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Introduction: Across Anthropology

Margareta von Oswald and Jonas Tinius

While it might seem as though only one thing is certain about anthropology – namely, that it is in “a permanent identity crisis” (Geertz 2000: 89) – this volume takes a different look at what anthropology is and how it is rendered meaningful. After decades of intense and productive critique of anthropological practices and knowledge production from ‘within’, we address the ways in which anthropology has been reformulated, rethought, and even re practised ‘elsewhere’ and ‘otherwise’. What is anthropology? Where and how is it negotiated? What new understandings of anthropology emerge from beyond the classical fields, practices, institutions, and modi of anthropological knowledge production?

As editors, we come to these questions through our fieldwork on museums, colonial legacies, contemporary art, and curatorial practice as they are articulated in Europe, specifically Berlin. We have witnessed and been struck by the extent to which both anthropology as a discipline (including its history and institutions, such as museums and archives), its methods (among them fieldwork and participant observation), and themes associated with it (such as alterity, race and racism, ontology and personhood, materiality and agency, statehood and citizenship) have become central areas of inquiry in fields and practices beyond the discipline and its institutions. Put differently, anthropology, far from being self-contained, is the subject in other fields of cultural production. Most notably, contemporary artistic research, theorising, education, and practice have turned towards anthropology, its methods, histories, turns and promises. The emergence of the curatorial has been integral in this movement, insofar as it transposes and translates across artistic, activist, and exhibition practices.

Where curatorial practices focus on the legacies of the European colonial project, these inquiries further multiply the possible meanings of anthropology. In this book, we seek to capture and theorise these fields, practices, and meanings as ‘trans-anthropological’. This introduction outlines the

emergence of the contestations, contexts, and the unfolding of our fieldwork, all of which ground our argument. Facing forward and expanding through its contributors' thick accounts, *Across Anthropology* wishes to trouble and stimulate debate on the futures, frictions, and colonial legacies of museums, art, and the curatorial in a post-colonial Europe.

Emergence: The legitimacy of anthropology

In recent years and especially across European countries, the renaming, reform, and even reconstruction of anthropological museums is embedded within and reinforced by a fierce debate about the legitimacy of anthropology. This debate encompasses the practice of fieldwork, the writing about, display, and visual representation of culture and society (ethnography), and the broader theoretical construction of accounts of human existence (anthropology). We use “anthropology”, then, as a term encompassing the multiplicity of traditions, especially those of Anglo-American social and cultural anthropology, as well as the many European iterations of *Ethnologie* and *Volkskunde*. The range and transformations of these traditions are themselves testament to the chronic reshuffling of the very meaning of what anthropology is.

Anthropological museums and collections materialise and embody traditions and styles of anthropological knowledge. We write of “anthropological” museums, therefore, as an umbrella term for museums and collections that emerged in relation to and which facilitated certain kinds of anthropological knowledge production. We use it also in distinction to forms of display and collections drawing on anthropology that may be found in other types of museums and exhibition-contexts. These museums and collections have turned into sites for the contestation and renewal of anthropology, from within as well as from without. Several contributions to this book explore the extent to which the processes of critique, renaming, and reform in museums are related to the different national histories of anthropology's colonial entanglement, asking, for instance: To what extent are anthropological museums caught up in their genesis and disciplinarity? Tasked to reflect on their past, they often reproduce the epistemological frameworks they are seeking to transcend. Among the questions we pose, it seems urgent to us to ask: What are ways to overcome such dilemmas of reflexivity? Which role, if any, can contemporary anthropological knowledge production and research play in these museum infrastructures themselves? What would it mean to conceive of an anthropological museum without anthropologists, or without

collections? Or are these processes of transformation a possibly fruitful pathway for the renewal of anthropological relevance?

Proposing terms such as the “post-ethnological” and “post-ethnographic museum”, Clémentine Deliss (2012) and Benoît de L’Estoile (2015), among others, have sought to reckon with the consequences of these frictions for contemporary curatorial and anthropological practice. For Deliss, “one can no longer be content to use earlier examples of material culture for the purpose of depicting ethnos, tribe, or an existing range of grand anthropological themes” (2012: 63). In other words, she wants us to move beyond the “logos of ethnos” (2013: 2).

Ruth B. Phillips tackles an aspect of this critique when she characterises exhibition histories in anthropological museums as defined by “the persistent and modernist paradigms of art and artefact” (2007: 98). The differences between exhibitions presenting collections as ‘art’ or ‘culture’ are consequential, insofar as they tend to imply particular self-understandings of anthropological museums. They affect how and what is put on display; either they represent, reconstruct, or explain ‘culture’ through ‘context’ – and thus mobilise a “translation of difference” (Lidchi 1997: 171) – or they value objects as ‘art’. This occurs not seldom against the backdrop of implicit Western aesthetic assumptions and market criteria for defining art, both of which serve to ‘elevate’ anthropological collections into particular canons. As Haidy Geismar argues,

[t]he legacies of modernism still continue to inflect the emergent practices of contemporary artists in ethnographic collections, who use art as a vehicle for overriding other categories and values surrounding the objects on display (2015: 184).

Exhibitions in the history of the love-hate relationship between art and anthropology, and their critical reception, pay witness to this deeply engrained, unresolvable, and strangely resilient modernist conflict across the entire twentieth century. Among the nodes in this genealogy, we count landmark exhibitions (as discussed, for instance, in the series *Exhibition Histories* by Afterall Books), as well as avant-garde movements (such as Surrealism) and their relation to anthropology and colonialism, manifested for example in the editorial project *Documents* (1929-1931). Central for us are also long-term institutional practices and reflexivity, like those of Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel, documenta, and Berlin’s HKW. They include particular cases and debates, like the international reception of the ways anthropological collections were restructured in France, which led to opening in

2006 of the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac (see Clifford 2007; Price 2007; Shelton 2009). Across all these, the tracing of independent curatorial practice in the field of contemporary art and its trans-national institutional inscriptions form a central part of this book's backbone. The recurrent concern for disciplinary and epistemological sovereignty in the fields of art and culture points us instead to the generative promiscuity of a *trans*-position.

Contemporary art has long been a central field in which such trans-positions across art and anthropology have been posited and contested. As Marcus and Myers put it, "(b)y virtue of cross-cultural training (...), most anthropologists encounter the category of 'art', internal to our own culture, with a suspicion and a sense of its strangeness", while they themselves tend to "simplify the complex internal dynamics of conflict within art worlds over the issue of autonomy (...) and modern art's own internal 'assault on tradition'" (1995: 6). In the same volume, Hal Foster notes that "advanced art on the left" since the 1990s has adopted a "quasi-anthropological model", struggling to grasp alterity and the "social and cultural other" (1995: 302). Okwui Enwezor reframed the relation between the artistic, the curatorial, and the ethnographic through the lens of appropriation, distance, and proximity (2012); a relation historically grounded in the unfolding of cultural anthropology's ties to modern art and aesthetics (Chakkalalakal 2019; Harney and Phillips 2019). Roger Sansi (2015) traced the canonisation of 'the ethnographic turn' in relational art around the turn of the last century, focusing on the emergence and prevalence of notions of gift and exchange since the Situationists and Duchamp's role in modern art in the mid-twentieth century (see also Rutten et al. 2013; Sansi and Strathern 2016). Sansi's idea of a post-relational anthropology brings into conversation the long-standing modern – and then more contemporary – transgressions and rebuilding of both the autonomy of art and anthropology (Canclini 2014). In his account of the intense proximity between and even assimilation of artistic and anthropological practices, he speculates whether "anthropology, like art, will disappear as a discipline, along with its experts, and (...) would become just one of the things that everyone can do in their daily life – as, in fact, it has always been" (Sansi 2015: 163).

The observations of this book are amplified by a particular historical moment with paradoxical consequences for the public role of anthropology. While Europe is facing renewed nationalist populisms that partly respond to perceived threats from migration and globalisation, ever more institutions – cultural and political – are calling for the diversification of its staff, publics, and programmes (Mignolo 2009; Ahmed 2012; Partridge and Chin 2019). At the same time, we witness the return of neo-nativist arguments

about threatened indigenous cultures in the Euro-American West among predominantly white nationalist movements (Beliso-De Jesús and Pierre 2019; Mazzarella 2019). In Europe, this has prompted public debate about the role of identity and culture, along with its physical borders and political limits, as well as nationalist centring and cosmopolitan decentering (Römhild 2017; Adam et al. 2019; Bock and Macdonald 2019). It would thus appear as if anthropological understandings of the complexity and representation of human difference and diversity, articulated in both extremes of globalisation and nationalisation, diversity and racism, could be more relevant than ever. Curiously, however, European anthropological institutes and museums do not act as the principal sites for offering publicly consequential and broadly received ways of addressing the above issues, prompting us to ask where and how they are negotiated.

One reason for this paradoxical moment is that anthropology has for some time occupied an ambivalent position: at once associated with colonial complicity and the problematic invention of human difference, as well as with post-colonial reckonings and the critical nuancing of how human difference is constituted and mobilised. As Sherry Ortner put it, “[i]t is hard to overstate the degree to which the colonial framework has reshaped the way anthropology relates to the world today” (2016: 51). How, then, does colonialism reappear in the present, as subject of critical and historical discourse and as material culture? To what extent does an engagement with the legacies of the European colonial project become a pathway to challenge institutions, discourses, and hierarchies of anthropological museums, anthropological practice, and the field of contemporary art today? To what degree does this challenge, as articulated most prominently in re-readings and new generations of post-colonial theory, offer ways to rethink and reshape anthropological museums and practice? Anthropology’s different iterations and ties to notions like *Volk*, *Heimat*, *race*, and *ethnos* are underlining its difficulties to situate itself publicly, testified to by the renamings of museums, professional associations, and departments linked to anthropology across Europe (see, e.g., Pagani 2013; Macdonald 2016; Vermeulen 2018). As such, the *critique* and *negotiation* of anthropology are politically consequential, even more so when its patterns or logics are challenged.

Argument: The trans-anthropological

The problematisation of anthropology beyond itself describes contexts and modes of research that turn anthropology into a subject of inquiry, yet also

includes those that mobilise anthropological modes of inquiry themselves. Our wording ‘across anthropology’ signals this type of movement. Working through different ways of tackling the above questions in our own research, we came to use the term “trans-anthropological”. Trans-anthropological, for us, means the frictions and dynamics that arise when people are grappling with the where, what, and how of anthropology. It also encompasses the ways in which anthropological knowledge is produced, analysed, and presented – its styles of authorship, universality, and authority – as well as the *problematization* of what falls within the legitimate remit of its subjects and objects of analysis. It speaks, thus, to the contestation and rethinking of the institutions – predominantly museums, collections, archives, and university institutes or departments – associated with anthropology. In some ways, the grappling with what constitutes anthropology, and the calling into question of its core methods, theories, and epistemologies, is itself most firmly embedded within the academic tradition of the discipline itself. It is then no longer counterintuitive to see crisis and critique of anthropology as signs of vitality, perhaps even of unexpected and fundamental innovation.

With this book, we chart a relational – rather than temporal – transformation, in which the ‘trans’ in trans-anthropological describes an uneasy encounter with critique against anthropological institutions, practices, and knowledge. ‘Trans’ means through, across, and beyond, but fundamentally it avoids an either-or dichotomy. Trans-gender and trans-cultural, for instance, do not deny the existence or association with particular identities but express a discomfort to processes of stabilisation and fixation. In the same vein, we want to highlight the meaning of the hyphen (“-”) between “trans” and “anthropological” as it underlines the uncertain *relation* between these two terms; an uncertainty that the debates in this book unravel, analyse, and themselves provoke.

Echoing the signification of “post” in “post-colonial” as the ongoing reverberations of the graspable legacies of the colonial today, we underline how contestations of anthropology’s past continue to shape anthropology in the present (see Hall 1995; Trouillot 2003). Anthropology’s own “difficult heritage” thus renders a “positive, self-affirming contemporary identity” in a way “contested and awkward” (Macdonald 2009: 1). Just as ‘post-colonial’ neither ignores the evident changes and divergent temporalities of different colonial projects nor declares the end of colonialism per se – and thus exceeds a temporal meaning – we seek to capture the persistent ambivalence and unsettling of anthropology in a move not just against itself but also towards a ‘beyond’, as Homi Bhabha put it (1994: 1–2). The rejection of modernism in post-modernism, likewise, is not possible without a continual reckoning

with modernism and its own genealogies – in nuanced difference yet not altogether unrelated to the complex temporal reflections in analyses of post-socialism (see Derrida 1994 [1993]; Yurchak 2006; Ssorin-Chaikov 2017).

What makes these frictions and dynamics trans-anthropological is that, while they fundamentally concern anthropology, they do not necessarily take place within anthropology, that is, within the professional confines of conferences, journals, departments, and museums associated with the discipline. Implicit in this observation is the question whether anthropology can only take place within anthropology, or if this is not a form of disciplinary narcissism (Gordon 2007). For this reason, we chose the *adjectival* form trans-anthropological, offering a term that works as a tool in relation to fields, practices, moments, or modes of thinking that problematise anthropology. This is, crucially, also an ethnographic observation. In conversations with the interlocutors of this book, they often came to and engaged with anthropology in a transversal way, that is, variously rejecting and embracing yet altogether invoking it.

Using the term “trans-anthropological”, we do not wish to return to but, rather, to build on the many twists and turns of the crisis of representation in anthropology, crystallised around the *Writing Culture* turn (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Behar and Gordon 1995; Clifford 1999), along with its repercussions on museums (Karp and Lavine 1991; Macdonald 1997, 1998) and continuations of this unresolved albeit generative debate within anthropology as it unfolds around more recent calls for its decanonisation, decolonisation, and diversification (Allen and Jobson 2016; McGranahan and Rizvi 2016; Sanchez 2018).¹

The kind of anthropology we propose between the lines would take these trans-anthropological reflections seriously as *part* of the movement of anthropology. Our argument is not about redrawing the boundaries of where anthropology begins and ends, or what counts as anthropological research, but to observe and think through the possibilities of multiplying and diversifying the *modi* and *loci* of anthropological practice. This has consequences, not least for the ways in which we engage with expertise and knowledge production of and with our interlocutors in fieldwork (see also Blanes et al. 2016; Chua and Mathur 2018; Schneider 2015).

At present, however, it remains indeed unclear in which direction, for instance, the critique levelled against anthropological museums from the field of contemporary art and from activist initiatives calling for their decolonisation will drive these institutions and the discipline of anthropology. The uncertainty we look at and consider here is thus not to be understood as a confusion or a chaos but, rather, as an ‘emergence’ of different, as yet

unknown, possibilities and “phenomena that can only be partially explained or comprehended by previous modes of analysis or existing practices” (Rabinow 2007: 4). This is why we open this inquiry from a range of contemporary standpoints, seeking dialogue with artists, curators, and scholars precisely to update these modes of analysis. We are interested in scoping and analysing beyond and across anthropology in order to rethink what these modes could be – not simply challenging but also adding to, enriching, and providing grounding for a different trajectory ahead.

Fieldwork: Berlin convergences

As our point of departure we take fieldwork conducted at a time of significant transformations in Berlin’s museum landscape as well as in contemporary art and curatorial practice. In our research, we have witnessed the emergence and consolidation of what we call trans-anthropological *fields*, marked by a multiplication of diverse interdisciplinary voices (activist, artistic, curatorial, scholarly), locations (museums, biennales, project spaces, galleries), and means (exhibitions, curatorial concepts, artistic projects, demonstrations) by which the where, what, and how of anthropology is disputed and negotiated. These observations draw on ethnographic research in Berlin and on Germany yet additionally offer a broader conceptual toolkit. Influenced by the overlapping of concerns of our interlocutors and the research exchanges that led to this book, we tried to make sense of these various developments that took place in Berlin – and indeed their reverberations in Europe.

One recurrent focal point in our research is the contested Humboldt Forum in the reconstructed Prussian-era City Palace on Berlin’s Museum Island. Exhibiting parts of the vast collections of the Ethnological Museum and the Museum of Asian Art, among others, and erected on the former site of the GDR’s Palace of the Republic, the project has since its official parliamentary confirmation in 2002 become a national matter of public concern (Binder 2009). It has been a “catalyst for critique” (Bose 2017b: 127) for simmering conflicts and frictions regarding nationalism and religious identity, migration and cosmopolitanism, racism and discrimination, urban politics, as well as Germany’s public reckoning with its difficult imperial, socialist, and fascist pasts (see Mandel 2008; Bach 2017; Thiemeyer 2019). Germany’s colonial project took centre stage in this context through the hesitant unravelling of its entanglements with Berlin’s museum collections (Zimmerman 2001; Penny 2002; Penny and Bunzl 2003; Perraudin and Zimmerer 2011; Eckert and Wirz 2013).

Particularly since the start of the City Palace's architectural reconstruction in June 2013, this process focalised previously active and variously repressed, marginalised, and ignored positions concerning the memory of German colonialism. Central to understanding the genealogy of this process is the formation of *No Humboldt 21!*, a coalition which assembled a broad range of activist, artistic, academic, and civic initiatives. It was formally announced through the publication of what they called the *Moratorium für das Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss* (*Stop the planned construction of the Humboldt Forum in the Berlin Palace*). The organisations it brought together – among others, *Berlin postkolonial*, *Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland*, *AfricAvenir*, *AFROTAK TV CyberNomads*, *Artefakte // anti-humboldt*, and the *Tanzania-Network* – had, in some cases for more than a decade, been making requests for the recognition and reparation of German colonial injustice (Bauche 2010). These included calls for the repatriation of human remains, the restitution of museum collections acquired during colonial contexts, the renaming of city streets commemorating colonial officials, and, in a broader sense, a debate about race and Germany as a post-colonial nation (see Sow 2008, Ha 2014; Jethro 2018; Aydemir and Yaghoobifarah 2019).

The Humboldt Forum became a cipher for Berlin and Germany's investment in rehabilitating a nostalgic Prussian past, its reconstruction alone being predicted at a total sum of 644.2 million euros in November 2019, according to the German government (Schönball 2019; Bundesregierung 2019). The Forum continues to attract media commentaries, scholarly analyses, as well as public rumours, tabloid attention, and even ridicule. As the often overturned plans about the constituent institutions and teams were gradually announced to the public between 2015 and 2020, the project garnered more consistent and critical attention in regard of its content and conceptual direction – or, rather, its lack thereof. For example, the 2015 nomination of the former head of the British Museum, Neil McGregor, as founding co-director of the Humboldt Forum, was first enthusiastically welcomed. Now, though, it has disappeared from any running commentary, and other events have since set the tone for a fast-paced, and predominantly national, debate on the Humboldt Forum and Germany's colonial heritage. Much-cited and discussed as a turning point in this genealogy of events, art historian Bénédicte Savoy's quitting of the Forum's advisory board in the summer of 2017 and her public denunciation of the project's ignorance regarding the colonial provenance of its collections (Häntzschel 2017) further facilitated the shift in focus towards the colonial ties and provenance of Berlin museum and heritage institutions and collections.

Noticeably, these shifts did not bring any *new* questions to the table. Rather, they changed the means, locations, and publics by which Germany's

colonial past was addressed and received. No longer primarily problematised in vain by marginalised initiatives, they were now transferred onto the front-pages and *feuilletons* of major national newspapers. A new context emerged in which negotiations of German colonialism – and therefore also and in particular collections and institutions associated with anthropology – became subjects of renewed and broader concern.

Conducting research on curatorial practices, museums, and contemporary art in this context between 2013 and the time of writing through 2020, inevitably meant observing convergences between these fields. Coinciding with the start of construction for the Humboldt Forum and the organised formation of resistance to it by *No Humboldt 2!*, Margareta began fieldwork in the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, working closely with staff in its Africa Department. Amid the museum's preparation for the move of its exhibitions into the Humboldt Forum, she looked at how museum staff were grappling with the museum's own colonial entanglements and the relevance of anthropology in this debate more broadly. During this time, she also took part in and accompanied the realisation of the Humboldt Lab Dahlem (2012-2015), a project initiated and funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation, designed to 'experiment' with anthropological exhibition-making, integrating artistic, and other collaborative practices beyond the museum. This process raised questions about self-reflexive anthropological framing and, among other things, the "trouble with the ethnological" (Macdonald 2015). Margareta's inquiry served to foreground the question of how the engagement with the collections and their entangled histories has co-produced the critique from *within* the institution – and where it has possibly failed to do so (Boast 2011, Deliss and Keck 2016; Macdonald, Lidchi, and Oswald 2017). Where have unexpected coalitions between the museums and critique appeared? How is post-colonial critique appropriated as an institution's "strategic reflexivity" (Bose 2017a)? The anticipated opening of the Humboldt Forum, along with the closure of the Ethnologisches Museum Berlin in its current location in 2016, prompted more than mere conversation. Rather, it incited further artistic and curatorial interrogations of anthropology and anthropological museums.

Until this point in 2013, these dynamics and frictions around Berlin's museum and heritage landscape were both entangled with, yet even more curiously detached from, the city's internationally recognised field of contemporary art. The affordances of the emerging context we sketched above meant that these fields coalesced around more closely interrelated, or more *relatable*, areas of problematisation. It was not that new problems as such emerged, but that the conditions for speaking about and the nodes at which

they intersected became more recognisable. Therefore, when the coalition *No Humboldt 2!* organised a major conference and book launch on *Prussian Colonial Heritage* (No Humboldt 2! 2018) and, later on, hosted the first German discussion of Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr's restitution report (2018), these events already took place against the backdrop of a set of shared reference points.

This was the focus and entry point for Jonas' fieldwork. He accompanied several curators and the spaces they directed, looking at how they crafted their own forms of thinking and practising a troubling of these colonial legacies, constructions of alterity, and different forms of knowledge production beyond the academy. Most of his time was spent with Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Antonia Alampi, and Elena Agudio at SAVVY Contemporary; Alya Sebti at the ifa-gallery (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen); and Solvej Ovesen at the district gallery of Berlin-Wedding. These curators enacted what we seek to describe with transversal agency, staging their proposals, critique, and imaginations in curatorial concepts. This agency found expression in pamphlets on the Humboldt Forum (Ndikung 2018) and in exhibitions and conferences, such as *Wir sind alle Berliner. 1884 – 2014* (SAVVY and ICI, 2015). It was similarly made manifest in the long-term trans-disciplinary projects *Untie to tie: On Colonial Legacies and Contemporary Societies* (2017-2020, ifa gallery, see Tinius 2020c), in colonial archives, and in critiques of hegemonic cultural production (Tinius 2020a).

These curatorial practices were recursive, enacting models for thinking about the European colonial project and anthropology that had been pioneered by curatorial precursors since the 1990s. Primarily, however, this more recent wave of curatorial work since the 2010s that we investigated in our fieldwork thickened the terrain of inquiry and contributed to catapulting these conversations onto a national and international stage. They brought artworks and projects on restitution, contested collections and museums, and colonial legacies – not to mention, notably, their relationships with anthropology – into major exhibitions, including documenta14 (2017), the Berlin Biennale (2018), and Dak'Art Biennale (2018). These also added to the curators' international reputation as agitators, critics, and commentators.

It is easy to overstate the importance of curatorial work at a time when its celebration as a political remedy has almost turned in on itself. We find it important nonetheless to begin at least to contribute to connecting the dots of small-scale organisations and independent curators in the fields we try to conjure from Berlin, even if the lines between 'independent' and 'state-funded' are fuzzy. Organisations styled as 'small', 'independent', or 'project-based' are for the most reliant on public funding. They are thus hardly

removed from public evaluation and accountability, juries, and financing – and certainly not ‘independent’ from the politics and patronage of city and state administrations. Their entanglement with exhibitions and discursive programmes that translate British, US, and French theoretical and artistic positions on Empire and the colonial condition is visible in the archives particularly of the documenta, the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, or the daad-galerie’s official artist-in-residency programme, which are direct organs of the German government’s cultural policy and politics. These should be considered as intellectual and curatorial precursors of celebrated articulations of Germany’s reckonings with its colonial past, such as *German Colonialism. Fragments Past and Present* (2016-2017), a landmark exhibition in the *German Historical Museum*, widely received and visited.

Our studies in and of Berlin were enhanced by comparative perspectives. We conducted research in the context of the multi-sited project *Making Differences: Transforming Museums and Heritage in the Twenty-First Century*, funded as part of Sharon Macdonald’s Alexander von Humboldt Professorship at the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) of the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.² While the larger project comprised fourteen scholars working across Berlin’s heritage, art, and museum institutions, we focused, together with Larissa Förster, on the thematic area *Transforming the Ethnographic*. Therein, we developed questions on collections, curating, and colonialism, including the very understanding of ‘ethnographic’, ‘ethnological’, ‘anthropological’, and related terminologies and distinctions. The conversations across our fieldsites sparked intense discussions, for instance, on the convergences of provenance and the role of policy work and the media (see CARMAH 2017; Förster 2018; Förster, et al. 2018; Förster and Bose 2018); on contemporary art, diversity, and experimental forms of curatorial collaborations (Tinius 2018a, 2018b, 2020b); and on the contested moves of collections and the construction of ‘Africa’ in the Humboldt Forum (Oswald and Rodatus 2017; Oswald 2018).

The convergences that we analysed in our research, and which this book takes as its point of departure, capture how a loosely related albeit pioneering set of institutions, initiatives, and actors across the fields of contemporary art, curating, activism, and museums had begun creating a recognisable and translatable set of means and reference points for grappling with anthropology in its imbroglio with German colonial legacies. Gradually and cumulatively, these became near impossible to ignore for policy makers and directors of major cultural institutions at a federal and indeed European level. The current transformations of anthropological museums, contemporary art, and post-colonial critique and activism have arguably become the most

productive and vibrant trans-anthropological fields – and the ones most closely associated with our fieldwork. They articulate each other and inter-relate, while having distinct genealogies and historicities. The next section highlights these convergent discursive terrains and institutional constellations, offering a route through the constituent chapters and conversations. They are meant as initiations to a way of seeing relations rather than conclusive statements and, in the process, hope to open future inquiries and problems.

Expanding: The contributions

Across these fields and discursive terrains, curators have acted as particularly noticeable translators, initiators, researchers, theorists, activists, and transversal agents, whose work has generated and catalysed the core conundrum of this book. Thinking against, with, and across anthropology, our conversations during fieldwork and otherwise inspired the argument to think trans-anthropologically. Hence, we accorded them positions across, in-between, around, and ‘nearby’ the other contributions by university-based scholars, many of whom are working themselves as curators, thus complicating these distinctions and recursive moves of the expanded curatorial field even further (see Sansi 2020; Tinius and Macdonald 2020).

In what follows, we have devised a varied and varying set of interviews and position pieces with individuals and collectives in these various roles. These contributions show how we consider curatorial practice to be transversally agentic across the three main sections of this book: museums, contemporary art, and colonialism. We consider these to be fields that both challenge anthropology and mobilise it in an especially generative way. Notably, however, we conducted interviews with curators whose positionality has come to be known under the unsatisfactory umbrella label of ‘independent’. Their emergent significance, particularly since the beginning of the 1990s, owes much to the multiplication of biennials around the world, substantiated by the proliferation of reflexive discourses on curating itself and promoted not least by the accompanying professionalising and institutionalising of such ‘independent’ curatorial expertise. Even so, this interstitial role comes with a price: the pressure for conceptual innovation; work conditions that are project-based and, thus, temporally limited and bureaucratically saturated; competition among peers and exposure to the ambivalent economy of self-promotion. In all, such circumstances create, for some, a predicament of insecurity and precarity.

The format of the interview *by, with, and among* curators has become part and parcel of this distribution of the curatorial. Published conversations established themselves, alongside the curatorial concept, as perhaps the most prominent form of curatorial theorising. In this volume, we sought to pry open the format and generation of theory by engaging in an explicit conversation about understandings of curatorial labour, anthropology, museums, and colonial legacies. Since many contributions address curatorial work as the subject of inquiry, albeit often in collaborative manner, the conversations we conducted together over the course of the two years 2018/19 operate refractorily, pick up echoes, and set impulses throughout the entire book.

Below we discuss the ways in which these conversations take us into anthropological institutions and also beyond them, offering a series of practice-based reflections on core anthropological themes as they are addressed in curatorial practice and in the field of contemporary art. The curatorial positions articulate in a multitude of ways post-colonial critiques (*of* anthropology) and contemporary exhibition making (*across and with* anthropology) on the trans-disciplinary ecologies of knowledge production, indigeneity, objecthood and agency, restitution and ownership, ethnography and fieldwork, and the legacies of the colonial project in Europe. The contributions in this volume complement the interviews with in-depth analyses of particular case studies of institutional transformations, curatorial collaborations, exhibitions, activist mobilisations, and archival inquiries in and across different national contexts and their entanglement in the global colonial oecumene.

It is quite the undertaking to summarise twenty-one contributions. In this section, we trace the actions and reactions across anthropology of the chapters and conversations. In their own ways, they expand the argument of this book, each responding to our grappling with the core questions we posed to ourselves: What is anthropology? Where and how is it negotiated? What new understandings of anthropology emerge from beyond the classical fields, practices, institutions, and *modi* of anthropological knowledge production?

In 'Museums and the Savage Sublime', anthropologist **Arjun Appadurai** crystallises a fundamental charge against anthropological museums, namely that they "became sites of deep misunderstanding of both the European self and the colonised, objectified other." For him, the fundamental contradiction facing museums is whether they "can be a space for the sacred, the scientific, the educational, and the spectacular, all at the same time." Anthropologist **Sharon Macdonald** contextualises these conundrums across transformations of (anthropological) museums and across heritage practices in Berlin and Europe today. Focusing on her research project, from which this volume emerged, she puts forward an ethnographic analysis of the role

of ‘difference-making’. Her assembly work speaks across and with institutions that enact themselves as key sites for the articulation and formation of Europe’s past and future. In conversation with us, Wayne Modest nuances Arjun Appadurai’s challenge to the museum. As head of the Research Center of Material Culture in Leiden (NL), he invites us to think with and through the anthropological as a category in the museum. A self-proclaimed “firm believer” in the discipline, he nevertheless claims that anthropology “cannot come without the histories that it is haunted by” and form an integral part of its structure, especially within the museum. Modest sees in art practices and activism from indigenous communities the driving force for the generative critique against the museum. He imagines the trans-anthropological to mean “the distribution of a certain kind of criticality where the museum and anthropology are now articulated in a broader network of critique.”

Anthropologist Emmanuel Grimaud takes us right into a much-discussed example of what he terms an explicitly “anthropological exhibition”, namely *Persona* (2016) at the Musée du Quai Branly-Jacques Chirac. Questioning the reasoning and relations between the supposed binaries subjects and objects, human and non-human forms of existence, his analysis opens up the process of conceiving and curating the exhibition, showing how curatorial, artistic, and anthropological collaborations can act beyond exoticisation and yet within a major public institution. In our conversation with Anne-Christine Taylor, former director of the Quai Branly’s research department and co-curator of *Persona* (with Emmanuel Grimaud), she offers a synoptic view on the involvement of indigenous curatorial positions and restitution claims within state museums and an ever-evolving anthropological landscape. She relates the routes and roots of many European collections with communities of implication in Latin America and the Pacific. Speaking from and for established national research and heritage contexts in Paris, she takes apart the different elements of what curating means as a translating and transversal practice, “mediating between different communities of interest”. Anthropologist Margareta von Oswald conducted fieldwork in Berlin’s Ethnologisches Museum in a phase that saw the preparation of its collections for their move into the Humboldt Forum against the backdrop of calls for the decolonisation of museum infrastructures. In her contribution, she draws on in-depth analysis of documentation and data practices through an ethnography of provenance research on colonial-era objects. Her research highlights the complex negotiations of anthropology’s colonial legacies and epistemologies as they are materialised within museum categories, ordering mechanisms, and ways of knowing collections. In our conversation with curator and cultural historian Clémentine Deliss, she takes issue with

anthropological museum epistemologies and infrastructures, reflecting on her experimental approaches to making and theorising exhibitions. In doing so, she puts forward a position “against the mono-disciplinarity of ethnographic museums”. As the former director of the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt, she pioneered a critical engagement that sought to go beyond received disciplinary framings of anthropology, while her central premise of remediation liaised her museum work closely with self-reflexive anthropological theorising. Arguing for a reconceptualisation of the museum-university, she urges rethinking the relationship between the university, the museum, and the art school – three “central civic institutions” – through “the question of decolonial methodologies”.

Drawing on fieldwork among women activists, sociologist Sarah Demart addresses what she frames as extraction politics in the context of the renovation of the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in Tervuren and Belgian post-colonial reckonings. In chronicling the activist calls for and the unfolding of restitution and ownership claims in Belgium, she problematises the appropriation of Afro-descendant identity politics in the context of contemporary museum and heritage processes. In our conversation with curator, art historian, and educator **Toma Muteba Luntumbe**, he addresses his own curatorial prodding into colonial institutional entanglements in Belgium through the practices and developments in contemporary art. His exhibition *ExitCongoMuseum!* (2001, with Boris Wastiau) at the RMCA offers a pioneering example of the “ideological decoding of its collection”. He affirms his insider critique and long-standing engagement with the museum, though he refuses to consider it as “post-colonial” since its re-opening in 2018, or to speak of Belgian “decolonisation”. He argues nonetheless for anthropology as “necessary to analyse the most urgent phenomena of our contemporaneity”. Thickening the perspectives from within curatorial and ethnographic work across a number of Belgian and French exhibition contexts, including the RMCA, philosopher **Anna Seiderer** and artist **Alexander Schellow** suggest a particular toolkit of methods for reframing colonial film archives. They discuss how moving between institutional contexts reshuffles ways of looking at colonial images, while analysing cognitive responses and visual perceptions to these through estrangement. In doing so, they problematise their “incapacity” and “desire to dissociate the images from their colonial framework”.

The Paris-based curatorial collective *le peuple qui manque* draws on literature, philosophy, anthropology, and film to propose an “ontological expansion of art”. They put forward curating as interstitial and transversal “between epistemological regimes”, whose politics is first and foremost one

of translation. Considering anthropology as the “structuring base for thinking about the space of art”, the collective wishes to shift towards thinking of the history of this discipline as “a poetic, formal, and political history of the configurations of enunciations”. Echoing Grimaud’s reflection on the making of an exhibition, anthropologist **Arnd Schneider** ponders the ambivalences and serendipities of art-anthropology interventions in a former colonial museum in Rome. He analyses the difficulties of working through the legacies of ethnographic collections amassed during Italy’s colonial enterprise in Libya. Engaging in oral history, as well as in artistic performances as part of an exhibition he co-curated, his contribution highlights in particular the violent colonial traces inscribed in plaster casts of the collection, in addition to the ambiguities of revisiting the “colonial amnesia” in Italy today.

The conversation with curator and writer **Natasha Ginwala** unravels the idea of the curator as a simple translator and reacts *against* our prompts in the interview. For her, curatorial practice should offer forms of “productive refusal” and be a “dissonant agent”. This occurs at the kinds of intersection between curating and anthropology, where we find a “non-conformative kinship of academia and artistic thinking” that allows for “a mutation of forms”. She traces her positionality among a generation of curators, who “have not waited for institutions to reset their agenda towards a ‘non-western’ compass, or to craft a more inclusive dialogue”. Anthropologist **Jonas Tinius** conducted fieldwork among curators of this generation who are crafting such kinds of reorientations in exhibition practice. Looking at what he terms “district curating”, he describes two longer-term curatorial exhibition and research programmes implemented in Berlin’s district-gallery of Wedding, called *Unsustainable Privileges* and *Post-Otherness Wedding*. These programmes constituted public efforts to transform the gallery, but they created tensions and ambivalences about what it means to curate a contemporary art gallery in and of a district stereotyped as working-class. Each exhibition took the gallery’s physical location in the district as a starting point, and investigated the “porous membranes” of the gallery thresholds, walls, and windows, initiating a difficult and oftentimes incomplete process of description, projection, and reflection on accessibility, locality, and gentrification. SAVVY Contemporary founder and artistic director **Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung**, who also co-curated the Galerie Wedding programmes, begins our conversation with a counter-question that further complicates our argument of the trans-anthropological. Asking “How do we avoid making the artistic, and in this case the curatorial, just another tool of anthropological research?”, he criticises the “audacity” and “disciplinary sovereignty” of the anthropologist to claim the authority of dealing with issues such as indigeneity, humanness, or alterity.

As curators, Ndikung claims, “we are constantly engaged – not in a negation but, rather, in a form of contradiction – with the eyes of anthropologists”, though crucially involved in a practice of “situating them as *one* among other forms of trajectories”.

Anthropologist and curator Erica Lehrer discusses her research in post-colonial, post-Holocaust Polish ethnographic collections, most notably “awkward objects” that push the frameworks of contemporary museums of national culture. Proposing the terminology of “communities of implication”, her chapter expands discussions of reimagining the museum today by refusing localised and temporal othering in discussions about restitution, repair, and redress. Describing herself as an “applied reflexive anthropologist”, curator and director of Cologne’s Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Nanette Snoep underlines the institutional and political constraints at play when implementing participatory curatorial work in European anthropological museums. Echoing conversations and practices throughout this book, she pushes artistic, anthropological, and what she calls trans-disciplinary curating to engender transformations towards and “suggestions for a post-museum”. In a personal and retrospective account, Annette Bhagwati, anthropologist and director of the Museum Rietberg in Zurich, examines the notion of cultural representation and traces its impact and genealogy throughout the history of Berlin’s Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) from the 1990s until today. Her chapter weaves together various kinds of archival traces, memories, and reflections that put centre stage the transformations of curatorial approaches in an exhibition context without collections: from geographically-bound and “representative” to “research-, process-, and topic-oriented”. As such, she highlights how the institution repeatedly questioned its own models of representing cultures, confronting itself with challenges from contemporary artistic practice and incorporating cultural critique in anthropological theorising of the time.

Educator, curator, and documenta-professor Nora Sternfeld sees the role of the curatorial subject position in the rendering “liveable” of conflicts. Underscoring her collective curatorial work with *freethought* for the *Bergen Assembly* (2016), she unfolds the neoliberal and institutional forces which trouble curatorial work. Departing from observations about the traditions of criticality in anthropology, Sternfeld raises the question of where and how agitation becomes complicit with the maintenance of existing power relations. And how, if at all, we can “align to use it to agitate?” Anthropologist Roger Sansi takes the film *Statues also die* (1953) by Alain Resnais and Chris Marker as his point of departure, in order to discuss the colonial legacies of (European) anthropology museum and their collections. In particular, he

understands these institutions as caught up in a temporal dilemma: being at the same time sites for the negotiation of contemporary identity politics and the recognition of colonial pasts, while remaining caught up in a paradoxical anachronism. “What, then, constitutes the contemporary at a time of anachronism?”, he asks, prodding at the fraught relation between contemporary art, modernism, and post-modernism to think of a possible anthropology of the contemporary.

Note

1. We also do not intend to associate the concerns articulated in this book to those revolving around *posthuman* debates on robotics and artificial intelligence (Braidotti 2013; Atanasoski and Vora 2019). In this sense, our propositions are related to but distinct from experimental methodologies and analytics, such as the “alter-anthropological” (Hage 2012: 286), where “critical anthropological thought can generate new problematics (...)”, and the “para-sitical” offered for debate by Deeb and Marcus (2011) to reflect on the creation of ethnographic situations.
2. The research that led to this piece was also funded by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation as part of the research award for Sharon Macdonald’s Alexander von Humboldt Professorship. We are grateful to CARMAH and all colleagues who contributed to making our joint research stimulating and productive. Additionally and in particular, we wish to thank Sharon Macdonald, Thomas Fillitz, and anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on our introduction.

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