



Ethnology Lab
on the Workings
of Covid-19 on
Museums

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Introduction

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On 8 and 9 October 2020, the Reinwardt Academy hosted the digital conference *Ethnology Lab on the Workings of Covid-19 on Museums*. The online gathering was coordinated in close collaboration with the Working Group on Museums and Material Culture of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), as well as ICOM's International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL). The programme was geared to address the challenges faced by museums and cultural heritage institutions in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. With this the organisers set out to provide a virtual platform for museum professionals and academics to establish a dialogue with one another, and in so doing, explore matters of common concern. These included some of the transformative shifts observed recently in the collection dynamics of museal and archival institutions, changes in the conception of participatory and inclusiveness strategies, and the emergence of new possibilities for cultural programming and exhibiting against the backdrop of uncertainty.

Everyday practices are considered key in ethnology. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it were the firsthand experiences with the Covid-19 situation of ethnologist and museum director Uta Karrer that spearheaded the idea behind this conference. In line with the aims of SIEF's Working Group of Museums and Material Culture, that is, to connect and strengthen the fields of ethnology and museum work, the conference set out to discuss how the pandemic is impacting the ongoing and future work practices of researchers, ethnologists and museum professionals.

A theme brought in by organising partner COMCOL centred around contemporary collecting as well as rapid response collecting in relation to everyday life during the pandemic. Is it ethical for members of staff to be dispatched 'outdoors' at a time of deteriorating public health circumstances in the name of collecting, processing and showcasing firsthand

experiences pertaining to the pandemic? If so, how should employers proceed in order to keep their staff members safe as they navigate their ethnological/museum work? Which materials ought to be collected, and how may the choices that have been made impact broader questions of (digital) accessibility and inclusiveness in representation?

It is precisely these kinds of questions which the Reinwardt Academy considers crucial for future heritage professionals to discuss. In the current research programme special attention is paid to the issue of how heritage professionals and academics actively *make* heritage through their practice, and the different ways of dealing with emotions and knowledge of the stakeholders in the process of heritage-making. What role(s) do these (f)actors play in times of crisis? Future approaches to heritage-making can benefit by the ethnological and social anthropological reflections gathered by different stakeholders as they undergo the present pandemic.

Practical issues and ethical dilemmas proved to be a fruitful starting point by delving into the lived experiences of museum professionals. In the midst of a very uncertain time, we asked ourselves: *Are we doing the right thing(s)?* It was consoling for participants and organisers alike to have a space and a designated opportunity to share personal experiences and formulate concerns, without needing to come up with immediate answers or solutions. It was helpful to learn how others have dealt (or are dealing) with issues similar to those we may face. An aspect that proved to be valuable was the opportunity to gain a panoramic insight into the workings of different forms of organisations across varying settings in the museums and cultural heritage field: from moving image archives and open-air folklore museums to contemporary art establishments and municipal cultural policymaking bodies.

Based on actual observations in their respective organisations, participants weighed in the impact of museological and ethnological considerations. Their position as such helped them to abstract themselves from purely practical concerns, allowing them to focus on what is it that truly shapes a person's experience during a pandemic. This resulted in a broad variety of reflections on cultural management, everyday life as a museum professional, the meaning of (re)presentation and the intricacies of being situated in a particular living and working environment. This publication offers a selection of these reflections,

organised in four different themes: collecting during crises, practical challenges, academic reflections and policy reflections..

This conference would not have been possible without the help of numerous people whom we would like to thank for their indispensable contribution: Marit van Dijk and Jule Forth, who took up the role of organisers as one of their first assignments in the newly-established *Heritage Lab* of the Reinwardt Academy; alumni Camilla Michelini and Camilla Miorelli, who did a great job in moderating the online conference; our alumnus Juan Aguirre Fernández-Bravo, who took care of the conference report and edited the papers in this publication in collaboration with Camila Miorelli, and last but not least, the presenters from all over the world. We are grateful to all of you who shared your personal experiences in and of these complicated times.

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sharing them publicly. After five weeks, the online collection amounted to more than six hundred contributions. Building on this notion of public engagement, we started to plan for the possible ways in which we could reopen the Museum of Everyday Culture after more than two months of closure. During the first stages of the outbreak, it became clear that we needed to grasp and reflect the changes that Covid-19 brought with it, to become a platform for people to share their impressions of changes in everyday life with us.

On the following pages, we want to outline the various aspects of our project “Back to Normality? Everyday Life Defies Corona”, via which we tried to bring new perspectives into the museum space.

2. Facets of “Back to Normality? Everyday Life Defies Corona”

During the closure period, we increasingly searched for ways to make the changes in everyday life due to Covid-19 into a museum topic. Many objects submitted to the online collection of the Württemberg State Museum specifically showed how people dealt with the ‘lockdown’ and their everyday practices in the beginning of the pandemic. When the Museum of Everyday Culture reopened, we showcased a selection of eighteen objects from this online collection as part of a new exhibition at the entrance, in order to share a few impressions with our visitors projecting what had been important to other people in the first stages of the pandemic. These objects featured personal impressions such as the beauty of clear blue skies, free of airplane chemtrails due to lockdown inactivity. They also showed strategies to cope with hardship at the beginning of the pandemic, such as self-made masks or daily schedules that were made in order to maintain a routine.

We quickly learned that these objects became ‘musealized’ as ‘material relicts’, given how they seemed to acquire a historical meaning as time went on. This was a very important perception for the further conceptualisation of our project: we did not simply want to depict the corona-crisis as historically unique, or rather fixed in time, since we found ourselves in the middle of it, which of course became apparent as well in the safety measures implemented by the museum itself (such as hygiene protocols, routing and so on). We recognized that this idea might give us an opportunity to collect and document some of the still ongoing changes and their meanings for our visitors.



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Figure 1. © Landesmuseum Württemberg, Yamaly Bayer Gomez

As we wanted to start a public discussion on the pandemic within the museum, we also adopted a term, 'normality', which had become recurrent in our conversations. We titled the project 'Back to Normality?', with a question mark, in order to ask whether we are (were) on our way back to normality or if we are moving towards a new normality, and what 'normality' even means in more general terms. These questions led us to the following interventions in the museum space.

Office for Corona-Concerns

Visitors had the opportunity to meet us, the museum workers, in the museum space or, more precisely, in an 'office for Corona-Concerns', as we called it. For nearly two months, visitors were able to come converse with us every Friday afternoon. They came to the museum and, either intentionally or unintentionally, ended up talking to us about the changes that the pandemic had introduced for them. Some of the visitors even brought objects to illustrate these changes. This element of the exhibition made us reconsider the function of our museum as a social space and how we might wish to incorporate similar 'offices' to our future practice.

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Corona-Alphabet

In the exhibition space 'Corona-Alphabet', we gave visitors the possibility to tell us about words that had become relevant during Covid-19. This was important for us, as we recognized that many new words had shaped the public discourse on the crisis (like the term 'crisis' itself), becoming part of our everyday language. The visitors had the option to write such words on posters in the museum space, as well as to publish them on the Facebook page of the Museum of Everyday Culture. It became clear that people were not only noticing changes in our everyday lives but also in our use of language, with words such as 'pandemic' or 'lockdown', which we also use in this paper, rarely having been used beforehand. We noted that people recalled very creative and precise vocabulary to illustrate changes to their everyday language.



Figure 2. The Corona-Alphabet © Landesmuseum Württemberg, Hendrik Zwietasch

Back to Normality?

The key aspect of our project was that people could take notes on the changes determined by Covid-19 in the exhibition rooms, in order to share individual and/or personal thoughts. For this, visitors were equipped with pencils and clipboards, as well as several notepads,

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with the question “Back to Normality?” written on them. In nearly each exhibition room in the museum we placed stretched black strings. They functioned as a display for the notepads, but also in order to intervene and disturb the initial conception of the room. Our idea was that the exhibition themes (living, working, consuming) might trigger our visitors to relate the installation of the room to their constantly changing everyday life in times of Covid-19. This worked out quite well: people picked up on the themes of each exhibition room and applied them to their lives as experienced during the pandemic.



Figure 3. Pencils, clipboards and notepads “Back to normality”
© Landesmuseum Württemberg, Yamaly Bayer Gomez

Until the beginning of January 2021, we received over 800 notes giving various insights on the impact of Covid-19. We took down the notes routinely in order to not only grasp the impressions and opinions within specific time frames, but also to be able to compare the notes as time passes by, since Covid-19 and its impact(s) on our lives change so quickly.

3. Evaluation of the Variety of Notes

In order to analyze the notes that visitors left in the exhibition spaces of the Museum of Everyday Culture, we started inductively examining the notes and categorizing them into topics that were frequently brought up. Eventually, we came up with nineteen topics:

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1. Consumption, e.g. 'less is more', thoughts about things that are really necessary.
2. Sport, e.g. climbing halls are closed.
3. Time, e.g. awareness of changing conditions as the weeks passed.
4. Work, e.g. changes in working conditions, how people organized their lunch breaks at home.
5. School, e.g. (dis)advantages of home-schooling, such as children being able to listen to music while doing their work, having online lessons, being able to concentrate better or missing friends.
6. Living, e.g. more things are done at home, such as working, spending more time with the family.
7. Environment, e.g. a different perception of nature, spending a lot of time outside, observing the sky with no chemtrails, seeing the stars at night.
8. Belief/Religion, e.g. churches are closed, but also coping with online worship services.
9. Living Together/Social Relationships, e.g. not being able touch or hug other people (or see their faces at all), seeing less people, getting lonely.
10. Language, e.g. words that were more frequently used during the pandemic.
11. Drawing, e.g. many drawings from children, sometimes also drawings with a text, many drawings showing images of the virus.
12. Digital Tools, e.g. increasing usage of digital tools, but also mistrust in them.
13. Entertainment, e.g. finding new hobbies to spend the time or games to play.

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14. Society/Politics, e.g. new borders, geographical as well as conceptual, built because of the coronavirus.
15. Mobility, e.g. travelling as usually is not possible.
16. Reflection, e.g. comments showing annoyance due to the coronavirus and the limitations that come with it, but also greater solidarity experienced with other people who are particularly affected by the crises..
17. Reference to the Exhibition
18. Feedback on the Museum, e.g. many positive elements of feedback, but also critique that during the tour of the museum, visitors get reminded of the crisis instead of evading/distracting themselves.
19. Other

In general, it was particularly remarkable that during the lockdown, people were increasingly looking to the future, wishing to apply changes as a consequence of the situations experienced in past weeks (for example, slowing down on the routine, consuming less or being more cautious). The perception of time was frequently addressed on the notepads, for instance when it came to highlighting the time that was gained to prioritise cooking, gardening, developing creative outlets, having longer breakfasts, sleeping longer or simply being bored. The category 'time' is also relevant because our visitors structured their experiences during the pandemic into different periods. There is, to give an example, a 'before and after' in terms of the lockdown, or in reference to the anxieties of the early stages of the crisis, the sense of impatience at the time of the imposition of restrictions, or the happiness that accompanied the lifting of certain public health measures. Since the beginning of August, visitors have used the notepads more frequently to criticise the current political action plan, to negate the crisis and to pay attention to conspiracy narratives.

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4. Reflections on the Notes

4.1 The Entrance Hall

The Entrance Hall of the museum was used to comment on urgent matters and questions, as well as experiences and opinions on the changing policy measures deployed to contain the pandemic. This is an interesting aspect, since we generally think about our visitors' emotional background, their feelings, political views and the knowledge with which they enter the museum space. The segment of the exhibition situated in the entrance hall also represented the changing public discourse and narratives on Covid-19. We could even identify a form of 'corona-canon', a collection of similar topics and comments that were reproduced over and over in the feedback relayed by the visitors. Comments left in this section signalled the importance of speaking about time during the pandemic, and how visitors reacted to the idea of 'returning to normality'. Responses included, for example:

"Still wearing a mask. Everywhere. And still constantly disinfecting my hands in every place."

"Some restrictions are actually really good: keeping distance, hygiene (washing hands and touching less), no crowds. I would miss these during normality, if it comes back!"

4.2 Living Room

In this exhibition room, we depicted the rising importance of watching TV in the living room together as a family. All chairs were arranged towards the television. On the notepads, people reflected on the concept of watching TV, commenting that the pandemic had prompted people to spend more time at home again. The TV itself was associated with following the news, a very important everyday practice throughout the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of the comments included:

"Everyone was watching TV together."

"The living room: my new home."

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“Daily observation of the coronavirus situation: at 20.00, the whole family meets to watch the news together.”



Figure 4. Living room. © Landesmuseum Württemberg, Hendrik Zwietasch

4.3 Kitchen of the Geyer Family

The kitchen is part of an ensemble of rooms that were relocated to the Museum of Everyday Culture ten years ago. For three generations, the “Geyer” family lived in these rooms and changed only little things concerning its interior. In the museum, we show the so-called “Gute Stube” (a sort of dining room only used for special occasions), the sleeping room and the kitchen. In showing these rooms, the conceptual idea was to raise the issue of how ‘living’ has changed in the last century. Within this installation, the kitchen is believed to be the cornerstone of the ‘house’ in having served as the most important room for the family to spend time together. On the notepads, many visitors related to this narrative and discussed the meaning of the kitchen during the pandemic:

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“Always at home, a lot to eat. Always in the kitchen, the microwave is broken.”

Cooking was one topic that was mentioned recurrently, especially when it came to reflecting on whom was responsible for the cooking. In the context of this topic, visitors commented on the theme of gender equality:

“A very strange feeling: when I come home from work, my husband is there (working from home). I [still] have to cook nearly every day.”

“I am getting more and more tired of cooking! Seven days a week [cooking] for 5-7 people, without a break! And at least one person is always grumbling!”

Advertisement

This part of the exhibition usually tackles different forms of advertisements, such as signs promoting enamel or tea tins. In the last few years, we have begun to problematise some of the representations therein, which were previously left unquestioned. Directly next to the display strings where the visitors could leave their notepads behind, there was a tea tin with a stereotypical depiction of a ‘Chinese woman’. Some visitors picked up on these racial stereotypes and reacted to this element in the showcase with comments conflating China with the origins of the virus. On a different note, comments on changes in terms of consumption could also be traced to this exhibition room:

“Online shopping is not an option for me, [it is] the one thing that I suddenly need less of.”

Textile

This room showcases the role of local textile production, as well as the social meaning of clothing. Visitors addressed for example the carnival costumes shown in the exhibition, relating them to the theme of coronavirus by pointing to local festivities which were not allowed during the pandemic:

“Of course we felt ashamed when our father was walking around like this [in costume], that’s why [I’m] pro-corona.”

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They also related historical textiles to the loss of significance of 'traditional' companies and discussed if this is only a result of the pandemic (due to the increasing reliance on online shopping):

"Too bad that many traditional stores had to shut down because of the corona crisis."

One visitor responded to this note: "The stores are shut down because we buy more comfortable (and maybe cheaper) on the internet. That was already the case before corona."

5. Conclusion

When we embarked on this project, we did not expect people to partake in it in such an intense manner. We were quickly overwhelmed by how it resonated on the people, with their need to communicate with us. We started asking ourselves: what can we learn from this project for future reference? How do we want (or have to) continue our work? Besides experiencing the changes to everyday life during the pandemic, we have learned a lot about how the visitors experience our museum and its exhibitions. This is especially the case for the rooms that evoke nostalgic feelings, triggering the need to leave a comment. At the same time, we could observe which topics were not mentioned on the notepads, due to us not discussing them as part of the exhibition (such as mobility, economics or politics).

We were surprised to see the urgent need to recount personal and individual experiences concerning the changes due to the coronavirus in relation to the museum spaces. While we acknowledge the positive effects this project had on the visitors, we are also aware of its weaknesses: we did not converse extensively with the visitors in person and comments functioned as 'impulsive reactions' to the stimuli offered. Moreover, we did not collect any information about the authors of the notes, and thus are not able to fully grasp their personal and subjective viewpoints.

Interacting with our visitors, as well as allowing them to interact with the themes and objects of the museum, is an important dimension to our work as museum professionals. Building relationships with visitors will be emphasised as one of the functions of the museum in the future. This is why we envisaged this project as "work in progress", which we decided to end in January 2021 as the Museum of Everyday Culture was already closed

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for several month by then due to Covid-19-measures. It is inspiring to see this project succeed, hopefully as a starting point to align the Museum of Everyday Culture to its function as a social space.

As is evident through the lens of our paper, we are still at the beginning of the process of observing, categorizing and finding out if this ethnographic method can be useful to document change within the museum space. It is interesting to observe how people established links from the historical perspective of the museum to their concerns in present times. We consider this an important aspect when thinking about the museum as a place for the discussion of historical as well as contemporary issues. We therefore find ourselves at a time where we need to consider which aspects of the project could help us to increase the social relevance of the Museum of Everyday Culture in the time to come.



As researchers and curators/curatorial associates of the Volkskundemuseum, we are both working on the new permanent exhibition of the museum in Graz. The museum, like the rest of the world, has been affected by Covid-19 for a few months now. On 31 March, the day on which mandatory masks were introduced in Austria and two weeks after the declaration of the nationwide lockdown, we launched an appeal for the general public to donate objects to the museum's collection. The appeal was published in newspapers and online media.

Following our return to the office, the call for the workshop organized by SIEF, the Reinwardt Academy and COMCOL and our interactions with Raffaella Sulzner and Janette Helm (from the Museum of Everyday Culture in Waldenbuch, Germany) prompted us to reflect on our hitherto mutual collection practices. We critically assessed these practices, and, on that basis, explored ways to make new decisions and change our practices where necessary. In a sense, our approach follows the principles of sociological praxeology (Schmidt 2021, 38), which in an ideal case integrates theoretical work with empirical studies and research. In the following paper, we will relate our museological practice step by step to the approaches of sociological praxeology, on the basis of which we, in turn, will derive questions and conclusions for our own museological practice.

We have divided the presentation of our findings into four parts, which reflect the chronological progression of our work with respect to and during the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, we will explore the reasons for creating a collection on coronavirus. Secondly, we will discuss the practice surrounding the creation of this collection, as well as the processes of collecting generally. Thirdly, we will look back on our appeal and the internal process(es) of reflection, and discuss further implications. What follows below is an exploration of the question: how will coronavirus be exhibited?

Collecting, analyzing and exhibiting every- day life during the Covid-19 pandemic

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Volkskundemuseum Graz



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1. Why Create a Collection on Corona?

The Folk Life Museum in Graz will open a new permanent exhibition in April 2021. The title of the show is “How It Is. Worlds, Changes, Perspectives”, making clear our essential approach to the content: the museum is taking the present times, with its social questions and cultural forms of expression, as the departure point for a new exhibition. It is dedicated to Styria as a case study of a region characterized by affluence and a high quality of life, and specifically to the people who live in this state, spend time here, or are in some other way connected with it, as well as finally to their experiences in times of change and social transition. We are interested in how people experience change as well as crises, how they confront them and try to cope with them. In other words, how they shape their lives, their environments and society more broadly, both in the past and the present.

As recently as February 2020, we did not consider the coronavirus to be relevant for the content of our exhibition and our work at the museum. As soon as the lockdown was announced, we realized that Covid-19 was a historical event that, as afterwards became clear, would affect all spheres of human life. Within the first days spent working in the format of the ‘home office’, we decided to issue an appeal for donations to the collection through the media. We expressed our interest in how everyday behaviors had changed and in the strategies that people employed to try and come to terms with the constantly changing situation. We thereby aimed to document coronavirus-specific practices in their situational contexts. We specifically appealed for notes, materials, digital objects (like photos or films) and any other objects that reflected coping or living with and during the pandemic. Objects could then be—and can still be—submitted digitally on the website of the museum. We aimed to analyze the submissions at a later, as of yet unspecified date.

We find it important to present a couple of theoretical and methodological considerations regarding our collecting practices. In preparation for the workshop organized by the Reinwardt Academy (AHK) the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF) *Ethnology Lab on the Workings of Covid-19 on Museums*, we did not so much ask ourselves why we were collecting materials on coronavirus, but rather how and what we were collecting. The central questions thus related to the method of enquiry, in other words: how to collect and to continue collecting, as well as the method of evaluation. What do the

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submissions communicate, and what do they not communicate? Which of the submissions should be incorporated into the collection?

We understand the process of collecting fundamentally as a research process. In sociological praxeology, which regards bodies and objects as substantial parts of any practice, an openness toward methods and research questions is important. The discipline is therefore opposed to any methodological constraint. While the collection process was already underway, we realized that it would now need to be reassessed and potentially adjusted to the specificities of the time. The museological and collection practices performed by museums are dependent on the bodies, artefacts and discourses involved in said practices (see previous citation). They are also dependent on external circumstances, on the geographical locations in which they are conducted, and on the material frameworks in which one is tied up.

2. Practices Surrounding the Creation of the Collection

On 31 March 2019, the Folk Life Museum in Graz published its collections appeal regarding Covid-19 on both its webpage and Facebook page. We made this decision as a curatorial team. We had already published appeals previously and so, conveniently, there was already an online form through which object proposals could be submitted. In all our appeals, one aspect was of special importance: the autobiographical and everyday context of submissions. This aspect constituted/s a mandatory field in the online form, meaning that the form cannot be submitted without filling in this field. As a matter of principle, we did/do not accept objects into our collection for which we cannot ascertain a context—with the exception of iconic exhibits. It is our responsibility to supervise all appeals for the collection, including those with regards to the coronavirus. Such appeals are formulated as outreach projects, public relations work and relationship-building all at once. All submissions are therefore treated seriously, whether they are of interest or not, meaning all persons submitting materials are then contacted individually to acknowledge the submission.

With the Covid-19 appeal in particular, we noticed that many people felt a need to engage with us and interact with our project. During the active phase of the appeal, we received submissions, sometimes multiple submissions, from approximately fifty-five individuals. Although this may not sound like a lot at first, this proved to be a convoluted process.

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Contacting 55 persons individually in order to thank them, to ask further questions, to file their submissions, clarify copyrights-related affairs, amplify the website, or to secure concrete object pledges alongside the digital images is certainly time-consuming and challenging. Nonetheless, it is also rewarding, as it allows us to discover deeper personal stories and to be offered further objects whether in relation to the ongoing appeal, or for future reference.

Against all odds, the concept of the 'home office' was, in fact, advantageous for the supervision of the appeal. Since many research and design activities needed to be put on hold, we were able to perform this work, characteristic of a 'public relations' task. As an example, we would like to present a variety of (paraphrased) accounts of the motivations of a photographer, who forwarded us ten photographs relating to the Covid-19 collection appeal. The photographs contained addenda as follows below:

1. *"Board games: These represent family time and togetherness during the corona crisis. Moreover, they reflect something one doesn't otherwise do very often."*
2. *"Hoarding: I want to donate this picture to the museum because it summarizes the corona[virus] crisis, and because hoarding will presumably be associated with this crisis in the future."*
3. *"Masks and disinfectant: These objects will presumably remind many people in the future of this difficult time."*
4. *"The government and the community are trying everything to protect the citizens and to appeal to their conscience."*

This set of examples in terms of social commentary is interesting because the donor summarized many aspects that affected and still continue to affect us all. This is also the case because he, like everyone else, had thought about and understood what our appeal was all about. The section below addresses the third phase in the process of conceptualizing our rework to the permanent exhibition of the museum.

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3. Analysis, Reflection and Further Considerations

The kinds of materials which we received, as can be shown on our website, include the stories individuals wished to contribute. The contributions are highly multi-faceted: they include street photography, other forms of documentation of public life as it ‘decelerated’ (for example, of the empty urban area of Kai in Graz, which is usually bustling with life), and other forms of artistic contributions. We expect all of these depicted scenes to be familiar with or relatable for our audiences, as we expect our public to have either received similar pictures or engage with the same form of contents.

Interlinking and overviewing our collections allows for similarities and differences in everyday life during the pandemic to come to the fore. It would be wonderful if we could create an international overview in line with the following question: how have particular “coronavirus objects” become dispersed across the world, such as crocheted ‘stuffed’ toys in the shape of viruses? Just like in our case, the Vienna Museum, for instance, received one of such crocheted toys in response to its appeal, which it then decided to feature prominently in its online newsletter. Where did this trend begin, how quickly was it shared and how rapidly were instructions prepared on how to make these crocheted viruses? This raises the question as per what it means for everyone to crochet the same virus toy. Will this new practice carry on into the Autumn, as an exponent of virus-conditioned handicraft/artistic practice, so to speak?

We have not yet undertaken a detailed analysis, grouping and classification of our submissions. This is due, on the one hand, to our limited human resources—considering also that our main priority is the preparation of the new permanent exhibition. On the other hand, the collection process is not yet complete. Another reason for this is that assessments of the situation are likely to change over time. For instance, the donor of the photo series to which we alluded earlier will probably not see the official measures in Austria as positively now as he did back in May 2020. From our perspective, it would therefore be interesting to contact the previous donors again as time passes, as though these communications were part of a longitudinal research exercise. In the following and final part under this section, situated underneath, we wanted to delve into an analysis of our findings, especially in connection to the future steps to be taken. Our thoughts when it comes to this part are

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derived, on the one hand, from internal discussions held among ourselves and, on the other, from select conversations with our colleagues Raffaella Sulzner and Janette Helm, representatives of the Württemberg State Museum. Some of our discussion points could be summarized in the following ways.

It became apparent that we found it realistic to examine all the digital submissions as a form of documentation. This led to the question as to which submissions to incorporate into the future collection, either as digital or physical objects, as well as which resources were necessary for this and whether we had the required resources to facilitate said incorporation. We likewise concluded that the 'landing' page on our website in relation to the topic of Covid-19 should remain in place for the time being, although the questions and focus therein may need to be adapted to the coronavirus situation and the prevailing mood in the framework of a renewed appeal. It also became salient that our collection efforts are thematically broad and not specially tailored to a single exhibition. Rather, they aim to document these extraordinary circumstances for posterity across a number of axes.

Another question that emerged is the following: how to deal with transregional submissions? The collection activities of the Volkskundemuseum in Graz were previously limited to the region of Styria. Now, however, we have received submissions from numerous Austrian states as well as from abroad. The photo series to which we made reference earlier was created by a person in Tyrol. Our position signposts to the view that, as the pandemic and the corresponding measures affect people worldwide, we can accept transregional submissions granted they express something unique or specific, for example the replication of particular 'coronavirus practices' such as the crocheting of coronavirus toys.

We also interrogated ourselves as to whether we should end the collection appeal or keep collecting materials. The response to this question was a resounding vote in favor of continuing to collect through the appeal. Covid-19 is not over yet, so we would like to keep observing and documenting new developments. The submissions until now reflected several of the facets characterizing the situation: the quietness of streets due to the decrease in traffic, the prevalence of online contact between friends and family, adjustments and ruptures. As we have already noted, many topics nevertheless remained unaddressed in the submissions: prohibitions in social contact, the psychological effects of the pandemic,

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economic hardship, existential fears, unemployment, illness, death and mourning, as well as protests against the measures. We have contacted some people directly to shed light and obtain their inputs over specific matters, for example those working in schools, hospitals, or funeral homes. However, even aspiring to reflect on all these themes would not be representative of the pandemic in all of its dimensions. In order to move towards this goal, we would need a quickly organized and sufficiently endowed research team.

4. The Covid-19 Pandemic in the New Permanent Exhibition

As mentioned at the outset, the new exhibition of the Volkskundemuseum is concerned with people in times of change, transition, as well as crisis. It was clear from the beginning when we began our Covid-19 collection activities that we would not use the submitted materials to create a specific 'coronavirus exhibition'. Rather, we are connecting the various questions underlying the exhibition with the objects and materials from the Covid-19-related collection. We thereby strive to connect themes and questions from the exhibition with the current situation and render visible the significance of the 'forms of practice' conditioned by the pandemic in everyday life on an individual and societal level. In light of this context, we are taking into account the fact that several individual practices have to come together for a particular praxeology (see previous citation). In order to make these deliberations concrete, we would like to present three examples of artefacts we collected:

Menu Slide, May 2020

This laminated menu was introduced by a colleague at the museum following an internal appeal for submissions relating to the topic 'food and regional identity'. Her annotation that "this menu was laminated due to corona" was decisive for the selection of this exhibit. This object allows for the chronological, economic, and social dimensions of practices conditioned by Covid-19 to be conveyed.

The lockdown led to a two-month closure in the food service industry, which culminated in a significant loss of revenues for many businesses. These businesses were allowed to reopen from mid-May onwards, but they had to obey special legal regulations and introduce new measures of hygiene. In theory, menus were to be cleaned after every use. At the same

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time, this menu relates to the initial period following the end of the lockdown, when people in Austria were allowed once more to congregate in restaurants and cafés.

Photographs of Graz-Thalerhof Airport, May 2020

Some of our objects consist of photographs of the Thalerhof Airport near Graz during the lockdown. These photographs were taken on our request by an airport employee. Sociological praxeology also takes into account these organic as well as non-organic bodies and discourses involved in practice. The lockdown meant that airplanes did not take off, baggage conveyor belts and other machines were out of use, staff members had their hours reduced, there were no passengers, and the stores remained shut. “Almost ghostly”, is how a local newspaper described these conditions¹. These photos tell the story of a broken line of various interdependent actions and processes because of the complete halting of airplanes. Covid-19 then also led (in Austria) to the question of how sensible air travel is, not only regarding the risk of infection, but above all concerning carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. The smaller Austrian airports in particular, such as those in Graz, Linz, and Salzburg, in reference to their domestic flights, became the focus of public discussion. Short flights were to be replaced with ground transportation wherever possible, at least in line with the directives of the management of Austrian Airlines as of August 2020. However, there was immediate opposition to the potential abolition of domestic flights in Graz, with the argument that the city was increasingly a part of a larger economic area and therefore needed to be connected to international air travel.²

Heroines of the Crisis

In all of the interviews that we still plan to conduct for the exhibition, we want to investigate practices conditioned by Covid-19. For example, we want to interview women from Styria who have to go to Vienna by bus every day for work, which can take up to two hours one way. We were interested among other elements in the effects of the ‘coronavirus crisis’ on these women’s everyday work and commuting experiences. These women, for a brief period, found themselves at the center of political discussions as people “of critical importance to the system” (*Systemerhalter*) and were applauded in gratitude by the public. These “heroines of the crisis” were initially promised thousand-euro bonuses by local

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1. <https://www.krone.at/2118870>, 18.3.2020, accessed 27.09.2020.

2. <https://www.vienna.at/aua-fluege-von-wien-nach-graz-salzburg-vor-dem-aus/6311991>, accessed 27.9.2020.

politicians, although these bonuses later and very quickly ceased to be a topic of discussion. These few examples highlight that, when it comes to collecting, there is no preference for specific objects, a particular type of data, or particular methods of inquiry, also not with specific regard to Covid-19. Rather, it is important, also in the context of the virus, to develop “field-specific opportunism” (Breidenstein et al. 2013, 34). In other words, the Volkskundemuseum needs to make space for situational documents, artefacts, narratives, silent practices and so forth.

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Systematic Collecting or Rapid Response?

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Introduction: #CollectingCorona - The Call

Since World War II, no historical event has changed the everyday lives of people living in Europe as abruptly as the corona pandemic.¹ Italy was the first country in Europe to be hit immensely by a growing number of people suffering from Covid-19 in February 2020 and the skiing resort Ischgl in Austria served as one of the most prominent virus spinners in early March 2020 with tourists taking the virus with them to homes all over Europe. By Mid-March, no European country was unaffected: Many national governments ordered schools, shops and restaurants to close and strictly regulated contact with friends and family to limit the spread of the highly contagious airborne virus. Some countries such as Italy and France went into lockdown, strictly prohibiting leaving one's home if it wasn't for essential trips to work or to the supermarket.

Museums were no less affected. For the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (MEK) this meant that the museum was temporarily closed to visitors on 14 March 2020.² All staff was ordered to work from home in the effort to minimize the spread of the virus. While the first two weeks of working from home were dedicated to organizing the team and chores that one could work on remotely, it soon became clear that as a museum of everyday culture, the MEK like other museums needed to preserve the historical dimension of this alteration of public and private life (Bounia 2020). On 27 March 2020, it therefore launched “#CollectingCorona”: Using the method of “Rapid Response Collecting”³, a call to submit digital impressions of everyday life under corona

1. Locally, there have been numerous events in Europe that abruptly changed the everyday lives of people in Europe since World War II – from the fall of the wall in Germany to the Balkan war. Yet no event affected everyone living in Europe in such unprecedented ways.
2. It reopened on 27 June 2020 with reduced opening hours (Saturday and Sunday) and went back to its regular opening hours on 5 September 2020 with strict health and safety measures for staff and visitors.
3. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/rapid-response-collecting> , accessed on 14 September 2020.

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was disseminated via social media, and later also taken up in the national public radio as well as newspapers.

Rapid response collecting

“Rapid Response Collecting” was a term coined by the Victoria & Albert Museum in 2014 to describe a new kind of collecting policy of the museum: “Objects are collected in response to major moments in history that touch the world of design and manufacturing”⁴, the V&A explains its method on its website. These newly acquired objects are rooted in the historically grown collections of the museum, but add items that reflect the current Zeitgeist, such as a period cup by Tampax, a pussy hat, or “a series of objects that explore the design identity of Extinction Rebellion”⁵. While some of these objects such as the pussy hat refer to singular events (in this case the manifestation “Women’s March on Washington” on 21 January 2017, a manifestation for women’s rights where wearing a pink hat, the pussy hat, became a symbol of solidarity) others such as the period cup, in our view, fall more broadly under the category of contemporary collecting: Time was not crucial in acquiring one as period cups have become a commodity that is found in most supermarkets.

The term “rapid response” itself is derived from emergency medicine and disaster relief. It refers to the first measures taken by the first people on the ground, in most cases before an adequate (albeit makeshift) infrastructure has been put in place. The Nordiska Museet in Stockholm and the Stockholm Läns Museum have applied the term to two digital collecting efforts situated around the historical events of the 2017 terrorist attacks in Stockholm and the #metoo and #knytblus examples of hashtag activism. In the following paper, we will show how the collecting effort #CollectingCorona of the MEK also was ‘rapid response’ in this quite literal meaning of the term and why this proved to be the right method in the case of a global emergency. However, just as rapid response in disaster relief efforts constantly monitor and adapt their procedures, we will also perform a critique of maneuver in order to be better prepared for future rapid response collecting projects.

4. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/tag/rapid-response-collecting>, accessed on 14 September 2020.

5. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/blog/design-and-society/extinction-rebellion-objects-acquired-for-our-collections>, accessed on 14 September 2020.

The acquisitions

Teased by an exemplary photo and commentary from one of our curators (Figure 1), the #CollectingCorona call asked people to submit any kind of digital object: photos, videos, audios, whatever they felt represented how they perceived pandemic everyday life in Europe.



Figure 1. Scribbled greetings to granny during lockdown, Berlin, March 2020.
© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Europäischer Kulturen.

Emails with very diverse entries started to arrive in the museum's inbox: People sent in different formats from videos, to photos and texts, different genres such as documentary as well as artistic photography, poems and fairy tales and also very diverse subjects from children's drawings to garbage, to empty streets and nudes. While the majority of entries came from Germany, with many contributions by Germans and other Europeans living in Berlin, others were sent to from Norway, Italy or Switzerland. Over all, we received 45 entries of which at this point 40 have been added to the MEK collection as digital assets.⁶

6. Every person submitting a digital asset was asked for permission to add the entry to our collection. Those photos for which people did not send in a filled-out form of consent were not given an inventory number and thus did not become part of the MEK collection.

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Communicating with the senders was time-consuming and asked for (cultural) empathy as, especially the early contributions, reflected the emotional instability that people underwent in the time of uncertainties that the early weeks of the pandemic represented. Early submissions reflected anger, sorrow and worries. Yet with time, submissions also reflected a (grim) sense of humor. This observation made in hindsight supported our initial hypothesis: Even though we did not have the digital infrastructure ready, we needed to start collecting rapidly in order to be able to archive the quickly changing everyday life under Corona. Yet how did this “better done than perfect” approach fit into the MEK’s 2019 collection development policy that had set out to perfect our collecting efforts rather than taking decisions on the go?



Figure 2. Staying at home, refugees welcome and May Day in Kreuzberg, Berlin, 2020.
© D. Herman.

Rapid Response Collecting and MEK's Collection Development Policy

We began working on our Collection Development Policy in the spring of 2018. Today, the MEK is a museum of everyday culture, but it originated as a museum of German folklore in the late 19th century. The major part of our collection also dates from the 19th and the early 20th century. As was common for German museums of folklore, the museum staff collected items they considered to be expressions of what they deemed to be the authentic and unchanged rural life that at the time seemed to be threatened by industrialization and modern times. This is why you will find a lot of wooden objects like mangles, butter moulds, cupboards and wooden bowls in the MEK's collection but very few objects used by the upper classes in the 19th century, and even fewer everyday objects from the late 20th century made from plastic.

The MEK started to open up its thematic focus in the 1960s and 1970s – first considering the lives of the urban underclasses as well, then towards the everyday lives of everybody. In 1999, the collection of European objects from the Ethnographic Museum merged with the collection of the Museum of German Folklore. Together they now formed the Museum of European Cultures, directed to the everyday lives of people living in Europe.

With this wide spectrum of possible subjects and objects, collecting became more difficult: Everything produced in times of mass capitalism worldwide could now be of interest, as long as there was a connection to everyday lives in Europe – so how to select? Through years of collecting mainly passively or actively in connection with exhibition projects, the idea of developing a Collection Policy in 2018 was to find a way for well-directed and actively collected acquisitions that would allow for our collection to better reflect the profile of a contemporary museum with a European focus. Thus, our main goal when starting to work on the Collection Concept was the same as that defined by the German Museum Organization, the "Museumsbund" in 2011 as goals of a Collection Development Policy in general: The Collection Policy shall serve as a manual to the strategic development of a collection. The other goal the Museumsbund defined for a Collection Development Policy was that it should document the collection strategy of a museum and make it visible to the public. In addition, there are also further intentions: As the study "Profusion in Museums"

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(Fredheim, et al. 2018, 14) stated, a collection development policy contributes to better accessioning and deaccessioning decisions. It does so, because it counters individual biases, discourages unsuitable donations and provides clarity. These are straight forward reasons for no longer making decisions about acquisitions on the go. And they are also good reasons against solitary decisions – not only when it comes to the acquisition of a single object, but also when working out the Collection Policy. That is why all the curators of the MEK worked on the Collection Policy together. In addition, we wanted to be transparent about our collection practices – not only internally, but also externally – so the Collection Development Policy is available on our website in German and English for everyone to read.⁷

When working on the document, we chose a systematic approach: We scanned all historic sections of our collection and developed perspectives for each on how and if to develop each section in the future. The MEK's collection is divided into 74 different (historically set) classification categories like women's wear, course of the year, measuring instruments and so on. Additionally, in the process of formulating the Collection Development Policy, we decided upon three different topics that we deemed important to focus on at the moment in order to preserve the present for future generations. These subjects are "processes of identification", "glocal Europe/Europe in the world" and "sustainability". They don't fit into particular classification categories of our collection. Instead, we understand them as themes that cross and connect the historically grown classification system. Last year, for example, we acquired the cookbook "Pink! Gay Cooking". It supplements our historical category "cookbooks" (62 H). At the same time this acquisition also reflects how diets have become a field of identification and lifestyle decisions.

However, as you might imagine, we did not anticipate a pandemic. While there is the category "medicine" in our historical collection classification system, it is one of the least used categories despite the fact that illness, disease health and well-being have played and continue to play an important role in everyday lives. Despite the fact that disease and wellbeing from a social and cultural perspective would seem to be a topic of interest to a collection of everyday objects, the #CollectingCorona call neither fits into our historically grown collection nor into the perspectives and requirements for collecting that we had decided upon in our collection development policy. We launched it nonetheless – limiting it to digital assets.

7. See https://www.smb.museum/fileadmin/website/Museen_und_Sammlungen/Museum_Europaeischer_Kulturen/02_Sammeln_und_Forschen/MEK_Sammlungskonzept_EN.pdf for the English version.

Digital Collecting and Collecting the Digital

Even though the digital sphere has shaped everyday life drastically during the last two decades, digital collecting is still underrepresented in museum collections. There are two ways of combining the digital with collecting: as collecting in the digital sphere and collecting digital artifacts. #CollectingCorona was both. As the first digital collection effort of the MEK, we also understand #CollectingCorona as a test run for similar collecting efforts in the future. We therefore wanted to record our learnings:

- Our everyday lives are shaped by digital communication, the digital sphere therefore reflects changes therein very soon. Collecting digital artifacts means getting access to even the most ephemeral changes of daily life that otherwise would pass unnoticed. Digital artifacts are thus extremely well suited to capture the momentary changes to our environment such as face masks or hand sanitizer bottles that end up as trash on the streets. Digital photos and other assets have also become a way for individuals to cope with sudden changes and times of uncertainty, especially if they are shared on social media or with friends and family (Hartig and Boogh 2020 a, b). Digital collecting efforts thus both archive the changes perceived, as well as these digital copying mechanisms.
- Collecting in the digital sphere also means quicker and better access to people all over Europe and easier ways to contribute to our collection for people in other places than Berlin.
- A call in the digital sphere makes the core pillar of museum's work – collecting – that is usually happening outside of the limelight more visible to the public. Rather than keeping contact with people via exhibitions, it highlights the fact that we rely on “the people” to build a diverse archive of everyday culture for future generations.
- It is important to acknowledge that digital collecting is just as time consuming as material collecting. It is essential to thoroughly document how the digital assets were collected (e.g. that the call was disseminated via social media as well as the wording of the call in order to give future curators a chance to understand the context.) Documenting the context is also important because of the “ephemeral nature of the

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social digital photography” (Boogh, et al. 2020, 12) and even more so when the context (pandemic life) is equally ephemeral.

- Furthermore, one has to decide whether all contributions will be included in the collection or whether the final choice is curated. In the case of #CollectingCorona, we decided to “(a)llow contributors to share what they consider important and of value” (N.N. 2020, 270) and added all contributions to the collection. That way, we do not prioritize some motifs (e.g. people wearing masks) over others (e.g. nudes that seem to have no visible connection to the pandemic) or some formats (e.g. photos) over others (e.g. fairy tales). This allowed us to not only archive the way that everyday life had changed but also the diverse creative coping mechanisms that we could not have imagined beforehand. While this proved to be the right approach in this particular call, in future calls, we might decide differently.
- A collecting initiative in an event characterized by uncertainty and grief can also serve as “a tool for communication, for expressing grief and coming to terms with what happened on a more personal level” (Boogh, et al. 2020, 43). Communicating with participants and at times emotional counseling should therefore be taken seriously especially when rapid collecting touches people’s lives in a time of uncertainty. Curators should be able to address people’s (emotional) needs when the latter send in highly personal accounts and impressions. Letting people have full control over their narrative is key to building trust in the relationship with the museum (Turtle and Turtle 2020, 26).
- But we also noticed limitations to digital collecting: The people we can reach via our social media outlets are naturally composed of our museum audience (cf. Hartig and Boogh 2020a, 171). In our case, this means mostly women, elderly people, people without economic worries (sometimes all three categories overlapping). The impressions collected are therefore the reactions of a certain privileged group of people, not representative of the diverse societies in Europe (although this might be asked too much). As noted above, most of the submissions also came from Germany, calling for the need to collaborate with institutions elsewhere in the future in order to collect in other national and regional settings. Furthermore, the digital assets collected all ended up

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portraying responsible behavior such as self-quarantine, adherence to social distancing guidelines and the correct use of mouth-and-nose-covering masks. We did not receive any “contentious, sensitive and potentially harmful content” (Kavanagh 2020, 6) that is impressions or digital artefacts questioning the measures taken by governments as well as conspiracy stories even though both were on the rise.⁸

- In addition, digital collection calls are short-lived as twitter timelines and Instagram feeds live on the constant stream of ephemeral and quickly changing dissemination of information. If the call is not renewed continuously, people forget about it. The biggest share of submissions came right when we first launched the idea. Further submissions were clearly linked to reports via radio or in newspapers. While we never stated a certain deadline for the collection effort, the submissions halted as life with corona became the new normal.
- We also became aware of technical problems that can arise when it comes to collecting digital objects: While five months after the call, the digital assets have officially become part of our collection, we are still not fully satisfied with the question of how digital artifacts can be adequately incorporated into a classification system that was once developed for material objects. Thus, while most of the submissions fit into the museum’s classification category 74 K that is photographs (74) of everyday life (K), we decided to also subsume all other entries – e.g. videos or fairy tales sent in as PDFs under this category. With this also goes the unsolved question of how digital artifacts should be preserved in order to ensure that they remain accessible in the future. Will it be possible to open mp4-files in 200 years? Likewise, the question of how they can be incorporated into digital museum collection databases arises: Shall the digital assets be part of the regular collection databases or searchable in an extra database? While Nordiska Museet in Stockholm uses the webpage Minnen (Swedish for memories) to make their digital collecting efforts publicly accessible, it is not possible to find the collected digital assets in their online collection. Thus, if one searches for “knytblus” on the homepage <https://digitaltmuseum.se/> one will find bow blouses and historic photos depicting women wearing bow blouses but no trace that in 2018, a digital collection effort was undertaken that collected photos that were posted under the

8. However, this might also have to do with the fact that at the time that such opinions became more visible in the public (for instance through manifestations of corona-deniers in August and September 2020 in Berlin) we no longer actively encouraged people to participate in #CollectingCorona.

which such digital artifacts were made and shared? By collecting the material object of a smartphone together with the digital artifacts stored on it? If we want to collect a blog post, would it be best to make screenshots? And would we then treat this screenshot as a photo, filing it under 74 K or as an excerpt of a digital diary, filing it under 62 F as our historical paper diaries?

- Are there, maybe, only certain kinds of digital objects that fit into museum collections? How do they relate to the material objects we already have?

At this point, we do not have answers to these questions. We therefore continue to welcome the opportunity to discuss the matter of rapid digital collecting with museum professionals elsewhere who face similar challenges so that in the future, we can strive to collect jointly and support each other with technical and intellectual solutions.

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Early in the Spring of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic started to manifest itself in Belgium. On 18 March, the federal government decided to introduce a 'soft lockdown'. Overnight, this transformed people's lives and the urban public space: physical distancing, silence in otherwise bustling streets, queues in front of supermarkets or applause for the health care sector... People had the feeling they were experiencing historical changes. This paper will elaborate on some of the choices that were made by the MAS (Museum aan de Stroom), the municipal archives FelixArchief and Erfgoedlab Antwerpen ('Heritage Lab Antwerp') in their attempt to document this extraordinary period with the help of the inhabitants of Antwerp. It will elaborate on some of their working processes and experiences, reflecting on aspects of representation and commemoration related to this singular contemporary collecting project.

Throughout April, several local and international initiatives to inventorise Covid-19 heritage caught our attention (e.g. Parcum, Amsterdam Museum). They led to the question as to whether it would be interesting to collect some of the stories of Antwerp and its inhabitants. After all, this pandemic was unforeseen and thus evidently did not fit within prior planning or frameworks. A rapid response collecting project would imply extra action(s) and work. MAS, FelixArchief and Erfgoedlab Antwerpen met each other (digitally) to discuss their options. All three share an interest in Antwerp and its population, the city's heritage and how these have significance in the continuum between present, past and future. They detected that from previous epidemics, mostly governmental information had been preserved. The stories of people's everyday lives had remained a little 'out of scope'. Nevertheless, for later generations, these could provide very lively and relatable testimonies of events. The decision was made to launch an open call. All people of Antwerp were invited to make suggestions of objects (mouth masks, banners, etc.) and archival materials (photos,

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websites, films, etc.) of everyday life during the lockdown in Antwerp to be preserved, both for commemoration of the extraordinary times as well as for future research.

In the run-up to this open call, some issues presented themselves. Firstly, there was no scenario for rapid response collecting to rely on. For many calamities, such as fires or floods, plans are drawn up for the preservation of collections and archives. But for unscripted historical events, no methodology existed for the formation of heritage collections. Every action taken now would have an experimental character. This would offer chances for us to learn, evaluate and—further down the process—possibly create a new framework for collection.

Next, the question was raised as to whether any more organisations needed to be involved. Other museums and organisations could have participated too (e.g. Letterenhuis). However, given the absence of planned emergency scenarios, it was decided it would be best to avert more complexity and not invite extra partners to partake in the project.

Starting from the collection profile of the participating organisations, it was agreed that MAS would make a selection of objects; FelixArchief would do the same for all digital and printed items. Erfgoedlab Antwerpen would develop a digital presentation of suggestions made by the public. Museums and archives handle a different terminology (e.g. object versus archival or archive item, register versus inventory). For the shared communication, this needed to be sorted out. Apart from this internal process of fine-tuning, our final message had to be adapted for a wider audience. The term ‘documenting’ was chosen to overcome this concern.

On 12 May, the open call was launched on websites, social media and a press release. People could send in their suggestion by e-mail up until 30 June. Many submissions followed, but when—two weeks later—all suggestions were listed, it became apparent that these did not represent the entire city, neither geographically nor demographically. Although exhaustive collecting had not been our main goal, it was clear that crowdsourcing through an open call did not automatically lead to enough representation of the diversity of Antwerp and its districts. Hence the need to embark upon a more proactive collecting approach. Different colleagues proceeded to scouting their own neighbourhoods. Professional and personal networks were contacted to cooperate and reach out. This led to many new submissions

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that enabled a more varied representation of groups and communities (e.g. celebration of Iftar and Pesach) in all of Antwerp's nine districts.



Figure 1. © dienst Levensbeschouwingen, Iftar on wheels, FelixArchief, inv.nr 2920#6.

In the next step, different processes of collection profiling came into play. With their collection or archive plans as guidelines, both MAS as FelixArchief started to make their selections. Despite having selection parameters, some room for personal assessment in said selection processes was always allowed. Sometimes, participants' submissions required further discussion. The banners were to go to the MAS. The photographs of these banners in their original setting, the façades of houses and buildings, were crucial documentation aspects to contextualise these objects. For the FelixArchief, these were equally interesting elements representative of the city's landscape. Would both organisations keep these photos? Would the archives preserve them, and the museum (in its collection registration database) refer to the archive entries? Or—as would eventually become the chosen option—would the museum keep all items that were related to each other altogether? In another case, the museum acquired protective clothing made by a popular initiative, whereas the archive preserved the initiative's Facebook page and manual on how to make mouth masks and aprons.

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importance. Some people felt motivated to participate; others did not. During this project, the exact motivations of intervening players were not mapped. It is hence impossible to draw scientific conclusions. However, some participants indicated they were acting out of solidarity, wishing for self-representation in heritage collections or looking for commercial profit. Also on the side of the museum and archive, subjective processes took place. Choices on how to communicate, how to collect, what to acquire, etc. all had an effect on the response ratio and thus on what actually will be preserved and displayed in an institutional context. For instance, the shift from crowdsourcing to proactive collecting implied a 'switchover' to a more personal approach.

The aspect of commemoration raises some critical questions too. The digital exhibition serves different purposes from the acquisition aspects of this project. The objects and archive items will be passed on to next generations. Their significance is expected to increase for future generations who will not have any direct recollection of this pandemic. The online presentation, meanwhile, has more importance for present-day stakeholders. Each person living through the times of the pandemic has spontaneous memories of it. Some of these recollections materialise in photos, Facebook posts, face masks, etc. Objects, in their own turn, might trigger additional memories. The online exhibition thus represents mostly stories in which people of today may recognise themselves and their personal experiences. It displays a shared situation. However, due to the lockdown, people were more socially and physically isolated. The presentation hence also reveals experiences of people on the 'other side' of the city, or of actions they did not spontaneously come across themselves. Additionally, some people will experience one image or story as positive (e.g. the stillness of streets without traffic), whereas for others it will instil negative connotations/feelings (e.g. restrictions in the freedom of movement). The relationship between people and their experiences, memory and the Corona-Archives is therefore highly multi-faceted.

This entire process in relation to the Antwerp Corona-Archives made MAS, FelixArchief and Erfgoedlab Antwerpen once more aware of issues of representation and how heritage processes can either restrict or facilitate. Representation takes on different shapes when linked to commemoration. Both undergo the influence of the choices made by both institutions and participants.

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*Afterthought: The online presentation was planned to be launched on 23 October 2020, the week this paper was written. Since September, the number of infections by Covid-19 have risen exponentially, recently leading to far-reaching measures taken by the government. Different from the 'first wave', which was documented by the Antwerp Corona-Archives, is the increasing polarisation (pertaining to which MAS and FelixArchief also selected samples for their collections and archives, but through a less participatory lens). Likewise, the mental wellbeing of many is under strain. Despite the objects and stories within the digital exhibition often being testimonies of the population's resilience, creativity and solidarity, the municipal authorities preferred to postpone the online presentation until further notice. They are concerned that recollecting the 'first wave' could be negatively perceived given the circumstances at the time of writing. On 6 November 2020 the exhibition was quietly made available online via <https://corona-archieff.mas.be> without press release. This decision illustrates the shifting relations between people, their memories and the heritage they share.

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Practical challenges

Covid-19 and the Inclusive Museum

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1. Introduction

Inclusion is a central mission of museums. At their core, museums are interactive social spaces where the perspectives, challenges and needs of different social groups become visible and real. Museums accommodate people with “special needs” in various ways: buildings and architectural features designed to meet the requirements of people with disability, accessible software, and specially created educational and outreach programs. This paper discusses some of the profound changes that Covid-19 has forced upon museums in respect to their inclusivity practices.

The needs of people with disabilities have gained international public attention, especially through the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), but efforts began much earlier in many countries. The United States adopted its Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Germany passed its Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities Act in 2002 (*Behindertengleichstellungsgesetz des Bundes*). These all marked landmark victories toward greater accessibility, in order to make it the responsibility of museums and other public spaces (Föhl et al. 2007; Auer 2007).

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 brought new and often existential challenges. For people with impairments, the public health emergency caused fear of losing public attention. One wonders whether their concerns and needs will still be noticed or will there be cuts in public funding? For museum professionals, this has led to a challenging situation, both in a theoretical and practical sense. Forced closures, while sensible as a response to the pandemic, have strained the resources available. Meanwhile, it has been challenging to combine the new demands for public hygiene with some of the hands-on demands of

1. Formerly Vogtland Open Air Museum

inclusiveness. For these reasons, it was very important to consider the topic of inclusion as part of my presentation for the *Ethnology Lab on the Workings of Covid-19 on Museums*, organized by the SIEF Working Group on Museums and Material Culture (M&MC), in collaboration with ICOM's International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL) and the Reinwardt Academy (Amsterdam University of the Arts).

2. The Inclusive Project 'Amid-Present-Different'

This paper focuses on the example presented by the project 'Amid-Present-Different' (German: *Mittendrin-Dabei-Verschieden*) of the Vogtland Open Air Museum and the Diakonie Auerbach e.V.. It analyses the experiences, challenges, and results highlighted in response to the ongoing project. After three years of preparations, the project started in the Autumn of 2019. The collaboration has helped our museum to progress significantly and to become increasingly accessible and inclusive to different audiences. Despite all obstacles during the Covid-19 crisis, our collaboration and communications have moved forward. We have exchanged and learned about each other's experiences, challenges, and needs.

The Diakonie Auerbach e.V. is a regional charitable organization of the Protestant Church in Germany. It is one of the main social welfare organizations in Germany dedicated to social services and inclusion. The Vogtland Open Air Museum is a regional museum located in Southern Saxony dedicated to the preservation and conveyance of the material culture of the everyday life in the rural region of Vogtland from the 18th to the 20th centuries. In 39 historical buildings and surroundings fields, gardens and meadows, the museum exhibits historic living and working conditions from throughout this period. The museum was founded in 1968 in the then German Democratic Republic in the context of a local agricultural co-operative (LPG) in the village of Landwüst. Today, the museum comprises two geographically separated sites within the municipal area of Markneukirchen.

Complementary to the museum's ethos of inclusivity, I would like to introduce the reader to the fundamental pillars of our all-encompassing project and our experiences. To do that, I start with our understanding of inclusion. In the museum's approach, we refer to the United Nations' 2008 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The convention recognizes that "disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the

interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (CRPD Preamble). “Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (CRPD Article 1).

From this perspective, a person’s body is not a source of impairment, but rather it is the world’s refusal to accommodate their needs. Consequently, it is our responsibility as a museum to accommodate the needs of as many groups of people as possible. Becoming a more inclusive museum has been an enormous challenge for us, especially as we are an open-air museum. Our museum includes houses, stables, barns, sheds, and workshops from the musical instrument manufacturing industry that once prospered in this area. The museum’s historical concept has been to portray the historic rural culture as ‘authentically’ as possible. The idea of authenticity here is suggestive of the manner in which it was understood in the political context of the German Democratic Republic’s era. The museum was designed as part of a historically developed village structure. About one third of the museum buildings are *in situ* infrastructures of the village. The former dwelling and agricultural buildings have been incorporated into the museum largely as they were left behind by their last residents and owners (Kolbe 1981; Kolbe, Skerswetat and Müller 1993; Kolbe 2018). Other historically unique buildings have been relocated to the museum area, maintaining their existing structure (Voigtmann 2003). Likewise, because of the conditions and frameworks pertaining to monument protection in the region, the museum’s buildings have been architectonically very minimally adapted to the visitor’s needs. The buildings have narrow doorways, steep stairways, and thresholds between the rooms. The rooms inside of the historical houses are quite dark, with very few small windows.

The museum’s collaboration with Diakonie Auerbach e.V. began three years ago in 2017, the museum’s leadership faced a significant challenge. On the one hand, the museum needed to become more inclusive, which meant reducing barriers. On the other hand, museum professionals wanted to maintain architectonic ‘authenticity’ as an open air museum. Together with the Diakonie Auerbach e.V. and Vogtland’s Network Inclusion, the museum team worked under the leadership of the project managers Margita Bischof and Sascha Theile in order to develop a new strategy for common inclusion, defining the following two

major objectives. Firstly, we planned to develop 'plain language' texts in written, audible, and multimedia formats to assist people with cognitive impairments or those with limited knowledge of the German language. These were to be implemented with multi-sensory exhibition elements, particularly in the stable exhibition space of the museum. Secondly, we sought to provide a tactile set-up in the exhibition rooms and outdoor areas of the museum, including objects and models that visitors could test and try out. This adaptation would especially benefit those with visual impairments, but would also enhance the experience of other museum visitors in general. Both parts of the project were to be developed in coordination with people affected by their respective impairment(s). On an equal basis museum and charity professionals were incorporated to cooperate with representatives of the parties concerned.

3. The Implementation of the Project

Within the framework of the project, the staff members of the Diakonie Auerbach e.V. and museum workers collaborated with people with cognitive and/or visual impairments. Students from a special-needs education centre, the Förderzentrum "Oberes Vogtland", and students from the Gymnasium Markneukirchen, a local secondary school, were integrated as central partners in the project. Additional partners included the Barrier-Testers of Vogtland's Network Inclusion (*Barriere-Tester des Netzwerkes Inklusion im Vogtland*), and The Media Competence Centre SAEK in Plauen. The latter supports the project with their knowhow and education equipment in respect to different kinds of media. The initiative was also supported financially and conceptually by Aktion Mensch e.V., a charitable NGO. Aktion Mensch e.V., formerly called Aktion Sorgenkind, is one of the main charities in Germany, financed by way of the 'Social Lottery' system. It is widely recognized for its projects supporting inclusion and equality for all.

The goal of the initiative was to facilitate efforts toward inclusion on several dimensions. On the one hand, we wanted it to resemble a 'lived experience' for project participants, making sure that everyone's views were heard and taken into account. On the other hand, we wanted to map a sustainable, long-term process for transforming the museum as an institution, physically and otherwise. On the stratum of inclusion as an experience, inclusion was 'lived' and experienced in the social interactions entertained by the project

participants. Through the interaction and the process of collaboration, we sought to strengthen mutual understanding and break down attitudinal barriers of communication. We organized common events, upheld common aims, and worked together as a lived experience of inclusion that could give the participants greater confidence. We wanted to guarantee that this lived experience would become part of a sustainable long-term project for inclusion. The texts and elements developed by the project participants themselves will form part of the permanent exhibition and wider cultural set-ups at the museum. The input has already helped us reduce barriers of many kinds, from physical to emotional, against the backdrop of the museum as an institution. The museum has moved a step ahead in becoming a social space for people with differing needs.

Students with cognitive impairments and from the Gymnasium worked in mixed groups to prepare the plain language texts and corresponding multisensory elements with support of the Diakonie and museum professionals. As part of the training, students were introduced to the concepts and rules of plain language, learning the goals and methods for its use in lowering access barriers (Winter 2014; Maaß 2015; Bredel and Maaß 2016). Furthermore, they received a practical introduction into the production of visual and audio media. With this training, the students visited the museum, where they toured the historic houses in mixed groups and learned about the region's historic living and working conditions. In addition, they threshed and ground grain, then used the flour to bake bread that they ate together in the museum patio. This series of experiences testified to the project's ethos of mutuality in the fostering of a lived communal experience between different social groups.

During the ensuing weeks, the students defined the key topics to be addressed in their texts and exhibition elements. They decided to focus on living conditions, food and nutrition, agriculture and farm animals. The museum provided reference materials for these topics, and the students worked in their mixed groups to research, develop content and write texts. During the process, the students from the special-needs education centre were assigned to be reviewers, tasked with deciding which words and phrases should be included into the plain language set-ups. They could choose to either accept texts or return them for revision using green 'thumbs up' cards (to accept) or red 'thumbs down' cards (to reject). In the next working stage, the students added photographs and graphics to illustrate the written texts. The finished texts were then printed on panels to be presented

in the museum. SAEK multimedia educators collaborated with the students to produce films and audio from the texts, with participating students making their own contribution as well through acting and voice-over roles. The project was well underway in March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic brought forth some major disruptions.

4. The Inclusive Museum During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the hygiene regulations and public health recommendations imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, social interaction has been strongly curtailed. Physical meetings between the project partners and participating students were nearly impossible. Schools were mostly shut down for the remainder of the academic year and students suddenly found themselves being schooled online from home. The new demands of Covid-19 hygiene meant that some of the hands-on elements introduced by the project, as well as parts of the media set-up, had to be removed from the exhibitions. This included the tactile stimuli that had been planned. Furthermore, access to the museum for groups of visitors was strongly restricted.

We carried on the collaboration and communication aspects of the project as far as possible, but it became apparent that the pandemic was affecting students with cognitive impairments more intensely than the students of the Gymnasium. The Gymnasium students were largely able to continue working on the exhibition contents independently. Although digital platforms theoretically could allow social interaction in the form of critique or appreciation to continue, the students from the special-needs education centre were not able to carry on. For persons living with one form or another of cognitive impairment, in-person social interaction and physical elements of exchange are crucial to enable their involvement, rendering digital tools inadequate.

During the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, we used the network meetings organized by the Diakonie Auerbach e.V. as a platform to discuss how the pandemic may be affecting people both with and without a form of impairment(s). We exchanged ideas and learned about each other's experiences, challenges, and needs with the aim of further developing inclusive set-ups and communications under the limitations dictated by the pandemic. As part of these discussions, people with cognitive impairments expressed, among others, some of the following needs:



- Most of those taking part in these conversations recognize the danger they face during the pandemic, given how they may belong to high-risk groups or have close relationships to others belonging to such groups. As such, it is important for them to remain as safe as possible from potential sources of contagion.
- Some emphasised the significance of inclusive cultural settings as enablers of broader social interactions at a time of need, expressing fear that the pandemic might affect the trajectory of the programmes that it has disrupted at present.
- Others pointed to the need for public life and in-person interaction, adding that personal exchange and physical contact is very important to them.
- A sizeable proportion of the people with whom we spoke signalled the necessity to establish clear, long-term rules applicable to everybody regarding the handling of the Covid-19 pandemic. They perceived short-term changes in the rules and shifts in expected behaviours to be 'excessive demands'. Even among this group, there was criticism for those who did not follow the rules. Some also expressed desire for positive 'role models' to follow.
- Finally, many expressed a need for greater flexibility and creativity to cope better with the pandemic. This idea of bringing flexibility and creativity to the fore was likewise seen as essential to continue to develop inclusiveness strategies for posterity.

One could say that these meetings with the many stakeholders of the museum were of relevance both to us as well as to our partners and other persons involved: the process heightened our mutual understanding and strengthened our ability to reflect on the various implications of the crisis.

5. Self-Reflection

For us, as museum workers, this inclusive project, undertaken in our partnership with the Diakonie Auerbach and others, combined with the social interactions and new collaborative formats introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic, have been formative. It has forced us to

undergo profound self-reflection. The processes of adapting our daily routines to protect ourselves and others from disease led to novel discussions and rethinking. How do we and others perceive the situation? What are our/their needs? Which development goals, priorities, and/or responsibilities should we establish during the pandemic moving forward? The museum as an institution (and we as people) have undoubtedly changed, requiring us to develop new aims, methods, and concepts of the self. The pandemic pushed us to experience myriad restrictions. How might these experiences help us to better grasp how other people understand restrictions in their daily lives in the future? How ought we to respond to the very different needs of our visitors, not only during the pandemic, but also once it is over?

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Introduction

At the time in which I write this article, much is still uncertain. Therefore, what I intend is more of an exploratory piece, taking a descriptive rather than prescriptive route. I focus on the context of Brazil, particularly, exploring some of the tensions of The Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP) in the face of the pandemic. I turn my attention to the relation between the museum and the body and look at the exhibition program of the year 2020 entitled *Histories of Dance*; how has it been affected? What new challenges do they now face? What new strategies have been developed so far?

I am a researcher who - through the lens of anthropology - has been looking at the current context of cultural institutions in Brazil, focusing on how museums have been articulating social and political issues through various museum practices. In my research I focus especially on the relations between the body and the museum, and my case study has been the last few years of exhibitions in the Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP). With the pandemic, my initial research had to be changed, as new questions demanded to be asked.

First, I present a brief history of The Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP) and how it has changed recently, I then highlight some of the defining characteristics of The Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP) - specifically its architecture and museography. I aim to show how the novel coronavirus poses questions regarding the practicalities of the museum experience, while also posing threats to a compelling project aimed at decolonizing and diversifying the museum.

What happens to exhibitions about performance when the body cannot be present?

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I then discuss recent exhibitions of The Museum of Art of São Paulo, and how Covid-19 has affected its program from the year 2020, which focused on the theme *Histories of Dance*. This exhibition program presented a particular engagement between the body and the museum. Showcasing visual representations of moving bodies, while also offering various museum experiences that relied on the engagement of the body of the museum visitor. But with the pandemic, the body - individual, collective and political - is subjected to new tensions. Thus, demanding that new forms of bodily engagement be generated; creating and shaping new relations between bodies and spaces.

The Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP)

The Museum of Art of São Paulo (MASP) is at the heart of the largest city in Brazil and holds what is widely considered the most important western art collection in Latin America. As stated by the current artistic curator of the museum, Adriano Pedrosa¹, perhaps the most singular item of their collection is the museum headquarters. The building, a symbol of Brazilian modernist architecture and exemplary by its novel museum display, was designed by the Italian architect Lina Bo Bardi.



Figure 1. The Museum of Art of São Paulo. By Soldon, R. (2009) MASP - Museu de Arte de São Paulo. (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/soldon/3407308679>).

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tCZ3PRaiGgk>

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Inaugurated in 1968, during the most violent period of the military dictatorship that ravaged the country for almost 30 years, the museum building was a project based on Bo Bardi's vision of how a museum could play a part in the emancipatory politics of the people of Brazil. Bo Bardi, when designing the space, wanted the streets to mix with the building, in an affirming gesture of the museum as a place of democracy. And so, the first floor of the MASP was designed in such a way to be indistinguishable from the street.



Figure 2. Protest about the murder of Marielle Franco at the Paulista Avenue. By Teixeira, D. (2018). *Manifestantes protestam na Paulista contra os assassinatos da vereadora Marielle Franco* (<https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/manifestantes-protestam-pelo-pais-contra-a-morte-de-marielle-franco.ghtml>)

This powerful idea and design, nonetheless, presents specific challenges in the middle of the pandemic. Paulista Avenue is one of the busiest streets in São Paulo - which already overflows with its population of 12 million people - and social distancing becomes hard amidst this urban chaos. This is a concern that has been on the mind of those who work at the MASP. In a survey launched after the outbreak of the pandemic one of the questions asked was whether the location of the museum in such a busy part of the city would stop people from visiting. When Bo Bardi projected this part of the building, the mingling of bodies - who together could exercise their political rights - was part of what made the

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architecture of the museum such a singular and powerful place of gathering. The relations between spaces and bodies, however, must now be redressed.

The museum is also singular for its exhibition space. The last floor of the museum, where the permanent collection is exhibited, has no walls. In a display apparatus, also developed by Bo Bardi, the artworks are exhibited in glass easels that represent a continuum between the building and the museum display. The artworks seem to be floating entities. They mix with each other in a complex visual composition. Their design speaks of the ideals of democracy which informed their development and re expressed by the equality in their exhibition. Whether the piece is a Renoir or a less known local artist, they are displayed the same, occupying equally the space of the gallery.



Figure 3. View from the permanent collection exhibition. By Museu de Arte de São Paulo. (<https://masp.org.br/exposicoes/acervo-em-transformacao-museum-of-contemporary-art-chicago-no-masp>)

The display also aims at providing the visitor with freedom to choose their own path while walking the exhibition. There are no straight lines or pre-designated courses to follow. The visitor is free to rummage through the artworks at their own will and choosing. But how to negotiate this radical project with the practical reality imposed by the novel coronavirus? One of the measures that was recommended by the Brazilian Institute of Museums², and

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2. <https://www.museus.gov.br/ibram-publica-recomendacoes-aos-museus-em-tempo-de-covid-19/>

that has already been taken by museums across the world, is to draw one- directional pathways to be followed in the exhibition. But how to maintain the ideals behind the glass easels when one of the measures of social distancing contradicts precisely the intentions behind the design of the exhibition space? The pandemic made explicit what Donna Haraway (1991) argued many years ago, that our bodies do not end at the limit of our skins. It marked in this way, the multiplicity³ of the body, its social and political forces, as well as its vulnerabilities. The demarcations on the floor, which act as a way of maintaining distance amongst these bodies that do not end at the skin, are a practical challenge for a museum where the original architecture stood against this limiting of spacilities and bodily engagements.

The MASP and its Histories: about the museum and the body

Since 2016 the MASP has established a new policy, proposing to be a more diverse and inclusive museum and transforming its permanent collection and the thematic rubric that guides its exhibitions each year. The museum started a series of displays and seminars that revolved around the notion of *Histories*. In the year 2020, the theme revolved around *Histories of Dance*, which was interrupted by the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. These exhibitions all had distinct articulations between the body and the artwork, privileging subjects that haven't always been prioritized in an art museum exhibition. For example, the main exhibition from *Histories of Childhood*, placed all of the artworks at the eye level of a child. This created an exhibition space that assumed and privileged a different body as the museum visitor than one that is usually assumed and catered for.

The body and the museum have a long relationship that crosses the dividing lines of ethnographic, history and art museums. As anthropologist Bruno Brulon (2020) points out, during modernity, European philosophical thought marks a separation between mind and body, notably expressed by Descartes' philosophy and the development of his rationalist method. In the Cartesian cogito the subject is conceived as a mind and this thinking subject would be entirely independent of the materiality of their own body. The effects of this understanding - of the separation of mind and matter - were political and material, so much so that they are a colonial heritage still present in museums around the world, and also mark the development of museology in Brazil. Art historian Brian O'Doherty (1986) argues that part of the institutionalization of art galleries and museums of the modern

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3. I refer to the multiple body as asserted by Annemarie Mol (2002), or how a body can be enacted depending on different practices, objects and environments.

era is the specific relationship between the viewer and the work of art. So, the presence before the work of art becomes the disembodiment of the person in favor of the eye. The body in museums is denied and we become passive spectators, summarized to our visual capacity.

However, this relationship between the museum and the body is not stable and has caused friction several times, notably by performance. Schneider (1997) demonstrates how, especially, feminist artists were at the forefront of artistic performance and explored the political uses of the body in art. And, as pointed out by Carol Kino (2010), when artistic performances became popular in the 1960s and 1970s, they had as one of their main intentions the opposition to art markets and art institutions. The artistic use of the body was in many ways antagonistic to the museum itself. Performance as something ephemeral defied categorization and commodification, making it something that escaped the usual practices of collection, preservation and curation.

With *Histories of Dance*, by creating new engagements between the body and the museum, the MASP revives many of the tensions inherent to performance and its forms of exhibition, while also producing new and specific frictions. With a celebratory intent of the expressive potentialities of dance to articulate an array of emotions - from joy and desire to anger and collective rage on the face of oppression - the *Histories of Dance* exhibition program was dedicated to moving bodies, and how they might perform in distinct and sometimes unfavorable contexts, political, economic and otherwise.⁴ The exhibitions program that was planned would be varied in its contents, with exhibitions that focused on the visual representations of dance through art history, video performances, installations, and a series of live performances. An open space would be created in the museum where these performances would take place. From different dances and rehearsals, to workshops by local choreographers, artists, and performers, the idea was to bring active bodies to the heart of the museum. But with the spread of the coronavirus in São Paulo, which quickly became the epicenter of the pandemic in Brazil, the MASP was one of the first places to close its doors, and the exhibitions that were supposed to open were postponed. So, the MASP developed an online program.

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4. <https://masp.org.br/en/exhibitions/histories-of-dance>

The museums online presence

For quite some time, there has been a strong tendency in several museums to invest in virtual experiences (Geismar, 2018). Not only has there been a shift in the use of social media like Instagram, Twitter and Facebook as a means of advertisement, but museums have also been investing in creating digitally focused experiences such as virtual museum tours, online seminars and interactive museum apps. Many studies have discussed this turn to digital media in the context of contemporary museums (Keene, 1998; Economou, 2007; Parry; 2007, 2010). The MASP is no different. It already had a strong online presence, particularly its Instagram account, which even before the pandemic was the most popular museum account in Latin America, with the highest number of followers (presently at 600k), likes and comments. The museum has turned to social media platforms during the pandemic, developing a special online program.

Every Tuesday in its Instagram the museum selects one of the artworks of their collection to be reproduced through drawing by the followers of the social media account. Some of the drawings produced are selected by the museum and shared, and the winners also receive a free subscription to the museum that gives them free entrance for a year. On Wednesdays, also through Instagram, the museum shares information about one of the artworks of their collection; such as the historical context of the production of the piece, the biography of the artist and stories about the artwork in the museum. This initiative is called 'Dialogues in the collection'. Through the same social media account, on Thursdays, there is a live talk between the curators of the museum and a diverse range of guests. The museum's YouTube channel regularly posts talks between curators, artists, and a diverse set of other stakeholders. These initiatives are similar to what many museums have been carrying out. But in the case of the MASP, as with other museums in Brazil and other third world countries, the sharing of knowledge through social media touches upon issues of accessibility, as arguably a way of democratizing information. Brazil is a big country and traveling is expensive, the online activities of the MASP reach out to many people. The success of the Museums Instagram account also seems to gesture towards the effectiveness of social media in at least making information more accessible to a wider audience than it would otherwise. However, the fact still remains that access to digital means in Brazil is not widely available, so the actual reach of these initiatives is still limited by the social and economic inequalities of the country.

What happens to exhibitions about performance when the body cannot be present?



The biggest issue concerning the exhibitions of *Histories of Dance* was in relation to the performances that were planned. The occupation of the museum space by the active bodies of the people is part of the initial project of the MASP and something that also expresses the efforts to decolonize the museum. The separation of body and mind, object and subject, are colonial legacies inherited by the museums in Brazil. The performances intended would transgress those boundaries, offering embodied ways of knowledge and practice. So, they also had to be translated by means of the digital. On the 23rd of June, the museum held an online opening of the Hélio Oiticica solo exhibition. It was a small preview of the works that would be displayed, along with commentary. A video with a guided tour of the exhibition was posted in the museum's YouTube channel, and there was a live chat with the curators on Instagram as well.

The museum also started to showcase musical presentations and dance workshops through live streaming in its YouTube channel. The first floor of the museum, the one that mixes with the street, before the pandemic, used to host musical presentations every so often. This is also an initiative that is aimed at making the museum a place for the people. For the *Histories of Dance* exhibitions many uses of the first floor were planned, particularly musical concerts, so on the 14th of June of 2020 the MASP live streamed the first concert online: a presentation by MC Tha, a Brazilian musician who mixes sounds from Brazilian funk, capoeira⁵ and umbanda (Afro-Brazilian religion). On the same night, there was a dance workshop hosted by Monique Costa, a dancer who through the online streaming taught Gumboot Dance, a South African style of dance from the XIX century. The second live stream happened on the 25th of September 2020 and featured a concert by the hip-hop artist Ricon Sapiência and a hip hop dance workshop by Mayara Rosa. As it can be observed, the MASP has made an effort to showcase different styles of dance and music that have roots in different black cultures, from Brazil, the USA and South Africa so far. This is also in line with the objectives of the project that focuses on the plurality of Histories and uses the visibility of the museum to offer diverse narratives about a wide range of subjects. In the case of *Histories of Dance* these narratives are embodied, they are sung and danced narratives. These dancing bodies, instead of occupying space together in the museum, are now spread through the world by means of the digital. Many people watched the live streams and commented on how they were trying to follow the dance steps or singing along to the

5. Capoeira is a style of danced fight which was created by the people who were enslaved in Brazil during the colonial period. The fact that it looks like a dance was a way for the people to train fighting tactics and be able to resist slavery.

What happens to exhibitions about performance when the body cannot be present?



music. Even with the many new limitations imposed on our bodies *Histories of Dance* shows that it is possible for our bodies to move together, even if far away and across the globe.

Conclusion

There are challenges presented by the pandemic that are very specific to this museum and its project. There have been measures that were developed by museums around the world while confronting the pandemic, but these measures assume certain relationships between bodies and spaces, relations that the MASP has particularly challenged. The body was mobilized for its transgressive potentials - rupturing with aesthetical, political and social norms - and now it must be carefully reconsidered during these uncertain times. The body multiple has demonstrated yet another of its enactments - the pandemic body - demanding that new understandings of spaces and relations be crafted. The digital seems to have definitely risen as a means and a place where bodies can be present, and where the bodies of the performances of the *Histories of Dance* exhibitions can still move lively.

The pandemic forced us yet again to consider new ways of interacting with each other. It bestowed on us new awareness of our own bodies and those of others, the frontiers of our skins (or lack thereof) suddenly made visible, marked by the use of masks and an array of distancing measures. The museum is one of the places where we will have to rethink our bodies and refashion our ways of being with each other. What the case of the MASP makes clear is that there is no unique measure that can be used to address this, but we'll have to keep grabbing for forms of presence and ways of enacting the realities of our bodies. What happens to an exhibition about performances when the body cannot be present? That is the question that gives the title to this piece and to which I argue there is no clear or definitive answer. I believe that this is instead a question that is open for different kinds of engagements.

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What happens to exhibitions about performance when the body cannot be present?



(De)accessioning nationality during Covid-19 pandemic

Milja Jelenić

Yugoslav Film Archive

Due to Covid-19, the Yugoslav Film Archive joined #DigitalSolidarity via official channels on Vimeo, YouTube and on European Film Gateway. Amongst other digitized material, we made available the opportunity to watch YU films online. And that is where the interesting impact of the pandemic comes to the arena. Last year the management had, what seemed to be, a clear vision of national determination when it comes to YU film for the purpose of creating a permanent exhibition. However, during the state of emergency introduced as a pandemic battle-measure (occurring conveniently only three months after the exhibition grand opening), the course seemed to change. The same management left the narrative of national determination that they felt was a must. Instead they advertised giving unlocked material without a national prefix, using instead its name and the 70 years long tradition for showing the magnitude of film collections. Our audiences are once again offered Yugoslav film. The problem is in the difference between the national-based interpretation we offered within our walls and the deliberate absence of the national-based interpretation in our online presence and activities during #DigitalSolidarity due to Covid-19. This paper explores the difference in operation of the Yugoslav Film Archive before and during Covid-19. It will elaborate on the changes that can be introduced when the physical space of our institution again becomes the primary space of communication with our audiences.

„If hell does exist, I think it almost certainly contains a corner devoted to pointless discussions.“
Thomas Sutcliffe

„From Pandora’s Box, where all the ills of humanity swarmed, the Greeks drew out hope after all the others, as the most dreadful of all. I know no more stirring symbol; for, contrary to the general belief, hope equals resignation. And to live is not to resign oneself.“
Albert Camus

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The Central Yugoslav Cinematheque was founded on August 5, 1949, by the Committee for Cinematography of the then Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. The mission and the rulebook on work of the Central Yugoslav Cinematheque was signed by the then President of the Committee for The Cinematography of the Government of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Vladislav Ribnikar, and approved by the Prime Minister of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito. The Rulebook clearly defines the task of the collection (among many others): "to collect and preserve all cinematographic works produced in the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, in one, and in case of need in a larger number of film copies." In ex-Yugoslavia each republic had its own film archive for the purpose of collecting and acquiring contemporary audio-visual works, but only from production companies established in that republic. The difference between these archives is that the Yugoslav Film Archive was established as the central federal institution in Yugoslavia at the time, with the obligation of acquiring negatives and copies of every audiovisual made in the state. During the break-up of Yugoslavia, it was transformed into an autonomous and independent institution, subsidized by the state.

Unlike other museums, the Yugoslav Film Archive has never had its own exhibition space and permanent exhibition. The Museum of the Yugoslav Film Archive at Kosovska street was another name for the cinema hall in which the audience enjoyed watching movies for decades. Occasionally, temporary exhibitions of film posters were organized in the lobby. The largest organized presentation of the history of film in our country was organized with the exhibition "Century of The Film" in December 1995 in the Gallery of Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of the first film screening in Belgrade and in the Balkans by the Limier brothers. The exhibition was realized by the Yugoslav Film Archive and the SASA. After the Cinematheque moved into the new building in Uzun Mirkova street, part of the exhibits from that exhibition were included in the old permanent exhibition. The new building, which was awarded to the Yugoslav Film Archive in 1992, became a real challenge for architects, and later for curators. Due to problems with static and subjective attempts of the political establishment to challenge its use, as many as twenty years passed until, in October 2012, the Yugoslav Film Archive opened the doors of the new building. Here, I would like to point out the problem of the complexity of the Yugoslav Cinematheque and the overall perception of that institution by the audience, for whom a permanent exhibition was formed. Hence the question of

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this chapter as the crux of the problem. When the opening of the new permanent exhibition was advertised, a good part of the audience flocked to the Museum of the Yugoslav Film Archive, because the name of the Cinematheque department drew the thoughts and expectations of the audience: that a permanent exhibition can only be found in a space called a museum. Was it a natural expectation that this space, which was repurposed by the Kosovo cinema and which has been perceived for seventy years as a museum of moving images (with two to three projections per day), would suddenly turn into a museum space for permanent display with its capacity? Do we really understand that the Cinematheque's cinema is actually a museum of moving images, it is an exhibition space for the most important and largest collection of film funds? No cinema in the country is a Cinematheque Museum, and yet the Cinematheque Museum is actually a cinema. The uniqueness of the Cinematheque cinema lies in the daily program. Thus, at the museological level, the monthly program of films can be read as a sum of a kind of temporary exhibition of the Yugoslav Cinematheque. With the opening of the new directorate building, the Museum of the Cinematheque received reinforcements in the new cinema halls. Also, space is opening for the creation of a permanent exhibition of the Yugoslav Cinematheque. Thus, we can say that the Cinematheque has enriched its exhibition activity on several levels.

Working as project manager of the new permanent exhibition of the Yugoslav Film Archive (opened on January 23, 2020) I encountered numerous questions and at the same time vague standpoints about what Yugoslav film heritage is. The key dilemma, which I had as a project leader, and also the point of my disagreement, is whether the modern formulas for determining the national, which were imposed on me by the administration, can be a justification for seeking and separating Serbian film from a corpus of creativity in Yugoslavia. What bothers someone who wants to stand out nationally are the rules that existed even then, and those are the rules that money determines the origin of the film. Whether we want to admit it or not, it is the same today. The origin of the production company, its place of foundation, is unfortunately interpreted as the source of the birth of a cinematographic work. Let me digress here. In June this year, the European Observatory for Audiovisual Archives published the results of a two-year research on the regulation of the nationality of filmmaking, under the auspices of the Council of Europe and the Creative Europe program. Also, in 2018, the European Observatory for Audiovisual Archives will publish the legal framework for international co-productions. As the legislation of R. Serbia did

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not enter the research, I want to point out that based on Articles 4 and 6 of the RS Law on Cinematography, in accordance with modern formulas, we have clear parameters for defining what a domestic cinematographic work is, as well as parameters for defining a foreign cinematographic work. We must not forget what further complicates the financing of Yugoslav cinematography, which, in addition to production companies, was also financed by the federation so some films can be read as state projects. The most resonating issue was levelled to the question of how we should treat the YU film heritage we are preserving. Can we argue that YU film can now be assessed as Serbian following the dissolution of Yugoslavia? And if so, which films can and should find their place in a permanent exhibition? Ever since its establishment until the final disintegration of the state (during the nineties) Yugoslav Film Archive was the main film archive in the country, storing what was understood as Yugoslavia's cinematic production. Today, 70 years later, we had to define sets of formulas for calculating the nationality of the same materials and to precisely display them within the first permanent exhibition of our institution. However, during the state of emergency introduced as a pandemic battle-measure (occurring conveniently only three months after the exhibition grand opening), the course seems to change. We are now proudly releasing materials from our funds and the national prefix seems to be limited, or even of no importance. Our audiences are once again offered Yugoslav film and the burning question is how do they perceive the offered materials? Is the difference in their inherent understanding of these materials which is going to impact our work within the physical setting of the exhibition space? And is the imposed national formula of selection going to be challenged, and at the end adjusted, according to the wishes, needs and understandings of our audiences? In order to answer the asked questions there first needs to be an acknowledgement of several parallel standpoints when it comes to the audience, and on the most basic level, to differentiate audiences based on their lived experience – how does someone who is coming from Yugoslavia understand what YU film is? How does someone born in Yugoslavia, but raised after its dissolution, frame the meaning of Yugoslav-prefix? And finally, how does an individual having no personal experience but only a passed-on memory of Yugoslavia build a critical capacity to apprehend the national-based interpretation we offer within our walls, but conveniently avoid within our online presence and activities.

Due to Covid-19, Serbia declared a state of emergency on March 15th 2020, and the Yugoslav Film Archive, amongst other institutions in Serbia, received an official plea from

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the Government to be a part of Digital Solidarity four days later. NB in Serbia during the state of emergency (15th of March - 6th of May), citizens of Serbia were under a curfew from 5 PM until 5AM and other movement restrictions were instated including curfew for several weekends. All cultural institutions were closed and people with means for Open Access had no choice between physical and virtual space like before the pandemic – the government measures turned them, forced them so to speak, to virtual space if they wanted and sought cultural content. In the pandemic Yugoslav Film Archive joined the #DigitalSolidarityMovement in Serbia and gave Open Access for various materials from its funds via official channels on Vimeo, YouTube and on European Film Gateway. Amongst other digitized material, we also had the opportunity to watch YU films online. And that is where the interesting impact of the pandemic comes to the arena. Actually, you had access to Serbian movies from the YU era under the YU name. Can we state, bearing in mind all the rules and regulations for determination of the audio-visual works, that some films from YU era are in fact today Serbian or any other nationality of another republic from ex-Yugoslavia? How can you measure and post festum determine something when there is no ground for that, given that all the works were in fact Yugoslavian film heritage? Back then all that was filmed in Yugoslavia, whatever the majority of a production company, during the film festivals was represented as nothing else but Yugoslavian film. How can we now state otherwise?

My main question is whether now, due to the disintegration of the country, we are giving up as an institution to restore, digitize and make available - YU film, which according to the modern formula for determining the national, does not read as Serbian? The audience, and not just the audience in Serbia, expects to see the YU film, and they only got what can be read as an exclusively Serbian film from YU era. Who claims the rights to YU film and presents it as YU film either on a permanent basis or on their e-channel? Or are we witnesses that the Yugoslav film was divided, like the SFRY, into the Yugoslav Cinematheque, which is unofficially presented as the Serbian Film Archive, and the cinematheques of other republics? As part of the event marking the seventieth anniversary of the Yugoslav Cinematheque, June 7, 2019, a panel discussion was organized on the topic "Preservation of film cultural heritage and the challenges of the digital age in the former Yugoslavia." The participants were the leaders of cinematheques and film archives of the ex-Yugoslav region. The issue of preservation and digital restoration of cinematographic works that represent a common cultural heritage was raised at the panel. At the panel, the director of

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the Yugoslav Cinematheque, Jugoslav Pantelić, presented a proposal for cooperation in the field of digital restoration, he stated that, “if one cinematheque keeps the original negative image and tone from its republic and currently has no possibility to digitally restore that film and another cinematheque is interested, for example, which was made in that film by an actor from her environment, and has the ability, desire and means to carry out the process of digital restoration, the first cinema would temporarily give the negative, i.e. scanned material, and after the work would get back the negative materials and new, digitally restored a copy.” I would like to conclude this chapter with the words of Sanjin Pejković “it is inevitable that new national cinemas must be built, but not on revisionism”. (Pejković, 2011)

We are here at the end, or should I say at the beginning, we are now entering the ouroboros of this issue. The question what is Yugoslav Film Archive may differ from the mathematical statement if... then...? So, we have two ifs: if yesterday and if today what is Yugoslav Film Archive. Also, those ifs refer to a mission statement as well. At the first glance, the simplicity of ifs will resolve all the issues of accessioning and presenting YU film heritage and on the other hand at the same time will offer the view towards a new growing up of desire for accessioning nationality and post festum determination of YU film heritage and its presentation as national, now digital, during Covid-19 pandemic. Basically, the invisible influence of the pandemic can be read in the different perception of given material due to the change of the “exhibition” space. At first, you have the failed attempt to present something as national when clearly it cannot be read as such, even if you try to do post festum determination of nationality. But, you also have the desire to incorporate something different than Serbian, due to the convenience of a specific film genre, and in those specific parts of the permanent exhibition you could not see the same pattern; but due to the pandemic in a different set of space, a virtual one, you have now movies from the YU era, post festum determined as Serbian using contemporary formulas adopted by all countries in the world (the origin of money i.e. the origin of production company/companies) and all that under the old name – Yugoslav Film Archive– which is a carrier of meaning, because behind that name, lies the depot with all the Yugoslavian movies. Let’s rewind a little bit. Before the pandemic, the GLAM sector had been doing the digitization process for the last two decades. But do we honestly comprehend the complexity behind the term ‘going digital’? Going digital for museums, and on the other hand going digital for film archives in the world. Also, to comprehend the complexity of the work we must first split the term – to

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digitize some museum object and to digitize & digitally restore some audio-visual objects. The number of units of data that lie behind, and the system which supports it, is more massive than that for objects in museums or other archive materials. So, when you are on a budget (in the Republic of Serbia the culture sector is given just 0.6 in total per annum), naturally you have to write a financial proposal and make a plan for every project including the digitization and digital restoration of a film. The plan is being approved by the Ministry of Culture and Information and now, as the central film archive in the country, top priority is given to Serbian film material. That is why you will find in official channels on YouTube and Vimeo mainly nationally based materials. For the rest of the material in possession of Yugoslav Film Archive, future collaboration when it comes to digitization between archives in the region is crucial. I think the pandemic revealed existing soft spots more obviously, and the important task is ahead of us now.

When it comes to the audience and the narrative that is offered to them with a permanent exhibition, with the questionable key to reading 'Serbian in Yugoslav film' and 'Yugoslav film', the question arises which audience is it and how can it read a permanent exhibition? In order to answer the question, it is necessary to first notice the existence of several different audiences that differ in (lived) experience. How does someone born in Yugoslavia but raised after its dissolution frame the meaning of Yugoslav-prefix? And finally, how does an individual having no personal experience but only a passed-on memory of Yugoslavia build a critical capacity to apprehend the national-based interpretation we offer within our walls, but conveniently avoid within our online presence and activities?

An interesting contribution to the re-examination of the determination of the nationality in the future will certainly be the research of the impact of the Corona virus pandemic on the differences in the premises of one institution, such as the Yugoslav Film Archive. Here I mean physical and virtual space, as well as the potentials that each brings with it. My answer to the question of what the Yugoslav Film Archive is, in terms of today, and I hope in the terms of if tomorrow, is the house where the film lives. I would like to end with words of director Rajko Grlić about the importance of cinemas around the world during the presentation of the Golden Seal during the celebration of the Yugoslav Film Archive's jubilee: „The dream of every film is to end up in the film archive, and the dream of every director is for the film archive to say thank you.“



Academic reflections

Urgency and Alliances of Convenience

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**Disclaimer: The coming paragraphs are a set of semi-structured thoughts aiming to stir a conversation and hopefully disagreement, leading to an agreement. The issues below were thought about and are now written while coming to terms with the new altered view of personal and collective action and responsibility. They are a reaction to a personal case of stepping away from what is felt as important, a reaction to a realization of different sorts of opportunistic or convenient actions and a way for figuring out if amends should be made. Read them with caution and, if provoked or even slightly interested, join me in a conversation: dordevicmarija86@gmail.com.*

A caption for the year 2020: “the seemingly unlimited possibilities of communication ‘meet’ the physical confinement and reduction of mobility”. One impact of this oxymoron is an altered comprehension of the present time. The present is equated with urgency: urgency of supplying, of adjusting limits, of communicating and of bettering later-to-be positions. Accompanied by a sense of solidarity and hospitality, the need for alliances resonated louder this time around. Alliances are by no means a product of the pandemic, or limited to the beginning and duration of social movements; they are always a faithful companion of uncertainty, precariousness and the imperative to stay afloat.

The act of ‘allying’ is in many ways a corporal and spatial phenomenon, as it is determined and conditioned by bodies coming together to express consensus on solidarity, content or discontent (Butler 2015). In this case, the issue of allying oneself is inextricable from the notion of consent, i.e. of giving or not giving permission to interact and, in so doing, instigating communication and its numerous consequences.

In a corporal sense, the pandemic has altered the physical present tense of communication. One of the common effects of the declared 'states of emergency' around the world has been the limiting of bodily participation within our community(ies), regardless of how we define it. This change of perceiving and sensing physicality is by no means a new occurrence. It has been here ever since the quiet takeover of the digital. In many ways, the heritage or museum fields and their people have already, more or less, successfully adapted their practice to digital/online demands.

However, this time around, the non-physical format was not a matter of choice, but an imposition. Diving into all-digital/online-available formats, the approach to building a community has radically changed. The sense of (or need for) belonging or participating has severely intensified. Alliances are built on each and every level, from constructing systems to provide supplies and disinfection to households, to supporting precarious health systems and, finally, to using solidarity within confinement in order to loudly confirm our physical existence to other bodies outside of the four walls of our homes: by singing or clapping, and in some places by expressing discontent with how the situation is approached by state apparatuses. This is what we, privileged people, do, as we can allow ourselves to stay safe, in literal terms.

As the circulation of work has not been paused but only rearranged (at the speed of light, one should add), the demand for achievement and, for young academics especially, of professional visibility required a new form of intervention. This sensation is probably as old as time, but on this occasion, due to the circumstances, the reflection on the reasons why we build alliances (or do not) was unavoidable. Professional, personal and above all individual self-reflection necessarily followed. Even when sheltered by existing protocols for the day-to-day operation of institutional settings and the tools that come with them (to adjust swiftly to the changing circumstances, such as rapid response collecting methods), the issues of institutional purposefulness and ethics come to the fore.

Without wishing to make a qualifying judgment of right versus wrong (especially in terms of professional choice and delivery), our research lens needs to turn to the issues of convenience and consent when thinking of alliances; to the morals of what we have chosen to be our "contribution" and why we made a particular choice; to the simple, but very pervasive,

question: what does one give their consent for? In terms of consent, it seems that 'giving it' is most effectively visible when two or more bodies are physically present—from explicitly vocalizing it, to providing a signature. However, in the present realm of 'altered physicality', the issue seems to rest on the mixing (up) of consent and convenience. The lack of an actual physical encounter when giving consent via online platforms means that this process often boils down to the issue of convenience; to the compulsory character of 'ticking the box' in order to proceed swiftly to enjoying the wanted services.

The same issue seems to appear in the pandemic-affected museum-related field (of course as seen from a screen, and within the unaltered physical relations between one's body and the couch, dining table or a balcony—when one is lucky to be based in a safe home). In the wave of urgency, numerous museum responses emerged. Some provided free-access to their digitized treasures, which very often does not occur in the non-pandemic reality. Some attempted to 'crisis collect' in numerous ways, from collecting contemporary objects to contemporary reflections on/of their own collection. However, the question is how these collections look like to those who are not involved, the observers of a reflective and sometimes critical kind. These appear as snippets coming from privileged people, since it is the communities managing to keep safe that have the time and means to digitally participate. If this assumption is true, the question is: what kind of a historical quote are we preparing to be inherited as the image of Covid-19? Why does it seem like we are perceiving these personalized additions to data and collections as newer and (in some cases) better historical material than the past archival materials on epidemics? Finally, why do we choose to showcase only one type of resilience, without touching upon the costs paid to provide security for some and not for all?

Some institutions were actually capable of breaking with this pattern and, in a state of urgency, modify their communication pathways. They became institutions for the benefit of their community, institutions taking an active role in building alliance systems or supply chains for the communities in one way or another impacted by the pandemic. Some took a good look at their means of communication and did their best to diversify the applicable media. Some made a commitment to their existing users (communities) to do their best to fulfill their side of the deal. Other institutions attempted to pause, take a wholesome look at the present, and transform it into analyzable material for the building of new relations and

tools to be applied in the future. Certain institutions also decided not to do too much at all, whenever the circumstances at hand allowed for this to be the case.

Regardless of the fact that each chosen path has its own justification and therefore can be exempt from harsh criticism, as not all institutions need to reach out and cater for their community in the same way (or at all, for that matter), the answer as to why certain approaches are applied and why specific pathways will be followed seems inconclusive.

What will be is yet to be seen, but the confrontation of saying 'yes' and 'no' that was made so visible in the past six months will be difficult to circumvent once we achieve the 'new' normality. The initial fear is turning into saturation, and what this 'overflow' brings can only be speculated for now. What we do have for the time being is a testimony of non-disclosure as to why we do the things we do, and why we give consent and act in certain ways. It seems like an effort was made to provide new kinds of documentation to explain our world to future imaginaries/generations, but it must be admitted that these efforts might have already failed to fulfill their intent as convenience took primacy over consent when alliances were made. Museums of the romantic West kept their position undisrupted and gave us what we already own, (un)intentionally remaining in a 'vacuum of silence' regarding what could be imagined as their sense of purpose.

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Policy reflections

In the times of Corona(virus): culture and museums

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In the times of Corona(virus) - Museums' thick and thin:
Answers and Questions from a researcher's perspective

Remember Marques' Love in the Time of Cholera? I did because there are some things that are similar then and now: epidemic and love, in this case it is the love of museums that we all at this event share.

Ciao bella! is a song of Italian partisans who fought against fascism in the 2nd World War. Fascism may be seen as kind of pandemic, because of fascism millions of innocent people died. During the lockdown in Spring 2020 "Ciao Bella!" was widely embraced, at least in the Balkans, as a symbol of our courage to face one of the greatest crisis' in the history of mankind, a pandemic that shook our world to the core, officially known as Covid-19 or unofficially - Corona.

The term "thick description" is borrowed from Geertz as a set of markers that describe how the challenges brought by the Corona virus were classified and addressed around the world in the domain of culture. The basis for thick description are reports published by UNESCO and at the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends i.e. on the portal culturalpolicies.net. Actions of CIMAM and ICOM were also taken into account. Thickness derives from the pure amount of available data.

Loss of revenue. As money makes the world go round, dramatic loss of revenue due to museum closures is certainly one of major challenges that museums are confronting. Though data referring to economic costs of closure of museums during Spring 2020 is still limited, preliminary findings of the Network of European Museums and Organizations

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(NEMO) show that while some museums have found their budget to be minimally impacted by the beginning of May other museums, especially bigger ones with larger number of tourists, reported a loss of income of 75-80% with weekly losses adding up to hundreds of thousands of euros. Smaller private museums that rely primarily on ticket sales are also reporting losses due to closures. It is also important to note the damage brought by losing sponsors and donors who were also affected by the economic crisis that emerged in relation to the Covid-19 situation.

To cross the Atlantic, the American Alliance of Museums stated: "Museums in the US are losing at least \$33 million daily due to closures. Up to 30% - mostly those in small and rural communities – will not reopen without emergency financial aid."

Loss of revenues has another deep consequence – lack of money means less or no money to pay **STAFF**, the people who actually make museums alive. According to UNESCO and ICOM data, 3 out of 5 museums have had to put on hold freelance workers. It is still difficult to estimate how many of them will be hired again in the foreseeable future. That is a real, serious threat and recent history in Serbia proves it because in 2015 due to a reduction of the number of people employed in public sector, museums in Serbia had to furlough 10% of people and a majority were curators. It seriously jeopardized the work of Serbian museums. Now, in the time of Corona, the Serbian government still sticks to the decision to keep all employees in sectors like education, health, social security and culture. Otherwise, it would be the death of Serbian museums.

As the cultural sector is particularly sensitive, throughout Europe states have introduced various **financial measures** aimed to help the cultural sector. On the basis of 28 countries' reports in relation to Covid-19 crisis, the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe at culturalpolicies.net portal provided an overview of financial measures classifying them in groups:

- Employment aid;
- Fiscal leniency;
- Fund / Grant;
- Grant leniency;
- Legal;

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- Liquidity aid;
- Loan;
- Loan leniency;
- Medical aid (so far only in Estonia)

To cut a long story short, employment aid, some fiscal measures and partial grants are applicable in the case of museums. So, I'll just briefly address them with a notion that in some countries like Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands measures are developed on all federal, regional and local levels.

Employment aid (employment aid like temporary unemployment benefits in Belgium; support for preservation of jobs in Austria and Croatia, short-term work allowances in Germany, support for employers and businesses to provide wages and salaries in Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Serbia and UK);

Fiscal leniency (like tax deferral and postponing the deadline for submitting annual financial reports in Albania, postponing or suspension of payments of certain taxes in Belgium, idle time benefit for taxpayers in Latvia, suspension of rent for owners of cultural properties in Croatia. Vouchers instead refunds for the tickets for events that couldn't be held due to lockdown in Czech Republic and Germany, reduction of VAT in Greece, variety of other fiscal measures in Estonia, France, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Scotland);

Fund / Grant (just to stick to those that may be applicable in the case of the museums like increased subsidies for art acquisitions in Austria, an emergency fund of EUR 200 million for the cultural and other sectors in Belgium, support for the cultural institutions of the City of Ghent also in Belgium; call for proposals "Arts and Culture Online" in Croatia; Support of cultural entities by financing operating expenses in order to sustain their viability in Cyprus; Call for projects using multimedia platforms, support funds for cultural institutions including museums and art galleries and also campaigns to attract local tourists and a benefit program that includes discounts of entry fees in Czech Republic; compensation for the direct costs of events cancelled due to lockdown, as well as partial compensation for museums for the loss due to cancelled events/activities in Estonia; revisited fiscal plan for the period 2021-2024 and a second supplementary budget with the focus on the costs caused

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by the corona virus epidemic – funds for theatres, orchestras and museums receiving central government transfers in Finland, etc.).

Altogether, these measures are primarily orientated towards independent and self-employed artists who suffered severe damage due to the lockdown and even after the lockdown still suffer due to travelling limitations as noted in, for example, CIMAM's president Ms. Kataoka's letter published at CIMAM website influencing changes in **business models** of arts museums. She emphasized that a limited number of visitors will be especially dramatic for those models that rely heavily on blockbuster exhibitions. As a consequence, arts museums will have to reconsider what has been the norm of exhibition making and large-scale exhibition design, among others. International travel restrictions will make it particularly difficult for modern and contemporary museums to invite artists to travel from all around the world, which will mean the loss of a vital source of energy for the institution and its publics. Arts museums are not the only spaces in need of change or adjustment of business models.

In many countries world-wide the response to corona virus, Covid-19, included full or partial lockdowns. In such situations, the response was **GOING ONLINE**. According to a UNESCO report "Museums Around the World in the Face of Covid-19", going online meant 5 types of reactions:

1. **Use of previously digitalized resources** (basically, museums around the world used the opportunity to boost already done work such as online collections, virtual tours, 360°, online publications, and digital exhibitions as showcases of their work. For example, the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, Russia really rocked with it's virtual tours promoted at the beginning of March 2020.
2. **Digitalization of planned activities during the months of lockdown** (as many activities were already scheduled when the lockdown was announced, many museums sought to put these events online in the form of more or less interactive visit. To depart from the UNESCO report, the Museum of Yugoslavia was quick to offer an online visit to two recent exhibitions: The Nineties: A Glossary of Migrations that was closed a few weeks before lockdown and Project Yugoslavia that was planned to last by mid-March.

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3. **Increased activity on social media** (many museums already have had profiles on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, whereas YouTube or SoundCloud channels were rather rare. Now they are more frequent. Also, in some museums in Serbia activities on social media are combined with using two previously mentioned reactions.
4. **Special activities created for lockdown.** According to the UNESCO report “Museums Around the World in the Face of Covid-19” just a few museums developed original projects in the context of lockdown. The report emphasizes three types of interventions designed to break away from more traditional projects such as the use of previously digitalized resources, going online with planned activities, and increased use of social media. The First type of intervention is concerned with exhibition projects and collections seeking new forms of experience like using a robot as museum guide (Hastings Contemporary in UK), online “cocktail with curators” at the Frick Collection in New York, or using the museum’s collection / reproduction in a video game related to an exhibition that engages visitor (the Angermuseum in Germany – Animal Crossing game). The second type of intervention is concerned with flipping the coin on the other side – explaining the inner side of museums’ work like what curators are actually doing. It’s not that far from offline initiatives in some Serbian museums but they are still offline. The third type of intervention is organizing participatory actions – posting challenges, educational games and quizzes related to collections, photos of visitors themselves reproducing famous works, etc. In Serbia, and perhaps the rest of former Yugoslavia since March, posting challenges was mainly done via social media like Facebook. Both museums on their Facebook pages and curators on their private profiles were sharing challenges such as one about childhood or “My best time in the museum” etc. These challenges are also related to the issues of collections which is the topic of our conference scheduled for Thursday, October 8th.
5. **Professional and scientific activities organized in the context of lockdown.** As a response to the situation, museums and organizations increased meeting online via various videoconferencing media. Most often, according to the UNESCO report, these online events were focused on topics related to Corona times. It was also the case with our SIEF Museum Work Group resulting in this online conference.

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In many museums world-wide these activities and initiatives were combined. Altogether they do manifest “an unprecedented acceleration in the digitalization of culture access to culture online.” However, as it was noted in UNESCO updates and the report “Museums around the world” as well as in a Serbian report at culturalpolicies.net, going online still bears difficulties as not all cultural institutions are sufficiently equipped to carry on complex digital projects. Also, some countries have a digital penetration of only 35%, meaning that two out of three persons does not have access to online content, many museums indeed acted promptly, without particular preparation to live online. This data, provided by UNESCO, however, should be (re)considered in relation to for example Eurostat data on Internet access and digital literacy. Even in Europe there are regions without or with poor Internet access, especially in remote areas. On the other hand, Internet access does not ensure that people do actually know how to use online content.

Back to offline or: **REOPENING.**

According to ICOM, **by April 2020** 95% of an estimated 60.000 museums around the world closed to the public due to Covid-19 pandemic. In many European countries museums reopened throughout May and June, having Serbia as a radical example because museums reopened on April 22nd. However, **by the end of May** ICOM estimated that 13% of museums may never reopen.

Reopening brings a bit of relief in terms of economic costs and hope for, rather sooner than later, regaining “normality” but is it really so comforting if the visitor numbers are limited?

Regarding reopening the most important issue is the issue of **SAFETY.**

On the basis of experiences in Far East countries like Japan, Singapore and China / Hong Kong, CIMAM provided comprehensive guidelines for reopening museums. These guidelines correspond with general precaution measures provided by governments over the world. These measures are “divided” onto visitor safety (wearing masks, keeping the distance, limiting duration of visits, suspension of guided tours, encouraging individual visits instead of group visits, floor markers, measuring temperature, and alike), staff safety (measuring temperature, wearing masks, keeping the distance, using hand sanitizers, possible

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flexible working arrangements), facility management (regular cleaning and disinfection, providing hand sanitizers) and public communication (proactive communication of the precautions in place in terms of distancing, visitor registration, temperature screening, etc.)

Museums, like the National Museum in Belgrade, did follow precaution measures in terms of limiting visitor numbers, suspending group visits, floor markers, clearly visible places for hand sanitizers, and also using art-works from their collections as a motif for a new “souvenir” – masks.



Figure 1. Courtesy of National Museum in Belgrade

Issues of safety and measures imposed by governments provoked public responses in the form of protests in many countries including Germany, Poland, Italy and quite disturbingly in Serbia. These reactions, of course, are not directly related to museums but they are important to note for the transition towards **THIN**.

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Figure 2. Courtesy of National Museum in Belgrade

El Condor Pasa is well known song. Originally it is a song of rebels in the Andes mountains in Bolivia and surrounding countries. When Simon and Garfunkel played it on their album “Bridge Over Troubled Waters” they triggered a chain of events leading to the UNESCO 2003 Convention on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. So do not underestimate “Thin lines” marked by words and not quite backed-up by thick data descriptions provided by all relevant international and national organizations and institutions.

Reflecting on effects of policy interventions and drawing upon Foucault’s “gaze” Anthropology made a distinction of being clear and being plain. The power of statements depends on them being clear (like ‘the clear truth’) sometimes rather than being plain (like “the plain truth”). Clarity comes from something being taken away (e.g. “being economical with the truth”), while plainness comes from nothing being added.

Having that in mind I opted for 3 buzz / key words. We all know what key words are – they are critically important for us to understand phenomenon, process, actions and reactions.

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Buzz words are ones that ring a bell, that inspire us to think and rethink implications for present and future practices. Key words and buzz words mingle so let's start with the one.

Museum. In our professional ears the word "museum" is a key word, it marks our understanding of the world as well as our professional endeavours. At least from the 1980s museum is a buzz word in the general population and the buzzing of the word is reflected in increasing numbers of visitors and growth of cultural tourism.

The definition of museum in the ICOM Statute displays plainness – a museum is an institution in service of the public. However, in recent years following museology debates on which public, local or visiting, scientific or popular, and more in general what roles museums may play in public, ICOM initiated work on the creation of a new definition of the museum. Corona time brought challenges that stalled endeavours on articulation of a new definition. Particularly, having in mind the anticipation that 13% of museums that closed due to lockdown won't reopen – what more are we losing?

On the other hand, Corona time brought a word that buzzes all through UNESCO and international museums' organizations reports and statements.

In May 2020 ICOM announced a statement that is plain. "Museums have remained open during other crises in the past, their spaces available to the communities to exchange, meet and heal... Our field is being forced to change at accelerated pace. We have the opportunity and the power to make the end of this story better than it can otherwise be." However, its plainness leave the door open for being clear. The time of Corona really emphasized the need to be quite clear about the role or roles of museum in society.

To go reverse in the ICOM statement: what story? The story of the Covid-19 pandemic? The story of a crisis that would include protests and rebellions? Whose stories – stories of the people, stories of professionals in all health, culture, education, social services, governance? Is it just about surviving? Are museums really ready to provide possible answers, at least, how to cope with the variety of issues that emerge from a crisis? How promptly? Does it have to be promptly? Or is it more important to comfort visitors that what is nowadays dark isn't really something new because there was plague, there was Spanish fever, there

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were nuclear bombs and people survived to share their stories leaving artefacts for museums' collections. Could museums be therapeutically important (in psychological terms)? And are curators healing themselves while contemplating to prepare exhibitions that may include presentations of artefacts that "speak" about times of crisis? How may these "healing" approaches reflect onto permanent exhibitions? Are they just going to be immediate responses to a contemporary crisis, a temporal exhibition from which we move on?

In other words, what would the qualitative impacts of museums' resilience be – staying alive? Just alive or alive and kicking, i.e. active as institutions that broadens the horizons of society?

Digitalization. Going online as a response to the Covid-19 situation was a strikingly prompt response of museums all over the world. A part of this reaction was digitalization of planned activities, I mentioned that the Museum of Yugoslavia quickly switched their activities regarding a planned closure of their exhibitions "90s – Glossary of Migrations" and "Project Yugoslavia". This museum was actually the first in Serbia to offer an online collection of photographs a bit over 10 years ago, so by now staff are quite familiar with going digital. But is it more exemption than a rule, not only in Serbia? Many museums in more developed countries do suffer the lack of professionals who are skilled to easily switch from offline to online and back. This issue is described in the thick part – loss of staff emphasizes the problem. In relation to business models and also the current definition of the museum as an institution in the service of the public, leaving aside penetration of digital contents around the globe (as museums cannot really influence an availability of Internet), the thing is how would availability of digital contents be accessible? On an economic level, we all know that more and more contents that were accessible without the charge became accessible with the charge. Let's name Academia.edu or Scribid – they were once available via free registration, but not anymore. On the other hand, as the current ICOM definition says – museums are institutions open to the public. In many cases they are largely financed from public funds. So, how to balance is an issue for developing new business models.

From a researcher's perspective it is important to know the "thick" data that backs-up drawing conclusions, in this particular case, about love in a pandemic situation. But it is also important to be aware of the "thin" notions. Bet that Italian partisans anticipated that

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“their” song would, 60+ years later, mark resistance in a completely different pandemic? Bet that Simon & Garfunkel anticipated that inclusion of the El Condor Pasa song would trigger profound changes in understanding and appreciating a variety of cultural heritage? Covid-19 or Corona virus is a Boogie-man that kicked out of the closet many skeletons that we have had to face anyway. It just turned out to be sooner than we anticipated.

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This publication is based on conference papers presented at 'Ethnology Lab on the Workings of COVID19 on Museums', hosted by the Reinwardt Academy, the Working Group on Museums and Material Culture of the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore (SIEF), as well as ICOM's International Committee for Collecting (COMCOL). All articles have been slightly altered for publication purposes.

EDITORIAL

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