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# Decolonial Aesthetic Practices?

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Porous bodies, toxic relationality

Correcting an understanding of bodies as self-contained, autonomous entities that look from a distance at an environment that is separate from them, the lecture focuses on artistic practices that are interested in the porosity, vulnerability and relationality of human and non-human bodies. Based on theoretical considerations of feminist materialisms and decolonial ecologies, works will be discussed that understand the affectedness and transformation provoked by toxic living conditions as bodily processes. Instead of countering the destructions caused by colonial modernity with an aspiration for purity, the artists traverse forms of *alterlife* (Murphy 2017): Life altered by chemicals, dispossession of land, capitalist economy and ever present pollution, and conceptualize their independent constitution with and in the world from there.

Dr. Lotte Arndt is a researcher and curator based in Paris and Berlin. She focuses on works of artists who question the postcolonial present and the antinomies of modernity in a transnational perspective. As part of the international project *Re-connecting "Objects": Epistemic Plurality and Transformative Practices in and beyond Museums* (Technische Universität Berlin), she is currently conducting research on toxic conservation, chemical modernity and colonial collections. She is co-founder of the online journal *Troubles dans les collections*, and recently published "Poisonous Heritage: Chemical Conservation, Monitored Collections, and the Threshold of Ethnological Museums" (*Museums & Society*, 2022, <https://journals.le.ac.uk/index.php/mas/article/view/4031>).

Exhibition curations: *Branching Streams. Sketches of Kinship* (collectively conceived by *Re-connecting "Objects"*, Théodore Monod Museum for African Art, Dakar, 18 May–15 September 2024); *Unextractable. Sammy Baloji invites* (with Yasmin Afschar and Marlène Harles, Kunsthalle Mainz, October 2023–February 2024), *Elvia Teotski: Molusma* (La Criée, Rennes, September 2021); *Extractive Landscapes* (Museumspavillon, Salzburg, 25 July–17 August 2019); *Candice Lin: A Hard White Body* (with Lucas Morin, Bétonsalon, Paris 2017; with Philippe Pirotte, Portikus, Frankfurt/Main 2018).

Selected publications: "Les survivances toxiques des collections coloniales" (*Troubles dans les collections*, 2022); *Candice Lin. A Hard White Body* (with Yesomi Umolu, 2019); *Les revues font la culture ! Négociations postcoloniales dans les revues culturelles africaines à Paris* (2016); *Crawling Doubles. Colonial Collecting and Affect* (ed. with Mathieu Kleyebe Abonnenc and Catalina Lozano, 2016); *Hunting & Collecting. Sammy Baloji* (ed. with Asgar Taiaksev, 2016).

## Chokri Ben Chikha

### Truth Commission: The Human Zoo as a tool for critical (re)search on decolonial practices

Artist and scholar Chokri Ben Chikha's research focuses on the colonial contexts of the European World Fairs, particularly in Belgium and the Netherlands. These exhibitions featured "human zoos", where "authentic" and "exotic" villagers were presented to entertain visitors. In the framework of his theatre company *Action Zoo Humain*, Ben Chikha has staged *Truth Commission* that investigates the harmful historical practices of colonization and their repercussions in the neo-colonial present, involving experts and diasporic artists in the process. The audience actively participates, creating scenarios of judgment, compensation and reconciliation. The *Truth Commission* has been performed in a variety of venues, including courthouses in Ghent, Antwerp and Mechelen, the University of the Western Cape in South Africa, churches in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, as well as a regional parliament (Arnhem) and a national parliament (The Hague). Its ability to adapt to local contexts led to its selection as one of the most urgent and essential productions of the Dutch National Theatre Festival in 2024. The presentation will introduce the *Truth Commission* project, taking a critical look at (de)colonial practices by exploring the persistence of historical injustices in contemporary contexts.

Dr. Chokri Ben Chikha is a distinguished international researcher, lecturer, theatre director, and performer, whose award-winning productions have garnered critical acclaim. He earned his MA in History from the University of Ghent and subsequently undertook extensive training in theatre-making, acting, dance, and choreography. Ben Chikha has held teaching positions at several esteemed institutions, including RITS Brussels, Toneelacademie Maastricht and Amsterdam, and the University of Antwerp. Since 2007, he has served as a lecturer and researcher in the arts at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts/University College Ghent and the University of Antwerp. In 2008, Chokri Ben Chikha paused his theatre activities to pursue a PhD in the arts at KASK/UGent, titled "What is the Critical

Value of Stereotypes as Signs in Theatre? The 'Human Zoo' as a (Re)search Tool". This research project combined scholarly reflection with theatrical experimentation, characterized by its performative, inter-, and multidisciplinary approach, incorporating a critique of the arts. The project led to the establishment of the international theatre company *Action Zoo Humain*, where Ben Chikha serves as the artistic leader. He successfully completed his PhD with the multidisciplinary performance "The Truth Commission". Ben Chikha regularly delivers lectures and literary performances at various educational institutions and socio-cultural organizations both domestically and internationally. Additionally, he is the 'artist in residence' at the city theatre of Ghent (NTGent).

Meriam Bousselmi

“Decolonial-splaining”?  
On the hegemony of a discursive practice

“Tchipologue” is a fictive new field of academic research invented by Franco-Ivorian theatre maker Sabine Pakora for her satirical character Denise Épinal in her 2022 solo performance, *La Freak, journal d'une femme vaudou* (*La Freak, Diary of a Voodoo Woman*). Pakora’s portrayal of Denise Épinal delivering a lecture and subsequent book signing on her specialized subject—the Tchip sound in African and Caribbean cultures, used to express disapproval or annoyance—can be seen as a satirical commentary on the surge of decolonial experts in contemporary discourse. Through the figure of the “tchipologist” Pakora criticizes what I term the “decolonial-splaining”, highlighting how mainstream decolonial discourses and practices can turn performative, often overshadowing and marginalizing the very voices they aim to amplify. Olúfemi Táíwò, Professor of African Political Thought at Cornell University, shares similar concerns in his book *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (African Arguments, 2022). Táíwò argues that the current use of “decolonisation” has strayed from its original purpose and is now often misapplied to various fields, hindering African scholarship and agency. He demonstrates that “decolonisers” often infantilize and impose their own values on present-day African thinkers and artists, a trend I strongly believe also affects Arab artists and thinkers. Based on these insights, in my talk, I want to question the hegemony of discursive decolonial practices that often reduce complex issues to rigid dichotomies. I try to take a differentiated perspective and develop an approach that is rooted in the Arab-African cultural context and heritage. In doing so, I recognize the mosaic of aesthetic discourses and practices in the local contexts of the Mena region and their diasporas that far transcend the patronizing assignments and reductions often inherent in current decolonial discourses.

Meriam Bousselmi, born in Tunis in 1983, works as a research associate in the DFG Research Training Group “Aesthetic Practice” at the Institute for Media, Theatre and Popular Culture at the University of Hildesheim. Her PhD project explores the (mis-)representations of justice on contemporary transcultural stages. She studied law and political science at the University of Tunis-Carthage and has been a lawyer at the Tunisian Order of Lawyers since 2010. With proficiency in

multiple languages and skills spanning writing, directing, lecturing, and researching across varied contexts and cultures, she fosters connections between disciplines and cultures. Through her thought-provoking artistic practice, she offers new perspectives on dynamics of power, delving into themes such as instrumentalization, categorization, and victimization within dominant transcultural narratives.

Sabine Choucair

## The Clowntastic lecture-performance

Welcome to the world of a very, very serious clown: Sabouny! Don't panic, rest assured, the clowning at our International Institute for Very, Very Serious Studies has nothing to do with oversized shoes and colourful wigs. This is mostly a western thing. Sabouny wouldn't come and colonize the colonizer with some old clowning practices.

In this lecture-performance, Sabouny, a humanitarian clown, storyteller and performer from Lebanon, doesn't want to "save" or "rescue" you. Instead, she will share with you her passion and insight into the very, very, very serious aesthetic practice of laughter. Laughter that is neither colonial nor decolonial, but rather radical. Radical laughter when it comes to dismantling the boundaries that divide the world into "heroes" and "saviours" on the one hand, and "victims" and "subalterns" on the other. For in the clowning practice Sabouny defends, radical laughter can draw its own geography and politics of relationality. Sabouny would like to discuss with you the power of laughter and live interaction techniques. You can hear about her very, very, very serious research and practice with *Clown Me In* and *Clowns Without Borders* in refugee camps, war and earthquake zones. And about the challenges she faces within her clowning practices.

Sabine Choucair is a Lebanese-American humanitarian clown and performer, and the first female clown to receive the "Premio Clown Nel Cuore" award in Italy. With qualifications in performing arts from London and social therapy from New York, she has been working with different communities around the world. She co-founded *Clown Me In* in Lebanon and Mexico, a group using the art of clowning to fight social injustice. She is a member of *Clowns Without Borders USA* spreading joy and laughter among disadvantaged communities. She's the artistic director of the *International Institute for Very Very Serious Studies*, a performance training

program in Beirut focusing on social street theatre as well as the *Caravan street theatre productions* that take refugee and human rights stories to more than 100 communities in Lebanon and Tunisia and Europe. Sabine was among the *40 cultural leaders* chosen to share their work at the World Economic Forum in January 2017. Her theatre and therapy projects led her to work in Lebanon, the UK, the US, Brazil, Mexico, India, Canada, Cyprus, Tunisia, Turkey, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, France, Cameroon, Morocco, Jordan and Dubai.

Sabotaging, listening, reorienting. Critical practices of a philosophy  
in an entanglement-historical perspective

Philosophy, in its predominant self-narrative, is deeply rooted in European (thought) traditions. Even today, it is often told as a heroic story of outstanding (predominantly male) thinkers. This self-narrative is slowly changing and is being questioned with systematic intent through criticism and (self-)reflection (in German-speaking countries, see e.g. Elberfeld 2021 or Därmann 2019). Nevertheless, the associated “feeling of superiority” is still far too often powerful and the criticism of it either fades away or coagulates into a self-assuring gesture. Against this background, it does not seem sufficient to merely integrate previously excluded positions into an academic canon. Without further changes, this would result in exploitative appropriation while leading the original project of decolonizing thought ad absurdum.

Based on the practices of sabotaging (Spivak), listening (Elberfeld) and reorienting (Ahmed), the presentation asks about the possibilities of (academic) philosophy to clarify its own “history of entanglement” (Elberfeld 2021). Furthermore, it is concerned with the limits of these practices and the resulting political implications.

Hannah Franziska Feiler studied philosophy and intercultural arts in Hildesheim and Montpellier. After her studies, she worked on various dance and theatre projects, including the format *Theatrales Philosophieren* in Hamburg. From 2019 to 2022, she worked as project coordinator and dramaturge for *Compagnie Fredeweß*

in Hanover. Since April 2022, she has been a researcher at the DFG Research Training Group “Aesthetic Practice” at the Institute of Philosophy at the University of Hildesheim. In her PhD project, she focuses on the political potential of embodied forms of articulation.

Sarah Hegenbart

Njideka Akunyili Crosby's transcultural interiors  
as dialogical images

The Nigerian US-based artist Njideka Akunyili Crosby problematises the genre of the interior by questioning whether the categorical distinction between inside and outside, between inner life and outer life or between the private and the political can be maintained at all in a cosmopolitan world that oscillates between multiple global spaces. Her hybrid interior scenes form the starting point for this research, which examines the ways in which transcultural dialogical images operate. Akunyili Crosby approaches interior painting in the arts of global contemporaneity as a strategy of dialogical identity construction. She relates aspects of Nigerian everyday life to her own childhood memories and her observations from the perspective of a migrant in the USA today. By experimenting with various forms of images, such as memory images, photos from Nigerian magazines and newspapers, images from historical archives, media images, and photographs from her family albums, which she integrates into her works using the photo transfer technique, she creates hybrid interiors and imagines transcultural spaces. In order to illuminate the numerous influences that Crosby condenses in her work, I introduce the concept of the dialogical image. The dialogical image characteristically negotiates between different transcultural forms of expression and symbolism. The concept of the dialogical image departs from thinkers of the Black Atlantic and is informed by Walter Benjamin's idea of the dialectical image as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical understanding of the self as an interface that spatially encompasses several (often temporally unconnected) perspectives. I argue that the concept of the dialogical image is central to the analysis of transcultural artworks, since (1) it can relate a variety of epistemological approaches to one another, (2) it is conceived relationally and captures processes of negotiating transcultural ruptures on a pictorial level, and (3) it goes beyond Eurocentric philosophical and aesthetic approaches. Therefore, the dialogical image contributes to developing transcultural image politics, which demand the (re-)negotiation between transcultural perspectives and ambiguities.

Dr. Sarah Hegenbart is an art historian, curator and philosopher. She works as a lecturer at Technical University of Munich and leads a work package for the University of Oxford as part of the EU-funded Horizon 2020 project "Art and Research on Transformations of Individuals and Societies". She has been selected as

member of the Junge Akademie Mainz. Among her recent publications are *From Bayreuth to Burkina Faso: Christoph Schlingensiefel's Opera Village Africa as Postcolonial Gesamtkunstwerk?* (2022) and *Curating Transcultural Spaces: Perspectives on Postcolonial Conflicts in Museum Culture* (edited volume, 2024).



Kene Igweonu

## The Ignorant Practitioner: A diasporic perspective on decolonisation and anti-racism in UK higher education

Decolonisation and anti-racism, often prominent in Global North discourses, appear less central in continental African contexts where concepts like postcolonialism, Africanisation, and Afropolitanism are dominant. In “The Ignorant Practitioner: A Diasporic Perspective on Decolonisation and Anti-Racism in UK Higher Education,” I explore decolonisation and anti-racism through a number of critical lenses, examining how they are often mis/understood and articulated by higher education institutions in the UK, and the role that researchers and education practitioners can play in bringing about positive change. Drawing on my personal experiences as a member of the African diaspora within British society and higher education sector, the paper considers how approaches to decolonisation and anti-racism within UK higher education are transformed by the diaspora through their infusion of ideas from continental African and other global contexts. Highlighting the civic role of universities in the UK, the paper emphasises the necessity of individual and collective actions to decolonise higher education and ultimately dismantle institutional racism. I argue in the paper that by embracing transgression as an emancipatory practice, university educators and leaders can challenge oppressive structures and reimagine inclusive, decolonial spaces. I also present my recent edited book, *Routledge Handbook of African Theatre and Performance* (2024), as exemplifying this diasporic decolonisation efforts, underscoring the value of radical inclusivity and socio-political engagement in academia and beyond.

Professor Kene Igweonu PhD, FHEA, FRSA is Professor of Creative Education at University of the Arts London, where he is also Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of London College of Communication. An interdisciplinary researcher, Igweonu has extensive experience of senior academic leadership in immersive and interactive practices and performance practice. His practice

research and publication interests are in storytelling, theatre, and performance in Africa and its Diaspora, as well as the Feldenkrais Method in health, wellbeing, and performance training. A champion for arts and creative industries, Kene Igweonu is Chair of *DramaHE*, Council Member for *Creative UK*, and was President of the *African Theatre Association* (until August 2023).

“A film half a millennium long played backwards”: The limits of decoloniality as a perspective for a critical art history

The notion of decolonization and its various cognates can be encountered in a wide range of contexts, used eclectically both as a noun and a verb. They could refer to a process of liberation from the colonial yoke, or designate an epochal condition and an epistemological frame, or serve as an impassioned call to action, to dismantle existing power constellations in domains such as museums, pedagogies, curricula, memory cultures, scholarly traditions, archives, and so on. This presentation will begin by examining some of the key concepts of decoloniality as expounded in its foundational texts, while examining its claim to a “radical rethinking” of postcolonial positions. It further identifies the conceptual blind spots that follow from the understanding of colonialism within which theorizations of the decolonial are anchored. What does the reductive conflation of modernity and coloniality that forms a key premise of decolonial theory imply for the study of societies across the globe that were once colonized, and whose subjects have redefined and reenacted what it means to be modern?

The second segment of this talk will draw on an empirical example through which to propose an alternative framework and tool-box adequate to the challenge of dismantling the Eurocentric epistemic foundations of art history. It will endeavor to identify some of the methods as well as institutional strategies required if we are to do justice to conceptual materials of regions that lie beyond the Euro-American center of dominant narratives. Such methods go beyond additive acts of inclusion or explanations that reduce humans and things to objects of colonial violence. Transregional collaborative enterprises additionally ask that care be taken against the risk of replicating, often in unacknowledged ways, colonial models of hierarchy and privilege.

Prof. Dr. Monica Juneja is Senior Professor of Global Art History at the University of Heidelberg, and Distinguished Professor of the Arts and Humanities at Shiv Nadar University, India. She has written extensively on transculturation and visual representation, the disciplinary practices of art history in South Asia, the history of visibility in early modern South Asia, heritage and architectural histories in transcultural perspective. Her latest book *Can Art History be Made Global? Meditations from the Periphery* (2023), received the Opus Magnum award of the Volkswagen Foundation. She is also the recipient of the prestigious Meyer-Struckmann Prize awarded for excellence in the

Humanities and Social Sciences, and the 2024 Distinguished Teaching of Art History Award of the College Art Association. Monica Juneja edits the Series *Visual and Media Histories* (Routledge), is on the editorial boards of *Ding, Materialität, Geschichte* (E.J. Brill), *Ästhetische Praxis. Transdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (E.J. Brill), *History of Humanities* (University of Chicago Press), *Journal of Architecture* (Taylor & Francis) and co-editor of *Journal of Transcultural Studies*. She also serves on the advisory boards of several institutions including Tate Hyundai Research (Tate Modern, London) and Cluster of Excellence *EurAsian Transformations* (University of Vienna).

Listening to images—Encountering colonial photo archives

Until today, photographs from formerly colonized countries shape the perception of colonial foreign rule. Representing landscapes, cities and people they are tools of colonial image politics. At the same time, they are regarded as relevant visual materials that researchers access to critically study colonial power hierarchies. Being stored in mostly European archive institutions these photographic collections are valued as historically relevant objects. Based on this ambivalence, the paper discusses how to responsibly engage with the colonial photo archive. How can we critically approach its structural power? How can we uncover the photographs' colonial content—often hidden behind representations of economic success and emptied out cities—and develop decolonial practices? Tina Campt suggests “listening” to images in order to learn about their “deep frequencies”, the hidden meanings beyond their colonial intention. In response to Campt's approach, I propose encountering archival photographs in different visual contexts beyond the archive. In reception environments such as social media platforms, the photographs are encountered with new readings and reinterpretations that are constantly negotiated. They do not dissolve the photographs' colonial gaze but can counter it with differentiated, current and personal interpretations. This paper will discuss how including the circulation of the photographs into their analysis questions the interpretative sovereignty (Deutungshoheit) of European archival institutions and emphasizes one's own situatedness in order to deconstruct the visual and archival power until today.

Dr. Sophie Junge is a substitute professor specializing in 20th century and contemporary art at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich from 2023. Her teaching and research interests lie in the history of photographic media and archives since the 19th century, art and activism in 20th century art and

contemporary art from Southeast Asia. Current publications include the thematic issue “Photography and Colonialism” (*Fotogeschichte*, 2021) and the anthology *Survey Practices: Landscape Photography across the Globe* (ed. with Erin Hyde Nolan, 2022).

Katrin Köppert

Digital Blackface.  
Decolonial aesthetics of computational fugitivity

With regard to reaction images that—in the form of the visualization of black facial expressions and gestures in memes and gifs—are offered on platforms as formulas for standardized emotional expression I understand digital blackface as a colonial aesthetic practice. It binds the subjugation of racialized people to the plundering of their emotional expressions. The constellation is not new: when racialized patterns of expression are appropriated, US cultural theory speaks of “blackfacing” and the genre of “minstrelsy”. The fact that this has always also been a form of expression of a subliminal, de-figured practice of resistance (Lott 1993, Hartman 1997) evokes the question of the status of liminal agency in the context of digital conjunctures of imitation and appropriation. In order to approach an answer, in this contribution I will deal with artistic examples of blackfacing (Glenn Ligon, Michael Ray Charles, Maren Hassinger, Zanele Muholi, Sandra Mujinga), whose aesthetic form of decolonial response is the liminality between legibility and illegibility, content and form, but also between man and machine, man and environment. Based on this, I ask about the transgressions that make digital blackface conceivable as a decolonial aesthetic in relation to its liminality and latent articulation.

Prof. Dr. Katrin Köppert is an art and media scholar. Since October 2019, she has held the Junior Professorship for Art History/Popular Cultures at the Academy of Fine Arts Leipzig. She has taught as a deputy professor and research assistant at Ruhr University Bochum, UdK Berlin, University of Art and Design Linz, University of Siegen. Since April 2024,

she has been conducting research as part of the VW-funded *Digital Blackface* project (with Simon Strick). She heads the DFG network *Gender, Media, Affect* (with Julia Bee) and is a member of the editorial board of the *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* and the *Open Gender Journal*. Together with Jiré Emine Gözen she hosts *GAAAP\_ The Blog*.

From decolonisation to emancipation:  
“desacralising Western paradigms of art”?

What is it to want to decolonise the arts if not first and foremost an awareness of the weight of colonial ideology on contemporary representations and aesthetics, and the desire to deconstruct this ideology? In this sense, it is not surprising that decolonial artistic movements are stronger in Europe than in Africa. Because it is in a predominantly white Western context that the ‘racialised’ artist experiences the symbolically violent experience of racial assignment and the perpetuation of a fantasised otherness.

But this does not mean that the decolonial approach is not valid in former colonies. On the contrary, the challenges of reappropriating cultural goods and knowledge, artistic practices, narratives, myths, traditions and rituals are just as crucial there, beyond the persistence and stigma of colonial ideologies. But in Africa, in Europe or in America, the racial experience is not the same for formerly colonised people and their descendants.

Is wanting to decolonise the arts enough to achieve emancipation from a system that is still profoundly dominant and inegalitarian? Judging by the way in which European cultural institutions have seized on the decolonial issue and largely emptied it of its meaning, this is highly doubtful. So is there a better way to emancipation? What if certain contemporary African artists were working, in a more or less assumed way, to desacralise “the Western paradigms of art” (Jean-Louis Sagot-Duvaurox, *L’Art est un faux dieu*, Paris 2020)?

Ayoko Mensah is an artistic curator and a cultural expert. Since 2024, she has been working as a curator at the *House of European History* in Brussels. Previously, she worked for seven years as an institutional advisor and artistic programmer at the *Centre for Fine Arts (BOZAR)* in Brussels where she was in charge of the Afropolitan Programme. Of Togolese heritage, born in France in 1968, Mensah is graduated in Cultural Management (MA) at University Paris-Dauphine, in Modern Literature (MA) at University Sorbonne Nouvelle and in journalism (CFPJ, Paris). Since 2000, Mensah also has worked as a consultant for several organisations (UNESCO, European Commission, EUNIC, Royal Museum for Central Africa,

International Music Council) and has been invited as a speaker at international conferences in Africa, Europe, in the United States and in China. In 2021, Mensah was invited by *Opera National de Paris* to join its “Committee on diversity issues” created the same year. In 2022, she gave a seminar at Paris 8 University entitled: “Decolonial dynamics of cultural institutions in Europe”. Mensah has co-authored several books, amongst others *Houn-Noukoun, Tambours & Visages* (1996); *Faustin Linyekula, choreographer* (2002); *A Body To Construct—The new generation of African Performance Artists* (2004); *Créations artistiques en pays d’islam* (2006); *Kultur Afrika* (2010); *Djoliba, le grand fleuve Niger* (2010).

Decoloniality—a challenge to modernity

Decoloniality is much more than a buzzword, even if it is currently on everyone's lips. In Europe, the history of the last 500 years has been told in such a way that the dehumanizing dimension of the enslavement and colonization of a large part of the world's population has been normalized and thus almost forgotten. Decoloniality offers itself as a challenge to our idea of modernity, since it thrives to remember that coloniality, i.e. colonial patterns of thought and action, and thus the dehumanization of almost all non-Europeans, was its strategy and goal. This must be discussed and changed by including non-Western epistemologies. Art history and art studies should rise to the challenge, as they were a decisive part of the territorial and mental conquest through the hierarchization of art and artefact and the consequent humiliation of other cultures and their art production. Both disciplines are called upon to include decoloniality as a method in their analytical practice. This lecture advocates this aim by describing the challenge from a Brazilian perspective and its contemporary art, exhibition practice and art history.

Prof. Dr. Carolin Overhoff Ferreira is an Associate Professor (Livre-Docente) at the Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil, where she teaches contemporary film and art from a decolonial perspective. She holds an MA in History of Art and Theatre Studies/Seminar in Film (1993) and a PhD in Theatre Studies (1997) from Freie Universität Berlin. During her undergraduate years she studied at the University of Vienna, University of Bristol and Humboldt University Berlin. She has taught at Hannover University for Applied Arts and Sciences, Freie Universität Berlin, Portuguese Catholic University in Porto and Coimbra University. She was a Research

Fellow at the University of São Paulo, a Visiting Fellow at the Portuguese Sub-faculty/University of Oxford and Visiting Fellow at Jesus College/Cambridge University. Ferreira also has a career in the arts as a dramaturge, curator and theatre critic. She worked at German national theatres, and for Portuguese and Brazilian fringe groups, curated several film shows on African and Luso-African cinema and contemporary film in Portugal and Brazil, and wrote weekly theatre reviews for the prestigious Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*.

Practices of unlearning and curating museum practices  
at the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*

Ethnological museums are closely entangled with colonial history and colonial continuities. Many ethnological museums look critically at this institutional history, which is reflected in exhibitions and curatorial approaches—including the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*.

The presentation looks at the exhibition spaces of the so-called *Backstage Area* of the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*. The area was designed as part of the *REINVENTING GRASSI.SKD* project (2020–2023) and opened in 2021 as the first part of the new permanent exhibition. It is striking that in this exhibition original objects are no longer the focus, but rather museum practices. The area is divided into three parts: a room for restoring objects, a commemorative room with the opportunity of ceremonially accompanying restitutions and a room for working on curatorial concepts, used for residencies. What usually happens “backstage” is brought to the “frontstage”. It seems that museum practices themselves are being curated in these exhibitions. Is the future of the ethnological museum to exhibit its inner self?

Ethnological museums are nowadays not only criticized from outside but act themselves as representatives of institutional and representational critique. As a result, criticism is quickly internalized and instrumentalized. One term that the *GRASSI Museum* uses in its efforts to decolonize the institution is that of “unlearning”. The term stands in conflict between serious attempts at decolonization and the internalization of critical approaches to stabilize the institution. This presentation therefore proposes shifting unlearning away from a discursive and towards an aesthetic practice and looking at practices of unlearning in curatorial processes.

The presentation discusses the exhibition example of the *Backstage Area* of the *GRASSI Museum* between in the tension of museum self-referentiality and decolonial museum practice and offers the concept of unlearning as a perspective of analysis.

Jocelyne Stahl is a cultural scientist, curator and mediator and deals with topics of education, mediation and exhibition making in the context of (ethnological) museums and their colonial continuities. She studied Media and Cultural Studies in Düsseldorf and Cultural Studies in Berlin. Jocelyne Stahl is a doctoral candidate at the Department of Cultural History and Theory at the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and an associate member of the DFG Research Training Group “Aesthetic Practice” at the University of Hildesheim. Her research

focuses on postcolonial and decolonial theories, the term of “unlearning” and aesthetic practices in museums. In her dissertation project, she investigates how aesthetic practices can break through and transform museum orders, looking at the *GRASSI Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig*, among others. She also works at the *Stiftung Humboldt Forum* as a curator of education for various exhibitions, co-leads a participatory youth project and deals with approaches of power-critical education.

Olaf Zenker

Lecturing on Anton Wilhelm Amo, or:  
How to decolonize the academy?

This talk engages the life and work of the first known Afro-German academic Anton Wilhelm Amo, and his time as an early Enlightenment scholar at the universities of Halle, Wittenberg and Jena, Germany, in the 18th century. Against this backdrop, it addresses the prevailing forgetting and silence around Amo, the increasing remembrance of him and his work in the 20th century, and the various expansions of the memory of and engagement with Amo in recent decades, using the University Halle-Wittenberg as a case study. In light of these discussions, the last part focuses on the annual ANTON WILHELM AMO LECTURES at the University Halle-Wittenberg, and explores how these, as decolonial aesthetic practices, attempt to engage Amo in order to enable multidirectional memories and imaginations of alternative worlds and futures—of a multiple otherwise—as well as the potentials and pitfalls that such an endeavour of decolonizing the academy might entail.

Prof. Dr. Olaf Zenker is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany). After earning his Master's degrees in Social Anthropology (London School of Economics) and Linguistics & Literature (University of Hamburg), he did his PhD at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology and the Martin Luther University in 2008, and subsequently became a Postdoc in the Max Planck Fellow Group "Law, Organisation, Science and Technology" (LOST). In 2009, he joined the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Bern as Assistant Professor, where he also held an Ambizione Research Fellowship (SNSF) and received his Habilitation in 2015.

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