

What can museum anthropology do in the twenty-first century?

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Abstract

This article sets out to tackle the question: 'what can museum anthropology do in the twenty-first century?' It does so by focusing on the *doing* in a double-sense: on what museum anthropology can *do*, as in affecting, impacting and achieving, as well as on museum anthropology's own *doing*, as a particular set of knowledge practices brimming with methodological, epistemological and ontological potentials to be harnessed for its own renewal and for cross-disciplinary fertilization across the academy and beyond the museum itself. The character of the article is programmatic, laying out the program of museum anthropology being developed at LMU Munich, Germany. The article begins by pondering this question explicitly. Then it proceeds by mapping out what has been done, what is being done, and what will be done to address this question at LMU Munich in collaboration with other universities and museums. At the end, the article draws out some of the implications of answering that question for an anthropology not only of and in but *through* museums, which intervenes in the fields that it studies.

Keywords: museology, museum anthropology, museum studies

Introduction

Museum anthropology is one of the oldest sub-fields of anthropology, which was, especially in the German context in which the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München (LMU Munich) is located, constitutive of the discipline itself.¹ Yet it has, again especially in the German context, long been disregarded in academic research and teaching, largely due to methodological and theoretical reorientations. However, in the past decade, one has been witnessing a sea change, or rather volcanic eruption, of (post)colonial attention that has exposed museums, especially *ethnologische* or ethnographic museums, and, through this, the discipline of *Ethnologie* or Social and Cultural Anthropology, to an unseen and unheard level of scholarly, political, journalistic and public scrutiny. As a result, long neglected colonial legacies have entered the status quo, demanding to be addressed in the present, insisting to be reshaped towards the future.² It remains to be seen what such future will entail, as imperialist fantasies and the associated resorting to extreme, despicable violence are not a thing of the past but continue to shape and even overwhelm the present.

While tackling the question of what museum anthropology can do in the twenty-first century, this article could justifiably be devoted to the scholarly ethos of *critique*, critiquing the institution of the ethnographic museum, its colonial histories and frameworks, as well as the resulting ethnographic knowledge. One could also reasonably suspect that it would mobilize such critique for the sake of posing an *argument*, to argue (in the German sense of *argumentieren*) for something which, as one could witness over the last decade of raging debates in the German ethnographic museum landscape, often leads to less productive arguments (in the German sense of *Streitereien*). Here, my goal is different. I would like to focus on the *doing*. More precisely, I want to zoom in on the *doing* in a double-sense: on what museum anthropology can *do*, as in affecting or impacting someone and achieving something, as well as on museum anthropology's own *doing*, as a particular set of knowledge practices brimming with methodological, epistemological and ontological potentials to be harnessed for its own renewal and, as I will stress, for cross-disciplinary fertilization across the academy and beyond the museum itself. In doing so, I wish to suggest that the predominant composition of scholarly work through the frames of critique and argument amounts to a reductionist view of what scholarly engagements and outcomes might entail. To be sure, we need to argue

(much more in a sense of *argumentieren* rather than *streiten*) and we need to critique, but both intellectual attitudes alone, and even in conjunction, will not do the trick. As Bruno Latour reminds us, critique can and in many ways has 'run out of steam' (Latour 2004). To avoid this, fellow French philosopher Michel Foucault offers a critical reframing of productive use for my purposes here:

I can't help but dream about a kind of criticism that would not try to judge, but bring an oeuvre, a book, a sentence, an idea to life; it would light fires, watch the grass grow, listen to the wind, and catch the sea-foam in the breeze and scatter it. It would **multiply**, not judgments, but **signs of existence**; it would summon them, drag them from their sleep. Perhaps it would **invent** them sometimes – all the better. All the better. Criticism that hands down sentences, sends me to sleep; I'd like a criticism of scintillating **leaps of the imagination**. It would not be a sovereign or dressed in red. It would bear the lightning of possible storms (Foucault in Rabinow 1994: 323, my emphasis).

In the same interview, Foucault continues to say:

What we are suffering from is not a void but inadequate means for thinking about everything that is **happening**. There is an overabundance of **things** to be known: fundamental, terrible, wonderful, funny, insignificant, and crucial at the same time. And there is an enormous **curiosity, a need, a desire to know** (Foucault in Rabinow 1994: 325, my emphasis).

Obviously, this is not an article in a journal of philosophy. Yet, anthropology in general and museum anthropology in particular lose their sense if they are not grounded in and speak back to philosophical ponderings on the human condition and, in this case, on what critique and intellectual labor more broadly might comprise. Such combination of philosophical reflection in relation to historical and ethnographic evidence has synergies with the growing school of existentialist anthropology (e.g. Jackson and Piette 2015), which may come to influence the present and future of museum anthropological work as a real world activity and experience beyond the often valid but also frequently misrepresenting critique or 'presentism' (Stocking 1965) of its past.³ By appropriating Foucault's insights, I wish to allude to the critical potential of the *doing* of museum anthropology, as it multiplies signs and forms of existence and (re)invents them by not only studying but *intervening* in its subject matter, thus articulating and enacting leaps of the imagination. Moreover, the doing of museum anthropology itself is *happening*, by engaging things, in their material and abstract sense, and people in often unpredictable, surprising and enriching ways. Taken together, then, the doings of museum anthropology can do something of vital importance in the twenty-first century: prompting curiosity to satisfy the desire and indeed the need to know.

The doings of museum anthropology

The focus on the (un/re)doings of museum anthropology, as pursued here, has been informed by several decades of transformative literature on 'decolonizing' anthropology (e.g. Harrison 1991) and museums (e.g. Lonetree 2012), and the associated scholarship on shifting the power relations and decision-making in interpretation and curatorship. Furthermore, there has been an inspiring body of literature informing and reflecting the move from (post)colonial critique to decolonial museum practices through museological reimaginings and reinventions, enacted through e.g. Indigenous and cross-disciplinary museologies, and geared towards more collaborative and participatory knowledge practices (e.g. McCarthy 2007 and 2011; Philipps 2011; Shannon and Lamar 2014; Carreau et al. 2018; Edenheiser and Förster 2019; Gibson 2020). Importantly, many of those initiatives have engaged with the *afterlives* of museum things, institutions and knowledges, that is, the affordances, efficacies and potentialities of materialized histories in the present towards new futures. What *happens*, for example, when a material thing, collected in the name of salvage anthropology, is (re)used and reinserted into the contemporary social fabric and cultural life of a formerly collected society? What can such material entities *do* when being (re)mobilized through museum anthropology's *doings*?⁴

The present article sets out to reflect on the doings of museum anthropology, as historically grounded, ethnographically informed and philosophically framed knowledge practices. While cultivating its own doing on the methodological plane (e.g. in terms of reciprocity, revitalization, return and other collaborative acts), museum anthropology is distinctively equipped to do certain things, in terms of affecting and achieving: *intervening* in the field that it studies; engaging with material things, biographies, bodies, relationships and knowledges; being simultaneously interpersonal, cross-cultural, scientific, ethical, political, diplomatic and therapeutic; attending to the tiniest material presence and trace while multiplying, reimagining and reinventing worlds. These particular museological doings have broader implications for general anthropology and other related disciplines and fields. While one of the hallmarks of anthropology is the study of human practices as the object of its analysis, the discipline continues to grapple with its own methodological practices and often detached theories. What can anthropology (and the wider humanities and social sciences) more generally learn from curatorship and museological doings?

In mapping out the program of museum anthropology being developed at LMU Munich, I wish to explain what has been done, what is being done and what will be done. In 2015, Conal McCarthy, Eveline Dürr and I convened an international conference with the title 'Curatopia: Museums and the Future of Curatorship', which led to an edited volume published in 2019 (Schorch and McCarthy 2019). At that time, we wanted to explore the following questions: What is the future of curatorship? Is there a vision for an ideal model, a curatopia, whether in the form of a utopia or dystopia? Or is there a plurality of approaches, amounting to a curatorial heterotopia? The resulting collection addresses those questions by considering the current state of curatorship. It reviews the different models and approaches operating in museums, galleries and cultural organizations around the world and discusses emerging concerns, challenges and opportunities. International in scope, the volume covers three regions: Europe, North America and the Pacific. The collection explores the ways in which the mutual, asymmetrical relations underpinning global, scientific entanglements of the past can be transformed into more reciprocal, symmetrical forms of cross-cultural curatorship in the present, suggesting that this is the most effective way for curatorial practice to remain meaningful.

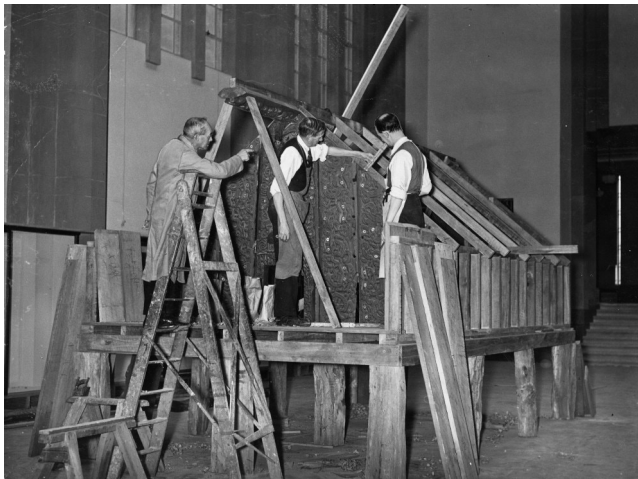


Fig. 1. The Māori carver Thomas Heberley directing work on the carved store house Te Tākinga in preparation for the opening of the Dominion Museum, Wellington, New Zealand, mid-1930s. Photograph courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Importantly, to avoid myopic epochal hubris, the suggested redoing of curatorial futures requires the revisiting of histories. In Aotearoa New Zealand, for example, one can detect a

long history of Indigenous engagement with the method, the practice, the doing of curation – in this case, through the figure of the *kaitiaki*, the guardian, caring for *taonga*, or treasures. In figure 1, one sees the Māori carver Thomas Heberley directing work on the carved store house *Te Tākinga* in preparation for the opening of the Dominion Museum in Wellington in the mid-1930s. In figure 2, Professor Hirini Moko Mead, academic and curator of the exhibition *Te Maori*, is seen giving a talk at the National Museum in Wellington in 1986. The *Te Maori* exhibition was a milestone in the so-called Māori cultural renaissance. First touring several high-profile institutions in the United States, it returned to Aotearoa New Zealand to make an impact upon Indigenous resurgence, revitalization and sovereignty (McCarthy *et al.* 2019). Exhibitions, as these examples show, do not simply represent, and they also do more than simply mean. They intervene in the environments in which they are embedded, remaking and redoing worlds.



Fig. 2. Professor Hirini Moko Mead, academic and curator of the exhibition Te Maori, seen giving a talk at the National Museum, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, 1986. Photography courtesy of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

Such histories continue to inform the present and future, through museological leaps of the imagination, which was the thematic focus of another book, *Refocusing Ethnographic Museums through Oceanic Lenses*, published in 2020, the outcome of a collaborative ethnographic investigation of Indigenous museum practices in three Pacific museums located at the corners of the so-called Polynesian triangle: Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Hawai'i; Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa); and Museo Antropológico Padre Sebastián Englert, Rapa Nui (Easter Island) (Schorch *et al.* 2020). The collaborative ethos was enacted at every stage and in each dimension of the ethnographic inquiry informing this book: from question and method to interpretation and representation or writing, by including co-written chapters with Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu, Sean Mallon, Cristián Moreno Pakarati, Mara Mulrooney and Nina Tonga, as well as an afterword by Ty P. Kāwika Tengan. A distinctive feature, then, is the book's form, the underlying scholarly doing, however imperfect it might be perceived. Overall, the volume shapes a dialogue between widely critiqued Euro-American myopia and Oceanic perspectives by offering historically informed, ethnographic insights into Indigenous museum practices grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and cosmologies. In doing so, it employs Oceanic lenses that help to reframe Pacific collections in, and the production of

public understandings through, ethnographic museums in Europe and the Americas.



Fig. 3. *Makaloa* mat, woven by Kala'i-o-kamalino from the island of Ni'ihau, 1874. Photograph courtesy of Marques Hanalei Marzan, Bishop Museum.

Let me provide you with a snippet of content to offer some evidence backing up such claims.⁵ At Bishop Museum, one can find a *makaloa* mat, woven by an 80-year-old woman by the name of Kala'i-o-kamalino from the island of Ni'ihau (figure 3). Kala'i originally made it for King Lunalilo, Hawai'i's first elected monarch and predecessor of Kalākaua. The mat is thus the physical manifestation of the relationship between a particular *ali'i* (leader) and one of his subjects. The *makaloa* mat then became Kalākaua's by an act of fate, given that he had assumed office following the death of Lunalilo by the time it arrived.⁶ According to the 'official record', the mat was presented to Kalākaua in 1874 with an inscribed petition asking the 'Heavenly One' to lift the 'burden' of the newly introduced animal tax at a time of dramatic change for the Hawaiian people. The full petition was printed by two Hawaiian newspapers, the version in *Kuokoa* (1874) corresponding more faithfully (yet not precisely) to the mat. Here we read how Kalai'i refers to King Kamehameha I, who unified the Hawaiian Islands in 1810, and 'peace' as the 'symbol of his kingdom' and its 'constitution', which did not allow for 'ruthless seizing... because of his love of the people'. She calls the reader to 'study the great cause for the decrease of the Hawaiian people... and to ask the king to change the taxes on animals... O heavenly One', Kala'i concludes by demanding, 'release [us] from the burden of the law that keeps us slaves under masters from the sky' (Kala'i in Rose 1990: 97-8).

This remarkable woven protest has been preserved in the Bishop Museum since 1891 but was virtually forgotten until recently. In the first comprehensive study, written almost 100 years later, in 1990, Roger Rose argues that 'incorporating the written language into a *makaloa* mat is one more example of the creativity of the Hawaiian artisan, and a remarkable adaptation of a traditional decorative technique to an innovative purpose' (Rose 1990: 95). This ethnographic-historical interpretation derived from subtle scholarly analysis sounds reasonable and convincing, but what is even more important for my purposes here is that the mat lives on and 'speaks to' Marques Hanalei Marzan, who currently looks after it in the Bishop Museum's collection, as he describes:

This particular mat is unique in that it has text written over the entire surface... The letters as well as the lines are all overlaid onto the surface of the mat, which means it can't be seen on the backside... I think the special way that this

particular weaver chose to express herself was in a very Hawaiian type of way... She made this mat to make sure that the king understood his responsibility to his people, just as all of the other kings of Hawai'i did during their reigns, to never forget that your predecessors laid the foundation for your work, and to always walk in the footsteps of your predecessors. If not to do exactly the same thing but to remember the intent, the reasons why they chose to do those things for the kingdom.⁷

Marques goes on to elaborate how Kala'i's chosen and distinctively Hawaiian manner of expressing herself and addressing an issue inspired him to weave the piece, *Nā'ū nā kala* (figure 4). He incorporated the petition's final words, 'na'ū na kala', which he interprets as 'let forgiveness resound',

to always be a symbol or a reminder that there are things that we all must do, for the betterment of ourselves or our family or our situations, that might not always be easy. And if we look to that and just remember what it is intended for, there's a greater purpose for it rather than just the immediate gratification, but the betterment for future generations, future decision making. Those ideas need to be remembered and that's how I interpret this wonderful mat that we see here in front of us... in the art work that I created that speaks to the mat very closely because I used the same lettering style.⁸



Fig. 4. Artwork, Nā'ū nā kala, by Marques Hanalei Marzan in conversation with Kala'i, 2014. Photograph courtesy of Marques Hanalei Marzan.

It becomes apparent that both material expressions are neither artifacts nor represent external realities. Instead, both function as vessels through which Marques and Kala'i converse through the language of weaving and the enactment of cultural skills, thereby mobilizing underlying Hawaiian purposes and values for ethical and political ends. Moreover, this museological conversation between two interlocutors, both past and present, is embedded in wider transpacific

reworldings through museological means, as the following excerpt attests.

On 26 January 1779, the reigning chief of Hawai'i Island, Kalani'ōpu'u, encountered Captain James Cook, whose ship landed in Kealakekua Bay.⁹ As a demonstration of his peaceful intentions, Kalani'ōpu'u gifted the *mahiōle* (feathered helmet) and *'ahu 'ula* (feathered cloak) he was wearing to Cook. According to Lieutenant James King, the chief 'got up & threw in a graceful manner over the Captns Shoulders the Cloak he himself wore, & put a feathered Cap upon his head, & a very handsome fly flap in his hand' (Beaglehole 1967: 512 in Mallon *et al.* 2017: 5). Both material treasures were subsequently taken to England and in the following years passed through various private and museum collections. They eventually arrived at the Dominion Museum in Wellington, New Zealand, the predecessor of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (Te Papa), and were displayed as part of the latter's opening exhibitions in 1998. Over the last decade, an increasing number of Hawaiian artists, activists, researchers, and school groups included Te Papa on their travel itineraries to Aotearoa New Zealand so they could visit Kalani'ōpu'u's *mahiōle* and *'ahu 'ula*. The display at Te Papa was described by the Wellington-based Hawaiian academic Emalani Case as a *pu'uhonua*, a place of refuge, sanctuary, or peace. But others openly challenged the status quo and demanded their return. For Native Hawaiians, the *'ahu 'ula*, *mahiōle*, and all other featherwork were reserved exclusively for the use of their *ali'i* (royalty), symbolizing their chiefly divinity, rank and power. From 2013, Te Papa was visited by delegations from the Bishop Museum and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in Honolulu. Conversations began about the possibility of a long-term loan of the *'ahu 'ula* and *mahiōle* to Hawai'i. In 2015, they were eventually taken off display to be prepared for their return to Hawai'i, which took place in March 2016 (Mallon *et al.* 2017).

The return of the *'ahu 'ula* and *mahiōle* from Aotearoa New Zealand to Hawai'i, which reconnected two corners of the ancient triangle of Hawai'i-nui-akea, is remarkable for several reasons. First, it enabled a historic 'reconnection of ancestral ties' (Carkreek 2017: 16) to take place through the enactment of Indigenous museological practices in the twenty-first century (Mallon *et al.* 2017). Second, it was a voluntary return as an act of restitution, underpinned not by (post)colonial redress but instead by Pan-Pacific notions of gift and reciprocity shared by many Māori and Hawaiian people, as well as other Pacific Islanders. Such Indigenous notions offer slightly different understandings of museums from the more common (post)colonial ideas of 'redress', as can be similarly observed in the related settler colonial contexts of Australia (Gibson 2019) and Northwest Canada (Glass 2015). As Arapata Hakiwai, Kaihautū or Māori co-director of Te Papa, stresses, these *taonga* (treasures) 'will be anchors in the revitalisation of the Hawaiian language and identity, and in the ongoing journey for Hawaiian self-determination'. The relationships between the three involved organizations (Te Papa, Bishop Museum, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs) were woven into the title of the exhibition – *He Nae Ākea: Bound Together*, thus reflecting the ties that bind – the *hulu* (feathers) bound to the *nae* (netting) of the *'ahu 'ula*, from the ancient past to the present (Hakiwai 2017: 19; McCarthy *et al.* 2019). Third, as Noelle Kahanu, who initiated the return from the Hawaiian side, emphasizes, it is significant to many in Hawai'i that these *mea waiwai ali'i* (chiefly valuables) were left by an act of Pacific generosity and returned by an act of Pacific generosity. 'Both acts were of lasting cultural and political importance', Kahanu concludes, and 'one might argue, commitments intended to bind future generations' (Kahanu *et al.* 2019: 297-8).

Such rebonding, as a decolonial methodology grounded in and enacted through real world activities and experiences, has sent ripples across the Pacific into Europe, witnessed in 2017 when German-Hawaiian entanglements were attended to through museological un- and redoing. On 23 October 2017, the Free State of Saxony in Germany, for the first time in its history, returned ancestral remains – in this case *iwi kūpuna* – to their descendants and place of origin, in this case Hawai'i. These *iwi kūpuna* were evidently stolen by German ship captains from burial caves in Hilo, Honolulu, and Wai'ālae in the Hawaiian Islands between 1896 and 1902 and sold directly to the Königliches Zoologisches und Anthropologisch-Ethnographisches Museum in Dresden. There they *became* scientific specimens incorporated into the anthropological collection that later, in 1957, formed part of the Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden. This museum belongs, since 2004, to the Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsen, or SES (State Ethnographic Collections Saxony) – together with the Grassi Museum

für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig and the Völkerkundemuseum Herrnhut – and, since 2010, to the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, or SKD (Dresden State Art Collections) (Schorch *et al.* 2020; Grimme *et al.* 2022).

Up to this day, this groundbreaking return of *iwi kūpuna* has remained the most meaningful museum-anthropological un- and redoing I have assisted with. I have shown a short version of a longer documentary about this occasion in many places and situations. In each instance, it has affected the audience, and it surely never stops affecting me. Without being able to show the documentary here, I can still briefly unpack what can be seen. I have always used the short version that operates in two languages, German and English, without subtitles, to allude to what museums are: spaces of radical cross-cultural translation. Cultures by definition undergo change and are fluid, so museums too should be sites of ongoing cross-cultural translation, thus extending the influential idea of ‘contact zones’ (Clifford 1997; see also Schorch 2013). At the beginning one can see how Eva-Maria Stange, then cultural minister of Saxony, struggled to pronounce *iwi kūpuna*, linguistically, but I am sure she also struggled to grasp it conceptually, cosmologically, ontologically, epistemologically. This is not meant disrespectfully at all, as I, as a museum anthropologist and so-called expert, certainly share her sense of puzzlement because I simply do not inhabit a Hawaiian world. Importantly, however, such cross-cultural dissonance did not prevent Stange from engaging with this Hawaiian world on the ethical and political plane, offering an apology while being moved to tears – honest tears, I am convinced. The ceremony took place in an exhibition space, thereby doing nothing less than rewriting, at least partially, the idea of the museum through its own doing. As Noelle Kahanu, who reappears throughout this article, stressed at the end, relationships and people made all the difference. Initially, it took travelling bodies and biographies to collect and create knowledge, and nowadays it takes travelling bodies and biographies to reconstitute and revise knowledge.

Consider the ripple effects that this sea changing ceremony has sent across Germany. While I was in Hawai‘i, in February 2022, a chain of high-profile restitutions took place from the Überseemuseum Bremen, the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, the Friedrich-Schiller Universität Jena and the Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz back to Hawai‘i.¹⁰ These momentous engagements resemble but differ from scenes of encounter in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Europe and the Pacific became intimately entangled. Initial encounters happened on the beach, as the historian of the Pacific, Greg Dening, famously pointed out, a site of cross-cultural and often violent engagement (Dening 2004). In the twenty-first century, for the descendants of emblematic figures such as the navigators Tupaia and Captain Cook,¹¹ the museum becomes another beach. The ongoing controversies around ethnographic museums show that material entities – through their transfer, presence and restitution – continue to gather people together. Far from being dead relics and static records of the past, they continue to live material lives of unforeseen potentialities, as can also be observed in related contexts (Morphy 2020), provoking human debate, contestation, conflict and, potentially, reconciliation and reciprocal knowledge production.

Another museological story lends further weight to such claims. Figure 5 depicts a scene of a Tlingit Basketry Workshop with the late Teri Rofkar at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in 2016. Participants of the workshop, including Diana Gabler, who works as conservator at the Museum am Rothenbaum – Kulturen und Künste der Welt (MARKK) in Hamburg and studies for a PhD with me at LMU Munich, were invited by Rofkar to wear the Mountain Goat DNA robe (Raven’s Tail Robes from Sitka, Alaska, made by her) to further the connection with contemporary cultural material. Sharing this unique experience was part of the relationship building process during the workshop. It allowed participants to connect more deeply with the basketry that was discussed during the workshop: ‘the robe is a basket that holds people’. From the moment I saw this picture as a set of snapshots for the first time, it never ceased to fire up my imagination. I use it here to sum up a key point: critiques and arguments provide us with important tools to take on the world we inherited, but it ultimately takes transformative doing to un- and redo this world. When I saw these pictures, I asked myself: what was happening? After Diana provided some explanation, which I briefly summarized here, I kept on pondering over the months on the space in which the doing happened. At first sight, this space appears as a sterile conservation lab, arbitrarily

reproducible, anytime and anywhere. The action happening, however, does nothing less than rewrite, at least partially, the idea of conservation through its own doing. I am convinced that neither the people nor the space depicted remained the same. In fact, this happening offered a significant impetus for Diana, a professional conservator, to study her own doing through a cross-cultural lens. This is what museum anthropology can do in the twenty-first century: open particular doors to particular spaces with particular actions to spur the curiosity, the desire, indeed the need to know.



Fig. 5. Scene of a Tlingit Basketry Workshop with the late Teri Rofkar at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) in 2016. Photograph courtesy of NMAI.

After laying out what has been done and what is being done, I want to sketch out, during the remainder of this article, what will be done to further develop museum anthropology at LMU Munich in conjunction with diverse partners. In an initiative titled 'Recollecting Rapa Nui', spearheaded by Diego Muñoz in collaboration with Cristián Moreno Pakarati and myself, we have created a digital platform or 'visual gallery', which centralizes dispersed Rapanui carvings housed in over thirty museum institutions across Europe and the Pacific as well as North and South America.¹² The visual gallery is organized through Rapanui categories and in chronological order, functioning as an aesthetic archive to investigate and inform art practices and styles.¹³ Once again we pursue a museum anthropology that intervenes and studies. Our ambition is to virtually reassemble and remobilize historical carvings, such as the significant *moai kavakava* housed at the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich (figure 6), so that they can inform new carvings, as produced by the late Bene Tuki Paté (figure 7). In the background behind Tuki, one can detect the *Art of Easter Island*, the famous and in some ways infamous book published by Thor Heyerdahl (1976). This book has evolved into an 'artistic bible' because it has allowed contemporary Rapanui artists to engage with the material expressions of their predecessors, now largely housed outside of the island. A traveling book has thus had an enormous impact on Rapanui art history. In our ongoing research, we want to understand what impact the visual gallery, which can travel even more dynamically than a book, can make. This is no small feat, as Heyerdahl did not include the collections from

Munich. The *moai kavakava*, arriving at the museum in 1825 and likely stemming from Cook's visit of the island in 1774, has thus not been known on the island. Furthermore, we want to understand what contemporary Rapanui artists think about such *moai kavakava* informing a drawing by the expressionist artist and member of the *Der Blaue Reiter* collective, August Macke, in 1913.¹⁴ Nowadays often critiqued as colonial appropriation, which is certainly justifiable to some extent, it remains an open question of what Rapanui artists themselves think about such cross-cultural fertilization. What are the characteristics of Rapanui art, and how does it resonate with art movements like expressionism and surrealism? We want and indeed need to know.

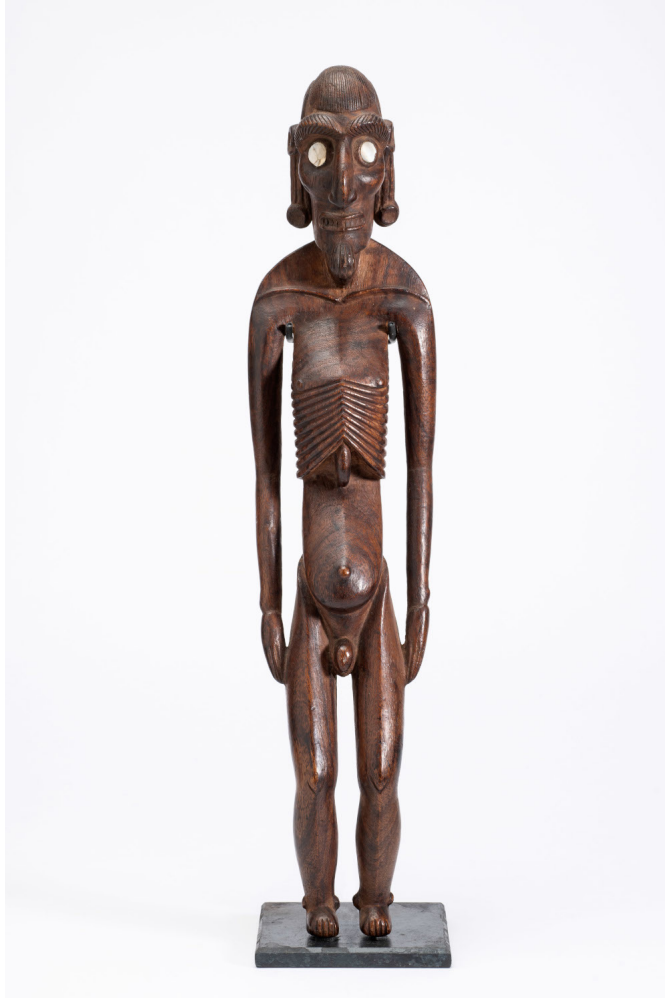


Fig. 6. Moai kavakava at the Museum Fünf Kontinente, Munich. Photograph courtesy of Nicolai Kästner, Museum Fünf Kontinente.



Fig 7. The late Bene Tuki Paté. Photograph courtesy of Paula Rossetti, Rapa Nui.

Our work in the ERC research group devoted to ‘Indigenities in the 21st Century’ has evolved towards the deployment and interrogation of a set of knowledge practices – collecting, filming, and exhibiting – through which Indigenous multiplicities become constituted.¹⁵ In the initiative ‘Sāmoan multiplicities’, Safua Akeli Amaama and Annika Sippel at Te Papa, as well as I are studying histories of ‘Sāmoa on display’; reconfiguring Sāmoan collections across the curatorial domains of Pacific Cultures, natural history and the arts; and intervening in ‘Sāmoa online’ from within and between several localities, such as Aotearoa New Zealand, Germany, Hawai’i and the two Sāmoas, independent western Sāmoa and so-called American Sāmoa.¹⁶ Noelle Kahanu as well as Taloi Havini, Leah Lui-Chivizhe and Jordan Wilson will guide the development of the exhibition *Indigenous Futures* (working title) to be staged at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA), University of Cambridge.¹⁷ During my recent trip to Hawai’i in early 2022, we filmed museum professionals at Bishop Museum – Kamalu du Preez and Marques, whom we encountered before in this article – with an eye on their engagement with *niu*, nowadays largely known as the coconut. Often seen as a mundane material, it is, in fact, foundational of a large portion of any Pacific collection. Take *niu* away, and the majority of Oceanic things would disappear. This short documentary will feature in the *Indigenous Futures* exhibition and is aligned with an award-winning animated fable, *Sina ma Tinirau*,¹⁸ about the creation story of *niu*, which we produced, and a documentary on *niu*, the tree of life, which we are producing.¹⁹ Our own doing will give rise to reflections on the nexus between exhibiting and filming, an underexplored terrain, especially through Indigenous lenses.

In a related context, we have been researching materiality in various ways. Another volume, *Exploring Materiality and Connectivity in Anthropology and Beyond*, was published in 2020, providing a new look at the old anthropological concern with materiality and connectivity (Schorch *et al.* 2020). Throughout the four-year research process that led to this book, the authors approached this question not just from a theoretical perspective; taking the suggestion of ‘thinking through things’ (Henare *et al.* 2007) literally and methodologically seriously, the first two workshops were dedicated to practical, hands-on exercises working with things. From these workshops a series of installations emerged, straddling the boundaries of art and academia. These installations served as artistic-academic interventions during the final symposium and are featured alongside the other academic contributions to this volume. Further developing this strand of thinking-by-doing, we have established a research focus at LMU’s Centre for Advanced Studies (CAS) on the relationship between materiality, museology and knowledge across the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, art history and natural history.²⁰ We have also been working on related initiatives: one treats the material cultures of ethnography and natural history as archives of environmental knowledge to be harnessed to

address pressing questions of human-environmental relationship;²¹ and the other sets out to pluralize the value of things.²² And in another project, we reassemble, reactivate and redistribute dispersed archival traces of 'Indigenous informants' as 'anthropology's interlocutors', in the largely hibernating university collections at LMU Munich and connected collections at other institutions, to shed light on the complexity of ethnographic knowledge production.²³ These initiatives, in conjunction, place museum anthropology's doing in a field of cross-disciplinary interaction beyond the museum itself. In other words, museum anthropology, as a specific methodological apparatus and range of knowledge practices, has something to offer to a variety of disciplines with which we have collaborated at LMU Munich and beyond: archaeology, art history, geography, history, natural history and theater studies. In the case of another book (and its underlying research), *Curating (Post-)Socialist Environments*, published in 2021, Daniel Habit and I suggest a curatorial lens through which urban environments become constituted and can thus be analyzed (Schorch and Habit 2021). In other words, urbanities might function akin to exhibitions. I leave it to you, the reader, to engage with this idea, by reading the book and/or meandering around cityscapes with fresh eyes. For now, I wish to conclude.

Conclusion

In this article, I set out to tackle the question of what museum anthropology can do in the twenty-first century. I did so by focusing on the *doing* in a double-sense: on what museum anthropology can *do*, as in affecting, impacting and achieving, as well as on museum anthropology's own *doing*, as a particular set of knowledge practices brimming with methodological, epistemological and ontological potentials to be harnessed for its own renewal and for cross-disciplinary fertilization across the academy and beyond the museum itself. Processes of restitution, for example, could be considered as ethnographic method through which the lives of material entities and their relationships with people can be better understood (Schorch 2020); or as (post)colonial memory work through which German-Hawaiian entanglements can be attended to and cared for (Grimme et al. 2022). Embracing it as a method, and developing a sound philosophical grounding for it, is an opportunity and challenge for the discipline of museum anthropology globally. Whatever lens we use, the point is that the underpinning doing, the real-world activities and experiences, exceed any explanatory frame. There simply is too much happening. When so-called ethnographic objects, collections and exhibitions are used in the present and mobilized towards the future, we might move from postcolonial critique to decolonial doing. An anthropology not only of and in but *through* museums might thus make a valid contribution to reimagining and reinventing the world we inherited and inhabit.

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Notes

1 In Germany, *Ethnologie* is used synonymously for social and cultural anthropology, while *Anthropologie* originally referred to physical anthropology and has recently also been adopted for cultural anthropology, as in *Kulturanthropologie*. Similarly, ethnographic museums tend to be called *ethnologisch* or are still associated with *Völkerkunde* (which has disappeared in the academic context). Spurred by the intensified debates around Germany's long-silenced colonial legacy, semantic shifts are occurring. In October 2017, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde* was renamed the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie* (German Association for Social and Cultural Anthropology), largely to distance itself from prior racialized notions of *Volk*. At the same time, there is a pervasive shift toward renaming museums and replacing the *ethnologisch*, as in the case of the Humboldt Forum. For the history of German anthropology/ethnology, see Penny and Bunzl (2003); and for the history of German ethnographic/ethnological museums, see Penny (2002).

- 2 The most prominent case has been the Humboldt Forum in Berlin, which has attempted to reconfigure the rebuilt Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace) as a museum forum for the world (Heller and Humboldt Lab Dahlem 2015; von Bose 2016; Bredekamp and Schuster 2016). This ambitious project has brought Germany's difficult and long-silenced colonial legacy back to the surface of a changing national commemorative environment and subjected it to international scrutiny, critique, and protest (Thiemeyer 2016; Heller and AfricAvenir International e.V. 2017; see also 'No Humboldt 21!': <http://www.no-humboldt21.de/>, accessed 21 October 2023).
- 3 As related examples of the current debates on the history of anthropology more generally, see e.g. Lewis (1999) and Darnell (2001).
- 4 Conal McCarthy, Miranda Johnson and I convened, in 2021, an online symposium on 'The Museum as Archive: Using the Past in the Present and Future', in which we asked related questions and which is currently being developed into a special journal issue.
- 5 The following paragraphs have been developed from chapter 2, 'Rethinking Temporalities: Curatorial Conversations, Material Languages, and Indigenous Skills' in Schorch *et al.* 2020.
- 6 I thank Marques Hanalei Marzan and Noelle M.K.Y. Kahanu for information pertaining to Kala'i and her woven protest.
- 7 Marques Marzan, interview by the author, 15 October 2014, Bishop Museum.
- 8 Marques Marzan, interview by the author, 19 November 2014, Bishop Museum.
- 9 The following paragraphs have been developed from the 'Introduction' in Schorch *et al.* 2020.
- 10 Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 'Hawaiian Delegation to Bring Home 58 Iwi Kūpuna from Germany and Austria', 7 February 2022. <https://www.oha.org/news/hawaiian-delegation-to-bring-home-58-iwi-kupuna-from-germany-austria/>, accessed 20 September 2023.
- 11 For a recent rendering, which draws the relationship between Tupaia and Cook into the realm of museums, see von Zinnenburg Carroll (2023).
- 12 Diego Muñoz, Philipp Schorch and Cristián Moreno Pakarati, 'Recollecting Rapa Nui', IndiGen. <https://www.indigen.eu/projects/core-projects/recollecting-rapa-nui> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.
- 13 'Recollecting Rapa Nui: Visual Gallery', IndiGen. <https://www.indigen.eu/gallery> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.
- 14 See blog by Philomena Luna Härdtlein, 'Expressing "Inner Form": Two Moai Kavakava in August Macke's Collection of Forms', IndiGen, 31 July 2021. <https://www.indigen.eu/blog/expressing-inner-form> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023; and Haas *et al.* (2023).
- 15 'Indigeneities in the 21st Century', IndiGen 2023. <https://www.indigen.eu/> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.
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- 21 Nicholas Thomas and Philipp Schorch, 'Museum Futures', IndiGen. <https://www.indigen.eu/projects/affiliated-projects/museum-futures> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.
- 22 Jonas Bens, Philipp Schorch, Timo Duile, Paola Ivanov, Andrea Scholz *et al.*, 'Pluralizing the Value of Things', IndiGen. <https://www.indigen.eu/projects/affiliated-projects/pluralizing-the-value-of-things> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.
- 23 Philipp Schorch, Magnus Treiber and Luisa Marten, 'Markus Mailopu and the II. Freiburg Moluccan Expedition: Reassembling, Reactivating and Redistributing "Anthropology's Interlocutors" through the Archive', IndiGen. <https://www.indigen.eu/projects/affiliated-projects/tracing-indigenous-informants> (author's project page), accessed 21 October 2023.

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