
ISOLATED INDIGENOUS PEOPLE
AMAZONIAN PHOTOGRAPHERS

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The Bird's Eye From Up Above or From Down Below:

Changing Perspectives on Aerial Photography of Indigenous Lands in the Brazilian Amazon

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Aerial images in which indigenous people are seen pointing bows and arrows in the air towards the airplane, from where these scenes were captured, belong to the social imagery when considering isolated indigenous peoples, with this kind of picture of the most vulnerable people on the planet having been reproduced over decades. The Brazilian State currently recognises the existence of 114 records of the presence of isolated indigenous people in the Amazon[1]. This number may vary depending on the availability of information from FUNAI – Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (the government agency responsible for the protection of indigenous peoples). Beyond proving the existence of isolated groups of people, their portrayal offers us several readings and reflections about this 'photographed event' (Azoulay 2008, 2012) and its ways of reproduction over the years.

The term 'isolated indigenous peoples' refers specifically to groups characterised by an absence of permanent relations or infrequent interaction with either non-indigenous or other native communities. This isolation constitutes a right to self-determination for these groups, with historical records showing that the choice to pursue isolation can be the result of encounters with negative effects on their societies, such as epidemics, physical violence, spoliation of natural resources, or other events that render their territories vulnerable, threatening their lives, rights, and historical continuity. Respecting the wishes of these communities depends on NGOs, institutions, civil society, and especially on the government of each country in its commitment to their protection.

[1] https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br/atuacao/povos-indigenas/povos-indigenas-isolados-e-de-recente-contato-2/povos-isolados-1

Apart from classifications in levels of contact and their singularities with respect to different ethnic groups, we will study the imagery of communities that desire total non-contact alongside other groups that, despite continuing to demand the rights of their peoples and their territories, have relationships and are integrated into the surrounding society. When we perceive the power relations established during the 'event of photography' (Azoulay 2008, 2012), another event becomes necessary: that of reviewing the photograph itself in order to have the opportunity to reconsider it from a perspective other than the hegemonic. As Joaquín Barriendos suggests, all the racialising narratives and imaginaries that promote a monoepistemic logic in the midst of cultural globalisation must be contested (Barriendos 2011:25). This article proposes re-examining aerial images of Brazilian indigenous lands by referencing articles that have been widely published in both local and international press, thereby transforming these photographs into visual stigmas that depict peoples in voluntary isolation. Conversely, we will analyse how techniques of aerial photography have been employed by indigenous peoples over the last decade and how perceptions are altered when the bird's-eye perspective[2] is used by groups belonging to the regions photographed.

[2] A bird's eye view is an overhead shot taken with the camera positioned at approximately a 90-degree angle above the photographed scene.

The making of visual stigma

A brief retrospective in the history of the representation of Brazil is necessary if we intend to approach the photographic medium. According to Ariella Azoulay, the origin of photography dates to 1492 when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, at a time when Europeans were encouraged to explore these 'New Worlds' (Azoulay 2019: 24). In the case of the land later delimited as Brazil, therefore, photography would be born eight years later with the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral and his Portuguese delegation. In this article we will not delve into the history of the imagetic construction of the country. Rather, we will approach photography as a medium dating from the nineteenth century onwards, departing from the principle that proposing a new understanding of the images depicting indigenous peoples requires a return to the first visual descriptions of these peoples. These early portrayals date back to 1500 with Pero Vaz de Caminha's letter to his king, D. Manuel I, upon his arrival in what would become Brazil. Although it was not an illustrated letter and remained unpublished until 1773, through his text he provided the first foreign visual impressions of the inhabitants of that place:

> They were dark brown and naked, and had no covering for their private parts, and they carried bows and arrows in their hands. They all came determinedly

towards the boat. Nicolau Coelho made a sign to them to put down their bows, and they put them down. […] It was not possible to speak to these people or understand them. […] they are a savage, ignorant people… (Ley 1943 : 42, 47, 52)

Even without offering resistance, since these were the first moments of contact and the inhabitants were not yet aware of the negative consequences of these encounters for their people, Vaz de Caminha emphasised the bows and arrows and their 'uncivilised' behaviour, while viewing them as non-threatening, unlike subsequent reports, such as the letter from Américo Vespúcio in 1502. When it comes to images, these characteristics have left the realm of the imaginary and taken shape through the series *Cenas de Antropofagia no Brasil* (Scenes of Cannibalism in Brazil), which is considered the first illustration of the country. Without ever having been to Brazil, Théodore de Bry made these engravings in 1596, based on the reports by the German Hans Staden (Brasiliana Iconográfica, n.d.) and the collection was translated into several European languages. The images represent the Indigenous as barbarians and devourers of humans. It can thus be noticed that, from the very first illustrated images of Brazil, the construction of a sensationalist dichotomic visual narrative between 'savages' and 'civilised' had begun.

The earliest representations of the population from the country provided the guidelines for how various authors would come to approach the imagery of Brazil over the years. To perpetuate territorial exploitation, the cartographic-imperial rhetoric and the Eurocentric *coloniality of seeing* allowed the totality of the New World, understood as an image-archive, to be deemed a territory populated by natural cannibals and therefore defined as an ontologically cannibalistic territory (Barriendos 2011: 19), despite an awareness that cannibalistic practices were restricted to certain groups and cultures. As for the term 'cannibals' in Brazilian reality, it should be emphasised that it would only be used to refer to the Tupi people, who were actually 'anthropophagous'. Although the two terms have become synonymous, cannibals feed generally on human flesh, while the Tupi ate their enemies exclusively for *revenge* (Carneiro da Cunha 1990: 99).

If we consider photography, we realise even more evidently that the technology was an instrument of colonisation and favoured the creation of subjects to be vanquished and lands to be occupied. With the popularisation of the photographic medium in the 1940s, thanks to its increasing use by the press, it is possible to highlight one specific way of registering communities that can be described as the most hegemonic: from the air, without them knowing that their images are being fixed on film. This history begins in Brazil through the French photographer Jean Manzon (1915-1990), who imported to the country the way of practising photojournalism by illustrated magazines such as *Paris-Soir*, *Match* and *Vu*. Manzon

joined *O Cruzeiro*, the most widely circulated magazine in the country, after having passed through the DIP (Press and Propaganda Department), the censorship and ideology propagation agency of Getúlio Vargas' (1882-1954) government, where he became known as the president's favourite photographer. He not only knew how to produce the photography desired to meet the interests of the powerful to whom he was close, but also maintained relations with the international press, to the point of selling government propaganda as journalistic content (Rebatel 1991: 46), which pleased the president.

Brazil, at that time, was under the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945), established after a coup d'état led by Vargas. Although the administration shared some characteristics with European fascism, it was not a fascist regime, nor did it seek to replicate any European fascist model, whether Portuguese, Italian, or Spanish. Instead, its nature was authoritarian, modernising and pragmatic (Schwarcz and Starling 2015: 375). It is important to highlight the context that Brazil was immersed in at that time to better understand how images were intended to translate these values, especially through the most visual of them: modernity. Before a country can become modern, it must be imagined as such. The concept of modernity in Brazil was envisioned and constructed in the public gaze through the pages of *O Cruzeiro*. It was an image that depicted the triumphant spirit of a modern, rapidly developing nation. Besides contributing to the successful sales of the illustrated magazine, it was a conception aligned with the aspirations of both the government and the elites. One way to visualise the unfolding of modernity is as the occupation of 'voids' deliberately created to be occupied by construction projects that would enable the country to participate in the global capital order. With a fiction about to begin and a newly forged 'virgin' territory, Vargas launched the *Marcha para o Oeste* (March Westward), which sought to open paths to conquer and exploit the country's midwest region and to promote cooperation with the economically more developed areas near the coast. Thus, under the obstinacy of *order and progress*[3], through systematic extermination practices, spaces previously described as empty were dominated. The 'desert' being a product, it is also a condition for the institutionalisation of the state apparatus (Uriarte 2021).

Manzon was the ideal photographer to express the desired project, since he possessed a repertoire and a foreign imaginary capable of framing the image of the country, and an expertise aligned with the formal experiences of European avant-garde modernism that could translate a sense of universal modernity. This construction and unveiling of the country were also much to the liking of the 'war survivor' photographer, who was exploring the country of his dreams[4]. As De Bry's collection was translated into several languages, so were Manzon's images printed

[3] Order and progress is the national motto inscribed on the Brazilian flag.

[4] For Jean Manzon's records of his perception of Brazil, see: Rebatel 1991.

in foreign magazines and books. Vargas relied on the photographer and his colleagues from *O Cruzeiro* magazine to document the achievements of his administration, affording Manzon rich knowledge of government affairs and strategy, helping him promote the country's image.

The photographer was given access to the *Roncador-Xingu* expedition – the most representative of the *Marcha para o Oeste* – where the first images of the Xavante people were captured and credited to him[5]. Originally published in the 24 June 1944 issue of *O Cruzeiro*, the visuals conquered the world and were widely published internationally. The reportage 'Confronting the Chavantes'[6] was born from a reconnaissance flight under the command of Captain Basílio, the former personal pilot of the dictator President Vargas, over the region covered by the expedition. The images reveal the Xavante people trying to defend themselves from the 'flying creature' that flies over their village, pointing their bows and arrows toward the plane, unaware that the real attack taking place is far quieter than the noise of the turbines swooping over their lands. Inside that aircraft is a person who decides to press the shutter button on his camera to shoot them. As stated by Paul Virilo, the visual perspective from above, from watch towers to remote-sensing satellites, has the same function: the eye functioning as a weapon (Virilo 2009:3). [Fig. 1]

While the consequences for the lives of indigenous people caused by encounters with non- indigenous people by land or water are understood[7], the question becomes what the effects are of contact made by air. In his testimony relating to

[5] Although the image may have been extracted from a cinematographic frame taken during the Roncador-Xingu expedition in which Manzon would not have been present, he never denied his authorship and until today the image is credited to him. Therefore, we will treat the images as having been effectively made by Manzon. For more information about this episode, see Maklouf Carvalho 2001.

[6] The magazine wrote Chavantes, but the correct spelling is Xavante. The Xavante are the indigenous people who belong to the Xavante ethnic group.

[7] See: Carneiro da Cunha 1992, Celestino de Almeida 2010, Fausto 2000, Pacheco de Oliveira and da Rocha Freire 2006.

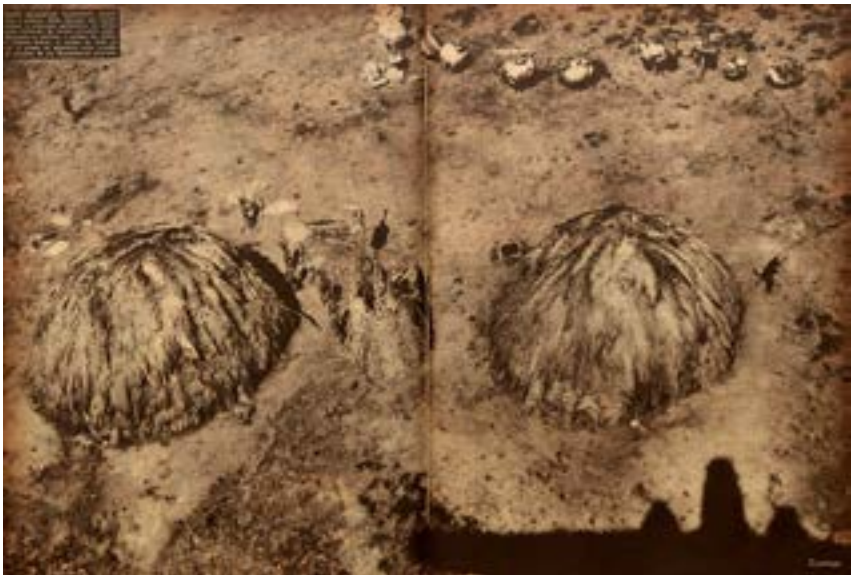

Fig. 1 – 'Enfrentado os Chavantes'. *O Cruzeiro*. June 24, 1944. Photograph by Jean Manzon; text by David Nasser. Magazine O Cruzeiro/ Archive Diários Associados

the flights undertaken for aerial photography over his village in the context of the *Comissão Brasileira Demarcadora de Limites* (Brazilian Boundary Commission) in the 1960s, Davi Kopenawa, a shaman and political leader of the Yanomami people, provides an impression of the terror the plane may have caused among the Xavante people:

> Yet what truly terrified everyone was their airplanes, which flew over our houses several times. No one had ever seen any before. The houses emptied out as soon as their roar could be heard! Men, women, and children ran off as fast as they could and scattered in the woods. The elders thought that these unknown flying beings could fall into the forest and burn everything as they crashed. They thought that we were all going to die and sometimes they were so frightened that they even cried as they talked about it! (Albert and Kopenawa 2013: 176)

The action of photographing something from above entails a verticalisation of the image, the creation of a superior, dominant gaze. Indeed, 'superior' literally means 'from above' and also 'better than ordinary', thus denoting hierarchy. This is a point of view that privileges a broad perspective, ideal to devalue both the communities whose bodies are depersonalised targets of destruction (Amad 2012: 71) 'down there' and those 'empty voids' that must be occupied. The images are made literally from top to bottom from this position of authority. Whoever is inside the plane has the power of narration, of silencing who is being photographed (Reubi 2022), and of deciding what will be exploited from those images and consequently from those people and places. In other words, the camera shutter contributes to the reproduction of imperial social divisions and can be defined as 'imperial shutters' (Azoulay 2019: 17).

With the power of narration, the title of the story 'confronting' the Xavante sets the tone of a warlike discourse, in which the non-Indigenous – the crew that was on board, the editors of the magazine, the readers, the State, Brazilians at large – need to confront the 'savages' below the aircraft. The last page of the reportage lists names under the heading 'Last victims of the Chavantes': a list of people who were supposedly murdered by the Xavante. This bellicose narrative that positions the Indigenous as 'dangerous savages', and the white men as 'the workers and conquerors who are victims of a people who do not work', justified the treatment given to those inhabiting areas to be explored by the *Marcha*. A symbol of progress, aerial photography promoted an 'integration' of communities and spaces through a process of conquest, exploitation of natural resources, and various forms

of violence against the people of the region. Effectively, social modernity, colonialism, and the aerial perspective are related, since this visuality acts as a persuasive means of understanding the world that indeed facilitates its control (Wilkinson 2008: 18). It is thus not difficult to understand the widespread acceptance and dissemination of overhead images at that time. Due to the accessibility of 'the empty lands', the extension of the Brazilian territory, and the scale of the mapping carried out, the top-down view facilitated the expansion of the *Marcha para o Oeste*. This type of perspective allied modernity with the spectacular, justified territorial conquest, and amply documented Vargas' project of taking progress to remote 'voids' forged in the country.

The headline of the *Life* magazine article which published the same images in the issue of 19 March 1945 further reinforces the tension of the encounter of the 'primitive' with the 'civilised': 'Indians shoot at plane. Tribe of fierce Brazilian savages war against a friendly flier with ancient bows and arrows'[8]. The words suggest that indigenous people, without defined ethnicity, using archaic means, attacked an inoffensive – and modern – aircraft. Indeed, planes were envoys of the modern world and usually dropped objects during flyovers as a way of enticing the communities into contact with this modernity. Several groups that resisted these contacts burned the gifts that came from the air. The Xavante are an indigenous ethnic group known for their resistance to such enticement, entailing a critical struggle to guarantee their own survival and the endurance of their culture[9]. These aerial images show the beginning of a process of resistance which is still alive in these peoples, despite the violence which has pervaded the relationship between them and the non-indigenous over many years.

A statement by a farm worker who came to occupy the land inhabited by the Xavante, even if reported a few years after these first contacts, shows how the flyovers to recognise the territory and from where the images were taken were initiating a colonial process over this community:

> We spent three years opening up the forest. The Xavante were there... wild, without any knowledge of civilised people! We started throwing food and gifts over their village from small planes, every day at the same time: dried meat, candy, unrefined cane sugar, clothes, red cloths, a blanket made of cheap cloth... we could not give them any nice things. All this to distract the village and make sure the Indigenous stayed where we threw the presents. Meanwhile, Teles opened a road leading to São Félix... and they made their first camp. As soon as the Indigenous noticed the formation of the camp, they came closer. They came in groups. In a short time, the Indigenous had made their village in

[8] 'Indians shoot at plane. Tribe of fierce Brazilian savages war against a friendly flier with ancient bows and arrows'. Life. March 19, 1945, 70-72 https://books.google.fr/books?id=K1MEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=pt-%20BR&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

[9] See: Coimbra Jr and Welch 2014.

front of the woodsmen's camp. And they continued receiving food from the hands of the civilised people[10].

On the other hand, a testimony from a Xavante person shows that these contacts were made to murder the people or, at best, to attract them with the aim of making them contribute to the economic development of the lands they inhabited. The concept of *land* is not always conceived in the same way by different indigenous peoples. Some have a symbolic attachment to their territory based on a mythological and ancestral relationship, and for these groups it is extremely problematic to be displaced from their lands. For others, geographical borders are fluid, mobile and constantly expanding, and they do not define their identity in relation to a particular geography. Nevertheless, in economic and legal terms, land for indigenous people was never defined as a commodity, an object that could be transferred in individual transactions (Seeger and Viveiros de Castro 1979: 104,105). Aware that the land is not simply a commercial instrument, the invaders benefited from the Xavante's labour without offering financial or material compensation. Once the region was ready to create profits for the new occupants, the indigenous people were persuaded to accept being removed from their lands and to occupy other spaces. In this case, the survivors were deported under the sponsorship of the Brazilian military government, and an agrobusiness enterprise known as *Fazenda Suiá-Missu* was installed on their territory, which at the time was the largest latifundium in Brazil:

The indigenous people went to work with scythes, cutting down the forest to make pasture, landing strip for the farmers. Before Ariosto, the farmers had their workers kill the Indigenous. In Ariosto's time, the Indigenous came to the farm, where they received scythes, machetes, axes and food – like flour and unrefined cane sugar. The Indigenous who worked there received cows for the Xavante to eat. The Xavante helped to make the plantation, the airfield. […] and then a village was built close to the farm. They worked with axes and scythes to make pasture, landing strip, to open up roads, from about 1960 until 1966 when they were taken away[11].

The indigenous people who lived on the *Marãwatsede* land were effectively removed from the area in 1966, following its occupation commanded by the farmer Ariosto Riva. After having worked for free for Riva and facing conflict with his employees and suffering hunger, approximately 230 Xavante were transferred by the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) aircraft to a farm 400 kilometres away. One week

[10] Ficamos três anos abrindo a mata. Os Xavante estavam lá... bravos, sem conhecer civilizado! Começamos jogando comida e presentes de aviãozinho sobre a aldeia deles, todo dia à mesma hora: carne seca, bala, rapadura, roupa, panos vermelhos, cobertor de pano vagabundo... não podíamos dar coisas boas. Tudo isso para distrair a tribo e fazer os índios ficarem fixos no lugar onde jogávamos os presentes. Enquanto isso, Teles abria uma picada que saía em São Félix... e fizeram o primeiro acampamento. Logo que os índios perceberam a formação do acampamento, foram se aproximando. Vieram em grupos. Em pouco tempo os índios haviam feito a sua aldeia em frente ao acampamento dos mateiros. E continuaram recebendo a comida da mão dos civilizados. (entrevista de antigo trabalhador da fazenda, cf. Jornal da Tarde, SP, 21. 7.71) (apud Anônimo, 1991 : 1 1). Author's translation. Wenzel, Eugênio Gervásio. n.d. Laudo Antropológico referente à terra indígena Marãwãitsede Xavante. Proc, no 956790 – 5o Vara da Justiça Federal de Mato Grosso. https://acervo.socioambiental.org/sites/default/files/documents/XVD00319.pdf

[11] 'Os índios foram trabalhar em serviço de foice, de derrubada de mato – para formar pasto, campo de pouso para fazendeiro. Antes de Ariosto, os fazendeiros mandavam os peões matar os índios. No tempo de Ariosto, os índios se aproximaram da fazenda – onde recebiam foice, facão, machado, comida – farinha, rapadura. Os índios que trabalhavam lá recebiam vaca para os Xavante comerem. Xavante ajudou a fazer roça, campo de avião. […] aí foi feito aldeia perto da fazenda. Trabalharam com machado, foice, para formar pasto, campo de pouso, para abrir estrada, a partir do ano I960 mais ou menos até 1966 quando foram tirados de lá.' Author's translation. Wenzel, Eugênio Gervásio. n.d. Laudo Antropológico referente à terra indígena Marãwãitsede Xavante. Proc, no 956790 – 5o Vara da Justiça Federal de Mato Grosso. https://acervo.socioambiental.org/sites/default/files/documents/XVD00319.pdf

after the transfer, 70 of them died of measles. According to the final report of the National Truth Commission (CNV), from 1964 to 1988 'the violations were 'systemic' and resulted from actions that aimed to 'produce demographic voids,' that is, they functioned as instruments of a practice of governing indigenous populations and territories that we could call a *policy of erasure*' (Tavares 2020: 20, emphasis in the original)[12].

Historically employed as a form of surveillance and implicitly as a tool of war, the top-down view is commonly used by various countries in the context of military operations: 'The conflict that drove the development of both aerial photography and aviation concurrently – World War I – was performed as a cartographic war' (Wilkinson 2008: 20). Besides interests of territorial conquest, exploitation and development, cartography reflects political and economic objectives. In Brazil it was no different, with the aerial perspective facilitating the mapping of territories previously belonged to indigenous people to be expropriated and explored. At that time the native peoples had no rights or guarantees, and their territories were not recognised. The Indigenous People Statute (Law 6001) was enacted in 1973 and the indigenous rights were only expressed in the 1988 Constitution. It can thus be argued that at that time they were considered non-citizens, whose rights, cultural and civilizational specificities were disregarded by the State.

Despite all the current debates about indigenous rights, the practice of taking aerial photographs of remote groups with people shooting arrows at airplanes has continued over the years and still exists in the twenty-first century. In 2008, Brazilian photographer Gleison Miranda produced a series of aerial snapshots of an isolated group in the northern Amazon, which can be viewed as a colour version of the images Manzon made in 1944. The pictures show frightened people, some hiding and others trying to protect themselves from the plane. Although they have their bows and arrows, we can see their position of disadvantage. The relationship of dominance and the vertical sovereignty are clear. The images recorded by Miranda, and published by FUNAI, travelled the world and were published in media such as The Guardian, BBC and National Geographic. [Fig. 2]

These same images are used in the membership brochures and various communication materials of the NGO Survival International. According to their website on 13 May 2023, they are 'a movement of people from over 100 countries. Our vision is a world where tribal peoples are respected as contemporary societies and their human rights protected. We reject government funding so we can guarantee our absolute independence and integrity.' The visuals are used as a way to justify the work carried out by the NGO, insofar as they are evidence of the existence of isolated indigenous groups in the world. In terms of strategy, it seems contradictory

[12] After years of struggle against the attempt to erase their histories, the Xavante were able to return to the area. Their ancestral presence in the region before their displacement in 1966 was officially confirmed. For detailed information about the process, see the study that made use of visual forensic analysis methodologies, coordinated by Paulo Tavares: Tavares 2020.

Fig. 2 – Photograph by Gleison Miranda/Funai published in BBC News. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/7426794.stm

to use shots of isolated peoples defending themselves against those who produce these images as a form of protection for these same individuals. Is there another way of addressing the importance of demarcating indigenous territories for the protection of the isolated peoples without them having to be subjected to overhead flights to monitor and photograph them and thus prove their existence? For José Carlos dos Reis Meirelles, organiser of the mission that flew over the village and coordinator of FUNAI's Ethno-environmental Protection Front, publicising the photographs is necessary for civil mobilisation: 'I decided to disseminate them because the mechanisms (to protect these populations) have not been working. Either public opinion gets involved or they will die.'[13] This article does not seek to analyse the work of NGOs or agencies that protect indigenous people, nor whether the photographic monitoring techniques used by aircraft are effective and bring real advantages for indigenous groups.[14] What is being evaluated here are the images, their colonial character, and the narrative attributed to them. [Fig. 3]

The iconic image continued to be reproduced in the following years. In 2014, the photographer Lunae Parracho made new versions of it in Acre State, on the border with the Peruvian Amazon. In the visuals, the indigenous are pointing their bows and arrows towards the plane, the pilot, the photographer and thus to the camera as well. The shots were made available by the international news agency Reuters and can easily be accessed online.

Similarly to Manzon who was President Vargas' favourite photographer in the 1940s, Ricardo Stuckert, the photographer of President Lula since 2003, made new records in 2016 of the same group registered by Miranda, who had since changed location. Even if they had moved away and remained voluntarily isolated, these populations did not escape traditional aerial photographs. Once more they were taken by surprise and demonstrate a resistance to this type of contact. Regarding their attitudes, Meirelles, who was also onboard, stated: 'They are messages. Those arrows mean 'Leave us in peace. Do not disturb''[15]. Even though the communication was clear, the photographs were originally published in National Geographic under the headline 'Exclusive: Stunning New Photos of Isolated Tribe Yield Surprises' and were also released in El País and the BBC. According to Stuckert: 'I felt like I was a painter in the last century. To think that in the 21st century there are still people who have no contact with civilisation, living like their ancestors did 20,000 years ago—it is a powerful emotion,'[16] Faced with the adventurous experience and the stereotypical scene of native peoples, it seems impossible not to reproduce that same click from inside the helicopter. Indeed, the flyover was actually part of a year-long project for Stuckert to photograph indigenous villages across the country. [Fig. 4]

The episode led to a statement from FUNAI[17] highlighting the improper and illegal nature of the pictures, since there was no authorisation to fly over the area

Fig. 3 – Brochure of NGO Survival International. Photograph by Gleison Miranda, scanned by the author.

[13] 'Resolvi fazer a divulgação porque os mecanismos (para proteger essas populações) não têm servido. Ou a opinião pública entra nisso ou eles vão dançar.' Author's translation. https://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Brasil/0,,MUL583116-5598,00-%20GRUPO+DE+INDIOS+E+FOTOGRAFADO+PELA+VEZ+NO+ACRE.html

[14] On alternative techniques that use traces, vestiges and reports to prove the existence of isolated peoples and that were used in 1996 in Rondônia, in the demarcation of the Massaco Indigenous Land, see Pereira's master's thesis of 2018.

[15] https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/photography/2017/10/exclusive-stunning-new-photos-of-isolated-tribe-yield-surprises

[16] https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/photography/2017/10/exclusive-stunning-new-photos-of-isolated-tribe-yield-surprises

[17] https://www.gov.br/funai/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2016/nota-sobre-a-publicacao-de-imagens-de-povo-indigena-isolado

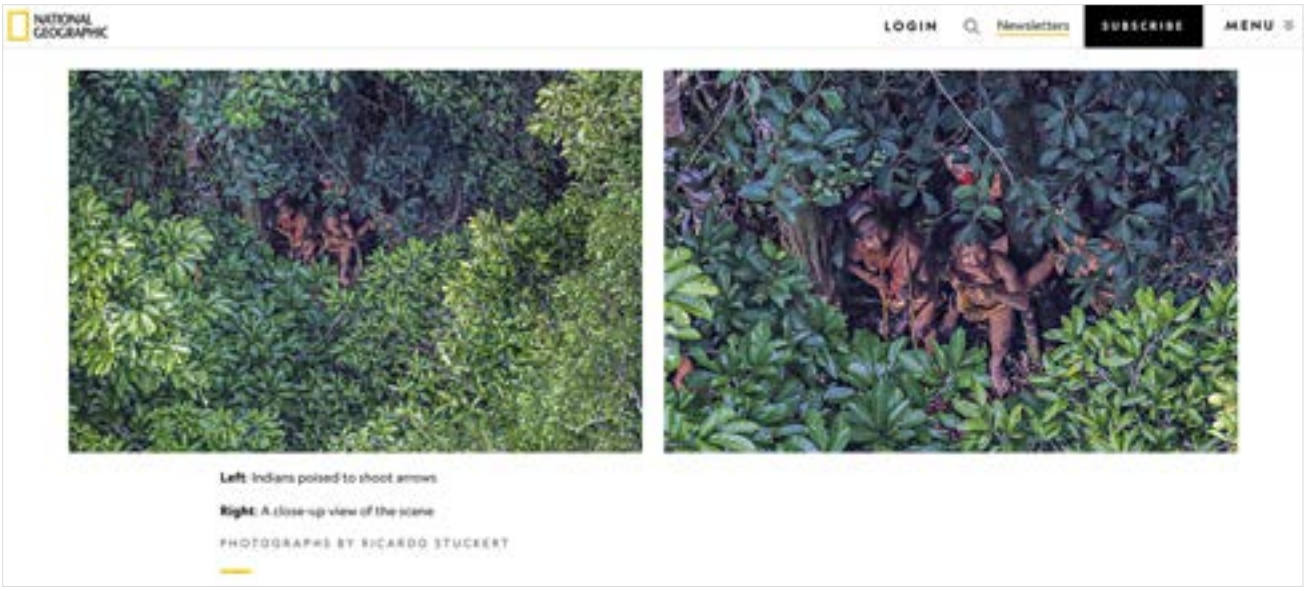

Fig. 4 – *Exclusive: Stunning New Photos of Isolated Tribe Yield Surprises*. Photograph by Ricardo Stuckert published in National Geographic. Available at https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/uncontacted-tribe-amazon-brazil-photos

– despite the presence of Meirelles, the agency's coordinator for over 40 years. Although the report affirmed that FUNAI would take measures to hold the authors and those involved accountable, and to safeguard the indigenous peoples being photographed, the images gained a new prominence in 2022 in the exhibition '*Povos originários: guerreiros do tempo*', which has travelled through Brazil and Portugal. The snapshots are included in the chapter 'Isolados' of the eponymous bilingual publication[18] which features images of indigenous people from eleven other ethnic groups posing for the photographer. As controversial as they may be, it can be argued that Stuckert's photos are contemporary icons, just like Manzon's, which have also figured in an author's book[19] and exhibition.

It is pertinent to observe that the widespread dissemination of aerial images as a cultural product highlights the popular incorporation of a military perspective in which those below are the targets of those flying over/photographing, while those above are the targets (even if not particularly threatened) of those below. Indeed, 'the differences between military and non-military, citizens and non-citizens, those who target and those who are targeted', as attested by Kaplan, 'become operational as culture over time, circulating as ways of seeing, modes of making and reproducing art, industrial design and technologies, composing the ground of everyday life' (Kaplan 2013: 21-22).

Before being categorised as such and up to the 1980s, isolated indigenous people were called *bravos* (angry) or *arredios* (elusive) (Ricardo and Fávero Gongora 2019: 20), the same adjectives given to undomesticated animals. Anthropologist Dominique Gallois explains that the term 'indigenous peoples in voluntary isola-

[18] Stuckert 2022.

[19] Manzon 1955.

tion' has limitations and was used for political reasons, considering the state's protectionist intervention in the marginalised condition of society in which these groups found themselves. For her, it is important to understand that the autonomy of these groups is conditional on their protection. Since protective measures are something recent, Gallois also notes that isolated peoples do not represent 'virgin societies'. Most of these groups are descended from indigenous (including interethnic) segments that refused the colonial situation or recomposed by fugitives who regrouped in refuge areas. Thus, 'when it is asserted that isolated groups 'preserve' their socio-cultural integrity, it means that they maintain active cognitive and organisational mechanisms through which they are capable of interpreting and adapting to the most diverse and constantly renewed situations' (Gallois 1992:4).[20] The statement of Ailton Krenak, philosopher and indigenous leader of the Krenak people, regarding their demarcated land and the survival of his people, can be added to Gallois' theory: 'We live inside a small reserve, segregated by the Brazilian government, in a little concentration camp that the State made for the Krenak to survive. […] We have endured so much offence… We have been resisting for 500 years'[21] (Krenak 2018). Considering both analyses, we can recognise some of the reasons behind the use of such aerial photographs in brochures and press articles. They depict the stereotype of the wild and untamed indigenous at the same time as portraying the efforts of the State in promoting the 'preservation' of these communities.

Aesthetically similar and performing a militarised perspective, we can discern that the narrative attached to the images from the 1940s and the 2000s are not very different either. Regardless of the fact that the bodily expressions of the isolated peoples make clear the message that flyovers are not welcome, the first images functioned as a government campaign for *Marcha para o Oeste* and the second as a government campaign for FUNAI. The visual reproduction of these scenes, which primarily depict acts of resistance, helps to justify a 'just war', whose scheme remains the same over the centuries with only surface-level variations (Arruda 2001: 40). Therefore, it can be said that the indigenous people are practically invisibilised in these aerial images, being supporting actors of the *territory* that was once to be *conquered* and is now *protected*.

However, the current advertised 'protected territory' is not exempt from the popular narrative associated with such aerial images that there is 'too much land for too few people,' or that indigenous people are 'slackers who hinder the development of the territory'. This premise was commonly used to justify activities that put indigenous peoples' lives at risk during President Jair Bolsonaro's term (2019-2022). We can highlight the nomination of the missionary Ricardo Lopes Dias, associated with the *Missão Novas Tribos do Brasil* (MNTB), appointed to lead

[20] 'Quando se afirma que os grupos isolados "conservam" sua integridade sócio-cultural, entende-se que eles mantêm atuantes mecanismos cognitivos e organizacionais através dos quais são capazes de interpretar e de se adaptar à situações das mais diversas e constantemente renovadas.' Author's translation.

[21] 'Vivemos dentro de uma pequena reserva, segregados pelo governo brasileiro, num campinho de concentração que o Estado fez para os krenak sobreviverem. […] Já passamos por tanta ofensa… Nós estamos resistindo há 500 anos.' Author's translation. https://expresso.pt/internacional/2018-10-19-Somos-indios-resistimos-ha-500-anos.-Fico-preocupado-e-se-os-brancos-vao-resistir

FUNAI's coordination of isolated indigenous groups. The MNTB, linked to the American organisation Ethnos 360, aims to bring its church to all indigenous peoples, even those in isolation, as indicated by its slogan, 'Reaching tribes until the very last!'[22] Dias was dismissed from his position by the Ministry of Justice after numerous reports of him facilitating the entry of missionaries into the Vale do Javari[23] and providing precise information about the locations of isolated groups.[24] As FUNAI is a State entity, its leadership, budget and commitment to protecting all indigenous people of the country are subject to change with each new government. It is important to note that the images themselves are not directly responsible for the extermination of populations and the predatory exploitation of territories, but they do contribute, together with the continuity of certain narratives, to a social imaginary about indigenous peoples that facilitates the justification and acceptance that these people depend on us for their development and that their territories should be exploited.

This study makes no mention of satellite images because they are not perceptible to indigenous people and thus not truly comparable to the perspective of a picture taken by a person. The cases discussed here concern aerial images that have identifiable authors who take responsibility for their actions. These photographers make a conscious choice to press the imperial shutter or to refrain from doing so. While ethical considerations and laws exist to prevent photographically violating someone's privacy and disseminating such images without consent, these rules are not applied when it comes to isolated indigenous peoples. Despite these photographs being taken in public spaces, when it comes to forests, these areas may be considered the private space of indigenous peoples: 'What was first deemed to be a clear-cut case of ownership of the unending open space above the terrain and buildings that one owned', Kaplan observes, 'became understood as volumes of space that could be carved up and claimed by municipalities, nations, militaries, and international bodies'(Kaplan 2020), and why not by indigenous lands?

When the press reproduces this iconography from the 1940s, it exploits the vulnerable position that these individuals occupy in the surrounding society. This raises the question of what perpetuates the widespread reproduction of these visual stigmas even today. In addition to being sensationalist, generating great curiosity, and ultimately serving the commercial interests of the media, these images highlight the imperial nature of photography, which aims to capture, document, and disseminate everything it encounters. Teju Cole argues that the future of photography is no different from its past: 'It will largely continue to illustrate, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful. It will bring the 'news' and continue to support the idea that doing so – collecting the lives of others for the consumption of 'us' – is a natural right' (Cole 2019). As this privileged 'us' will

[22] https://novastribosdobrasil.org.br During the preparation of this article, the slogan of the Brazilian website was changed to 'Reaching ethnicities until the very last'. Although it can still be seen on the Ethnos 360 website the intentions to continue the idea of the organisation's founder to 'reach the last tribe in our generation.'

[23] The Vale do Javari Indigenous Land is home to the biggest number of indigenous natives living in 'voluntary isolation' in Brazil and, very possibly, the world. (Marubo 2019: 125)

[24] https://oglobo.globo.com/politica/ministerio-da-justica-exonera-missionario-da-coordenacao-de-indios-isolados-da-FUNAI-1-24768506

never encompass everyone, the continuity of violence against those who are excluded from this all-seeing global order is inherent.

For centuries, the Brazilian Amazon region has been the target of land-use conflicts involving native communities, illegal extractive industries, monocultural farming, cattle ranching, religious institutions, the army and the Brazilian State itself. Consequently, the region and its ecosystems have been subjected to various forms of violence that affect the lands, forests, rivers and skies, endangering the lives of local communities, the ancestral knowledge derived from life in the forest, and contributing to several ecological imbalances. Despite the devastating consequences, the relentless exploitation of the entire territory persists, encompassing not only the surface but also reaching into the very air above, all fuelled by the unceasing pursuit of occupying untapped areas. In a region where predatory eyes are constantly waiting to strike, one wonders what would happen if the people inhabiting these places had access to the bird's eye view themselves.

The bird's eye perspective from the land

On this battlefield, aerial photography is a tool that has been embraced by certain indigenous communities themselves. Through the utilisation of drones and geospatial mapping, the perspective 'up above' is an attempt to safeguard indigenous territories, their way of living, and the area of the planet's greatest biodiversity. By reclaiming one of their colonisers' weapons, these people operate drones as a means of defence and resistance, legally reporting the occurrence of environmental crimes and violations within their lands. These injustices have been endured by several generations and the indigenous people know this from their living experience on the land and from stories told by their ancestors. Consequently, aerial surveillance assumes a significant role in the indigenous struggle to establish a bridge of communication with non-indigenous people through a universal common language: the visual one.

Forms of audiovisual documentation have been present in indigenous territories since the 1980s by means of training projects provided by institutions, particularly *Vídeo nas Aldeias*, a pioneering project in indigenous audiovisual production in Brazil created in 1986. Through collaborative production with indigenous peoples, the NGO is currently a video production centre and an audiovisual training school for indigenous villages. As attested by their work, the production of images by indigenous people was a collective and individual desire. If the attempt to domesticate the indigenous people through the dissemination of their images was

Fig. 5 – Aerial photography from the Khikatxi village of the Kisêdjê people, at the Wawi indigenous land. Courtesy of the photographer Kamikia Kisêdjê.

common from the 1940s onwards, now they are those who domesticate technology, appropriating photography and video to present their narratives. Today, indigenous authorial works compete for space with productions by large groups (Jesus 2023: 203-205). With the popularisation of drones, the aerial perspective is also present in the scenes captured by these image-makers [Fig. 5].

It is not possible to refer to indigenous peoples in a homogenous way, even among people of the same ethnic group. Following colonial processes, some groups are completely integrated into urban life, while others collaborate with miners that harm their own territories. Thus, the term *indigenous audiovisual* seeks common aspects between various productions. According to Naine Terena de Jesus, an educator, filmmaker, artist, curator and researcher of the Terena people: 'Indigenous production can be categorised between everyday acts and records for family consumption, on the one hand, and productions made for external audiences on the other'[25] (Jesus 2023: 203). Thus, there are photographs and videos that deal with aspects of the culture that they consider important to be exalted in their relations among themselves and that aim to continue knowledge and traditions of each ethnic group, such as the complete recording of rituals. Meanwhile, the images taken for consumption beyond the communities highlight how the indigenous people want

[25] 'Existe uma categorização sobre tais produções, dividindo-as entre os atos e registros cotidianos e de consumo familiar, por um lado, e as produções realizadas para o público externo, por outro'. Author's translation.

to present themselves outside their group. The productions show parts of their rituals and address historical aspects, stories and the relations with elements of non-indigenous society. Regardless of whether they are created for internal or external consumption, the use of photography and video by indigenous people can be characterised as forms of communication that involve resistance and a desire for self-representation.

Since the overhead standpoint is a tool of control, indigenous communities also employ it for this same purpose. When the bird's eye view is used by indigenous people, there is an inversion of perspective not only in the approach, but also in the visual hierarchy. By positioning themselves literally above the attacks on their native region, they gain the ability to shape the narrative portrayed in images of their lands. The vertical photography employed by drones in the hands of indigenous communities represents a quest for autonomy in the surveillance of their own territories. Through photographic denunciations, there is an attempt to provide evidence and to engage in a dialogue that non-indigenous individuals can comprehend. The aerial photography employed for territorial monitoring could be included in the category of indigenous production that is made for an external public, insofar as it involves an effort to produce images which prove what the native people claim and denounce. This top-down shooting thus surpasses the

Fig. 6 – Aerial photography from Wawi indigenous land, 2021. Courtesy of the photographer Kamikia Kisêdjê.

boundaries of cultural production and enters the legal sphere by becoming proofs according to the established codes of the juridical field. [Fig. 6]

As previously mentioned, the concept of territory with delimited borders is not an idea that existed in various native cultures. It is a foreign concept that had to be learnt by indigenous peoples in order to be used in their struggles for recognition and demarcation of the lands they inhabit. The technique of shooting from above thus operates for indigenous people as a *forest security camera* against intrusions and harm to their territories. When employed by indigenous peoples, the aerial perspective that is widely used as an instrument of offensive is a means of defence. Contrary to the idea that link aerial vision strictly with State control and violence, Schuster observes that drones, when used by activists, can serve as an instrument of subversion, demonstrating the emancipatory potential of the vertical gaze (Schuster 2021: 29).

Indigenous initiatives using aerial photography for territorial surveillance have proliferated across various regions of the country. Collaborative workshops facilitated by NGOs and involving skilled indigenous practitioners provide training to operate drones and to apply other monitoring tools to ensure the continuity of these efforts by the communities. Noteworthy cases include a collective based in Rondônia and a photographer working in multiple locations.

The Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau refer to themselves as Jupaú and live in six villages in the Uru-Eu- Wau-Wau Indigenous Land in Rondônia, which is also home to the Amondawa, the Oro Win and three isolated groups.[26] The conflicts over the Indigenous Land were accentuated during the military dictatorship, especially with the implementation of the *Polonoroeste*- Integrated Development Programme for Northwest Brazil, between Rondônia and Mato Grosso, by the federal government under President João Figueiredo in 1981. The project was based on opening up areas for farming in the middle of the Amazon rainforest with the aim of supporting a new rural middle class from the South and Centre of the country, which would bring progress to the region. 'It was an attempt at agrarian reform without affecting the interests (or lands) of the great landowners. […] Massacred by centuries of invasions, indigenous peoples were decimated by these migratory fronts' (Roman 2019: 225). Since then, the territory has been constantly invaded by illegal loggers, miners and land grabbers, who illegally sell areas within indigenous lands. These invaders jeopardise the lives of indigenous peoples in voluntary isolation in particular.

Due to such conflicts for land, since 2019, with the support of the WWF – Brasil and the Kanindé Ethno-Environmental Defence Association, the Jupaú people have been trained in the use of drones, GPS devices, mobile phones and notebooks to carry out their own environmental monitoring and territorial defence. Formed by young

[26] https://pib.socioambiental.org/pt/Povo:Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau

indigenous people, the surveillance teams use such equipment to provide more consistency to reports of environmental crimes and to monitor the biodiversity in the region. Through these tools, they can increase their agility, autonomy and safety as they do not need to physically enter to a deforested area and risk running into camps where miners or loggers welcome them with gunshots, for example.

Israel Vale, coordinator of territorial and environmental monitoring at Kanindé, points out that on indigenous land, the residents of the villages tend to retreat at the sight of traces of peoples in voluntary isolation. During training sessions on territorial surveillance, Vale explains that the participants expressed concern about how to handle situations in which they encounter traces or even the presence of their isolated relatives. The form of monitoring used in the application was developed through a participatory process, with the indigenous deciding to incorporate documentation of traces of isolated people and information on environmental violations within their lands (deforestation, timber theft, mining, invasion, illegal hunting and fishing). If traces of isolated groups are found during inspection activities in the territory, the practice of the surveillance team is to withdraw, seeking to avoid conflicts and contact with this people. The protocol upon approaching, encountering traces, or sighting isolated indigenous is to promptly notify FUNAI. While it is acknowledged that drone flights have the potential to identify *malocas*[27] or even isolated individuals, Vale emphasises that the indigenous teams understand the sensitive nature of this information, recognising its imperative role in safeguarding those same isolated peoples. Hence, aerial photography has not previously been employed by the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau as a means of documenting the isolated groups within their land. Finally, as Vale elucidates, the aim is for the drone to serve as a tool for the protection of indigenous territory, thereby benefiting the isolated peoples who coexist within these lands.[28]

The defence of self-determination and the right of isolated peoples to live free, healthy and safe in their own territories is also a concern of the indigenous peoples who share land with them. In May 2023, a forum was held in Aldeia São Vicente in the Kaxinawá indigenous lands of the Humaitá River in Acre for an exchange on indigenous initiatives for the protection of isolated peoples. The event brought together leaders from 12 indigenous peoples (including the Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau), inhabiting lands with whom they call their 'distrustful' relatives. The document which emerged from the forum highlights the following issues of what they call 'indigenous protagonism to strengthen FUNAI and SESAI' – the Federal Department of Indigenous Health:

> We also demand that temporary agents are permanently absorbed into FUNAI's staff via a specific public recruitment process, and that the work of these pro-

[27] A large communal dwelling produced by the indigenous people themselves.

[28] All the information in this paragraph was provided to the author by Israel Vale on 7 October 2023.

fessionals also includes activities related to territorial surveillance, access control and monitoring of approaches, traces and sightings of isolated indigenous people. We ask that the allies commit to continuing to support and finance the activities of indigenous watchmen and guards that are already in progress, and that FUNAI establishes technical cooperation agreements with indigenous and civil society organisations in order to strengthen these initiatives. We also hope that indigenous strategies for the protection of territories shared with isolated indigenous peoples will be increasingly recognised and supported by FUNAI and the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples (MPI). SESAI must invest in specific actions to monitor the epidemiological situation in these areas. Indigenous protagonism must be increasingly promoted and instrumentalised through training in the use of technologies such as drones and geoprocessing tools, among others, considering the remuneration of those involved in such activities. In addition, we call for new exchanges with the aim of sharing information and experiences of protection between the different indigenous peoples neighbouring the 'distrustful' people.[29]

Drones have thus proven to be a significant and requested tool in indigenous advocacy, both for environmental and territorial monitoring, and for the protection of peoples in voluntary isolation. The indigenous communities themselves advocate for the official deployment of this technology by FUNAI. However, they stipulate that those among them who are already proficient in piloting drones for territorial monitoring should be integrated into FUNAI to serve as official agents and duly compensated for their services. This demand reflects, notably, the indigenous aspiration for self-management of territorial protection and also of their aerial representation. In addition to preventing unauthorised access to their territory, the drones used together with the forms created in conjunction with the indigenous peoples function as a tool for documenting the presence of voluntarily isolated indigenous peoples, without the need for unwelcome flyovers to produce aerial photographs that merely reinforces stigmas in the portrayal of the isolated.

Another case in which drones are used in indigenous daily life is through the photographer, filmmaker, educator and activist Kamikia Kisêdjê, who has been documenting cultural and political events of indigenous peoples throughout the country for two decades. He lives in the Wawi Indigenous Land on the border of the Xingu indigenous territory. Kamikia is a leader of his community and a pioneer in the operation of drones by indigenous people in the country. He is a film director and teaches photography and the pilot of drones in other communities in Brazil and abroad. He actively collaborates with independent media that prioritise indigenous rights, and is highly engaged on social media platforms, where he shares

[29] Exigimos também que os agentes temporários sejam absorvidos de forma permanente no quadro da Funai via concurso público específico, e que o trabalho desses profissionais contemple também atividades relacionadas à vigilância territorial, controle de acesso e monitoramento de aproximações, vestígios e avistamentos de indígenas isolados. Pedimos que os aliados se comprometam a continuar apoiando e financiando as atividades de monitores e vigilantes indígenas já em curso, e que a Funai estabeleça acordos de cooperação técnica com organizações indígenas e da sociedade civil a fim de fortalecer tais iniciativas. Esperamos também que as estratégias indígenas para a proteção dos territórios compartilhados com povos indígenas isolados sejam cada vez mais reconhecidas e apoiadas pela Funai e pelo Ministério dos Povos Indígenas (MPI). A SESAI deve investir em ações específicas de monitoramento da situação epidemiológica desse entorno. O protagonismo indígena deve ser cada vez mais promovido e instrumentalizado por meio de formações para uso de tecnologias, como drones, ferramentas de geoprocessamento, entre outras, levando em consideração a remuneração dos envolvidos em tais atividades. Além disso, demandamos a realização de novos intercâmbios, com o objetivo de compartilhar informações e experiências de proteção entre os diferentes povos indígenas vizinhos aos povos 'desconfiados'. Author's translation. https://trabalhoindigenista.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/docfinal_intercambiohumaita_acre_maio2023_vale_230517_111914.pdf

Fig. 7 – Kamikia Kisêdjê at a presentation on drone surveillance during an assembly of the Kisêdjê Indigenous Association in the Wawi Indigenous Territory, 2021. Courtesy of the photographer Atakuma Suya.

his photographs and videos. The aerial audiovisual production by Kamikia spans between the two categories proposed by Terena de Jesus, documenting both the activities, manifestations, and traditions of his people and relatives, as well as monitoring deforestation of the region he lives and the pollution of the Suiá-Miçu River. Among his surveillance actions, Kamikia's archive of aerial images includes records of criminal fires near indigenous territories, illegal roads opened in the middle of the forest to facilitate access for illegal extractive industries, fires to clear the soil for soybean plantations, and several more incidences of devastation in the areas surrounding his village with a direct impact on their community living. [Fig. 7]
Although the process of colonisation of the Brazilian Amazonian territory over the years is somewhat followed by the press, the narrative of those who inhabit these lands is little considered, with the use of aerial images produced by indigenous people in the context of surveillance rarely printed in the country's major newspapers and magazines. The traditional press continues with the same precepts of the 1940s when it collaborated with the socio-economic exploitation of the region. The mainstream media has yet to fully acknowledge that these photographs, captured by indigenous peoples themselves, represent historical documents generated from an endogenous perspective, and are of relevance to a broader audience, even though they may not please some advertisers. Effectively, it is fundamental that the images and narratives of these peoples are widely disseminated: 'A political imagination is insufficient to enable us to imagine the non-citizen or second-class

citizen as citizen: civil imagination is also needed' (Azoulay 2012: 9). The circulation of these images may provide more information for civil society and promote new imaginaries that reduce stigma against indigenous peoples. This potential civil imagination may even offer significant shifts in reality, placing pressure on governments for demarcations, protection and inspection of indigenous territories and criminalising enterprises that conduct illegal practices in Brazilian forests. The inclusion of indigenous aesthetics in the spheres of knowledge, governance, and cultural production is a starting point when considering historical reparations. Despite the limited space in the mainstream media, indigenous audiovisual production is increasingly being integrated in the artistic milieu through participation in festivals, biennials, and exhibitions in museums and art galleries.

When indigenous people are the protagonists and producers of the aerial images of their territories, there is not only a change of perspective, distance and discourse, but also of purpose and use. The visuals represent the unique temporal relationship of those who inhabit the place being photographed, and the aerial perspective is used intimately with the scene. These indigenous image-makers use the panoramic view from a local perspective, acting as authors but also as witnesses, forming an integral part of the photographed scene. Their photographs depict attentive changes in their environment, privileged by their daily connection to the land. Instead of capturing snapshots from a predatory top-down view that takes advantage of the lack of identification with the place being photographed to merely click and leave, indigenous records make themselves present in the scene being registered, documenting the land from the land itself. In this way, the aerial perspective represents a temporary and necessary distancing to obtain a broad and comprehensive view of their land, as opposed to the aerial perspective serving the purpose of obtaining a macro view, characteristic of what is not visible from the distance at which the territory is experienced.

In this way, the adoption of the elevated viewpoint by indigenous people can raise crucial questions related to the airspace of their lands. This area, characterised as a place of power, holds the potential to expand and serve as a place of governance, resistance, defence, testimony, memory, and expression for indigenous peoples, attesting to what Caren Kaplan calls *the ambiguity of airspace* (Kaplan 2020). When there exists a *civic view from above* (Keysar 2017), it opens up the possibility for the creation of atmospheric policies and the shaping of distinct aerial spaces (Kaplan 2020).

Conventional press photographs are systematically catalogued and typically consulted when there is a need to revisit the subjects initially documented upon their publication. However, it is imperative to recognise that a photograph should not be reevaluated solely based on keywords, as this approach may restrict the possible

interpretations and insights derived from visual analysis. Each image has the potential to be reviewed from countless forms of analysis and perspective, demonstrating the always unfinished nature of the event of photography (Azoulay 2012: 25). To put it another way, the position of spectator, regardless of whether they have been part of the photographed scene, can be attributed to anyone, at any time, and this attitude of reviewing a photographic event is fundamental when we reflect on deconstructing an image of a group of people that has been reduced to non-citizens. The re-signification of the visual stigma in the way of registering indigenous peoples is thus a fundamental task when seeking to revise history and undo the colonial underpinning that permeate the imaginary when referring to the image of the land know as Brazil and its native peoples.

In addressing indigenous counter-narratives in the manner of how their territories are photographed from above, the intention is not to merely 'classify cosmologies that seem excessively exotic to us, but to counter-analyse anthropologies that are excessively familiar to us' (Castro 2018: 73)[30]. Through a reconfiguration of the relations between spectators, photographers and photographed subjects, points of view that once served as colonial agents can now be employed to pursue historical reparation. In essence, by adopting a counter-colonial perspective toward photographed events, photography itself has the potential to serve as an antidote to its own poison.

[30] Classificar cosmologias que nos parecem excessivamente exóticas, mas em contra-analisar antropologias que nos são demasiadamente familiares. Author's translation.

Author's note

This article does not aim to perpetuate the stigmatisation of indigenous peoples in isolation by reproducing their images. The decision of whether to publish them again or not was carefully considered. On one hand, these images are already ingrained in the social imaginary when it comes to isolated indigenous groups and would not need to be reviewed to be remembered. On the other, these published images, taken on various occasions, are easily accessible online and certainly the interested reader could look for them independently. Therefore, the intention of gathering and documenting them in a single article serves two purposes: firstly, this is an academic article in an art history journal that places significant importance on images, and it is thus important that the photographs can be analysed for a deeper understanding of the subject matter; secondly, the article proposes that these uncomfortable images should be re-read and re-interpreted without concealing history, but rather contextualising them and approaching the topic in a critical, conscious, and responsible light. While the negative consequences of a production are alive in the present, it should not be left in the past and viewed as a final product that marked an era.

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ABSTRACT

a darker, better place is a visual project (video and photography) that I created during an artist residence at the Centre for Urban History (Lviv, Ukraine, 2019) with a grant from the British Council.

The work is the outcome of research into the CUH archives, namely TV reels from the 1960s, and comprises a video installation in addition to still images retrieved from the reels. The assembled material portrays a semi-fictional community that, sometime in the 1960s, somewhere in Ukraine, turned their backs on the perils of a world on the brink of disaster. They decided to build a place of their own, secreted away from the Cold War and Space Race rhetoric. They aimed to voyage to the centre of the earth, reaching for a darker, better place.

The images retrieved are overlayered stills, unintentional and fleeting passages between two different shots that gather as a single composite image for one 24th of a second. The words accompanying the piece seek to reflect on the following questions: How can appropriation and intervention on archival footage, within the realm of artistic practice, retrieve content from its original purpose and, in so doing, generate new readings?

Secondly, to what extent do these interventions on archival material bridge between the past and the present?

These questions will be addressed in articulation with the work of authors such as Joan Fontcuberta (on the realms of real and fiction), Marianne Hirsch (on the distinctions between history and memory), and Ariella Aïsha Azoulay (on the possibilities inscribed within archives).

keywords

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APPROPRIATION
INTERVENTION
UKRAINE
PHOTOGRAPHY
WITNESS

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a darker, better place

MARTIM RAMOS

> 'Now I realize that these tiny tombs, lined with foil and filled with a tiny supply of all the beauty in the world were very like ancient burial chambers, with their assortment of objects ready for the immortal life. (…)
> Like all buried treasure (X marks the spot), they weren't very reliable hiding places, and you could more or less forget about ever seeing your trove again. Very few people knew about the burial place, two or three trusted friends. But a few days later, when you checked back under the bush there was nothing there. The 'little secret' had disappeared as if it'd never existed.'
>
> Maria Stepanova

Introduction

On October 2018 I arrived in Lviv, Ukraine, to take part in an artist residency. By sheer coincidence, some weeks before, on the exact day that I received the acceptance e-mail, I was looking at a stack of books on my brother's desk. As I grabbed the one on top and flicked through the pages, I saw a map. The title said *Lwów 1911*. The book was *East West Street* by Philippe Sands and it felt like my entrance into Lviv. Sands, who is a Professor of Law and a practicing barrister involved in many of the most important cases in International Law, from Congo

to Iraq, Guantanamo and Rwanda, had written a searing portrait of his Jewish ancestors' ordeals throughout the twentieth century, a stirring journey starting in Lviv that underpins the creation and ensuing development of two fundamental (juridical) concepts, the core of his current practice: genocide and crimes against humanity. These two concepts, Sands was to explore, were first conceived in Lviv by Rafael Lemkin and Hersch Lauterpacht, respectively, and were first used at the Nuremberg trials, between 1945 and 1946.

Soon enough, I was stepping on its cobblestone pavements, bearing Sands' descriptions in mind, aware of how 'the streets of Lviv are a microcosm of Europe's turbulent twentieth century, the focus of bloody conflicts that tore cultures apart', a city at 'the midpoint of imaginary lines connecting Riga to Athens, Prague to Kiev, Moscow to Venice, (…) the crossing of the fault lines that divided east from west, north from south' (Sands 2016: xxv). I could feel how transient the present is when the past creeps up on every corner. Lviv had changed sovereignty over six times throughout the twentieth century and one could scent a whiff of all those bygone periods.

The artist residency was taking place at the Centre for Urban History, an institution aimed at archiving and researching the history of Central and Eastern European cities.

I was to dive into their vast archive and to produce an artistic proposition, an ongoing initiative promoted by the CUH in an effort to expand the realm and reach of actors and discourses around materials whose stories are often neglected and, at times, forever lost. I asked myself what should be the actual purpose of my actions in retrieving these materials from their stored hibernation? What was I to look for in this archive? The answers could be aligned with what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay suggests:

> That which we have deposited there. Not necessarily you or I personally, but you and I as those sharing a world with others; 'we' who are beyond the borders of a certain time and place; 'we' who do not converge into a collective of national or ethnic identity; 'we' who ought to have been regarded as the reason and sense of the archive, but were instead replaced by 'history' – as if at the end of time history itself would come knocking on the gates of the archive, demanding to settle the accounts. (Azoulay 2014: 6)

Azoulay clearly demarcates 'us' as subjective bodies with an anti-historical agency, which in turn strengthens our ability to navigate the archive and to create from it. The archive presents itself in its double nature, as the structural edifice that upholds the burden of history in its overarching and all-encompassing advance,

while simultaneously opening up the backdoors to the unsaid, the unwritten, the unthought, in what, according to Georges Didi-Huberman, can be perceived as a sort of an *operating field*:

> a determined place – framed like a *templum* in every possible expanse, (…), capable of making heterogeneous orders of reality meet, then of constructing this very meeting in place of overdetermination. It is a 'table' on which one decides to place certain disparate things with a view to establishing multiple 'intimate and secret relations', an area possessing its own rules of arrangement and of transformation for relinking certain things whose links are not at all obvious. And for making these links, once they are brought to light, the paradigms of a rereading of the world. (Didi-Huberman 2018: 39)

Wandering through the archive

I was particularly intrigued by a set of digitised film reels, hours and hours of silent and unbranded TV news footage from the 60s, and so I spent most of my time facing a computer screen, staring at a stream of moving images: parades; crowds; speeches; meetings; people on the phone; blueprints and models; industrial sites; people working at TV factories, shoe factories, furniture factories; hands making things, hands feeling the soil; people ploughing, people sowing, people harvesting; kids at school, grown-ups at school; medical exams; houses under construction, people moving into houses; miners digging holes in the ground; faces staring at us.

There were no captions or any form of text to go with the images, to provide some background information of any sort. Yet, hollow as they may be without any supporting references, these images still harbour something. The countless actions performed by nameless characters comprise a material and symbolic body to be reckoned with. I was looking at a society in the making. A collective endeavour towards a near future of social well-being. Silent displays of commitment and comradery. Or so I thought. Working from the archive means working through the archive. Pictures from the archive do not exist as fixed or unequivocal, they 'configure the times of memory and of desire at the same time. They have a corporeal, mnemonic, and votive character' (Didi-Huberman 2018: 27). As Marianne Hirsch posited:

> Rather than giving information about that past, archival images function as 'points of memory' that tell us more about our own needs and desires, our own fantasies and fears, than about the past to which they supposedly bear witness. (Hirsch 2012: 22)

The resulting outcome of my work is a threefold piece depicting a group of people that at some time in the 1960s, somewhere in Ukraine, made the harsh decision to turn their backs on the perils of a world at the brink of disaster, deciding to find and build a place of their own, away from the aggressiveness of the Cold War and as a counter to the Space Race rhetoric. They envisioned reaching the centre of the earth, reaching out for *a darker, better place*. The work comprises a video installation made from the archival footage documenting this radical action, from scanning the landscape to the actual moving in and settling down of its inhabitants; a set of photographs I made illustrating the efforts to locate remnants of this place and actions; a set of film stills extracted from the videos consisting of overlayered pictures created by the original edits when two distinct reels are glued together, resulting in uncanny and eerie pictures unintended to be seen as such. The work was first presented at the Museum of Modern Art of Odesa in February 2019.

The circumstances of the work implied forms of appropriation and intervention, which inevitably raise questions of accountability on behalf of the artist. With regards to these uses, Azoulay affirms that:

> Intervention, imagination and transmission are the main practices through which researchers and artists today exercise their right to (the) archive, that is, the right to share the archive, the right to make use of the archive in ways that do not take it (merely) as a depository of the past, storing materials that document what is over and done with. Traces of the constituent violence preserved in the archive can either be preserved untouched, preserving the law of the archive, or be reconfigured and reconceptualized through a new grid, whose consequences affect the way one is governed, as well as the ways one shares the world with others. (Azoulay 2014: 8)

Azoulay stresses the significance of the author as a leading actor, exerting an important influence upon the faith of the object, namely the picture, echoing Joan Fontcuberta's observation that, 'when in literature we talk about the death of the author as a renewal formula looming over writing, in photography we could talk about the death of the object' (Fontcuberta 2002: 22).

On the agency of witnessing

Asserting the agency of the creator as an active player invested in the construction of the picture and ensuing readings thereof does not take anything away from the image as a material and symbolic item. Throughout the ages, image makers have exerted such subjective influence over the destiny of their works, framing, rather than constraining, the outcomes of subsequent interpretations.

A few years before the invention of photography, between 1810 and 1815, Goya depicted the disasters of war that ravaged Spain. Under each drawing he wrote personal observations that not only underlined the gruesome nature of the bloodshed but which most strikingly reinforced his position amidst the occurrences. Under plaque 44, one reads *yo lo vi* (*I saw it*). Such words mark an outstanding and groundbreaking visual affirmation of the witness as an engaged and active body implicated in the events, signalling and reclaiming its subjectivity as paramount, and emphasising that to look is to participate.

In 1968, upon witnessing US soldiers killing a Viet Cong soldier, British photojournalist Don McCullin made what is arguably his most well-known picture. However, before raising his camera, he went through the dead soldier's possessions and arranged them below his corpse. We see portraits of a woman (a wife? a sister?) and a handwritten letter. The intervention introduces a cognitive shift whereby the dead soldier becomes a dead person. McCullin did not shy away from letting his actions be known and, in doing so, his meddling, as questionable as it may be, reinforces the idea that the witness is not a bystander. Although McCullin creates a fact that did not take place by itself, thus challenging the most elemental rules of good photojournalistic practice, he manages to invoke a reality that is no less truthful.

The artist Alfredo Jaar has dedicated a great volume of work to the Rwanda Massacre. Shortly after that dreadful occurrence, in 1994, Jaar visited the country, thus coming to learn of the unspeakable ordeal endured by a woman that witnessed the cold-blooded murder of her husband and two sons before managing to flee with her daughter. This harrowing experience is told to us through Jaar's own words, which are then supported by 100,000 slides piled on a light table depicting nothing but the woman's eyes in the work *The Eyes of Gutete Emerita*.

The work is a perceptive attempt at addressing the core of a traumatic event while avoiding the recurrent material, symbolic and moral paralysis in the face of such terrors. A mélange of layered accounts and events relays the greater purpose of the testimony: the actual action as witnessed by Emerita; the meeting of Jaar and Emerita, and her description of what took place; Jaar's sharing of the story and, in the

end, the striking reminder that it all comes to us through the eyes of Gutete Emerita. What these three distinct examples share, I argue, is a common investment on the role of the witness, one that is aware of the powers at play when bridging different times, places, experiences, and accounts. The role of the witness is thus one that is not only able to absorb the *ethos* of a given circumstance but which is also capable of acting it out in the face of others. Writing about Anna Akhmatova's memoir, Slavoj Žižek states the following:

> The key question, of course, is what kind of description is intended here? Surely it is not a realistic description of the situation, but what Wallace Stevens called 'description without place,' which is what is proper to art. This is not a description which locates its content in a historical space and time, but a description which creates, as the background of the phenomena it describes, an inexistent (virtual) space of its own, so that what appears in it is not an appearance sustained by the depth of reality behind it, but a decontextualized appearance, an appearance which fully coincides with real being. To quote Stevens again: 'What it seems it is and in such seeming all things are.' Such an artistic description 'is not a sign for something that lies outside its form.' Rather, it extracts from the confused reality its own inner form in the same way that Schoenberg 'extracted' the inner form of totalitarian terror. He evoked the way this terror affects subjectivity. (Žižek 2008: 6)

Therefore, the extent of the role of the witness does not have to be contingent on the circumstantial presence at a given place in a given moment, but rather reaches and acts much beyond these markers. This has been made clear over the years, particularly if we consider how courts of law have dismissed testimony by people whose accounts did not match the evidence which, in turn, has come to play the most significant role in the reconstruction of past events.

Joan Fontcuberta asserts that 'against what we have been ingrained with, against what we allow ourselves to think, photography always lies, lies by instinct, lies because its nature doesn't allow it to do anything else'[1] (Fontcuberta 2002: 15). He further downplays such claims, adding that what really matters is how the photographer uses this inevitable lie, to what ends or with what purposes. This is what Philippe Sands did in his efforts to retrace his family's stories, often finding himself looking at photographs, reading into people's demeanour, their grins, their gestures, their gazes. His training as a barrister is akin to the exercise of looking at photographs, which certainly demands that he asks questions, interrogates them even, gathering dots, inferring from absences, retrieving information that lies within the picture, uncovering the hidden lives of those long gone.

[1] All quotes by Joan Fontcuberta have been translated from Spanish by the author.

Reading pictures implies entering into dialogue with them, because not only do they speak of what is visible, they also touch on what is concealed. Photography is not so much a lie, as claimed by Fontcuberta, it is rather a riddle before which one has to ask the right questions. As Azoulay claims in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, one has to 'take into account all the participants in photographic acts – camera, photographer, photographed subject, and spectator – approaching the photograph (and its meaning) as an unintentional effect of the encounter between all of these' (Azoulay 2008: 23).

The end is not near

In February 2022, I found myself again staring obsessively at news' reels from TV networks; no longer the lost films from a previous century, but the shocking and ongoing invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army. Familiar streets and buildings turned into rubble, engulfed in clouds of dust. As the alarms blasted through the air, people rushed to their basements, garages, metro stations and bunkers to seek protection from the bombs dropping down. TV screens kept on showing these ongoing events with populations packed underground, their stunned faces quietly staring in vague anticipation. This is the place I had come to know through its people's stories and my personal interpretation of an overlooked archive, sketching out an attempt to find something better down below. Some of the people who were now enduring such perils were good friends with whom I had worked with closely in the making of my piece. We exchanged messages, I expressed my concern and solidarity, and was humbled by the resolution of their responses, their confident spirits, and their dire commitment to the dreadful present. In face of the ongoing disasters of war, it became clear to me that history did not rest quietly in the past. History has always been present, has always been the present.

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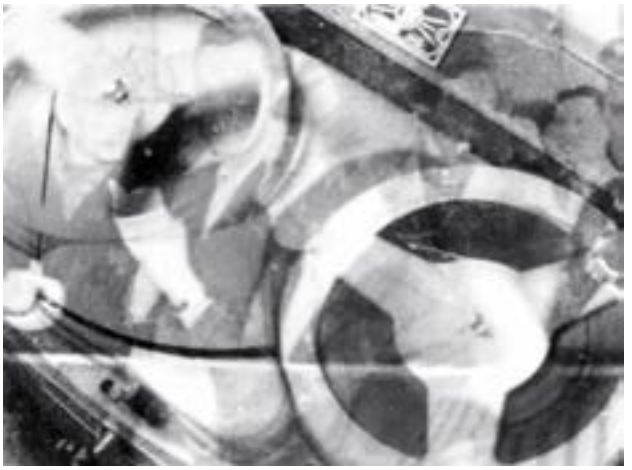

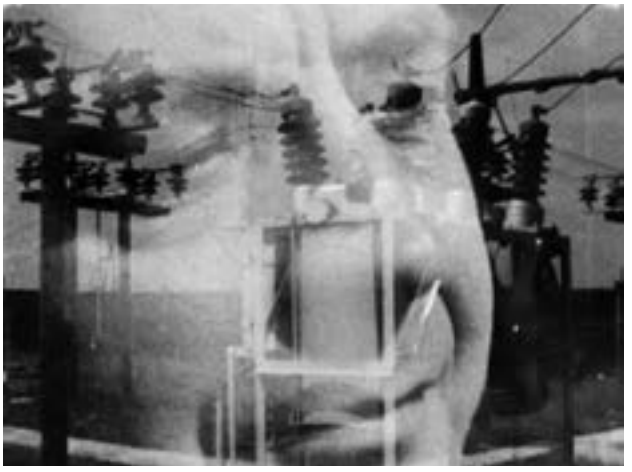

ABSTRACT

Drawing from a research project focusing on women artists active in Wrocław in the 1970s, I propose an interdisciplinary approach for current and future art histories that is based on a combination of methods from various fields (cultural anthropology, social history, archival studies) and driven by feminist theory, activism for social and historical justice, and the politics of care.

Considering Wrocław's historical and cultural context in the second half of the 20th century – being the main but extensively destroyed city of the so-called regained territories, populated almost entirely by people resettling from the Eastern Borderlands and Central Poland – and shifting the disciplinary focus from the objective (artefact) to the subjective (personal narrative), I would like to bring more attention to the multitude of diverse women's stories that have not been incorporated into what we know as conventional art history. This approach, based on inclusion and collaboration, involves mutual discovering, creating, archiving, and disseminating of what I eventually name 'oral art herstories', combining 'oral history' as the main research method with 'art herstories' as the project's more activist output and goal.

The research evolved slowly from 2014 and had a chance to bloom with substantial funding obtained in 2018 from the National Science Centre (NCN). Unfortunately, it was violently interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis. The risk of endangering the elderly artists willing to share their stories caused critical revision of the project and resulted in a withdrawal from outcome-oriented pursuits. This became the clarifying turning point where the project's underlying values suddenly emerged: personal connection, mutual trust and care, establishing collective knowledge and shared agency. This could become an ethical agenda for an engaged art history, willing not only to rescue and reclaim the value of the overlooked or forgotten (initially after Ewa Domańska), but also to become mindfully inclusive and empowering for the living, resisting the neoliberal urge of academic production and perhaps becoming 'relational art history'.

keywords

CONTEMPORARY ART
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ORAL HISTORY
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WROCŁAW
1970S

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The Vulnerable Body in the Archive:

Matriculating Oral Herstories of Art with (Self-)care

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'I don't want to disappoint you, but I'm not a feminist' – as one of the artists told me at the very beginning of our first interview. I was too preoccupied with my role as interviewer, busy setting up the conversation space and adjusting all the equipment, to react in that moment. I simply carried on, taking it for granted that probably no one from that generation of artists studying or just starting their careers in 1970s Poland would identify as a feminist. But when I started working on the opening paragraph for this article, this sentence came back to me. That particular artist – who I knew from her outstandingly reflexive and emancipatory artworks, full of vital imagination and wit, and from her courage to explore both artistic and gender boundaries – would have been a perfect match for the figure of the 1970s feminist creator. However, it is her own beliefs and views that are central to the methodology of this oral history. Why would she think that? Does she consider feminism irrelevant, or is it for her a 'ridiculous' Western idea? Is being called a feminist considered an insult for a woman of a particular context in Poland today? The seeming discrepancy between how I perceive that artist's works and the meaning of her sentence has moved me deeply.

As I began to write my own story down for this article, the energy moving between my eyes and hands recalled that seemingly negligible moment from the unconscious and I began to wonder about its significance. Its meaning emerges between two physical acts of communication: my conversation with the artist and the encounter with myself in writing, and it was my organism that held and released the recollection. When I am interviewing women artists, along with various digital

recording devices, I also bring the organic apparatus of my body. It is inhabited by my [*pardon the dualism*] mind and feelings [*and the unknown?*], which are prone to involuntarily respond with thoughts and emotions. I have just recently acknowledged that this plays an important role in the research process. After many years of working predominantly at a mental level, I have grown – not without setbacks – to recognise and appreciate that the practice of oral art history is an inherently corporeal method, in which intellect and body are intertwined. This living instrument that I use in my research also has its characteristics, boundaries, and needs, which I have learned to better recognise and embrace with successive interviews.

In this article, I would like to present some of my methodological reflections regarding the situated practice of researching creative women's micronarratives – collecting, archiving, and engaging with personal stories of artists who have lived experience of being a woman. I consider it to be *a process of facilitating art herstories* rather than writing about women's art from the position of an expert. My goal is to share my findings in pursuit of using oral history methodology in the field of art history, contributing to more inclusive and equitable narratives within the discipline. Specifically, I would like to present how the researcher's corporeality is intertwined with the archive's collective speaking body and suggest mutual self-care as a means of addressing potential vulnerabilities and as a tool for co-emancipation. I also believe that this text can become a mirror for other struggling researchers and that it has the potential to enrich art history with an affective perspective on how knowledge is generated.

These findings are mainly based on the oral history study of the strategies of female artists active in Wrocław in the 1970s, which I carry out for my PhD research at the Institute of Art History, University of Wrocław, under the supervision of Professor Anna Markowska.[1] This ongoing project, initiated formally in 2013, involves a combination of methods derived from various fields, including cultural anthropology, sociology, digital humanities, and archival studies, as well as art itself. It is primarily driven by my explorations of feminist theory and practice, on one hand aiming to generate new knowledge, and on the other seeking to foster social change through activism striving for historical justice, informed by the politics of care. This article is a presentation of the partial results of the project regarding the methodology of the oral herstory projects in the field of art history.

The *oral history of art*, investigating subjective experiences and beliefs instead of facts and 'objective' truths, seems to be a particularly insightful method in the context of the Northern and Western Territories of Poland. The so-called Regained Territories were severely affected by the brutal physical, symbolic and social dev-

[1] The article was developed within the framework of the research project *Art of Wroclaw's female artists in XXth 70s in the light of their micronarratives,* funded by the National Science Centre (no 2017/27/N/HS2/02476).

astation inflicted during World War II and the total population displacement after 1945. As this displacement and the events of the war were followed simultaneously by heavy state propaganda, cultural modernisation, and a bottom-up recultivation of the artistic milieu, personal testimonies from individuals of diverse backgrounds are very precious and reveal history as a polyphony of sometimes contradictory voices, presenting both official and unofficial historical narratives (Markowska and Reznik 2016). This method has proved to be very productive in destabilising dominant historical narratives and introducing underrepresented ones, and I have found it useful also in the context of the paradigm shift in art at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, when artistic practices were increasingly becoming ephemeral, body-related, performance- or action-based, conceptual or contextual.

By 'situated practice of oral art history', I mean not only the consideration of the complex contexts in which artists were situated, both in the period under study and at the time of the meetings, but also the dynamic negotiations of the historian's existence and identity taking place *with* the research process. For me, those two were very often interdependent: my investigations were informed by my academic and personal development, and my growth relied not only on my findings but also on my encounters with the artists themselves. Those 'encounters in-between-worlds', as historian Ewa Domańska would describe meetings with the witnesses to history (Domańska 1999), in all cases resulted in forming specific interpersonal bonds. Especially when created from feminist positions, *art herstories* are based on reinforcing sisterhood, and thus mutual empowerment, as well as caring for matrilineal heritage. My initial intention was to induce art herstories and make them more visible, but these meetings with artists also 'made me' – I emerged as an art herstorian.

'Matriculation' is a term I have coined for this text adopting the Polish translation of Bracha L. Ettinger's theory of the matrix and inspired by its artistic-academic exemplification in the *Macierz/Matrix* project presented by The Curatorial Collective (Kolektyw Kuratorski) in Kraków in 2018 (Chromik, Giemza and Bojarska 2022). I use it here with the (politically understood) meanings of: 1) registering, incorporating (stories) into a register (archive, history) – the act of conscious inclusion into an institutionalised system of social remembrance; 2) acknowledging someone's entrance into the academic realm; 3) maturing, maternal fostering (de) growth – bestowing the caring 'matrixial gaze' instead of the dominant and exploitative male gaze; 4) coming of age – the liminal act of passing into society, marked in the Polish education system by the almost ritualistic 'matriculation exam' for entrance to university at the age of 18, thus transitioning from private childhood to public adulthood.

At first, attention and care were directed in my project towards the legacy that I have recognised as undervalued and underrepresented in art history, and which I dearly wanted to save. Yet gradually my undertaking has been revealed to me as one of self-rescue: I needed to find out how to take care – under a loving inner motherly eye – of myself first. It was a personal shift from the intellectual to the corporeal, moving towards more organic self-awareness, mindful movement, sustainable pleasure, and creative practices of everyday life, embracing artivism and embodied knowledges. This *radical self-care*, understood as a micropolitical act of confronting the oppressive, patriarchal imperative to self-sacrifice, could only then be extended to my environment and become a research method.

After ten years of my meandering feminist oral history practice, I feel ready not only to amplify the voices of others but also to share my narrative of becoming and failing as an oral art herstorian, even though initially I did not expect to have a story of my own. I would therefore like to explore the possibilities of academic storytelling, drawing mainly from autoethnography, which focuses on research-based and positionally conscious self-description. I aim to track stimulating and healing practices, relationships and readings that have affected me on a variety of levels. I wish to further use this methodological framework in my PhD thesis, where I will be presenting the testimonies of the interviewed women artists and analysis of their artistic strategies together with my observations and the subsequent reworking of the material collected. I believe this will adequately represent the interconnection between the artist and the researcher, the two biological and socio-cultural organisms that carry all their memories, cultures, herstories and the possible futures within them.

This text is also a report on the 'archive's vulnerabilities' – my testimony of failures and doubts. Those not only reveal the project's weaknesses but can be transformed into invigorating sources of compassionate strength and resistance to the exploitative mode of academic production. Putting in ever-increasing levels of effort, stemming from childhood trauma and gendered into self-exploitation, has turned out to be a downward spiral for me. Collapsing, asking for help, and learning from it was probably my most significant research experience and success so far. Recovery from a crisis would have not been possible if not for all the caring people around me, to whom I am deeply grateful for their empathetic understanding, tender presence, and wise support.

Chosen roots. Collecting pieces for oral herstories of art

As an art historian, I had been taught that interviews are a useful tool for writing about contemporary art insofar as artists and curators and even their families and associates are often able to share vital information, documents, photographs, unknown artworks, and precious insights. Yet I cannot recall getting trained in conducting interviews. Moreover, I cannot say that I was trained to use feminist theory either – I think it was not really part of the art history curriculum at that time, as even recall one of my professors making patronising jokes about it. But I was lucky to have been able to blaze my own path of study within the Interdepartmental Individual Studies in the Humanities (MISH) at the University of Wrocław, having the opportunity to take classes in Polish philology, philosophy, cultural studies and ethnology, which broadened my perspective with an interdisciplinary approach.

My application for doctoral studies was preceded by a vital turning phase – my 'feminist awakening'. Being raised and having studied in the paradigm of the male gaze and under male authorities, reading philosophy and texts written mostly by men, presenting a masculine, Western and anthropocentric perspective, I had succumbed to the charm of this type of power and aspired to the phallogocentric order. But this changed after I had taken a year's leave to work as a waitress in London. I came back to Wrocław to finish my studies and to obtain my degree and started working in the Falanster cooperative – a leftist bookshop, café and cultural venue. For a diligent student coming from a conservative family background, this was the ultimate de-schooling. I still wanted to grow intellectually, so I applied for the PhD programme, seeking to exercise the new perspectives and skills that I had acquired thanks to socio-politically aware teamwork. The idea to deal with the oral histories of women artists active in Wrocław came to me quite spontaneously, as a transgressive gesture of leaving the academic 'ivory tower'. Just after discovering Linda Nochlin's pivotal *Have There Been No Great Women Artists?* (Nochlin 1973), I realised that important stories of women were missing in my area of study. Feminist oral history appeared to me the most promising method of challenging the dominant narrative in art history. I recognised it as a collective space for a transgenerational polylogue where a multitude of underrepresented women's voices could be heard and amplified. I saw it as a vehicle of unlearning, a tool of mutual empowerment, a space for social bonding, and eventually a platform for establishing more inclusive and open archives of contemporary art. But at the time there was, and to some extent there still is, no established methodology of the

oral art history. On one hand, I was excited to be entering uncharted territory; on the other, I was looking for points of support.

Among the available sources were various collections of interviews with contemporary artists, but the majority of them were journalistic and conducted predominantly with men. The most impactful for me were the conversations held by the established artist Artur Żmijewski with his colleagues, all of them associated with the 1990s Critical Art movement, collected in a publication entitled *Trembling Bodies*. This book included feminist artists Katarzyna Górna, Katarzyna Kozyra, and Joanna Rajkowska, and presented precious insights on the heterogenous social, political, and artistic motivations for the artworks created by this flamboyant generation active in the period of post-communist transformation in Poland. As Żmijewski states, his position as a fellow creator and a friend enabled his interlocutors to be open with him, instantly establishing a mutual understanding within the intersubjectivity of the verbal exchange (Żmijewski 2008, 10-11). He also claimed that his book was research and that the artists he spoke with created new knowledge by transforming their socio-political observations into discursive pieces of art. He thus named them 'the eyewitnesses' of reality (ibid, 12-14). This disciplinary crossover of art and science was very attractive and promising for me, as it validated my intuition. But as Żmijewski's bold statements were expressed from a position different from mine, at the same time I felt intimidated.

A few years later, similar feelings were evoked by the widely acclaimed Hans Ulrich Obrist's *Lives of the Artists, Lives of the Architects*. I read the copy I managed to obtain in excitement, as it was a collection of interviews with the greatest figures in Western art (Obrist 2016). I secretly fantasised about becoming a local and feminist Obrist. It was a desire for achievement, recognition, and power, which I believed I could use to support the little-known women artists from the eastern European Wrocław while simultaneously elevating myself. But I was nothing like the Swiss curator and critic nor like the Polish male artist – although I was somewhat privileged and intellectually eager, on a material and emotional level I did not have enough resources, confidence, and empowerment to successfully perform such a transgression.

It was grounded in the lived experience of a white, overweight and non-heteronormative girl/woman, raised in a modest family of Catholic resettlers from the so-called Eastern Borderlands (today part of Ukraine), Polish with a possibly suppressed Jewish or Armenian heritage, living in a town in the heavily industrialised region of Upper Silesia, overly ambitious and well trained in people pleasing. Crossing the borders of various areas of study, combining humanities with art, hybridising methodologies and dissemination formats – playing with and around knowledge – was my pleasure since I passed what in Poland is known as the 'matriculation

exam' for entrance to university and chose my course of studies. But instead of following an idealised career path of a rogue experimenter, I delved into the search for a 'reliable' oral history methodology that I could transmit into the field of art history from other university disciplines, like cultural studies, anthropology or history. I had believed that this would attract more approval. Using the language drawn from Clarissa Pinkola Estés' famous psychoanalytical *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, a book which became a self-recovery manual for women of my generation, that was the voice of the internalised Bluebeard, a fear preventing me from reaching my truth (Estés 1998).

My first 'proper' methodological source was *Oral History and War. The Concentration Camp Experience in the Perspective of Biographical Narratives* by Piotr Filipkowski (Filipkowski 2010). Because of this study's scope, it was a very difficult read for me. But as it was the only available Polish academic monograph using that method, I had an inner compulsion to get through it. Since the theme of atrocities was present throughout my entire childhood and adolescence, I should be mentally immune to it, I rationalised, though I had no organic space in my mind-body to process the book. Most of the sources I found later on dealt either with war and trauma, oppression under the communist regime, or ethnic-based violence (Kudela-Świątek 2013; Kłapeć, Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, Szadura and Szumiło 2014). However, I believed it was my duty to work through all that at times quite heavy reading and to pick out methodological clues for my research in the field of art. It was a relief when I came across the journalistic *Rebels*, published by Anka Grupińska and Joanna Wawrzyniak, a collection of interviews conducted with representatives of the Polish counterculture of the 1970s and 1980s (Grupińska and Wawrzyniak 2011). I was delighted to be finally reading the micronarratives of creative individuals who were contesting the system with their actions and artworks, even though the majority of interviewees were men.

I knew that the oral art herstories archive I was envisioning had to address three key issues: 1) the so-called Regained Territories and recultivating cultural life after the resettlement – uncertainty combined with the vitality of creating the new life in the 1970s, known as the 'golden decade' of post-war Wrocław; 2) art and its shifting paradigm, modernisation, and the neo-avant garde experimentation, changing representation strategies, the relationships, and power dynamics within the artworld; 3) the notions of womanhood, emancipation, and equality. This last component I was exploring intensively while undertaking postgraduate gender studies at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences (IBL PAN), where I was de- and re-learning philosophy, literature, art criticism, humanities, social sciences, and even theology from feminist perspectives. I was

recognising them as mine – representative of the gender I was socialised in and in line with my own corporeal experiences.

Around that time, I accidentally came across a bilingual book *Testimonies: In a Female Voice*, a collection of herstories of key Czech and Slovak female artists and art theoreticians (Štefková 2012). In a situation of certain methodological isolation, learning about this project gave me a feeling of warmth and proximity, a sense of being part of a transnational community of like-minded researchers. In Poland, there was much more inspiration for me in the field of art, which seemed to be in the midst of an archival turn, than in academia. The most notable was Karol Radziszewski's exhibition *America Is Not Ready for This* – a queer exploration of the story of one of the most important contemporary female artists Natalia LL, using the oral history method and presented as a film and a collection of documents. The Warsaw-based pioneering gay artist revisited the legacy of the senior colleague from Wrocław, reperforming her legendary 1977 trip to New York funded by the Kościuszko Foundation. He visited places she had been to and collected stories of the people she had met, namely Vito Acconci and Carolee Schneemann, while also receiving interview refusals from Hans Haacke, Lucy Lippard, Anthony McCall, Sarah Charlesworth, William Wegman, and Colette, who either did not recall meeting her or had other reasons not to speak (Radziszewski, Szcześniak 2012). It was a well-produced and multilayered project that, again, both inspired and intimidated me. I was held by an impression that what I was trying to do at the intersection of art and research had already been done and that there was not much space left [*my old demons of competitiveness of the desire for originality or dealing with manspreading?*]. So I pushed myself even more into the scientific field, creating online databases within the digital humanities. Even though I dearly wanted to have a conversation with Natalia LL, I felt 'unready for this' – we lived in the same city for several years before her passing away in 2022, but I never found the courage to approach her. However, out of this particular vulnerability grew one of my key research questions: why have there been no other great women artists in Wrocław?

Nochlin's original question was addressed by the Łódź-based feminist artist Anka Leśniak, who in her *Fading Traces* project collected the autobiographical testimonies of the most important Polish female artists of the 1970s: Izabella Gustowska, Anna Kutera, Natalia LL, Teresa Murak, Ewa Partum, Krystyna Piotrowska, and Teresa Tyszkiewicz, presenting them as a video archive-installation.[2] I remember again having the feeling of similarity and mirroring the work of an experienced artist, like with Štefková's project, but at the same time, I cannot recall envy, like when visiting Radziszewski's exhibition. Perhaps those reactions were different due to the medium of my experience, respectively: a small book, a full-blown

[2] *Fading Traces: Polskie artystki w sztuce lat 70. = Fading Traces: Polish Women Artists in the Art of the 1970s*, Anka Leśniak, accessed 4 May 2023, http://www.ankalesniak.pl/fading2010_pl.htm.

museum exhibition, or an internet website with a project's documentation. But I believe that, regardless of the presentation format, I was attracted by the feeling of commonality and synergy of efforts – being there for the same cause and speaking from similar positions.

In 2014, a collection of stories about an artistic event of the Golden Grape Symposium and Exhibitions (1963-1981) and the New Art Biennial (1985-1996) taking place in Zielona Góra was published (Słodkowski 2014). It felt very grounding to discover that there was such oral art history research being conducted parallel to my commencing project, and that it even matched some of my criteria. I felt I was part of something bigger – perhaps a disciplinary shift or a community of researchers making the change I had hoped for. Again, this validated my research intuition and aroused some envy in me: reading this beautifully designed book stemming from similar intellectual interests in 'rescue history' (Domańska 2014) and 'horizontal art history' (Piotrowski 2009), with amazing contents and a foreword by the aforementioned Filipowski, I felt one step behind [*why such rivalry?*]. Even though my research was from a feminist angle and exploring specifically women's art, meaning that there was no actual conflict of interest, and my study could have benefited greatly from that publication being disseminated, somehow it put me off. It took me a while to understand this.

Reflecting upon my thoughts around Żmijewski's project, fantasies around Obrist's practice, or feelings towards Słodkowski's accomplished publication, I have realised that all those were my projections onto male figures, resulting possibly from not having enough women role models. Why were there no acclaimed women experimenters in my field of study? It also resembled the emotions that were evoked when I was discovering the Women's Art Archive in Goldsmiths,[3] exploring oral history collections of the British Library or the Smithsonian,[4] after visiting the libraries in Frankfurt, Oslo and Helsinki, when learning about the basis wien archive[5] or Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest,[6] when admiring the Forgotten Heritage: European Avant-garde Art On-Line website,[7] the All-women Art Exhibitions research project,[8] or the recent Oral Histories of Modernity archive of the Modern Art Museum in Warsaw.[9] This particular envy is a mix of appreciation, affinity, excitement, desire, and motivation, all triggered by a deficiency.

I recognised that I was longing for a proper material structure. But beneath it, it was always my conviction that 'I do not have enough', my belief that 'I am not enough'. In the realm of the highly parameterised academy, where one has to constantly prove their worth to the system and speak the language of benefits, while there is such an overflow of scholarly publications, this is a very vulnerable place to be in, risking the relentless pursuit of points while simultaneously struggling to read everything and, at the same time, make existential ends meet. On a more

[3] *The Women's Art Library*, Goldsmiths, accessed May 4, 2023, https://www.gold.ac.uk/make/.

[4] *Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project*, Smithsonian Archives of American Art, accessed May 4, 2023, https://www.aaa.si.edu/inside-the-archives/elizabeth-murray-oral-history-of-women-the-visual-arts-project.

[5] Documentation Centre for Contemporary Art in and from Austria, basis wien, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.basis-wien.at/.

[6] Artpool Art Research Center, accessed 4 May 2023, https://artpool.hu/en.

[7] Forgotten Heritage – European Avant-Garde Art Online, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.forgottenheritage.eu/about/.

[8] Wystawy sztuki kobiet = All-women Art Exhibitions, accessed 4 May 2023, http://wystawykobiet.amu.edu.pl/english.html.

[9] Historie Mówione Nowoczesności, Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej = Oral Histories of Modernity, Museum of Modern Art, accessed 4 May 2023, https://artmuseum.pl/en/archiwum/historie-mowione-nowoczesnosci.

pragmatic level, I needed material resources for outsourcing the technical work, preservation of the archive, development of a website or a publication, and also financial remuneration for my work, allowing me to pay my bills and support myself. I decided to apply for a substantial grant to gain security and it took me a few years before I got it in 2018. It was an amazing feeling of accomplishment after several attempts, especially since I have been on the verge of abandoning that project and changing my occupation on several occasions. I was about to turn thirty-five and I was at times very frustrated and tired of the precarious life of a perpetual PhD candidate with no reliable job or basic housing security. But with that fund-raising achievement, I felt a new wave of enthusiasm – my sense of agency was artificially enhanced by winning a grant competition, which I saw as my academic springboard to advancement.

The great reveal: the matter that matters and a global failure

It might be disappointing, but in this article, I will not present or analyse the micro-narratives of artists whom I have talked to across all those years of research. I am saving those stories for my PhD dissertation, where I will describe the project's scope, methods, research questions, critical axes, and progression. In this text, I aim to present the learning and meta-processes happening while meeting in person, engaging with, and collecting the stories of Katarzyna Chierowska, Anna Kutera, Anna Bolcewicz, Anna Szpakowska-Kujawska, Ewa Maria Poradowska-Werszler, Maria Gostylla-Pachucka, Anna Płotnicka, Jolanta Marcolla, and others [*is it enough material already?*]. I would like to use my own research experience to tell a story which can be useful in the field of art histories, especially one that aims at social justice and is informed by the ethics of care. For me, reconnecting with the organic matter became vital: learning how to take care not only of the stories, the carriers of meanings, or cultural heritage and civilisational values, but first and foremost how to take care of the physical and psychoemotional roots and relations, and how to mutually care for the living biological beings.

From the very beginning, I knew that my research was a corporeal event – I wanted to physically meet artists and interact with them. Yet I was not fully conscious of the underlying significance of this, as my focus was initially on memories and the content of stories told. Slowly, during the subsequent interviews, I started to notice the fascinating multitude of aesthetic information flowing: the qualities of different voices, gestures, facial expressions, body postures, ways of moving, appearances and clothing, and even the decorations in the flats. There was information coming

at me from all sides, the meanings of which I could not fully grasp, but which I felt were very important, especially when studying women artists who were excellent in creating representations: gendered personas and environments. It was clear to me that these conversations should be recorded as high-quality audiovisual material that could become a precious source for the future. I wished that others could interact with the archive so that it was more like a living organism than just a dusty library shelf. But there is also another side to it: being a sensually sensitive person and trained as an art historian, I have a body strongly receptive to a variety of sensory qualities, especially visual ones, and process them with my whole organism, along the body-mind line. But understanding that aspect of my work came to me a bit later, with some worrying symptoms of health problems.

I started noticing that the conversations I was conducting were energetically, sensorially, and verbally intense for me, quite overwhelming and exhausting – usually it took me a few days to recover from them. Just recently I realised what a huge portion of information I was processing through my body each time: I was handling the interview, the interpersonal interaction, the technical equipment, the psychobiological sentient device of myself, post-production, and analysis. Ironically, in my commitment to taking care of others' stories, I was neglecting myself, which I became aware of after facing the consequences. The emergence of an autoimmune disease, situated somewhere at the intersection of body and mind, was a source of reflection for me, that I had been unfortunately abusing my organism. So I redirected my attention: I gave myself dietary, psychotherapeutic, and pharmacological care, developing body awareness, practising yoga, exploring movement, contact with nature, and sexuality, looking for what gives me peace, pleasure, and joy.

During this time I was also reading *The Shaking Woman or a History of my Nerves*, a book that I had acquired accidentally, ignorant of who its author was. It turned out to be a treasured companion, which I nibbled on bit by bit for a few years, like the most delicious, intense and long-lasting delicacy – it was so satisfying to interact with the erudite and critical Siri Hustvedt's narrative. She describes her own experience of recurrent convulsions, which began after her father's death. The experience of loss triggered violent bodily reactions that, from time to time, completely took control of her entire being, abruptly interrupting her lectures, throwing her on the ground, and completely preventing her from her usual verbal communication. Hustvedt takes a sharp look at her ailment, deconstructing the Western medicine paradigm, where health is not only pathologised but where body and mind became arbitrarily separated. By telling her own story with great self-awareness and by situating her self-observation in the context of the history of psychiatry, neuroscience, or psychoanalysis, the author shows how knowing her own experience is an integral part of a sovereign being, and how caring evokes

understanding. That it is she who has the agency to narrate her life, with all the inherent mental and organic processes, and that this is not the privilege of any of these Western disciplines (Hustvedt 2010).

After the liberation of my inner writer thanks to the *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1976), it was the reading of Susan Sontag's diaries that introduced me to the conscious reconnecting of mind and body (Sontag 2012); this was grounded later in movement during the Body-Mind Centering sessions with dancer and choreographer Iwona Olszowska; the experience of contact-improvisation and gaga workshops bringing me more self-awareness and expression; rereading Jolanta Brach-Czaina's *Cracks in Existence* (Brach-Czaina 2018), one of the most important Polish feminist philosophical texts; discovering ecosexuality through the artworks of Annie Sprinkle & Beth Stevens or Agnieszka Szpila's radical novel *Hexes* (Szpila 2021); the recently published in Poland *Bad Feminist*, a collection of essays by Roxane Gay, who inspired me to be a naughty academic, to enjoy myself, and to make a difference at the same time (Gay 2022). All these physical-mental exercises helped me unlearn my limiting academic discipline and convictions, eventually enabling me to surpass the scholarly apathy and exhaustion that I had been experiencing.

As I re-learned how to handle my own emotions and care for my body, I began to notice the special role these play in the process of creating an archive of oral art herstories, providing a medium for the formation of relationships and communication between two conversing women. This became strikingly clear to me with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought into every physical interaction a serious risk of a severe disruption to those 'protein interfaces' we inhabit. With the lockdown and the spread of a deadly virus, as an oral historian investigating the stories of elderly women, I found myself in a total deadlock, from which I was unable to extricate myself on either a technical or an ethical level.

Wanting to find a way out, I invited Joanna Synowiec to an artistic research collaboration in the context of the Wrocław 70/20 Symposium,[10] a celebration of the 50th anniversary of an artistic event from 1970 that symbolically established a conceptual breakthrough in the Wrocław art scene (Nader 2009). In the project entitled *Reverberations*, carried out jointly with Dominika Łabądź, Beata Rojek, Katarzyna Roj, and curator Alicja Jodko, as well as Iwona Ogrodzka and Agata Kalinowska, we planned to develop and creatively rework the oral histories archive of the Wrocław '70 Visual Arts Symposium. After conducting a couple of interviews in between lockdowns, we made a docu-camera performance in the form of a séance [Fig. 1], presented online as a miniseries [Fig. 2].[11] As women symposiasts on the verge of two worlds, inspired by nineteenth-century spiritualist

[10] *Symposium Wrocław 70/20*, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.sympozjum7020.pl/en.

[11] *Pogłosy = Reverberations*, Entropia Gallery, accessed 4 May 2023, https://entropia.art.pl/view_news.php?id=609&arc=1&year=2020.

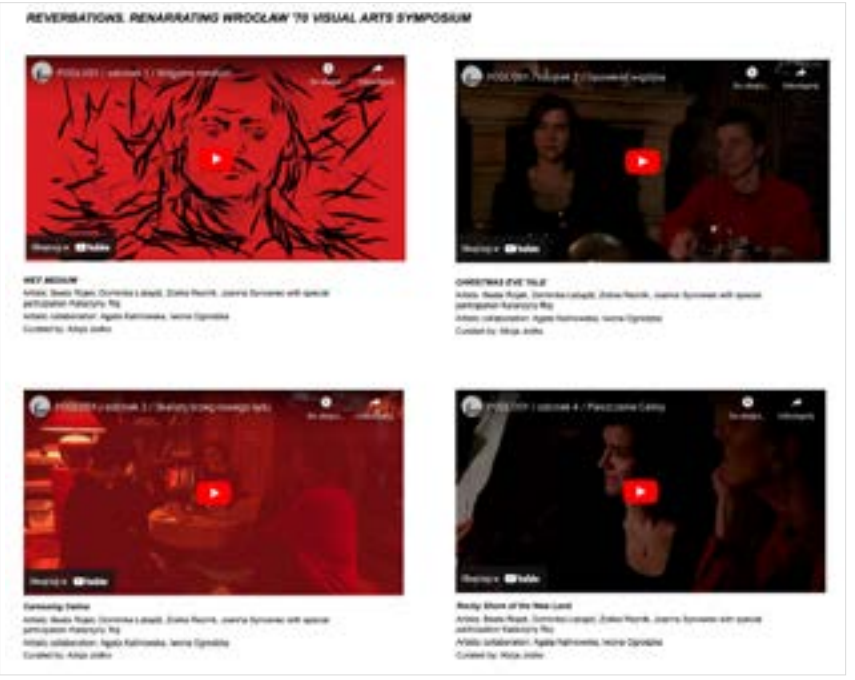

Fig. 1 – Katarzyna Roj on the set of *Reverberations*, Wrocław, 2020. Photo courtesy: Agata Kalinowska, Galeria Entropia / Strefa Kultury Wrocław.

Fig. 2 – *Reverberations* miniseries, 2020.

practices, we embodied the conflicting stories of two important witnesses to the history of 1970, Anna Szpakowska-Kujawska and Zbigniew Makarewicz, filtering them through our organisms and experiences. Eventually, we did not directly present any of the interviews, but rather used them as prompts to evoke the performance of our own feminist narratives around both official events and to release our stories and critical insights rooted in our bodies. The corporeal and ethical aspects of running an oral history project during the pandemic, with a set of guidelines, were presented in a text *Breathing the Same Air* (Reznik and Synowiec 2020).

This project was a laboratory for me, where I drew on the energy of sisterhood and collaboration – exchanging knowledge, experiences and ideas with trusted, creative women from different disciplines. This motion inspired me to redesign an ongoing grant project in which I was seriously stuck. I realised that by conducting this research individually for over seven years and struggling to prove myself as a PhD candidate while earning as a teacher, I was experiencing isolation and burnout, which were exacerbated during the pandemic. But in the collective artistic research of *Reverberations* I experienced joy and fulfilment, so I knew that I would be able to move on with my research if I could work in a healthy, team-based environment. I needed to find a way to open up the project formally restricted to be conducted solo – I was eager to expose the vulnerabilities of the research processes, exchange doubts, invite new perspectives, ask for and accept help, start

delegating tasks, let go of control and meticulousness, invite more chaotic and creative processes, accept imperfections, sacrifice some of my initial goals, heal from the neoliberally reinforced narcissistic desire for individual achievement.

Despite the huge pandemic crisis, I saw a chance of saving the project and thus saving my PhD. With *Reverberations* I intuitively sent out the impulse to establish a diverse and horizontal women's circle, where we mirrored each other's practice, sparked energies and cross-over in thoughts. Most importantly, we were mutually taking care of the project, supporting each other in self-care. From this experience, I began to rebuild, strengthen and confidently embrace my agency in the hierarchical field of the academy, ready to consciously reposition myself and take a stand in the borderland territory of art history and artistic research. However, I did not manage to embody this intention, because my body-mind did not keep up with my professional plans – it painfully resisted any further work with a meltdown. It was later that I understood why that happened.

In the course of the pandemic, I was unaware of burning out professionally, frustrated by the solitude in my long-lasting research and the online teaching deprived of corporeal stimulation. After experiencing major turbulence in my personal life and several losses among the people closest to me, I felt immense loneliness and suffered from grief, which I did not know how to process. I threw myself into various tasks that kept me busy, like the mindless work of additive data collecting. I made the mistake of trying to work out emotional difficulties through labour, using it for self-regulation rather than to achieve the research objective. It was one of my self-destructive behavioural patterns I was not aware of, together with overthinking, ruminating, procrastination, and keeping the illusion of having everything under control.

I had signalled my intentions to extend the duration of the project to my supervisor and in one of the reports and for that purpose I had saved the grant money. I was convinced that even though I had difficulties I would eventually manage to fulfil the project's obligations, as I had already found a solution. However, while struggling with depression and anxiety and on a medical leave, I did not send a formal request on time. I was shocked when the project was automatically terminated with only about 25% of the grant money used, without the possibility of resumption due to my health situation. As a researcher I worked for 36 months under a so-called 'junk contract', so formally I was not an employee and was not protected by labour laws. This only intensified the crisis I was already in, and it took me another two years to get out of it.

Taking extra self-care

Hustvedt's autobiographical essay became my literary aid and comprehension device. It helped me to reconnect the jagged threads of my own problematic existential experience, socio-cultural situatedness, and creative and research processes into a more conscious and integrated whole. My crisis became also an opportunity to deconstruct the unhealthy and exploitative environment I found myself in within the academic system, something more other people also face. I am deeply convinced that the path of healing through reclaiming my relationship with my emotions and body, as well as my voice and story, is not just something private, but rather an extremely vital emancipatory practice that should be at the very centre of my attention and practice.

Having a rather traditional upbringing in Poland, I have inherited a set of romantic phantasms around the figure of the self-sacrificing Mother Pole in the forefront. This myth grew very strongly into the collective consciousness during the period of Poland's partitions, constituting an oppressive positioning of women as the guardian of the home, and thus the protector of tradition, sacrificing her own life for the sake of the fatherland and to save national values. According to Iza Kowalczyk, during the transformation period of the 1990s, this myth was recreated in the figure of a bold businesswoman, supporting another patriarchal logic – neoliberal capitalism (Kowalczyk 1999, 12-18; 2010, 51-63).

Taking care of others, their stories, values, and legacy, was bringing me approval and appreciation. The dark side of this culturally inherited 'mothering' is the ease of accepting excess obligations. It is very tricky how the patriarchal hetero-matrix situated me, a contemporary educated woman, as willing to take extensive care of whole my universe – an underpaid, precarious worker of the fields of art and academy, concerned more about the heritage then about self. While being intellectually aware that it is a shard of patriarchal misogyny, my body did not know it until I consolidated my corporeal and mental experiences into a fully embodied knowledge. It was the simple, everyday deeds of caring for myself that became micro-revolutionary acts of disobedience, opposing the logic of (self-)exploitation. *Radical self-care* became my antidote to putting myself second, removing myself into the shadows, slowly disappearing [*though physically gaining weight*], excluding myself. Moving away from a 'toxic sense of responsibility' towards a more compassionate, continuous, and mutual care was also inspired by Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*, which promoted my capacity to trust my processes and accept fatigue, frustrations or even burnout as political acts (Solnit 2016).

Considering art and heritage, I decided to follow the maternal gaze that also sets healthy boundaries for using resources. Unlearning some of the cultural patterns,

roles, and behaviours, 'matriculation' became for me *caring for others through caring for myself* – cultivating others' stories by nourishing my presence. In everyday practice, it is tender nurturing and fierce standing for all the notions of otherness in me as the way to respectfully make and hold a more equitable social space. In terms of archival practice, this is the courage to keep asking an open question 'Whose archive is it?', followed by 'How to make it more inclusive?', and an empathetic yet mindful of our resources 'How can we take care of it together?'.

A relational and corporeal turn for (oral) art histories

I have noticed that incorporating my own existence into my academic practice helped me to become more mature as a partner for my interlocutors. Having a mutual lived experience of being a creative and socially active woman became a connecting, communal sensation. This was clarified for me after the several conversations I had with Joanna Synowiec within the framework of the *Reverberations* project when interviewing Anna Szpakowska-Kujawska together. I took the role of the camera operator then while Joanna was conducting the conversation. I was enchanted to observe as the two talking women bonded and I knew that, even though I was also an active participant in that situation, their exchange had a very special quality. Synowiec, a newlywed mother, expressed that explicitly in our miniseries episode entitled *A Christmas Eve Tale*, where we discuss various issues around motherhood while working in arts and culture: 'Well, I kind of went to Szpakowska-Kujawska to have her tell me how to do it. Really!', she said.[12]

As an 'oral art herstorian' I have decided to hold conversational space as an intersubjective platform for the existential exchange – not only hearing and collecting the female artists' stories but also resonating with them, bringing my own identity and experience to the meeting, enabling myself to be seen. I believe that within the discipline I have moved away from interviews that I would call 'mental excavations', mining information from the memories of my interviewees, which I connote as belonging to the patriarchal logic of extraction, inevitably leading to the exploitative use of the so-called natural and human resources. I practise a conversational mode rooted in the exchange of lived experience and the corporeal being, for which I found dance and choreographic exercises very helpful, especially contact improvisation.

I am embracing a more empathetic mode of research that I would describe as *relational art history*, after Nicolas Bourriaud's essay on Relational Aesthetics, which has informed my research since my master's thesis (Bourriaud 2002). In that model, I wish to discover or establish a consensual and at least a temporary relationship with the person who is willing to share their story with me. Within the artworld, a multitude of non-financial forms of exchange exist to nurture interpersonal and professional bonds – we cooperate, interchange competences, share resources or

[12] *Pogłosy / odcinek 2 / Opowieść wigilijna = Reverberations / Episode 2 / A Christmas Eve Tale*, YouTube.com, 2:10-2:18, accessed 4 May 2023, https://youtu.be/9tYbGZO62rY?t=130.

Fig. 3 – The opening of the 2015 F/M Festival, Centre for the Reanimation of Culture (Centrum Reanimacji Kultury – CRK), Wrocław, 23 May 2015. In the front right: Katarzyna Chierowska and Anna Bolcewicz with Zofia Reznik, in the centre: Magdalena Grobelna, and in the back: Marta Pałyga. Photo courtesy: Patrycja Mastej, Fundacja Wersja. https://www.flickr.com/photos/wersja/22822065444/in/album-72157659554534704/

networks. As an art professional, I have been asked by my interlocutors to write reviews, Wikipedia biographies, and curate their exhibitions. Such flows of symbolic values, resources, and influence are no secret in the community, although they do raise controversy, making it necessary, in my view, to make them transparent and visible. Even with the flattened hierarchies and in communal archives the power dynamic is still there in the relational practice, as Claire Bishop points out (Bishop 2004).

I remember that at an early stage of my research, in 2015, I invited the artists I had been meeting to actively participate in a grassroots, almost zero-budget feminist festival that I co-organised with a group of friends [Fig. 3].[13] Inviting Katarzyna Chierowska, Anna Bolcewicz, and Anna Kutera, who were involved in the independent art scene of the 1970s, to exhibit and perform with the young artists in one of the Wrocław's squats was an incredible, inclusive, and transgressive experience. Following this, in 2016, I received an invitation from Chierowska to be the

[13] *F/M Festiwal 2015*, Flickr, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.flickr.com/photos/wersja/albums/72157659554534704

Fig. 4 – Katarzyna Chierowska with Aga Tomaszewska during Chierowska's action 'The Art of Begging' (*Sztuka żebrania*) at 2015 F/M Festival, Centre for the Reanimation of Culture (Centrum Reanimacji Kultury – CRK), Wrocław, 23 May 2015. Photo courtesy: Kamil Nowelli/ Katarzyna Chierowska, Fundacja Wersja. https://www.flickr.com/photos/wersja/ 23082691079/in/album-72157661762013841/

curator for her project [Fig. 4].[14] I also remember that for some time we were neighbours with Bolcewicz, and that she paid me and my family a visit for Christmas Eve dinner. I also remember that Chierowska, after I moved into a new flat, visited me with her best wishes and gave me some houseplants from her own abundant collection. But I must confess that I have failed to stay very close with the women artists I met when my personal difficulties started and when the pandemic hit all of us, which made me feel guilty. I wanted to offer more than I was capable of. Those plants from Chierowska, among other indicators, visualised for me how during my periods of depression I stop nurturing the entities around me, letting them dry out and sometimes die, which is a manifestation of self-neglect [Fig. 5]. The pandemic also triggered my anxiety about the loss of people who were important to me, especially the loved ones and the elderly. Because of my fear, I was frozen – physically unable to pick up the phone, write emails, respond to invitations, and certainly not able to conduct research based on meeting and talking to people. I managed to confide in one of the doctoral seminars, but the reasonable solutions suggested by my supervisor and colleagues did not convince me – because I was driven by the irrational. It was impossible to maintain complete safety, especially when the women inviting me to their private spaces, tired of the rules and forced alienation, insisted on talking without face masks. Or when their bodies spontaneously sought physical contact, for example by touching my arm, or when waves of cordiality led to completely natural bursts of laughter or even hugs. Having to restrain this spectrum of physical and emotional communication also felt to

[14] *F/M Festiwal 2015: Photelart Katarzyna Chierowska 'Sztuka żebrania' = F/M Festival 2015: Photelart Katarzyna Chierowska 'The art of begging'*, Flickr, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.flickr.com/photos/wersja/albums/72157661762013841/with/23342213262/. *18000 GROSZY = SZCZĘŚCIE, CZYLI SZTUKA ŻEBRANIA. FINAŁ PROJEKTU = 18,000 PENNIES = HAPPINESS, OR THE ART OF BEGGING. PROJECT FINALE*, Cojestgrane.pl, 6.09.2016, accessed 4 May 2023, https://cojestgrane.pl/polska/dolnoslaskie/wroclaw/wydarzenie/39he/18000-groszy-szczescie-czyli-sztuka-zebrania.-final-projektu/bylo. MWW Muzeum Współczesne Wrocław, Facebook, 16.09.2016, accessed 4 May 2023, https://www.facebook.com/MuzeumWspolczesne/photos/a.1193519817385099/1193519984051749/.

Fig. 5 – Fallen plants at the *Reverberations* setting in my apartment. Wrocław, 2020. Photo courtesy: Agata Kalinowska, Galeria Entropia / Strefa Kultury Wrocław.

me like a major loss, and switching to online interviews seemed impossible due to technical capabilities. The fear of transmitting the COVID-19 virus – but not of receiving it! – was probably just a representation of my deeper problem with control, catalysed by the pandemic. But there was just too much going on for my organism to handle at the same time: the refugee crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border, the war in Ukraine, sexual violence, mobbing and homophobia, to name a few of

my personal experiences of that time. All these subsequent waves of difficulties kept me disconnected, immersed in emotions stemming from traumas, including the intergenerational ones I was carrying or resonating with. It took me a while to see through it all and to understand what was mine and what was not.

As I made the decision to be more attentive to my own well-being and feelings, I began to notice new sensations and qualities in my own research. I noticed that during conversations I bring out the part of myself that resonates with the person's story, that I am easily moved and drawn into the reality of others. Effortlessly, often subconsciously, I tune into the emotional reality of others and actively follow their narratives, so I put a lot of effort into not getting carried away. When this was happening at the beginning of my fieldwork, I thought it was a useful attunement, helping me to gain trust and keep the story flowing. But later I started to question it. What is my intention when I connect with another person's world? How am I feeling in that moment, what experiences and emotions am I bringing with me that day? How much energy and space do I have in that particular situation to evoke and receive another person's story? How is my body reacting to what I am hearing? Do I need a break or a change? Apparently, the oral history techniques I studied were not suitable for me, perhaps they were written by and for researchers with different backgrounds, predispositions or socialisation (Kaufmann 2010) [*wasn't it mainly by and for men?*]. I realised that I was too open and too active as a listener, too susceptible to experiencing or physically responsive to the stories being told to me. Perhaps I was hypersensitive because my own traumas or insecurities were very active. Was I too self-concerned, narcissistic, 'hysterical', or just trained to be overly polite?

I am a great listener, and I have received this feedback on numerous occasions. I would follow someone's story with great ease, helping them weave their individual narratives and retrieving their personal meanings. During the course of the research, however, I began to suffer – the symptoms were headaches, bloating, constant fatigue, irritability, sleep problems, and weight fluctuations. I was diagnosed quite inconclusively, and I would see it as 'creeping deregulation': autoimmune thyroid disease, eating disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, neurosis, depressive-anxiety disorder… a growing collection of manifestations of internal conflict. I was amazed to discover during psychotherapy that the root was in me being not open enough. How could this be, when I was allowing such a huge flow of verbal, emotional and sensory information through my mental-organic system during every conversation, eager to meet and understand others? With the appropriate guidance, I understood that my issue was coming from the opposite angle – I was not being open enough to show myself, to present, express and include myself in the conversation. It made perfect sense in the context of the gendered social training I had received.

Following various interview guidelines, I was trying too hard on the side of empathy all that time. By being so committed to collecting herstories and possibly enhancing them, I had left no room for my own herstory to be part of this project. I believed that I should not occupy any space, and become almost invisible – without volume or body – while being very present with my consciousness and mind. So I was keeping myself out of the dialogue, leaving my own experience, personality, and identity on the threshold of the encounter, remaining quiet about myself for the presumed sake of other women. This act of silencing myself was, of course, caused by the internalised misogyny that I probably still carry within me and that still needs to be addressed (Beard 2017). Like many people socialised as women, I need to train boundary-setting, self-respect, and putting my immaterial and organic self in first place. Eventually, I adjusted my oral history methodology and came up with my own, personalised conversation techniques, specific to my psycho-emotional and sensory constitution and experiences.

I would call it a *corporeal turn* in the way I practise oral art history, as it was all about the awareness of the sensitive, responsive and affective apparatus I am using when encountering other entities in their bodily manifestations. This turnaround is at the same time a realisation of the invisible 'choreographic' training I had received as part of my discipline: wandering around artefacts and experiencing the ambience of exhibitions, physically visiting monuments and assessing their proportions with body measurements or steps, kinetically exploring the artworks' colour energetics with skin. Apparently, the sensual reception of artworks precedes the intellectual one just like bodies converse before any words are uttered.

Who cares? Is an ally!

The artist I invoked at the very beginning of my text, Jolanta Marcolla, sent me a surprising gift – my portrait. During the pandemic, losing physical contact with people she considered of significance to her, she painted watercolour images of them, which she displayed as an exhibition at a moment of safety in 2021, inviting everyone to come to the opening. I was enchanted by this simple relational practice and simultaneously very touched to be included. However, I was moving then and the parcel had been circulating somewhere for an alarmingly long time. When it finally arrived after a few weeks, for some reason I did not open it for another year and a half – I put the envelope in a prominent place, right next to a statuette of Natalia LL made by Wykwitex, a collective of young artists from Wrocław, acting together from 2017 to 2020 [Fig. 6]. At the time of writing this text, I was forced to move again, and at this point, I can finally say that I feel

Fig. 6 – In the front: a bust of Natalia LL's by Wykwitex, from the *Bravo Girls* series, around 2019. In the back: the sealed envelope with a portrait painted by Jolanta Marcolla. Wrocław, 2023. Photo of the author.

safe. Now, I would love to open this parcel and revive the energy flow in this acquaintance.

Personal safety, physical comfort and general well-being became an area of keen interest to me at every stage of my research. I have eventually arrived at what I consider to be **the** *facilitation of art herstories*, where I am responsible for creating a safe space for the micronarratives to emerge in a consensual exchange. This requires enhancing mutual trust and openness on both sides of the conversation: the capacity to reveal ourselves, show our various aspects, monitor mood, raise needs and be responsive, acknowledge vulnerabilities and take care of them. As a woman researcher with an excessive focus on others, I had to unlearn handling people to achieve my goals and focus more on maintaining myself. Reestablishing

a healthy relationship with my own body and feelings and learning how to give and receive organic and emotional feedback became fundamental in my practice in the oral history of art. I find that *mutual self-care* – a collective act of supporting each other's self-care and nurturing our own stories – is a good cure for the gendered self-sacrifice and the risk of self-exploitation in the field of academic and artistic production. I consider this 'matriculative' responsibility a truly micro-revolutionary strategy that prevents giving up dignity, comfort, pleasure, and fun in the name of any noble mission or rescue.

Forming a women's circle with a group of friends in *Reverberations* encouraged me to allow myself to become and act as one of the speaking bodies. Performing within the safe boundaries of collective artistic research empowered me to reclaim my voice and space in academia, to tell my own story. With the act of writing this vulnerable text, I am gaining self-acceptance, compassion, and gratitude. I believe that as a scholar I am becoming more aware of my own presence and position, more visible and responsive, and more alive and curious of others and their truths. I deeply hope that this instance of herstory might be useful for another underprivileged researcher, precarious art worker, or academic struggling to find comfort. And that as a collective speaking body, we can co-create more diverse and inclusive knowledge.

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ABSTRACT

This research is focused on the development of a new methodology to curate political performance art from the Baltic countries and Sápmi. Sámi and Baltic artists share a colonial history connected to their traditional lands, which is often why they work with such politically loaded themes. A more complete understanding of their artworks by audiences can contribute to opening up a social dialogue about these issues, which could have the effect of lessening the notion of Other and erasing the hierarchies of cultural centre and periphery.

Performance and live artwork can generally be experienced by the audience only once. Thus, the audience has only one chance to grasp the artwork and understand it. Here, the curator's task is to establish a close dialogue with the artist and shape the meeting point with the audience in order to lower the barriers between the artist (and their artwork's content) and the audience.

How can curators work with live art and performances by Baltic and Sámi artists themed around postcolonial memory and decolonisation to give international audiences a more coherent understanding of such artwork?

The results of my research, key points towards a new curatorial methodology, are useful for the education of curators. The methodology developed could be used by art institutions such as art centres and galleries that work with performance art and present artwork from the Baltic region and indigenous Sámi artists, which often deals with the themes of decolonisation and postcolonial memory. Lastly, the methodology could increase engagement and connectedness with audiences to the performance artwork they experience.

keywords

BALTIC
SÁMI
ART
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POLITICAL
PROXIMITIES

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Curating as Care in Performance and Live Art:

A case study of Lithuanian and Sámi art

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Introduction

The focus of this article is to extract key points from an analysis of selected curatorial cases dealing with Indigenous Sámi and postcolonial Lithuanian live and performance art. Performance and live art have been broadly defined as 'experimental time-, body- and action-focused art practices that we have come to group under this catch-all term 'performance art', or its later variant, 'live art'' (Roms 2020, 117). While both concepts have similar meanings, 'live art' is the more recent iteration. According to Charles S. Garoian (1999), performance art is rooted in the exploration of personal, cultural, and historical issues; as such, in certain cases the artist(s) in question may come from territories with colonial histories, with this type of narrative entering the artwork from a personal perspective based on familial connections. Live and performance art are politically charged and understood here to be connected to the personal background of the artists and to a particular narrative of their histories and respective lands that experienced colonial oppression, with the personal perspective being infused with what is understood as postmemory, or memory narrated through several generations (Hirsh 2012). In this way, the memories and national and cultural identities of the artists in the cases presented are interconnected.

Art's connection to the social and political context of the artist, the concrete location where the artwork is shown, and the location of its creation position it as a powerful agent for societal change (Busch 2009). Both Sámi and Lithuanian

artists share a common colonial history. Lithuania is tied to the Soviet occupation, which often leads artists in this region to explore politically sensitive themes. The colonial history of Sápmi is tied to its division by borders into Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Russia, as well as the cultural restrictions imposed on Sámi culture by these countries. Lithuania, an independent state since 1991, and Sápmi, with its current Sámi representations in the parliaments of Norway (from 1989), Finland (1995), and Sweden (1993), share a common discourse that emphasises their respective cultural identities. Oppression against Lithuanians in the Soviet era led to their relocation to the Arctic North of the Soviet Union and Siberia, and the forceful inclusion of farmers' lands into collective farming arrangements. In Sápmi, families were coercively relocated due to the introduction of the state borders of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Russia; industrialisation of the landscape and restrictions on Sámi culture and language later ensued.

Curators who effectively provoke a comprehensive understanding of performance artworks by Lithuanian and Sámi artists can facilitate a broader social discourse, thereby potentially reducing the perception of 'Otherness' and dismantling hierarchical notions of cultural centres and peripheries. Performance and live art possess a unique quality, in that they are experienced by the audience only once. Consequently, audiences have a single opportunity to engage with and comprehend the artwork. This brings to the forefront the curator's role in establishing a dynamic dialogue with the artist and in shaping an interactive space for the audience. Such an approach should aim to break down barriers between the artist, the artwork's content, and the audience. However, the extent to which the curator should assert their authority in exhibition design and event curation remains unclear, as does the extent to which a dialogical approach should cross the boundaries of traditional curatorial norms within art institutions and creative spaces.

Colonial history perceives the maps of colonial regimes as a homogenous closed construct, with mapmaking occupying the core of colonial thinking (Huggan 1995). Mapmaking thus resulted in Sápmi being divided over the borders of four separate countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia. In the case of Lithuania, meanwhile, the result was that country's integration into the map of the Soviet Union. This mapmaking approach is present in the artworks of artists from Sápmi and Lithuania in the cases presented here. Memory here is postcolonial memory, which builds on Hirsch's (2012) concept of postmemory. Postmemory is interconnected with colonial history and mapmaking and the artists in the cases introduced here work with themes of the colonial past through the narratives of their families and ancestors. The notion of 'Othering', meanwhile, is based on a twofold definition that accounts for difference that needs to be acknowledged, and the negative impacts of asymmetrical power, systemic inequalities, oppression, and inequity.

In this case, 'Othering implies *otherism*, a psychological, sociological, or institutional position that, like racism, is only ever negative', where the idea of a 'Close Other' (Kukaine 2023) seems to acknowledge differences in the pluriversal manner in which many truths can co-exist (Escobar 2021).

Hierarchies are discussed here from the perspective of artist-run initiatives and institutional curatorial work. In the first case, artists take on the role of curators; in the second, individuals are trained as curators (or have backgrounds in art theory or art history). For example, an artist-curator is working as a curator within the institution of the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, but also working with particular projects, such as the 'Nomadic Radical Academy'. Therefore, in this research, the perspective of the curator is that of the artist in an artist-run initiative, but also that of the artist taking on the role of an institutional curator.

Ecology, as the angle from which the colonial critique is advanced, is discussed from a posthumanist perspective of ecology as a more-than-human agent, where the question of ownership of land arises (ie Do we have ownership over the more-than-human agent?). This question was addressed by the artists in three of the cases presented. Specifically, as Willow (2016) discussed, the process of extracting natural resources for the sake of state prosperity within colonial contexts is connected to the cases here, specifically in terms of how both collective farming and the industrialisation of the landscapes are relevant when discussing ecology and colonial history.

Some of the challenges of performance art and curatorial work are that the curator needs to provide care towards different stakeholders, such as the artist, the audiences, the staff at the event venues, and the artwork itself, and communicate the content coherently in a pluriversal way to multiple audiences. Here, curatorial and performance work are intertwined to create a space that serves as a meeting point for several stakeholders.

The present research is based on an analysis of artist-organised and curated art of a historical and politically loaded nature that was created in Sápmi by the Máze group (Hætta 2020) and in Lithuania for the AN88 and AN89 performance art festivals (Griniuk 2020). These examples share the format of an artist-run activity that promotes a distinctive national and cultural identity. The two contemporary live art cases, curated by both an individual curator and one within the institution of Sámi Center for the Contemporary Art, will be presented and analysed to show how politically loaded live art is curated and communicated for audiences today, and what methodological approach can be discerned in this alignment of historical and contemporary artist-run live art from Lithuania and Sápmi.

How can Lithuanian and Sámi artist-run curating as care be analysed from the perspectives of colonial history, the notion of 'Othering', existing hierarchies, ecology

as an angle of colonial critique, memory, and national and cultural identity? In attempting to answer this question, this article comprises several parts. First, a description of all four cases included in the research is presented. These cases include one from the Máze group, in the northern Sámi language Mázejoavku, and AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989) from Lithuania. These works serve as examples of historical artist-run activism in these two regions. The members of these two artist-run initiatives have never met or had any kind of collaboration, yet they are united in this research by the timeframe of their artistic activity and by their approach to artistic activism as a means towards freedom and decolonisation. The contemporary cases have been represented by the Nomadic Radical Academy (2019, 2020) in Lithuania and in several art projects and exhibitions at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok in Sápmi in the period 2022–2023, all of which were curated either by the project curator or the curator within the exhibition venue. Both cases used live art and performance as tools for communicating the projects' content to various audiences. The content of all the projects discussed here is colonial history and ecology, as well as live art within a particular place and site as expanding empathic connections between art and audiences. The cases are followed by an analysis and key findings. The results of this research point to the importance of artist-run curating and curatorial curating as care in representing colonial history, the notion of 'Othering', existing hierarchies, ecology as an angle of colonial critique, memory, and national and cultural identity in Lithuanian and Sámi art. It is hoped that such an approach can contribute to the deeper development of curatorial practices in the postcolonial context of art institutions, such as art centres and galleries that work with performance art and present artworks from the Baltic region and by Indigenous Sámi artists, which often deal with themes of decolonisation and postcolonial memory. Finally, the methodology of new curating could increase engagement and connectedness with audiences through the performance artwork they experience.

State of the arts

Sámi and Lithuanian art and colonial histories

Since this research brings together Sámi and Baltic performance artists, it draws on two key sources of literature: contemporary Sámi performance art and performances by Baltic artists, with the meeting point between the two being a thematic approach to postcolonial memory, decolonisation, and ecology. In recent years, Nordic universities have collaborated on research into contemporary Sámi art (Aamold

et al 2017; Danbolt 2018; Lien 2020; Thisted 2012) and ethno-aesthetics (Arke 2012), the latter of which can be applied to the case of Sámi live art. The growth of interest in this domain has been notable (Jørgensen 2017), given the rise of large-scale art events, such as the Sámi Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2022) and the presentation of *Girjegumpi* by Joar Nango at the Venice Architecture Biennale (2023), which have increased public interest in Sámi art. Nevertheless, the focus of these studies and projects on live art and performance is still far too restricted (Aamold et al 2017). While some Sámi artists often work in the performance medium alongside sculpture, installation, painting, and printmaking practices[1], others identify themselves as working exclusively with performance.[2]

In the Baltics, while some investigation has taken place into the postcolonial themes of contemporary performance artwork, these such attempts have largely focused on single projects and resulted in single publications (Griniuk 2021; Kristberga 2018; Orav 2017). As performance is a relatively new medium the Baltics, its lack of tradition thus limits the amount of research undertaken on performance art thus far. The use of performance as an artistic tool to challenge certain restrictions and political ideologies was first discussed by Brygzel (2018) and later by Kukaine (2023) in reference to feminist performance artworks. To develop a methodology of cross-border curatorial communication of live artwork dealing with themes of colonial memory (Griniuk 2021; Jørgensen 2017), it is important to involve artists from these two regions (ie Baltic performance artists and Sámi artists). Artists connected to these lands aesthetically approach the themes of the past, identity, and prohibition by using their own languages, cultures, traditions, ancestral lands, and colonial oppression to open up visual discussion about colonialism and its connection to Soviet occupation (Jørgensen 2017) and about the notion of 'Othering' (Jensen 2011). Belonging to the land and its community by having parents and/or grandparents is the history that these artists address in their work, which makes these artists narrators of that history from their families' perspectives, as they employ their identities as the active components of the narrative. In this way, the artists work directly from the perspective of transgenerational memory and find its expression through artistic work.

The concept of transgenerational memory finds its roots in the notion of 'post-memory', as introduced by Hirsch (2012). Transgenerational memory pertains to the process of recollection that is inherited by succeeding generations, particularly following an era in which previous generations directly endured traumatic experiences of political oppression, such as the Soviet era in Lithuania. Archives of the past, such as photo collections, seem to be echoed in many artistic practices from the Baltic and Sámi regions and have become an integral part of these artworks.[3]

[1] Examples of such artists include Hilde Skancke Pedersen, Marry Somby, and Pauliina Feodoroff.

[2] An example of a Sámi artist who takes this approach would be Skole-Petter Anna.

[3] For example, consider the artworks of two Lithuanian artists, Evelina Simkute and Marija Griniuk, and artworks displayed in the AN88 and AN89 festivals, and those of two Sami artists, Tomas Colbengtson and Lena Stenberg.

Performance

Performance art has been discussed as being capable of impacting the communities involved in its creation (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller 2014) and is therefore perceived as a means of mitigating the effects of Othering. The curation of performance art requires that the site and its space be effectively managed, leading to the notion of the 'Close Other' as an interplay of strangeness and familiarity (Kukaine 2023). In other words, the notion of the Other via the performance space may be transformed into a 'Close Other' (Kukaine 2023), as this is a step towards lessening the barriers built by colonial regimes. Coloniality and Othering share asymmetrical power relations, which are mitigated or dismantled on the pathway towards pluriversal values (Escobar 2021).

Performance art and its host environment shape the concept of space. The term 'space' refers both to the physical world and to mental states (Stock 2015), and it interconnects with the *placeness* of the performance, the backgrounds of the artists, and the backgrounds of the audience members inhabiting a particular space for the duration of a performance. The curator's role here can be understood as that of a mediator of the performance space, in close collaboration with the artist, to enhance the experience of liveness for the audience. In this context, space refers to connected entities, actions, and ideas (Stock 2015). Time and location in a performance are crucial to defining space (McAuley 1999). Therefore, the two pillars of the literature around Sámi and Lithuanian performance art are connected to the space and placeness of performance.

Curating as care and decolonising space

The first of the two conceptual frameworks is curating as care and decolonising space. Decolonisation here is understood as the dissemination of narratives from the perspective of the Indigenous Sámi or Lithuanian artists that promote more advanced social awareness and reflection on the colonial pasts of these lands (MacDonald 2007; Cosley et al 2008). Understanding the relationship between performance and space is crucial for curating successful performances. The curator must work closely with the artist to create a space that enhances the performance and engages the audience; as such, the curatorial role is that of a caretaker of stakeholders involved in the performance's creation and presentation. The concept of curating here is interpreted as both a care space and a decolonising space. The concept of care in live and performance art and curatorial contexts has been

explained by Sarantou (2014) in terms of the pivotal role of care narratives in the creation and portrayal of artefacts originating from Indigenous and marginalised backgrounds, which emphasises their intrinsic values and identities within exhibition spaces. The concept of care is connected to decolonisation in research within art education, in which artistic processes are compared to healing in decolonising contexts (Tabor et al 2023). According to Arnold (2013), art spaces – which include exhibitions and live and performance art – are spaces of knowledge dissemination, and when expanded to include the digital spaces of artistic interventions, the aspects of care and decolonisation have a central role.

Curating and dismantling hierarchies

The second conceptual framework is curating care as a process of dismantling hierarchies. Here, the hierarchies addressed are those of the centre and periphery of culture, which are understood through the artist-run and curatorial activities that take place in the established institutions, as well as those that emerge as historical and contemporary art cases. The idea of curating performance comes from the context of Fluxus art in the early 1960s (Ferdman 2019). Curating as the creation of an input-output system, regulated by the practical consciousness (and embodied cognition) of artistic codes and conventions (Acord 2010), is practiced by the artists in the artist-run context and extends their artistic activity as practitioners, while in the institutional context, curators may have different backgrounds – often theoretical – and also be artists working in the institutions as curators (Adamopoulou and Solomon 2016), as in the current cases, where the curator is a performance artist affiliated with the institution. It has been argued that it can be difficult to distinguish the artist-practitioner's artistic work from their curatorial work (Adamopoulou and Solomon 2016). Accordingly, if the hierarchy in the art world is understood as artist-run opposition to established art institutions and museums, an interesting discussion emerges as to whether the fact of artists working as curators in these same institutions lessens the hierarchies of the centre and periphery within art.

Method

The overall method used in this study is arts-based action research (ABAR) from the perspectives of a Lithuanian curator, the director of the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art, and a performance artist, Marija Griniuk, who curates live art events

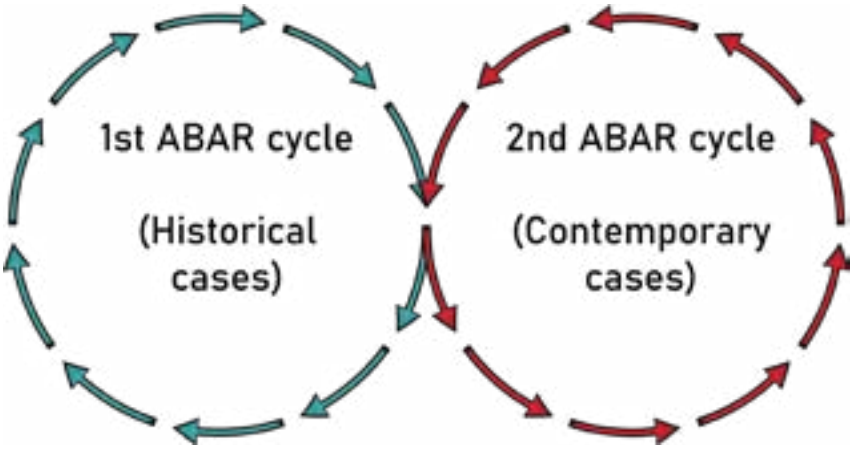

Fig. 1 – Research cycles of the current study developed by Marija Griniuk.

at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art. ABAR was developed by a group of scholars at the University of Lapland who intended for the approach to be used by artists, teachers, and researchers to recognise existing problems and envision a plurality of possible solutions (Härkönen et al 2018; Jokela 2013). ABAR consists of arts-based research and action research and therefore comprises various research cycles (Härkönen et al 2018; Jokela 2013). The arts-based component of ABAR involves the use of various artistic mediums, such as visual art, music, and performance, to gather data and insights into a research topic. The action research component consists of working with stakeholders to identify potential solutions to the problem at hand. In all three cases, the author-artist-curator has an insider position within the projects. In the case of the Máze group the author-artist-curator read the research by Susanne Hætta and had conversations with her about the Máze group. In this way, two action research cycles are completed – one addressing the comparison of historical cases and one addressing contemporary cases [see Fig. 1].

Action research requires the direct involvement of the researcher in the content of the project with the aim of enacting change. The iterative research cycles of ABAR involve ongoing reflection, analysis, and adjustment of the research approach as the project progresses. In the present research, the case study was grouped into two research cycles, leading to analysis and findings that outline an answer to the posed research question. The ABAR approach aligns well with the goals of this research project. By combining artistic practices with action research, this method can help illuminate the unique challenges faced by Sámi curators, artists, and communities in the contemporary art world when engaging in performance and live art in postcolonial scenarios.

Cases

This study addresses four cases, two of which are from the context of historical and political artist-run activities in Sápmi and Lithuania, and two of which are contemporary cases of performance art in Sápmi and Lithuania dealing with decolonising and postcolonial memory in these respective areas. The historical cases are a Máze artist-run collective in Sápmi (1973-1983) and AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989), which were artist-run performance festivals in Lithuania. Together, these phenomena can be classified within the zeitgeist of the 1980s, which was a period of awareness-awakening towards art and a call for decolonising narratives. Besides their similar timeframe, these historical cases share an artist-organised, non-institutional take on the management and organisation of artistic practices within a collective or community, which was a means by which a counter narrative, a narrative based within the community, could be created from the perspective of that community. It is important to understand the historical context of art in Sápmi and Lithuania before describing these contemporary cases. For the contemporary context, cases are drawn from the live art projects of the Nomadic Radical Academy in Lithuania (exhibited in 2019 and 2020) and the interconnection of live art and performance presented in the exhibition spaces at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok in 2022-2023.

In all four cases, art transgresses the frame of aesthetic production and serves as a tool for communicating the need for political and societal change. All the initiatives described here are artist-run; although one of the cases from the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art has the status of a foundation, its current management and curatorial work is artist-driven. Liveness and activism are the values that underlie the interest in expanding traditional object-based art into the space of experience and learning. Performance functions in all four cases as the medium or actions through which an expression of value and a call for freedom can take place. As in the case of Máze group artists, even though their individual artistic expression was mainly object-based, they were involved in collaborative, performative productions, such as *Point Zero* (Hætta 2020), as well as in political actions.

Máze group in Sapmi

The Máze group (1978–1983) was the first collective of Sámi artists whose artistic work was inseparable from political activism. Such activism was exemplified in their movement against the building of a hydropower plant on the Alta River, which was called the Alta Action (Hætta 2020). Alta Action was defined by Hætta (2020)

as the first eco-Indigenous uprising in Europe. The village of Máze, the source of the title for the Máze group, has a majority population of Indigenous Sámi people and was chosen as the homebase for the activities of the group. The members of the Máze group were Aage Gaup (d. 2022), Trygve Lund Guttormsen (d. 2012), Josef Halse, Berit Marit Hætta, Rannveig Persen, Hans Ragnar Mathisen, Britta Marakatt-Labba, and Synnøve Persen. All these artists had formal art academy education, through which they were able to infuse their traditional Sámi knowledge in the development of their artistic style, which for the Sámi community was a significant innovation demanding a new terminology, such as the term 'dáidda', which was used to refer to contemporary art (Hætta 2020). The Máze group of artists, in particular Synnøve Persen, outlined and defined the categories of artistic expression in their contemporary Sápmi context. For instance, Persen served as the editor of the Sámi artist lexicon.

AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989) in Lithuania

The AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989) were the very first performance art festivals held in Lithuania, arranged by a group of young musicians and artists in the last years of Soviet occupation before Lithuania became independent in 1991. The festivals were organised in the town Ažuožeriai in the Anykščiai region, an area around 100 kilometres from the capital city. The titles of the festivals, as in the Máze group case, were bound to the geographical location of that particular region. The choice of this host area was quite deliberate, since the content of the performances featured strong political symbols and demonstrated a longing for Lithuanian independence, which was especially evident in the inclusion of the three-coloured national flag in the performance or the ironic comments that glorified war actions and veteran routines (Griniuk 2021). In 1988 and 1989, such themes in artworks could lead to the imprisonment of artists. Therefore, Ažuožeriai was the peripheral, safe location for such artistic actions, as was explained by the organiser of the events, Gintaras Sodeika (Griniuk 2021).

An example of one of the artworks presented within AN88 is *Bureaucratic Hitchhiking* by Sodeika (1988), which sought to underline the nature of the political system and bureaucracy of Soviet times (see Fig. 2). The artists staged an accident that attracted the attention of drivers passing by. Each driver who stopped by the staged accident received a gratitude paper for their performed care to another human being; in this way, the gratitude letter was a comment on the other documents of honour circulating routinely in the Soviet system. The participating artists and composers at AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989) were Tomas Juzeliūnas,

Fig. 2 – *Bureaucratic Hitchhiking* by Sodeika, 1988. Photo by Arvydas Baltrūnas.

Šarūnas Nakas, Arūnas Dikčius, Ričardas Kabelis, Rytis Mažulis, Arvydas Baltrūnas, and Austė Nakienė, among others. AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989) represented a completely new approach to media for Lithuanian creators – performance art had only just begun in the Lithuanian context in 1988 and 1989. The position of the author here is that of a researcher into the projects AN88 (1988) and AN89 (1989), with this investigation being based on conversations with the artists and on examination of archival material containing videos and photos.

Nomadic Radical Academy (2019 and 2020) from Lithuania

The Nomadic Radical Academy was initiated as an artist-run project at the gallery of Meno Parkas in Kaunas, Lithuania, and consisted of one edition per year for two years. The project was one of a participatory performative space, meaning that the audience entering the artwork was invited to actively join in the live action

Fig. 3 – The Nomadic Radical Academy, First Floor, 2019. Photo by Antanas Untidy.

Fig. 4 – The Nomadic Radical Academy, Second Floor, 2019. Photo by Antanas Untidy.

within the two-week take-over of the art gallery; the scenography of the project included tents and shanty-town elements built into the space where the artists and participants would inhabit (see Image 2, 3). The participants of the project were children and young people aged 13-16 years old, some of whom were accompanied by adults.

The project was developed in 2019 by Marija Griniuk who invited the participating artists, including Tue Brisson Mosich (DK/LT), Nanna Ylönen (FIN), Anne-Louise Knudsen (DK), Anders Werdelin (DK), and the Kaunas-based Lithuanian artists and art initiatives, for example Evelina Šimkutė. The goal of the project was to

communicate the importance of eco-friendly behaviour and awareness of environmental care and responsibility to young audiences. The project's theme was grounded in the local issues of soil and water pollution, which were the result of decades of massive pesticide and herbicide use in the Soviet collective farming regime in Lithuania. In this historical context, the majority of the land was exploited through the enforcement of collective farming in the Soviet Union. This international team of artists approached this theme from the angle of their own practices and experiences. The project was a way of finding the means for visual expression and narrative interpretation through the performance of ecology- and decolonisation-related themes, all specific to the Lithuanian context but still relevant to global discussions. Site specificity is considered a theme, as the stories within the performances were built around local narratives, and the audiences responded from their own local perspectives and the lived experiences of their ancestors. The position of the author in this case was that of artist-curator and one of the artists behind the development of the project.

Live art and performance within the exhibition spaces at Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok in 2022-2023 in Sapmi

Live art and performance within the exhibition spaces at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art usually accompanied the openings of exhibitions, forming part of the public event in order to extend the audience experience after official talks and exhibition presentations. Nevertheless, there are certain limits to what a performance can be and do within the site of an exhibition. Exhibitions can serve as the stage and dramaturgy of performance, providing a background for interpreting the work of performing artists. Therefore, in 2022, the decision was made to expand the notion of what a performance can be in the context of the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art visitor experience. Performance was thus proposed as the format for further exploring exhibitions and opening discussions.

The first attempt at such a performance within the exhibition space was in 2022, with performance workshops being held for a multicultural group of children from the Troms and Finnmark areas in Norway. This particular performance was designed to help these children understand and interpret the *Treasure Chest* exhibition of Sámi art at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok. In this case, diversity was understood in terms of both age (the children were aged between seven and 16 years) and cultural representation (some were Indigenous Sámi, while others were from mixed international families). The children at the Sámi Center for Contempo-

rary Art were divided into small groups and asked to choose their favourite artwork (see Image 5). They then worked together to create a short performance, with each child taking on individual roles and actively contributing. Some children interpreted a painting through their movements and gestures, while others used sculpture to create a new story and act it out. The performance, even though it was abstract, was effectively used to explain and interpret specific ideas and concepts. Performance in this case was employed as a tool to bring together diverse voices and perspectives, which created a sense of community within the learning space and enhanced the creative process, through which the final product was presented.

Another approach was to extend the exhibition experience by asking the musicians to produce a performance specifically in the context of the exhibition. As in the exhibition by Lena Stenberg called 'Borders' (2023), which was themed around the separation of Sápmi across the national borders of Norway, Finland, Sweden, and Russia, the music performance was designed to extend and explain the theme of the exhibition through sound and music-based experience. The musicians Hildá Länsman and Lávre (see Image 4), two yoikers and musicians of the younger generation in Sápmi with mastery of both the traditional forms of the Sámi vocal technique *luohti* (yoik) from their respective areas and of experimentation with modern expressions, presented the three sequences of the performance, each discussing the issue of the contemporary division of Sápmi through their performance. The exhibition experience was also enhanced by tools involving DIY technology, with visitors able to spend time at the Techno-Lab in the Sámi Centre for Contemporary Art and build their own instrument to explore the site and space with sound-based interaction. This experience was available every Saturday as an additional activity.

One could say that in both cases the performance took on a pedagogical quality that helped the curator communicate the content of the exhibition in a different, non-static way within the space and site of the exhibition. By expanding their sensual experience of the space, audience members were able to explore and enhance their ways of moving through and within the exhibition space, which is particular to the performance. The position of the author within this case was that of the facilitator of the meeting between the artworks, the audiences, and the curator of the exhibition, as demonstrated in the example of the Lena Stenberg exhibition.

Fig. 4 – Hildá Länsman and Lávre perform at the Lena Stenberg exhibition.

Fig. 5 – Exhibition experience through performance facilitated by Marija Griniuk at the *Treasure Chest* exhibition of Sámi art at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art in Karasjok.

Analysing the cases

These four cases, two from the historical context of Sámi and Lithuanian art and two from the contemporary context, will be analysed through the perspectives of curating and care as decolonising, of artistic practices as a reflection on colonial mapmaking, and of hierarchies of cultural centres and peripheries. The first perspective focuses on the curatorial tools, the second looks into the content of the artworks as what is being curated, and the third considers the position and context of the artwork, meaning where it takes place, from what platform it speaks to audiences, and how curators are involved in these artist-run and institutional platforms.

Analysis from the perspective of curating and care as decolonising

Who Is the Curator?

In the historical cases examined in this article, the artists are interpreted from today's perspective as artist-curators. In the contemporary cases of this article, curators work within art institutions – in the project in Lithuania, the curated project steps into the institution as an external pop-up project; in the Sámi cases, the projects occur as part of an annual institutional curated event and exhibition programme. The same person, the artist Marija Griniuk, was involved in all of these curatorial contexts, specifically as an independent curator of the Nomadic Radical Academy and as an institutional curator at the Sámi Center for Contemporary Art. As the main person behind the event who sets it up in a particular way in a particular space, be it from an artist-run perspective or from an institutional perspective, the role of the curator is focused on building meaning around the artwork, its place, its context, and the artist behind it. In the contexts of the two lands of Lithuania and Sápmi, the colonial past steps into the artwork by forming part of the context and by the artists' identities representing these nations. The curators here are the artists, and the events are artist-run in the cases of the Máze group and the AN88/89 projects; accordingly, decision making in these locations and actions arose directly from the artist-curator perspective. It must be noted that the curatorship of artist-run works is being interpreted from today's perspective of the writer, which implies that specific people, in this case the artists within these groups, acted as curators. It was an artist-organiser, or a group of artist-organisers,

who were doing the same tasks as the curator does today, which consist of communication with fellow artists, the planning and conceptualisation of events, the choice of their location, and their implementation, to name just a few. Curatorship was definitely at play in these events, albeit conducted by the artists as internal participants in the groups.

Decolonising

What does such a curatorship of decolonising entail? What does it mean to be decolonised, and how does this happen? First, the fact that these artworks speak in the way they do is itself a gesture of decolonisation, insofar as the freedom of the artworks to narrate the past, including painful stories of postmemory (Hirsch 2012) told to the artists by their grandparents and ancestors, inspires the creation of such artworks. The fact that the artworks speak and in this way claim their freedom of artistic expression, particularly in times of colonial oppression, as in the case of the Soviet regime in the cases of AN88/89, is a decolonial fact. In the historical cases, the speech of the artworks is achieved through the risk taking of the artists who challenged the established regimes and political norms. In the Máze group, this risk taking was expressed as a demonstration that challenged the authorities to keep the Alta River as it had been for generations (not industrialised) through the Alta Action. Here, the colonisation of Sápmi aligned with the assumed authority to intervene in ecosystems (ie in the nature-human connection, as it had been in Sámi culture) for the sake of industrialisation. In the AN88/89 projects, the organisers moved the events to the countryside to lessen the risk of the Soviet authorities knowing they had taken place, which would have led to the suspension of the events and/or harm to the artists, as the artists explained when talking about organisational decisions within the project. In this specific case nature also became one of the stakeholders, insofar as it served as a hosting ground for the event to take place. This role of nature was especially evident in the artists' performances of protest against the Soviet regime. From the present perspective, these performances can be interpreted in the following way: the Soviet regime brought about massive industrialisation of land, nuclear power plant building, collective farming with extended use of pesticides, leading to the logical conclusion of performances of resistance taking place in nature. Colonial mapmaking is challenged by the notion of nature having its own narrative, as in the case of Sámi art by Lena Stenberg and the performances within her exhibition, which challenged prevailing political borders.

The first decolonial perspective, then, is a product of the location of the events that allow for their interpretation from the perspective of a decolonising ecology. The second decolonising perspective is found in the curatorship itself as a manifestation of the internal organisation of the Mãze group and of the AN88/89 projects, respectively. Curators are artists, and the artist-run format can be interpreted as an act of decolonising art management itself, given how it challenges the institutional structures of art and value. The question of such hierarchies will be further addressed later in this discussion.

Care

In the contemporary performance cases, the theme of nature and ecology is moved into the gallery space, and here, ecological issues become a part of the exhibition as the site and dramaturgy of performance. This was evident in the images of the industrialisation of Kiruna, including its mining and relocation to the next geographical place, as found in Lena Stenberg's exhibition. Plants inhabited the exhibition space of the Nomadic Radical Academy, including the wild medical herbs presented by the Elder of the community of gardeners in Šilainiai, and the zucchini plants, taken away from their natural location and moved into the dark space of the art gallery, with its artificial spotlights. These constructed spaces served as scenography for the performative action by the artists and curators, which gained one more layer of narration as the performances began, and which were themselves also curated by the same curators who worked at the exhibition space. The exact location of the performance is of the utmost importance, as the viewers directly connect what is happening with where exactly in the exhibition space these things occur. As discussed by Sarantou (2014), the care narrative outlines the care and carefulness to take place on the site as a prerequisite of the performative action. The performative action underlines and reinforces once again the statement made by the site of the performance. It is as if the same narrative is spoken twice: once by the site, and once by the performance. The care towards the place of the action allows for this speaking to speak and speak again, which ensures that the audience is exposed to the layered narrative in a loop that reinforces the statement within the artistic story that is spoken in the artwork. The process of healing and the decolonising context (Tabor et al 2023) can be seen in this layered narrative and its care in being spoken by different channels: the static channel of the exhibition, and the time-based live channel of the performative action.

Curatorial Care Towards the Narrative

In all the cases, care in curating the narrative is a means of focusing on the theme presented by the artists through different methods. This was done, for instance, by locating actions within the AN88/89 festivals in the Lithuanian countryside, or by making exhibitions in institutions sites in which performances were to take place. Through this action of care, artists thus experience art as the power of political action; art as medium is allocated as the medium of political action, and the artist is the carrier of political action. At the same time, art as a political action is a collective, multi-voiced action. For the artists, care is a form of attention and respect for the theme addressed in their art, and other artists are invited into the space to think and interpret their art through their live media, as Hildá Länsman and Lávre did at the Lena Stenberg exhibition, and the young people in the *Treasure Chest* exhibition. In such a curated place, everyone joining in can be seen as both the carrier and expander of this artistic performance into political action.

Curatorial Care Towards the Artist

If care is a means of ensuring that the artist's voice is heard, and that the artist is seen, it must also mean that the artist should not be harmed by the prevailing regime, as in the case of the AN88/89 projects, which were thoughtfully allocated to the countryside as a safe zone under the Soviet regime. The role of the curator is, in this way, a balancing act between allowing artists to be heard and ensuring that they are not harmed. Harm here refers to physical harm as well as emotional harm, and the task of the curator seems to have been fulfilled in the AN88/89 cases, insofar as the events included only those people who were internal to the art scene, without the interference of the military or authorities, who were unaware of the event taking place.

Care towards the artist in the contemporary cases of this article seems to overlap with care for the narrative. The story within the artwork is connected to the life story of the artist and the artist's ancestors. Taking care of this story as worthy of being heard and well understood by the audience, and letting other artists perform and interpret this story in a respectful way, is an exemplification of caring about the artist.

Artist-Run curator care and institutional curator care: hierarchical notions of cultural centres and peripheries

Towards a close other

The concept of the Close Other was introduced as a way of mitigating barriers and Othering. There must be some understanding of difference and care for the difference itself to emerge, which provides a pluriversal approach to accounting for the many different aspects that co-exist equally in one world, as explained by Escobar (2021) in the context of pluriversality. Differences here refer to different ontologies (in other words, truths) that are equally valued and pluriversally cared for (Escobar 2021). Escobar provides a specific example of Indigenous cultures existing within the global culture. In the cases examined here, the Close Other is manifested through the artists' self-organised activity, which in the context of the 1980s is a means of achieving artistic empowerment beyond established institutions. Here specifically, professional, art-academy-trained artists, in the case of the Máze group, or students undergoing artistic education at the Vilnius Academy of Arts in the context of AN88/89 projects, show that artists are somehow navigating between being a part of established art institutions (if we interpret formal art academy education as an institutional context) and participating in bold artist-run actions. The fact that the same people belong to these two activities calls forth the notion of the Close Other, as artists have excellent knowledge of how both institutional and artist-run formats operate. In all the contemporary cases from Sápmi and Lithuania, the same person took on multiple roles (eg independent pop-up project curator and institutional curator with internal knowledge of artistic processes and the ability to perform as an artist-practitioner). This combined role of artist-curator, like the historical cases, allows us to assume that the same person has knowledge of how different processes function and in this way bridges the gap between independent and institutional curatorship, with independent and institutional curating becoming a Close Other in relation to each other. While these contexts do not overlap, the content of curatorial work crosses over into both as institutional-curatorial-artistic work.

In regards to the space of performance as one of strangeness and familiarity (Kukaine 2023), and in regards to coloniality, when the approach is to build a direct narration from the perspective of an artist, the creator of the artwork, or a fellow artist who interprets the static artwork through time-based performative action, the Close Other is a curatorial provision of a direct artistic voice, which does not

overlap with theoretical interpretations or text-based materials. All the cases presented featured an artistic action within a space, and this was the content provided to the audience, as one layer of artist expression overlapped with another layer. In the pluriversal approach, both artistic expressions address the same theme through different artistic identities and media. In this way, the artistic content is made available for a possible third layer, which would be interpretation on the part of the pluriversal audiences witnessing the live events. If an audience member does not have a deep knowledge of Sámi or Lithuanian history, this third layer of interpretation would be the emotional and empathic meeting between one's own lived experience and the static artwork interpreted in the live artwork. In this way, the audience experience becomes an extension of the live interpretation of the static artwork. By not involving leading text or educational material-based explanations, the curator cares for the audience members' extension of the witnessed context, and in this way mitigates barriers between institution, artist, interpreting artist, and audience members. In none of the cases was extensive information provided in the exhibition space; the only information available about the artworks was their titles and visual and performative content. This erodes the hierarchy of truths in the institutional space; there is no dominant truth designed by the art institution – the space is the embodied meeting space of many co-existing truths – and the artistic space becomes a pluriverse (Escobar 2021), which allows for a gesture of care to be made by the curator towards the audience while looping the narrative through different artistic media, as the extension of the artists' theme in the work is also a gesture of curatorial care towards the artist.

Curatorial work is based on the model of the 'artwork-interpretation-extension of interpretation', which can be seen in the above analysis of the cases. The images and titles of the artworks are very concrete and are thus connected to concrete stories of the concrete lives of people in concrete places, such as Kiruna, in the case of the artist Lena Stenberg. In any case, the curatorial gesture of care in facilitating multilayered interpretation also extends the relevance of the images, stories, and experiences to many audiences, each coming into the space with a different background.

Relation between curator, artist and institution

Artists establish art-run galleries and project spaces with the aim of exploring alternative avenues for exhibiting their works independently of established curator-led galleries. Within these artist-run spaces, artists adopt a peer-to-peer approach, thereby seamlessly integrating their artistic practices with the responsibilities

inherent in artist-run initiatives. This often results in artists assuming multiple roles, including those of the practicing artist, author, director, curator, installer, designer, manager, fundraiser, cleaner, runner, and practical assistant.

In the context of artist-run endeavours, individuals engaged in self-organised artistic activities must possess fluency in project presentation, adept promotional skills, and, most crucially, effective fundraising abilities to bring their projects to fruition. These activities unfold in the presence of and in collaboration with individuals directly involved in the projects and serve as the intended audience for these endeavours.

As stated by Jones (2004), 'Art in artist-run organizations needs to embrace principles of critical exploration to challenge its precepts of cultural construction, including the authorizing context of the artist-run organization itself' (59). As shown in the cases presented, the artist enters the institution in the role of curator and manager. This is seen more often today than ever before as interdisciplinarity has entered artistic practices. For artists, it seems a self-evident extension of their practice to take on the roles of institution leader and curator. As another example, consider Michelle Olga van Wyk, the artist-researcher who recently accepted the position of director at the National Art Gallery of Namibia.[4] Artists taking on roles as curators and art managers are making curator-artist-institution relations closer, as such institutions are now run by the artists themselves. If traditionally artist-run initiatives held the responsibility of offering a critical perspective on commercialised art spaces, the artist-curator-manager in today's art institution deploys practice-based knowledge from the perspective of the artist-practitioner in the institutional space.

[4] The announcement of the appointment of the new director on the National Art Gallery of Namibia was released on social media: https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=775432651249357&set=a.522438073215484.

Conclusion

This article analysed four cases, two historical and two contemporary, of Sámi and Lithuanian art from following perspectives: curating and care as a decolonising process and the dismantling of cultural hierarchies. The role of the curator is pivotal in shaping the meaning around artworks, whether in artist-run or institutional contexts. In the historical cases, the artists themselves took on the role of artist-curators, which allowed them to challenge existing norms and authorities. The artist-curators within the historical cases demonstrated care towards the narratives presented within the artworks and towards the artists themselves. This care involved providing a platform for artists to express their voices freely while ensuring their physical and emotional safety. In contemporary performance art, curatorial care extends to the exhibition space itself, with nature and ecology

becoming integral parts of the narrative. The care directed towards the place of action allowed for a layered narrative that reinforced the artistic story through both a static exhibition and live performance. This, in turn, built a model of interpretation for static artworks that extended to performance and live artworks, which was extended further to individual interpretations of the audience members in the pluriversal perception of the artwork's narratives. The absence of dominant truths allowed audiences to engage emotionally and empathically with the artworks, thereby extending the relevance of the stories to their diverse backgrounds. The concept of the Close Other was introduced as a means of bridging the gap between institutional and artist-run contexts. Artists in the cases presented took on roles as curators and managers in art institutions, which blurred the lines between artist-run and institutional spaces. This shift brings artist-practitioners closer to institutional spaces and helps infuse institutional practices with the practical knowledge and perspectives of artists. The cases presented here highlight the multifaceted roles of curators, artists, and institutions in challenging colonial legacies, caring for narratives and artists, and reshaping the hierarchical landscape of the art world. Together, they exemplify the ongoing process of decolonising the art world and the importance of embracing a pluriversal approach to artistic expression and interpretation.

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