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Collecting Corona (Corona Sammeln)

2020 was a decisive year for museums, in which two important museological approaches became especially recognizable under the conditions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic: Digital collecting and participative collecting oriented to the present day.

During the phases of lockdown since March 2020, digital communications with visitors, users and target groups became the only possibility of remaining in contact with the public, creating events via digital offers, and confronting the current situation, which poses a great limitation for everyone.

Thus, various corona collections have arisen worldwide in museums and archives. There has been lively discussion among the specialists about the attendant methods, ethical questions and results. The project “Journal of the Plague Year“ digitally collects and locates worldwide stories, experiences and digital objects in relation to the corona pandemic Covid-19 Archive 2020]. Many of the scientific and museum collections which have arisen worldwide can be viewed via international Public-History-Mapping [Cauvin 2020]. The Lyrasis Study gives an overview of the handling of archives and memory institutions in the collection of objects in the USA [LYRASIS 2020]. ICOM recommends “rapid response collecting“ as a possibility to record the effects of the crisis as part of a Community-Resilience Strategy [ICOM 2020]. The COMCOL Newsletter presents insights into the collection strategies of museums worldwide [Bounia 2020]. An overview of participative collection initiatives in Germany, which makes no claim to completeness,

has been compiled in a collaborative effort [Räth 2020]. All these initiatives mark a development in which museums still find themselves in 2021 and which could give them more social presence and relevance.

Historicization of the Present

Development has shown in the past years that cultural-historical museums have increasingly been turning toward contemporary cultural and social realities in their collection and exhibition strategies [Elpers and Palm 2014: 9]. Such contemporary collections repeatedly raise similar new questions for the museums: How can the relevance of objects be judged without critical, historical distance? Who should and will examine the material culture of the present day for its relevance as a future material witness of contemporary culture and select what is significant? [Walz 2014: 34]. What qualities do objects have that indicate current, emotionally-laden events, which must be addressed politically and what potentials are thus given for memory institutions like museums? A new quality of contemporary-oriented collections is seen in participative collection approaches, which becomes especially apparent in the “Rapid Response Collecting“ method, as practiced and published for example by the Victoria & Albert Museum [Victoria and Albert Museum 2021]:

The focus undoubtedly lies in managing a practice that can empower museums to collect the ephemeral and the momentous that might be difficult to acquire once the phenomenon is over. The practice itself was conceived in response to the 11th September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, which stands for an unprecedented event in American history [Debono 2021].

In the Germanspeaking regions, the method was adapted e.g. by the Jewish Museum Berlin as a reaction to anti-Semitic events [Jüdisches Museum Berlin 2021].

Focusing on contemporary collecting often addresses on the one hand the responsibility of memory institutions for an uncertain future or future research interests, and on the other emphasizes the relevance which museums may have for their communities by creating a space for dealing with and reflecting on decisive events. Moreover, the collections usually present a critical stock-taking and diversity related critique of representativeness.

Participative, Digital Collecting

Collecting — one of the most characteristic tasks of museums in addition to conservating, research and exhibiting, has taken on an important dimension through participative, contemporary-oriented and digital collecting activities in museums during the COVID-19 pandemic: The individual interests of the collector becomes the topic of the collective memory.

In many of the collections made during the corona pandemic, the „compensatory function“ of collecting appears to be central: Collecting as a protection against the processuality of existence and the uncontrollability of the world and thus an explanation for the growing museal processing resulting from the need to „guarantee memory and offer resistance to abundance and the increasingly rapid disappearance of objects“ [Flagmeier 2012: 193]. Collecting as a form of “practical remembering“ [Benjamin 1989], as a “battle against distraction“, as a search for meaning or a form of enlightenment can be observed: Since March 2020, “calls” have been initiated all over Germany by historical and cultural-historical museums and archives, asking the population to document their everyday lives during the corona pandemic and submit objects or stories representing their altered everyday situation. The Public History Project “Coronarchiv” [Coronarchiv 2020] was created just for this purpose in cooperation between the universities in Bochum, Hamburg and Gießen and has developed also included cooperations with museums. Thanks to rapid digital communication, a working mode developed starting with a Tweet, in which the idea could be realized cooperatively. The project had thus understood a public need early in the pandemic and was able to present an appropriate offer:

Social distancing, infection risks, limited going out — the corona virus changed our everyday lives, our work and our social lives. As early as 2020, the pandemic and its consequences were characterized as historic. Up to now, it is uncertain what and especially how things will be ‘when it’s finally over’. Although corona affects everyone, each person is uniquely affected. And everyone deals with it differently [Coronarchiv 2020].

Collecting is made and submitted digitally using a formsheet which governs the questions of copyright and data protection. The submissions are checked by a team of moderators and anything which has no recognizable relevance to the corona crisis, violates existing law, is discriminatory as

well as advertising or objects without documentary intension is rejected. The national press and broad accessibility in social media [@coronarchiv 2020] contribute to making the project known and present the results of a broad diversity.

Diversity & Digitality as a Challenge

Questions about diversity are addressed actively in this digital collection:

A diverse society needs diverse memory. We know how dissimilar and socially-biased records of the past often are. This is not the least important reason why we are beginning already now to collect and archive the diverse voices and experiences surrounding corona. After all, the pandemic will someday be over. How the “corona crisis” is talked about and considered will depend essentially on which contemporary witnesses have been preserved. By means of the broadest documentation of the present, the Coronarchive wants to contribute in the long run to the plurality and diversity of future memory [Coronarchiv 2020].

But who feels addressed by such an appeal, who takes the trouble to document his/her everyday life and uses the online offer?

Initial results show that further efforts for diversity of story culture are needed. So cooperations arise which translate the appeal into Turkish, or make it more appealing for adolescents. The quick call to action was very successful, but central museological questions had not been answered when the project started: How is long-term archiving governed and maintenance guaranteed? Who can and will take over the collection and make use of it? How are the digitized items to be handled and what metadata will be recorded and permanently secured? But the collection is an important basis for further research into the corona pandemic, and an important reference as a digital collection strategy.

New Networks #CollectingCorona

One important result of these cooperative collection actions are new exchange and cooperation networks which are forming during the pandemic: Some of the actors who are creating memory-cultural collections present themselves under the Hashtag #CollectingCorona. Important institutions like the German Historical Museum (Deutsches Historisches Museum DHM) or the Museum of European Cultures (Museum Europäischer Kulturen [Schühle 2020; Museum and the City 2020]) see the pandemic as an impetus to open a new

area of collection. Special museums, too, [Werkbundarchiv — Museum der Dinge 2021], State Museums [Landesmuseum Württemberg 2020; Badisches Landesmuseum 2020], historical City Museums in Hamburg [SHMH 2020; #CoronaCollectionHH], Berlin [Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin 2021], Frankfurt [Historisches Museum Frankfurt 2020], Köln [Kölnisches Stadtmuseum 2020] and Munich [Münchner Stadtmuseum 2020], Vienna [WIEN MUSEUM 2021] as well as small museums run by volunteers [for example Museum Erding 2020] and in many other places, especially archives, are documenting the everyday corona phenomena in both digital and analog records. „As I see it, what’s happening now is very serious. It is history in the making”, said Paul Spies, Director of the Berlin Museum [Augsburger Allgemeine 2020]. The historical relevance is quickly determined to be „Comparable situations arose at great moments in history. Like the time the Wall came down, or the period after the reunification” [ibid.].

Giving Individuality Room

The nature of the appeals makes a new quality of argumentation clear, to which some of the museums are giving impetus: Historical relevance is ascribed to the individual documentation of everyday life, whereby the transition from the individual to the public memory space is marked. For example, at the Museum Erding: “What does the corona virus mean to you personally? How has Covid-19 and the attendant limitations affected your life? How will your life be after the crisis — private and at work?” [Museum Erding 2020], “Document or photograph your present everyday life in the corona crisis and write down your thoughts about it. Whether at home under quarantine, in your limited work life, during school sessions online or the situation in food stores or on the weekly market. Streets and playground void of people, closed stores and restaurants are all part of this, of course” [Museum Erding 2020]. Digital objects take on new value in such collections: Primarily digital images, photos and texts, and a few videos are being submitted. The majority of submissions shows a new quality and requires standards for metadata and automatization processes. Museologically, it is seen that methods of collection used thus far, applied by a single person trained in curatorship, are not the only possibility of expanding the collection. Rather, it is increasingly necessary to provide a digital infrastructure, communicate rules for submission in a transparent manner and to guarantee the processes of communication, publication and lasting

security. The curator tasks are changing. Museums and institutions that have developed digital infrastructures adapted to current user behavior now profit from higher numbers of users and simple continued use: Platforms and simple, low-threshold and automated handling formats promote interaction, for instance like in the “Stadtlabor digital“ of the Historical Museum Frankfurt [Historisches Museum Frankfurt 2020] or at the State Museum Württemberg [Landesmuseum Württemberg 2020]. Another advantage of such a collection strategy has been found in that the digital collections can be used to quickly create digital exhibitions which, ideally, open new room for discussion and reflection, and contribute to dealing with the global pandemic.

A Look at the Practice

In the end, a number of circumstances (local specifics, concrete agreements, professional expertise) will mean that the corona collections started in 2020 will take very diverse shapes and ideally supplement each other. The same applies for the resultant initiatives (research projects, exhibitions and events). The corona collection initiated in Karlsruhe is part of this. It can, however, be called both “hybrid“ and specific in that it supplements its own collecting with autonomic entries from outsiders and in this puts emphasis on analogous witnesses. This opening up of the curatorship and also the documentation of contemporary processes follows up on previous projects which inform the concept of the Corona Collection in Karlsruhe. On the one hand, it is the task of the folkloristic department to collect the regional historical as well as contemporary popular and everyday culture. On the other hand, the question has been addressed in Karlsruhe since the millennium how contemporary-oriented the collection and exhibition can be and to what extent our curator’s look into the future can document today’s material culture for tomorrow. This inspired the design of the new collection exhibit “Baden und Europa 1918 bis 2000”.

And since 2002, the house has been experimenting with “Time Capsule Projects“ (inspired by Andy Warhol’s “time capsules”) as small laboratory collections by pupils and students on current phenomena. At the end, this arrangement led to the collaborative and participative collection and exhibition project Life 20.15. Memories of today (“Leben 20.15. Erinnerungen an heute“ [Heck 2017]). In accordance with Nina Simon’s views [Simon 2010] participation as a method of collection and exhibition has not only

been broadly applied, but has become a fixed component of the curatorial toolbox. The high participation and across-the-board positive resonance to this project were proof of its social-political relevance in Stephen E. Weil's view [Weil 2002], since it made a public offer and addressed current discourses. This is now being repeated with the Corona Collection.

Confronting the Present

As a large cultural-historical museum, museum, the Baden State Museum, located in Karlsruhe, represents the western part of the German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg bordering on France and Switzerland. Like all cultural-historical museums, its collections make available memory storages and spaces for reminiscence [Assmann 1999]. With its diverse historical exhibitions, it considers itself an active part of a public memory culture and also of the social discourse on how much remembrance a group needs, and who creates it, for whom and in what form. The pandemic and the attendant consequences have made these questions even more pointed in 2020: How will we remember this historical event and will we do this in retrospect or beginning already today for tomorrow? On 16 March 2020, a process accompanying and open corona collection in Karlsruhe was begun: proactive, participative and without delay. In the lockdown, digital appeals were the first instrument of choice to generate public awareness, to reach interested groups within the population, to inform them and to stimulate them to active participation. Thereby the collection process initially reflected the phenomenon to be collected: Given the way in which politics and society approached the phenomenon corona, it soon became clear that an adequate procedure had to be developed in a process-accompanying Corona Collection. The questions of relevance and representativeness of material examples and observations could not be easily and definitively answered. Parallel to the events, topics had to be identified, contacts established and material examples acquired. Moreover, the great quantity of digital input (mobile phone pictures, films and audiofiles) formed a digital collection and storage area for which structures and procedures had yet to be developed. Shortly after the collecting began, helpful exchanges with colleagues at other museums and archives supported and influenced our own work.

In the Corona-Collections in Karlsruhe and elsewhere, there will be too little of this and too much of that. That's a risk, but also an opportunity. After

all, ideally, the quantity of the submitted proofs will contribute to a broad description of that phenomenon that elicited it, the corona pandemic.

The character arising from the perspective and curatory diversity of the submissions differentiates the new Corona Collection essentially from classical collection contexts. A proactive, Corona Collection accompanying a process in progress comprises analog and digital items with high information density, which can be well queried, documented and contextualized [Miller 2010]. A valid arrangement and ascription of meaning in the superordinate event can, however, only be made with reservations and can only be done after critical looking back and reevaluation of the collection items. The sustainable options of a Corona Collection will therefore first become a constructive contribution to knowledge of the events in the future. This increase in knowledge occurs independent of the social and culturalpolitical benefits which museums draw immediately from actions like the Corona Collection: they are revealed as “Resonance rooms of cultural diversity and plural lifestyles” [Fackler and Heck 2019]. In Karlsruhe, we are aware of the challenges of a collection of current phenomena aimed at the future, with which not only an anthropology of the future [Bryant und Knight 2019], but also a practical museological discourse [Grießer et al. 2020] are involved.

The Moment as an opportunity

Closing the museum during the corona pandemic and excluding the public were part of the uniqueness and basis for the Corona Collection. The other aspect was the blurred borders of the pandemic situation with respect to working “in the field“. Unlike in a classical observation or fieldwork, it was not possible to approach the phenomenon from outside and initially as a neutral observer. One’s own world and the professional field are essentially affected by the consequences of the pandemic and critical distance is almost impossible to create. This practically made the opening of museum work quasi systematically necessary and addressed curatorial documentations and object acquisition to all interested persons who could contribute their everyday knowledge and experience of the crisis. The invitations to cooperation were and are continuing to be placed informally via the homepage and social media channels of the museum and reports in printed media, radio and television spread this curatorial opening to the masses. Thus far, 40 people and institutions have responded to the request for participation with suggestions, commentaries and sometimes several



Fot 1. Hand-painted banner as a greeting from the teachers of a kindergarten in Karlsruhe, March 2020, Inv.Nr. 2020/35-61 © Peter Gaul, BLM Karlsruhe



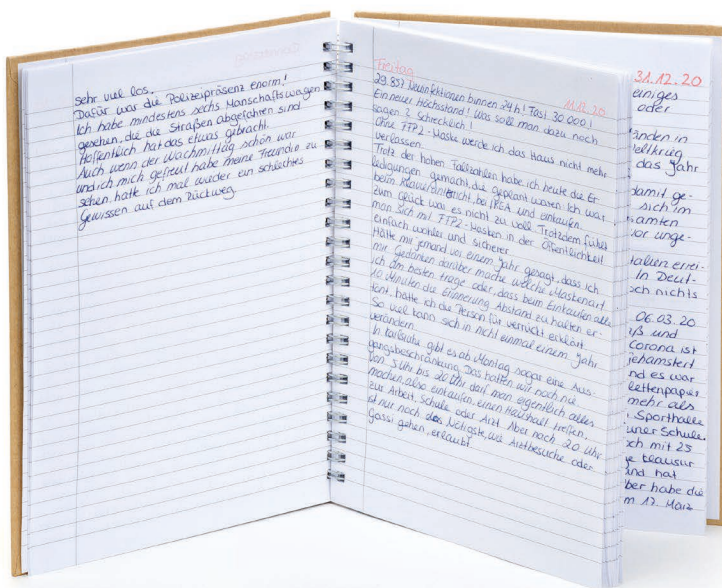
Fot 2. Cookie, a so-called „Amerikaner“, with an everyday mask as a motif, industrial bakery in Karlsruhe, May 2020, Inv.Nr. 2020/35-29 © Peter Gaul, BLM Karlsruhe

concrete submissions. This practice of social participation in the cultural work of the museum and its transfer of knowledge is based not only on a growing awareness of the museum's social responsibility. It also reflects the specialist discourses of "public anthropology" [Beck and Maida 2015; Borofsky 2019] and "public history" [Lücke and Zündorf 2018]. Due to the involvement of many people, multiple examples of objects or documentation of phenomena in variation may occur (masks for daily wear). A "wild things" collection [Attfield 2000], created participatively, with its often chance interlacing, represents in a no less "real" way the complexity of the facts than an exclusively special-curatorial selection of single items would. Actually, no-one can claim at the present to have registered the "only valid" corona object at the moment of acquiring or accepting it. Permitting this rather chance penetration of participative items as well as the planned insertion of curatorial witnesses is an anarchical and at the same time creative-constructive characteristic of participative corona collections.

After 12 months, the Karlsruhe Corona Collection comprises 375 analog and digital items, whereby the digital proportion is only about 30%. Our own collecting documents cover politics and administration, the health and education sector, document regional producers and products, contain witnesses of the art and cultural life and document actions in the public domain.

About 40% of the collected items reached the museum at the suggestion of others. They strongly reflect the private world of the people and thus the "inner life" of the crisis and the emotions with which it is coupled. These are mostly objects of everyday use, whose cultural importance has been newly articulated in the crisis. The altered consumer behavior resulting from the pandemic conditions has changed the usual function and meaning of several everyday items and accustomed behavior or even given rise to something completely new. Many everyday items with reference to the corona pandemic have an emotional quality for the donor, especially biographical meaning and close ties to references in the life around them. For example, the everyday masks provide the collection with evidence going beyond the context of individual use to social importance, where reception and folkloristics identify the mask as a key motif for the crisis.

In the area of social communication, concrete objects (like this Corona Cookie) can create ironic distance to pandemic events in the same way *memes* do on social media. A large number of such objects have been submitted and, beyond their concrete message, also transmitted a personal stance toward



Fot 3. Diary for December 2020, Inv.Nr. 2020/35-81 © Peter Gaul, BLM Karlsruhe



Fot 4. Bench along a hiking trail near Bruchsal, constructed in March 2020, Inv.Nr. 2021/3-13-1 © Susanne Käser, Kaichtal

the events, as a gesture which is just as exciting from a cultural-anthropological point of view as the many statements and actions of individuals and groups in the public sphere. Personal comments or autobiographical narratives are documented in the collection in texts, pictures and films.

Hybrid Collecting as an opportunity

In an overall review of the appeals and collection actions, and with a look at the example in Karlsruhe as well, it is seen that digital objects have attained a new value for museums. Depending on the focus of the museum, either a more object-centered, analog approach or a digital submission process is selected. Sometimes purely digital collections are created, but usually hybrid mixed forms result, whereby besides digital objects, a transition to the material culture is sought — the specific collection criteria of the Baden State Museum are applied here. This has the advantage that the exhibitions themselves benefit directly from the currency of the collections, which excited great visitor interest in the Museum of Everyday Culture. The contents refer back particularly to the way in which decisive changes and new realities of life are dealt with and promote active dealing with an uncertain present and open future by means of autoethnographic approaches. The arguments are based on historical relevance and potential future research and spaces for reflection.

Museums with digital platform infrastructures have advantages with respect to automatization processes and the linking and inclusion of objects in the collection databases. However, there are still challenges in the area of long-term archiving, recording of metadata and linked data. Digital collecting and documentation are a challenge for museums.

Recurrent methodological questions concern data protection, copyrights, long-term archiving, digital curatorial selection processes as well as (a lack of) digital infrastructures and interinstitutional collection strategies. Challenges always arise with respect to the topics of diversity, automatization processes in digital collection work as well as ethical questions. In the “Ethnology Lab“ of COMCOL, these questions will also be further addressed in 2021 [ICOM — COMCOL 2021].

Since March 2020, corona collections have been developing in a wide range of places: In archives, libraries and museums, in private and public places. For museums, who see themselves as participants in social discourse, this actuality and diversity present both a challenge and a chance. Never were

the possibilities and chances for participation in and design of memory cultures as manifold as now.

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Collecting Corona (Corona Sammeln)

The Corona pandemic posed major challenges to the museum landscape. Not only because their presence was not accessible for a long period of time, but also because their social significance was re-located. „System relevance“ was the characteristic that decided whether a museum was to be opened or closed in Germany. Many colleagues in cultural history museums and collections took up this discussion constructively and used the opportunities to participate in social discourse, collection initiatives, and collegial cooperation. The article gives an overview of the ongoing process, the different theoretical and practical approaches and focuses on the example of the Baden State Museum in Karlsruhe as a cultural history museum with expertise in participatory contemporary projects.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, collecting corona, participation, digital collection, shared curacy, historicization of the present, rapid response collecting