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critical radio
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After a series of staggered openings, the Humboldt Forum was inaugurated on 20 July 2021 as a space for criticism and debate, discursively reframing its problematic collections. While the CCWAH announced that they would "refuse to participate" others resigned to work with it—I suspect because precarious artists cannot afford to refuse a paying gig, especially migrants whose visas are dependent on such contracts. Indeed, the Forum welcomes critical readings of its collection by so-called "People-Of-Colour" whose participation validates its means of knowledge production, neutralizing the potency of their critique. Activists I've met complain that the Forum has appropriated their language, community-building methods and commissioned work from thinkers whom they reference. After much pressure, the Forum announced a restitution deal with Nigeria in 2022 to return over 1000 objects, including two prized "Benin Bronzes." Recently a friend disclosed attending a free hip-hop dance class at the Forum, confirming that despite lingering disquiet some dissenting artists had normalized their relations with it.

solidarity

Even in the progressive capital of Berlin, solidarities among its creative scenes are uneasy. At the time of writing, the war in Israel–Palestine has divided the city which is home to significant communities linked to this conflict. The artist and broadcaster Nathan Gray calls it "the new Berlin Wall."

In January 2024, the Berlin Senate adopted an anti-discrimination clause as a condition of cultural funding. With an emphasis on anti-Semitism over other forms of racism, such as Islamophobia and anti-blackness, the Senate controversially chose a working definition promoted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adding an extension that conflates persecution of Jewish people with criticisms of Israel. Many are anxious about this curbing of free speech and artistic expression as wars escalate worldwide, and noticeably it is Palestinians who have been silenced. As Jewish critics of Zionism question if they are being subject to antisemitism by German police when arrested for protesting the war, those from

"learn from lumbung," a reference to an Indonesian community rice barn, emphasizing the pooling and redistribution resources among inter-local networks and collective planning." I think it would also be wise to learn from the Humboldt Forum.

normalization

I first encountered plans to re-house collections from Berlin's Ethnological Museum and Museum of Asian Art in an architectural monument recalling Prussian imperialism at the conference "Postcolonial Justice", University of Potsdam, 2014.¹⁰ At panels about the restitution of sensitive objects, I learned of Tanzania-born Myaka Sutura Mboro's campaign to return human remains held in these collections. In July 2017, Bénédicte Savoy, an art historian specializing in restitution and provenance, resigned from the Humboldt Forum's advisory board stating:

The architecture signals that history can be undone. But people who ask for the return of stolen objects are told that history cannot be undone.¹¹

Her sensationalized departure sparked debate about Germany's colonial legacy. Groups protesting the Forum included: No Humboldt 21, Decolonize Berlin Alliance, Africa Avenir and Barazani. The Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum (CCWAH) formed in 2020, objecting to the crowning of this public-funded building erected on the site of East Germany's former parliament, with a privately funded golden orb and cross. Bearing an inscription that demands "the living and the dead kneel unconditionally before Jesus", they opposed the Forum's assertion of Christian domination.¹²

9 For example: "Learning from lumbung Public Forum on documenta fifteen" 23–24 January 2023, Jubilee, Brussels; "Lumbung Practice" temporary masters programme, Sandberg Instituut, De Appel and Gidskul.

10 Gesellschaft für Anglistische Postkoloniale Studien, "Postcolonial Justice", 29 May–1 June 2014, Potsdam and Berlin.

11 Cited in dpa, "Expertin: Humboldt-Forum verschweigt Ursprung seiner Sammlungen", *Monopol*, 21 July 2017.

12 Noelle Bübbud, "Nightmare at the Museum: An Interview with Coalition of Cultural Workers Against the Humboldt Forum," *Berlin Art Link*, 5 February 2021.

When I initiated fugitive radio in 2020, during the first year of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it seemed like everyone was making a podcast, but I wondered who was listening. As “if a radio broadcasts in a forest...”, quipped Sophea Lerner, co-founder of the independent radio platform {openradio}.¹ Curious about the sociabilities arising around (experimental) radio technologies, fugitive radio made a series of live “performance–radio” broadcasts for Pixelache Helsinki Festival #BURN_____2021.² Since 2021, it has produced a monthly podcast, “fugitive frequency,” for the radio communities Colaboradio/Freie Radios Berlin–Brandenburg³ and Helsinki Open Waves.⁴ It is also active with lumbung radio/Station of Commons,⁵ a platform founded for documenta fifteen (2022), and π Node,⁶ a community formed around an ad hoc network of radio infrastructures in France. I have further developed fugitive radio’s collaborative live broadcast events across residencies at Helsinki International Artist Programme (2022), Lanchonete.org (São Paulo, 2022) and Jan van Eyck Academie (JvE) (2022–23).

At an assembly held during documenta fifteen, it was suggested that net radio is a kind of low bandwidth activism taking up digital space in a largely privatized and commercialized World Wide Web. While this may be so, fugitive radio claims that the critical front is not at public facing websites, rather “critical radio” emerges in the kinds of organizing, skill sharing and community building that occurs alongside the production of content. Hack-labs and live broadcast happenings facilitate sharing, co-learning and generate enthusiasm for alternative networked-sociabilities. While such gatherings are often premised on pursuing free and open (source) culture and promoting digital commons, it is arguably conviviality that shapes the micro-politics of experimental radio activity.

- 1 <https://openradio.in/>
- 2 <https://burn.pixelache.ac/>
- 3 <https://fr-bb.org/>
- 4 <https://www.helsinkiopenwaves.com/>
- 5 <https://lumbungradio.org/>
- 6 <https://p-node.org/>

7 A term proposed to me by Amanda Sarroff, writing advisor to Jan van Eyck Academie.

I suspect fugitive radio’s critique is indulged in such contexts precisely because of its low visibility—indeed there is nothing to see! But who listens? My friends and peers assure me that they follow online, however, I predict fugitive radio’s legacy will be publishing; it produces podcasts and publishes zines that leave a trace of critical radio practice in contemporary art.

I’ve found some affinity between experimental radio makers and independent art book publishers and fugitive radio has participated in several related fairs including: Under The Leaf, Helsinki (2022), The Fabulous Books Are Bridges, Rotterdam (2023) and MISS READ, Berlin (2023). Not long ago I ran into a curator of book events clutching a copy of Rebecca Ruth Gould’s *Erasing Palestine* (2023) concerning the IHRA. When I asked if he should be seen with this book in Berlin, he laughed and replied that it was not a problem on a book display, “but if it were an exhibition...”. His remark indicates tiers of visibility that are subject to differing scrutiny and censorship. After all, who reads books these days?

As an “anoptic” practice, might radio modulate the functions of art institutions as instruments for the commodification of creativity and the enforcing of state interests? Collaborating with community-developed platforms fugitive radio promotes alternative sociable medias. It approaches radio not as a mass media, but rather as a catalyst for coming together to discuss, experiment and play. Co-opting the discursive impulses of institutional art to co-produce responsive micro-media—promoted by word-of-mouth and distributed hand-to-hand—could critical radio circumvent authoritarian oversight and the performative pressures of corporate social medias under which professionalized art is subsumed?

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<https://www.springer.at/>

8 <https://fugitive-radio.net/2023/05/02/fugitive-frequency-season-3-episode-5-where-charles/>

“Instagram is my portfolio,” a visual artist once told me. In the 1990s the World Wide Web became the graphical interface for the internet. With the advent of social media in the early 2000s, notably Facebook, Instagram and now TikTok, it seems that much of net culture has become by default still active in Brazil who recall the *Coletivo Digital*, a rare group still active in Brazil who recall the optimism of the early World Wide Web. They suggested that the emancipatory and experimental drives of open culture movements had coalesced in net radio. Indeed, I propose that current (net-)radio practices are a counterculture to prevailing pics-or-it-didn’t-happen social media engineered relations.

“Make friends not art” was a phrase that memed during the Jakarta-based collective rungrup’s takeover of documenta fifteen (2022), also known as “lumbung one,” valorizing of the social aspects of art-making over its commodified objects. Friendship was thus politicized as it determined the communities, practices and issues leveraged through infrastructural art power. This was notable as evidence of antisemitism alongside racist and transphobic attacks rocked the event, leading to censorship, withdrawals and the resignation of Documenta’s Director General Sabine Schormann. Nevertheless, solidarities resolved among those remaining and initiatives, such as lumbung radio, are ongoing. Organizations have since proposed to

countries where support for Palestine is the norm, call out the hypocrisy of German institutions’ decolonial interests. In response, a campaign to “Strike Germany”¹³ has gained traction. Recalling the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction campaigns against Israel declared antisemitic by the Bundestag in 2019, it demands that the state “protect artistic freedom,” focus the fight against antisemitism and “combat structural racism.”

When I moved to Berlin in 2017, curators I met sought to politicize their practices. Now some admit to being strategically silent, contributing to a climate of self-censorship and antagonism that recalls East Germany’s Stasi era or McCarthyism in the United States. As spaces holding multiple perspectives are dramatically reduced, what are the alternative platforms for critical debate?

While German mainstream media echoes the state’s unequal support for Israel, a group of artists and intellectuals are providing counter-narrative resources. Learning Palestine have so far compiled two twelve-hour radio programs, “Until Liberation I & II”, collaborating with Bethlehem-based Radio Alhara.¹⁴ Birthed in 2020 among friends isolating during the pandemic, Radio Alhara takes its name from the Arabic word for neighborhood. Interpersonal organizing and low operating costs afforded it to function beyond the “constraints of social media and corporate controlled networks” and it was welcomed among a globalized cultural community as a forum where otherwise silenced Palestinian voices—and music—are made audible. Since first airing in October 2023, “Until Liberation” has been rebroadcast on several sympathetic platforms including lumbung radio, suggestive of participating radios’ (infra)structural solidarity.

(an)optics

At JvE I learned that optics is a primary concern of exhibition-making—exhibitions must look “professional” regardless of intent.

13 <https://strikegermany.org/>

14 <https://learningpalestine.net/>