The Museum as a Choir: Visitor Reactions to the Multivocality at the Humboldt Forum's *Berlin Global* Exhibition

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The contemporary museum has two contradictory agendas. It is supposed to be a place of dialogue, debate, and even conflict – and it is called upon not to shy away from positioning itself in relation to contemporary discussions, which implies engaging in an activist museum practice and advancing social justice. The current article contributes to the debates on this apparent paradox from an audience studies perspective. Adopting *Berlin Global*, an exhibition in the newly opened Humboldt Forum in Berlin, Germany, as a case study, it describes the exhibition's embeddedness in the human rights framework as a choir-like, polyphonic multivocality, seen as a type of multiperspectivity in which a diversity of voices 'sing' in unison. Employing ethnography as the methodological approach, the authors analyse visitor reactions to the exhibition's multiperspectivity and positioning. They demonstrate that some visitors perceive *Berlin Global* as highly political and even ideological. This leads the authors to join the arguments in favour of 'agonistic interventions' that not only potentiate a better balance of multivocality with positioning and thus offer a solution to the aforementioned paradox, but also, they contend, increase the chance of engaging those who would otherwise reject the exhibition.

The question of what role the museum should and can play in contemporary society has received numerous answers over the past decades. While the absence of a definitive answer can be seen as positive, for it continues the debate and underlines the significance of the issue at hand, the task of curatorial teams has not become any easier as a result. Embarking on the creation of an exhibition, its curators need to decide, among other things, how visible their own perspective(s) will be in it. Even adherents of the conventional view that the museum is a neutral space can no longer pretend their curatorial voice is entirely objective. As for those who build their work on other premises, the challenge of positioning themselves morally and/ or politically remains even more acute.

The museum as a space of unidirectional transmission of authoritative knowledge, characterized by a strictly defined relationship between the curator/exhibitor, visitor/spectator and exhibition/object, is a thing of the past. At least that is what New Museological thinking has claimed. Since the publication of Peter Vergo's (1989) *The New Museology*, museum practitioners and scholars have increasingly regarded traditional museum practice as 'certainly implicated' and called for finding ways 'to reduce the authoritative, elite, and object-based quality of museums' (Jung 2010: 276, 284). Questions of representation and visibility, inclusion and emancipation, diversity and community engagement, openness and power-sharing have become central to museum studies and, to a certain extent, museums themselves (see Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Marstine 2006; Message 2006; Macdonald 2008).

Multiperspectivism is a key strategy of New Museology, for it allows one to achieve many, if not all, of the aforementioned objectives by incorporating in an exhibition a diversity of voices and thus instigating power-sharing on the part of museum staff. There are numerous meanings attached to the term 'multiperspectivity'.[1] In narratology, it is commonly understood as 'a mode of storytelling in which multiple and often discrepant viewpoints are employed for the presentation and evaluation of a story and its storyworld'.[2] Within the context of museums,

a multiperspectival approach aims to lead the museum away from authoritative, not to say authoritarian, knowledge transmission. It seeks to break down dogmatic, all-encompassing narratives and present an issue or aspect of the past, present and/or future from a variety of angles and standpoints. Moreover, as Sharon Macdonald (forthcoming 2024) writes,

> [t]he very act of publicly showing these various perspectives carries an assumption – or aspiration – that it is possible to adopt the perspective of another, to some extent at least. Indeed, this is a major allure of the very idea of multiperspectivity.

In other words, the strategy of multiperspectivism is guided by the ideas of inclusivity, empathy, and democratization. What this means with regard to the museum's self-positioning has gradually come into researchers' focus (see Cameron 2003; Bose 2016a; Jahnsen 2019; Robinson 2020). Sofie Scheen Jahnsen (2019) explores the tensions that arise because of the museum's clear positioning combined with its simultaneous aspiration to be a pluralistic space. Her findings suggest that the museum's two roles – that of a moral compass and/or progressive political institution, on the one hand, and of a space of democratic debate that engages with different perspectives and views, on the other – 'can be hard to reconcile' and require a careful 'balancing act' (Jahnsen 2019: 4).

The literature on this issue clearly lacks an audience perspective. How do visitors relate to the multiperspectivity presented at and positioning adopted by a museum? The current article seeks to address this question empirically, employing ethnographic audience research. Our goal is thus not to conclude what the museum should and should not be, but to add to the (as of yet limited) understanding of how visitors perceive these issues and what consequences this might have for considerations of the contemporary museum's societal role.

Our research was conducted at *Berlin Global*, an exhibition within the Humboldt Forum. The latter is an ambitious, expensive and contentious cultural space that opened in Berlin, Germany, in 2021, after almost three decades of planning and construction. The project has brought together several stakeholders,[3] which resulted in an institutional complexity that, among other things, makes its positioning a challenging task. At the press conference prior to the institution's digital opening in December 2020, the Forum presented itself as a 'place of contention' (*Ort der Auseinandersetzung*) that strives to be inclusive and diverse, and to bring together different perspectives on the past and present. Critics, however, regard such positioning as the appropriation of the critique directed at the institution: over the years, the Humboldt Forum has been the subject of considerable scholarly and public debate, especially regarding its approaches to colonial and socialist histories (Binder 2009; Bach 2017).[4]

The concept of *Berlin Global* was developed by Kulturprojekte Berlin and the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation.[5] The exhibition's curators, many of whom were (and remain) critical of the Humboldt Forum project as such, knew they were embarking on a challenging task that would demand navigating conflicting political agendas and negotiating them with curatorial goals. By choosing Berlin's global entanglements as the exhibition's topic, the curators aimed to create a link between the interior of the Forum – first and foremost, the contentious ethnographic collections implicated in the history of European colonialism – and the contemporary life of the exterior. In this context, Macdonald (2023), who undertook an extensive behind-the-scenes study of the making of *Berlin Global*, speaks of the exhibition as a 'hinge' between the Forum's different stakeholders. From the outset, multiperspectivity and positioning were central to the curators' thinking. The exhibition set out to give space and voice to those with a history of exclusion from dominant museum narratives, thus promoting notions of equality and social justice (Macdonald forthcoming 2024).

In what follows, we first outline this article's theoretical framework, with a focus on different multiperspectival approaches to and the role of positioning in exhibition-making. Then, we elaborate on *Berlin Global* as a multivocal exhibition and explain why it is a perfect case study for our analysis. In the next section, we present our methodological approach, followed by relevant empirical data. We go on to discuss our findings, with an emphasis on the problem of the exhibition's 'rejectors' that emerges out of them, and to ruminate on how

'agonistic interventions' (Cento Bull *et al*. 2021) could be a way to solve it. Afterwards, we offer some concluding remarks.

Singing In and Out of Tune

The classic museum triad – curator/exhibitor, visitor/spectator and exhibition/object – has been subject to rethinking within New Museology. The concept of multiperspectivity is central to this process. Multiperspectival approaches have been most often realized and analysed with regard to objects (Hein 1998; Oswald and Rodatus 2017). The idea that an object does not simply convey a singular meaning, but can be viewed and understood from different perspectives, has been widely adopted by exhibition makers. Views on the other two triad components, the spectator and the curator, have been reconsidered as well. A museum's audience is no longer seen as homogenous, and individual visitors are no longer regarded as passive recipients of museum-approved knowledge. Reception research has demonstrated that, when coming to the museum, people bring their own perspectives with them (Falk and Dierking 1992, 2000; Hooper-Greenhill 2006; Sandell 2007; Jung 2010; Smith 2020). With regard to the curator, it has been argued that the museum should become an institution whose staff would be 'a learner in the same way the public already is' (Sitzia 2018: 82). Departing from the role of authoritative meaning-makers creating and unilaterally transmitting knowledge, curators have been encouraged to engage visitors in the creation of expositions (Simon 2010; McSweeney and Kavanagh 2016). Oral histories and personal testimonies are incorporated in exhibitions in an effort 'to include other perspectives and viewpoints, and by that counterbalance the museum's voice' (Jahnsen 2019: 10; see also Mason *et al*. 2013; Cento Bull and Reynolds 2021).

But there seems to be yet another change underway. Helena Robinson discusses what she sees as 'a second phase in the development of New Museological thinking – the idea of the socially just museum' (Robinson 2020: 473). Reviewing literature on the topic, she observes a shift towards viewing the museum as an agent of social change. Richard Sandell (2017) has argued in favour of the museum that engages in an activist practice and advances human rights. According to Sandell, the museum should 'be more open to taking sides', which requires a change of perspective from the museum as a 'forum' to the museum as an 'arbiter' (Sandell 2017: 161). For Robinson, this new direction in New Museology signifies a certain, 'perhaps unintended' paradox, born out of the museum's 'dual commitments to cultural democracy and social justice' (Robinson 2020: 471). Jahnsen (2019) notes the same, asking: '[H]ow can museums adopt a particular standpoint, and thereby direct people towards a particular world view, while at the same time recognizing and making space for a plurality of perspectives?' (Jahnsen 2019: 5). Does this mean that two contradictory conceptions of the new museum are coming to the fore?

The 'older' new museum was supposed to stop imposing authoritative knowledge on the visitor. It was to depart from the idea of a grand narrative, present a variety of voices and perspectives, and pose questions rather than provide answers. Moreover, the diminishing of the museum's authoritativeness was to result in it becoming a place of dialogue, debate, unsettlement, and even conflict – a democratic forum (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Marstine 2006; Smith 2014). In contrast, the 'newer' new museum is supposed to push forward an agenda of justice; to take a stand on an issue and promote this stand among visitors (Sandell 2017; Janes and Sandell 2019). In other words, the museum is to 'build' citizens (Høholt 2017), which implies, in a sense, a return to the 'civilising' function of the 'traditional' museum (Bennett 1995), if beyond the framework of the nation state.

The museum's commitment to justice involves promoting inclusion and human rights, and 'advanc[ing] the social, cultural and political aspirations of previously marginalised groups' (Robinson 2020: 473). To an extent, multiperspectivity goes hand in hand with these broader objectives. Righting the wrongs of the past and the present, holding people accountable, raising awareness, including in displays those who were continuously pushed to the background and empowering them to tell their own stories, is multiperspectivist by definition – simply due to the sheer multiplicity of voices that need to be heard and societal wrongs that need to be righted.

Such multiperspectivity has to do with the diversity of stories and personal experiences demonstrated in an exhibition. These are meant to 'highlight the perceptually, epistemologically or ideologically restricted nature of individual perspectives'[6] (see also Zündorf and Lücke 2021). However, these voices often 'sing' in unison – even when, guided by subjective experiences, they sound somewhat different. Here, we refer to this kind of multiperspectivity as *choir-like multivocality*. Anna Cento Bull and Chris Reynolds (2021), it must be noted, distinguish between multivocality that strengthens and supports curatorial positioning, and 'deeper' multivocality that allows for conflicting voices and perspectives. They refer to the former as multivocality devoid of multiperspectivity, and to the latter as multivocality that 'incorporates (radical) multiperspectivity' (Cento Bull and Reynolds 2021: 294). By contrast, we understand multivocality as a type of multiperspectivity that presents more or less complementing, rather than discrepant or conflicting, views and positions.

The choir,[7] while requiring a multiplicity of voices and hence welcoming *multivocality*, tends to have a strict selection process, directed by the ideas of harmony and polyphony and thus excluding voices that sing even slightly out of tune. This could be likened to what narratologists see as a 'closed' form of multiperspectivity, one that underlines 'the relative or limited nature of individual viewpoints, while at the same time creating a dominant voice that provides an authoritative account of the narrated events'.[8] In an exhibition, this dominant voice manifests itself in the form of a set of values – Sandell (2007: 103) speaks of 'ethical parameters and moral constraints' – and is usually supplied by the curatorial team, the 'conductor' in the choral museum. It guides the other voices in accordance with the 'score', that is, a conceptual framework formulated by curators in collaboration with others (the museum, the city, the funding bodies, and so on). Anna Cento Bull, Hans Lauge Hansen and Francisco Colom-González refer to this kind of multiperspectivity as 'consensual.' According to them, '[i]n consensual multiperspectivism, [...] voices and perspectives belonging to characters who basically agree, or at least believe in the possibility of rational consensus, coincide' (Cento Bull *et al.* 2021: 20). They contrast this type of multiperspectivity with 'radical' multiperspectivity, one that includes different and often contradictory voices, is able to unsettle, and does not require 'singing in unison', that is, polyphony and consensus. To link these ideas to narratological thinking, the latter type could be compared to 'open' forms of multiperspectivity, guided by 'dissonance, contradiction and dialogism'.[9]

This distinction between consensual and radical multiperspectivity is central to the current discussion. Is consensual multiperspectivity – a representation of voices that 'sing' in unison – always the best option? Are there situations in which a human-rights perspective is not enough in a museum? When do we need radical multiperspectivity, one that unsettles and challenges our beliefs?

The Multiple Voices of *Berlin Global*

Berlin Global is one of several exhibitions that opened to the public in July 2021, together with the completed building of the Humboldt Forum. Planned to run for five years, this 'semi-permanent' exhibition is dedicated to Berlin and its global entanglements, both past and present. The conceptual phase began in 2016, amid continuing heated discussions about the demolition of the Palace of the Republic, the partial rebuilding of the Berlin City Palace, and the decision to move there the Ethnological Museum of Berlin and the Museum of Asian Art.[10] The core of the initial curatorial team consisted of historians of Berlin and curators with experience in participatory/collaborative exhibition-making. Early on, they decided against the conventional format of a chronological historical exhibition. They did not wish to follow a linear story of Berlin because the city already has numerous museums, monuments, and educational institutions dedicated to specific histories or historical periods, and these narratives would never fit into a single exhibition.[11] Instead, the idea was to focus on particular 'aspects' (as the curators call them) of and perspectives on the city's past and present.

Crucially, the curatorial team sought to diversify their own perspectives on the city (Macdonald 2023) and did so by involving a range of Berliners and Berlin organizations in the

exhibition's preparation. Although multiperspectivity (as well as participation) was central to the curators' thinking, the exhibition did not aim to incorporate as many divergent perspectives as possible, but to invite carefully selected persons and organizations that would 'represent' marginalized and/or less visible groups and positions, which aimed to combat prejudice without falling into stereotypes (Hilden and Zavadski forthcoming 2024; Macdonald 2023). This also meant that the curators adopted a pronounced ethical stance on the reflexive methods they chose and the stories they wanted to convey, with this positioning firmly set within a social justice framework.[12] It is with regard to this curatorial approach that we speak of a choir-like, polyphonic multivocality.
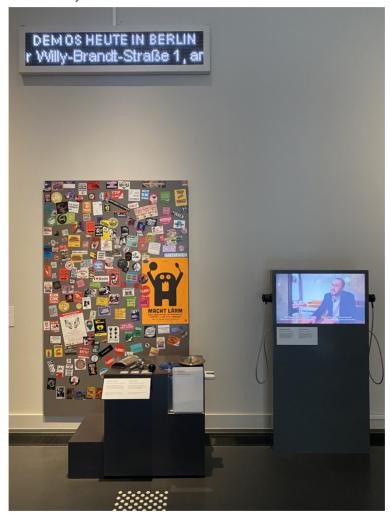

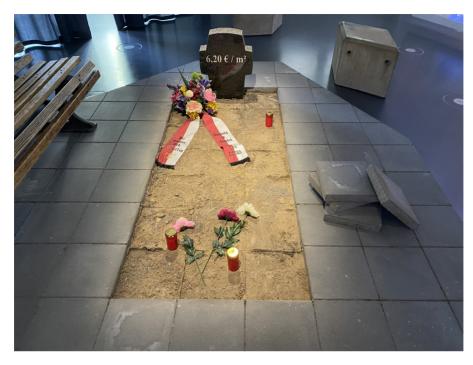*Fig. 1. A display in the 'Revolution' hall, Berlin Global, 23 March 2022. Image by the authors.*

Fig 2. An art installation by the 'Rocco und seine Brüder' collective in the 'Free Space' hall, Berlin Global, 23 March 2022. Image by the authors.

Berlin Global consists of seven exhibition halls as well as two introductory rooms, a lounge, and an educational area, occupying 4,000 square metres in total. Each hall is dedicated to one of the exhibition's seven 'aspects': 'Revolution', 'Free Space', 'Boundaries', 'Entertainment', 'War', 'Fashion', and 'Interconnection'. The galleries differ in design and aesthetics, both due to the overarching concept and because they were shaped by different curators and participants with whom the curators collaborated. Artworks are very present in some galleries, whilst in others, multimedia and interactive modules dominate (see Figure 1). Questions are posed at various points in the exhibition in an effort to engage visitors and prompt them to ask how they would position themselves in relation to historical and current issues.

While a detailed discussion of the exhibition is beyond this article's scope (for that, see Morat forthcoming 2024), one of its halls, 'Free Space', is worth elaborating on. Divided into smaller sections, it presents a showcase of the curatorial approach. Here, visitors can engage with persons and stories claiming space, literally and/or socio-politically. The sections are dedicated to Berlin-specific and/or contested 'free spaces', such as Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexology,[13] the famous nightclub Berghain, or the city's rapidly gentrifying neighbourhoods. The impact on Berlin of the speculative real estate market and international investors, for example, has resulted in a tangible struggle for space and the displacement of urban subcultures and the financially disadvantaged (the artistic installation in Figure 2 mourns the death of low rents in the city). The basic right to live one's sexuality and gender identity or to practise one's religion in a predominantly white, Christian and heterosexual society also necessitates claiming one's place in that society and fighting discrimination (see Figure 3 for a view of the 'Free Space' hall).

There are two telling examples that highlight different notions of taking up space. The first one is the section given to two collectives of Berlin's oldest leftwing-autonomous youth centres, 'Drugstore' and 'Potse', whose leases in the city had not been renewed, meaning that, after long negotiations, they were forced to cede their premises to new investors. When

approached by the curatorial team of *Berlin Global*, the collectives asked for complete authority over their installations within the exhibition, which turned out to be recreations of their original spaces.[14] The second display that stands out, not least because of its personal tone, is a video installation featuring fragments of a conversation between three Berlin women, Gül Karaduman-Çerkeş, Dorothea Schulz-Ngomane, and Ruthe Zuntz, talking about their personal stories, including their relationship to their respective Muslim, Christian, and Jewish faiths (see Figure 4). Several of the above-mentioned curatorial approaches manifest themselves in these two sections. Evident is the curators' aim to involve external partners in order to cede exclusive curatorial authority. Focusing on the history of a Berlin subculture, the anti-capitalist punk culture that goes back to the 1970s in West Berlin, reflects the intention to bring out the interconnections and continuities of past and present struggles. Offering insights into different perspectives on and personal experiences with one's faith in a city like Berlin highlights the strategy to make stereotypical portrayals of religion and belonging more complex. In this way, the curators sought to do justice to their polyphonic approach, allowing the audience to broaden their horizons on issues of difference and diversity.

Fig. 3. A view of the 'Free Space' hall, Berlin Global, 23 March 2022. Image by the authors.

Fig. 4. The video installation with Ruthe Zuntz, Gül Karaduman-Çerkeş and Dorothea Schulz-Ngomane (from left to right), Berlin Global, 23 March 2022. Image by the authors.

Initially, multiperspectivity had not been a central preoccupation of our research. Our goal was to get a sense of the people who would visit the exhibition in the first months of its operation, as well as to explore the modes and means by which these visitors related to the displays. The observations, surveys, and interviews we conducted revealed that people responded strongly to the exhibition's explicit positioning as well as its emphasis on diversity, anti-racism, and social justice. What for some represented the many facets of Berlin's turbulent, exciting, and ever-changing past and present, was perceived by others as imbalanced, superficial, and politically determined. This prompted us to focus our analysis on the exhibition's multivocality and positioning, and how they were perceived by audiences. The key question that we ask here is: How do visitors read and respond to the inclusion of many – though not necessarily conflicting – voices and perspectives?

Ethnography as a Method of Visitor Studies

Most major museums and cultural institutions conduct regular visitor surveys today. Primarily based on socio-demographic data collection, such studies seek to identify types of audiences and to explore patterns of (non-)visiting. But while the data collected in quantitative surveys are impressive in terms of scale and comparability, they provide limited insights into the socio-cultural and political meanings of people's museum experiences. This is partly due to the fact that quantitative visitor studies have other goals and partly because they often fail to explore visitors' perceptions of and feelings about the museum. This is where ethnography is invaluable.

      We worked with *Berlin Global* visitors living in Berlin or other parts of Germany as well as with tourists (though the number of international visitors was limited during the COVID-19 pandemic). Our methodological design relied on a mixture of qualitative ethnographic approaches, including observations, surveys, and in-depth interviews with selected survey

participants. The core of the material analysed in this article consists of the data collected during the first weeks of the Humboldt Forum's operation in late summer 2021; however, we also rely on our field research of the exhibition's participatory dimension, including interviews with curators and participants involved in the creation of *Berlin Global* (Hilden and Zavadski forthcoming 2024).

During our fieldwork, we approached potential respondents immediately after their visit to the exhibition and invited them to answer a few questions. Using questionnaires, the surveys were based on a structured schema, containing mainly open-ended as well as some socio-demographic questions that required short answers but also provided the opportunity to elaborate. Ours being a qualitative ethnographic study, we did not aim to assemble a representative sample of visitors. If respondents, following the survey, expressed interest in an in-depth interview, we contacted them a few weeks later. The semi-structured interviews allowed for gaining insights into how visitors felt during and after their museum experience, and what it meant to them in retrospect.

As part of the survey, we spoke to a total of 172 respondents, of whom we subsequently interviewed 16 people. While the survey interviews usually lasted ten to 15 minutes, the in-depth interviews took between 45 and 90 minutes. We selected our interviewees (with the oldest born in 1941 and the youngest in 1998) based on the range of opinions they held as well as on their willingness to reflect on their visit. Participants of in-depth interviews were asked three sets of questions and shown a selection of photographs depicting specific parts of the exhibition. They were able to use their own words to describe how they had experienced the Humboldt Forum in general and *Berlin Global* in particular. Mostly taking place online, the interviews were co-led by the two authors, which made it possible to open up the one-on-one interview setting to a freer exchange. In addition, this format allowed us to discuss the responses immediately after each interview. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed, coded, and analysed to triangulate the data sets and identify patterns of response. Some of our findings are presented and discussed below. The curators quoted in the article are identified by name, while the visitors, both survey participants and interview partners, have been anonymized.[15] Most quotations have been translated from German and slightly edited for clarity.

During our data collection and analysis, we sought not to impose identities on participants. For example, instead of a multiple-choice design, our questionnaires contained open-ended questions about respondents' socio-demographic backgrounds, thus offering them the opportunity to give answers beyond rigid identity categories. Moreover, even though earlier versions of this article provided respondents' names (in a pseudonymized form), ages and genders, after much deliberation – and partly prompted by the reviewers – we have opted to leave this information out. Similarly, we refrain from addressing here a respondent's race, class, and other socio-demographics, in an attempt to avoid pigeonholing people or reproducing normative social markers. By no means do we contend that these parameters are irrelevant. Rather, we choose to leave them beyond our scope, since considering them in detail would require another, much longer article. That said, we do provide some context when referring to our anonymized interviewees throughout the article.

Visitors' Responses to the Exhibition

Our analysis revealed a wide range of visitor reactions to the exhibition and its multivocal approach: they oscillate between being appreciative of or overwhelmed by the diversity of themes and voices, feeling included or excluded, and finding themselves compelled to negotiate their own views and values. Overall, most visitors considered *Berlin Global* to be a positive museum experience. Many, not exclusively younger ones, welcomed the exhibition's interactive and immersive elements. Some, however, expressed their irritation with – or even rejection of – both the concept and the content. In the following, we group the statements we collected into three modes of response: 'acknowledging', 'engaging', and 'rejecting'.

Acknowledging: 'It is very cool that you can see many perspectives'.

For the curators of *Berlin Global*, the presentation of various perspectives was important from the start. Macdonald (forthcoming 2024), who carried out fieldwork at different stages of the exhibition's making, writes that the team 'used the notion of *multiperspectivity* to emphasise how *diversely* Berlin may be experienced' (our emphases). The exhibition's catalogue speaks of *Berlin Global* as 'an insight into Berlin's diversity', an opportunity to show that 'there is only one Berlin with its unique history, yet there are endless opinions, experiences and perspectives on the city and its issues' (Leimbach and van Dülmen 2021: 5). The curatorial team, as the publication puts it, 'let different voices speak' (Leimbach and van Dülmen 2021: 5). Discussing this phrasing, Macdonald (forthcoming 2024) points out that it 'was also part of a criticism that [the curators] sometimes made of the visual metaphor of "perspective", arguing that the notion of "voice" (Stimme) positions participants more actively – as speaking rather than just looking'. What matters most for the current analysis, however, is that the terms 'multiperspectivity', 'diversity', 'voices', and others are used, despite their semantic differences, to refer to the variety of stories told within the exhibition by a variety of people. Notably, this terminological plurality is characteristic of those who participated in the creation of the exhibition, those who comment on it, and, as our fieldwork shows, those who experience it as visitors.

Our survey participants overwhelmingly recognize the efforts of the exhibition's creators. When asked about their impressions of the exhibition, perceptions of its key message, and main take-aways, many would point to Berlin's diversity and multiplicity. It is not just the city in general that would be invoked: the variety of topics, voices, perspectives, forms of life, and values presented was also frequently mentioned: 'It is very cool to see many perspectives', as one respondent puts it; 'Berlin means diversity. [It's] not boring' and 'I live in Berlin. [Here] one has diversity on one's doorstep', in the words of another.

The open-ended interviews we conducted not only allow for a deeper understanding of visitors' responses to the exhibition, but, carried out a few weeks after the surveys, add a temporal dimension to this understanding. Diversity and multiperspectivity remained important topics in these conversations. For instance, in reply to the question of what stayed with them after visiting the exhibition, Interviewee 1, who had moved to (East) Berlin before the fall of the Wall, says:

> Actually, diversity, which is what Berlin is all about. [It] is also what I like, and that's why I live in Berlin. This diversity is expressed very well. [...] The more [that is brought in the exhibition] together, the more colourful and interesting it becomes. Logical, actually.

Some respondents do not stop at acknowledging the exhibition's diversity and multivocality but go further to critically assess and even question it. Interviewee 2, for example, recognizes the curators' attempts to present as many perspectives as possible and sees them as largely successful. Yet, they are not sure the results are sufficient:

> [...] what I then ask myself is: where does this lead? Does it only lead to applauding oneself for [doing so] and, consequently, always being able to mask every other and perhaps deeper criticism with it, or does it actually somehow lead to [...] a more diverse, multiperspectival, inclusive narrative of the history of the place and of society?

Familiar with the decades-long debates surrounding the Humboldt Forum and rather sceptical of the project, Interviewee 2 sees the incorporation of different (including critical) voices as something that is not necessarily positive:

>Integration [of critical perspectives and voices] is fine, but if it only serves to legitimize things and if the message [of the criticism] somehow fizzles out, or if, in the worst case, it leads to nothing changing and we can no longer even criticize things properly because we have integrated the criticism, then I find it incredibly problematic.

In short, most of our respondents grasp the curatorial concept and distinguish between different perspectives and voices presented in the exhibition. While some see this strategy as a dangerous instrumentalization of criticisms, others respond by welcoming the diversity of voices.

Engaging: 'I felt in some way identified and I felt that it was a safe place'.

This diversity of voices is not always simply acknowledged, welcomed, admired, or even criticized. The replies of some survey participants point to transformative experiences occurring during or after the visit. Some of them have to do with emotional reactions: '[You learn about] people from different backgrounds, with their personal stories. This fascinates, captivates [you], you have an emotional connection, different voices have their say'. Others indicate a learning experience: 'The exhibition', as one respondent admits, 'went into diversity and made me aware of a lot of things: racism, for example'. 'Difference can also mean strength', concludes another.

Dialogue is crucial for some visitors' engagement with the exhibition. According to Interviewee 3, the key to a successful exhibition is not only the inclusion of different perspectives, but also one's willingness to engage in a dialogue by connecting the displays to one's own experiences and beliefs. Interviewee 3 argues for allowing radical – in their words, 'uncomfortable' – positions in a museum in order to achieve actual multiperspectivity. But that is something a museum must consciously strive for, and Interviewee 3, who presented themselves as a junior museum practitioner from outside Berlin, did not know 'if they [the curators of *Berlin Global*] want it'.

Interviewee 4 experiences the exhibition, and the 'Free Space' hall especially, as 'empowering'. To them, the voices in this hall say: 'We take space and we shape it'. Notably, however, they describe themselves as more of a bystander – as someone who approves of the struggles for basic rights (the right to the city, to live one's religion, sexuality, and gender identity), but who does not necessarily have to fight for these rights themselves. In contrast, Interviewee 5 states: 'I felt in some way identified'. They explain that the exhibition gave them the impression of entering a 'safe space'. 'I really felt that I was included', they say, despite emphasizing that they are a newcomer to Berlin. During their visit, Interviewee 5 had the feeling that they were 'an active part of the exhibition' for several reasons. Besides a personal connection, they appreciated being implicated by having to think, watch, and feel – especially in the exhibition's more interactive parts.

Although most of our respondents shared a sense of being included, this was not the case for everyone. In both our surveys and our interviews, there were participants who expressed disappointment and irritation because they had not recognized *their* Berlin in the exhibition or felt alienated by what they had seen. For example, Interviewee 6, who grew up and has lived in (West) Berlin all their life, says:

>I've been there twice, by the way, because during the first visit I walked through [the exhibition] and felt strange, absolutely strange. Then I thought, maybe it's because of me that I didn't really understand everything that was there. Then I came back the second time and felt strange again. I didn't feel that this was Berlin Global, that this was Berlin. I have to say that. That was not my world. I felt strange [there], like a stranger.

The fact that Interviewee 6 returned to the exhibition underscores their desire to understand their feeling of not being able to comprehend it. Our interview shows that, while grasping and even endorsing the exhibition's concept, they share little sympathy for how its voices were chosen. According to Interviewee 6, the voices do not properly reflect Berlin and thus make it hard for them to relate to the perspectives presented:

> The general idea, I think, is great: that groups present themselves in this way and say something about Berlin. But for me, these are groups that, as I said, have only known Berlin for a short time. [...] I'm just very old and probably too old for this exhibition, is my feeling. It's probably something for young people. I don't know.

To sum up, the feelings of empowerment and inclusion experienced by some visitors are contrasted by unsettlement and doubt felt by others.

Moreover, many visitors welcome the transparency that the curators sought to achieve, calling the presentation an 'unsparing treatment of the past', as one survey participant states. Interviewee 7 explains that the explicit positioning as well as the inclusion of different, and in the course of the exhibition, possibly changing, perspectives was particularly visible to them in the 'Free Space' hall:

> So, there are different perspectives and, as far as I understand, they can also be changed. Sometimes a new topic is added – and another goes. I thought the topics had been selected in a cool, Berlin-specific way. [...] I also found it very nice that it was clearly political. [...] There was somehow such a clear positioning, politically.

According to Interviewee 7, it is both the design of the smaller sections and the curators' conscious selection of voices that convey the messages implied in the 'Free Space' gallery:

> That was the room that I thought was great, where I also spent quite a long time. [...] Also just this conversation [on faith]. I found these niches with the video installation very cool. [I also liked the fact] that the design was already aimed at multiperspectivity. [...] Especially with the religions, I found the discussion, and also how the images were cut, really cool. And the fact that it is only women who talked about religion. […] It stayed with me in a positive way.

These two comments show the interviewee's perceptive take on the implications of curatorial decisions. To them, it is obvious that the curators chose the different sub-themes and perspectives in order to reflect unique characteristics of Berlin, but also to position themselves and the exhibition ethically by providing space for marginalized realities. Being able to listen to women talk about their lives and faiths in Berlin resonates positively with Interviewee 7, who identifies as progressive and feminist. They feel that both the representation of female perspectives and the interreligious dialogue is well-placed and indicates that this would still not be common in mainstream museum settings. Interviewee 5, whom we mentioned above, wonders 'if people who are not so tolerant towards different religions could change their mind in a museum like this'. Elsewhere in the interview, they take their thoughts further, describing the exhibition as 'a great place for somebody to change her or his mind'. For Interviewee 5, *Berlin Global* is not an 'imperative exhibition': its message does not suggest, 'you have to change your mind, or you have to think in these terms', but rather gives visitors the feeling of 'accepting *everyone's* ideas' (our emphasis).

But who exactly is 'everyone', one might ask. Whose ideas and perspectives does the exhibition include, and whose does it exclude? Who is receptive to its positioning, and who remains sceptical or dismissive?

Rejecting: An exhibition should 'make you think, not impose a thought on you'.

In our surveys, quite a few visitors have expressed sentiments of exclusion, pointing to the impression that the exhibition's content was politically controlled – since 'everything is politically driven these days', as a survey respondent cynically notes. Another person reacts even more sharply, complaining that 'the political stuff gets on my nerves. I want an exhibition; I don't want to have anything imposed on me'. Yet another describes the exhibition's overt positioning as 'very, very political', an opinion shared by several people who criticize the exhibition as too blunt and lacking historical nuance.

Our findings show that while most visitors consider the presence of multiple voices enriching, some perceive these perspectives as too dominant and wonder whether the museum is the right place for such strong political viewpoints, in this case, viewpoints leaning toward leftist attitudes or ideologies. Commenting on the visible fact that the production of *Berlin Global* involved numerous people (including activists), and on what they see as the prevalence of leftist positions, Interviewee 8 questions the exhibition's ability to provide a 'neutral' and balanced account of the contents presented:

> [...] you could see that a lot of activists were also included. I think you could see this just because of the [exhibition's] colours. It was very, partly it was also very lively and colourful. [...] If you look at it from the political side, I mean, Berlin is also very, very left-wing in its political views. I think you also noticed this in the exhibition. [...] If you looked at it as a neutral account, I think it was very… I don't know if it was politically influenced, but that was a little bit my impression.

According to Interviewee 8, not only the content, but also the aesthetics of the exhibition, its multicoloured and animating design, act as a reference to Berlin's left-leaning politics, which seemingly alludes to both the Berlin government at that time and the presence of social movements in the city. Hence, on the one hand, *Berlin Global* merely depicts what Berlin *is*. On the other hand, our interview partner, who grew up in East Germany and, in our conversation, distanced themselves from Berlin's left-wing political views, raises the question of whether the exhibition has been politically influenced and thus presents a biased reflection of the city and its histories.

Another of our interlocutors, Interviewee 9, shares a similar impression, saying that they prefer a neutral presentation of information in a museum. Comparing *Berlin Global* to another exhibition they had visited at the Humboldt Forum, Interviewee 9 sees the texts of the Berlin exhibition to be tinged with an 'embedded worldview', unlike the other exhibition 'where one can learn a lot'. In their opinion, an exhibition should 'make you think, not impose a thought on you'. What our interview partner took away from their museum experience, however, was that *Berlin Global*, as they put it, 'leaves less room to reflect on what happened'. Describing themselves as somebody 'from the colonized side' who has lived in Berlin for many years, they imply that the exhibition offers a singular and fixed account of the (global) past and present or, in other words, a one-dimensional perspective with a political bias – not only in relation to the history of colonialism.

While some visitors object to the lack of neutrality in the exhibition generally, others are more selective in their 'rejecting' responses. Reacting to some visual impressions from the 'Free Space' hall that we showed to our interviewees to refresh their memories, Interviewee 10 admits that they must have deliberately ignored the section on gender diversity. In our interview, this retired nurse, who frequently visits Berlin, says:

> I probably saw it and walked past it because, with these LBTXY, this annoys me so much here in Berlin that, for sure, when I saw and read that, I thought: no, please not here too. [...] I can't remember that at all, it's not at the back of my mind at all, I really have to say, mea culpa, I am ashamed to say.

In short, a proportion of visitors refuse to engage with *Berlin Global*, due to its representation of diverse identities and lived realities, and/or because of the exhibition's positioning in general.

Multivocality and Positionality: Variety of Voices, Lack of Opinions?

The multiperspectivity of *Berlin Global*, as we have demonstrated, consists first and foremost in the presentation of a diversity of voices, with a focus on those that previously were rarely included in museal grand narratives. We have argued that the exhibition's multiperspectivity could be likened to a choir's multivocality, where different voices sing more or less in unison. Our findings show that, while most visitors *recognize* the curators' intention to present a multiplicity of voices in the exhibition, they *react* to this curatorial decision in different ways. What for some feels like an inclusive, safe, and empowering space is, for others, a political construction with little or no entry point. We define these patterns of response as 'acknowledging', 'engaging', and 'rejecting', thus offering a structure that comes into dialogue with one used in media audience studies. This structure, influenced by Stuart Hall's model of encoding and decoding, identifies audience responses as 'either *confirmatory* (those which accept and endorse the preferred message encoded at the point of production), *oppositional* (those that could be said to be antonymous to those intended by the producer) or *negotiated* (those containing contradictory elements)' (Sandell 2007: 80, original emphases). While Sandell notes that this tripartite structure can be useful for understanding and interpreting museum visitor responses, he is also aware of its limiting nature, emphasizing that visitors can express less static, more fluid and complex reactions (Sandell 2007: 80-1). We consider the patterns of reception that we identified in our research as more nuanced, allowing us, for example, to illuminate not only the type, but also the scale and/or modality of response. In contrast to *confirmatory* responses, the mode of *acknowledging* does not necessarily imply that people establish a personal connection to the exhibition's focus on difference and diversity (although some will do so). Nevertheless, as our research shows, it is not only the recognition of the exhibition's implied messages, but also the many perspectives and topics covered that leads most visitors to perceive their visit to *Berlin Global* as a positive experience. Referring to visitors who demonstrate a *rejective* response to the exhibition, we have shown that, while some oppose the presented positions, others challenge the very inclusion of political statements in a public museum, which they understand to be a neutral space and an 'objective' knowledge provider. Hence, the rejective responses are at least twofold: visitors object to the representation of a diversity of identities and lived realities (and hence cannot relate to what they see) and/or to the transparent positioning of the exhibition in general. Finally, in terms of *engaging* we have observed *confirmatory* responses (that is, visitors' endorsement of the exhibition's messages), but also reactions that contain a more active component: they go beyond mere approval and attest to the exhibition's empowering quality. That said, drawing on the difficulties that some visitors faced when trying to relate to the exhibition, we have been able to shed light on the varying degrees of interpretative processes of *negotiation* that audiences employ to engage with and make sense of the exhibition.

Being regarded as a safe(r) space that engages and empowers visitors is an excellent outcome for a multivocal exhibition with a distinct positioning. But what about the proportion of people who feel excluded from and unable to engage at all with what they see? Some of these visitors pursue their attempts to engage with the exhibition, questioning their own perception – at times even after two visits, which points to a conflictual, challenging experience posed by the exhibition. Others, however, perceive the exhibition as politically biased and feel that they do not belong in it, which results in an outright rejection. Consequently, these visitors are *de facto* marginalized.[16] Although it is hardly possible to please everybody, with an exhibition as much as with any other media (and *Berlin Global* does not aim to do that), it is still worth asking whether anything could be done to draw 'rejectors' into the exhibition. Agency, Sandell (2007) underlines, is distributed between an exhibition and its visitor. According to him, '[m]useum exhibitions, purposefully designed to combat prejudice, are no longer simply texts (to be accepted, rejected or negotiated) but rather resources (alongside those of other wide-ranging media) available for appropriation and use by active audiences' (Sandell 2007:

101). So, the question is: How can one engage visitors who reject the exhibition as such and hence, do not 'appropriate' or 'use' the resources offered by it?

If an exhibition deals with societal changes for which some people have been pushing, which some have accepted, and with which others are struggling, a solely affirmative approach promoting the views and values of the former two groups *de facto* means excluding the latter one. Our ethnographic research demonstrates that not everyone accepts and engages with the choir-like multivocality of *Berlin Global*. Some visitors find its 'closed' or 'consensual' multiperspectivity politically biased and hence unacceptable, which results in their refusing to engage with the exhibition. Reflecting on these findings, we ask whether it is possible to draw 'rejectors' in without forgoing an exhibition's overall consensual, choir-like multiperspectivity. Drawing on extant literature, we contend that introducing so-called *agonistic elements* (Cento Bull et al. 2021) into the exposition could offer a solution to this problem. In the next section, we offer a speculative rumination on their potential to do so.

A Way to Engage 'Rejectors'

Cento Bull *et al*. (2021) explore the strategy of multiperspectivism with regard to ways of remembering the past. The authors advance the understanding of the antagonistic, cosmopolitan, and agonistic modes of remembering that were first theorized by Cento Bull and Hansen (2016). According to Cento Bull *et al.* (2021: 16), the antagonistic mode is monologic and 'recognizes conflict as a means to eradicate the enemy with the purpose of creating a conflict-free society'. The 'universalist-cosmopolitan'[17] mode is reflexive as well as *consensually* dialogic and multiperspectivist; its focus is on compassion and empathy for victims' suffering. Finally, the agonistic mode recognizes society 'as ontologically conflictive'; it is *open-endedly* dialogic and *radically* multiperspectivist (Cento Bull *et al.* 2021: 17). Two things need to be emphasized here. First, this distinction between consensual and radical multiperspectivity does not only refer to the past. The idea of agonistic – and hence, radically multiperspectivist – remembering is rooted in Chantal Mouffe's (2005, 2013) concept of agonistic democracy. Mouffe sees human society as inherently conflictual, with 'total reconciliation or indeed consensus [being] neither possible nor desirable' (Cento Bull *et al*. 2021: 25). In this conception, the 'other' becomes an adversary, rather than an enemy, whereby opponents respect rules of democratic conduct (Mouffe 2005). Agonism is meant to challenge both the affirmative nature of universalistic cosmopolitanism and the aggressive nature of antagonism, or, in the words of Stefan Berger and Wulf Kansteiner (2021a: 3), 'claims the messy middle ground in the name of realism and decency'. Second, the three modes of remembering discussed by the volume's (Berger and Kansteiner 2021b) authors should be regarded as 'ideal types' that in actual social reality assume various forms and interconnections. One is not necessarily better than the other; moreover, their realization and understanding always depend on local political and social contexts.

We suggest that *instances* of 'radical multiperspectivity', with positions and views diverging from the overall dominant voice of the choral museum, can act as hooks that are able to catch the attention of those who would otherwise glide over the exhibition's surface without a deeper engagement with its content, perceiving the displays as lacquered with politics and ideology. Radical – or 'open' – multiperspectivity is informed by dissonant, contradictory, and dialogic elements. It allows for conflict and/or contestation. Why could this be important? One argument has to do with the problematic nature of universalistic cosmopolitanism. We invoke cosmopolitanism here because exhibitions with strong self-positioning are often driven by the Western – but frequently presented as universal – human rights agenda (Cento Bull *et al*. 2021: 17), which is inseparable from calls in favour of the museum promoting social justice (Sandell 2017; Robinson 2020). But how can taking a side and creating an exhibition with a distinct value-conscious foundation be combined with self-questioning? How can a curatorial team ensure a self-reflective approach to the values they convey in an exhibition (and strongly believe to be the right values)? For, even if one agrees that the human rights framework is the right one, its universalism is regarded as disagreeable by some thinkers, including Mouffe (2008). Moreover, even if one completely disregards these debates and considers the human

rights framework to be universal, how can an exhibition go beyond empowering those who already share the values it conveys? How can a multivocal-multiperspectival exhibition better engage those who feel differently? Cento Bull and Reynolds (2021: 294) argue that radical multiperspectivity – 'multivocality [that] incorporates (radical) multiperspectivity', in their words – is aimed at thought-provoking open-endedness that some visitors find *unsettling* and/or *uncomfortable*. While this can be productive for visitors who perceive an exhibition as a safe, empowering place, one could potentially go beyond that. Based on our research, we argue that what some visitors might perceive as uncomfortable, others – first and foremost, those to whom we descriptively refer as 'rejectors' – might find some *comfort* in. This implies that, in addition to balancing positionality with plurality (Jahnsen 2019), agonistic elements can act as a way to draw 'rejectors' in, rather than push them away.

Cento Bull *et al.* (2021: 31-2) point to 'a persistent reluctance on the part of museum curators to introduce radical multiperspectivism in their permanent exhibitions'. According to them, it is easier for creators of temporary exhibitions to incorporate agonistic elements. With five years as the planned running time, *Berlin Global* could be seen as a semi-permanent exhibition. This might explain why it is radical in its participatory approach and the resulting multivocality, but not as radical as to introduce significant conflictual or contentious elements. Notably, the exhibition's design has 'Open Spaces' – areas that are filled with changing third-party contributions. This offers huge potential for introducing agonistic elements, provided the selection committee agrees on the added value of such 'interventions', as Cento Bull *et al.* (2021) call them, pointing to their effectiveness. Notably, the first two 'Open Spaces' installations were completely in line with the overall human rights framework of *Berlin Global*. The first one opened at the same time as the exhibition itself. Created in close cooperation with the Lebenshilfe Berlin association, it presents artistic perspectives of differently abled people on some of the exhibition's 'aspects'. The second one, entitled 'Citizens with Equal Rights', was curated by the Documentation and Cultural Centre of German Sinti and Roma, and is dedicated to combating antigypsyism. While important and more than timely, the installations merely add new voices to the exhibition's choir-like multivocality, without providing any agonism to its overall positioning.

Another important point for discussion with regard to Cento Bull *et al.*'s arguments has to do with the contextual nature of the different modes of presenting difficult pasts (and presents, one could add here). If one considers *Berlin Global* in the context of the cultural space in which it is located, could the exhibition, with its progressive left-leaning agenda, be seen as an agonistic element in relation to the more conservative, even traditionalist perspectives of those who have supported the Humboldt Forum project over the years? This is a position shared by several members of the exhibition's original curatorial team.[18] A case in point of this argument is the fact that some of the visitors who rejected *Berlin Global* enjoyed the Forum in general. For others, however, *Berlin Global* is the only exhibition worth seeing in the Forum. One visitor feels that the exhibition 'has to do [and does] what the other stakeholders at the Humboldt Forum fail to do'. Does this mean that they and others perceive *Berlin Global* as a cosmopolitan or even agonistic component in the overall antagonistic institution, one that some critics refuse to visit altogether (which means a rejecting stance of another level)?

The museum's positioning, with human rights at its core, might well be the right way to go, for it helps re-establish the role of the museum in today's increasingly unequal world. However, in this process of fast-forward transformation, it is easy to forget about those who are slower at adapting. Retaining them aboard this ship of social change does not necessarily require the museum to give up its new-old role of *arbiter* (Sandell 2017). What is required is a hook for them to grab – or be grabbed by. This does not necessarily mean that they would be able (or would want) to climb aboard, but it does significantly increase their chances of staying afloat. Agonism could be one such hook.

Concluding Remarks

This article's aim has been to address empirically the paradox in New Museological thinking that emerged as a result of the museum's 'dual commitments to cultural democracy and social justice' (Robinson 2020: 471). Based on ethnographic audience research, we have looked

at museal multiperspectivity and positioning through the lens of visitor reception. Building on our findings as well as on Cento Bull *et al.* (2021), Cento Bull and Reynolds (2021), and Jahnsen (2019), who speak in favour of agonistic elements in museums, we pose that such interventions are able to potentiate a better balance of multiperspectivity with positioning and thus offer a solution to the museum paradox.

The questions that remain here have to do with this article's choir metaphor. What happens to it once an agonistic intervention has been introduced into an exhibition with pronounced positioning? How can such an intervention transform the exhibition's choir-like polyphonic multivocality? Would one require another metaphor to describe the result?

We believe that the core of the metaphor – the choir itself – could remain intact, while its attributes – harmony, polyphony, and similar – would have to make room for elements of dissonance and atonality. The 'conventional' polyphonic choir would thus give way to one that still demonstrates multivocality and positioning, but in a way that does not create a 'perfect' sound. Despite the seeming incongruity of the dissonant voices, this 'imperfect' sound, carefully thought through by the 'conductor' (the curatorial team) and the 'score' (the exhibition's concept), would allow space for those voices that are unable to sing in unison.

Disclosure Statement

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Notes

1. 'Multiperspectivism' and 'multiperspectivity' are often used synonymously in the literature. We understand 'multiperspectivism' as a principle/strategy that one employs, and 'multiperspectivity' as a result of this strategy.

2. Marcus Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity', The Living Handbook of Narratology 2012. http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/node/37.html, accessed 6 May 2023.

3. Involved are the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, which includes the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Ethnological Museum, and the Museum of Asian Art; Kulturprojekte Berlin and the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation; the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; and Humboldt Forum Foundation.

4. Irene Hilden, Harriet Merrow and Andrei Zavadski, 'Present Imperfect, Future Intense: The Opening of the Humboldt Forum', Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage 2021. https://www.carmah.berlin/reflections/present-imperfect-future-intense,

accessed 6 May 2023.

5. Kulturprojekte Berlin is a non-profit funded by the federal state of Berlin and implementing a range of cultural projects in Germany's capital. The Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation runs six museum sites in Berlin, including the *Berlin Global* exhibition.

6. Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity'.

7. Introducing the 'museum as a choir' metaphor, we distinguish it from the 'choir effect' described by Viviane Gosselin, who understands it as a multivocality – as opposed to the curator as 'solo performer' – consisting of both convergent and divergent voices (Gosselin 2014: 112). We thank one of the anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this work.

8. Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity'.

9. Hartner, 'Multiperspectivity'.

10. For details on the planning process of the Humboldt Forum and the controversial discussions accompanying it, see Bose and Förster 2015; Bose 2016b; Thiemeyer 2019; Oswald 2022.

11. Daniel Morat, interview by authors, digital recording, 21 September 2021, Berlin; Brenda Spiesbach, interview by authors, digital recording, 28 September 2021, Berlin.

12. Léontine Meijer-van Mensch, interview by authors, digital recording, 14 January 2022, Berlin; Idil Efe, interview by authors, digital recording, 28 April 2021, Berlin; Sophie Perl, interview by authors, digital recording, 6 September 2021, Berlin.

13. The Institute (*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*) opened in 1919 and was destroyed by the Nazis in 1933.

14. As presented to the public, a prerequisite of the two collectives' decision to collaborate was that the exhibition would remain free of charge. As the Stadtmuseum Berlin Foundation could not fulfil this condition in the long term, 'Drugstore' removed its installation after 100 days, exactly on the date when the exhibition started charging visitors, albeit in a solidarity-based model (whereby some people are given a partial or full discount). 'Potse' had withdrawn its participation already before the exhibition's opening, due to the increasing public critique of how the Forum deals with the colonial past and its continuities.

15. This is in accordance with our ethics plan that was evaluated by an ethics committee of the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

16. We are aware that the usage of terms like 'exclusion' and 'marginalization' in this context is controversial, as voices that are thus undermined or excluded often belong to adherents of ideas historically used to marginalize or exclude others. However, in this particular instance, what kind of voices they are and what positions or stories they convey is of less significance. What is important is that these voices are pushed out of the debates instead of being engaged and potentially changed.

17. The authors admit that in Cento Bull and Hansen (2016), 'cosmopolitanism' was invoked and criticized 'in a reductive and simplistic way' (Cento Bull *et al*. 2021: 21). Therefore, in the 2021 article/book, they specifically refer to 'universalistic cosmopolitanism'.

18. This was voiced by Daniel Morat and supported by other participants of a feedback meeting (perceived as part of our methodology) with the curatorial team. The meeting took place on 7 November 2022 and included (besides Daniel Morat) Martin Düspohl, Verda Kaya, Sophie Perl, Brinda Sommer, and Brenda Spiesbach, as well as the two authors. We sincerely thank these curators for their engagement with our work.

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