

# The Anthropologist as Sparring Partner: Instigative Public Fieldwork, Curatorial Collaboration, and German Colonial Heritage

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**ABSTRACT:** *Anthropological fieldwork is a collaborative practice, based and reliant on interactions and relations of trust and exchange. Yet, it is limited and enabled by the openings and closings, the stability and instability of relations between interlocutors, fieldworkers, and the many things that matter in-between and around these relations. This article reflects on a series of public conversations called gallery reflections, which were instigated as a collaborative ethnographic practice with and within the gallery of the institute of international cultural relations (ifa) in Berlin-Mitte. The series addressed the legacies of German colonial heritage and the public role of anthropology against the backdrop of the construction of the Humboldt Forum and museum transformations. Investigating the notion of the anthropologist as sparring partner, this article probes into possible ways of conceiving curatorial-ethnographic collaborations as ›instigative public fieldwork‹.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Anthropology; art; curating; collaboration; colonial heritage; ethnography; Berlin*

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## Fieldwork, collaboration, and relationality

**A**nthropological fieldwork is a collaborative practice, based and reliant on interactions and relations of trust and exchange.<sup>1</sup> The work one is able to conduct in the field as an ethnographer, and the insight one is able to gain, changes with each new conundrum one (deliberately) confronts or seeks to understand. Yet, it is limited and enabled by the openings and closings, the stability and instability of relations between interlocutors, fieldworkers, and the many things that matter in-between and around these relations. In fact, the differential make-up of these very relations that constitute (and occasionally render impossible) fieldwork is where, how, and why fieldwork varies: how these relations between anthropologist, interlocutors, and other persons in the field are initiated, configured, and articulated are meaningful beyond mere questions of ›access‹, ›method‹, or ›ethics‹ in the field. They *are* what makes fieldwork (Strathern 2020). Indeed, a great deal of anthropological scholarship has exemplified the value added from treating configurations of relations in and of themselves – for what they tell us about perspectives and ontologies (Viveiros de

Castro 2015), power and hierarchy (Strathern 1995), mistrust and scepticism (Carey 2017), or the extent to which practices of detachment are (perhaps counterintuitively) constitutive of relationalities (Candea et al. 2015; Tinius 2016).

Equally, the nature and make-up of the relations established and maintained during fieldwork affect the possibilities and dilemmas when writing about these relationships. Arguably, this relation between the initiation and variable maintenance (or rupture) of such relations and their description and analysis is even constitutive of the anthropological enterprise as such. »To practice participant observation«, as Tim Ingold puts it in an intervention on ethnographic theory, »is to join in correspondence with whom we learn or among whom we study, in a movement that goes forward rather than back in time« (2014, 390). It is in this sense that anthropological fieldwork – participant observation and its variations on this practice – is *variably* collaborative in the etymological sense of collaboration, that is, as research conducted and insight generated by working with other people or someone else. Whether I consider the people to whom I relate to be interlocutors, colleagues in a shared professional enterprise where their »epistemic jurisdiction« (Boyer 2008, 38) overlaps with mine, or as informants kept at bay, impacts the conception and significance of collaboration. This vocabulary – informant, interlocutor, colleague –, and the distinctions between them, impact research design and imply, potentially, vastly divergent ideas about the possibility of shared aims, or even the undesirability thereof.

During the design and unfolding of my own research collaborations with curators in Berlin, I have borrowed from approaches in contemporary anthropological discussions that set out to be experimental and reflexive, most notably »ethnographic conceptualism« (Ssorin-Chaikov 2013) as well as joint research partnerships established under the banner of »para-sitical ethnography« (Deeb/Marcus 2011; Marcus 2010).<sup>2</sup> Anthropological studies on the self-positioning and reflexivity of intellectuals and expertise (Boyer 2008; Baert/Marcus 2015) and »co-laboration« (Niewöhner 2016), prototypes (Corsín Jiménez/Estalella 2017) and critique (Holbraad 2017) have all facilitated a terrain on which experimentation with what it means to practise fieldwork is no longer merely a question of method. Instead, the work emerging in this context addresses the very politics of anthropology and the future of its epistemic partnerships and relations to interlocutors, which constitute the very core of anthropology. What anthropologists thus consider to be the outcome of fieldwork and whom they consider to be their producers – in other words, how inclusive the idea of authorship is constructed before, during, and after fieldwork – allows for a great deal of variation on the meaning of collaboration. Therefore, neither the collaborative nature of fieldwork nor the relational constitution of anthropology as a discipline are self-evident, but vary drastically and with methodological, epistemological, and political implications. In this article, I analyse my collaborations with curators in the context of a public art gallery and outline what I describe as »instigative public fieldwork«. Thereby, I refer to a form of collaborative anthropological work that positions the anthropologist as a visible and marked sparring partner in a mutually challenging and generative institutional collaboration with curatorial and artistic practice, which itself becomes a trigger for public discussions – in this case on organisational responsibility and the role of anthropology in the face of public debates on critical heritage and colonial legacies in Germany.

The field of art-anthropology collaborations abounds with such questions of form, method, and epistemology in particular (see e.g. Bakke/Peterson 2017a; Schneider/Wright 2006). Not least since the so-called »relational« and »ethnographic« turns in contemporary arts practice (Bishop 2004, 2012; Bourriaud 2002 [1998]) and scholarship (Rutten et al. 2013; Siegenthaler 2013), anthropologists and artists alike have been fixated on what they can

learn from each other, how to ›unlearn‹ and redo certain canons. Predominantly, these criss-crossing practices concern exchange and sociality (Flynn/Tinius 2015; Long/Moore 2012), relationality and fiction (Blanes et al. 2016), as well as means and methods of artistic and ethnographic work (Bakke/Peterson 2017b). Okwui Enwezor's notion of ›intense proximity‹ (2012) captured the sense in which anthropologists, curators, and artists, synthesised through curatorial work on coloniality, drew on joint experiences and conceptualisations of planetary and cognitive distance, offering a lens to think about the discrepancies and irregularities, the jealousy and misunderstandings arising from an assumption of similarity rather than difference (see also Sansi 2020). We can detect caution, when Enwezor asks whether »the curator [is] a co-traveller with the ethnographer in the same procedures of contact and exploration?« – or even more drastically put when he suggests that »[l]ike the ethnographer, the contemporary curator is a creature of wanderlust« (2012, 21). These more recent reflections on modern and contemporary art and curatorial practice thus draw on experimentations of surrealist art (Sansi 2015), structuralist, and later interpretative anthropology (Clifford/Marcus 1986), which already prior to the relational artistic practices of the 1990s, unmoored the scientific certainty of anthropology and pointed to its productive affinities between the poetic, the fugitive, and associative of artistic subjectivity and the ethnographic imaginary.

However, too little thought, in my view, has been devoted to considering the *limits* of ethnographic research in and with the arts and curatorial practice, and the difficulties of integrating artistic practices in anthropology, as, for instance, Sansi and Strathern (2016) elaborate in a conversation on gift exchange and participation in the arts. Arnd Schneider sums it up fittingly when he describes the need for a »mutual recognition of difference« within a joint »hermeneutic field« shared by art and anthropology that is »tenuous and uneven« (2015, 26–27) rather than stable and clear. While many of the recent publications on anthropology and art have treated a broad range of aspects (ranging from practical co-productions to philosophical exchanges and theoretical critiques), studies looking at the role of the anthropologist or anthropology have frequently exhausted themselves in taking it as a source for material or positing a quasi-equivalence in the name of experimentation and critique (Foster 1995). Many of these attempts aim at methodological innovation (Criado/Estalella 2018) or lobby for a more confident, contemporary, and firmly integrated anthropology of art as »another subdiscipline of anthropology«, as Fillitz and van der Grijp (2018, 22) argue in their introduction to one of the recent volumes on contemporary anthropologies of art that have multiplied over the last ten years.

This discussion is central to the developments of a collaborative anthropology of and with curatorial practice. Yet, however exciting and productive this development of collaborative practices and writing since the 1990s has been for both anthropological and artistic work, the call to ›establish‹ the study of art as a subdiscipline of anthropology is a deceptive red herring. Recognising artistic practices as a specialised niche with its own discourses and theoretical developments fails to acknowledge that art, not unlike anthropology, has a *productively* fuzzy focus. Any form of art, be it amateur, modern, or contemporary, treats a range of subjects; it has been the retrospective writing of art history – art historiography – as a history of ›landscape‹, ›abstract‹, ›relational‹ art, et cetera, that has created the idea of an art *of* something, rather than art as a form of thinking (see Bourdieu 1993; Heinich 2014). It is not an esoteric observation that art, like anthropology, deals potentially with all dimensions of human (and even post- or non-human) existence and is therefore potentially of interest to the entire discipline of anthropology. Artistic practices range from the practical intuitive to the conceptual and theoretical spectrum, dealing with anything, from

indigeneity and nativism to food and kinship, politics and economics, technology and markets, to ethnographic methodologies and anthropological theories. Furthermore, artistic practices, objects, and theories are also aligned across the entire political and ideological spectrum, making art not just a priori a »Good Thing« (Gell 2006, 159), but potentially awkward and difficult albeit productive problematisations to think with in collaborative terms (Tinius 2018). For this reason, rather than treating the analysis of artistic practices as a sub-discipline of anthropology, it is more productive to think of it and treat it as an aspect of human existence and social practices that is inseparably linked to the study of human life. The sociological notion of distinct art worlds, or art systems as particular bourgeois and modern systems of cultural production, and therefore as forms of artifice unrelated to the otherwise functioning of a society, has led to a curious and problematic detachment between the study of modern and contemporary art in Western art history as institutionalised systems and the otherwise focused anthropological study of art as a social form in predominantly indigenous communities. As Sansi (2015) and Canclini (2014) trace, this separation may have been the result of modernism in art and modernist anthropology itself, but it has backfired in so far as it carved out the anthropological study of modern and contemporary art as a niche rather than a way of understanding society and human life more broadly. Considered such, it is more useful to treat it as a field of ›problems‹, or ways of finding forms to think through, rather than assuming it to be helpful in finding solutions for contemporary problems and thus to mobilise it as therapeutics rather than analytics. It is, in Rabinow's sense of the emergent contemporary, a realm of social life that points to yet unformed ways of describing present problems »that can only be partially explained or comprehended by previous modes of analysis or existing practices« (2007, 4).

This article addresses a field replete with such problems, and offers a proposal born from a discontent with an assumption that curatorial practice or artistic practice is *like* ethnographic fieldwork. Focusing on emerging curatorial work and contemporary art that works to generate an intersectional critique of German national heritage narratives by recourse to their colonial legacies, this article offers instead the emic notion of ›sparring partnerships‹. This notion seeks to capture a mutually provoking and challenging, albeit generative way to think about collaboration between curatorial and anthropological work in the context of contemporary art. This arose from and was one of the main methods of my fieldwork between June 2016 and March 2020 as part of the multi-researcher, multi-sited ethnographic project »Making Differences in Berlin: Transforming Museums and Heritage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century« (2016–2020) of the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) in the Department of European Ethnology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin funded by Sharon Macdonald's Alexander von Humboldt Professorship. To complement research done by other colleagues e.g. in the field of provenance research and the transformation of ethnological museums in Europe, my research focused on the role of contemporary art and independent curators. This took place against the charged backdrop of the opening of the controversial Humboldt Forum in December 2020 in the reconstructed City Palace (*Stadtschloss*) on Berlin's museum island, south of Alexanderplatz and along the pompous *Unter den Linden* boulevard.

This »palatial recurrence« (Tinius and Zinnenburg 2020) and the difficult phantoms of Germany's past that haunted it served as a backdrop to the unfolding of narratives on German colonialism. I chose to work with a selected number of gallery and exhibition spaces, most notably the communal gallery of the diverse northern district of Berlin-Wedding and the nearby independent project space SAVVY Contemporary. I accompanied them in order to understand forms of curatorial troubling of such grander narratives on national



Fig. 1: A section of the ifa-gallery as seen from Linienstraße. For the second chapter and exhibition »Watch your step/Mind your head«, the curator Marina Reyes Franco had attached a blue line signalling part of Christopher Columbus' journey through the Carribean. Copyright: Victoria Tomaschko, 2017. Reproduced with permission.

cultural heritage, and to trace their thought and practice of curatorial work in a dense context of literature and theorisation on intersectionality, coloniality, and exhibition-making. Throughout these research phases, I sought to construct and maintain dialogic forms of fieldwork, most of the time quite literally based on long-term conversation projects, such as the »relexification dialogues« with Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung for which we took the twenty-six letters of the alphabet as starting points for a creolisation of the way to talk between curating and anthropology.<sup>3</sup> These forms of relating to curatorial work exceeded observation and participation, and instead prompted a certain kind of complicity, or as Dwight Conquergood called it, a »co-performative witnessing« (Donkor 2007, 822) of curatorial labour at a particular moment in Berlin's museum and heritage landscape transformations (Macdonald 2016). This article focuses on one kind of collaborative fieldwork in a public gallery in which this grappling, both my own on how to conduct fieldwork in such a highly reflexive and critical context, and that of these curators who became my most significant interlocutors during and beyond this time of research, unfolded.

### Gallery Reflections: Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Societies in Berlin

For this article, I draw on an experimental research agreement and public cooperation with the Berlin gallery of the German Institute for International Cultural Relations, the *Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen* (hereafter, ifa) in the city's central gallery district of Mitte, led since April 2016 by the Berlin-based curator Alya Sebti (except during phases of maternal leave, when interim director Inka Gressel led the gallery). Sebti had been working on various iterations of her relational curatorial practice in the Berlin and Stuttgart gallery branches of

the ifa visual arts department, before assuming her role as director. Her curatorial practice is relational and participatory, since she emphasises her work as the facilitation and finding of forms for encounters between different forms of knowledge (scholarly, curatorial, artistic) and practices or fields of inquiry (art history, anthropology, sociology, philosophy). Her exhibition *Carrefour/Treffpunkt. The Marrakech Biennale and beyond* (2015), which was shown in both ifa venues in Stuttgart and Berlin, exemplified her relational and transnational approach to reconfiguring the role of foreign cultural relations through contemporary art. Taking Marrakech as a real and metaphoric centre, she invited artists, curators, and writers who had worked on previous instalments of the well-known Biennale, of which Sebti was artistic director in 2014, to reflect on the porous crossroads of North and Sub-Saharan Africa, East and West Africa, the Maghreb and Europe, creating a platform for rethinking these relations.

I first learned about the one-year programme she had devised for the beginning of her tenure as director at the Berlin ifa-gallery in late 2016 during an exhibition visit of the show *With Different Eyes* (2016), which showed photographs by Johannes Haile (1927–2016). Haile was commissioned by the German Embassy in Ethiopia to capture images of post-war Germany during its industrial comeback. The show caught my attention due to its reversal of the gaze on cultural heritage and German identity. Rather than focusing on representations of Africa, or Ethiopia, from a patronising ›contemporary arts‹ perspective, it exemplified the subjective encounters and moments of curiosity between subjects on street corners and crossings, ephemeral gazes that revealed the ways in which encounters between the »West«, and the categories that have been misconstrued as its Other, can be thought through in relation to art and photography. As Sebti wrote in her preface to the exhibition catalogue, »The stories he [Haile] narrated through his journey became part of a globally circulated set of imagery. Not as a representation of the ›Other‹, but as an enunciation of diverse realities« (2016, 6). Relating her analysis to the theoretical writings of Édouard Glissant (1990), she underlines how the exhibition – thus anticipating her own curatorial perspective – is not simply recreating a process of Othering in reverse but seeks to create reversed aesthetic perspectives on subjectivity and difference. The photographs arranged in black and white on the gallery walls – at first glimpse a fairly common arrangement for a photographic exhibition – appeared to gaze back at the visitors, whose own situatedness in the streets on which Haile documented Germans echoed those in the frames on show.

I passed the show several times on my way home from the university office and kept asking myself what it signalled for such a show to stage these forms of theory in relation to German public cultural narratives. An assistant in the gallery told me of the larger programme and nudged me to get in touch with the director, Sebti. Her response came, as she admitted later, after some initial scepticism about an anthropologist writing to her »out of the blue« before she had even started her programme – a scepticism that became symptomatic of engagements with curatorial work and anthropology's difficult colonial legacies in other fieldwork encounters (see Oswald and Tinius 2020). We took this problematisation of anthropology as a starting point of our first meeting, and unfolded this conversation subsequently on a regular basis, beginning in late 2016 over coffee in the ifa-offices on Linienstraße, situated in the courtyard of a former GDR publishing house just off Friedrichstraße in Berlin's former East, now home to several foundations and ifa-related departments and their international journal *Kulturaustausch*. The initial focus of our conversations was to think of possible ways of overcoming the impasse between the colonial stain on anthropology, not least in the context of Germany, and to find collaborative ways of integrating this interrogation of anthropology's colonial entanglements actively in the gallery programme.

Pointing to her sketches on a whiteboard in her office, and presentations she had prepared and discussed with the then head of the ifa visual arts department, Elke aus dem Moore (at the time of writing director of Akademie Schloss Solitude), Sebti outlined her initial programming project in greater detail to me. Grappling with the right ways to frame the concepts she wanted to use, across translations back and forth from English and French into German – she laid out her plans for what eventually came to be called *Untie to tie: On Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Societies*.<sup>4</sup> The initially one-year, eventually multi-year, research and exhibition programme, she told me during a meeting in early 2017, would be divided into four autonomously curated and differently themed, albeit interrelated, »chapters« (*Kapitel*), each of which with a different invited curator or team of curators and a set of one to ten artistic positions. These chapters were to run from April 2017 to April 2018, allowing between about two and a half to four months for each position to be shown, exhibited, and discussed in the gallery space. These artistic positions, curated by invited exhibition-makers, thematised entangled histories of exploitation, protest, and colonial conquest, drawing on artistic research across the globe and from several continents. The programme itself was part, at the time, of a growing and ever more recognised set of other institutions, among them SAVVY Contemporary and Galerie Wedding, which stirred up theoretically reflexive, non-commercial, and publicly discussed responses to an exhibition landscape that thitherto had not addressed questions of coloniality, intersectionality, and epistemologies beyond the West in a coherent and interconnected way. Curators in these institutions drew on a connected set of shows and publications on these themes that became ever more relatable reference points for thinking about exhibition-making as a form of counter-narrative to official heritage-making processes of public museums in the city, most notably the Humboldt Forum.

Crucial to the programme – and provocative in its reform of the preceding exhibition styles and approaches by former directors, which directed in epistemological and aesthetic terms of culturally-bound national heritage narratives – Sebti attempted to come up with ways to open the gallery for audiences from a broader set of demographics beyond the statistically white German audience of the Mitte gallery district where it was situated. In order to break with other assumptions of the white cube – frontal presentations, vitrines, and a lack of interaction with the positions presented –, which characterised exhibitions in the space prior to this project, the one-year programme was divided into three so-called »pillars«: a reading and listening station for visitors to use as a library, a digital platform, and a discursive, accompanying public and educational programme. »We want to render the space discursive«, Sebti said to me during an interview around the same time in early 2017, »by which I mean bringing the artists, curators, and audiences into conversation« (fieldnote, 27 January 2017). For this purpose, she had invited the ifa in-house sponsored publication *Contemporary&* (led by founding editors Julia Grosse and Yvette Mutumba) to host and curate a so-called »reading and hearing station«. Placed in a semi-detached room visible through large glass windows from the street, this space, later renamed the *Centre of Unfinished Business*, was to be accessible during the regular opening hours of the gallery, providing a custom-built library and study space with selected books connected to colonialism and its legacies in the present in unexpected ways. Including loans from the grassroots neighbourhood association *Each One Teach One* (EOTO) e.V., a library on the literature, history and lives of people of African descent, this space juxtaposed, for instance, a work on Emil Nolde and the German expressionist collective *Die Brücke* with Achille Mbembe, suggesting that »their romanticizing and (...) stereotyping perspective on the »beautiful savages« overseas (...) expresses colonial and biased mind-sets«. <sup>5</sup> The reading room and the Cen-

*tre of Unfinished Business* also organised public events, readings, and discussions as well as artist talks and book launches that bridged the exhibition programme, the overall discursive context, and the digital platform set up to capture and accompany the one-year programme. The digital platform ([www.untietotie.org](http://www.untietotie.org)) also contains artist-edited documentaries of all events, events; podcasts contributed by the collaborative sound and music collective Saout Radio<sup>6</sup>, and columns as well as essays by curators, artists, and academics that would continue to cover and archive until 2020.

A third and crucial pillar for the exhibition programme was a section that Alya Sebti outlined as »art in conversation«, a title for the public programme responding to the positions presented by artists and curators for each chapter, that is, each central exhibition and its accompanying events. In collaboration with teachers, mediators, schools, and vocational colleges, a pedagogic series of seminars was designed and public lectures, workshops, and performances dotted the calendar for each exhibition chapter. It became evident in our initial brainstorming and exchanges on the theme of the programme, the situation in Berlin, and our interests in collaborative forms of curatorial practice that one could enrich the programme with some kind of regular, long-term, reflection on the practice of the institution offered by the positions introduced by Sebti.

In the following, I describe and unpack the kind of collaboration that ensued from a shared concern over the colonial legacies of Germany and fieldwork in and with curatorial practice. I will trace the initiation, articulation, and reflection of my collaboration with the gallery in the context of the institution's 2016–2019 programming on colonial legacies and contemporary societies. Through a series of curated encounters called the ›gallery reflections‹, this collaboration functioned as a way to interrogate the practices of curating the gallery programme within a public institution with a difficult heritage and to query and rethink the role of anthropology within such a frame. Explicitly designed to facilitate experimentation, dialogue, and transparent critique of both curatorial and anthropological practice, the gallery reflections constituted a practical public intervention and a methodological experiment for the gallery as well as myself at the same time. Due to the politicised and critical nature of the subject of this programming, I acted as moderator, convenor, and ethnographer, but, crucially, also as subject of critique. Through this series emerged the idea of the anthropologist as a »sparring partner«, that is, neither as observant participant nor participant observer, but as instigator of events within a field site, whose ripples and reverberations would become themselves part of fieldwork and research. The gallery reflections could thus be described as a public form of research and dialogue that served a complex set of intertwined and open-ended purposes; and it proposed how we might conceptualise ethnographic collaboration with the anthropologist written firmly into rather than out of the picture.

Key to this conception was a shared concern with the public role of anthropology as a discipline that emerged out of the European age of empire, and the debates at the time of fieldwork in 2017 around the then nascent Humboldt Forum and the way it muddled the reckoning with German colonial legacies with an ambivalent appraisal of Prussian cultural heritage. While both the ifa gallery direction and programming, and I as an ethnographer, shared this common starting observation about the transformations of museums and heritage in Berlin and the emerging ambivalence around the history and legacies of the Prussian empire, it was as of yet unclear how and if there was a way of finding a public form for addressing this in a manner that could be both fieldwork and exhibition-making.



## Public anthropology and colonial legacies

»In our team, we decided to translate colonial legacies as *koloniale Hinterlassenschaften*«, Alya Sebti points out in the Q&A after our second gallery reflection on time and temporality in September 2017.

»As the curatorial team at the ifa Galerie, we could have translated it as *Erbe*, denoting inheritance, but we wished to stress that we, too, are leaving something behind, right now as we are recording this session, but also in the sense that we have an impact in one way or another on the way we think about colonial legacies in our contemporary societies, so also on Berlin and Germany.« (ibid.)

Sebti here points to a crucial aspect of the gallery reflections. As part of a public engagement series with a relatively broad reach, at least in the city of Berlin, and a direct institutional footing in a central public organ of the German government, our involvement was neither retrospective nor neutral. Not least because my own research project takes place explicitly against the backdrop of Berlin's, if not Germany's most contested and anticipated cultural heritage project, the Humboldt Forum. The impact of debates around this prism, which at once refracts and concentrates debates around German colonial heritage, difficult collections, and awkward pasts (AfricAvenir 2017; Tinius 2018) is such that institutions such as the ifa gallery and anthropologists working in the city can hardly afford *not* to position themselves in one way or another in relation to it; and needless to say, many and regular discussions have taken place across these fields for quite some decades now (Binder 2009, von Bose 2016). Each gallery reflection offered an additional public instance of reflection on colonial legacies, anthropology, and contemporary art, and we thus decided for each reflection to address contentious and current albeit neglected issues.

The series opened with a theme that we considered to be remarkably absent from discussions on the Humboldt Forum, namely the Asian diaspora in Berlin and its relation to urban space. On 4 May 2017 and against the background of Cameroonian artist Pascale Martine-Tayou's exhibition on abandoned colonial spaces, we held our first gallery reflection entitled ›Urban Decolonisation and Diasporic Formations‹. I was in conversation with Noa Ha from the Center for Metropolitan Studies at the Technical University of Berlin, who had been working on postcolonial urbanism and Indonesian-Asian diasporas in European cities and is a board member of the »Migrationsrat Berlin-Brandenburg«, Trang Tran Thu, an anthropologist working on Vietnamese diasporas in Berlin and also a member of the Migrationsrat as well as the Berlin Asian Film Network, and Hyunsin Kim, Korean choreographer and performer. Our conversation touched on many issues related to decolonial perspectives on urban space and the representation of place, but the discussion with the public led to an important and broader problematisation of intergenerational forms of activism and the differential discrimination of minorities in Germany today. Especially noteworthy was a comment by an audience member from the initiative *Afrotak* about the lack of representation of »African persons« on the panel, which to the audience member represented »only one Asian perspective«. This sparked a heated debate about the plurality – rather than the accused singularity – of diasporic experiences within different Asian communities in Berlin, whose heritage is either relegated into international ties between former East bloc states (e.g. Vietnam and the GDR) or implicitly othered in relation to postcolonial critique with a focus on decolonisation in Africa. For the participants, as they articulated in the Q&A, their work with diverse Asian-German communities and their intergenerational reflections on



Figures 2–3 Screenshot of the YouTube documentation of gallery reflection #1 showing Pascale Martine-Tayou's exhibition as part of chapter 1 »Global Relatedness« and gallery reflection #4 in ACUD, Berlin. © Ifa-Galerie Berlin, 2017.



their families' routes and roots draws on the Afro-German life, poetry, literature, and activism that has reshuffled the otherwise white reading of German heritage and recent past. The first event in the series immediately – before the conclusion of its public element, and before we could begin analysing and talking about the conversations – offered an example of the iterative public aspect of such fieldwork. The series provoked a conversation around stigmatised identities, marginalised voices, and the responsibility of curating and anthropology, that would otherwise not have come together in the same way.

We continued the series on 7 September 2017 with gallery reflection #2, entitled ›Traces, Legacies, Futures: A Conversation on Art and Temporality‹. For this encounter, I had

invited Berlin-based artist Nora Al-Badri, anthropologist Silvy Chakkalakal, professor at the Institute of European Ethnology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and London-based interdisciplinary artist Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Professor of Global Art History at the University of Birmingham (UK). This second event in the series dealt with the vocabulary of time and temporality. We discussed, for instance, the aforementioned complexities of using the term colonial ›legacies‹, and how this is different from talking about ›traces‹, or ›remnants‹. In what sense, we further debated, do concerns, for instance, over repatriation, decolonisation, and institutional critique concern a future-oriented temporal thinking? How do practices of copying and authenticating colonial objects challenge ideas of linear temporalities, and what role does art play in negotiating these entanglements? This conversation drew in audience participants from various Berlin-based institutions, including the Humboldt-Forum and the Hermann von Helmholtz Centre for Cultural Techniques, both of whom were intended addressees of this conversation. In the sense of Sebti's idea of rendering her programme discursive, this gallery reflection event sought to underline the way in which artistic and aesthetic positions provide a different entry into thinking about German heritage, restitution of objects from ethnological collections and museums in Berlin and beyond. The conversation with these participants led to further collaborations; Nora Al-Badri, for instance, taught a class on techno-heritage in a MA-course on art, anthropology, and colonialism that I convened at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and we organised a follow-up conversation at the ifa-gallery on restitution and techno-heritage.<sup>7</sup> Crucial here, to unfold one aspect of the sparring collaboration, was that the link between art and anthropology was two-fold; as material of fieldwork, to be written up in articles such as this, and as a public event, to be recorded and immediately made publicly available.

A third and fourth encounter followed suit on 16 November 2017 with gallery reflection #3 ›Art and Intersectional Feminism(s)‹, for which I invited the author Alanna Lockward, who tragically passed away between the time of the event and that of writing<sup>8</sup>, academic Kathy-Ann Tan, and writer Federica Bueti to the gallery in the context of the similarly titled third chapter on »On Intersectional Feminisms« curated by Eva Barois de Caebel and anthropologist and artist Wura-Natasha Ogunji. This event problematised the role of writing, autobiography, and aesthetics in the crafting not just of decolonial narratives, but as ways to bring into dialogue and recognise the intersectionality of matters of race, class, and gender. The event was a deliberate poking at the emergence of an increasing number of events on decolonial aesthetics, and it coincided with the run-up to the 10<sup>th</sup> Berlin Biennale, curated by Gabi Ngcobo and a team of curators that addressed these questions in the framework of one of the most recognised art biennials; yet also in the context and vicinity of a network, collaboration, and event emerging, among others, through Lockward's efforts to counter institutionalised form of decolonial thinking, namely the BE.BOP 2018 (Black Europe Body Politics. Coalitions Facing White Innocence).<sup>9</sup> The context of discussions about the proclaimed diversity (and yet apparent lack thereof) in the German arts scene offered this event a stage to address the role of feminist intersectional critique. Gallery reflection #4 on 15 March 2018 underlined the ambivalence of the notion ›protesting identities‹, meaning both the protest against and of identities, and took place with artist Candice Breitz, curator of the fourth ifa-exhibition chapter »On Riots«, Natasha Ginwala, and theatre scholar Azadeh Sharifi in collaboration with a nearby art space, ACUD, in Prenzlauer Berg. The event zoomed in on the relation between refusal, protest, strategic essentialism, and tokenism in discussions about diversity and identity in the context of contemporary artistic practice. It offered, furthermore, a chance to move outside of speaking on a specific exhibition and speaking instead about the undergirding politics of who speaks up for whom.

## Epistemic jurisdiction

In-between these two last events of the gallery reflections series, on 5 December 2017, Alya Sebti and I organised a »galery reflection« extra, for which we found ourselves on the ground floor of a renovated club a few minutes south of the *Gare du Nord* in Paris' 18<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement. We had been invited to give a talk as part of a public programme entitled »Concrete Mirror«, put together by Brazilian artist Noara Quintana and British anthropologist Alex Ungprateeb Flynn who greeted us with a cup of tea at the bar of the venue.<sup>10</sup> In addition to conceiving a research and exhibition project shown at the entrance foyer of the *Laboratoire d'anthropologie* at the EHESS, their project »Concrete Mirror« also brought together practitioners (artists) and academics (anthropologists) to reflect on indigenous alterity, the role of the museum, decoloniality, and forms of collaboration between art and anthropology. They had attended a previous gallery reflection I organised at the ifa-gallery in Berlin and were interested to offer us an opportunity to look back and reflect frankly on the aspects of the programme, thus opening the curatorial programme to a reflection on the means and infrastructures undergirding it.

As part of the »Concrete Mirror« project documentation, Alex and Noara video-recorded short introductions to the event from the first-floor mezzanine of the space. From above, we could see the coffee tables and a few early visitors strolling towards the bar.<sup>11</sup> We had welcomed the invitation, since the institution – now sadly discontinued after Covid-19–related funding difficulties – was founded, among others, by Kader Attia, Berlin-based Algerian-born artist, whose pioneering work on issues of repair had made him one of the most important references in thinking about colonial legacies – and a significant winner of the 2016 Prix Marcel Duchamp. The name of the venue, *La Colonie*, whenever printed, is written with crossed-out letters (~~*La Colonie*~~). Looked at it thus, it spells out as well as denounces a reference to colonialism. Programmatic for Attia's engagement and the space, whose projects varied from music and entertainment to academic colloquia and exhibitions, was a complex rejection of debates on violence and colonial heritage. It proposed to think specifically about the way in which intergenerational injuries inflicted upon the psyche of individuals and the collective psyche of entire societies by colonial empire leave scars and injuries that cannot simply be repaired or healed. In a provocative turn, then, ~~*La Colonie*~~ reassembled this trace of the past – not unlike Sebti's programmatic reflections on the polyvalence of the word legacy (as *Hinterlassenschaft*) in her project's title; or put more drastically, »Here we colonise Paris«, in the words of the space's project programmer Lucie Tayou. It was also, besides this broader allusion to the legacies of diverse forms of colonial appropriation, a space that brought to the fore once more the relation between Algeria and France before the independence on 5 July 1962.<sup>12</sup> It was opened on 17 October 2016, anniversary of a bloodbath committed by the French against Algerian demonstrators in Paris in 1961. As Touya explained, the space was

»dedicated to thinking, to contemporary societies, to France and its history – the colonial one but not only. Enabling people with diverse backgrounds, coming from outside Europe, to talk. A place where we could debate with intellectuals, scientists, artists, writers, poets, militants, nurses ... A space for dialogue which tries to improve our ways of all living together.«<sup>13</sup>

Back to the mezzanine, we record the conversation: »Ok, camera is running – *on commence?*« Alex Flynn looks at us and invites Sebti to talk to the camera. She briefly looks at me,

nods, and listens to the first question. »I haven't spoken about this much in French, but if I am missing certain words, it's a good exercise in thinking.« Asked to reflect on the context of our collaboration, she elaborates: »First, thanks for the invitation, I am really happy to be in this space, and to be here with an anthropologist with whom we conceived a curatorial programme, called ›Gallery Reflections‹«. She describes how, for her, the opening of the gallery through her programme »Untie to tie« has aimed and managed to bring together different forms of knowledge; »*savoirs, qui se rencontrent*«. Of these knowledges, she expands, the academic knowledge is one, but it is partnered with others – »knowledges of the body, of experience« (»*des savoirs du corps, de l'expérience*«) that we try to bring into conversation (»*de les faire dialoguer*«). In that sense, she continues, the gallery reflections constitute an encounter of different forms of practice and not just knowledge: those of curating a critical public set of conversations and those of an anthropology that seeks to reflect on its public role in the context of German colonial reckoning. She acknowledges that »there is a tension between these practices«, one being focused on the active selection and putting together of relations between artists, artworks, and exhibition spaces; the other being concerned with the analysis and study of such relations. But it is for this very reason, Sebti stresses, »that we sought to create a collaboration with someone who puts into question the very approach of anthropology through an exercise of dialogue and listening« (»*remet en question l'approche de l'anthropologie soi-même par une exercice de dialogue et écoute*«).

The curator here referred to some core aspects motivating our inauguration of the gallery reflections as a regular fixture in her »arts in conversation« programme of the one-year programme. Inspired by the writings, among others, of Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez (2013) on decolonial aesthetics, we wished to find a way of integrating anthropological reflection without recreating a scholar-informant relation. Instead, we discussed early on in the preparation for the series, that we wanted to reflect, too, on the implicit privileges of speaking as a white male anthropologist with an institutional affiliation – but not to end there; rather, to take this recognition as a starting point for developing a collaborative ethics of listening and empathic collaboration. This implied, for us, to think the anthropologist as a moderator, as someone whose presence is not an unmarked absence. It was key for us to recognise, as Sebti pointed out in her statement recorded in Paris, that we strongly wished to recognise unevenness and frictions, but not reproduce forms of hierarchisation between the practical knowledge of curators and artists, and the canonised academic knowledge of the anthropologist. In other words, we tried to »bring anthropological knowledge into disquieting, but also potentially productive, juxtaposition with a plurality of modes of ›para-ethnographic‹ knowledge that now exist outside the networks and institutions of academic anthropology«, as Boyer (2008, 40) put it. This form of recognition of overlapping »epistemic jurisdictions« (ibid., 38) thus required of us both, but especially of the part of the anthropologist, to reconsider the artistic and curatorial space of the gallery and its institutional and epistemic halo as »realms in which the traditional informants of ethnography must be rethought as counterparts rather than ›others‹ – as both subjects and intellectual partners in inquiry« (Holmes/Marcus 2005, 236).

When we came up with the idea of creating a discursive platform for critical perspectives on colonial legacies from the arts and related fields of inquiry, we also had in mind rethinking perhaps in an experimental way the relation between curatorial and anthropological practice. Inspired by an exchange with curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and anthropologist Arjun Appadurai that I facilitated at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin in early 2017 and exchanges with Ndikung about the curator as a sparring partner for artists (2020, 13),<sup>14</sup> we picked up the idea of a »sparring partner«. This was really initially more of a met-

aphor for uneasy bouts of scepticism, but turned into a more serious way of thinking about ethnographic collaboration. The term suggests that each person, including the anthropologist, is involved in and deliberately made vulnerable in the exchange, but also keeps one another on their feet – in an exchange where anthropology is no longer the unmarked white backdrop, but where it is part of the picture, gets questioned, and ›takes punches‹, metaphorically. It is a form of ›speaking nearby‹ (Trinh T. Minh-Ha 1992, 82), not speaking about one another. The decentring of my own perspective, while maintaining the position of anthropologist as a marked presence, rather than a backstage observer, also allowed us to leave behind what Ingold described as the pretence »that our arguments are distillations of the practical wisdom of those among whom we have worked. Our job is to *correspond* with them, not to speak for them« (2017, 21).

The anthropologist conceived as a sparring partner, while borrowing a combat sport vocabulary, is not a loose and brutal phrase. Key to sparring is, first of all, that it is a form of training. This means, it aims to develop skills and techniques of movement and awareness, which have at heart the controlled confrontation with different levels and expression of skill.<sup>15</sup> A second key element is that sparring takes place within the frame of a certain number of agreements for conduct that prevent injury. It is characterised, as a practice, by »a dialectic of challenge and response« (Wacquant 2007, 83) and governed by a »principle of reciprocity« (ibid., 84). In the context of the gallery reflections and the collaboration at the heart of this article, these agreements include a transparency and trust relation; being open about one's intentions – both as ethnographer and as curator – and respecting the professional responsibilities and ethical vulnerabilities of one's interlocutor. These are, in the context of a highly politicised contemporary art context dealing with colonial heritage and identity politics, a heightened sense of awareness of privilege and vulnerability. It also means being open about what is done for what purpose: opening the protocols of each practice. It means asking, for instance: What is the benefit of each position in the other's context of professional practice, what are the risks? It also means opening each protocol, the ethnographic and the curatorial, to mutual scrutiny: how an exhibition is framed, how anthropology is framed – but equally, how curating is depicted, theorised, talked about. While it is part of the educational aspect of sparring to learn from each other's skill, techniques and even tricks, its aim in this case was a change of institutional and disciplinary habitus – which, far from being merely cognitive, involves practical, emotional, communicative, and spatial learning just as well. These are all aspects of a trained conduct that any collaborative anthropological practice affords, but their value added is the feedback into the very perspective and stance of the discipline itself: confident to venture out of its own comfort zone, but with the greatest respect and attention to the movements, thoughts, and reflections it can learn from others.

### Expanding the curatorial

By calling the series of conversations »gallery reflections«, these events deliberately did not strictly relate to each of the four chapters and the respective exhibitions, as an illustration or mediating programme, but sought to criss-cross the overall themes and decentre as well as expand its focal points. These conversations were therefore not decontextualised from the exhibitions either, but rather refracted the thematic foci of the exhibitions; to take them as starting points for broader discussions. The idea of a reflection, then, was not meant in the sense of »reflex«, like an instinctive physical reaction to something, but rather in the sense

of a ray of light that breaks, altering the usual way of thinking and seeing, prying open its spectrum and making visible and transparent what is otherwise unseen. As Karen Barad (2014, 168) puts it in her article ›Diffracting Diffractions‹, the concept of diffraction owes as much from physics as it does from feminist theorising about difference. Borrowing from Gloria Anzaldúa, Barad writes that diffraction poses the apt question, »How can we understand this coming together of opposite qualities within, not as a flattening out or erasure of difference, but as a relation of difference within?« (2014, 174) The event in Paris was precisely such an occasion for us to reflect on what the gallery reflections refracted and diffracted in terms of differences and relations. We thought to propose that fieldwork, as in this case, is not a form of intrusion from without, but rather conceptualised as part of an internal process, which gets reflected and analysed and thus transformed. Trinh T. Minh-Ha puts this in a way that resembles the movement we sought to provoke with regard to the positionality of both researcher and curator. And it also situated the perspective of each gallery reflection, because each session took place (see Fig. 1) behind and with view to the street outside the gallery, its threshold and variously porous membrane.

»The moment the insider steps out from the inside she's no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. [...] She is, in other words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ›I am like you‹ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ›I am different‹ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at.« (Trinh T. Minh-Ha 1988, cited by Anzaldúa 1987, 175).

As part of the conversation at *La Colonie*, we showed images of each of the gallery reflections that we had held in Berlin to that date. The occasion was meant precisely to lay bare the protocols of the gallery reflections and to decentre them further in a different curated context, here to a public audience of academics, artists, and curators, many of whom working in such fields with connections to French, North African, or Brazilian discourses on contemporary art and curatorial research projects due to Flynn and Quintana's previous fieldwork and university networks in Paris. Alya Sebti and I devised the conversation as a frank reflection on the difficulties of collaboration, but also as a kind of fieldwork reflection on our encounter. The panel in Paris also afforded a chance to speak, more openly than if we had been in Berlin, about issues with budgeting, invitation policies, and institutional constraints. Talking thus about what Groth and Ritter (2019, 7) described as practices of coordinating and cooperating in collaborative processes, we lay bare decisions and policies. We spoke about how budgets were adopted to reflect invitees' differing financial positions (freelance artists for whom fees form a substantial part of their income by contrast to tenured academics, for instance), or how we wanted to put the focus of invitations on female and queer positions of colour and those with a migration background to offer narratives that differ from the white, male backdrop of decision-making personnel in German cultural institutions (Hunter et al. 2020). We also addressed institutional restraints of collaborating within public cultural institutions such as the ifa gallery, especially with regard to how habituated and regulated forms of public display, translation, and marketing inhibited critical content reflection.

The aim of taking the time and space to reflect publicly on this collaboration was also to inquire the impacts of such an expanded fieldwork and curatorial setting. Sebti underlined that the everyday running of a gallery left her with practically no time to organise

a public exchange on the broader context of her programming and the implications of a several-year long project on colonial legacies in Germany, let alone a series that focuses on a dialogue between curatorial, artistic, and anthropological knowledge production. For me, the series allowed fieldwork to become instigative and prefigurative, rather than passive and descriptive. Instead of following events, it allowed me to ask questions and investigate the responses to them, and to conceive that as a form of fieldwork – akin to what Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, drawing on ethnographic conceptualism, described as making visible the tension between »what such projects perform and [what they] describe« (2020, 1). Additionally, it created an archive of conversations, organised and funded by the ifa. These conversations would otherwise not have been documented in the same way; and certainly not generated further connections to other members of the public who then became closer acquaintances, interlocutors, and friends. The conversations allowed me to invite key interlocutors of mine, and experts whose practices and theoretical considerations were central to my fieldwork, to get into conversation on themes pertinent to my field; it was thus at the same time an intervention, fieldwork, and an analysis of it.

For me, furthermore, to consider the project as part of an ethnographic inquiry into how contemporary art curators negotiate the current heritage debates in Berlin, I had to engage in the double role as ethnographer and public moderator of a series of conversations with a broad range of themes and competences that afforded careful preparation and familiarisation with the ethics, politics, and thoughts for each theme. This required balancing of a number of tensions, some of which irresolvable, others productive. As one participant of the framing programme involved in creating a critical library on German colonial heritage commented during an internal meeting at ifa when we introduced the series, »How is it that as soon as an exhibition concerns non-Western artists, anthropologists are involved, rather than art historians?« This comment stemmed from a discontent with the exoticisation of art, but it also fundamentally misunderstood the interest of the series. As I also responded at the time, my presence as an anthropologist did not signal a marking of the artists and shows as ›non-European‹, but rather aimed at looking back at the possible opening up of anthropological practice as one of listening and conversation. This tension ultimately proved a central and continuous strand of our collaboration, culminating in the fourth gallery reflection »protesting identities«, which sought to underline the double meaning of the phrase: protesting the reifications of identities and strategically mobilising markers of identities as a form of protest.

### Forms and Formats of Collaboration: Concluding thoughts

In this article, I have traced the conception and articulation of a collaboration between public curating and what I describe as ›instigative public fieldwork‹. The joint project, labelled »gallery reflections« and hosted by the gallery of the *Institute of International Cultural Relations* (ifa) in Berlin, served the purpose of interrogating the practices, assumptions, and concepts, but also the forms and formats of the two professional fields of anthropology and curatorial work, seeking to construct a common ground from which to talk about colonial legacies and contemporary societies. Yet, this common ground was uneven, and recognised the differences between each field, positing thus not a symmetry between curatorial and anthropological work (see Sansi 2020), but rather a productive sparring practice. I analyse the collaborative format I discussed in this article as such, because it was not designed from start to finish, not planned as a conclusive format, but rather as a public conversation, a kind



of training and testing of how we can put the protocols of both ethnographic practice and curatorial work on display and unfold them over time.

Besides the official programming – a series of four public conversations with artists, activists, scholars, and writers, and two more conversations that the gallery director and I put on about the series – the collaboration was deliberately experimental in form, that is, based on certain ideas and hopes for constructive discussions, but with a willingness to integrate feedback and to change the format and form of our collaboration. Thus, for instance, we received comments, emails, and discussed in public as well as in closed circuits of exchange with persons who got in touch with us via the gallery a variety of aspects, ranging from the constellations of speakers, the seating arrangements, the kind of documentation, the location of the conversations, my presence as moderator, as well as fees and funding for the series. The fact that each conversation was documented, archived, and publicly disseminated, meant that feedback from the network of interlocutors, curators, anthropologists, and artists who attended the seminars, reached us before the end of our project, and often was, in fact, immediate – a temporality of response that is more direct and faster than is usually the case with academic publications, for instance. This is witnessed, not least, by the time it took to publish one edited and transcribed conversation, or for this reflection to appear in peer-reviewed journals.

The consequences of the collaborative project were tangible for Sebti, as she noted during the Q&A at our joint event at *La Colonie* in Paris: »It is the only discursive and reflexive element that has accompanied every chapter of our one-year programme and it was a constant point of negotiation of what we do.« In this sense, the series has provided a regular albeit marginal public forum, whose contents are stored and disseminated in the digital realm. It was thus a public testing ground of ideas, a discussion and brain-storming of central ideas of exhibition-making as they unfold. Contrary to the presentation of finished exhibitions or conclusive concepts on themes, the series opened up the exhibition plans and curatorial proposals for discussion. This was tangible, and it was consequential, insofar as each reflection became well-attended, provoked immediate audience reactions, and – since I considered it fieldwork – was followed up on my part with unstructured interviews, archival research, or discussions in the team.

The series more broadly tapped into and consolidated a discourse on colonial legacies and contemporary memory culture and heritage in Berlin, which is no longer entirely peripheral or solitary at all, but interconnected in new convergences and central to the future heritage politics of Germany. Likewise, the theorisation of postcolonial curatorial practice provoked significant »concept work« (Ong 2015, 12) beyond exhibition-making, feeding back into the unsettling of broader disciplinary certainties and authorship of theories. As Margareta von Oswald and I discuss in the introduction to our volume *Across Anthropology* (2020, 33), curators and interlocutors in our series and the fieldwork and organisations associated with it, like Alya Sebti, Natasha Ginwala, and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, who worked together and across contexts of heritage, museums, and contemporary arts organisations, are involved in a tense process of conceptualising relations between art works and the contexts in which they are positioned by exhibitions here in Berlin. They often craft curatorial neologisms, such as *Dis-Othering* or *Ultrasanity* or refusing to translate their work into existing institutional or conceptual frameworks by rejecting terminologies commonly used in the fields of ethnological exhibition-making. Additionally, the experimental possibilities afforded to anthropology by the expanded curatorial field of contemporary art shifts the role of ethnographic collaboration from an internal debate on methods to one of significant public epistemic collaborations.

Overall, as we noted towards the end of our reflection on the series at *La Colonie*, the project was an experiment in collaboration with an outcome that was not clearly defined. Despite, or perhaps because of, the openness of our approach, the series of reflections allowed us to address and explore the complexity of a number of aspects that may help to think through collaborative work in anthropology and curatorial practice. In particular, it revealed some of the consequences of what Irit Rogoff has described as the »dominant transdisciplinarity of the expanded field of art and cultural production« (2013, 42). For Rogoff, curating has in recent decades moved from being about the management of material culture whose protocols exhaust themselves in »collecting, conserving, displaying, visualising« to becoming »the staging ground of the development of an idea or an insight« (ibid., 45) and thus part of a broader field of epistemic and curatorial practices. The curatorial, for Rogoff, describes »[i]deas in the process of development, [...] to speculate and to draw a new set of relations« (ibid.). In this sense, the curatorial-anthropological collaboration of the gallery reflections organised at ifa-gallery can be seen as part of a broader turn towards expanding from artistic production via curatorial work to generating public dialogues on history, legacies, and futures of contemporary societies. This, in turn, afforded a recalibrated anthropological practice, one kept on its feet by public exposure and the affordances of the curatorial space. This article proposes that instigative public fieldwork thought as a form of sparring can render productive the mutual tensions and generative differences between curating and fieldwork. By not relegating fieldwork to a mono-directional participant observation and subsequent writing phase, but conducting fieldwork as a form of instigating public and curatorial practice, the gallery reflections provided both form and format to this collaborative mode of ethnography.

## Endnotes

- 1 The research that has led to this publication was carried out during my postdoctoral research fellowship at CARMAH, funded as part of by Sharon Macdonald's Alexander von Humboldt professorship. I am grateful to comments from colleagues on earlier drafts of this version. I would also like to thank the editors of this special issue for their thoughts on this article. It was written up during a postdoctoral research fellowship funded by the European Consolidator Grant project Minor Universality. Narrative World Productions After Western Universalism (PI: Markus Messling, Saarland University).
- 2 For a previous issue of the *Berliner Blätter* edited by Kathrin Amelang and Silvy Chakkalakal, I have analysed the ways in which »ethnographic conceptualism« might help us understand research-based installations and performances, such as those of the German group Rimini Protokoll, and where I see the limits and pitfalls of participatory art (see Tinius 2015).
- 3 Sharon Macdonald and I (2020) discuss this fieldwork and dialogue project as a form of anthropological and curatorial recursivity, that is, as a form of mutual and yet not exact mirroring; more as a form of refraction of differences and similarities in style and content, but also regarding the models and formats of each field, practice, and form of theorizing.
- 4 The German title is *Untie to tie: Über koloniale Vermächtnisse und zeitgenössische Gesellschaften*. It is an ifa policy to translate all titles, announcements, and publications into German, often creating awkward issues of translation, e.g. of the term »legacy« as *Vermächtnis*, rather than *Erbe*, for instance. The first part of the programme »Untie to tie« remained untranslated as it functions as a bracket for several one-year programmes continuing in 2018–2019 with a series called *Untie to tie: Movement. Bewegung*.
- 5 Quote retrieved from *Untie to tie* digital platform description of the Reading Room. <<http://untietie.org/center-of-unfinished-business/?chapter=2>>, last accessed, 28 February 2018.
- 6 »Saout Radio explores the universe of sonic arts. ‚Sonic Panoramas‘ is made up of a hearing station inside the gallery and diverse radio shows. Each radio show will also be broadcasted on different radio stations such as Reboot.fm or Radio Corax, but also on stations all over the world such as Radio Panik in Brussels, Radio Tsonami in Chile.» Source of description: <<https://www.ifa.de/en/visual-arts/untie-to-tie.html>>, last accessed, 28 February 2018.

- 7 A full video of this conversation can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHiTk3fNXfM> (last accessed, 4 December 2019) and the conversation was later published as ›Traces, Legacies, and Futures: A Conversation on Art and Temporality‹ (with Nora-Al-Badri, Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Silvy Chakkalakal, Alya Sebti, and Jonas Tinius). Third Text Forum 01/2020. Open-access via: <http://www.thirdtext.org/tinius-et-al-conversation> (last accessed, 7 December 2020).
- 8 The SAVVY Contemporary curator and writer Elena Quintarelli has created an archive and memory room about Lockward's work which was on show at the Maxim Gorki Herbstsalon in November 2019. <<https://www.berliner-herbstsalon.de/vierter-berliner-herbstsalon/artist/alanna-lockward>> (last accessed, 4 December 2019).
- 9 For more information, please see: <<https://bebop2018coalitionsfacingwhiteinnocence.wordpress.com/berlin/> and <https://www.sleek-mag.com/article/berlin-biennale-art-new-black/>> (both last accessed, 4 December 2019).
- 10 Laureates of the art and research programme *L'invention des forms à l'ère de la mondialisation* (Eng. *Invention of forms in the age of globalisation*) based at the *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales* (EHESS), the two have been in residence at the *Cité Internationale des Arts*, an established and renowned institution hosting artists and scholars from around the world. As part of their residency, they have been »working with the Brazilian community of Paris on the emergence of a political imaginary at the frontier, exploring how subjectivity and immigration intersect and take form.« Description retrieved from Flynn and Quintana's project website (<<https://concretemirror.cargocollective.com>>, last accessed 28 February 2018).
- 11 »Kader had in mind this type of atmosphere. Zico – his associate – and him bargain-hunted and assembled everything with the idea of preserving the space. They got their inspiration in Berlin.« (Interview with programmer Lucie Tayou, <<https://www.thesocialitefamily.com/en/blog/la-colonie-paris-kader-attia/>>, last accessed 28 February 2018).
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 The event took place on 7 January 2017, entitled »Design, Failure, and the Globalisation of Risk. A talk by Arjun Appadurai, followed by a conversation with Jonas Tinius and Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung«. Video documentation is available via the following link: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QN1WhYSFd0>>, last accessed 01 March 2018.
- 15 I am grateful to Friederike Faust for pointing out this particular point on difference in sparring.

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