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Ambivalent Pasts: Colonial History and the Theatricalities of Ethnographic Display

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An installation by contemporary Berlin-based artist Peggy Buth, known for her critique of ethnographic museums as sites of colonial knowledge, shown at the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures (Weltkulturen Museum) in 2014, presents four life-size figures of what appear at first glance to be four indigenous men standing next to one another in an otherwise empty room (fig. 1).¹ Despite being dressed slightly differently—with a selection of tribal ornaments, red and orange loincloths, and spears in the hands of only two of these figures—these are indeed, unmistakably, four times the same man: "The Warrior as Multiple," as this part of Buth's installation is called.²

The figures on display are not sculptures made by a contemporary artist; rather, they are a peculiar kind of "objet trouvé" found in the storage spaces of ethnographic museums and brought together by Buth from where they lay more or less forgotten. In the exhibition catalog accompanying Buth's art installation at the Museum of World Cultures, photographs show the dark-brown figures at the sites of their discovery: naked and without hair in wooden crates at Frankfurt and Freiburg, partly dressed and upright in St. Gallen and Burgdorf.³ Manufactured and marketed from around 1904 by a Hamburg company called Umlauff, which specialized in selling "exotic" objects, skulls and skeletons, stuffed animals, and display mannequins to collectors, impresarios, film studios, and museums across Europe, these models of an indigenous warrior are paradigmatic for the *culture of display* that pervaded ethnographic museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴ It was a culture of display marked by colonial practices of representation in which the figure of one indigenous warrior would typify a non-European culture rather than represent an individual, and where the irony that commercially produced plaster figures for display quite literally epitomized the objectification of non-Europeans, as well as their exploitation for cheap or unpaid labor, would be lost on most visitors to Victorian-era museums. Reviewing current practices of ethnographic curation, this essay explores the traces of that culture of display and asks how ethnographic museums today deal with the colonial legacy of their collections.

When speaking about a culture of display to describe museum practice around 1900, I want not only to emphasize, as in Emma Barker's use of the term, that "museums and galleries are not neutral containers offering a transparent, unmediated experience" of their exhibits.⁵ Instead, within this context, culture of display also acknowledges a turn toward the spectacular in ethnographic and natural history museums that in the 1910s became increasingly compartmentalized, separating storage, research

collection, and exhibit. As the latter's function was now mainly to educate a public through visually compelling displays, life-size figures like the indigenous warrior gained significance. They became a "stage" for ethnographic objects that could be presented on their artificial bodies, and were often put on a kind of stage themselves, as part of elaborate dioramic set designs.⁶ Against the background of decolonization and the critical reevaluation of ethnography and cultural anthropology in the latter half of the twentieth century, these stagings lost their currency and many plaster figures were relegated to storage.⁷ Both's installation at the Museum of World Cultures is a theatrical intervention that reverses this move by bringing one specific figure—in four iterations—back into the limelight as it were. In order to establish my argument, I will first describe the context of this reversal.

From Storage to Display: “The Warrior as Multiple” in Frankfurt

“The Warrior as Multiple” installation was part of a decidedly self-reflexive exhibition titled *Foreign Exchange (or the Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger)*. Curated by Clémentine Deliss, the then-director of the Museum of World Cultures, and Yvette Mutumba, who at the time was responsible for the museum's African collection, *Foreign Exchange* focused on the relationship between global trade and the production of ethnographic knowledge.⁸ The exhibition thus consciously reflects on its site—the Frankfurt museum itself and its history as an institution that benefited from colonial trade, and regarded the exploration of new trade routes as one of the aims of ethnography. Speaking in 1904 at the opening of the museum, its founding director Bernhard Hagen (1853–1919) claimed that the “new science of ethnography,” as epitomized by his institution, hoped to fill the gaps left by “the geography of trade,” partly in order to expand the latter.⁹ *Foreign Exchange*, then, can be thought of as a critical engagement with an ambivalent past in which museums were important nodes in networks of (European) “mastery” over (non-European) cultures.

Here and throughout, my use of the term *ambivalent* is informed by its psychoanalytic usage in which it refers to the simultaneous coexistence of (at least) two conflicting desires or attitudes toward an object.¹⁰ In contrast to the looser term *ambiguity*, which simply indicates that, say, a concept or historical situation is not unambiguous in its meaning or interpretation, ambivalence insists on an impossibility of choosing one attitude (meaning, interpretation, idea, and so on) over the other. For instance, in psychoanalysis, an ambivalent patient would not feel love *or* hate toward someone, but actually love *and* hate at the same time. Likewise, the *Foreign Exchange* exhibition does not choose between two pasts: it simultaneously insists on the one hand on ethnography's implication in the colonial exploitation of people and resources outside Europe; and on the other on its contribution to knowledge in the form of a potentially positive understanding of cultural difference.

As the works of Jacques Derrida and Homi Bhabha make clear, such simultaneity means that in ambivalence, different categories can no longer be easily separated, but necessarily "haunt" one another.¹¹ With regard to *Foreign Exchange*, this produces what I call an "ambivalent past." Colonialism/trade and knowledge/understanding are not simply binary oppositions, both sides of which relating to the history of the museum, but the colonial project is already part of the production of knowledge and vice versa. In my reading of ethnographic museums, not only the pasts that they refer to, and that they carry with them as their collections, are ambivalent; rather, I analyze the different ambivalences of their curatorial strategies and forms of display with regard to how their conflicting meanings are used to engage with colonial pasts.

Like the exhibition for which it was commissioned, Buth's work speaks directly to the link between ethnography and commerce. The placement of the warrior figures and the history they allude to visualize the serialized fabrication and commodification of the non-European Other as ethnographic object. Before the opening of the exhibition as such, Buth also undertook a series of lecture-performances in different spaces of the museum and its archives in which she restaged parts of Hagen's speech about the value of ethnography for trade. Throughout the exhibition, video recordings of these performances were projected on the walls of the mostly empty space that presented "The Warrior as Multiple" installation.

At the Frankfurt museum, this engagement with a specific aspect of the museum's history was directed toward the future as much as the past. For Deliss, who describes herself as working "on the borders of anthropology as a curator of contemporary art," the collections of ethnographic museums "appear anachronistic within today's geopolitical context."¹² Thus according to her, "these museums face a crisis, which cannot be resolved by display and presentation alone."¹³ Under her directorship of the museum from 2010 to 2015, Deliss cleared its exhibition space and invited artists like Buth to creatively engage with what is usually hidden "backstage"—for example, the storage spaces in which Buth found the first of her warrior figures. The yearlong exhibitions that were assembled from the artists' discoveries and creations, most notably *Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum* (2012) and *Foreign Exchange*, attempted to create what Deliss conceives of as a "post-ethnographic" space.¹⁴

From this perspective, the transfer of the figures from storage to display appears as an inherently critical practice, because it is understood to change the nature of display itself. Rather than presenting these plaster figures as specimens of a foreign culture, as was their function at the beginning of the twentieth century, or simply repurposing them as art, the concept of *post-ethnographic* dictates that their return would help change the discourse of the museum. Buth, who like Deliss often works at the border of anthropology and contemporary art, describes this as a move from "questions around representations

of the Other" to "questions around processing and portraying the *history* of such representations."¹⁵ While I am sympathetic toward such a project, I do not think, and probably neither do Deliss and Buth, that placing the warrior back on display can be reduced to a critical, self-reflexive gesture. In what follows I analyze what I understand as a fundamental ambivalence of this move from storage to display and of the figure itself—an ambivalence inscribed, I would argue, into its very multiplicity. The indigenous warrior figure remains and becomes an ethnographic object, artwork, and post-ethnographic gesture. Placing it on display draws attention to the history and modes of colonial/ethnographic representation, but it also reinscribes, in the public sphere of the museum, a colonial mode of constituting and exhibiting the "non-European Other."

I take this as a starting point to think through the notion of ambivalence when dealing with the legacies of European colonialism and how it informs contemporary approaches to the curation of ethnographic collections. What does it mean for the warrior figure to reappear in this contested space? Can its presence be reduced to a critical meta-commentary on museum history and ethnography's construction of the Other; and if so, does it implicitly indicate a better present and future, by way of standing in for the post-ethnographic museum and what has been called a shift from "colonial exhibition to intercultural dialogue"?¹⁶ Or does the presence of the figure reinstate the imperial gaze through which and for which it was once constructed; and if so, is this a criticism of today's ethnographic culture of display or is it complicit with continuing instances of colonialism and racism?

What I propose is neither a "right" answer to these questions nor by extension a right way of dealing with both past and present of ethnographic collections. Rather, I am interested in the ambivalent pasts embedded within the forms of their representation and staging. Offering a critical survey of curatorial strategies used by contemporary ethnographic museums as a way of dealing with the colonial legacies of collection and exhibition, I will argue that the promise of intercultural dialogue and post-ethnographic experiments run the risk of "working through" (in the Freudian sense explained below) and thus potentially setting aside colonial history. Approaching this issue from the perspective of theatre and performance studies, my focus is on the different theatricalities of display at work in these curatorial strategies and how they might either become complicit in or resist such an erasure.¹⁷

Theatricalities of Display: A Critical Framework

Writing in 1992 about the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City, cultural critic Mieke Bal described the renowned institution as "a product of colonialism in a postcolonial era."¹⁸ Founded in 1869, AMNH possesses an important, extraordinary collection of dioramas, which it commenced exhibiting during the 1910s. Most display taxidermic animals in naturalistic settings, but

some also show groups of indigenous peoples—for example, the East African Pokot. Within the larger framework of the museum, the collocation of human and animal is motivated by its dual mission to present nature and non-European (including Native American) cultures.¹⁹ I am using Bal's critical analysis of AMNH that, even though it was written more than twenty years ago, still holds true for the museum in its current state to develop a critical framework for analyzing theatricalities of display.²⁰ I do so by comparing AMNH, and Bal's reading of it, to two other museums that use dioramas as prime features of their permanent exhibitions: the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center in Connecticut, and the Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics) in Amsterdam. Founded as the Koloniaal Museum in 1864, the latter's historical mission is closer to the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures than to AMNH. Whereas AMNH was heavily influenced by the nature movement in the United States and propagated a view of nature (including indigenous people) as unspoiled by civilization and capitalism,²¹ the Tropenmuseum, like the Frankfurt institution, was a product of trade and actively sought to foster it in the colonies.²² The Mashantucket Pequot Museum is different from these institutions and from any others mentioned in this essay because it is not a product of the nineteenth century. Founded in the late 1990s by a Native American nation, it attempts to write indigenous history from its own perspective rather than that of the colonizers, but it does so by the uses of dioramas. It is also important to note that each of these institutions belongs within a distinctive geopolitical context: AMNH and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum are located within the history of settler colonialism, whereas for their European counterparts, colonialism meant a very different relationship between the alleged periphery and center.

At AMNH the collocation of humans and animals is a clear indicator of the colonial ideology informing its original mission, because such a museum layout claims that indigenous peoples are closer to the "natural" than to the "civilized" world. This colonial legacy is at the core of what Bal analyzed as a conflict between the museum's "meta-function" and its "object-function."²³ On the one hand, to preserve the dioramas and continue the representation of non-Western cultures in a building dedicated to natural history potentially renders the museum a "display of its own status and history," indicating its "complicity with practices of domination" and "nineteenth-century collecting as being rooted in the colonial conquest of foreignness."²⁴ On the other, the existence of such an institution is justified by its object-function, which is to disseminate knowledge—an "educational project" that, as Bal wrote, emerged out of colonial practices, but has since been "adjusted to new conceptions and pedagogical needs."²⁵ The diorama thus carries an ambivalent past as its present, both the promise of education and the history of conquest. At the same time, it is ambivalent in its function: on a meta level, from the

perspective of a postcolonial era, it unfolds the problematic history of its form; on the object level it continues to educate through a visually compelling *mise en scène*.

This functional ambivalence relates to the double meaning of *culture of display* that I have mentioned at the beginning of this essay: the turn toward the spectacular epitomized by both the diorama and display mannequin, and a critical awareness for how the display produces, rather than simply shows meaning. Both of these layers of what a culture of display might be within the context of ethnographic curation can be, and indeed have been, described as “theatrical.” For Susan Bennett, Carl Akeley's dioramas at AMNH and elsewhere “may well have been the beginning” of what she calls “the theatrical turn in museum exhibition.”²⁶ In her introduction to *Theatre & Museums* (2013), Bennett also quotes Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's oft-cited assertion that exhibitions “are fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create.”²⁷

Two different conceptualizations of *theatricality* are at work in Bennett's text, although they are somewhat unacknowledged. The first, referring to the spectacularity of display, ultimately understands theatricality as a mode of perception that goes beyond the visual. In Bennett the “theatrical turn” of the museum is a gradual shift “from display to experience.”²⁸ Placing the diorama at the outset of this historical move implies that its visual staging is theatrical to the extent in which it creates an experiential relationship between spectator and represented world, but also that the quasi-theatrical form of the diorama—for example, using elaborate set designs, props, and mannequins standing in as actors—facilitates such a relationship. While this notion of theatricality emphasizes spectatorship and is predicated on specific (theatrical) forms of exhibition, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's quote refers to a “fundamental” function of museums, irrespective of their specific curatorial strategies. Similar to Barker's culture of display, her concept of theatricality refers first and foremost to a staging that might be taken for granted and thereby be rendered invisible. From this perspective, to regard museums as akin to theatres emphasizes the museum's performative power. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett puts it, “ethnographic objects are made, not found, despite claims to the contrary. . . . They *became* ethnographic through processes of detachment and contextualization.”²⁹ This is what she calls the “agency of display,” that it “not only shows and speaks, it also *does*.”³⁰

Against this background, even though Bal does not use theatrical concepts in her reading of AMNH, her criticism can be reformulated as follows: first, AMNH fails its meta-function by not showing the theatricality embedded within the agency of its displays; second, it fails to reflect on naturalism's dramaturgical logic, which is inherent in the dioramic form of showing; and third, the museum distinguishes between the individuals being placed onstage as life-size figures, and the

individuals doing the staging. The European culture, which informs AMNH's view of the world, is not on display, but only those being cast as Euro-American Others.

While the continuing presence of colonial dioramas in a postcolonial era is legitimized by their potential to not only display other cultures, but also the history of the latter's representation; there is, as Bal writes, no "absorption, *in the display*, of that critical and historical consciousness."³¹ As a curatorial strategy to deal with this ambivalence she suggests simply rewriting the dioramas' panels to "transform the interaction between visual and verbal representation so as to provide one with a commentary on the other."³² A more radical approach can be seen at the Tropenmuseum. There, the dioramas have been turned into a permanent exhibition called *Colonial Theatre* that shows life-size figures not of indigenous peoples, but of explorers, traders, and ethnographers, as if this was a material staging of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's insight that displays "are also exhibits of those who make them."³³

Dioramas follow the dramaturgical logic of naturalism insofar as they present human figures and/or taxidermied animals in relation to one another as well as to their environment, represented through props and often lovingly painted backdrops but never in relation to, or as an acknowledgment of, the spectator. Even though the figures do not move, the diorama usually presents a narrative caught in a single scene—for instance, the depiction of a hunt. As Donna Haraway writes, "a diorama is eminently a story, a part of natural history . . . read by the naked eye."³⁴ At AMNH the realism of the dioramas, according to Haraway, "does not appear to be a point of view"—in other words, an aesthetic style—"but appears as a 'peephole into the jungle,'" meaning that it is staged as an unmediated view of reality itself.³⁵ As in a proscenium theatre, the frames into which these dioramas are built are supposed to disappear behind a successful naturalistic staging. To return to Bal, this means that the theatricality of dioramas' object-function—their aim to educate visitors through visual persuasiveness, and to let them, at least potentially, "experience" rather than simply view a represented world—might overpower their critical framing. It is easy to imagine, as Bal does, signs displayed next to dioramas that explain their naturalism—what she calls the "truth-speak" of the displays—as a system affirming a Western vision of the world rather than as a "peephole" into reality. However, Bal fears that such verbal efforts to "de-naturalize" the realism of displays would be swept away by dioramas' visual power.³⁶

Again, the *Colonial Theatre* exhibition at the Tropenmuseum could be said to address these issues. However, it does so only in the mode of ironic inversion by replacing indigenous figures with the ones who usually do the staging, putting the inventors of "colonial realism" at the center of a realist staging.³⁷ Rather than dealing with the ambivalence of the diorama, this curatorial strategy, unlike Buth's indigenous warrior, declares its display at a safe distance from the colonial legacy embedded in the form it uses. This happens precisely because *Colonial Theatre* criticizes the imperial gaze through inversion

rather than deconstruction; it changes the object of the gaze, substituting the explorer for the explored. While this powerfully turns the colonial gaze back on itself, it does so at the expense of affirming a Western perspective: the inversion only works if the object of the gaze mirrors (and thus brings into being) its subject. Therefore the *Colonial Theatre* exhibit remains haunted by the ambivalent pasts of the diorama, even though it avoids engaging with the ambivalence of its form. In other words, *Colonial Theatre*—wrongly, as I would argue—assumes that changing the content solves the problems of the form. On the one hand this is true, because placing the explorer at the center of the diorama indeed establishes a meta-commentary on realist discourse and naturalist stagings: it exposes one of the agents producing a reality that shows itself as the "natural" order. But on the other hand, by operating within this mode *Colonial Theatre* does not allow for a different meaning-making subject to appear: that is, the irony of placing the explorer center-stage only works if, from the outset, there is no possibility that the European figure could not be an observer who is being observed, but is just an "object" within another system of knowledge and power.

In contrast, the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, opened in 1998, employs multisensory dioramas that more uneasily recall the visual displays of the natural history museum. Established with casino earnings, the dioramas of the Mashantucket Pequot attempt to recreate tribal life both before and after colonial contact, using life-size indigenous figures and plastic animals in naturalistic habitats.³⁸ These dioramas range from the Ice Age, to the Pequot War of 1636–37 (as a result of which the Pequot, already decimated by smallpox epidemics due to European settlement, were no longer allowed to use their name), to life on the reservation. The museum's centerpiece, however, is a gigantic walk-through diorama of a sixteenth-century (that is, pre-contact) Pequot village showcasing traditional ways of living, from fishing and building wigwams to hunting small game.³⁹ The dramaturgy of the museum is designed so that the dioramas give way to a final gallery featuring photographs of present-day members of the Mashantucket Pequot tribal nation.⁴⁰

On a formal level this staging follows and extends the theatricality of dioramas as described by Susan Bennett. Moving "from display to experience," its primary aim is not simply to display a Native American past, but to allow visitors to experience as part of their present, through life-size figures, smells, and sounds, a tribal culture that was deemed eradicated. In terms of content this does not seem too far removed from the colonial logic of the ethnographic and natural history museum, because the dioramas present tribal culture as firmly rooted in the past and part of a continuum from natural to indigenous life. The Mashantucket Pequot Museum does not explicitly address the history of the diorama as a Western form of representation nor does it seek to draw attention to the fundamental theatricality/agency of display that naturalizes its narrative; on an institutional level, however, it

performs a clear shift in curatorial authority, which uses the form of the diorama to take back Native American history from the colonizers. The framework of a museum and research center operated by a Native American nation casts the Mashantucket Pequots firmly as authorial subject of their own history, regardless of how difficult this history should prove to write. What is being staged is the *reimagined* past of those responsible for the staging.

The diorama's ambivalence thus partakes in a precarious subject/object relationship. On the one hand the Pequot people are doubly objectified in this setting: first, as immobile, life-sized mannequins similar to figures like Buth's warrior that, in European museums, had to stand in as a specimen for the whole of Native American and other indigenous cultures; second, within an exhibitionistic logic that follows the naturalistic dramaturgy of the fourth wall, they become objects to be looked at rather than subjects confronting the viewer. On the other hand the same naturalistic logic brings these figures to life, as it were, transforming them into agents of Pequot ways of living rather than into specimens of "the Indian." Within this context the continuum between the natural and indigenous life stages the endurance and survival of a tribal nation and its belonging to a land long before the Europeans arrived. The experiential display of the diorama is no longer simply a glimpse into the past, but performs the persistence of this past into the present. This is only possible, however, because of its institutional context: the Native American curatorship of the museum becomes conspicuous affirmation that indigenous life continues beyond the confines of its aesthetic (dioramic) representation.

Strategies of Display: A Critical Survey

Three curatorial strategies of how to deal with the colonial legacy of the diorama and plaster figures like Buth's indigenous warrior come into focus via this examination of AMNH, the Tropenmuseum, and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum: *self-reflexive contextualization*, *inversion*, and *indigenous curation*. These are not the only strategies that can be used—for instance, there is a long history of presenting ethnographic artifacts as artworks—but they are the three dominant strategies of display used to address colonial history directly, something that the aesthetic approach could be said to evade.⁴¹ However, their engagement with colonial history is somewhat flawed, as I will show in relation to the critical framework developed above.

One of the most prominent strategies used by curators in ethnographic museums, and the one that Bal proposes as the easiest to show a critical awareness of a museum's implication in colonial history, is *self-reflexive contextualization*. Rather than simply explain the cultural significance of the scenes and artifacts on display, often in the authoritative voice of the Western ethnographer, museum panels are used to speak to the construction of that voice, to problematize collecting as a form of conquest, and to

theatricalize (lay bare) the fundamental agency of display. As mentioned above, a potential problem with this approach, especially if used on its own, is that the spectacularity of display—its experiential theatricality in Bennett's sense—might marginalize the word, so that the power of theatrical spectacle ultimately helps to "work through" the colonial legacy by way of an explanation that can easily be ignored. *Working through* (*durcharbeiten*) is a term taken from Freud and has a purely positive meaning in his psychoanalytic practice. For him, it is important that therapy does not end with the patient remembering repressed memories, but that it allows "the patient time to become more conversant with this resistance with which he has now become acquainted, to *work through* it, to overcome it."⁴² In other words, for Freud, remembering is just the first step toward healing, and working through promises an engagement with the (no longer) repressed memory that is so thorough that the memory will diminish in healing. Throughout this essay, when referring to *working through* colonial history, I mean a mode of engagement that resembles Freudian practice, but that I do not see in a positive light. Instead, I use the term to emphasize the danger that colonial history, as the "repressed memory" of ethnographic museums, is only "remembered"—that is, addressed through curatorial strategies—in order to ultimately "cleanse" the collections from this memory.

As with the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, institutional context must be taken into account when analyzing self-reflexive contextualization. For instance, consider the case of an alternative audio guide produced for the German Historical Museum in Berlin, by the activist group *Kolonialismus im Kasten* (Colonialism in a Box) in 2013.⁴³ The museum's permanent exhibition addresses German colonial history almost exclusively through a single display case featuring colonial memorabilia, as if that history was separate from developments in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Germany. The audio guide created by *Kolonialismus im Kasten* goes against this nationally contained narrative by contextualizing other objects on display with regard to their place in colonial history, thus denying the latter its separate box. While such a contextualization would also make sense if it came from the museum itself, its critical effectiveness partly relies upon its counter-institutional source—it promises change instead of containment.⁴⁴

A second strategy is to stage the ethnographic process of world-making (and thus the agency of display) as a kind of colonial theatre, as proposed by the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam. As argued above this is a very effective inversion of the imperial gaze, but it runs the danger of ultimately affirming the perspective it seems to undo; it changes the object of the gaze rather than destabilizing the gaze itself.

The third strategy is the turn toward indigenous curation, which can take many forms. At the Mashantucket Pequot Museum this means institutional responsibility. The entire establishment is

operated by the tribal nation, thus turning "anthropologists" into "employees," as Joseph Roach bluntly puts it, of the indigenous subjects that they used to study.⁴⁵ However, a more common approach is collaboration. For instance, New Zealand's national museum, Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, takes care to employ as many Maori as Pākehā curators, and it organizes its permanent exhibition in a way that takes into account both settler and indigenous epistemologies.⁴⁶

These might represent the most common curatorial strategies, but they are not the only ways in which museums attempt to address what I have been calling the ambivalence of collection, storage, and display. Increasingly, museums are exploring strategies of curation that materialize institutional forms, as well as bodies, via a turn toward *visible storage* on the one hand and *live performance* within the museum on the other. Both of these developments can be understood as a response to the limitations posed by the three dominant curatorial strategies I have identified above.

Curation within the Context of Settler Colonialism: Visible Storage

Visible storage destabilizes the early twentieth-century separation among storage, research collection, and display. In contrast to a curated exhibition of collected artifacts, it provides access to the collection itself, as it were, thus potentially shifting the locus of agency from display to spectator. One of the best-known examples of visible storage is the Multiversity Galleries at the University of British Columbia's Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, first introduced in 1976. Just as collaboration at Te Papa Tongarewa has to be understood within the context of New Zealand's official biculturalism, the Multiversity Galleries owe a lot to the strong indigenous presence on Canada's Pacific Northwest Coast. The galleries are housed in a large hall filled with exhibit cases designed to display as many artifacts as possible without interpretive explanation, and not just highlights from the collection. Thus visible storage introduces a different value judgment to the museum, because it does not seem to preselect items according to their ethnographic or artistic worth—in other words, as signifiers for a culture or as aesthetic "masterpieces." Of course, selection still takes place, since not everything in storage can be shown, and the Museum of Anthropology uses mixed modes of exhibition, following different cultures of display in Barker's sense. The Multiversity Galleries are located next to the Great Hall featuring Pacific Northwest Coast art and artifacts, including nineteenth-century totem poles, curated precisely according to principles of ethnographic and aesthetic significance. At the Museum of Anthropology, one of the aims of visible storage is to grant access to indigenous communities to artifacts that their ancestors made, and to allow them, as well as other visitors, to make their own meaningful links among parts of the collection. Knowledge-exchange initiatives like the Native Youth Program encourages First

Nations students to "develop their own tour based on their research and connection to the objects, often incorporating family histories and information from elders into their tours."⁴⁷

The display strategy of visible storage, which blurs the boundaries between collection and curation, proposes a different theatricality (in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's sense) of how ethnographic objects are made. By staging them as part of a research collection, it still produces decontextualized objects as ethnographic rather than as being in daily or ritual, individual or community use. However, in contrast to the totem poles in the Great Hall or to the dioramas discussed above, no singular object or scenic element demands attention. The sheer multitude and density of artifacts displayed next to one another constitutes a dispersed perspective—one guided not by an ethnographic master narrative, neither visually nor through verbal explanation. It is useful here to recall Barker's definition of *culture of display* as referring to the fact that museums are never "neutral containers offering a transparent, unmediated experience" of exhibits.⁴⁸ While visible storage, through its dispersal of perspective, weakens the agency of display, it also does not offer a "neutral" or "unmediated experience"; instead, what is being staged is a different way of creating knowledge in collaboration between spectator and collection and is located in the individual rather than in an overarching narrative.

The turn to live performance as another curatorial strategy that responds to the collection of indigenous artifacts is a less open mode of collaboration than visible storage, because it often focuses on specialist participants. The Multiversity Galleries have a unique relationship with local Pacific Northwest Coast First Nations communities. However, other indigenous and nonindigenous visitors are equally invited to directly engage with the objects on display—that is, without a mediating structure other than the theatricality of visible storage. In contrast, live performance within the context of ethnographic curation singles out specific bodies either as mediators between a more general audience and a museum's collection or else as a precarious part of that which is being put on display.

Institutional Frameworks and Indigenous Epistemologies: The Turn to Live Performance

James Luna's *Artifact Piece*, first performed at the San Diego Museum of Man in 1987, is well-known and one of the first examples of the introduction of live performance into the ethnographic museum to address the question of how the latter's treatment of "other" cultures continues to shape attitudes toward indigenous peoples. Dressed in only a loincloth, the Native American artist presented himself lying still in a glass case filled with sand, as if he were a dead object or wax figure representing "the Indian," complete with verbal panels loosely mimicking the tone of ethnographic description. This insertion of a living, although acting as if dead, indigenous body into a museum gallery dedicated to ethnographic artifacts resonates with Chicano performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña's practice (with whom Luna

has worked), yet it follows a different logic. The turn to live performance in ethnographic museums is one of the most powerful strategies to address the colonial legacies of ethnographic collections and attempt a move toward other frames of knowledge. However, as I will argue, performance often gets caught up in ambivalent institutional frameworks; that is, the critical project of the performer and that of the museum can be in (often unacknowledged) conflict with each other.

In *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit*, also known as *Couple in the Cage* (1992–93), Gómez-Peña and Cuban American artist Coco Fusco exhibited themselves as human specimens from a newly discovered indigenous tribe at various locations throughout the United States and Europe, including Chicago's Field Museum and the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.⁴⁹ Their performance critically engaged with what Fusco calls the "other history of intercultural performance"—namely, the exhibition of indigenous bodies in museums, ethnographic villages, and "human zoos."⁵⁰ Like some of Gómez-Peña's later work with La Pocha Nostra, which uses "human artifacts" in dioramic environments, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit* examined "colonial practices of representation," as well as their underlying cross-cultural fears and desires by way of parody.⁵¹ Nevertheless, one of the most powerful aspects of Fusco and Gómez-Peña's performance was the ambivalence of its framing; spectators, especially within the museum context, remained confused as to whether this was a true ethnographic display or whether it was performance art.

With Luna, in contrast, the audience unambiguously knows that *Artifact Piece* is a performance. Ambivalence thus resides in the artist's body between living (performer) and dead (object), as well as between Luna's presence as artist and his representation as "Indian."⁵² His approach troubles the representation of indigenous culture through ethnographic artifacts not by way of parody, even though it comprises a form of clowning (as art historian Jane Blocker points out), but by overacting the object status and alleged pastness of Native America, as ascribed by settler ideology.⁵³

In the work of Gómez-Peña, Fusco, and Luna the turn to live performance deals with the colonial legacies of ethnographic collection and curation by making these artists part of the display, thus emphasizing the continuum between nonwhite human and object under the imperial gaze. By doing so, they primarily engage with the de-subjectification of indigenous, ethnic, and minority bodies in the colonial culture of display, as epitomized by the theatrical spectacularity of human zoos and ethnographic dioramas. Live performance as mediator between collection and general audience approaches the subject/object continuum from the opposite direction: rather than focusing on the de-subjectification of humans, it is concerned with the making of ethnographic objects, described by Kirshenblatt-Gimblett as the fundamental theatrical operation of museums, and with attempts at its reversal through a different type of performance.

For instance, artist Rosanna Raymond, who identifies as "NZ born Pacific Islander of mixed race," has worked within European museum contexts to transform what has been made "object" back into what, according to Maori epistemology, is *taonga*.⁵⁴ A *taonga* work is not a decontextualized and lifeless artifact (as a signifier for another culture) in the tradition of the Western ethnographic museum, but, according to its legal definition by the Waitangi tribunal, "a work, whether or not it has been fixed, that is in its entirety an expression of *mātauranga* Maori"—meaning "a creation of the preexisting and distinctive body of [Maori] knowledge, values, and insights."⁵⁵ A *taonga* work "will possess *mauri*"; that is, a "living essence or spirit" and "have living *kaitiaki* [spiritual guardians] in accordance with *tikanga* Maori [the Maori way of doing things]."⁵⁶ Two aspects are of particular importance in this definition: first, that if translated into Western terms, the *taonga* can be either a material object or an immaterial performance, song, or poem; and second, that it has a "living" essence invoking ancestral relations (to the *mātauranga* Maori) regardless of which of these forms the *taonga* takes. Within the epistemological order of the ethnographic museum, however, performance would traditionally be excluded, and the material work would be regarded as lifeless artifact rather than as living *taonga*.

Through poetry, ceremonial performance, and song, Raymond's work attempts to "activate the *mauri* (the spark of life, sustains existence and form) . . . connecting past + present" that resides, in a dormant state, in some of the ethnographic objects collected from the South Seas.⁵⁷ She is able to do this because "we are woven into the very fabric of existence allowing the ancestors to inhabit the present," and her own relation to *mātauranga* Maori is what allows the object to become *taonga* again.⁵⁸ Here, live performance in ethnographic collections seeks to overcome what Diana Taylor has analyzed as a rift between the archive and the repertoire and the separation between museum context and living "source culture." These are related though not identical operations. The first one attempts a more general reevaluation of the "so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" in the face of Western epistemology's emphasis on "the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones)."⁵⁹ Such an approach might test the hierarchical status of the ethnographic object, but it does not change the status of the artifact itself. In contrast, the second operation, Raymond's activation of the *mauri*, weaves the object back into its source culture's ancestral relations.

Importantly, therefore, live performance as a strategy to deal with the colonial legacies of ethnographic collections does not primarily challenge these legacies through ephemerality. According to Rebecca Schneider, the "definition of performance as that which disappears, which is continually lost in time" is what has made performance interesting for art history and the curation of art in the contemporary museum.⁶⁰ She convincingly argues that this "equation of performance with

impermanence, destruction, and loss follow[s] rather than disrupt[s] a cultural habituation to the imperialism inherent in archival logic."⁶¹ This is also true with regard to the relationship between performance and ethnographic collection. Nevertheless, here it has to be understood as an ambivalence between perspectives: from an indigenous epistemology, Raymond's activation is not just a performance in linear time, but "remains" with the collection, embedded within the institutional logic of the ethnographic museum. However, there is the real danger of ignoring such remains or insisting on the ephemerality of performance as an event in time that has once and for all *worked through*, in the sense outlined above, the problematic making of objects and with it colonial history.

I see this tendency, for instance, with regard to a residency that Raymond had at the Berlin Ethnological Museum in 2014, and as part of which she reanimated the *taonga* in the latter's South Sea exhibition.⁶² On an institutional level the residency was doubly framed: namely, as part of the European Research Council project "Indigeneity in the Contemporary World," led by Helen Gilbert at Royal Holloway, University of London, and as part of the museum's Humboldt Lab *Probekühnen* (rehearsal stages), funded by the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes). As part of the first institutional frame, Raymond's residency brings an indigenous presence back to the imperial spaces from which it has been excluded (turned into representation); as part of the second institutional frame, however, the residency contributes to the museum's planned move from the quiet suburb of Dahlem to Berlin's historic center, where its collections will be presented, starting in 2019, in a reconstruction of the former Prussian city palace. This move explicitly takes up the problematic discourse of Germany as a cultural nation by which the presence of ethnographic artifacts in the capital's center would prove the country's openness toward the world, and the collections would be staged as part of a positive Enlightenment tradition rather than as a product of colonialism.⁶³

The ambivalence of work such as Raymond's—that it may, depending on the institutional context, be used to work through the problematic aspects of ethnographic collections rather than reinstate an indigenous presence and epistemology—does in no way invalidate the importance and necessity of such an approach, not least because the ambivalence remains, as I will show below by returning to Buth's installation at the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures.

Kubai's Gaze: The Ambivalence of Multiplicity

Under the directorship of Deliss, the Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures attempted to reinvent itself as a "post-ethnographic" forum.⁶⁴ As part of this reframing, the museum emptied its exhibition spaces, turning toward curatorial strategies of temporalization and aesthetization.⁶⁵ As mentioned above, the museum produced a series of yearlong exhibitions, inviting artists to creatively engage with its

collections. These exhibitions included *Foreign Exchange*, for which Buth created her warrior installation. With this exhibition the Frankfurt museum embraced, even if in variations, the curatorial strategies I have examined in this essay: self-reflexive contextualization, inversion, indigenous curation, visible storage, and the turn to live performance.

As they are used by ethnographic museums, all of these strategies directly address colonial history, and they do so by using what I have analyzed as different "theatricalizations" of display. *Self-reflexive contextualization* can draw attention to the fundamental agency of display—its theatricality in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's sense—but might be overpowered by the visual spectacularity of display. *Inversion* changes who is being put onstage, as in the case of the Tropenmuseum, where the colonial gaze is subverted by placing its source (the agent of colonial power) into the limelight. However, as I have argued, the authority for this staging remains with the colonial matrix of power. In contrast, *indigenous curation* might continue to use problematic theatrical forms, such as the dioramas in the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, but it changes their institutional context. *Visible storage* exposes what has been described as the "backstage" of ethnographic museums and usually weakens the ethnographic master narrative through a dispersal of perspective. Thus it empowers spectators to find their own relations among objects. *Live performance* can help animate ethnographic objects and bring indigenous epistemologies into the space of the Western museum, but it is at the peril of being used to work through the colonial legacies of ethnographic collections, as if these legacies could be redeemed.

The *Foreign Exchange* exhibition is explicitly framed as "self-reflexive analysis" by the Museum of World Cultures, including meta-commentaries on the history of its collection and "the emergence and development of ethnographic collections" as such.⁶⁶ This framing is done through panels in the exhibition, and even more importantly through a series of conversations with international academics, artists, and curators—for instance, on "The Administration of People and Goods" and "The Rhetoric of Display"—reprinted in the exhibition catalog.⁶⁷ As I will argue below in a more detailed reading of Buth's installation, the exhibition also addresses the construction of the colonial gaze in a way that complicates the strategy of inversion, as practiced in the Tropenmuseum's *Colonial Theatre* exhibit. Finally, on an institutional level the Museum of World Cultures turns toward collaborative approaches, even though problematically bypassing indigenous epistemologies in favor of artistic collaboration. Again, Buth's installation offers variations on the use of visible storage and live performance. Her indigenous warrior, insofar as he is a found object, makes visible the trajectory between storage and display; this visibility is reinforced, as mentioned above, by photos in the exhibition catalog and the video projected in the same room as the display mannequins. They show Buth in the museum galleries

and the storage space re-performing two speeches originally given by the museum's founding director, Hagen.

In around 1895 Hagen—a German physician who since 1879 had intermittently worked as a doctor and anthropological researcher in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea—took photos of an indigenous Papuan man. It was a man he had met in the Astrolabe Bay area of what was at that time the German protectorate of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland, named after the Prussian king and German emperor Wilhelm II. After returning to Germany in 1896, Hagen published the pictures in his popular travelogue *Unter den Papua's* (Among the Papua), with one even making the frontispiece. In the book itself, a collection (as its subtitle claims) of "observations and studies of land and people, animals and plants in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland," Hagen identifies the man in the picture as "my friend Kubai, a '*tamo koba* [an elder]' from [the town of] Bogadjim."⁶⁸ This is the man who would become an ethnographic display puppet, exhibited in Hagen's own museum as well as throughout Europe, and featured again, in four variations, in Buth's installation at the Museum of World Cultures.

Because we have only Hagen's word for it, it is known neither whether he and Kubai were actually friends nor if the latter's name was indeed Kubai. Hagen himself does not provide any details about their alleged friendship or Kubai's personal life. The *tamo koba's* main function in the book is to serve as a photographic object of study, subjected to the ethnographer's colonial gaze. In particular Hagen gives a detailed description of the tribal ornaments worn by Kubai, hence making him an exemplary bearer of indigenous culture and tradition rather than treating him as an individual. Even his name reappears, a little later in the book, in a series of "typical examples" for names from Bogadjim, thus further reducing Kubai's individuality.⁶⁹ Last but not least, his portrait on the frontispiece has him standing in for all the Papua that Hagen traveled among.

It is significant, however, that Kubai is given a name at all, and that, in conjunction with his casting as a "friend," he thus emerges as someone who potentially resists the objectifying and generalizing tendency of the ethnographic description. The photo itself, in which a half-smiling man looks directly into the camera, reinforces this agency. As historian Max Quanchi writes, the pictures in Hagen's book have people "stare at the reader, smiling and wondering in a moment of close personal contact," thus creating a certain sense of "immediacy."⁷⁰ Furthermore, and not necessarily in contradiction to this closeness and immediacy, I would argue that Kubai's gaze also acknowledges the presence of the camera. Hagen's text itself alerts the reader to the possibility that the camera has Kubai become someone else, insofar as he "poses," in Roland Barthes's sense, for a present and future audience: "I nearly forgot," Hagen writes, "to elaborate on the nose arrow . . . that Herr Kubai put on when preparing for the photographic record. Usually, in daily life, this is rarely worn."⁷¹ The man

known as Kubai stages himself for the gaze of the other, and while Hagen's description is meant to scientifically cut through this staging, explaining the nose arrow as an atypical occurrence, it inadvertently emphasizes the theatricality of the ethnographic image as such: that it is the product of a careful staging rather than a "slice of life."

Kubai's photograph and its description, inviting a spectatorial regime of friendship and a certain awareness for the theatricality of its production that, no matter how problematically, allows the man in the photo to assume some individual agency (over his staging), must be seen in relation to a very different set of pictures by Hagen. Published a year earlier, in 1898, as part of Hagen's *Anthropologischer Atlas ostasiatischer & melanesischer Völker* (Anthropological atlas of East Asian and Melanesian peoples), these images are governed by a very different theatricality of display.⁷² Taking advantage of his day job as a physician, Hagen, during his time in Indonesia, collected anthropometric measurements of hundreds of plantation workers, supporting his findings with three photos of each of them. The pictures show the workers in the nude: from the front, side, and rear. As Yvette Mutumba, one of the curators of *Foreign Exchange*, notes, the staging of people in Hagen's photos does not only objectify them, but indeed exposes, through the theatricality/agency of their display, their objectification as indentured laborers: "even before he [Hagen] arrived, they had been reduced to objects of use."⁷³ Of course, Hagen has no critical stance toward this objectification, but merely repeats it. Collecting humans in this way, Mutumba surmises, would also have influenced Hagen's work as founding director of what would later become the Museum of World Cultures, shaping "his ideas on the accumulation, administration and presentation of foreign material culture," hence making the photos "a component of the museum's biography."⁷⁴

The photos from Hagen's *Anthropologischer Atlas* are shown within the *Foreign Exchange* exhibition, but Buth does not reference them directly. Nevertheless, they become part of the different theatricalities of display put in motion, as I would argue, by her installation. The warrior figure, as he stands now—across time and space, fourfold, in an empty room of the Museum of World Cultures—still bears the traces of the culture of display that for Bennett constitutes the theatricality of dioramic representation. It is precisely the emptiness of the room and the whiteness of its walls that recall the diorama as a void, an immaterial presence in the contemporary museum. Additionally, the multiplication of the warrior figure and its decontextualized presentation as four mannequins next to one another resonate with the strategy of visible storage, in which no single object claims to be a paradigmatic signifier. Because the figure is not arranged according to a naturalistic logic, as in the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, but as if presented in a warehouse, it theatricalizes the agency of display in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's sense, turning our attention to the construction of the ethnographic gaze.

Additionally, by assuming the position of "The Warrior as Multiple," on the one hand the figure retains the individuality and agency embedded in the staging of Kubai's photo. The seriality of the figure—that it is the same man four times, albeit with differences—speaks to the theatricality of posing and to the man called Kubai as being an agent of his pose. On the other hand, the seriality recalls the anthropometric photos made by Hagen, in which each indigenous worker is presented three times, and how the *Colonial Theatre* is restaged by such a gaze.

By assembling different theatricalities in the same way that it gathers the same figure four times, Buth's installation resists a *working through* of ethnographic collections, instead insisting on their trauma, opening up wounds hidden in storage. This approach does not turn her work into a model of how to deal with the colonial legacies of ethnographic curation and collection, not least because it remains ambivalent itself through its classification as art. However, the installation proposes, or so I would argue, to remain with ambivalent pasts, finding no right answers but instead a critical awareness for their modes of display. This insistence on ambivalence is different from Bal's call to focus on the ones who do the staging, laying bare the theatrical structure of the agency of display, or even different from Buth's own interest in processes of representation that produce Otherness. It is invested in a multiplicity of perspectives rather than in the shift from one to another. Within a psychoanalytical framework, unresolved ambivalence is a pathological condition. Of course, love and hate are both valid attitudes toward an object, but to love and hate the object at the same time is deemed an untenable position. With regard to the history of ethnographic collections, this means that museums in the twenty-first century will usually acknowledge their implication in colonialism, and at the same time try to move forward—for instance, by propagating a positive view of cultural difference. Indeed, this is an important task, and the curatorial strategies analyzed in this essay help accomplish it. However, there is always the danger that both sides of this story—colonialism and knowledge—are presented as separate aspects of the museum, and that by addressing the dark side, colonialism can be understood as a thing of the past, acknowledged though ultimately set aside in today's production of knowledge. Ambivalence works against this disentanglement.

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. "The Warrior as Multiple." Installation view, Frankfurt Museum of World Cultures (2014).

(Photo: Wolfgang Günzel, courtesy of Peggy Buth.)

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ I would like to thank Jen Parker-Starbuck, Sabine Kim, and the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback concerning this essay.
- ² Peggy Buth, "The Warrior as Multiple," in *All of Us: Trauma, Repression, and Ghosts in the Museum*. Buth's installation was commissioned by the Weltkulturen Museum, Frankfurt, for its exhibition *Foreign Exchange (or the Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger)*, January 16, 2014–January 4, 2015.
- ³ Peggy Buth, "'All of Us': Trauma, Repression, and Ghosts in the Museum," in *Foreign Exchange (or the Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger)*, ed. Clémentine Deliss and Yvette Mutumba (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2014), 275.
- ⁴ See Britta Lange, *Echt, Unecht, Lebensecht: Menschenbilder im Umlauf* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2006) for a cultural history of the Umlauff company and a critical analysis of how ethnographic objects, display mannequins, and fake artifacts shaped social imaginaries of the Other in the period around 1900.
- ⁵ Emma Barker, ed., "Introduction," in *Contemporary Cultures of Display* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 8.
- ⁶ Critical histories of the diorama within museum contexts mention these plaster figures, but are more often focused on the taxidermied animals that would populate, sometimes alongside indigenous figures, dioramas at natural history museums. For a careful contextualization of animal dioramas alongside other modes of museum display, see Karen Rader and Victoria Cain, *Life on Display: Revolutionizing U.S. Museums of Science and Natural History in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- ⁷ Among the seminal texts offering a critique of ethnography and cultural anthropology from within these disciplines (rather than from the outside) are Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); and the contributions to James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
- ⁸ *Foreign Exchange* is the official English translation of the exhibition's German title, *Ware & Wissen*, which could also be translated as "goods & knowledge." The typographical substitution of the "and" by the ampersand brings the two words in even closer relation to each other. It thus opens up the possibility of reading the exhibition's title as *Ware Wissen*, or "knowledge as commodity." The exhibition's subtitle, "*or the Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger*," is in English in the original.

- ⁹ Bernhard Hagen, qtd. in Clémentine Deliss, "Trading Perceptions in a Post-Ethnographic Museum" (2013), available at <http://theatrum-mundi.org/research/trading-perceptions-in-a-post-ethnographic-museum/>.
- ¹⁰ See Karen Pinkus, *Alchemical Mercury: A Theory of Ambivalence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 61–65.
- ¹¹ For Derrida, ambivalence is the necessary condition of all writing; Bhabha is specifically interested in the ambivalence of colonial discourse and practices. See Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 65–171; and Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- ¹² Clémentine Deliss and Frédéric Keck, "Remediation, and Some Problems Post-Ethnographic Museums Face," in "Forum: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary: Addressing Concepts, Designs, and Practices." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 1 (2016): 386–87.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 387.
- ¹⁴ See Clémentine Deliss, ed., *Object Atlas: Fieldwork in the Museum* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2012); and Deliss, "Trading Perceptions."
- ¹⁵ Buth, "'All of Us,'" 277. Buth's work at the Weltkulturen Museum can be understood as a continuation of an earlier project, *Desire in Representation* (2004–08), in which she analyzed—through photography, installation, film, and archival work—the colonial history of the Belgian Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren, near Brussels, and the material traces of that history in the present. See Peggy Buth, ed., *Katalog: "Desire in Representation"* (Berlin: Spector Books, 2010).
- ¹⁶ See Deliss, "Trading Perceptions"; and Fabienne Boursiquot, "Ethnographic Museums: From Colonial Exposition to Intercultural Dialogue," in *The Postcolonial Museum: The Arts of Memory and the Pressures of History*, ed. Iain Chambers, Alessandra De Angelis, Celeste Ianniciello, Mariangela Orabona, and Michaela Quadraro (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), 76–83.
- ¹⁷ Since my focus is on curatorial strategies of display, I will not go into any detail concerning restitution and repatriation as obvious ways of dealing with problematic collections. See, for instance, Louise Tythacott and Kostas Arvanitis, eds., *Museums and Restitution: New Practices, New Approaches*, (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014); and Emma Cox, "Economies of Atonement in the European Museum: Repatriation and the Post-rational," in *Performances of Capitalism, Crises and Resistance: Inside/Outside Europe*, ed. Marilene Zaroulia and Philip Hager (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 211–31.

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- ¹⁸ Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 15. Bal's chapter on the American Museum of Natural History is revised from her essay "Telling, Showing, Showing Off," first published in *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 3 (1992): 556–94.
- ¹⁹ For an overview of AMNH's permanent exhibitions, including photographs of some of the dioramas, see www.amnh.org/exhibitions/permanent-exhibitions.
- ²⁰ See Susan Harding and Emily Martin's critical description of a recent visit to AMNH in "Anthropology Now and Then in the American Museum of Natural History," *Anthropology Now* 8, no. 3 (2016).
- ²¹ See Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 54–55.
- ²² For the history of the Tropenmuseum as "a product of trade," see Daan van Dartel, "The Tropenmuseum and Trade: Product and Source," *Journal of Museum of Ethnography* 20 (2008): 82–93.
- ²³ See Bal, *Double Exposures*, 13–56.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Susan Bennett, *Theatre & Museums* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4. Bennett takes this quote from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's seminal study, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 3.
- ²⁸ Bennett, *Theatre & Museums*, 8.
- ²⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 3.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ³¹ Bal, *Double Exposures*, 19.
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture*, 2. For the *Colonial Theatre* exhibit, see <https://tropenmuseum.nl/en/node/213>; and Felicity Bodenstein and Camilla Pagani, "Decolonising National Museums of Ethnography in Europe: Exposing and Reshaping Colonial Heritage (2000–2012)," in *The Postcolonial Museum*, 42–43.
- ³⁴ Haraway, *Primate Visions*, 29.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.
- ³⁶ See Bal, *Double Exposures*, 36.
- ³⁷ "Colonial realism" is Michael Taussig's term; see his *What Color Is the Sacred?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 119–29.

- ³⁸ For detailed analyses of how the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center—in its relationship, both symbolically and economically, to the tribe's nearby Foxwoods Resort Casino—performs Mashantucket Pequot identity, see, for example, Mary Lawlor, *Public Native America: Tribal Self-Representations in Museums, Powwows, and Casinos* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 31–55; and Bill Anthes, "Learning from Foxwoods: Visualizing the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation," *American Indian Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2008): 204–18.
- ³⁹ In a complex reading of the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, theatre historian Joseph Roach analyses the pre-contact village diorama as a Miltonic "paradise lost" and describes the implied position of a visitor to the museum as "Orphic," uneasily poised among tribal past, present, and future. See his "The Return of the Last of the Pequots: Disappearance as Heritage," unpublished lecture, Centre for International Theatre and Performance Research, Royal Holloway, London, September 18, 2009. A podcast is available at http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/archive/audio/2009_09_18_JosephRoach/2009_09_18_JosephRoach_TheReturnOfTheLastOfThePequots.mp3.
- ⁴⁰ The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center's "History & Culture eBook" is available at www.pequotmuseum.org/eBook.aspx.
- ⁴¹ For the conventional aesthetic approach to ethnographic collections—that is, presenting them as artworks—see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," in *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- ⁴² Sigmund Freud, "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated from the German under the General Editorship of James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, vol. 12 (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), 155.
- ⁴³ The audio guide and more information is available at www.kolonialismusimkasten.de/.
- ⁴⁴ Partly in reaction to the audio guide, the museum has addressed some of the most problematic issues of its "colonial box." For example, it no longer displays—without sufficient commentary—photographs taken by the perpetrators of the torture and murder of Herero and Nama peoples in German South-West Africa (present-day Namibia). The permanent exhibition of the German Historical Museum will be revised in 2018.
- ⁴⁵ Roach, "The Return of the Last of the Pequots."
- ⁴⁶ See below for the relationship between artifact and ancestral relations in Maori epistemology.

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- ⁴⁷ Katherine Molineux, "Permanent Collection Displays," in *Manual of Museum Exhibitions*, 2nd ed., ed. Barry Lord and Maria Piacente (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 132.
- ⁴⁸ Barker, "Introduction," 8.
- ⁴⁹ See *The Couple in the Cage: A Guatianaui Odyssey*, documentary film directed by Coco Fusco and Paula Heredia (Art Institute of Chicago: Video Data Bank, 1993). For one among many critical readings of the performance, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "The Ethnographic Burlesque," *TDR: The Drama Review* 42, no. 2 (1998): 175–80.
- ⁵⁰ Coco Fusco, *English Is Broken Here: Notes on Cultural Fusion in the Americas* (New York: New Press, 1995), 37–63; see also Pascal Blanchard, Gilles Boëtsch, and Nanette Jacomijn Snoep, eds., *Human Zoos: The Invention of the Savage* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2011).
- ⁵¹ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Ethno-techno: Writings on Performance, Activism, and Pedagogy* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 81.
- ⁵² It is important to understand this productive ambivalence between *presence* (of the living performer) and *representation* (as "dead" body/object) as related to a larger "historical shift towards the inclusion of the artist or cultural producer as an acting subject within the contemporary exhibition context," which Pablo Lafuente describes when comparing the seminal 1989 exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre* at Centre Pompidou/La Villette in Paris to the 1941 Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) show *Indian Art of the United States* in New York City. At MoMA, two Navajo artists produced ceremonial sand drawings for museum visitors. This "act of 'performing' a work in front of an audience highlighted the difference of the Navajo artists with respect to the modern artists whose work the museum would normally exhibit, turning their presence into an act of representation. In contrast, in 'Magiciens de la Terre' the artist was no longer just represented; rather, the figure of the artist was the structural unit that gave form to the exhibition." See Lafuente, "Introduction: From the Outside In—'Magiciens de la Terre' and Two Histories of Exhibitions," in *Making Art Global (Part 2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989*, ed. Lucy Steeds (London: Afterall Books, 2013), 13.
- ⁵³ Jane Blocker, *Seeing Witness: Visuality and the Ethics of Testimony* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 14, 28. Blocker is right to describe *Artifact Piece* as "a critical parody of the ethnographic museum" (15). However, I understand her notion of "overacting" as going against this parodic stance.
- ⁵⁴ Rosanna Raymond (aka Sistar S'Pacific), "A Body of VA'rt," *Te Kaharoa* 9 (2016): 29.
- ⁵⁵ Waitangi Tribunal, *Ko Aotearoa Tēnei: A Report into Claims Concerning New Zealand Law and Policy Affecting Māori Culture and Identity—Te Taumata Tuarua*, vol. 1 (Wellington: Legislation Direct, 2011), 44, 96. The Waitangi Tribunal is a legal institution that since 1975 has examined

breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, signed in 1840 between the British Crown and several Maori tribes.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 17, 96.

⁵⁷ Raymond, "A Body of VA'rt," 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁵⁹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 98.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² For a video of this, see <https://vimeo.com/110965423>.

⁶³ Hermann Parzinger, "Das Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss: Anspruch und Chance," in *Das Humboldt-Forum im Berliner Schloss: Planungen, Prozesse, Perspektiven*, ed. Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (München: Hirmer, 2013), 12–29.

⁶⁴ Deliss, "Trading Perceptions," n.p.

⁶⁵ As Georgina Guy notes with regard to the curation of visual and performance art, temporary exhibitions contradict "the affected permanence and preservation of traditional museological display." The curatorial strategy of aestheticization has a problematic legacy in ethnographic exhibition, because it forms part of what James Clifford has termed "ethnographic surrealism." See Guy, *Theatre, Exhibition, and Curation: Displayed and Performed* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 12–13; and Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 117–51.

⁶⁶ Yvette Mutumba, "The Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger," in *Foreign Exchange*, 19.

⁶⁷ See *Foreign Exchange*, 93–200.

⁶⁸ Bernhard Hagen, *Unter den Papua's: Beobachtungen und Studien über Land und Leute, Thier- und Pflanzenwelt in Kaiser-Wilhelmsland* (Wiesbaden: C. W. Kreidel, 1899), 170. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from the German are mine.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 170–72, 230.

⁷⁰ Max Quanchi, *Photographing Papua: Representation, Colonial Encounters and Imaging in the Public Domain* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 186.

⁷¹ Hagen, *Unter den Papua's*, 173; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

⁷² See Bernhard Hagen, *Anthropologischer Atlas ostasiatischer & melanesischer Völker* (Wiesbaden: C. W. Kreidel, 1898).

⁷³ Mutumba, "The Stories You Wouldn't Tell a Stranger," 19.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*