Erhard Schüttpelz

Into the Whirlpool

Part Two: Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch

Marx was right, but we can delve deeper into his famous dictum from the "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte". History does not repeat itself by alternating from tragedy to farce. Farce is the covering of tragedy, i.e., its being and its mask. The beheading of the former ethnological museum is a tragedy that hasn't only now taken on the form of a farce, but that was prepared by many little tragicomic travesties. And after 15 years of discussion, all the repetitions of this process ineluctably become parodies – and I am no exception. I devote myself to the farce to make the tragedy more recognizable.

The debate about placing the non-European collections in the Humboldt Forum gave rise to two parties that field two venerable motifs of German intellectual history and ethnological self-criticism. For both sides, the point of the ethnological collections is no longer the creators of the objects that were collected, but the representation of the collection itself. Nothing about that is new, not even the mutual reduction. For one side, the issue is colonial history. The critique of the colonial representation takes on a life of its own as representation of the critique and as representation of the critical discussion of the representation. The colonized and their claims to representation are left by the wayside, despite lip service repeated like a mantra, because the descendants of the colonizers, like almost all peoples on this earth, are primarily interested in their own ancestors and their ancestor's schemes. As soon as an exhibition or the presentation of an item concentrates on the "representation of the representation", we can measure quite spatially in centimeters and cubic centimeters how much space is taken by the critical representation of the colonizers and their reception processes and how much is given to the "native's point of view". The more critical the presentation, the more exponential the relation will be. In the

end stands a reliquary full of explanations, and usually without any original language of those who created the collected object.

Gaabi cirey! Every classificatory act of collecting and ordering is meticulously registered as an act of violence. It is meticulously classified and pigeonholed. Examples of acts of violence are placed in showcases and put under headings. In the end stands a world consisting solely of power, and all the objects' roads and crossroads lead back to power. The cognitive means of power with which this presentation encounters the colonizers' cognitive means of power thereby have the same character, in principle. This is presumably what makes this kind of knowledge so irresistible. Finally, the methodological procedure corresponds and merges with that of the field. In-depth considerations of ethnographic interactions could only disturb.

The others dream the dream that the ethnological collections can revive a continuous German cosmopolitan tradition, from Leibniz through Herder and Humboldt to Boas and Warburg. This dream is not merely a dream, because many others have already dreamed it and implemented it in lasting works, especially German and Austrian migrants like Franz Boas and Walter Benjamin, Fritz Saxl and Leo Spitzer. Giving this dream the name "Humboldt", with the conscious ambiguity of the names of the Dioskuri, is legitimate, but not a solution for the ethnological collections. Indeed, the German ethnological museums around 1900 had a Humboldtian tradition of collecting, and indeed, the Berlin collections would have been impossible without this tradition. But invoking a better German tradition is no substitute for dealing with German and European colonialism. In particular, it is no solution for the imbalance between covering and content, because it implies sorting new coverings and new contents dualistically.

The maelstrom arises anew: guilty covering, innocent core… innocent covering and a

core of guilt. Both options mislead. The ethnological collections cannot be reduced either to the guilt and debts of colonial history or to the innocence of a pre-colonial or extra-colonial understanding of the world. Leibniz and the German-Russian research on Siberia, Boas and the Potlatch ban on North America's Northwest Coast, Warburg and the Oraibi Split in Tusayan, Bastian's incessant world travels – the protagonists of this tradition lived from the colonized and with the colonization projects and resistance movements of this earth. But they had their own goals that both sides could regard as betrayal.

Obviously, both parties to the discussion have in common that they want to liberate themselves from the guilt of the past: one side wants to morally distance itself from the ethnology of the past, and the other wants to play a purified tradition off against the German guilt of the past. The result is suspiciously similar: most of what characterized ethnology was morally ambiguous and cannot be told as the story of moral clarities. Yes, there were missionaries who wanted to use publications on rituals with many illustrations to destroy a heathen religion and who made the ritual stability of holy acts possible for those born later; there were linguists who wrote down everything a last speaker of a language dictated, until the heraldic motto of a postcolonial nation emerged from their transcriptions; and there were ethnologists who kept their knowledge of insurgencies secret in order to avoid triggering punitive measures. Traitors, the whole lot of them, including to their own causes: the linguist didn't finish writing his grammatical magnum opus; the missionary protected his potential flock against the interventions of the state; and in other cases the ethnologist was more than willing to assume military command.

Has ethnology become the scapegoat for all other social and cultural sciences because it is the only one that, for many decades, has openly discussed and confessed its mixed loyalties and moral ambiguities? That would be downright human. And a symptom of a lack of reflectivity. Unable to look into the mirror of

their own moral ambiguities, unable to address their own disciplinary history's much clearer involvement in histories of power, nationalism, warmongering, plundering, one-sided viewpoints, and colonization, all the other social and cultural sciences use ethnology as a whipping boy.

What a joke, once you are familiar with the many crooked and the few straight paths of ethnological careers, texts, objects, and especially the paths of ethnographic friendships. But this joke set a precedent. The attack on ethnology never ends and finally denies it any competence for its own collections, the formerly ethnological and now "non-European" collections. The statement from the provenience researcher could still have unforeseen consequences: if the ethnological collections are based on crimes whose dimensions we mere mortals cannot even imagine, then the objects should first be confiscated as evidence. The ethnologists are not suitable for taking the evidence of these crimes, because they are the successors of the suspects. Who knows what they want to cover up?! They no longer call themselves ethnologists? There you have it. Let's leave taking the forensic evidence to the historians and art history.

What is to be done? If a swimmer finds himself in a whirlpool between two currents, he should waste no strength fighting the vortex that pulls him into the depths. On the contrary, he should take a deep breath and try to overcome the eddy by first swimming with it and then away from its margins into the depths, diving below the vortex. There is no other chance. The maelstrom of the Humboldt Forum, which is devouring ethnology and spitting out patriotism, will not stop until the dichotomies between covering and content are suspended, until ethnology assumes the covering and the mask of the Humboldt Forum, because the covering is the essence and the mask effects the transformation. Until ethnology appropriates Prussia, Berlin, the cross, and the legitimization and delegitimization of Germany and Europe in the world, in the Humboldt Forum or somewhere else.

Prussian history is not an old curiosity shop in which every bit of bric-a-brac is so valuable that one can only caress it and pay for it in its meticulous packaging. What ruined the Humboldt Forum was not ethnology, but the pampering of Prussiandom. Let's think about the unthinkable, i.e., the obvious. An ethnological exhibition about Prussia, ethno-historical exhibitions about Berlin, ethnological exhibitions about "the legitimization of Germany and Europe in the world". For Minister of State Grütters, an exhibition on the Christian IS-style bloodlust of the religious wars and the arduous, skeptical distance-taking from Christianity, out of which our religious tolerance emerged in the first place. In the Humboldt Forum. With many blasphemous items, because we are a secular society, also and especially under a symbol of tolerance reconstructed according to the divine right of kings. Otherwise, the cross would be a damage fetish. Tolerance must be proven, so let's get on with the proof, on the roof.

An exhibition about the Generalplan Ost, the Nazi plan to colonize Central and Eastern Europe, and the ethnology of settler colonies: an exhibition about the most radical, brutal colonization campaign in world history, from whose zenith and collapse everything else followed: the Shoah, the founding of the state of Israel, the truncation and division of Germany, but also the end of the British Empire, the failure of Japan's colonial undertaking, the partition of India. Germany's colonial history with its ethnological dreams and nightmares didn't end in 1914, it ended in 1945. Let's end our self-deceptions about the supposedly so short German colonial period. The German post-colonial trauma of 1945 was simultaneously the climax and the turning point of European and worldwide imperialism. In Berlin. The legitimization and delegitimization of Germany *and* Europe (and Berlin) in Europe and the world and in Berlin (and Potsdam), indeed. The "site in the world" you were looking for.

Unrepresentable? Then we need a discussion about why the international state of

historical research on German colonialism and its accompanying ethnological and anthropological developments, of all things, should be unrepresentable. Let's bring a detailed, scholarly ethnological exhibition on the Wehrmacht to the Humboldt Forum, because that's where the issue is Berlin and the non-European world. Berlin at the center of Germany and Europe and the whole world – wasn't that the Generalplan Ost? Reason enough for a comparative exhibition on the millenarian movements of the 19th and 20th centuries, from the sides of the colonizers and the colonized in equal measure, including the Xhosa, the Germans, and the Maji Maji Uprising. Better yet: a permanent hall.

And follow it with an ethnological presentation of the Prussian and Wilhelminian men's societies, a comparison between fraternity and mask association, homosexual clique and cadet school, in the Palace. German ethnology has already done this, and it would require little effort to repeat it (in case you are looking for it, the exhibition was called "Männerbünde – Männerbande", and the catalogue is worth studying). And a permanent partial exhibition about divine kingship, to give the cross on the cupola a context, the friendship between Wilhelm II and Frobenius, the Shilluk and Frazer, all of it harmoniously and regicidally together. German-Prussian history requires no Surrealists; it was already surrealistic enough. It need only be presented ethnographically. How would it be if we combined Spoerri's "Musée Sentimental de Prusse" with Maupassant's venomous descriptions of Prussian soldiers and smeared them as graffiti on the wall of a Prussian chandelier hall? It would be revealing and in the right place. Impossible?

If nothing at all of the sort happens, if ethnology remains in its assigned place, it will be pulverized between self-flagellation and its role as a scapegoat. Then there will only be "non-European collections" anymore, the representation of representation, and art in construction. Berlin has a Historical Museum that recently showed an exhibition about German colonialism; there is a Jewish Museum; we are to receive a

Museum of Expulsions; and then the Humboldt Forum with its ethnological collections; and the Museum Island and the National Gallery and, and, and. Now all that's lacking is a history of Prussia and its capital in 100 objects by Neil McGregor. "What can I do about my dreams?" Everything is wonderfully partitioned, so that the fields of the politics of memory don't interfere with each other. That's why the Humboldt Forum will not function, because if we are to show Germany in its intertwining with the world, to show Europe in the world, to show Berlin "with its intertwining in the world", then all the separations that characterize German politics of memory have to end. The ethnological tradition with its classics can still instruct us how to violate the boundaries of all these areas of jurisdiction, because it is in charge of such journeys.

So, let's cross those boundaries. An exhibition about the Dybbuk and the Bacchae in the Pergamon Museum; an exhibition about the cruelties of island states with Polynesia and Thucydides in the Humboldt Forum; an Asylum Exhibition about current expulsions and the religious-ecstatic modes of coping with them in the Museum of Expulsions; an exhibition about the Marranos, the Pre-Adamites, the beginnings of research on the Eskimos, the Turkish spy, and the rise of modern racism in the Jewish Museum. Cosmopolitanism does not consist of arbitrarily thrown-together exhibitions about the eternal themes of birth, death, clothing, cosmetics, and sexual maturity, but of the question how things, people, and their behaviors come to terms wherever fate takes them. Cosmopolitanism is not a "Family of Man", but family on the road and despairing loneliness. Of the Poles who emigrated as workers to the Ruhr Valley, one-third moved back, one-third traveled on to France, and one-third remained. All three are German history. For years, I have imagined a museum of migration that presents every imaginable migration from and to Germany on equal footing, the emigrations to North and South America, the Gastarbeiter, the 1848ers, the Germans driven out of Eastern Europe, the Eastern European Jews, the forced laborers, the collaborators, the Swahili teachers, the

traveling circus people, the Sinti and Roma, the East German escapees and the West German escapees, the Russian Germans and Siebenbürgen Saxons, and the Syrian refugees, war and peace, poverty and affluence, persecution and freedom in Germany and elsewhere. At the exhibition, they would all bump into each other, because something of the holy of holies of each group would be shown, something not to be seen anywhere else; and each family could bring new items with a story of their own. One would have to leave enough rooms empty, which would gradually be filled with pictures of tears and bright eyes. The poster and the invitation cards would also show something of the holy of holies, namely Merkel's selfie with Anas Modamani.

From the start, the exhibition would seem like an ethnological museum of all Germans, also because in the course of the showing all its representations could become mixed up with counter-representations. No curator and no institution would take the risks of such an exhibition. And here we arrive at the core of the essence of the covering. Façades are classifications and vice versa. Façade means face. The depressing truth about the current museum culture is that it is so divided among fields and genres that it permits no loss of face anymore. Today, if one thinks up something against the grain of existing genres and kinds of exhibition genres, it ineluctably seems like satire or art. That's why the category "art" is not part of the solution, but part of the problem. Because only the artists are permitted anymore to do what earlier generations could expect from exhibitions in ethnological museums, back when they were "only" ethnological museums, and because only satirists are permitted anymore to voice what one may no longer see exhibited in combinations of objects.

Three practical suggestions:

First. Art in construction. Nail a frog to the cross on top of the Humboldt Forum.

Five-meter cross, three times two-meter frog. Accept the plagiarism, because the cross isn't authentic, either.

Second. Beside the Prussian Palace, build a Maya pyramid of the same size, and inside the Maya pyramid show an extensive ethnographic exhibition about Prussian soldiers and peasants, scholars and Junkers, with individual sections on subjugated parts of the country and their forms of reaction, for example about Catholic cults of the Virgin Mary and ritual murder trials in the Prussian provinces, Carnival and its "Rote Funken" as a cult of foreign spirits in the Rhineland. The Maya pyramid should take up construction components from the Palace of the Republic, concrete, glass, mirror façades. Celebrate Carnival on 11/11 on the pyramid and masquerade in the rubber skin of a dead Prussian.

Third. Mount a bronze plaque on the façade of the Prussian Palace, on every side of the building or at least above the entrance, with easily legible letters:

Allied Control Council Law No. 46
Dissolution of the State of Prussia

of 25 February 1947

The Prussian State which from early days has been a bearer of militarism and reaction in Germany has de facto ceased to exist.

Guided by the interests of preservation of peace and security of peoples and with the desire to assure further reconstruction of the political life of Germany on a democratic basis, the Control Council enacts as follows:

Article I. The Prussian State together with its central government and all its agencies

is abolished.

Article II. Territories which were a part of the Prussian State and which are at present under the supreme authority of the Control Council will receive the status of *Länder* or will be absorbed into *Länder*.

The provisions of this Article are subject to such revision and other provisions as may be agreed upon by the Control Council, or as may be laid down in the future Constitution of Germany.

Article III. The State and administrative functions as well as the assets and liabilities of the former Prussian State will be transferred to appropriate *Länder*, subject to such agreements as may be necessary and made by the Allied Control Council.

Article IV. This law becomes effective on the day of its signature.

Done at Berlin on February 25, 1947

(*P. Koenig, V. Sokolowsky, Lucius D. Clay, B. H. Robertson*)

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translated by Mitch Cohen