

# Final Report

## Oxford – UdK Berlin Partnership in Arts and Humanities – Seedfunding for Creative Collaborations –

### “The Library and the Archive”

2022, project leads: Daria Martin, Kathrin Peters

### “Dissenting Knowledges”

2022/23 project leads: Kate Keohane, Kathrin Peters

- 1) Traversing the Archive  
Workshop, Berlin, October 2022

“Traversing the Archive” was a workshop with Onyeka Igwe (The Ruskin School of Art), Harold Offeh (The Ruskin School of Art) and Grit Köppen (UdK Berlin).

Guiding questions were: How have colonial histories been inscribed in our archives? How can we lay the ground for an artistic research project into the past and present of our art schools?

The first part of the workshop took place at the Humboldt Forum, where video works by Onyeka Igwe, which deal with colonial films, were on temporary display: “No Archive Can Restore You” (2022) shows the neglected rooms of the Nigerian Film Unit in Lagos, which had been installed by the British colonial power; “Specialised Technique” (2018) works with an ethnological film on black dance; and in “the names have changed, including my own and truths have been altered” (2019), the artist deals with the history of her Nigerian grandfather, patriarchy, memory and history(ies).

Later, in the Medienhaus of UdK, Harold Offeh presented his installation “Croydon Plays Itself” (2019), which connects the current commercialization of Croydon with the archives on sexuality and gender. Grit Köppen gave a presentation from a theater studies perspective on „Performing Strategies of Mockery for Traversing a Construction of ‘Africanness’”. Among others, the participants of the seminar “Queering the Archive” by Kathrin Peters participated, as well as colleagues from the UdK Berlin such as Karina Griffith, Annika Haas, Constantin Hartenstein, Miriam Oesterreich and Lisa Rein with whom we discussed the possibilities of critique and reenactment of Black and queer histories.



“No Archive Can Restore You”, exhibition  
by Onyeka Igwe at Humboldt Forum Berlin



2) The Library and the Archive  
Workshop, Oxford, April 2023

Seven colleagues from Berlin visited Oxford in April 2023 for the Workshop “The Library and the Archive” at the Ruskin School of Art. Mika Ebbing and Annika Haas presented their work as part of the seminar “Critical Fabulations” by Onyeka Igwe and Guilia Smith. Mika Ebbing’s presentation “Sinking into the Archive” introduced their research (together with Jule Roehr) in the archive of the Berlin University of the Arts and how they came across files documenting the denunciation of a student by fellow Nazi students, which ultimately led to the exmatriculation of the denounced student despite a professor’s futile attempt to prevent it. Ebbing works with the materiality of the files, which bear the traces of the past and by that unfold a presence. Annika Haas led the mini workshop “Auto-Archives” on literary life-logging as well as unconscious archiving of human life through datafication. In a writing exercise, the participants were asked to examine their auto-archives on their smartphones.

In the afternoon, the guests from Berlin took part in a crit session of BFA Visual Arts students led by Kate Keohane and Kelly Lloyd. Here, the different methodologies of discussing student’s works were particularly striking: instead of having the students present their work, the instructors and co-students first talked amongst themselves about the works in the studio space, about what they see and think, before the presenting student would comment on their plans and intentions. As a teaching method, the Ruskin approach focuses on perception and listening: the students’ work is received as if seen in an exhibition.

The following day, the workshop concluded with a panel with short presentations from on-going research projects. Karina Griffith (“Black Authorship in German Cinema”), Kate Keohane (“Locating Common-Places”), Grit Koeppen (“On Dramaturgies of Flux in Contemporary African Plays”), Guilia Smith (“The Racialised Politics of Historical Memory: Exploring the Archives of Postcolonial Guyanese Artists”) and Frank Wasser (“Decolonial Pedagogies: Exploring Hidden Histories of the Ruskin”) presented their projects. Overall, the exchange showed which explorative, questioning and self-reflective methods an artistic-scientific research approach has to offer. It was characterized in particular by a performative approach, including the performative lectures on the panel itself. The great hospitality of the colleagues from Ruskin provided many opportunities to talk, eat and laugh in the impressive ambience of Oxford and its colleges.



Crit Session, Mika Ebbing, Onyeka Igwe, Karina Griffith, Lisa Rein, a student, in Oxford

3) Dissenting Knowledges  
Retreat, Sauen, September 2023

“Dissenting Knowledges” was an artistic-scientific project that interrogated and compared resistant and conflicting forms of knowledge production and the aesthetic procedures of (re)constructing, archiving, and teaching these alternative methodologies.

It asked 1) can academic conceptions of the archive as a material site account for formations of knowledge that are dispersed, embodied or ephemeral?; 2) what are the most productive means for disseminating, teaching and documenting intersectional modes of knowledge production (e.g. LGBTQ+, decolonial, feminist approaches)?; and 3) what can be learned through the sharing of aesthetic-scientific approaches between two art schools in comparable but differing contexts?

During the three days of our stay, the participants led experimental workshops or presented work and research. This was driven by reflections about whether the art school is (still) an institution for dissenting knowledges or if institutional critique can be gained through ways of sharing a space and self-organizing. Play, self-learning and facilitating learning as aesthetic-scientific methods were explored together as a group. What does it mean to make, to practice, to produce collectively?

Different workshops led by participants facilitated the discussion of these questions. We connected to histories and narratives around first names (storytelling workshop with Sina Ataeian Dena) and investigated the post-prussian history of the place of the retreat, i. e. Gutshof Sauen, the seminar house of the Berlin art schools (walking seminar with Kathrin Peters). We embodied, gestured, sonified and collectively drew our needs and desires (“Replay Performance” with Harold Offeh) and speculated about unknown objects (workshop with Lee Trimming). We discussed working conditions in the art world (presentation of Kelly Lloyd’s research project “This Thing We Call Art”) and in the gig economy (workshop with Lisa Rein on “Localized Narratives—Teaching the Archive to Play”). We watched films about colonial history (introduced and moderated by Eli Zuzovsky) and gender-fluid reproduction (film screening of “what’s safe, what’s gross, what’s selfish and what’s stupid” by Jasmine Johnson). Annika Haas offered morning movements in the garden. In the final phase of the workshop, we collectively composed a zine. It comprises documentation of the different workshops, its results as well as ephemera, sketches, notes and annotations by participants, artworks produced during the retreat, references, the retreat schedule and found material on site.



Workshop “Replay Performance” with Harold Offeh, Jasmine, Harold, Lee, Annika, Eli, Mika, Kate, Kelly, Sina, Lisa



## Final reflections

The initial phase of this Oxford – UdK Berlin Partnership collaboration was about setting up a project group with members from both institutions as well as allowing some time to get to know each other and to learn about respective research projects and methods. While parts of the group remained in place for the duration of the collaborations, several changes occurred over the project period of two years: colleagues left the Berlin University of the Arts or the Ruskin School of Art due to expiring contracts, others could not commit longterm because of too much workload in general.

These circumstances of collaboration made evident, again, that “planting seeds” requires time that is often rare in academic institutions. Part of the academic staff’s reality are precarious employment and an overwhelming amount of research administration tasks – in the UK and Germany alike. This situation is known as the neoliberal or entrepreneurial university. It is characterised by more and more applications for funding, which are accompanied by an increasing shift of administrative work to the researchers. Partly, this is the result of insufficient basic funding of universities. Furthermore, this situation is upheld by the assumption that the (mere) existence of an application system guarantees the quality of research. It fosters competition for relatively low amounts of research funding. Aspects of this dynamic could be also observed in the design of the Oxford – UdK seed-funding. The evaluation of this project thus needs to consider not only the outcomes and prospects, but also the conditions of this research project. Dissenting Knowledges was a research project that dealt with the history of the art academies, their archives and omissions, their knowledge and their forgetting. The project also asked for the possibilities of dissenting knowledges. Hence, naming and reflecting on the material, administrative as well as ideological conditions of knowledge production had to be its starting point as well as part of its results. Behind and alongside the outcome summarised here, much paper work has taken place, many e-mails have been sent and online conferences have been held. These infrastructural traces and documents of research form an archive of its own.



March 2024

Gutshof Sauen, Garden  
Page from the collectively composed zine

