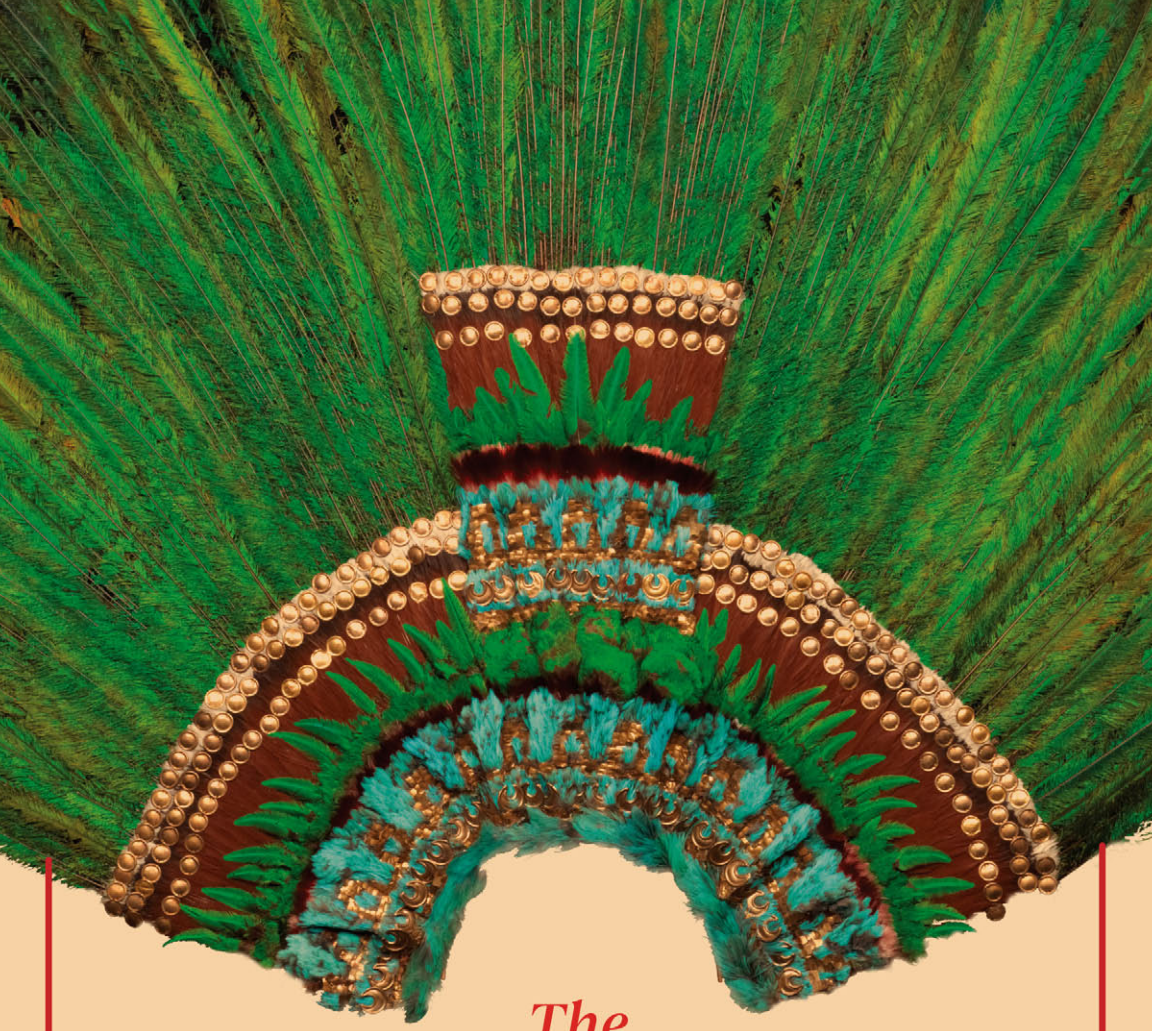

The CONTESTED CROWN

Repatriation Politics between Europe and Mexico

KHADIJA VON ZINNENBURG CARROLL

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For Piju and Nikolaus

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Introduction

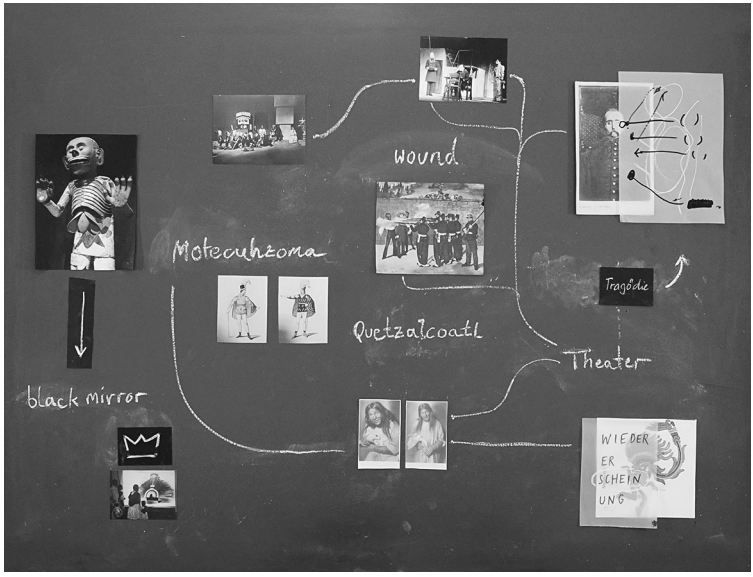

FIGURE 0.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

In a crypt below the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, now housing some of the city's principal museums, is found the storage area for less sensitive materials from their collections. Among them, several Aztec stone sculptures are assembled on temporary metal racks. Curled up on a shelf is the feath-

ered serpent deity Quetzalcóatl, the geometry of its scales and plumage deeply incised in stone. The stone effigies are unaffected by the damp in the underground passageways, and the catacombs are seldom visited.

In Mexico, subterranean civic structures are romanticized as part of a more ancient world, submerged beneath the modern. In Aztec philosophy, this is the realm of Mictlāntēcuhtli (fig. 0.1, left), lord of the deepest region of the underworld, the last level in which the dead remain. In Vienna, such spaces have different associations. The basement below the Palace was once part of a central underground corridor, connecting a city once used by the Nazis. A few floors above, the sound of classical stringed instruments reverberates from the walls; but below ground, these hidden passageways have witnessed many murders. The ring of boots on cobbles lingers. It is always dark in this subterranean stratum of Vienna.

Some nights are gloomier than others; but not even the blackest night can provide as effective a cover as an underground passage, as the Viennese have long known. In times gone by they built passages large enough to accommodate a carriage drawn by two horses, to carry the royal family from the center of the city to a place of safety in times of crisis. Over the centuries, the high-ranking in society have been able to escape the wrath of the masses using these same routes. Opposite the museum is another node in the underground network, situated beneath the parliament building that is crowned by sculpted chariots drawing eight winged Nikes. When they were undergoing restoration the sculptures were X-rayed, revealing that the horses' bellies were full of the corpses of dead birds. Doves had nested in the cavity of the sculpted horses' bowels, and the acid produced by the excrement of the dead was corroding the sculptures from the inside. Conservators removed the remains of the doves amid the stench of rot, and the monumental horses and

winged figures that mark the site of the Viennese parliament were restored.

Facing these sculpted figures is the balcony of the Hofburg Palace, from which Hitler made his annexation speech to a crowded *Heldenplatz* (Heroes' Square) on March 15, 1938. It is on this site that my story begins, although it will go back and forth in both time and space between the Aztec Empire (now Mexico) and Europe, its chronology spanning five hundred years of history embodied in the five hundred feathers that make up one headdress, (also referred to as a crown since the twentieth century). The headdress is held in the Hofburg Palace, and this unique, ancient Aztec artifact symbolizes the repatriation debates that unfold in this book. A prize of the Spanish conquest over the Aztec Empire in the sixteenth century, El Penacho is a treasure that troubles the ethnographic museum of Vienna.[1] Too valuable and, some argue, too fragile to return, it has become so notorious through protests demanding its repatriation that it now overshadows Mexican-Austrian relations.

Today the feather headdress is displayed in the Weltmuseum; previously called the Museum für Völkerkunde, which has occupied part of the Hofburg Palace since 1928. In the museum's kaleidoscope of grand, colored marble rooms, the gallery in which the headdress was most recently displayed is a dark labyrinth, with the vitrine containing the feather headdress at its center. Often when I linger here a visitor will ask me, "How did the last remaining Aztec feather crown come to be in Vienna?"

The Hofburg Palace was the seat of the Habsburgs in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria's brief reign over Mexico in the 1860s, little known internationally, is an episode in nineteenth-century colonial history that highlights the fragility of any crown. When the Habsburg crown fell in Mexico, it became conflated with the feather crown that

symbolizes the Aztec monarch, Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin (Motecuhzoma the Younger, 1466–1520).[2] A ceremonial headdress rather than a crown, it was taken after Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin was murdered during the invasion by Hernán Cortés, the infamous conquistador who led the Spanish forces to conquer the capital of the Aztecs, present-day Mexico City.

In the sixteenth century, the Habsburg Empire spanned Europe, from Austria to the Netherlands and Spain, Bohemia, parts of Hungary, Croatia, Silesia. Through this network, formed by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, artifacts from the New World entered Europe through ports such as Antwerp. Although the Habsburg Empire included Madrid, these artifacts came directly to Ambras Castle in Innsbruck, the home of Charles's nephew, Ferdinand II, an avid art collector. In popular imagination, Ferdinand's cousin, Maximilian, the Habsburg emperor of the short-lived second Mexican Empire from 1864 to 1867, sent the headdress to Vienna. In fact, Maximilian did not arrive in Mexico until some three hundred years after the feather headdress had departed. This mistaken provenance speaks volumes about the lingering presence of colonialism within the relationship between Mexico and Austria.

The assumed connection between the history of the headdress and Maximilian is but one of a surreal but impassioned set of associations that today tie Mexicans and Austrians together. Another is the 1867 execution of Maximilian, depicted on popular postcards in a jacket shot through with blood-soaked bullet holes (fig. 0.1, right). Édouard Manet painted *The Execution of the Emperor Maximilian* (fig. 0.1, center) the same year the ancien régime's colony in Mexico ended, a year that also saw the defeat of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian War. The painting marks the French president's betrayal of Maximilian at the conclusion of what Karl

Marx called "one of the most monstrous enterprises ever chronicled in the annals of international history."[3]

After Napoleon III withdrew his troops from Mexico and left Maximilian helpless, his wife, Empress Carlota, slid into madness as she lobbied him ever more desperately to support the colony in Mexico. Maximilian's Enlightenment ideals regarding the creation of a liberal society in Mexico ended with his self-proclaimed martyrdom. The collection that Maximilian acquired for a museum in Mexico City would remain in boxes for another twenty-one years, until President Porfirio Díaz opened the Galería de los Monolitos in the National Museum on September 16, 1887.[4] Díaz politicized the museum and its association with nationalization; Maximilian's contribution to the founding of a national museum did not fit the image of an independent Mexico.

In the version of Manet's painting on display in the National Gallery in London, Maximilian has been sliced out of the canvas. The painting had been cut up into sections that were sold separately after Manet's death, but Edgar Degas purchased all the surviving fragments he could find and reassembled them. All that remains of Maximilian in this version is his hand, being held by his loyal general, Miguel Miramón, during the execution.

The political life and death of El Penacho is the center of very different national stories of Mexico and Austria. In Mexico, the figure of the emperor from Europe who lost his crown in Mexico is part of a national discourse; the displaced feather headdress is anachronistically associated with independence. The body of Maximillian was displayed in a church for public viewing, and a year passed before the request for its return for burial in Vienna was respected. Talk of the feather crown today being "dead" in its display case in Vienna, and therefore needing to be returned to Mexico to come "alive," turns El Penacho into a place marker in a political index of

power. All the feather headdress's previous owners have long since passed away, so the trade in cultural symbols is difficult to justify otherwise. Yet the lack of a substantive rationale (as opposed to the ethical argument I make in this book) has not calmed the debate over its restitution to Mexico.

In the central Europe that has sung Motecuhzoma's tragedy as opera, the Aztec feather headdress is the subject of one of the most fiercely contested repatriation claims between Europe and the Americas. The complexity of its case rests in the time lapse between sixteenth-century colonialism and twentieth-century conventions regarding looted objects that continue to this day. The feather headdress is emblematic of many similar objects that are a legacy of other epochs, which today haunt very different legal and ethical regimes.

The desire for the repatriation of museum objects is often voiced by a nation-state to make claims that aid the construction of its identity. The writer and politician José Vasconselos linked Mexican identity to the idea of an Aztec heritage in his cult text *The Cosmic Race* in 1925. Nationalist movements in modern Mexico often base themselves on *indigenismo*—the revival of Indigenous cultures. Mexican identification with historical objects such as El Penacho grew from a sense that their foreign ownership was an illegitimate result of colonization. To demand the return of the fragile feather headdress is to remind Europe of the lasting gain it made through its conquest of Latin America. Also often sought in such demands is an acknowledgment of past actions, for which the return of a symbolic object would represent an apology.

A hundred years of stillness. Two hundred years of stillness—for a feather, this is a long time. Feathers are designed for movement and yet, ironically, the reason these particular feathers have survived for five hundred years is because they were kept relatively immobile for several centuries in a castle

high up in the Tirolean Alps. Ambras Castle is located near the border between Italy and Switzerland, in a part of Austria that has seen various peoples and language groups over the centuries. El Penacho was a prized possession of the owners of the castle, Habsburg collectors Erzherzog Ferdinand II and his wife Philippine Welser Freiherrin von Zinnenburg. The care shown to El Penacho in Ambras could be said to have ultimately led to its survival today. While colonial appropriation is clearly part of its story, when it was taken from the Aztecs and entered the art market in Europe, the feather crown benefited from inclusion in this particular collection. For me this story is personal, because this was my family's collection. Throughout the process of researching and writing this book, I have been interested in understanding more about their relationship to this Aztec headdress. Typically, the study of European history, the history of the Habsburg Empire and its colonies, and family histories have been kept discrete, never to overlap in the same project or researcher's profile. My method uses these different methods simultaneously to reflect on the collective through the personal. Added to this is my research focus on Indigenous knowledge, which influences me to take the method of family history seriously. It is often assumed that Europeans have a stable identity, but the migration crisis, Brexit, and colonial history show that to be untrue. Actually, rather than being the subjects of salvage due to colonial decimation, Indigenous knowledge of genealogy through oral history is strongly established in the places I have been working.

While Dina Gusjenova was making a film about my research for this book project, a road trip of associations unfolded. Through the process of making the film with Dina, I could see myself as an ethnographic subject, as could she: "I felt like you were the native."[5] Dina recalled the time we went to Ambras Castle and a plant there reminded me of

Australia. That moment encapsulated the project for her, the time-space loophole between Australia and Austria, triggered by an exotic plant. The restitution of knowledge about plants exemplifies the difficulties of the arguments for repatriation, as it is tied to context and practice. My ancestor that embodies this, Philippine Welser, represents a different Europe, which is connected to its natural world and its medicines. She was also liminal, mobile—migrant, in modern terms—moving from Augsburg to Bohemia to meet Ferdinand secretly and then to Tirol. What was a love story was likely also connected to this knowledge of healing that Ferdinand found in Philippine.

My analysis of the Welser and Habsburg family history also shows the separation between pre- and post-capitalist Europe to be false. For the Welsers' capitalist exploits in the colonies benefited the Habsburgs and vice versa. While my family history is partly available as public history, displayed in the Ambras Castle, the darker connections to the Atlantic slave trade (see chapter 1) required deeper research. The El Dorado that the Welsers sought in Venezuela was a fiction that cost lives.

Five hundred years of stillness—this is a long time for a wound to heal. Perhaps what is needed is a black mirror: not the black, backlit screen of a toxic tele-device, but the polished obsidian, pre-glass surface of Aztec mirroring. We mirror things using modern glass, the brittle material of the vitrine which encases the object on display, whereas the polished black stone of an obsidian mirror is as dense as a body and as reflective as a mind. A black mirror is what this book aspires to become, a black mirror through which a greater clarity can be found. To listen to and reflect, as a black mirror, the outlines and atmosphere of faces reflecting back.

El Penacho survived the bombing of Vienna in World War II because it was a favorite of the then director of the eth-

nographic museum, Friedrich Röck. While he served Hitler faithfully until the end of the war, he also shuttled what he called *Altmexikanischer Federschmuck des weissen Heilands* (the ancient Mexican feather jewel of the white messiah, referring to Montezuma mistaking Cortés for a white god) to safety on August 31, 1939, the day before the declaration of war. It was stored in "Box 1," which was transferred from the Hofburg to the Österreichische Nationalbank Wien. After the war, in July 1945, it was transported back to the museum.

The last occasion when El Penacho left Vienna was in 1946, when it traveled to Zurich as part of an exhibition of treasures from Austria (*Meisterwerke aus Österreich*). Prior to the war, the museum had imposed a ban on loaning the headdress for exhibitions, but this was not enforced in 1946, given the political will to assert national independence and present Austria internationally as one of the free countries of Europe. The headdress's movements immediately before and after the war, which undermine the reasoning used with such authority by conservators banning its movement today, are addressed in chapter 4.

El Penacho is an unusual national treasure for Austria to advertise because its provenance, however uncertain, makes it a kind of hostage.[6] Chapter 5 addresses the problematic term *national treasure*, often applied to the headdress, thus making it an iconic symbol of statehood. Ironically, after being successfully protected during WWII, the headdress suffered damage in transport back from the exhibition in Zurich. The description of this damage does not appear in the museum's records, nor does the subsequent restoration work carried out in 1955 at the Naturkundemuseum (Natural History Museum). In 1959–60, for a Pre-Columbian Art exhibition in the Künstlerhaus (art house) Vienna, conservators allowed the headdress to cross the road to be displayed but did not permit its inclusion in the traveling part of the

exhibition. By April 1971, all loans of the object were categorically rejected.

In a world where mobility is evidence of power and value, the state of in-betweenness is common, sometimes even necessary. But enforced in-betweenness, beyond the natural flow or *durée* of movement unfolding over time, sets the power of the museum against the power of the mobile object. The museum cabinet is therefore often associated with a deathly rest—a kind of limbo. This is the topic of chapter 3.

Relationships between humans and objects are various; objects can stand in for lost people, for painful histories, for histories impossible to return to. There is a seemingly incommensurable divide between the conflicting desires of the current and traditional owners of the headdress. On one hand, the formerly colonized, who want what was taken from their land during the Spanish colonization of Mexico to be returned and who feel that, since the headdress was seized in the violent circumstances of Cortés's annexation of the pre-Columbian city of Tenochtitlan, it should be repatriated. Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City classifies the Aztec as a pinnacle of civilization, citing Teotihuacan's material culture, including El Penacho, as primary evidence.

On the other hand, the current legal owner, the Republic of Austria, is the administrator of what is claimed to be an inalienable part of the cultural heritage of the House of Habsburg. Thus, the Weltmuseum believes it has a duty to safeguard and maintain the headdress as a part of the wider world cultural heritage. The question is, how can this difference in perspective be realigned in light of postcolonial justice? Should cultural nationalism or cultural internationalism guide decisions on repatriation? Compromises between the two have long attempted to stave off fear that more repatriation agreements and laws protecting looted artworks would discourage future sales and loans across international borders. All this is now changing since the moves of France

and Germany regarding repatriation, which are the subject of chapter 7.

Often the repatriation debate about the feather headdress questions the integrity of the feathers: their indefinite provenance and date of assembly, their current state of dishevelment, their flattening through restoration in Vienna, and their reappearance in many copy crowns. These raise doubts about the historical integrity of the material. The analysis of materials and images is one basis for the repatriation method addressed in this book, using archives and interviews to piece together the evidence and the ontology in which it sits. One example is the photograph of an Indigenous family looking at a copy of El Penacho (fig. 0.2) that I found and discussed in the subterranean offices of the Museo Nacional de Antropología. "Look how much respect they have [standing before El Penacho]," said the archaeologist Bertina Olmedo as we discussed the image. "They don't know anything but *feel* their connection to it." Rather than knowing, perhaps feeling might guide the way our encounters with an object could shift from the Enlightenment mode of decoding and explaining to one of openness to an object's impact. The "feeling" produced by the headdress is more insubstantial as evidence but also presents an important area of investigation. A new field of academic inquiry, the study of the "history of emotions," has recently opened up in this previously undervalued area.[7]

In a discussion about colonial collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the director Tristan Hunt suggested a "trigger warning" might be added to certain displays that could elicit a strong emotional response from some viewers. As Charlotte Joy pointed out, this showed how he (and the British establishment, one might say) is not triggered emotionally.[8] He does not (yet) see how he is implicated in the burden of colonial legacies.

Joy's book *Heritage Justice* argues how the ethical and

FIGURE 0.2 Indigenous family looking at a copy of El Penacho in the Mexico City National Museum of Anthropology. Courtesy of Mexican-Austrian Penacho Project.

legal dimensions of repatriation could lead us all to access the emotions necessary to sense this implication. She goes on to say it is not a case only of the implication of ruling classes, as in my project of connecting El Penacho to the transatlantic slave trade.

Joy reflects on the "complexities of history, national boundaries (drawn and redrawn), definitions of descent (biological, cultural, social, political, economic, religious, artistic, gendered, existential and so on) and abilities for individuals or communities to be 'heard' within a recognised heritage discourse" and surmises that

> this complexity alone is enough to lead some heritage professionals to consider any form of repatriation/restitution an impossibility, a constructed political fantasy in the present that

> more often than not enters the realm of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1983) or "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) as projects of contemporary nationalism. On the other hand, the fact that the shield [collected by Captain Cook, which she discusses in this section] indexes the triad of coercion, alienation and ongoing despair can be seen to give [the repatriation claim of the Aboriginal man in this case] a moral authority beyond that of the curator/scientist. It seems that only in conditions where the museum could robustly help to address these grievances could a scenario be envisaged where the museum becomes part of the solution, restoring a voice to those who feel disenfranchised. A turn to archival and scientific research is not an adequate answer to a question about dignity unless it includes the concerns of those who have brought the claim as a key catalyst to the research.[9]

Everything being always in movement, even the stone Quetzalcóatl made its way up from the basement and into the exhibition space, to sit flanking Motecuhzoma's feather headdress in the display installed in 2017. In chapter 2, I look at how museology has changed over this five-hundred-year period, to the current moment. For example, since the 2000s, narratives of conquest have become central to progressive museum displays. In Mexico City, the rehang in 2000 of the Museo Nacional de Antropología saw the Tlatoani kings' wall, of which the reproduced feather headdress was a part, become the final room in a story of conquest, as scripted by the archaeologist Leonardo López Luján.

Since 1987, groups of Mexican protestors have gathered in Vienna, often in re-created Aztec regalia and dancing wearing feather headdresses. These performances (like *Las danzas de conquista* that reenact the Aztec conquest) offer a brilliantly vivid contrast to the containment of Motecuhzoma's El Penacho in a museum vitrine. Yet these demonstrative

interpretations performed by Mexican communities were not what inspired the Austrian president, Thomas Klestil, to support the notion of the repatriation of Motecuhzoma's crown in 1996. The complexities of restoration play a powerful, often invisible role behind the scenes of heritage. At other times, it is the museum's focus on the conservator's scientific process of restoration that allows it, in the case of the Weltmuseum, to give little acknowledgment of the widely held desire to see the restoration of the feather crown to Mexico. The same word, *restoration*, can be used to describe both repairing a work of art to its original condition and the action of returning an object to a former owner or place of origin. Furthermore, *restoration* can also be defined as the reinstatement of a previous practice, right, custom, or situation. It is ironic that the same term can be used to justify opposite ends. Arguably the Weltmuseum employs one form of restoration to avoid engaging in the other.

Fragile and balding, El Penacho spans 3 meters by 4 meters from its gold crown to the tips of its longest feathers. Its resplendent attributes are associated with the wind god Quetzalcóatl, who is represented as a feathered snake (see fig. 0.3). *Coatl* is the word in Nahuatl for serpent, and the green feathers of Motecuhzoma's crown would writhe like snakes in the breeze if not for the surrounding stillness of their glass chamber. Spreading out in a luminescent green arc, when worn, they framed the faces of those humans closest to the realm of gods. The quetzal's red feathers are said to be dyed with the blood of the Aztecs killed during colonization, following pre-Columbian rituals involving blood.

The deeply felt aspiration to exhibit the feather headdress in Mexico is political, yet the danger in transporting it and fulfilling this desire is physical. The feather headdress is in danger of losing even more of the individual barbs that make up its plumage display, many of which were found, to

FIGURE 0.3 Feathered snake with Quetzal feather headdress. *Codex Vaticanus A (Rios)*, fol. 27r. Courtesy of Mexican-Austrian Penacho Project.

the horror of the conservators, lying on the velvet where the headdress had rested. The conservation scientists who have analyzed the headdress say that the levels of vibration encountered in transporting it by air could destroy its fine and brittle feathers. In order to avoid such damage, it has been suggested that a special vibration-proof case could be built for the headdress—for a price. While the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City could not afford to commission its own expert report regarding the transportation of the headdress to its featherwork exhibition, the Mexican president's office stepped in and provided funds for an additional engineering report from an expert on countervibration.

The worldview of the Mexican protest dancers relates

to the Aztec gods. Particularly important among them for featherworkers is Quetzalcóatl. Jacques Soustelle, in the *Daily Life of the Aztecs*, writes that Quetzalcóatl was the god of the Toltecas [craftsmen]. For them, he "discovered great treasures of emeralds, of fine turquoises, gold, silver, coral, shells, and the [plumes of] quetzal, tlauhquechol, zacuan, tzinitzcan and ayocuan . . . [in his palace] he had mats of feathers and precious gems and silver." [10] As the pioneering ethnographer Bernardino de Sahagún interprets from the Codexes, "all these crafts and sciences [of mining the precious stones] came from Quetzalcóatl."[11]

In the syncretic spirituality of the contemporary Mexican dancers who wear the feathers, Quetzalcóatl symbolizes assumption, evolution from serpent to bird, as Quetzalcóatl flies up to become part of the heavens. The cult of Quetzalcóatl is said to have begun long before the Mexica arrived in Anahuac. The wall paintings and sculptures of Teotihuacan, Tula, and Xochicalco show the god of featherwork. It is said that, in addition to painting and featherwork, Quetzalcóatl brought the techniques of silverwork and wood and stone sculpture to Tula. There were feathered rooms in feather houses at the time of Ce Acatl Topilzin Quetzalcóatl. The room to the east was decorated in yellow parrot feathers; to the West, with the green quetzal and blue cotinga; the south was white with eagle feathers; and the north was entirely red, made up of the feathers of the roseate spoonbill, the red macaw, and other birds. When Quetzalcóatl was banished from Tula, he buried his treasure and set free the birds he had kept to supply feathers.

In everyday life, the feathers accompanied the whole of life: when you were born, you were said to be as precious as a feather, and when you died you went to your grave with feathers. Sahagún reported that the Toltecs were a skilled people who knew the art of featherwork. Since ages past they had

FIGURE 0.4 Leopold Fertbauer, *Costume Design for Ferdinand Cortez 1818*. Tusche, watercolor on paper, 32.8 cm × 21.3 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

FIGURE 0.5 Leopold Fertbauer, *Costume Design for Ferdinand Cortez 1818*. Tusche, watercolor on paper, 32.6 cm × 21.3 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

kept this technique alive and were the inventors of feather mosaic. The art of the *amanteca* (feather artisans) is an ability to tie down feathers, to make them part of the serpent but not unable to fly. Individual feathers in a piece of featherwork are distinguishable only from underneath, a testament to the great skill of those who sat and worked each plume into place on a piece of backing. Their headdresses reached not only across the wearer's forehead but also through time and through all the hands that practiced the art of featherwork before them. That is what a skilled craft is: an inheritance of lessons learned by experiment, taught in oral histories, and handed down between generations. The craft is not held by one person, but it is the one person engaged in it who epitomizes all the *amanteca*.

Motecuhzoma as Theater

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are a historical lacuna, in which the movements of the feather headdress remain largely unknown, except that during the Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) it traveled with part of the Ambras collection to the Lower Belvedere castle in Vienna. A golden beak that was once positioned above the center of the crown was removed and never seen again. This central piece of the crown was detached from El Penacho sometime between its appearance in Ferdinand's 1596 inventory and 1720, when the headdress had already been recorded without its large golden bird head. Melting precious metal down into currency, or into more fashionable objects, was common practice at the time. Where these gold elements of the headdress went in the seventeenth century remains a mystery.

We can only imagine what this beak, that opened out from the face of the wearer, looked like from the drawings of the Motecuhzoma operas in the 1920s and 1930s (bottom

right of fig. 1.1 in the following chapter). These were revived Romantic operas; originally composed by Vivaldi for Venice in 1733, by Carl Heinrich Graun for Berlin in 1755, and by Josef Mysliveček for Florence in 1771. Motecuhzoma's afterlife on the European stage appears to begin with a chance encounter between Vivaldi and a relative of a conquistador wearing a copy of Motecuhzoma's feather headdress as a mask during a 1732 carnival in Venice. When the feather mask wearer tells Vivaldi the story of Spanish conquest, the composer is inspired to write an opera titled *Motezuma*, which premiered at the Teatro Sant'Angelo on November 14, 1733. Although the theater was well known at the time and showed numerous new works with "exotic" content, it has sadly gone.

In Vienna, the opera house and Theater Museum's archive of drawings for the sets and costumes (figs. 0.4 and 0.5) in which these portrayals of Motecuhzoma were staged are situated just by the Hofburg palace complex, next door to the ethnographic collection. The information on the screen in the Weltmuseum today has a disproportionate focus on the theater performances, such as *Der Weisse Heiland*, which was an adaptation of the popular novel *Die Weissen Goetter*, translated as *The Great White Gods: An Epic of the Spanish Invasion of Mexico and the Conquest of the Barbaric Aztec Culture of the New World.* The novel's author, Eduard Stucken, sued the dramatist Gerard Hauptmann for plagiarism in his theater script, but nevertheless the play had two big seasons. Figures 0.6 and 0.7 show the actor Alexander Moissi as Motecuhzoma, apparently descending into madness, holding a white rabbit and a white lily, perhaps as symbols of defeat. In blackface, this German fantasy of a Motecuhzoma is a striking projection of its own madness, expressed on the actor's face. His pose would later be mirrored in Joseph Beuys's "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare."

FIGURE 0.6 Alexander Moissi as Montezuma in *Der weisse Heiland* (the white savior), March 28, 1920. Black and white photograph, 15.2 cm × 22.6 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

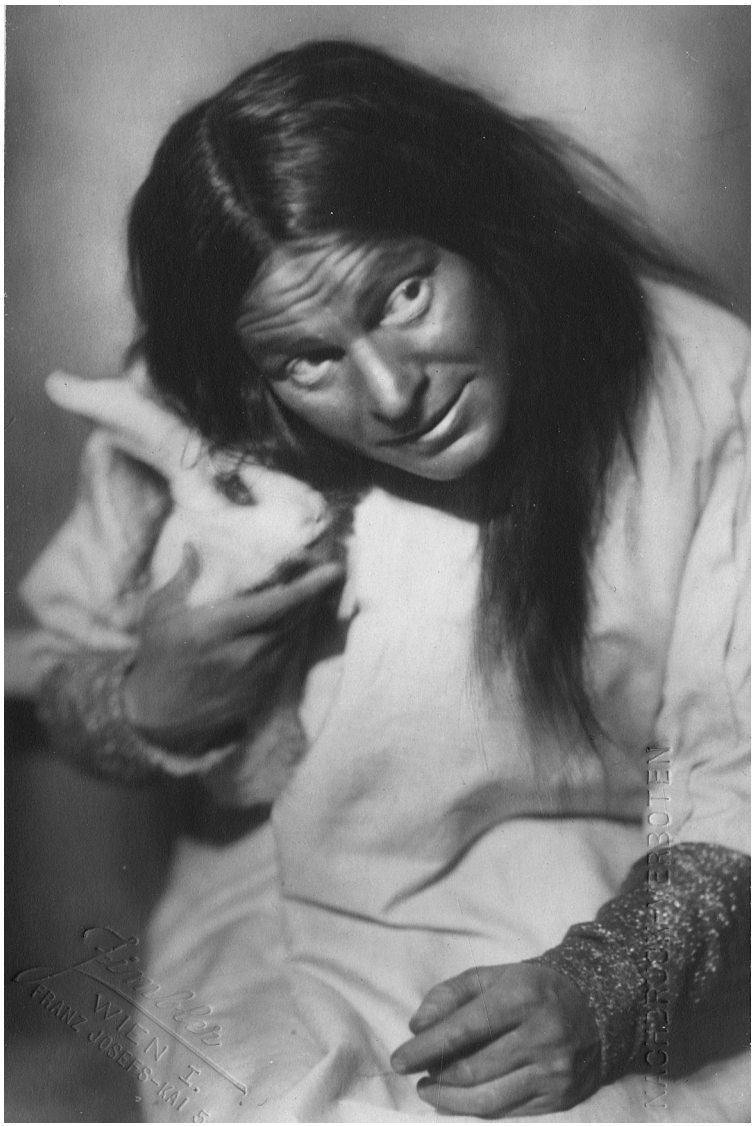

FIGURE 0.7 Alexander Moissi as Montezuma in *Der weisse Heiland* (the white savior), March 28, 1920. Black and white photograph, 16.5 cm × 22.3 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

Der Weisse Heiland (figs. 0.8 and 0.9) tells the story of Cortés's conquest through conversations between the conquistadors as they move overland from Veracruz to take the capital city. Figure 0.9 shows the larger set with Cortés's army approaching Motecuhzoma's court on the steps of a pyramid. The costume for Motecuhzoma included a re-creation of El Penacho that, sadly, was dismantled so that the feathers could be used for another play.

The Austrian historian Franz Ferdinand Anders was the advisor to the 1953 Volkstheater (People's Theater) production of *Der Weisse Heiland*, for which the set designer Gustav Manker took inspiration from Anders's library. Nestled in a suburb of Vienna, this library has probably the largest private collection of books on Mexico and related historical subjects in Austria. With pride he tells me that he does not have to go anywhere—now, at the age of eighty-nine, this is in any

FIGURE 0.8 Anonymous, scene from *Der weisse Heiland*, March 28, 1920. Black and white photograph, 15.2 cm × 22.6 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

FIGURE 0.9 Anonymous, scene from *Der weisse Heiland*, March 28,1920. Black and white photograph, 16.5 cm × 22.3 cm. Theater Museum, Vienna.

case virtually impossible—but merely has to reach out from his chair to grab any book he needs. He is the epitome of armchair academia, an image which sits comfortably with his statement that "there is nothing to give back from Austria; we got everything honestly." Anders was the historical expert called upon by several state inquiries to offer his opinion on whether El Penacho should be repatriated. His knowledge of the gaps in the provenance record have made for the strongest counterarguments, and it is on this lack of empirical evidence that the rejection of repatriation rests. The leap in logic between lack of evidence and the assurance that "everything" was gained "honestly" is where the consideration of the history of colonialism can contribute. When knowledge of colonial expropriation and violence are considered, even where there may be no direct historical record of coercion or looting of a particular object, claims of honesty and rightful ownership become dubious at best. Yet it is on the basis of factual evidence and not on addressing a more expansive his-

torical argument that the ontology of rejecting repatriation stands. With the inclusion of the whole historical context of colonialism comes the responses to violence and pain, which further drive that ontology apart from the one of emotional repression based solely on scientific facts. These erasures in the archive do not salve the colonial wound: as Anders says, his research did not placate the Mexican protestors and archaeologists who "kept hoping." The inability of the archive to represent the pain of the colonial experience in terms that make its acknowledgment undeniable is a further failing of imperial administration.[12]

1

Writing as Listening

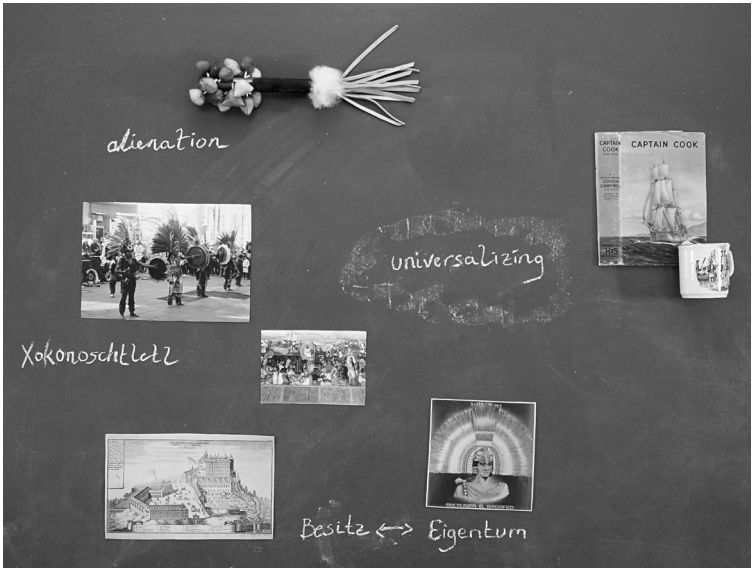

FIGURE 1.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

I decided to write the story of El Penacho as a way of liberating myself from various modes of academic writing that do not seem adequate to heal the colonial wound. I will reflect on decolonizing whiteness and the perpetrator position through my own family history. Much of this book is based

on conversations, providing space for reflection by accessing alternative perspectives. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay puts it this way: "I do not refuse . . . to assume the implications of this [Israeli in her case] perpetrator's position that I inherited and out of and against which this book has been written."[1]

I include those raw moments when, all of a sudden, I realize I am not just writing a set of facts. An unconscious set of desires drives what I am doing. For, despite skepticism, World War II demonstrated that passions could be harnessed in the service of fascism and propaganda, and modernity did not produce a less irrational society. It is therefore not possible to access the truth (whatever that might be) solely through facts. The repression of angry and "irrational" desires will only magnify them when they return, more violent than before. Frantz Fanon presents this social pathology in his texts *On Violence* in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

> Demanding yet denying the human condition makes for an explosive contradiction. And explode it does, as you and I know. And we live in an age of conflagration: it only needs the rising birth rate to worsen the food shortage, it only needs the newly born to fear living a little more than dying, and for the torrent of violence to sweep away all the barriers. In Algeria and Angola, Europeans are massacred on sight.[2]

The contemporary relevance of this 1961 text is extraordinary and signals why understanding the role anger plays in political dissidence is so important. Yet anger is just one of the emotions, affects, feelings, or desires—the terms vary—that Western political thought, from the Stoics to Kant and Rawls, has treated as disruptive and suspicious. Since they influence the choices we make, the passions are necessarily caught up in political judgments and scientific research questions. They play a crucial role in providing the emotional

basis of individual and social identities, and thus in forming the collective political communities in which we are all caught up. Passionate convictions are the basis of movements and ideologies that drive political change. The repatriation complex would be impoverished if we could not take into account how the violence and anger, expressed by Fanon and other decolonial voices, are responses to colonial upheaval; ask what the roles of love and empathy play in the formation of solidarity expressed among those who campaign and protest for the return of El Penacho or among the *Concheros* dancers; and examine the role of fear in white perpetrator repression. Recognition of such dynamics has driven the so-called "affective turn" in academia which, rather than seeing the passions only as a source of chaos, recognizes the way in which they inform the public and the so-called rational.[3]

My aim is to explore the responses of the perpetrators of colonial violence to positions of inherited white privilege by examining my own history but avoiding narcissism. Acknowledging and understanding my own position is necessary to the process of decolonization. For, as Indigenous scholars rightly stress, the onus is not on Indigenous people to accompany the process that white subjects must undertake—it is the white person's responsibility to decolonize themselves. As greater transparency is sought regarding white privilege, the process of self-reflexivity, along with the realignment of responsibilities and reckoning with guilt, is something only the individual can do, even if in the context of a collective or social process.

What can change in a process of decolonization when a point of view shifts from white subjectivity to Indigenous ontologies? Shifting the arrogance that Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez have written about to a "humbling ignorance" is one step on the way.[4] A touch of guilt that gives way to a sense of responsibility may be another. Where trust has

been eroded, honesty is necessary. Thus self-reflexivity offers a mode through which to move forward, although it must be employed without self-absorption, indulgence, or the instrumental quality that passing acknowledgments have. If decolonization of whiteness is reduced to merely an opening acknowledgment—"I am a white male"—it is misused, like a poem in a politician's speech. Placed at the beginning or end of a text, such a statement replaces action. The self-reflexive and poetic might also be misunderstood as foreclosing empirical research and the important questions about who articulates what, and on behalf of whom. However, when the poetic is used as it is in Pacific history, it is precisely the language of identification, passion, and creative association that can move the discourse on decolonization forward. Poetry in oral histories, performance, and ceremony—like storytelling and narrative—offer ways of decolonizing knowledge because they do not invite the same analysis of meaning found in other cultures. Instead, oral histories, poetry, and stories are material for dialogue across cultures.

The Restitution of Complexity, from which the chapter frontispieces for this book are taken, is a performance that harnesses these elements.[5] This is a short extract of the script, which preceded this book:

> I am Quetzalcóatl the feathered serpent. Ghostly. Earthly. Heavenly. I was a priest banished from the ancient city of Tula. When I went out to sea it was expected I would return. I am Quetzalcóatl the banished priest from Tula who disappeared out to sea one day. And one day returned. I am Quetzalcóatl the feathered serpent god who is both of the sky and of the earth, to whom the Aztecs pray above all. I am the god of priests, I am Quetzalcóatl. But I am also Cortez. I am the banished priest god returning on a boat, blanched. And I am also Moctezuma who gives his hand to Cortez because I am the returned god, the prophesy of the end of

> empire. I am Quetzalcóatl, two sides, two eyes, both Moctezuma and Cortez. The black mirror. I am Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent. In the black mirror. Quetzal, Quetzalcóatl. Quetzal, Quetzalcóatl.

In the live performance these voices bubble and strut around the stage in an experiment in embodiment of the silenced. After the performance I thought I would let this book unfold in a similar way. Sometimes it is me speaking and often it is in conversation with someone else. Always I am the scribe (though I lapse in my ventriloquism, as the translator is always also interpreter). But the scribe does not try to interpret everything, know or represent everything she is told. This is like dramaturgy of many actors at different times on different stages. All the jumps and contradictions, repetitions and changes in register are left intentionally to signal the rupture between these voices. Some are complicit in the violence, others don't agree, and everything dances on, deadly.

Recognizing that the onus is on white writers and readers to undertake a process of self-reflexive decolonization of their own imagination, how did I approach this ethical process? In the research for this book, I began to delve into my Austrian family history. There, to my initial horror, I found many more colonial encounters in the sixteenth century than in the family history of my parents who had emigrated to Australia after World War II. Among my ancestors, Philippine Welser Freiherrin von Zinnenburg, who moved to Austria from Bavaria after her illicit love affair with Prince Ferdinand, was the first Zinnenburg given the name and title of baroness to elevate her from the merchant class to the aristocracy. The cultural historian Gunther Bakay speculates that Ferdinand invented the name Zinnenburg as a play on Minneburg, which was the *Zinnen* (fortification) to which

minnesänger (minstrels) would devote love songs about storming the castle with their desire. Minneburg would be too overt to take as a name, but Zinnenburg had just the right playful association, through its pronunciation, with a castle from which the loved one could look down to the suitor singing below. The name was also taken at the time Ferdinand gave Philippine the Ambras Castle as a gift.[6]

Traveling from Augsburg, Philippine arrived at the Ambras Castle in the Alps via Bohemia, where she had secretly married Ferdinand and was soon followed by a vast collection of marvelous objects from around the world. This empire of artifacts drawn from the New and Old World was assembled, interpreted, and played with in the sixteenth century, while Philippine and Ferdinand's reign lasted.

Philippine's family, the Welsers, led the world trade in spices, investing in the Portuguese circumnavigation of Africa in 1500 to evade the Venetian tax on trade with India and the Orient. In 1517 Philippine's uncle Bartholomäus took leadership of the dynasty and shifted its focus from trade to credit and finance. Most significantly, his assets included investment in Emperor Charles V, who had succeeded his uncle Maximilian in 1519. Charles would not have become kaiser if he had not bribed the German *Kurfürsten* (princes entitled to take part in the election of the Holy Roman emperor) with funds from the Welser and Fugger families. The kaiser was therefore indebted to Bartholomäus Welser, and in 1528 he agreed to an asiento (a contract issued by the Spanish crown for the monopoly on a trade route or product) that made Bartholomäus the governor of Venezuela and gave the Welsers exclusive access to the country for four years. Charles V was not only the kaiser of Germany but also of Spain and thus of the Spanish colonies, opening up almost worldwide potential trade to the Welsers. In an asiento, the source of income and its particular type is also guaranteed. For four years, the Welsers could trade slaves from Guinea and the Venezuelan

mainland. Bartholomäus procured 4,000 African slaves for the sugar plantations in the Antilles. Records show that 1,005 Indigenous slaves were exported from Venezuela, and it is estimated that a further 4,000 were sold to settlers, although this was illegal according to a king's law passed in 1528.

The Welsers established mines in Venezuela and imported African slaves to work in them, although with limited success. Attempts in 1536 to harvest pearls failed, although later, from 1541 to 1543, pearls with a value of 150,000 pesos were harvested, and by the end of the sixteenth century, the annual profit from the trade reached 500,000 ducats (roughly $75 million USD today). Other exports included sugar, guaja wood, and canafista. The Arabs had initially traded sugar as a medicine, which had created the appetite for it on a global market. Guaja wood was prescribed to combat syphilis, which was plaguing Europe. Canafista, *Rohr Cassia fistula*, which in Latin America was mixed with saffron and cinnamon in a warm pea paste, was marketed in Europe as a failsafe laxative.

The Welsers' exploits in Venezuela represent an underexposed episode in German colonial history. Some sixty texts have been published, currently only in Spanish and German, which paint a grim picture of gold-greedy German conquistadors who invested their time and fortune in searching for El Dorado. The Welsers traded throughout Venezuela with the Spanish settlers (whom they ruthlessly taxed as governors), hunting down those Indigenous people who had survived Spanish settler colonization and exploiting them as slaves to carry supplies on their *entradas* (expeditions) into the interior. This carried on until 1546, by which time the settlers had become bankrupt and could not pay their taxes. El Dorado had not been found and on return from the last *entrada*, the Welsers secretly abducted a group of Indigenous women and a leader of their party was murdered in revenge.

Transnationalism and Global Art History

Being an Austrian-Australian offers plenty of sources from which to choose guilt; including the vast dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land and central European accumulations of wealth from the colonies. Removing oneself from colonized lands seemed one obvious way to redress the settler situation, although it does not reverse history and its unjust privileges. Actively (rather than theoretically) changing practice, in my case of art history, was the next step.

I have been asked whether my life history is what led me to study global art history. The topic of my research would certainly suggest so, but I suspect this might be true, even if in indirect ways, of most researchers in the humanities. For in all family memories and collections there are personal histories that open out into the wider world. Therefore, I am experimenting with the idea that telling my story as honestly as possible, can be a way of approaching the emotionally charged subject of repatriation.

What are the implications of that approach for the subdiscipline of global art history that has emerged in past years? In my practice, it joins the ranks of poststructuralist movements and draws postcolonial theory into "decolonial doing," as Philipp Schorch has called it.[7] The reason it is promoted by universities, for example, the Chair of Global Art History post I hold at Birmingham University in the UK, is because of its resonance with the economics of globalization and its subsequent market-driven trends. The university system responds as a business venture, a position which makes scholars like the Czech art historian Marie Rakušanová and me skeptical. Global art history and its recent twin, transnationalism, should be treated as critically as globalization, capitalism, and neoliberal markets themselves. On one hand, the current transnational turn is one away from national art

histories toward an acknowledgment of the mobility and multiplicity of influences on artists in the modern world. Mobility of goods and people are certainly characteristic of the accelerated circulation of capital, also theorized in terms of globalization. However, the drivers of these movements, or rather the beneficiaries of them, are a small percentage that force movement on the larger mass of working poor.

While the acceleration of global movements is associated with the contemporary world, there were transnational networks around different parts of the globe in the sixteenth century and even earlier, as shown in examples such as the Makassar trading Trepang with Aboriginal people on north coast of Australia; the colonizing of the Philippines by Mexico; or the migration of techniques such as batik through Asia to Africa.[8] These historical relationships remain evident in cultural forms, institutional partnerships, and funding structures, for instance through international artist residency programs. The settler colonies maintain these global networks, which are evident in their art histories. The settler colonial position engendered the early study of transnational art works, which exist separately from national art works, outside of national boundaries or with dual or multiple identities. Global art history has emerged as a cure for the radicalized marginalization of particular communities, which remain difficult to access even when put on display. Transnationalism brings not only a shift in the canon of works viewed by art history but also, and more importantly, in the stance assumed by the historian. It is not entirely possible to take a perspective different from one's own, but it is possible to be aware of other situations and to thereby perceive space beyond and toward those positions that have not yet been articulated. It is this expansion of the canon that a global art history seeks.

The chronopolitics that each postcolonial subject resides

in are made up of a double movement in which the contemporary moment comes into focus and yet the ways in which we move are guided by specters from another time. These chronopolitical guidelines are both spatial and conceptual. We are forced to navigate imperial structures. Within those structures are found the organizing principles that demand chronology, that value older more stable colonial forms over ephemeral protests against them. In order to propose an alternative to traditional art history, global art history must be a platform for different perspectives other than a dominant epistemic regime that replaces the modernist linear chromosphere with a homogenous canon. Euro-American high culture does not resonate with the deterritorialized state of postcolonial histories, yet at the same time, the tendency to quickly narrow the range of artists included in a canon is also adopted by those advocating only certain minorities autochthony, or other positions of strategic essentialism. Opponents of indigeneity and autochthony; such as Quentin Gausset, Justin Kenrick, and Robert Gibb, show that these concepts can be cynically exploited to gain undue privileges and to exclude others from benefiting from them.[9] This is uncomfortable to acknowledge because of the politics around gaining entrance into the traditional canon faced by minorities.

The essential and urgent sense I have is that the academic discipline of art history must shake off its parochial and nationalist tendencies. This might indeed come from deep within my own deterritorialized state, as Rakušanová shrewdly observed when she listened to a summary of this book's research. Strategically, I moved to England as a place from which to actively and critically redress colonial history and my own sense of belonging. This place, at the center of conservative art history and extracted from the settler colony, was also a base from which to mediate opportunities for

Indigenous researchers to gain access to the collections of their cultures in Europe. That is, rather than merely contemplating the estranged binary of black/white, Indigenous/settler, I sought to find a way of actively realigning these messy relationships.

Because identity is set up as unitary, many experience deterritorialization as a threat to their identity. Countless times I have been asked, in one way or another, where I am from. In essence this question seeks to understand the position from which I speak. I honestly cannot reply with any single nationality, and I am skeptical of universals, thus straddling the globe is not something I aspire to do. Straddling an ocean, on the other hand, means crossing between and existing in islands that are separated by vast tracts of water. My ocean is the Pacific and my mountains are the Austrian Alps—these are the landmarks you are asked to introduce yourself with in Pacific cultural protocol—and it is the distance of those two that I somehow straddle. To return to Europe and present an unstable array of perspectives is quite different from being positioned in the former colony, writing history with an experimental sense of distance to the center of the empire and the authority of its version of history.

I recall visiting Harvard's Peabody Museum for the first time when I began my PhD there in 2004 and finding the dated display of Pacific culture. Tiny, dusty cases presented a view of Australia that did not resonate with me and felt out of touch with the vibrant life I grew up with. That was when I switched from studying Renaissance art to Oceanic art.

In 2019, Tate Modern in London launched a new focus on transnational curating, after consultation with many of us in the field. The conversation ranged from specific case studies to larger themes such as that of time, the differences in the perception of which struck the Tate curators, and advisors like Briony Fer, as particularly interesting. For the outside

experts in the room it was on the other hand no revelation to learn about multiple hierarchies of time and the everywhen: how the past, present, and future can exist concurrently, for example in Aboriginal art.[10]

There already exists a transnational network for Indigenous approaches. The Tate's cautious, even paranoid approach to its own image—for example, the great anxiety expressed about collecting Aboriginal paintings on bark not as "art" but as "craft"—contrasted with the refreshing openness to include new work in the canon of modern art, as defined by them. The curator Katya García-Antón later expressed the idea of "necessary essentialism" regarding such works, rather than assimilation into the canon. The director of the Tate Modern cheerfully told an Anischwabee curator at our advisory meeting that she would also adopt "Indigenous methodology" after hearing her speak about it. Appropriation follows quickly on the heels of learning I thought, as I watched the Anischwabee curator's face drop.

The ontological question of whether works were defined as "art" rather than "outsider art" had been tackled in past exhibitions in ways that could be instructive. Tate curators such as Nada Raza spoke about the changes that occur when these works come into the collection, hence the challenges that the Tate had in collecting Indigenous art. The ethnographic turn and other global contemporary practices increasingly consider Indigenous objects and art histories. How will their debt be ethically resolved in the context of decolonization processes?

The questions of authenticity, value, and the secondary market that were raised in relation to Indigenous works were familiar from my experience accompanying American art institutions grappling with collecting this new material. While Aboriginal art is clearly of great value, galleries lack expertise and the knowledge of what is "good" and why. Since Tate Modern mostly collects from one gallery in Lon-

don, Marian Goodman Gallery, the contradiction becomes palpable. If only one gallery is trusted, but it does not deal with Indigenous art, how would the acquisitions team know whom to trust? Three new curatorial positions were created by the Tate Modern in 2019–2021 to further engage with these practices. Such structural change, if made more permanent, could lead to an expansion of art history.

The long-term effects of transnational research that I have observed in my own practice have come from discovering the way Aboriginal people keep their oral family history. That has influenced my work on colonialism and the processes of repatriation. What Aboriginal people taught me about the ancestors and their history was that place is central to identity and well-being. To know your ancestors is basic but is not a given for many. Upheavals and global mobility mean that we are not necessarily in the place where our ancestors were. In my case at least, what connection was lost with my immediate country can be regained in the country my ancestors are from. The settler colonial has long appropriated Indigenous tropes of belonging to land; aware of this, it is a repatriation of the settler descendant back to Europe that is my ongoing experiment.

A concurrent method has been for me to work for Indigenous people in ways that are useful to them. That has led to films and publications, activism, and friendship. It has also been difficult and emotionally confrontational, drawing much time and energy into processes of mediation rather than the traditional forms of research. These intense collaborations have led to an inward process of understanding my settler guilt and the ways it drives my creativity. Even living in London and serving the immigrant community during 2014–2016 while working on *Bordered Lives: Immigration Detention Archive* was, on reflection, partly driven by my settler guilt.[11]

History has been philosophically undermined in its objec-

tive and chronic linearity by postmodern and decolonial theories. In a seeming contradiction, family history is a genre that epitomizes the great aversion historians feel for admission of personal desire in the pursuit of objective writing. Yet familial or ancestral connection is also the only connection justifiable to Indigenous people, who have a healthy suspicion of other people researching family stories that are not their own.

In the process of talking about this book, many historian friends have joked about how family history is usually something you do at the end of your life, when the embarrassment of what you discover can do no damage to your reputation. One academic colleague recounted how he had been criticized for not being objective enough when he wrote something personal. This academic repression of opinion, instinct, and attraction is what I hope to abandon in the process of telling this history, revising the discipline and exploring how we are present in everything we write.

2

El Penacho

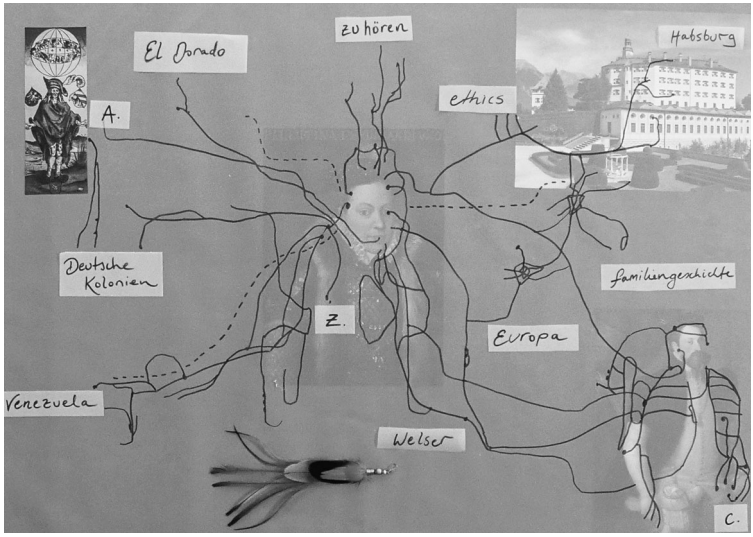

FIGURE 2.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

As an Austrian-Australian in Mexico I listened with great interest, and some amazement, when I was told reproachfully by numerous Mexican people that "*you* have *our Penacho*." I am sensitive to being told I have stolen something because I grew up benefiting from Aboriginal dispossession and have, for a long time now, considered how best to give

something back. I began to look into the question of how El Penacho, which became better known as Motecuhzoma's Crown, reached Vienna. A commonly held belief in Mexico in the twenty-first century is that Maximillian of Mexico, the Austrian emperor, had stolen it. But the obscure Austrian emperor of Mexico arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, some three centuries after Motecuhzoma was dethroned by Cortés in 1518. It is the kind of anachronistic history puzzle that appeals to me.

I was teaching art in Vienna and on my return from Mexico I went with my students into the stores of the museum. We could not see El Penacho because it was kept highly secure, but we discovered that it had been in Austria since the sixteenth century. It had come with a collection of art works and curiosities from the Ambras Castle. This name sounded familiar, so I rang my mother, perhaps the most unusual Austrian exile in Australia. She said, "Oh yes, your great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great-grandmother was given Ambras as a present by her husband, Archduke Ferdinand, in 1567."

I went to the Ambras Castle to find out where we were from. "We" being myself and El Penacho, which had already started to take hold in my imagination as a character for a book. Ambras Castle is an extant cabinet of curiosities, run as a public museum, with its own historians and curators.

When I asked a historian there about my family, I realized for the first time how embarrassingly little I knew. Was it the way the litany of names piled up as abstract evidence, or because I had grown up far from the places where this history happened? How strange that a historian who had nothing to do with my ancestors knew more about them than I did. He could identify which of my questions related to myth and which to fact. Humbled by this great expertise in something

I only had vague though intimate relations with, I forgot half my questions and left feeling I had made a fool of myself.

I have been on the other side of the conversation in similar meetings when conducting research on Aboriginal art history. There have been times when it was clear that I had uncovered records that a family had never had access to. One of the most satisfying experiences was putting my research into the hands of individuals who identified closely with the material. However, I would never ask the same questions of them again, now that I know how uncomfortable not knowing what happened to your own family can be. Especially when there has been war and genocide, migration and a struggle to survive; family history gets lost.

This is a project about the process of recovering family history and the objects that embody it. The confusion and shame of not being able to answer a historical expert's questions about parts of my family in the sixteenth century is the same problem that Mexicans face when they are asked to explain the generations between Motecuhzoma and themselves. So much in the Habsburg family history, of which El Penacho became a part, is myth and invented tradition. The very status of the Habsburg family was founded on the power of fabulation when Rudolf IV commissioned the forged *Privilegium Maius* (greater privilege, 1358), which claimed that Austria was an archduchy. I thought of myself as a historian, not a member of a family of storytellers who ran empires on the backs of their myths. I wonder if my own embarrassment is the most interesting response to the mythologizing of the Habsburgs. What I am writing now is an experiment in what else the process of uncovering family history might reveal in terms of fabulated stories in the process of decolonization.

It is not a coincidence that a family history runs parallel to one about restitution, since an ancestral tie is often the basis of people's claims upon objects. It became apparent to

me, after many conversations with Indigenous people about my research, that it is perhaps time we settlers study our own family history rather than other people's. That is one motivation for this book; another stems from my return to Europe, a movement in the reverse direction to the one traveled by repatriated Indigenous objects taken during colonization. These movements—back and forth from Europe to former colonies and between the largest debate about restitution and the very personal story about my family—should weave a space for insight into how one relates to the objects that one carries from the past into the future.

Disalienation

Another way to think about this practice of self-reflection is to view it as the responsibility of the alienated to disalienate themselves. The writings of Marx, Brecht, and Fanon serve as guides to the potential for the colonized to disalienate themselves, and to understand the difficulty of alienation. Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, written when he was twenty-seven years old amid the bourgeois comforts of Paris, uses the image of the mask to describe rage at alienation.[1] In Paris, where slight attitudes of disdain are as varied as the names for snow in colder places, alienation is another shadow cast by the state of "not belonging." The safe and familiar coherence of Europe alienates those who lack access to it, and whose lack is historical. Lack is not merely an emotional trigger in the postcolonialism that Horst Bredekamp has labeled a "guilt-religion," suspecting it of being nothing more than propaganda. He argued that the collectors who made the ethnographic museum (in Berlin, in this case) were anticolonial liberals—Jewish academics who "just wanted to save them from disappearance [. . .] from [the German colony in] Namibia to Auschwitz."[2] By implication, the Black

Lives Matter and decolonization of the museum movements are anti-Semitic in Bredekamp's view. Lack is personal; it has an energy and a will to fill the void it expresses.

Fanon was intensely engaged with the Algerian struggle for independence. In 1963, he asked Jean Paul Sartre to write the preface to his book *Wretched of the Earth*. The anger brooding in the Paris *banlieues* (outer suburbs) is heard in Fanon's texts and speeches. Sartre listened and amplified this articulation of alienation. As a mouthpiece for those feeling alienated, *Wretched of the Earth* introduces and investigates the process of disalienation. Fanon looks to artists and others, who experiment with ways of shifting alienation into something that does not estrange them from the world. I look to Fanon to think about what happens after the violence he has diagnosed. What happens after cities like Paris have been hit by what Sartre called the boomerang: "It is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and we do not realise any more than we did the other times that it's we who have launched it."[3]

Written in the context of the Algerian struggle for freedom from the brutal French colonial regime, Sartre argues that it is settler violence that produces a colonized people "who understand only violence."[4] He uses the boomerang analogy to describe how "the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go towards a mirror." Sartre's writing on postcolonial Paris is particularly pertinent in the context of such violent attacks as the one on *Charlie Hebdo* for publishing parodies of Muslims in 2015.

Bertolt Brecht's use of the alienation effect (*Verfremdungseffekt* or V-effect) in theater made the audience participate critically in historical and social relationships.[5] Considering different stagings and interpretations of El Penacho in theater, opera, and dance provides another form of social

engagement with the object's history. Artists are the avant garde of the current repatriation debate, being ahead of the archaeologists and anthropologists in their ability to imagine futures of respectful exchange. In the visual culture of repatriation, the alienation effect heightens the presence of the object. For example, Tony Phillips's *British Punitive Expedition* enlarged the figure of a Benin bronze to the scale of heroic defender, overshadowing an absurdly miniaturized colonial enemy. Part of the series *History of the Benin Bronzes* (1984), *British Punitive Expedition* was made after the artist met Effa Okupa, a Nigerian campaigner for the restitution of the looted bronzes. Returning agency to the taken objects, Phillips wanted to show the sculptures surviving "plunder," "dispersal," and "representation" (according to the wall label in the 2016 Tate Britain exhibition *Artist and Empire*).

Brecht and Fanon were both influenced by Karl Marx's theory of capital, which posits that people are alienated from the things they produce when those things are turned into currency. This is a dimension of restitution that is addressed through the cross-cultural definitions of property and potential co-ownership. In the context of postcolonial repatriation, the strategic essentialism of autochthony creates a complex ethical field. Elizabeth Burns Coleman warns of the moral and political risk in notions of "inalienable possession," creating the law of inalienable right, which traps Indigenous people and which alienates them from freedom to participate in the market for patrimonial and sacred objects.[6] As Karl Marx writes in *Das Kapital*:

> Objects in themselves are external to man, and consequently alienable by him. In order that this alienation may be reciprocal, it is only necessary for men, by a tacit understanding, to treat each other as private owners of those alienable objects, and by implication as independent individuals. But such a state of

> reciprocal independence has no existence in a primitive society based on property in common, whether such a society takes the form of a patriarchal family, an ancient Indian community, or a Peruvian Inca State.[7]

Property

The difference between possession and inalienable property is important in the repatriation debate. It makes sense, as Bénédicte Savoy has argued, of the legal state of the claim. In German there is a distinction between the term *Besitz*, which comes from *Sitz*, meaning sitting (as the museum sits on the collection) and the term *Eigentum*, which means inalienable property belonging to the owner.[8]

The German legal system, quite unlike the American or British, is based on Roman law. In law deriving from the Latin, *Besitz* (possession) is *res propria*, which is distinct from a right in the property of another, *Eigentum* (*jus in re aliena*). Therefore *aliena* relates to inalienable property that has the right to repatriation (for example, *Herausgabeanspruch* in German law relates to the cases of art bought or inherited before the Second World War).

The object's ontology is thereby expressed in terms of possession or ownership and the different relationships these embody. This distinction also helps to explain the lack of knowledge about the possessions in the European colonial museum collections and the reasons for building a relationship with the original owners who may have that cultural knowledge. As Lilia Rivera, the then head of Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia commented, "I can understand one thing, Mexicans say it is ours, but they [Austria] have had it for five hundred years. It is their property. I don't think we should fight but find a win-win situation." To illustrate the point that El Penacho has "no context" in

Vienna, she tells me the story of when she first came to see El Penacho: "When I was fifteen, I first went to the Ethnography Museum in Vienna. There was a little Chinese restaurant around the corner, which is still there. In the restaurant after my day in the museum, they asked me, 'What can you be coming to see here? What is of interest here in Vienna for a Mexican?' People in Vienna do not care in the same way for El Penacho as they do in Mexico."[9]

Walter Benjamin wrote that "ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects."[10] Many would agree with Benjamin's statement, which he applied to collecting books, feeling the greatest intimacy with those he owned. As a Marxist, it may have been his view that the logic of European capitalism cast ownership as the most intimate relationship one could have to objects more broadly. The possessive logic is so pervasive that it is difficult to imagine a greater intimacy is possible with something that one cannot call one's own. Yet there are many contrary examples, such as things and beings that either cannot be owned or that are made to be given away. It is in the gesture of giving that intimacy is heightened between the receiver and the giver.

The intimacy one develops with something one creates also produces a possessive logic. The material and manufacturing process of the object is more familiar to those who create than to those who consume things. As a writer, was Benjamin referring to his own printed words enfolded in pages as a book-object? It is not clear whether Benjamin was referring to the greater intimacy he felt with his own books than with books written by others.

There is almost no need to assert that one owns a book one has written when the copyright of intellectual property is with the author, whereas the authorship of looted objects is alienated from their creators. The complex difference between the intimacy of ownership and the intimacy of cre-

ation becomes most apparent when the descendants of makers claim ownership over looted artifacts.

Will this identification with property be the lasting European belief, or instead is it possible to imagine a greater intimacy with something one creates or shares, or that is known, available, and culturally invigorating? It is necessary to offer a historical context to the requirement for clearer property relations. The looting, pillaging, exile, and dispossession resulting from the world wars in Europe formed the emotional backdrop to Benjamin's thinking. That the current repatriation debate still emphasizes giving back rather than giving away is part of this legacy. Yet this prioritizes European history and modes of historical repair above other modes that might be learned from cultures whose emphasis is on reciprocal relationships rather than individual material accumulation. Might we explore the ways in which ownership is not universally regarded as the most intimate relationship possible with an object? Indeed, how does this play out in the context of dispossession, in which the loss of ownership heightens the feelings of intimacy in those who may in the past have had relationships, familial or cultural, with the object. Intimacy is also sought, perhaps surprisingly, with objects in state ownership, despite their patrimonial status and the security of the vitrines that reinforce their distance from the individual. Feelings of intimacy are produced, heightened, shared, politicized, and fought over far beyond any realm of actual ownership. Would a co-ownership or repossession allow for different feelings, an intimacy that is not always reminiscent of loss and therefore painful? An intimacy that might be productive and expanded out to a larger group of people? If so, it would seem useful to think through new and expansive forms of co-ownership in order to steer beyond the conundrums of private possession in the repatriation debate.

Take, for example, the case of André Malraux, who looted the temple site Angkor Wat in Cambodia in 1923. Malraux is not a stereotypical tomb raider, but a refined Parisian intellectual who assumes he has the right to loot objects from a French colony. Cambodia's artifacts were displayed in the Paris Colonial Exposition in 1931. Malraux knows that looting is illegal officially but presumes he will not be penalized for the crime. He is not a professional thief but a white man with connections in the center of empire, and so when he gets caught, he is imprisoned only briefly in Phnom Penh. In the decade following his crime, he rose to become Charles de Gaulle's Minister of Cultural Affairs, epitomizing the politically powerful man of letters, whose attitude to colonial culture is one of entitled extraction.

One might explain Malraux's shameless tone in his novel *The Royal Way* (1930), which fictionalizes his experience of looting in Cambodia, as an anachronism. It is "of its time" for this powerful cultural minister in the French government to exploit his privilege by extracting colonial resources with utter disrespect for the integrity of the cultural property that is destroyed in the process. In horrendously vivid detail, Malraux describes in *The Royal Way* how he smashed the stone sculptures from the architecture they adorned.[11] The loosely fictionalized novel centers around a hardened colonial character, Perken (epitomized by Joseph Conrad's Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*), meeting a young man named Claude, who is based on Malraux himself.[12] Claude is in need of money and is portrayed as having a brilliant idea, which he has in fact stolen from an archaeological survey report published in France. This appropriated idea—that there must be a road or "royal way" along which these temples were built—is presented as his own romantic genius.

Even on the site of the Banteay Srei, a tenth-century shrine in the Angkor complex, Malraux does not value the

masterpiece's right to remain in context rather than be beheaded, hacked from the buildings and transported, above his own financial gain. The respected art historian is a tomb raider, and not just any historical thief but the creator of a very early conceptual call to dematerialize exhibitions into books. His *Psychologie de l'art: Le Musée imaginaire* (The Psychology of Art: The Imaginary Museum) was published in Paris in 1947, just ten years after his Cambodian "adventure."[13] In this book he argues for a museum without walls, for creating exhibitions between the covers of a book. In light of his activities—turning ancient friezes into flat transportable saleable items—this sounds like the justification for dislocation of heritage. What is the relationship between the disrespect for material in looting and his argument for book exhibitions of visual reproductions that can circulate freely?

Why in the secondary literature is Malraux's own poverty presented as a justification for looting? The same reasoning is not acceptable to international agencies currently seeking to protect world heritage sites. On the archaeological site at Angkor Wat today, the space given to the biography of Malraux over any Cambodian object or artist's biography is striking. Even the failure of his looting attempt is presented as an adventure, resonant with the racism and romanticism of Dr. Henry Walton 'Indiana' Jones Jr. at Angkor Wat in *Indiana Jones Part 2: Temple of Doom* (1984).

The temple was once again a film set in 2000, for the making of the Hollywood blockbuster *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. In exchange for use of the site, the multimillion-dollar production company had agreed to pay for much needed restoration to the temple Ta Prohm. However, the École française d'Extrême-Orient decided that Ta Prohm should be left largely as it had been found, as a "concession to the general taste for the picturesque." This meant that despite the necessary funding being available, the root system of the forest

of strangler fig trees continues to crush the building in their root systems because this appeals to the taste of tourists for the nineteenth-century sublime.

The appropriation of the twelfth-century Mahayana Buddhist monastery and university Ta Prohm, a site of actual, vigorous looting, into the Hollywood fueled imagination and game of conquest and extraction makes Angkor a ground zero for another kind of root system, one made up of colonial appropriation, theft, looting, economic gain, and cultural destruction. The violent form of material appropriation is an important precursor to later forms of cultural appropriation that are themselves colonial boomerangs, which will return throughout the course of this book.

Relational Ethics

"The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics" was commissioned as a response to a personal promise that President Emmanuel Macron made in Burkina Faso in late November 2017: "Conditions [are] to be met for the temporary or permanent restitution of African heritage to Africa from France."[14] Understandably, given its context, it does not address French colonialism in Asia or the Pacific, and focuses only on Africa. The president did not anticipate or expect the implications of the substantial and radical report subsequently produced by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy. He is reported to have been "very still" when it was delivered to him in November 2018. The magnitude of its scale and political weight became clear only once Sarr and Savoy outlined their suggestions: to restitute all objects taken in a range of colonial circumstances, including not only the spoils of war and conquest but also of exploratory "missions and scientific raids," as well as gifts from private collectors (who had acquired them as part of the privilege of

colonial occupation) and objects looted after independence and trafficked illegally on the art and antiquities market.

"The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage" is an important document that defines the scope of what should be repatriated. Many of its critics do not see the difference between its necessary first step of acknowledgment and the longer-term implementation, as well as the experiences that come with that process. Germany and the Netherlands have already responded in kind, the Netherlands promising repatriations to their former colonies. After Sarr and Savoy's report was released, its critics said it did not show a practical way forward, but it does make clear how returning historical objects will solve larger social problems left in the wake of colonialism. Ethnographic museums, primarily impacted by the report's suggestions, feel they are being criticized for their practice. In response, they argue that the urgent and time-consuming provenance work and logistically demanding necessary engagement with communities required for restitution has not been funded.

German art historical expertise has centered around provenance research, making it unsurprising that in 2019 Monica Grütters, the Commissioner for Culture and Media in the German government, dedicated 1.9 million euros to the field in response to France's moves toward repatriation. While this is certainly necessary as a first step in remedying the lack of knowledge about non-Western art in European museum archives, it does privilege a certain kind of work on those archives, which continues to support museum "business as usual." What would really supplement the lack of documentation around objects looted during colonialism, a lack due in part to the oral rather than written histories that exist in sites of violent erasure of cultural memory, would be the ability to read about them in the terms in which they were originally conceived. That, however, would be better placed

in the hands of those practicing cultural production, rather than European armchair historians.

There is an incommensurable gap between the expertise of these two groups because of longstanding lack of access to education on one side and education models that are in a format that does not teach Indigenous knowledge on the other. To argue for something other than an approach based on provenance research disturbs museums for whom this method is the backbone of their expertise, and without which their own livelihoods are not secure. In the end, the battle to repatriate or not to repatriate is fought on the level of survival, and European curators and scholars rightly sense that the validity of their position is in question. Sarr and Savoy declare a position that would not privilege provenance if a relationship to the object can be otherwise proven. This reminds us that the written record is not the only way of "knowing" an object's story. El Penacho is a prime example of this, as its own provenance is unclear and the book demonstrates how much can nevertheless be said. For people have asked me over and over, with a concerned look on their faces, "You don't think it should be returned, do you?"

I see it as a proposition.

Re-patria

The Bird in Borrowed Feathers is a fable usually attributed to Aesop, retold in Latin by Phaedrus, in which a crow or jackdaw disguises himself in peacock feathers. The black bird that tries to pass as a peacock is usually taken as an allegory for plagiarism, or empty pretensions that can be stripped away, but it reinforces the idea that wealth naturally belongs to those who hold it. This is similar to the way in which looted objects are kept by museums after they have been lost in political battles. Humans have long decorated them-

selves in feathers to connect with an imagined above, and a conquered beyond. Feathers were even used as money in some pre-Columbian cultures. The featherwork that adorns popular performers in central squares of Mexico City and in international carnivals has a more ancient referent: the feather headdress of Motecuhzoma el Magnifico of the Aztec Empire.

What does repatriation mean, and why is it important to political and artistic representation? The literal meaning of repatriation, which comes from the Latin *re* (back) and *patria* (native land), is to return to one's own country. It suggests the heat of patriotism and nationalism; ideas around origin, property ownership, and return are not becoming any less politicized in the twenty-first century. The mass mobility of objects and people due to global trade results in economic rationales for art collections to travel and return, and for the retention of objects far from their cultural contexts. It might be impossible to return after a conflict to a time and place, but the outpouring of desire to do so is urgently expressed both by artists and by activists. The voices of communities of people who enliven culture come "from below" as anthropologists of heritage David Berliner and Charlotte Joy and archaeologist Lynn Meskell argue.[15] It is necessary to weigh their reality, as it is understood through cultural heritage, with the institutional definitions that operate at the state level and often have little relevance or interest in the cultures of the communities. After the introduction of the repatriation debate, the voices of the activists and artists engaged in the campaign for the repatriation of the feather headdress from Vienna will contribute their ideas of its particular significance in their worldview. Their views are remarkably at odds with the interests of the national museums and the history of their collection during colonialism.

At the British Museum I recall being invited to debate the question Who owns culture? As in many other institutions of late, such events are knee-jerk reactions to the discourse of decolonialization. The forms of heritage and ownership familiar to modern Europeans are state, church, and the individual, but relationships of inheritance and ownership are more complicated when the colonialization of relational ways of being with ancestors and trauma are taken into account. The church crypt full of gold, relics, and bones was protected by original "curators." Long before the profession of curating art and lifestyle in the twenty-first century became fashionable, there was always the job of "keeping" collections. "Keeper" is still the name of the head curator in large collections such as those found at the British Museum and others that look to it as setting the standard.

What are the collecting and display strategies of Aboriginal peoples? Aboriginal keeping places are carefully organized and protected by the keepers who codify them. The Indigenous languages in which these collections understand themselves are not those of the universal museum, therefore it is tricky to align Indigenous knowledge with the categories and priorities established by Western science. Who is the keeper in Western society? Does the law of "finders-keepers" apply, or does the misuse of power require another law to be created that overrides the urge to keep?

Perhaps keeping is no longer the central business of museums. Outwardly it would appear that curators see their role as ensuring that communities know where their objects are: that is the ideal at least. However, the longer I have spent behind the scenes of various museums, the more evidence I see of possessive ownership among all beholden to the institution. Complexities in legal procedure and processes, as well as the potential loss of valuable resources, has made museum staff loath to actively research the provenance of objects that

might potentially trigger repatriation claims. There is an uneasiness within museums about how to appear to act ethically and avoid any costly legal proceedings. This makes our era an exciting time in which to observe how political processes are putting pressure on these institutions.

There are optimistic arguments for cultural revival through museum objects. On the other hand, Severin Fowles has argued objects are replacing people, because people have become too problematic to study, in effect salvaging the authority of Euro-American scholars at the precise moment when their claims to represent non-European people seem to be evaporating.[16]

As museums begin to comprehend that their responsibilities extend beyond their walls, they are having to adjust. However, at times achieving a shift in institutional ideas about ownership seems as likely as moving the outer perimeter of the British Museum. For example, there is even a governmental law that stipulates that none of the British Museum's holdings may be de-accessioned from its walled precincts, the principle being that a collection is kept within the museum to protect it as national patrimony for eternity. Of course the government can change and so can the law, as demonstrated in the UK by Prime Minister Tony Blair's 1999 revocation of the promised repatriation of the Elgin Marbles. As museum anthropologist Charlotte Joy writes:

> At the moment, deliberations around the return of cultural objects from the UK take in to account multiple Conventions, Acts, laws and legal principles, to name but a few: the 1954 Hague Convention, the 1970 UNESCO Convention, the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention, the 2000 Human Tissue Act, the 2009 Holocaust Act, ICOM [International Council of Museums] code of ethics, Museum Association ethics, Acts concerning the founding of museums (e.g. The British Museum Act 1963), the distinction in

> UK law between possession and ownership and so on. It is therefore very difficult for claimants to be heard amidst this sea of legal complexity. It seems that a museum would fairly easily be able to hold on to objects should they want to. Conversely, museums find it very hard to deaccession (remove from their collection) objects—sometimes because the deaccessioning would contravene their founding statutes (in the case of national museums) and in other cases because such an eventuality was not foreseen by founders of museums, so trustees would have to try and fit within existing categories that allow for deaccessioning such as duplication, damage or objects not considered of use for future research. It will probably soon be time for the UK Government to take the lead on dealing with colonial era contested collections. Following the path of reckoning over Nazi looted art, the ethical case currently being established in relation to colonial era collections will prepare the ground for legal conventions to follow.[17]

In France, a landmark case signified a major shift in the state's longstanding position that its museum treasures belong to the nation and therefore cannot be restored to their countries of origin. This view, which was formalized and protected by the Code of Heritage, had always been thought to include objects looted from foreign palaces and princely collections. Yet in 2011, after a five-year battle, the French courts ruled that a group of *toi moko* (Māori shrunken heads) should be restored to New Zealand. Such human remains subsequently became alienable from the French state in a new act that was passed by parliament.

This was made possible by a series of unpredictable events that influenced the outcome, and while the actors are different in each case, it supports the view that repatriation is in the hands of politics. In the case of the *toi moko*, Frédéric Mittérrand (who was supportive of their return) replaced

Christine Albanel (minister of culture, who was aggressively hostile to their return) just two days before the vote in the Sénat. In another sudden reversal, Stéphane Martin (director of the Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac), who first argued adamantly against the return of the *toi moko* because it threatened to become a precedent for his own collections, later took personal credit for it.[18]

The willingness of French legislators to allow the repatriation of the *toi moko* was grounded in an understanding of their cultural significance to the Māori. This illustrates that repatriations are likely to be reflective of specific historical and cultural circumstances. Those examining claims like those of the Māori must work case by case, dealing with the rights of Indigenous groups as distinct peoples.[19] Central to repatriation processes will be the political will to revise property law. Hence French legislators allowed the repatriation of the *toi moko*, finding one of the few precedents in existence in Emmanuel Macron's announcement of intention to return African heritage in France to Africa.

Two years later, the University of Birmingham followed suit, initiating a repatriation of Māori heads from the university collections to a delegation from New Zealand via the university's law department, in a ceremony held on campus. Notably those private and nonstate university collections are more agile in their ability to enact repatriations than the larger national museums. This has meant that university museums and college collections in Cambridge, Manchester, and Glasgow have also recently deaccessioned material (notably, there is no word for deaccession in French). In the Paris auctions of North American Indian "masks" around 2013 to 2015, the principle of inalienability (part of French law since 1566) was pitted against the religious rights of a whole series of North American first peoples to define (and possess) their own patrimony.

Cultural Property

Indigenous notions of property are distinct from the Western legal system's definition of property as the exclusive ownership of "things." The animist worldview, in which everything in the universe is linked by a common liveliness, suggests a different form of ownership. One of the implications of animism is that there must be an equivalent to human rights that applies to objects. To understand how objects might claim moral rights, the active subjecthood of objects, or what many scholars term the "agency" of objects, needs to be addressed.[20]

Historically human agency has been understood as separate from material objects. However, this object/personhood distinction has now been destabilized through, for example, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, which allows for more nuanced understandings of the cultural significance of objects.[21] How does human agency express itself through objects? What does the return of stolen heritage enable? In what ways do historical objects help revive a craft, practice, tradition, or cultural identity? What objects have an accrual of historical significance to humans, which thereby give them agency to maintain culture?

Aspects of an object's agency, its ability to move mimetically for example, can also be understood through testing materials using conservation methods. In the commentary on El Penacho, there is often an animistic projection of its relationships to the world. Plucking metaphors, among many other absurd images, raised in the German parliament in 1992 turned the debate over the crown into a chicken coop. This resulted in news headlines such as "Disheveled Aztec Crown: The Tattered Feather Jewel from Mexico Is Being Parliamentarily Plucked" in the *WitschaftsWoche*, prophesying the disintegration of El Penacho in the ongoing struggle over its ownership and display.[22]

Understanding artistic practices as part of a transformative shift for the material involved leads to further insights into the culture of objects as actors or agents. The evidence for this dimension of objecthood is even further removed from the legal evidence currently used in repatriation claims. But clearly there is a kind of material presence that has great influence, in and of itself, and those who copy the zigzag form from a Star of David, or a crown of Motecuhzoma, not only play an intellectual game of homage and political protest through icons but also enter the more unpredictable influence of objects in the world.

Recent research has shown that material artifacts, in an intimate relational sphere, are the locus of moral rights. As Achille Mbembe notes, from an African perspective, artifacts are not mere objects but active subjects.[23] This agency of an object thereby adds a further dimension to claims for repatriation. The notion that objects are not merely things that illustrate ideas but subjects that have their own influence and agency in the relationships they constitute is adopted in the Bill of Rights for Works of Art that Artwatch released in 1992.[24] This bill eschews restoration (which often radically alters the original object) and argues in favor of a notion of the agency and integrity of the artwork. The idea of the Bill of Rights for Works of Art as equivalent to bills of human rights needs to be interrogated in regard to the law used to justify restoration, which is often an instrument of political power. The Bill of Rights for Works of Art seeks to criminalize restorations that undermine a work of art's inalienable right to remain where and as it is. By treating the artwork as an entity with inalienable rights, it implicitly makes a comparison with the Bill of Human Rights from which the Artwatch bill derives its title.

Yet for most of us it is difficult to perceive reciprocal affects—such as love—from "inanimate" things. Because the object cannot speak to us in our language, we think we can-

not gauge the agency it possesses. We do not seem to know whether it has a life and whether it can be seen to reciprocate. There are extreme examples of those who have overcome this difficulty, like Erika Eiffel, who married and lived in a sexual relationship with the Eiffel Tower, or more precisely, with models of the tower that she had built. Erika Eiffel identifies with a sexuality that has been termed "objektophilia" by experts in California. Such preferences may seem absurd and illustrate the difficulties that may arise with the creation of a universal bill of rights for objects. Because how can we know whether the Eiffel Tower was ever in love with Erika?

Animists have no qualms in attributing agency to an object that might help or harm a person. In exchange, humans ventriloquize for objects. The activists and artists, the lawyers and museums also speak for what they claim the object wants. The voices of their human clients, the market, and the politics of the state enter the conversation with another range of unheard voices. To the polemicized opposition between the perspectives of archaeologists and museum curators toward looted art can be added the oft-occluded perspectives on repatriation of Indigenous non-European stakeholders.

The term "inalienable" describes the inseparableness of an object from a person or a group's identity. This has been studied by linguists such as Lévy-Bruhl, who found in 1914 that Melanesian languages have two types of nouns distinguished by a prefix to indicate the difference between alienable and inalienable things.[25] The inalienable relates to parts of the body, kin, and spatial relationships and objects closely related to a person (and all other nouns were presented by a free possessive morpheme). These certain things, such as the body, family, and the home and its contents, are the inalienable right of their owners to possess and control. It is the objects, in this intimate relational sphere, that are in

possession of moral rights and are thus justified in claims for repatriation. The inalienable is interpreted in two ways, that which cannot be transferred and cannot be waived.

Making things and land alienable through capital, through the transformation of these once inalienable beings into equivalents in money, is what Karl Marx theorized in *Das Kapital*.[26] Vladimir Lenin would later modify Marx's economic theories by describing the function of financial capital in profiting from colonialism in his 1917 book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*.[27] Marx spoke about alienation and predicted the kinds of alienation people would experience when their labor and everything associated with them became a currency rather than something they had intrinsic possession of. Dispossession of land and things became a dispossession of time, place, and sense of self. A process of disalienation is the attempt to regain some of these relationships to land, things, and people, likewise alienated through capitalism and colonialism.

De-universalizing: The Polemics against Repatriation

At the center of the ontological divide that exists in the process of decolonization is the assumption that the museum in possession of a collection can assimilate it into a universal understanding. Yet it is clear from research conducted on colonial collections that holders' knowledge about them is scant and lacks the cultural context that could place them within the ontologies in which they were created. Being put on display, without the power to determine that display, has a perverse history from colonial exhibitions to zoos and anthropology museums that persistently attract audiences with their spectacles of othering.

The universal museum privileges the art historical value

of the collector but does not offer narratives beyond a European biography and a moment of reception history. Former director of the British Museum David M. Wilson described the institution as a universal museum that stands as a "museum for *all* nations."[28] This is the ideal rather than the defined neutrality that the encyclopedic museum propagates—because this "universal model institution" is actually, and revealingly, called the "British" Museum and sits in the center of London.

The debate over repatriation has drawn the heads of museums and archaeologists into polemical opposition. Museum directors such as Neil McGregor, Philip de Montebello, and James Cuno eloquently defend the universal museum against claims that might jeopardize their institutions' ownership of treasures and have based their careers on their opposition to repatriation. Their reactionary turn to universalism undermines the affective and healing potential of repatriation.[29] Ariella Aïsha Azoulay has written about the "Declaration on the Importance and Values of Universal Museums" signed by eighteen directors of major museums in the United States and Europe in 2004:

> Not surprisingly, the category used by museum directors, boards, and staff to counter restitution claims is "retention." The choice of a rival word that shares the prefix "re" is not innocent. It seeks to impose a kind of symmetry between two sides in a dispute, and rather than substantively engage with restitution claims, responds to them superficially in order to bury them as soon as possible and be able to pursue business as usual, as if the reasons for restitution should have no impact on the museum profession. In both cases, the prefix "re" serves to refer to a prior situation and to anchor a claim in it: museums seek to retain, to keep holding, what is already in their hands, while those who push for restitution seek recognition of their initial ownership of the object.[30]

Setting the universal against the national is a powerful argument. It allows James Cuno to say that all claims upon objects from universal museums are driven by nationalism. Since nations are relatively recent constructs, the authenticity of original objects is seen as clear defense against cooptation into these "imagined communities." Cuno begins his book *Who Owns Antiquity?* with an image of the Parthenon Marbles and quotes from the key theorists of nationalism: Benedict Anderson, Anthony D. Smith, and Nayan Chanda.[31] Especially useful to Cuno is the skeptical position of the British-Ghanaian philosopher Anthony Kwame Appiah, who cleverly outlines the unknowns of provenance and purpose and the certainty that the modern nation-states did not exist at the time of the objects' creation.

With the shift in museology to include Indigenous curatorial voices, national museums have become more representative of "the people" who Appiah says are conflated with the nation. The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (MAA) at the University of Cambridge, under Nicholas Thomas's directorship, became supportive of this move to bring Indigenous voices into the museum through well-funded research projects. By writing grants that brought teams of Pacific and Indigenous researchers from the former British dominions, MAA gathered and disseminated valuable knowledge about their collections without repatriating them.

The closest, though not comparable, gesture is that of digital repatriation. With the Trawoolawai artist Julie Gough, I embarked on a conceptual artist's take on digital repatriation as the anthropology museums had conceived of them around the early 2010s. This was a long process, not without its frustrations. The idea was to document all of the Tasmanian surface archaeology and then place a printed photograph of each item in the location where it had been collected. Julie Gough did brilliant historical research, a complement to her sophisticated art practice. She found the locations and ascribed

their Indigenous names where possible, attaching new labels to the rocks, which we put on display in the MAA.[32] Stretching the museum's technical capacities, we installed webcams on the digital photographs, documenting their decay in their locations outside in Tasmania. This was a slow, poetic reflection on the fate of the digital and nondigital repatriate. The Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, the Maritime Museum London, and the National Museum of Australia are among other museums that have taken initiative to invite Indigenous artists and researchers to work critically on their collections.

Nevertheless, as Dan Hicks has written in *The Brutish Museums*, "Where discipline does come into things is where the academic fields of anthropology and archaeology repress the knowledge of the brutality of 'acquisition' in the form of loot, knowledge that, when we see it, shatters our image of the museum, forces us to question ourselves, to question what the curation of 'world culture collections' today actually means."[33]

There are museum curators who are not staunchly opposed to repatriation but excitedly tell stories of its failure. Maybe it is my own insistence on addressing the topic that gets these conversations so heated that the museum directors take cover behind its walls and laws; they do not want to be responsible for any damage during their tenure.

"We gave back a Māori head," one director of a European museum told me, "and they keep writing each year with a standard request; they don't even bother to change the letter." This director is particularly irritated by the lack of differentiation and lack of respect shown to him. He wants something back, something in return for the repatriation that was made before his arrival in the museum. In his return letters he asks where the Māori head is now, and he says he receives no reply. He wrote to the embassy in New Zealand, and they were the only ones to respond with a letter of

thanks for the repatriation. He concludes that the Māori do not actually care about the head. He is not going to repatriate anything further because they have failed to reply to his demands to know where the head now resides. "What about the possibility that they don't want to tell you where the head is?" I respond. It is a hot day. We are sitting in the sun and he is drinking wine, but the emotional temperature goes up far beyond the effects of wine in the heat––the loss of control over possessions and gift-giving processes can certainly drive people wild.

One might say the museum director and I, having a conversation in the sunshine, are "working" with the collection. We have a break to discuss the individual fields in which we are toiling. We think of ourselves as making things "work" in the process of our discussion, like making fallow land productive through labor. Rather than leaving objects from the collection lying unseen in underground suspension, our working with them justifies them being kept, in much the same way that settler agriculture was used to justify the dispossession of Indigenous people from their land during colonization.

The museum director tells me a second story to try and convince me of the validity of his stance on repatriation. A collection of Peruvian mummies was offered for sale to the European museum. The museum declined but was then offered them for free. The museum declined again but offered to mediate the return of the collection to Peru. Two archaeologists from Peru came in a delegation to assess the mummies. Such mummies are among the most terrifying objects I have ever encountered in a storeroom. The ones in the Dahlem Museum in Berlin are simply bodies: crunched up but very recognizable as human beings, cowering on the shelves as if just recently deceased, with all the necessary rituals omitted.

The archaeologists from Peru visited, wrote their report,

and the government selected some of the mummies to be returned. Others remained and were buried in a named grave in a Swiss cemetery. Time passed and the image of one of the Peruvian mummies went viral on the internet, with reports that started in Peru then spread further afield and picked up on the "indecent" burial of the remaining mummies in the Swiss cemetery. The director is getting heated again, this story of the undead is not terribly clear, but the problems are familiar. The archaeologists recommended the return of all the mummies, but the government concealed this, perhaps for reasons as banal as transportation costs. Once again, the museum is made to look responsible, despite its limited role as mediator, and is left feeling politically manipulated.

The issues around repatriation highlight the legal or clinical detachment of the institution toward the material life, the lived history of an object and its previous owner. In the confusion of ethics and economics, in the debate about ownership and repatriation, a disentanglement of what is possible from what is desirable might reveal what is meant by wanting something "back." The question of repatriation is therefore one of historical loss and contemporary gain.

Dacia Viejo-Rose writes of the dislocation of material culture, in which it becomes "like a divining instrument tracing for the lifelines of the territory from which it came, yet its stillness seems to indicate the broken connection between the object and the territory, a distance of time, space and meaning, too vast now for the dialogue to start up again. This silence has an effecting presence, for without the conversation, the references linking objects and places remain dislocated. What does reunion look like when both object and place have changed?"[34]

In the case of El Penacho the "reunion" Viejo-Rose speaks of sometimes takes the form of collective protest outside the museum. At other times, Mexican visitors put their hands

on the glass of the vitrine and speak to El Penacho. Through these gestures, the holy and resplendent green feathers, once part of sixteenth-century collections of early colonial featherwork, are now part of the history of the encyclopedic display and part of the modern museum. A set of deeper continuities exists between the sixteenth and twenty-first century collections. This is not only a post-Holocaust moment in which repatriation has come into the light; there are older exchanges, styles of collection and relationships to be considered, which realign possible futures.

The universalism that the museum claims is in fact itself partial to a particular philosophy that is in no way universal. Humanism, which has existed in a parallel space and time, cannot explain to us the humanitarian thinking of other cultures. This is another reason why place is of critical importance when assessing the rights of objects. For while the universal museum idea lives on in the extraction of objects from their locations, there is a strong counterargument that every excavation puts those objects in danger, particularly within a dominant power of scientific collection that will in turn degrade the meanings of objects both in the present and in the future.

The critics of repatriation cling to universalism and cite the likes of Terence's famous statement "I am human and I think nothing human is alien to me" alongside other pompous voices from Greco-Roman antiquity.[35] Pop art historian Tiffany Jenkins does just this in her book *Keeping Their Marbles*. Notably, the Wikipedia entry cut-and-paste job that Jenkins does in this book shows in every regurgitation of standard (and often dated) history that so much is incommensurable without a deeper engagement. The first chapter of *Keeping Their Marbles* tells the history of the British Museum's earliest collections through popular misconceptions of the history of Captain Cook. It appears that all the work

of scholars on the Pacific in recent years, who have nuanced and complicated this heroic narrative of British imperialism, is alien or at least unknown to a polemic like the one adopted by Jenkins.

The process of de-universalizing positions on the European Enlightenment ideals of universality differentiates them as belonging to a particular historical moment, along with other historical ontologies around the world that would have very different understandings of the same collection. This form of decolonization levels the scholarship that is included in public history by not focusing on the rejection of the Enlightenment as every reversal is also a kind of reaffirmation which meanwhile already has a long European intellectual history. What is missing is a deeper knowledge of those traditions of thought and ways of being, or as I am terming them, 'indigenous ontologies'.

The Museum as Jail

Xokonoschtletl, the leader of the protestors who gather outside the museum in Vienna, has made the repatriation of El Penacho back to Mexico his life's work. He has organized forty-five public demonstrations in Vienna while living just across the border in Germany for many years to avoid arrest for his campaign for the return of Motecuhzoma's crown (fig. 2.2). Xokonoschtletl told me the following when I interviewed him in Mexico: "Police hit us and put us in jail in 1993. The director of the museum called the police and told the police to put us in jail, saying we belong in there, we are not human. He was mad and arrogant."

This arrogance expresses itself in various ways in its attempt to undermine Xokonoschtletl's protest. Historian Ferdinand Anders describes him as a foreign tour guide, trumping up Austrian colonial history in *Fremdenfuerherlatein*

FIGURE 2.2 Lisl Ponger, "Mexico was against Hitler's march into Austria in 1938 . . . already forgotten??" Banner in demonstration organized by Xokonoschtletl, 2005. Stephansplatz, Vienna.

(foreign tour guide Latin), in order to embellish the image of Xokonoschtletl as a "mad" opportunist and nationalist.[36] Anders dismisses his arguments as stemming from the Mexicanidad movement that unified Indigenous groups in the Americas beyond the boundaries of their acknowledged territories (which were often forcibly allocated in any case).

In our interview, Xokonoschtletl continued: "Our work was doubled because both Mexican and Austrian governments were unsure. The government of Mexico is more difficult as it did not recognize it as a crown. The Austrian press was asking us why our government was not supporting us."

The Austrian press has covered this repatriation case over many decades in a range of exoticizing and perplexing short reports. There are no first nations writers among the Viennese intellectuals, because there are few living connections between Mexico and the Austrian state today. This is a notably different situation from that of the settler colonies in the former British dominions of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, where Indigenous voices are now guiding curatorial and public funding decisions. Xokonoschtletl explains:

> We are between two states, neither of which support us. The people are ignorant, they present the Aztecs as savages, with human sacrifices, gods, killing others. Yet many of these myths do not exist. There were never human sacrifices. There was no 'God' in our language. I am telling a different story. I want them to wake up. Meanwhile the government wants us to stay stupid, like Germans—work, work, work, but don't say anything. Germans and Austrians are nice, but very passive.
>
> How silly to say "Spain is the Motherland." Most Mexicans know this history and that is why they are ashamed to be what they are. But this thing is our mother country.
>
> The same history that is told in Spain about our people is also told here in Mexico. History has been rewritten and it is sad because ignorant people are like blind people.

History in Mexico has been rewritten several times. José Vasconcelos's *The Cosmic Race* (1925) argues that the mestizo mixed race population of Indigenous and "Anglo" descent will become *la raza cosmica* (the superior fifth race).[37]

FIGURE. 2.3 Xokonoschtletl at a demonstration, 1992. Xokonoschtletl personal archive.

Vasconcelos revitalized Mexico City as Minister of Public Education (1921–1924) with the murals he commissioned from Diego Rivera and other artists. For the Palace of Public Education in Mexico he commissioned allegorical murals of "the four civilizations of Spain, Mexico, Greece and India . . . the four great contemporary races: The white, the red, the black and the yellow," leading to the culmination in "the final race" in America. He continues in *The Cosmic Race* to explain: "Finally, in the center, a monument should have been raised that in some way would symbolize the law of the three states: The material, the intellectual and the aesthetic."

This text became controversial for several reasons. The emphasis on racial difference evidently heightened an already extreme distinction between white, mestizo, and "indio." At the same time, this flattens what Gayatri Spivak would later call the "strategic essentialism" that Indigenous groups seek to maintain autonomy.[38] Vasconcelos went on to become a contact for those on the run from Vienna and in exile in Mexico.

Xokonoschtletl contrasts the sonically and physically different ontologies of dancing a waltz from Vienna and of the pre-Hispanic dances: "The crown is a symbol in a process of rewriting history. You will see the people believe in symbols. They are spiritual people; rather than knowing about our own symbols, they look to Jesus or Maria. These Spaniards made it possible that our people destroy our own symbols, made in places in Mexico hundreds of years before Spanish people came. We are talking about five hundred years of brainwashing: many generations. Many, many Mexicans are ashamed to be traditional dancers, but they are not ashamed to dance a waltz from Vienna."

The Viennese waltz, as embodied and imported by the empress and emperor, Carlota and Maximillian, lingers today in contemporary art works. One example, Enrique Méndez

de Hoyos's video *Tiempo sagrado*, was shown in the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 2010. The video enacts the Austrian crown's final waltz on a barren hilltop, Cerro de las Campanas. The landscape in this video has the same stark lack of depth the characterizes the Manet paintings of Maximillian's execution. It provides an empty theatrical set, on which, in a black funerary costume and wearing a white brooch, the soon-to-be-psychotic princess dances with her soon-to-be-deceased husband, the emperor of Mexico. The culture symbolized by the Viennese waltz is a haunting tableau.

The erasure of Indigenous culture through shaming and the assimilation of social performances such as dance, along with the particular rhythms and bodies they train, are a familiar basis for dissent. Xokonoschtletl describes the contradiction of Mexicans being both proud and ashamed of their Indigenous heritage. On one hand it is being marketed by international embassies and tourist organizations as exotic, colorful, vibrant, and for sale; on the other, Indigenous people are instrumentalized, merchandised, and packaged in a way that does harm to their actual lives. Those lives are led in poverty, without access to the services that might be theirs if they were indeed respected in ways commensurate to their culture's appropriation in national celebrations. These are reserved for moments in which it is convenient to show that there was not a complete genocide, that Europe did not successfully colonize Mexico and that what remains today is an image of resistance.

It is against this form of government that activists like Xokonoschtletl fight. Against the hypocrisy of using El Penacho for ubiquitous signs all over Mexican popular culture: from the Motecuhzoma beer, to the Motecuhzoma subway station, to the National Museum. Everywhere, Motecuhzoma

lives on in banal circulations and consumable objects. The protestors seek to regain agency in the access, definition, and representation of Aztec culture.

The performances of feather headdresses embody culture in ways that are instrumentalized politically and commercially. Xokonoschtletl claims: "The government doesn't give a damn about our wisdom, it's not to be sold. For us wisdom is the most important thing: the world needs wisdom. People read but they don't act, they don't make. Many people have ears but they don't hear."

In none of the various publications about El Penacho has Xokonoschtletl, or any of the other protestors, been interviewed. Yet the collection of newspaper clippings in Ferdinand Anders's archive attests to the irritation he causes them. As Xokonoschtletl stresses: "This is oral history, and it's important. It is no longer about the crown. It is now the case that in Mexico there could be a whole change, especially in the politics. That is why the crown is not here. Because the politics were held up. They were marionettes, one can move them like puppets."

Xokoschotletl argues that on the level of politics, the people and the object involved are puppets, manipulated in a power game. This further reduces the cultural, social, and spiritual importance that the image of the feather headdress holds for him, and for others frustrated by the politics and commerce of heritage at an international level. What is required is to follow the strings, to find the hands that control the political puppetry of this repatriation claim in different directions.

As Xokoschotletl emphasizes, the rejection of colonial renaming of Indigenous things and places is an ongoing battle. He criticizes the logic of violent colonial displacement and demarcation of space, making comparison with Zócalo, the central square in Mexico City, where the colonial buildings of the modern city are layered on top of Aztec ruins. For de-

spite filling in its lakes and canals and leveling its pyramid, Cortés maintained the essential structure of Mexico City, its grid of streets radiating out from a central square to the four cardinal directions that are central to Aztec thinking. Hence, many of the key figures who argue for a repatriation to Mexico agree with Xokoschotletl, that the feather headdress

> must return to the middle of the sacred city, in the middle of that place. It must go in the museum [at Huey Teocalli / Temple Mayor], for many reasons. It is so valuable, it must be secure. The most important museum is where the middle of the holy city of Tenochitlan was, near the Cathedral, inside our holy city. It is very near Temple Mayor, it is stupid to call it by this Spanish name. It was built before the Spanish arrived. It is called Huey Teocalli, in our way of thinking it has its own name and is full of symbolism. Place is holy and the crown is holy.
>
> It was a holy city that was turned into a market. You are sitting on corpses. Children are crying. Women were killed.
>
> [The headdress] is not supposed to be called *Penacho*, which means "punish." "Penacho" is an unspeakable part of a woman. It should be *Corona, Corona Real* (crown, royal crown).

To the staff of the Weltmuseum in Vienna, Xokonoschtletl embodies the threat of hostile community claims, leading some of them to tell me that he is "crazy."[39] On the other side of the debate, it is not surprising that Xokonoschtletl finds engaging with the museum, let alone engaging with the state, maddening, as his personal identity is entangled with the politics of nation building. In such a situation the self is projected onto the state in an act of extreme identification, something that happens particularly to Indigenous people because of their dispossession from the land. Destabilized mental states are a common response to living through political troubles that make self-realization impossible.

Xokonoschtletl tries to initiate dialogue with the museum

that he protests in front of, to no effect: "They are directors of a jail, not a museum. I had an interview with Christian Feest when he was director, and he walked out of the interview. The former museum director Hans Manndorf tried to mock the Mexicans as 'grasshoppers,' 'Springboecke' and 'Praerieindijaner.'"

Describing the Weltmuseum as a jail, not a museum, implies there is a living consciousness in the resident museum objects. If the museum is indeed a jail, then all those within it are convicts, serving time either behind the glass of the vitrine or acting as gatekeepers to it. To equate the contents of the museum with those punished within the penal system is to position Indigenous artifacts as dissidents, in opposition to the political norms, enemies of the state. It is expected, and even "necessary," that a hostile "other" should challenge the museum-state. This seems paradoxical until one experiences the position of the outsider, who is both invited in as a critical voice and denied any agency to change the actual operational structure of the museum. This strategy of paying lip service to decolonial discourse makes sense of the creative, and sometimes outlandish, suggestions made by the museum's directors. For example, in a twist to the much-discussed notions of the museum as embassy or sovereign territory, the Weltmuseum director Christian Schickelgruber suggested designating the Gallery of Three Nations (where El Penacho is sited) as a territory of Mexico. This appropriates the oft-articulated idea that objects in museums represent their nation-states internationally, creating portals of connection between places. But would El Penacho act as a diplomat or a hostage in this case? As the many examples of dissidents seeking asylum in embassies—from Cardinal Mindzenty to Ang Sung Su Qui and Julian Assange—demonstrate, those who seek protection in the extraterritorial sovereignty of the embassy often become prisoners.[40]

Whether El Penacho is seen as an envoy in the free public space of the museum, or whether being held there is symbolic of the removal of Indigenous sovereignty, is a matter of perspective. Xokonoschtletl would say that since this museo-embassy has no real political power or meaning, it does not give the Mexican people anything. It merely reinforces the experience of alienation that many recount. In contrast to museums fabulating sovereign space within their walls, the powerful legacy of repatriation is that it is a real act of transferring value, ownership, power, and thereby agency.

Relative to a museum resident like El Penacho—*resident* might be a better term than *object*, as it is also the preferred name for detained migrants—raises the interesting question of how, and by whom, sovereignty is recognized. The framing devices of the national museum keep tight control on the objects housed within it, and thereby the sovereignty of the object is defined by the nation-state and is secondary to the decisions made by that nation-state about how it is stored, displayed, and interpreted. Chapter 3 focuses on those framing devices that the museum employs in order to further understand the forms of sovereignty that might be claimed.

In 2017 the museum tried to shift shape from being the "Ethnographic Museum" of Vienna by renaming itself Weltmuseum Wien (World Museum Vienna). "The crown is heart and brain of that museum," Xokonoschtletl told me jokingly, responding to the name change. "That's why they changed their name: Diebesgut Museum Wien (Loot Museum Vienna)."

Weltmuseum Wien (the actual new name of the museum) has a strange ring to it, in the sense that the *Wien* part is the provincial adage separated from the *Welt* (world) by the *Museum*. For curators in the museum, Claudia Augustat says it was important to qualify that this was specifically about the world as seen from Vienna. It is unclear what the rebranding

brings, as it has changed neither institutional practice nor the public's perceptions of the museum. It remains largely empty of local visitors and a site of pilgrimage for Mexicans and a few other tourists.

"I don't know whether to laugh or cry," Xokonoschtletl tells me.

> Most Mexicans, 90 percent, don't even know what Mexico means. They don't know how to pronounce Meshishko.
>
> Austria is a very rich country, but it has nothing. Mexico is a poor country, but it has everything. We need to change our mind, our spirit, our way of thinking. Away from being a copy of Spaniards, a copy of English, of Austrians, of Europeans. We have our own food, animals, music. We don't need to be someone that we are not.
>
> The government of Mexico is so stupid that still today the people in the schools look outside of our country. They forgot inside. That's why they show Aztec and Maya culture to many people around the world. What do they do with them? They are alive! Most of the time they are ashamed of themselves, those poor Indians, they don't know what to do. They have incredible knowledge about medicine, about astronomy. And I'm talking about now. On one side they are proud, on the other they are ashamed.
>
> Aztecs were the same as many other high cultures in the world, yet their knowledge was perhaps more than other countries.

When Xokonoschtletl tells me "the crown is medicine," he is referring to a set of ritual practices used to heal and to align the self with the world. As medicine heals physical wounds, cultural medicine heals cultural wounds; in this case those inflicted specifically on Indigenous culture by colonization. In Mexico, there is a sense of well-being derived from a multiplicity of beliefs and stories associated with ancestors that are known by name, valued for what they believed, and who

did not convert to monotheism. "The crown has different symbolism," Xokonoschtletl continues, "but it represents our old history and also our destruction. That is exactly why only the feather crown can help for our history to be once again written for us, for all ancestors, for our teachers to see our new sun."

Traditional medicine in Mexico includes the cultivation of plants and other nonhuman agents in the world, the health of which also makes for a healthy human sphere. This is unlike the West, where medicine only includes the ingested cures made to treat physical ailments. The feathers, when worn by a priest who would be responsible for the health of people, can thereby also be medicine. The passing away of the spiritual power of the priest or ruler who would have worn El Penacho is also perceived as the source of disease. Herein the destructive aspect of the crown's absence is felt and articulated, although as a reason for repatriation it remains esoteric to the quasi-scientific museum. The over-determined burden of significance placed on the crown thus includes this priestly power, as well as the end of the Aztec Empire and the extinction of a species of a most precious bird, hunted for the feathers needed to create such headdresses.

In an experience that he likened to a phone call from Atlantis, the Mexican author Álvaro Enrigue wrote that when he saw the traditional featherwork in the *El vuelo de las imágenes: Arte plumario en México y Europa, 1300–1700* exhibition in Museo Nacional de Arte México, he hallucinated another world.[41] What did the other world say in this "phone call from Atlantis"? Did it speak of a place and a time that we have lost touch with? Enrigue's use of the featherwork as a portal to the past symbolizes the lost world of Atlantis, resonates with the early modern idea that Francis Bacon expressed in his book *New Atlantis* (1627), in which he speculated that Mexico was in fact the site of Atlantis.[42] For Bacon,

the raid known as the "discovery" of the New World was followed by the projection of an ideal society where all inhabitants shared a harmonious happiness. Mexico has turned out not to be Atlantis, but an echo of the lost world fable remains to this day in the discourse around the Aztec Empire. Within the complex logic of the fabulated Aztec Atlantis, the crown is medicine and possesses the potential to heal the effects of colonialism.

3

The View from the Vitrine

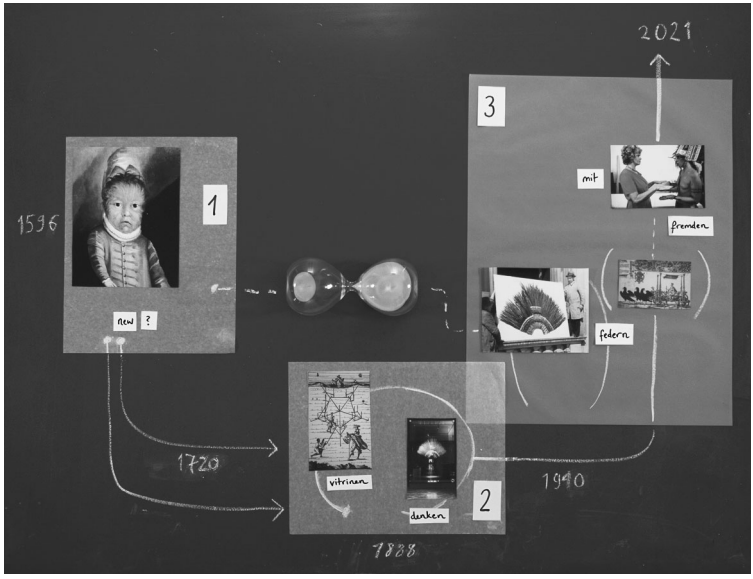

FIGURE 3.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer, 2020.

El Penacho, the fragile feather headdress that is the focus of this book, cannot be encountered except through the lens of the vitrine, its architecture of thick glass a barrier between it and us. As Jacques Derrida has argued, parerga, such as the frames of paintings, are supplementary to works of art, but

they are not easily detached from them and instead form an ambiguous unity with the works, framing our perception and understanding of them.[1] The vitrine, it might be said, holds the object it displays in a "parergonic embrace."[2]

Since the sixteenth century, the headdress has passed through numerous vitrines and, indeed, at the time of this writing, has just been installed in another, specially designed for it, in a new gallery of the Weltmuseum in Vienna. While the object itself might appear to remain the same, it could also be said to change according to the interpretive context that each vitrine produces. The three vitrines examined in this chapter represent three moments in a greater movement: between the sixteenth-century *Wunderkammer*, the soft politics of postwar international relations, and the potential of copies to break free of institutional framings altogether.

The use of the vitrine distinguishes the museum from other spaces in which social or sacred practices engage material objects. It is justified by conservation demands, strengthened by technological advances, enforced by national law, and institutionalized by design. It demands particular attention and asserts particular value, affecting the art object or collection on display. In some cases it may be more modern, more valuable, and more visually and physically present than the actual object it displays. The vitrine is in this sense a parergon: that which, as Derrida writes, like the picture frame or the sculptural plinth, is "against, beside, and above and beyond the ergon, the work accomplished, the accomplishment of the work."[3] Such display elements are a visual cue to read whatever they frame as desirable, aesthetic, and elevated.

In its in-betweenness, the vitrine exists outside the flow of time, demonstrating only the potential for suspension between states. It blurs the image with its own age, with the

historical specificity of its design—the *Wunderkammer* for instance is instantly dated as pre-Enlightenment—and the failure to replace an old vitrine can make a museum look self-conscious, a museum of a museum, like the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England.

The glass of the vitrine, which lies between the artifact it contains and the viewer, is the epistemic membrane crystallized around an object. In the vitrinized relationship between "us"—modern, civilized, mobile—and "them"—ancient, primitive, immobile—lies a cognitive alienation preventing identification and embodiment. Glass walls provide the most insidious kind of alienation: transparent yet impenetrable, they are the ultimate medium of modern consumer display. In the Weltmuseum, the vitrine is a parergon of another world, the frame that frames the gap between colonized object and the completeness of context.

El Penacho—the plume—is the oldest-known Aztec feather headdress. Claimed traditionally if somewhat doubtfully to be the crown of the Aztec king Motecuhzoma, it shimmers in the breeze, like the bird from whose feathers it is made. Since the age of the *Wunderkammer*, however, it has hovered in a succession of glass cases designed to resist movement and still the forces that might cause it to disintegrate into thousands of small feather particles. Encased in glass, this prize of colonial conquest is held in suspended animation between Austria and Mexico.

In its original context, the movement of the crown's plumes activated connections with invisible spirits, and it was worn with the understanding that ancestors born by the wind were articulated in the movement of its feathers. The glass of the vitrine intervenes in the relationship between spirits in the wind and feathers worn as the spirits' avatars. From the viewpoint of conservation science, the wind that moves through the matter it buffets is purely destructive.

El Penacho's feathers already weathered movement during journey to Europe, which is registered in the delicate but strong structure. The same wind that bore the ancestors caught the Spanish boat between Central America and Europe, and the sea-swell as it sailed from Veracruz must have caused damage to its fragile cargo, buckling El Penacho's feathers into shapes of resistance.

While El Penacho's attribution to Motecuhzoma drifts in a fog of missing historical evidence, time lapses, and anachronisms of interpretation, to Mexicans the headdress marks out the space of the absent form of their heroic emperor, embodying the end of the Aztec Empire itself. It is one of the very few feather artifacts that has survived from the time of the conquest and is certainly typical of the regalia that Motecuhzoma and his priests wore. The crown's life therefore begins in a period of violent change for the Aztecs, corresponding with the overthrow of their empire in 1521. At this time the Aztec world was fundamentally transformed, and material things such as El Penacho are stubborn reminders that, as contemporary Maya would say, "*Weyanone*" (or in Spanish, "*Aqui estamos*")—we are still present.

The passage of El Penacho from the New World to the Old did not leave a paper trail. It does not appear in the list of things Hernán Cortés acquired in Mexico. Historians have yet to find mention in any ship's records of a feather headdress in its inventory of possessions amassed in Mexico and bound for Europe.[4] Nor has the hand that took the feather headdress left a line for us to identify him by. It is described for the first time in a 1575 inventory of the Swabian Count Ulrich von Montfort zu Tettnang's collection among "all sorts of Moorish armory and featherwork" (*Allerlei mörsche Rüstung von Federwerk*).[5] It was subsequently acquired by the Habsburg archduke Ferdinand II, when he purchased part of Montfort's collection. In the 1596 inventory of Fer-

dinand's still extant cabinet of curiosities in Ambras Castle, Innsbruck, the feather headdress is recorded under the similar classification of "Moorish hat." In the age of the *Wunderkammer*, "Moorish" was used as a general term meaning "foreign," and the collections from the Americas and Africa were often identified as such. Thus El Penacho went from being the material avatar of Aztec spirits, inspired by the spectacle of the quetzal, to becoming a vitrinized signifier of global power, wrongly categorized as Moorish.

Vitrine 1: Schloss Ambras, Innsbruck, 1595

Schloss Ambras, in the Tyrolian Alps, is the site of the *Wunderkammer* of Archduke Ferdinand, the oldest of the few such Renaissance collections both still intact and in situ. As the son of the emperor at the height of the Habsburg Empire, Ferdinand was able to collect widely, and he installed his *Wunderkammer* in the castle he gifted to his wife, Philippine Welser. The work of a cultured romantic rather than the spoils of military prowess, this *Wunderkammer* in the classic sense displays art together with science, the regional together with the exotic. Among the wonders included from the distant Americas was El Penacho. The feather as a material was so valuable to the Aztecs, it was used as currency; it was costly also to Ferdinand II when he bought the feather headdress and accrued further value through its Habsburg provenance.

In the sixteenth century, there does not seem to have been a hierarchy in the way the objects in these *Wunderkammer* were organized. In one case after another, material was classified according to type—gold, silver, feathers; but incommensurable objects—Turkish costumes, china, crocodiles—were also lumped together in displays falling somewhere between ignorance and order. At Schloss Ambras, the vitrines of the

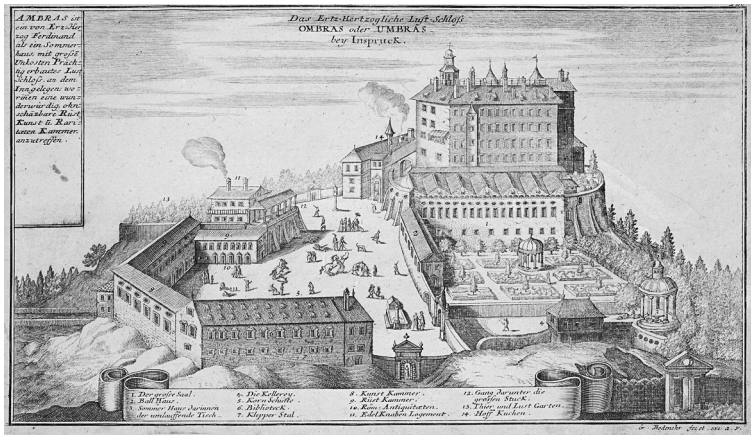

FIGURE 3.2 Matthäus Merian, "Schloss Ambras." Engraving from *Topographia Provinciarium Austriacarum*, 1649. Wikimedia Commons.

Wunderkammer are the kind of beautiful custom carpentry that is now fetishized as antique; floor to ceiling glass cases in rooms specially fitted for the purpose of display. The spectator pleasures available in this court moved easily between play-fights and the aesthetic treasures of a world discovered and conquered. The wealth of the New World colonies was distilled into containers, while the craftsmanship of European artists provided it with parerga. Here, European scientific instruments lay beside the ritual artifacts of animists, unfettered by later evolutionary arguments, and the leveling effect of such vitrine displays are given in defense of the Eurocentrism of the *Wunderkammer*.

Visual stimulation was part of the larger experience of court life at Ambras. Walking through its *Wunderkammer* today, the visitor is left with an impression of great delicacy, wonderful artistry, and a deep fascination in the extremes of nature and culture. These, if anything, provide the signature style of the *Wunderkammer*. Behind glass in a vitrine of their own and sometimes behind a red velvet curtain—a further framing device—a natural marvel could be encoun-

tered as *imponderabilia*; beyond understanding. Vitrines painted with brightly colored backgrounds, dramatically lit, made the *Wunderkammer* not only spectacular to sixteenth-century viewers but at times frightening. *Mirabilia*—things that inspired wonder, including people living with physical deformities and freakish bodies—were used to set off other wonders of nature. Paintings of unicorns and of *Haarmenschen*—the term then used to describe people with hypertrichosis—were hung with pride in the collection.

On occasion, Ferdinand, Philippine, and their guests would take objects out of the vitrines and use them. Blackface masks, for example, were worn in play-battles with the "Moors" that were staged in the courtyard outside the *Wunderkammer*. The Siege of Algiers in 1541, at which Cortés was present, was one inspiration for such theatrical battles. In cabinet 9 of the Ambras Castle collection was El Penacho, then claimed to be a Moorish skirt, or perhaps a hat; it was not certain, hence cabinet 9 was dedicated to the category *Varia*, variety. The *Varia* were exhibited between cabinets displaying precious metals and stones that had been shaped by European craftsmen into a contortion between *Naturalia* and *Artificialia*. The aesthetic frisson of these things lay in the play between objects that had occurred naturally and human-made artifacts. Motecuhzoma's feather headdress was displayed in cabinet 9, alongside bundles of bird of paradise feathers, examples of *Naturalia*. The *Artificialia* of New World peoples were ambiguously placed close by on the same continuum.

Privileged artists like Albrecht Dürer also enjoyed cabinets of curiosities filled with wonders "from the new land of gold [Mexico]."[6] In 1520, after visiting a display in Brussels of gifts given to Cortés by Motecuhzoma, Dürer recorded in his diary: "I have seen nothing that rejoiced my heart so much as these things, for I saw amongst them wonderful works

of art, and I marveled at the subtle *Ingenia* of people in foreign lands." Though he concludes that "I cannot express all I thought there," the Northern Renaissance master's acknowledgment of the Mexican objects as having great artistry—*Ingenia*—was enough. The *Wunderkammer* does not have the same snobbishness toward items of ethnographic or cultural interest often displayed today, or differentiate them from high art. It did not yet matter who made the marvel, or where. The objects stood on the merit of their extraordinariness, and then, as if to turn this on its head, they were all subjected to the parergon of the vitrine. This marked the moment of their birth as museum objects. Deprived of the power with which they might have been imbued in another context, in the *Wunderkammer* they became purely items on display, hovering behind the glass of the vitrine. Their audiences, from the Renaissance to now, have had the power to make of them what they will.

Everything was a performance in Ferdinand's court, a space in which the good life, variously referred to as Eden and even Paradise, played out. What do the good life and the ideal space for it look like? An open space is required outside on which to hold parties, called tournaments, in which dressed-up horses and men danced. There were also special women's tournaments that took a slightly different form, at least in the number of horses and the amount of obvious political maneuvering involved, instead featuring more pastries and baptisms. This was an epicurean version of Paradise, its inhabitants excessively well-fed and drunk, in which a dwarf would jump out of the pastry served for dessert.[7] There was a grotto dedicated to drinking wine and a book in which each session was recorded. Women also had drinking parties in this grotto, and their guests and the quantities of wine they drank are listed. The archive, as dry and dusty as it is, gives a sense of the social pleasures for which Ambras in Innsbruck

and the Star Pavilion in Bohemia were designed. These were projects that experimented with modern engineering; the first bathroom with a bathtub was designed by Philippine Welser von Zinnenburg in Ambras. The Star Pavilion is a four-story hunting lodge built in the very crisp outline of a star, which in its clean geometry looks more modernist than its Palladian and other Italian Renaissance inspirations.

On the stage provided by Ferdinand's court unfolded the details and depths of the universe. For this was not just a sugar surface but also one adorned with references to fantastical underworlds, where animals carried souls across oceans on fins that grew out of the back of deer and fish tritons accompanied by dolphins with cheeky smiles. These dolphins played on small waves, turning into dragons on the stucco Ferdinand II designed. No one has been able to decode his complex view of Paradise since. Already in his Star Pavilion in Prague and even more so in the Ambras Castle, his designs strive to create an ideal world.

The performance of the *Wunderkammer* included a tour, often given by an artist well acquainted with the collection, who would guide visitors through the space. Rudolph II (who inherited the Ambras *Wunderkammer*) was known to hide in a secret corridor so that instead of participating in the tour he could enjoy it by covertly observing his guests' pleasure. Ferdinand II was more social than Rudolf II and enjoyed organizing festivities, both performing in and curating his collection. There are accounts of Ferdinand II dancing with "Amazons" at his niece Eleanor's tournament in Brussels. The women in the family, including Mary of Hungary and Margaret Habsburg, sister and aunt to Charles V, were all also interested collectors. Philippine was socially adept and interested in material from the New World, which she knew from her uncle's Latin American exploits and from the medicinal plants he imported and she used.

Ferdinand owned Pietro Andrea Mattioli's seminal book on plant medicine (1554), translated from Latin into German while he was still living in Prague. Philippine was known for curing people who came to her at Schloss Ambras from far and wide, using remedies made up from her medicinal garden, which shone green just outside the *Wunderkammer*.

Anna Welser, Philippine's mother, also published a book of medicine, though women were not allowed to be doctors at the time and were regularly denounced as witches, even though the medicines doctors used were based on the same herbal recipes. Philippine's cookbook also survives and reveals how closely linked cooking and medicine were in the sixteenth century. Chefs knew about the medicinal properties of their ingredients, and there was a philosophy to the way spices were used, although Gunter Bakay says from his experience remaking the dishes that they were so intensely spiced that they all tasted much the same. At the time, they believed that substances that are cold and wet, like fish, should be mixed with those that are warm and dry, like cinnamon and pepper. It is from this philosophy of combining warm and cold, dry and wet food that the *Applestrudel* for example gets its added cinnamon.

This is another Europe, one informed by cosmology and knowledge of plants, and it was in this context of conservation that the fragile feather headdress survived.

Vitrine 2: Museo Nacional de Antropología, Mexico City, 1940

There is a copy of El Penacho in the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City, in a vitrine which is less about providing impenetrable protection and more about simulating its original in Vienna. In a memo written before the copy of the feather headdress was installed, the museum

FIGURE. 3.3 Alfonso Caso, Daniel Cosío Villegas, and others with the reproduction of the Penacho of Montezuma, 1945. Photograph by Casasola. D.R. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City.

expresses urgency by noting that while El Penacho has not yet arrived, they have already built the vitrine to house it. It stands ready as a frame, symbolic of the power it will contain. In photographs taken at the press conference, the new Penacho is flanked by Daniel Cosío Villegas, author of *Modern History of Mexico*, and the pre-Columbian archaeologist Alfonso Caso (fig. 3.3). The vitrine adds to the monumental height of the feather headdress that is already as tall as many of those who stand beside it. Portable, it is presented to the throng of dignitaries and reflects them as if in a huge mirror, before being hung in its place in the gallery.

Reflection in the copy-vitrine continues with full force in the age of the "museum selfie." In the central space of the Mexican museum the copy of El Penacho is displayed vertically at a height that invites visitors to photograph themselves as if wearing the crown. Hundreds of thousands of photographs must have been taken in front of it by now. The

significance of such a gesture has a broad spectrum, from the playful to the esoteric. Prior to the *Penacho: Pracht and Passion* (Penacho: Glory and Passion) reinstallation, the headdress was displayed in a similar manner at the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna. In a special exhibition entitled *Pracht and Passion* I saw in 2012, the vitrine designed by architect Adolf Krischanitz and made by the glass company Reier was first laid at a 45-degree angle in a case with vertical glass sides that reach high and wide around the headdress. The design is justified on the basis of conservation standards, but this makes it impossible for visitors to identify with El Penacho by framing themselves with the crown in a selfie photograph. The curator for Latin America at the museum remarks to me how absurd it is that Mexican visitors crouch down on the floor and crane their heads back to be able to take a selfie. It has become the de rigueur memento of their pilgrimage. The museum marketing team designed an app in which one can graft *el Penacho* onto a selfie but to their surprise it has not replaced the Mexican pilgrims' desire to frame themselves with the original as they hoped it would, "because they want the authentic one."[8]

The ways the vitrines enable—or disable—audiences to interact with the crowns in Vienna and Mexico City speak of the very different political positions of the two states to the constituencies represented by the "national treasure." The Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City classifies the Aztec as a pinnacle of civilization, and the copy crown they have created is symbolic of precontact power.[9] The Weltmuseum sees it as its duty to safeguard and maintain the original that it came to possess "in good faith," as part of "World Heritage." As the current legal owners of *el Penacho*, the Republic of Austria is the custodian of this cultural heritage, a heritage that is itself suspended between the histories of two empires and two nation-states.

In Mexico, the Museo Nacional de Antropología invites identification with the display of the commissioned copy—and an array of other copies have now followed. Activists campaigning for the repatriation of the original outside the museum in Vienna have performed in replica feather crowns in a display that embodies the entrapment of the crown within the vitrine. The power of such performative acts is a tool for political self-identification; even the "selfie" has been theorized by Jesse Shipley in such terms.[10] But what of those who perform their opposition to the vitrine, not with the visual tricks of photography, but with their own copies of the crown? These neo-pre-Hispanics, who have been termed by Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié as "Neo-Indian," religiously make feather crowns for their "dances of conquest" in Mexico City.[11] How should we understand the process of making, wearing, and dancing in a feather headdress like El Penacho? What inspires the *Concheros* dancers, as they are called, to make their crowns? When they are worn, what happens to their dance? The crown clearly *does* things. It has effects. But how does this work? The references for these copy crowns are both old and new. Their makers do not struggle for authenticity. Indeed, some of the makers in Mexico City are oblivious to the "ur-crown" in Vienna, but their statements about the significance of their feather headdresses echo what is said of the precolonial priests' rituals. The feather crowns guide and constitute their wearers, as many objects do.

If objects also stand in for absent people, then the problem of authenticity and moral right can be approached differently. In this way the Mexican repatriation claims can be understood as being about Motecuhzoma, rather than being about the crown itself. This is why it has proven unsatisfactory to protestors campaigning for its repatriation to have historians debunk the claim that links the provenance of the

headdress with Motecuhzoma, the last Indigenous emperor of Mexico. While the authenticity, name, and status of the original headdress are in question, the Viennese enjoy the cruel irony that the copy of the crown in Mexico is more correctly Motecuhzoma's than Vienna's own, since it happened to be made by a traditional craftsman named Francisco Motecuhzoma.[12]

Indeed, over the years, in repeated processes of restoration, the original crown in Vienna has been flattened, new feathers have been added, pure gold has been replaced with gold plate, and other substitutions have been made. After so many changes to the original, a question is raised in the Mexican literature whether Mexico should even want it back in such an altered state. What of the "original" crown actually survives? How much is artifact and how much artifice? Despite this, there are still ongoing requests for a return of El Penacho from Vienna.

When repatriation is negotiated at the highest diplomatic level, the object and its authenticity itself disappear. Instead, it is a catalog of relationships, gifts, favors, and political and corporate interests that are being weighed. At the opposite extreme to this abstract bargaining between politicians, diplomats, and museum directors of representative national collections lies the physical presence of the object itself.

Vitrine 3: Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna, 2021

In the early nineteenth century, the imperial collection from Ambras Castle was transferred to the Baroque palace of the Lower Belvedere in Vienna. The headdress was subsequently accessioned into the collections of the K. K. Naturhistorisches Hof-Museum (Court Museum of Natural History) and was restored in 1878, though identified at the time as a standard rather than a headdress. El Penacho

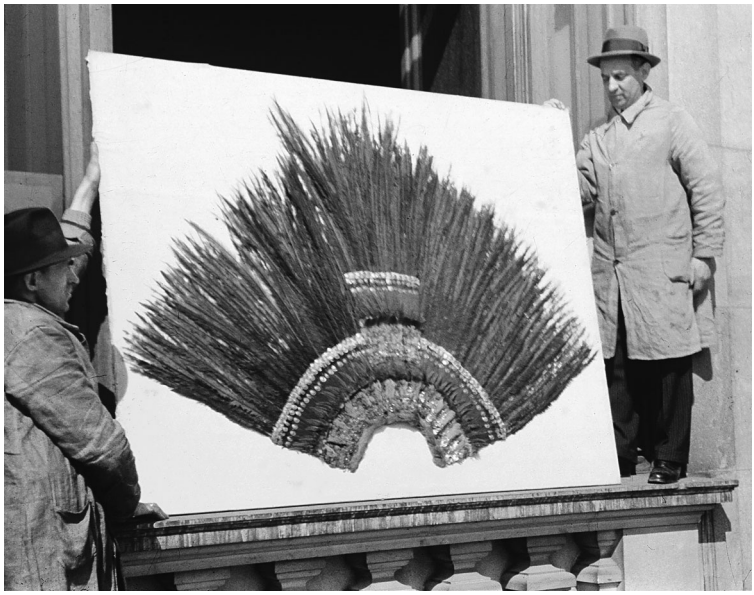

FIGURE 3.4 Preparator Karl Toman (right) and another museum worker at the Museum fuer Voelkerkunde, Vienna, lifting El Penacho onto the windowsill on the museum's Burggarten terrace for a photograph, 1955 or 1956. Courtesy of Mexican-Austrian Penacho Project.

was again transferred with the founding of the Museum für Völkerkunde in part of the Hofburg Palace complex in 1928. After surviving the Second World War in storage, the headdress featured in an exhibition of treasures from Austria sent as part of a cultural diplomatic mission to Zurich. It was returned in a damaged state in 1947, and after further restoration work was placed back on display in a new vitrine at the Museum für Völkerkunde, never to travel again. Despite intensifying demands since the 1980s to repatriate the headdress, El Penacho has remained a centerpiece to the modern museum, immobilized in a succession of increasingly sophisticated cases.

When I encountered El Penacho in 2012, after a major refurbishment project at the Museum für Völkerkunde and

soon before the museum was renamed the Weltmuseum, the headdress was poised in another new custom-built vitrine in *Penacho: Pracht and Passion*. The exhibition, which granted free access to Mexican citizens and was accompanied by a Spanish version of the catalog, focused on the art of museum conservation and studiously avoided any reference to the by-now vociferous repatriation lobby. Every free entrance ticket for Mexicans is paid for through Telecom Austria by its chairman, Carlos Slim, a public relations campaign on the part of the former director Steven Engelsman to improve Mexican's approval of the museum.

Philanthropy further enables statements of shared access, which can be in contrast to the French state's gesture toward free admission, for example. In 2009 a law was passed that allowed national museums in France to grant free admission to young people (ages 18–25). The Museum of Immigration (housed in the former Colonial Museum at the Porte Dorée) interpreted the same law as an opportunity to display both permanent and temporary exhibits for young people, whether or not they were citizens of the European Union. The equivalent of the Weltmuseum, the Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac, decided to give free access only to European visitors (and this in a museum of non-European material). In Paris this means the African student pays the equivalent of a week's wage to enter while her French friend enters free.[13] It must also be added that few of the Mexican visitors in Vienna are workers with equivalent wages but rather from a mobile middle class, and the few euros spent on entry fees is miniscule compared to the value of El Penacho.

Feedback to the museum turned positive from this moment on, the marketing department tells me. But it is a palliative measure that is insufficient in the eyes of those who see the larger imbalance it maintains. Most Indigenous Mexicans cannot afford to fly to Vienna. As Lilia Rivero Weber,

the director of the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia at the time of writing, says "for them it would be important, it is very close to their ancestors."[14] Referring to the offer by Mexican President Filipe Calderon to pay for the American Wing of the Viennese museum in exchange for the return of El Penacho, the Weltmuseum's former director Steven Engelman asked, "If you Mexicans are willing to pay so much money then why don't you give the money to Mexicans to fly here?"[15] This was more provocation than proposal, but joined a host of absurd ideas on the part of the Weltmuseum. Among them was that Mexicans should be satisfied with a hologram of El Penacho in Mexico, to which Lilia Rivero Weber replied that the hologram could stay in Vienna and the original returned to Mexico.

There are countless stories of copies being made in lieu of or as decoys for looting the originals. The quick and dirty ways this could be done included colonial artists making copies on the spot during the looting to immediately fill the hole left by the expedition. For example, the Ethiopian mural that hangs in the Musée du Quai Branly–Jacques Chirac is one Marcel Griaule ripped out of a church during the Dakar-Djibouti mission. It was replaced by a copy made on the spot by an artist, Gaston-Louis Roux, who joined the expedition through his friendship with Michel Leiris.[16]

Pressed up against the vitrine in which El Penacho is now displayed in the Weltmuseum, I was more aware of the glass placed between the headdress and me than of anything else. I stood back and looked at others looking. They fascinate me, these people who come to the museum. Some visitors ambled by aimlessly, most were arrested for a time. I talked to young Mexicans, evidently surprised and awed in the presence of this object. They have grown up learning about the Aztec Empire, and objects like this crown stand most powerfully for their identity.

The Russian doll–like architecture that surrounded the feather headdress included a black box that created a theater around the vitrine. There were no seats but after a while I leaned against the back wall of the blackened space to watch the spotlighted center. The dimensions of the vitrine theater were such that only a small group of visitors was able to wander through at a time. The air was poor and the glass was smeared from fingers pressed against it in an attempt to see the feather headdress better. Dust had already gathered on the glass ceiling of the vitrine, which was backlit by the synthetic ochre sun installed as a faux skylight in the ceiling.

This redisplay of the headdress in 2012 was advertised as "demystifying" in the *Wiener Zeitung*.[17] Focusing on the scientific process of restoration, the *Pracht and Passion* exhibition said nothing of the demands for El Penacho's restoration to Mexico. Thus the new glass case and support added the parergon of scientific conservation to the previous model of public display from royal accumulation. Its high-tech case was purpose designed for the feather headdress to counter any vibrations that could adversely affect it in its fragile state. Indeed the vitrine signposted El Penacho's extreme fragility and exaggerated the impossibility of movement, including its return to Mexico.

The vibration-proof design of the case and mount resulted from the discovery that the headdress was losing many of the individual barbs that make up its feathers. They were found, to the horror of the conservators, lying on the sheet on which the headdress had been previously supported. As well as defining the specifications of its new vitrine, the conservation scientists who analyzed the headdress also reported that the levels of vibration encountered in transporting it—by air, for example, to Mexico—could destroy its fine and brittle feathers. When the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico requested a loan of the headdress for its temporary featherwork exhibi-

tion *El vuelo de las imagines: Arte plumario en México y Europa*, they were presented with a specialist engineering report, which stated that a special vibration-proof case would have to be built to transport it to avoid damage.[18] The cost of manufacturing such a case was, of course, prohibitively expensive for the Mexican museum. Indeed, due to the cost of the required expertise, the Museo Nacional de Arte was only able to commission a separate independent engineering report with the assistance of the Mexican president's office.

I encountered an air of conspiracy when I interviewed the key actors on this matter in Vienna in 2014. The head scientist advising the conservation team had been both eager to participate in my research and vague about his availability. It was not until the end of our interview that he explained he had to seek the museum's approval before speaking to me. He was one of the few who had met in a closed room of the Hofburg Palace to discuss the repatriation at the highest level of government. I wondered why the head scientist had to be briefed before he spoke about this topic. The former director Christian Feest said that it was the Mexican museum that commissioned the conservation report from the countervibration expert directly. Yet my research on the ground revealed evidence that this was an instance of what heritage expert Lynn Meskell has identified: "political issues are often masked as technical ones."[19] For when I asked for access to the archive on El Penacho, the museum said none was allowed. When I requested the minutes of the binational commission, the then director said he consulted the government and found that the proceedings will be kept locked for another thirty years, according to a national archive law (*Archivsperre*). The binational commission between Mexico and Austria was announced at this time as if it had just been invented, although former Cultural Officer of the Embassy of Mexico Rafael Donadio remembers being at one of the five-

year meetings in 2002. During the lunchbreak, he stayed while the cleaning staff were tidying up and struck up a conversation. The delegation had just been told that they could not analyze El Penacho because it would fall apart if taken out of the vitrine. The cleaners said with a laugh that they moved it all the time to clean around it, inside and outside the glass case.

Ironically the second report for the Museo Nacional de Arte was prepared by the same Austrian engineer from the Technical University of Vienna who had prepared the first for the Museum für Völkerkunde. The report is based on tests of vibration under different conditions, from a crowd of visitors in the gallery to a glass cleaning, which was found to be more destructive than transportation in an airplane. All this can be mathematically predicted; the stronger the vibration, the larger the container necessary to counter that vibration. The resulting document looks like an engineering report but reads like a science fiction joke. On the last page, there is a drawing of the 300-meter-long, 50-meter-high airplane that would be necessary, in the mathematic model, to buffer the velocity of takeoff and landing to meet the conservation requirements set by Vienna. Since such an aircraft does not exist, it was deemed unreasonable and unaffordable for the Mexicans, hence the headdress could not be loaned and must remain a captive in its vitrine in Vienna, a situation now supported by scientific rationale. The case for the repatriation of the headdress again proved inextricable from the object.

For the 2018 reopening of the new permanent galleries, the new vitrine was moved to the first floor to an exhibition space that is strategically not named Mexico or the Americas but Gallery of Three Nations (and subsequently renamed to A1 Mobile Gallery). Without actually identifying the three nations, there was no mention in the original wall text that

El Penacho is from what is now Mexico, although this is undenied. There is also no mention of repatriation or of El Penacho being the subject of an ongoing series of claims and statements of desire that it be returned to Mexico. The Mexican Embassy complained about these omissions in advance of the opening, and the museum agreed to add a text to the vitrine that says "El Penacho del Mexico Antiguo." Opposite on a screen there are pages of information that serve as an extended wall text, but it is overlooked by many visitors. On a screen that backs the vitrine is the video made by the one conservator without the agreement of the others, of the findings of the conservation project, which concluded that the headdress was too fragile to travel. On the flanking walls is a kind of nonhierarchical display that flattens, on one side, the ancient and sacred sculptures with which I began this book, and on the other, contemporary textiles and trinkets from everyday culture. The archaeology and anthropology of the museum are thereby represented, but the effect is to undermine the significance of some of the pieces alongside the others.

At the moment of writing, Beatriz Gutiérrez-Müller, writer, historian, and wife of the current president of Mexico, visited Vienna on October 12, 2020, to again request the return of El Penacho, or at least a loan. The international press was again enflamed with the claim, and the curators in Vienna are quoted as saying it would not be repatriated in the coming decade. Sabine Haag, director of the Kunshistorisches Museum, said El Penacho is meanwhile also "in the Austrian DNA."[20] Two days later, the *Aztecs* exhibition opened and a small sticker was added to El Penacho's vitrine, which read "daily many people from Mexico come to Vienna to see him [El Penacho]. For many of them he is of indescribable value—a symbol of the time before colonization, and of the violent power grab and Spanish settlement of the country."[21]

Quite in contrast to this critical captioning within the

museum, Sabine Haag drew not only on the hard science of DNA to emphasize El Penacho's natural descendancy from the Habsburg crown but also said it would not travel to Mexico until there was a "teleportation, like in *Star Trek*."[22] The analogy to the science fiction that copied colonialism is a perfect fit. Haag's museum has more than two hundred objects from the Captain Cook voyages, and I wonder if she knows that Captain James Kirk on his *Enterprise* was a close copy of Captain James Cook on his *Endeavour*. Both captains came from the country and sailed "farther than any man has been before" or went boldly "where no man has gone before!"[23]

Haag also asks her interviewer, "Have you seen the original? When you stand in front it is a magical moment. When you look at the plume through the glass it is possible to see its fragility."[24] The cultural solipsism and appropriation in this statement is contradictory, for if you see it as magical, you can see a powerful thing full of energy and potential movement, whereas if you project fragility onto what you see through, or because of, the glass case, then in turn you see what you want to see.

Smashing the Vitrines

The stasis of in-betweenness always has a shadow state of movement. The journeys that an object has completed are engrained in its very materiality. The transport between where it has stopped for the time being and where it started from becomes an important part of the story. The inability to now move El Penacho due to its fragility has become the basis of the denial of the demand for repatriation that Mexico has been making since 1987. Movement is absorbed into immobility; life is stilled to a promise of eternity. In the narcissistic reflection of the glass, the European visitor can see both themselves and the world, and thus the illusion of universalism and cosmopolitanism. Made invisible, through

an invisible glass shield, it is a *Vitrinendenken*, a "thinking through vitrines," which guides the audience through Enlightenment museums.[25] Herein lies the difference between the Mexican *Concheros*' dancers view of the feather crown and the Weltmuseum's. In the performance of identification with Motecuhzoma, the meaning of the crown changes. No longer is the suspended in-betweenness that the Weltmuseum conserves with science the only authority.

Anticipating the latest redisplay of the feather headdress at the Weltmuseum, the three vitrines I discuss in this chapter raise a more provocative question in relation to museum display. What would a museum without vitrines look like and how might the kinds of community engagement we have witnessed around El Penacho help us to imagine this break? In the afterword to his book *My Cocaine Museum*, the anthropologist Michael Taussig conjures the image of the gods imprisoned in Columbian gold museum cabinets awakening and escaping their bondage:

> I can only hope that the gods asleep in the museum—all 38,500 of them—will awaken and come to life with the tinkling of glass as the vitrines give way. This is my magic and this is why I write strange apotropaic texts like *My Cocaine Museum* made of spells, intended to break the catastrophic spell of things, starting with the smashing of the vitrines whose sole purpose is to uphold the view that you are you and over there is there and here you are—looking at captured objects, from the outside. But now, no more! Together with the previously invisible ghosts of slavery, the awakened gods will awaken remote pasts and remote places.[26]

El Penacho, too, has been visited by priests and shamans who would break the spell of things and free the spirits of the headdress from the vitrine that encases them.

The replica crown in the Museo Nacional de Antropología

in Mexico is no substitute for El Penacho, but perhaps copies provide a "third way" out of the seemingly irreconcilable conflict between how a living community wants to use a ceremonial object and how a museum is charged with scientifically protecting it. For the priests, who are able to speak to the spirits through the object, power does not reside only in the original. In a contemporary ceremony, and with the agreement of the spirits, it is possible to transfer the ritual efficacy from the original to a copy.[27] As Felwine Sarr says,

> The notion of originality here is fluid. It was thought that once the artist made two copies of an object, both were authentic; doubling had no bearing on the power of either. When many African communities experienced the theft of their masks, for instance, they made identical copies of them, and their spiritual charge was transferred from the old to the new, rendering those examples we find today exhibited in the West spiritually empty: their immaterial content was channelled into a new physical body. We are less concerned here with an original object's multiplication, but rather a spiritual essence's appropriation of a physical form. An object is made real through its ritualization.[28]

Historians who resist these claims cast such ritualization or reenactment as self-conscious versions of historical ritual, an invention of tradition that creates a distance between the participant and some perceived authenticity of the ritual from the past. Yet the possessions of the past can also possess those who wear them. The parergon is one kind of spell that protects and captures the object, the spoken spell another.

In 1980 Dr. Guillermo Schmidhuber de la Mora of the University of Guadalajara wrote a play, *The Theft of the Penacho of Moctezuma*. In this play he imagines that during an official visit to Austria El Penacho is stolen by three students from Mexico, who take it into extraterritorial immunity in

the Mexican Embassy in Vienna. In the first scene the three students speak to the gods in the museum to wake them up:

Location: Museum für Völkerkunde, Vienna

Fernando: Wake up gods! For four hundred years no one has cradled you!

[With his appeal, three ancient stone figures appear to wake up. First they make a slightly mechanical movement, then another, and so on until we clearly see that the stones have been woken up.]

Would you like this to be one of your temples?
You don't live in a history museum, and also not in an art museum.
Your competition is with canoes from the Pacific
and with the robes of medicine men
who were not made to last forever.

[During this monologue, the three stone figures begin an archaic song in Maya and Náhuatl.]

Figure from Teotihuacan: I am the god of rain, responsible for fertility! I have accompanied the people since the beginning of time and was the most revered. Why are you ripping me from my centuries-long silence?[29]

4

The Real and the Replica

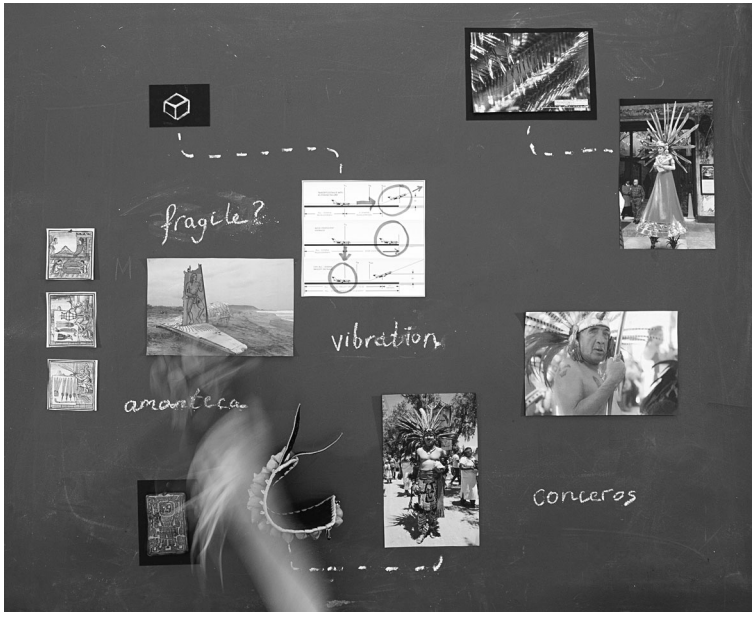

FIGURE 4.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

Spanish colonists enacted a particularly harsh ban on feather headdresses, which the archaeologist Nelly M. Robles García believes was motivated by a "great fear of this Indigenous symbol."[1] The prohibition in turn produced the basis for the revival of lost identities in neo-pre-Hispanic movements

that began in the nineteenth century. Although the art of featherwork itself was never lost or forgotten, García interprets the contemporary adoption of the feather adornment as a central ritual object in the revival of spirituality from the old cultures of Mexico. In the 1960s the poetry magazine *El corno emplumado* (The feathered horn) used feathers to represent the poetic spirituality of Mexico. Since the 1960s a movement of dancers calling themselves *Concheros* have been making feather headdresses and performing in them, dancing to music played on five-string *concha* guitars fashioned from armadillo shells. Some identify as Motecuhzoma. They are one of several groups, including Quetzal dancers in Sierra Norte de Puebla and on the coast of Veracruz, and feather dancers in Oaxaca. These groups represent a continuity of pre-Hispanic costume.

Instead of dwelling on the (lack of) authenticity of such movements, as Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié do in their book *Neo-Indians: A Religion for the Third Millennium*, the anthropologist of religion Birgit Meyer would say the *Concheros* experience identifying as Aztec as "real."[2] Meyer writes, "Since heritage is not given, but has to be constituted through the cultural production of the real, it has no natural owners." Outlining the "structures of feeling" that attach themselves to material forms, Meyer speaks of an aesthetics of persuasion. This helps to clarify that when "enveloped in a political-aesthetic regime . . . a form of cultural heritage ceases to be merely an object on display 'out there' in the world but becomes an embodied part of a lived experience . . . that conveys a strong aura of authenticity and a sense of essence."[3] To historicize the "authenticity" of heritage as Meyer does, based on a romantic European conception of experience, enables one to view the revived Aztec rituals and not merely dismiss them. As Michael Taussig wrote in *Mimesis and Alterity*: "[Faced with] the once unsettling ob-

servation that most of what seems important in life is made up and is neither more (nor less) than, as a certain turn of phrase would have it, 'a social construction' . . . it seems to me that not enough surprise has been expressed as to how we nevertheless get on with living, pretending that we live facts, not fictions."[4]

In Mexico City and Hidalgo, I joined a group of *Concheros* preparing to perform the next day. They were carefully inserting feathers, one by one, into their headdresses. The headdresses had clearly been made with great care, making me question what their sources were, and what they thought was conveyed or received through wearing the headdresses in public. They were vague about the kind of historical sources that I would seek out as an art historian. Their knowledge of history derived from the community of *Concheros* rather than from institutions. Several of the group had made copies of El Penacho without ever seeing the Museo Nacional de Antropología reproduction in person.

The curators at the Mexico City museums have run workshops in featherwork over the years. In the 1970s there was a van containing replica feather crowns parked outside the Museo Nacional de Antropología for educational but also commercial purposes, which may have influenced the *Concheros*' designs. The amount of knowledge gathered in the museum about the construction of the crown would theoretically allow for technically perfect copies to be made. Yet the power of the new headdresses that the *Concheros* make does not rest upon conservation knowledge. The *Concheros* replace parts when they break or become ragged; feathers are sold for this purpose in the large gatherings on Plaza de las Tres Culturas, Plaza Seminario, and Plaza Manuel Gamio.

The relationship the *Concheros* have to their feather headdresses is not one of historical reenactment but rather a spiritual connection through their performance. It is the kind of

intangible cultural heritage that is not self-consciously historical; nor are their politics directly related to repatriation but rather to the Mexicanidad movement that links Mexican modernity to pre-Hispanic culture. Enriched with syncretic features of pre-Hispanic and Christian symbolism, the *Concheros*' ritual dances and processions, vigils, and regalia are a plumed, pulsing anachronism. Through their performance the present can form a living connection to the past; "culture is transmission" the leader of one dance group told me.[5] The process of the preparation of regalia worn during the ceremony is important because it marks the identity of the *Concheros* in the public spaces in which they dance in Mexico. The ongoing employment of copies of Motecuhzoma's crown in dances, protests, and celebrations of Aztec heritage exerts a different pull on the object than that of conservation science, which the Austrian state has used as the false pretext for denying repatriation of El Penacho.

Founded to continue Indigenous dance under the guise of Christian worship, the *Concheros* depict an Aztec cosmology and play out the identity of certain Aztec gods. On a Sunday morning in Hidalgo, I find two incarnations of Quetzalcóatl. One is Ernesto, the leader of the group, who sees obvious resonances with Christian beliefs in the serpent's ability to fly and thereby ascend beyond the human. However, Ernesto also relates Quetzalcóatl to the Rainbow Serpent in Aboriginal creation mythology. The Aboriginal Australian resistance to the appropriation of Indigenous culture by the nation-state has begun to influence the way Mexicans think about their own cultural inheritance.

The second Quetzalcóatl on this Sunday is worn by a Hidalgan *Conchero*, José Navarro, who dances in an obvious copy of El Penacho. He made the copy with his friends, one of whom has since passed away. Dancing in this feather headdress has now become a memorial to that friend. The loss of the man who made the crown echoes the loss of Motecuhzoma,

with which Mexicans associate such bereavement. Navarro dances on the edge of the group that has come together from Mexico City, not quite part of it. I am told, by a historian who is also a *Conchero*, that he belongs to the group of "fanatics" who think of themselves as descendants of Motecuhzoma. There is a distinctly conservative tone to the *Concheros*' politics and their motivations for Aztec revivalism. The status of the Aztec aristocracy and their warriors can be seen in the costumes the *Concheros* are entitled to wear, raising the question of whether this hierarchical fetish for uniforms and their ranking of caste and race is what drives market stalls on the Zócalo square, a place associated with the *Concheros*, to stock copies of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Are the *Concheros* another appropriation of the Habsburg Empire in Mexico? One in which Motecuhzoma stands in for Cortés, since this precolonial empire was a native imperial formation? What are the *Concheros*' claims? Are they testing the legitimacy of the monarch? The political views of the *Concheros* are quite different from the rhetoric of the repatriation demonstrator Xokonoschtletl (discussed in chapter 2), for whom cultural history is used to challenge absolutist feudal structures. Unrelated to other groups, like the Zapatistas who want radical change, the *Concheros* are not aligned with modern movements like the Black Jacobins or the Many-Headed Hydra, which refer to global antisystemic movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While the initial *Concheros* were anticolonial in their effort to save pre-Hispanic ritual, when the Communist Party's antichurch policies forbade public worship in the 1920s, the *Concheros* ironically joined the most ardent defenders of the Catholic Church during the Cristero War.

On the other hand, the decolonizing move of replacing a colonial hero with a precontact Indigenous leader is a feature of such protests across the colonial world. Yet criticism of decolonial memorial practices is couched not only in Marx-

ist terms but in the pragmatic difficulties of justifying the vast expenditure of funds on culture when communities lack other social basics such as running water. Spending government funds on the insurance of precious material culture like El Penacho is debated, with strong arguments on both sides. Culture is dignity and sovereignty, on par with food and water. Without culture, you are not recognizable to your kin.

Heritage has also become a huge industry from which some *Concheros* dancers make a living. The central Zócalo square, where many now perform for tourists, was also a ceremonial place for the Aztecs. When Bernal Díaz del Castillo arrived in the Zócalo with Cortés, he wrote, "We returned to contemplate the large square and the multitude of people there . . . with the murmurs and bursts of voices and words ringing out for miles, and among us [conquistadors] were soldiers who had lived in various parts of the world, in Constantinople and in all of Italy and in Rome, and they said that they had never seen a square so large, so active, so full of people."[6] On one side of the square, in the entrance stairway to the government building, Palacio National, the Mexican artist Diego Rivera was commissioned to paint a mural celebrating the struggles and eventual independence of the Mexican postrevolutionary state. But what came from his brushes was a depiction of the precolonial city of Tula, with Toltec and Aztec references entangled in the modern Mexican imagination, including Quetzalcóatl in the middle of the scene. This is apt, because when Cortés seized power, he layered colonial institutions (including Palacio National) directly on top of the existing structures of the Aztec city.

The Riddle of the Copy

Conjecture about the premodern "original" headdress produces a riddle: if there are multiple crowns, is only one of

them Motecuhzoma's? The answer is not as simple as the Viennese museum's response about the doubtful provenance of the crown and whether it really was Motecuhzoma's. There are Motecuhzomas from the sixteenth century and from before the conquest in 1519, as well as Motecuhzomas active in the cultural production of the 1930s and 1940s. There are even Motecuhzomas involved in the discourse over repatriation today; the video in the Weltmuseum includes commentary by a Mexican expert named Motecuhzoma, who says the crown is an important part of cultural heritage wherever it is kept, with the convenient implication that it need not be repatriated to Mexico. The riddle therefore continues: there are multiple Motecuhzomas, and he never wore the same crown twice; if there is one crown left, which of the Motecuhzomas did it belong to?

The Lost Third Dimension

One particularly elusive but important Motecuhzoma is Francisco Moctezuma, who made the copy of the crown in 1939. Nothing remains in the archive of the anthropology museum about the man who won this commission, although the archaeologist and curator Bertina Olmedo searched for him as part of her research during the binational commission. She found an elderly conservator named Maria Aguilar who recalled the story of how the crown was remade. Aguilar also knew Francisco Moctezuma from Yucatan and had been involved in selecting him for the job, but that is as much as is known. Olmedo argues that the copy made in 1940 is now itself a historical artifact that reveals much about the conditions under which it came into being.[7] Its design and construction are evidence of the lack of access Francisco Moctezuma had to the original in Vienna. What knowledge he possessed had come from photographs, which led him

astray, for the crown had already been heavily distorted through restoration, changed from a flexible, moving headdress into a stiff, flat object. Without an archival record of Moctezuma's process, we can only speculate about what his knowledge of featherwork could have brought to the copy if he had not been asked to replicate the one in Vienna.

The copy in Mexico mirrors the errors made by the Austrian curator Hochstetter, who commissioned a conservation in 1878; the errors became apparent during an intensive period of research (2012–2014) by the binational commission. Hochstetter thought that the crown was a flat standard or fan-like banner, worn by Aztec army leaders as a military symbol on their backs.[8] The three-dimensional nature of the crown was lost at the moment of its modern conservation, when it was pressed down into a two-dimensional artwork for display. Flattened, the Aztec crown shifts from being a ritual garment worn on the head to a visual reference to the past head that wore it, precluding contemporary use. Alienated from the power that comes from being worn, personalized, and enlivened, it becomes instead a symbol of modern Mexico.

The modern shift for the original feather headdress was from a feathered costume worn at Ambras Castle and kept with the various materials held in the *Wunderkammer* to an image that would come to represent the nation-state. The shift from one to the other is given material form by the new supports of fabric and board that El Penacho is attached to in the vitrine, after having been wrested from the living body. The modernist aesthetic concern with the physical nature of supports on the flat picture plane is significant to the feather crown. Dancing in a feather headdress reverses the modernist disavowal of the spiritual and attributes agency to the materials that make up the crown, such as the feathers. Reference to the crown's spiritual power is common in Mexico,

and not only among the *Concheros*. At the National Art Museum in Mexico City in 2011, the installation team realized that when the light caught the feathers at a certain angle, they became electric, as if emitting their own light. With this knowledge, the exhibition's curator Alessandra Russo reproduced the candlelight that would have illuminated the featherwork in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from below (eighteenth century featherwork required lighting from above). It is only in this way that the feathers "light up" and emanate their intense aura. The novelist Álvaro Enrigue described the rediscovery of the featherwork's luminescence as "a miracle."[9] There is a tradition of feather pictures in Mexico called *arte plumario*, in which colored feathers are collaged to create figurative representations. In churches, the operation of light on feathers was carefully choreographed so that when a supplicant knelt in front of a feathered icon, it would shine in the candlelight at an angle that matched their gaze. This appropriation of pre-Hispanic lighting effects by the church demonstrates the way religion resonated with the spiritual medium provided by the resplendent birds. Past and present, Catholic and Aztec, brought together again in the *Concheros*' dances.

The past is constantly being played out in the present. Take the *lucha libre* match I witnessed between a wrestler named Superdevolución Copilli Quetzalli, dressed as El Penacho, battling (and losing to) the well-known wrestler Crazy Boy. The boxing ring heightens the spectacular nature of this endless battle. Superdevolución's *Penacho* masks, instead of being frightening, are carnivalesque (see fig. 4.2). Yet behind this mock fight lies a serious cultural battle. Neither of the fighters' outfits is actually a costume—Superdevolución is El Penacho when he fights. The wearer of El Penacho is the quetzal, is Quetzalcóatl, is Motecuhzoma, is the priest. Masks allow underlying ritual to remain to some extent hid-

FIGURE 4.2 Nina Hoechtl, *The Transcultural Legacy: Penacho vs Penacho*, 2011. Photograph by Eduardo Thomas.

den, evading explanation. Both a mask and a weapon, in the current moment, the *lucha libre* costume might be the most authentic Motecuhzoma *Penacho* of all.

It is the archaeologist Lilia Rivero Weber who first tells me about this wrestling match as we discuss El Penacho images on tacos and other appearances in popular culture. She does not intimate or perhaps even know that the *PENACHO VS PENACHO* battle was an intervention by the Austrian artist Nina Hoechtl. As an art project in 2011, she created the wrestling character Superdevolución Copilli Quetzalli and promoted his fight as being "over the Penacho" but as part of an existing *lucha libre* program. In an accompanying comic, Crazy Boy is said to have "wrestled for Mexican power for years . . . receiving energy from the past," while Superdevolución Copilli Quetzalli was "fighting for the treasures that originated in other places and are now hoarded in Europe."[10]

There are also the surreal *Penachos* on the Zócalo in central Mexico City. Just outside the Palazzo Nacional, inter-

preters of Mexican culture gather to perform variations on the theme of "feather headdress as index of precontact" spiritual power. Copales are smoked. Rituals are enacted. Dances are danced. Feather headdresses are displayed, performed. Down a side street, you can find a woman on stilts wearing a headdress made of painted wood (fig. 4.1, top left). She beckons passersby into a store while teetering on her extended legs, as if the step from past to present is a wobbly one for her. Her *Penacho* is enormous, but somehow she manages to balance. People stand around filming her, watching her in awe. The *Penacho* on stilts in the Zócalo is a far cry from the *amanteca*'s (featherworker's) fine craftsmanship, and sadly, although *amanteca* still exist, I am told by conservator Lilia Rivera Weber that "they have to sell tortas on the Metro because they can't make their artistic living with dignity."

Conservation Science

The conservation analysis performed on El Penacho in Vienna, which is central to the body of research on the feather crown, has not been published in English, though the details and diagrams remain important appendixes in the Spanish and German versions of the 2012 volume *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*.[11] The book distills the research undertaken during the binational commission, the publication of which was delayed because some of the Mexican authors did not agree with the level of censorship imposed by its Austrian editors, but I will return to that. The institutional memory of the museum's modern conservation practice is recorded through interviews with staff and close analysis of the object in comparison to historical representations. While the great care taken by the historical craftsmen who made the crown is discussed, the volume also includes an account of the carelessness of the Austrian conservators. For example, in 1992

the crown was moved from its old 1961 vitrine and lifted onto a new support. A conservator who was present, says, relying on her memory: "Since the conservators didn't have much time, this move had to happen in an afternoon. In the move two long green tail feathers came off, of which one was superglued back on and the other was attached to the new support with a pin." Photographic evidence and the report reveal how the sloppy sewing of feathers to each other in 1878 had already led to the plumes becoming deformed. Yet the published record only goes this far, while the testimonies from those on the ground paint a more elaborate picture of the subtle, psychologically loaded privilege and arrogance the Viennese conservators showed toward the team from Mexico. From extensive interviews with many of those involved in research on El Penacho, a picture of a situation emerges that is not unlike others I have experienced—for example in the national archives in Vienna, where descendants of Holocaust victims have struggled to gain access to files related to their families. Shame at what might be found, even if not openly expressed, plays a role in the ways in which a place, especially one of wealth and power, denies access to outsiders who are represented in their collections. A researcher from the History of Emotions project replied to my interest in the decolonial agency of guilt that it is a difficult emotion to historicize. Might this be because it is not a passion with a form, but a form of repression that hides its representation?

Guilt on national, personal, and historical levels was an undercurrent in the binational conservation project on El Penacho carried out between 2010 and 2012. While the material was reported on in detail, there has not yet been an analysis of the relationship at stake in the process that set out to mediate a solution for both nation-states. Therefore it is important to understand the role that guilt plays as one of the steps in what Rolando Vázquez, in his public lectures, has

called "an act of listening to the other, of understanding itself through the voice of 'others,' [so] that the West can overcome the ignorance of Eurocentrism and recognize itself through a more truthful positionality."[12] The lack of understanding of the abstract universality of modernity is what is at stake in this decolonial process. Described by Vázquez as "humbling," it inevitably brings a dose of guilt for the modern/colonial benefactors in its wake. Acknowledging implication in the suffering of others is part of building decolonial awareness and inevitably leads to guilt about privilege and injustice. "Has the museum been engaged with these questions or has it rather been oblivious to and in complicity with global injustice and ecocide?" Vázquez asks in "The Museum, Decoloniality and the End of the Contemporary," his critique of the museum and the temporal tyranny of contemporaneity.[13] Where such questioning is entirely absent, the process of engaging with living culture outside of the constant search for the contemporary and new is disabled.

The conservation of El Penacho in preparation for further collaboration could have been the basis for a decolonial process in the Weltmuseum, but sadly it turned out to be a missed opportunity. Instead the relationships between the Mexican and Austrian teams deteriorated over time. Heavy-hearted accounts from the Mexican side recall with what high hopes they began to research ways to transport El Penacho. Yet while the Mexican team worked with that goal in mind, the Austrians seemed to begin from the position that it was not going to travel and sought in the conservation science a justification for this political decision, which had already foreclosed the research.

A conservator who had moved to Vienna from Mexico for the course of the project found she was almost never allowed to touch El Penacho; that privilege was reserved for her Austrian counterparts, while she was assigned to registration

work. The Mexicans felt their skills as conservators were not trusted—one tried to reach for a tool in the laboratory and was asked condescendingly by the head of the Austrian team, "You know that is sharp and you could do some damage?" The level of politicization also led this conservator to go personally to the Mexican Embassy in Vienna each month to receive payment for her work on the *Penacho* project, which was disguised as a bureaucratic position.[14]

Eight times over a two-year period, the Mexican team flew back and forth to Vienna. At Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), they worked hard in their lab on how to best move the headdress from the black velvet support it was attached to, coming up with a solution that would allow El Penacho to be lifted without friction. They boarded their flight to Vienna; the set time to move the object was programmed for the following week. When they arrived, however, the Austrian team had already moved the headdress without consulting them. Looking later at the black velvet backing through the microscope, hundreds of minute fragments of feathers were observable, the result of the Austrian team pushing and pulling El Penacho.

The Mexican team, frustrated that all their carbon-fiber research was ignored, claimed that the actions of the Austrians caused more damage than that which would have been caused by the vibrations resulting from a flight to Mexico. Their design for a case for El Penacho, based on a honeycomb system, was adopted but not acknowledged as their work. The honeycomb is a stiff, light, layered system, designed for satellites, which cancels vibrations. A Mexican engineer showed me a sample of this material in his lab and ruefully added that the Austrians never returned the samples he had loaned them.

Meanwhile, backstage at the binational research project, the conservator who had moved to Vienna from Mexico for

the project cracked under pressure eight months into it. The rest of the Mexican team felt they had lost their main link to the project from this point onward as the Mexican conservator had changed her position to "avoid being attacked." Their sense of betrayal caused a rift in the Mexican team and eventually, when the facade of collaboration had in any case collapsed, this conservator sat on the "Austrian side" as the results were delivered. A film made for Mexican television features the disloyal conservator. The film is propaganda; it outraged the rest of the Mexican research team, who were not interviewed, and it did not reflect their findings. In the film the conservator speaks about El Penacho as if she were an undertaker talking about a dead body, describing it as "deteriorated but stable." The film edits in an archaeologist named Montezuma, who says that wherever it is, El Penacho is a Mexican treasure, effectively supporting the view that it does not need to move.

There are medicines, and there are medicines. For some the crown is a medicine, the people's cultural medicine; for others it an object that must be preserved by the means of modern scientific techniques. These two ontologies are worlds apart.

Another point of view would be that the feather headdress would not exist at all if it were not for the museum and its predecessor, the *Wunderkammer* in Ambras Castle. Indeed, there is a complete lack of comparable pieces of featherwork from the sixteenth century and earlier periods because no such artifacts survived in Mexico. Archaeological excavations have revealed places where a feather had once lain, but does not remain, making it difficult to put El Penacho into historical perspective through comparison to similar work. Made to be seen from all sides, the back of the feather headdress is as carefully finished as the front. A netted cap, too badly damaged to reconstruct, accompanied the headdress

FIGURE 4.3 Amanteca making a feather headdress, Florentine Codex, book 9, chap. 20, fol. 62v. Photo Biblioteca Central. Courtesy of Mexican-Austrian Penacho Project.

when it was flattened in the 1878 restoration. The most recent conservators, Melanie Korn and María Olvido Moreno Guzmán, conclude that there is evidence of a construction plan, according to which the traditional techniques were assembled. Marks in red and the weaving and knotting techniques align exactly with sixteenth-century descriptions by Bernadino de Sahagún, with which they can be cross-referenced.[15]

The *amanteca*'s hands were so skilled that their techniques are invisible to the human eye, although they can be deduced using a 3D microscope. An X-ray of the body of the feather headdress shows that it is broken twenty-nine times on the twenty-eight sticks of its main structure. The precision of the

craftsmanship is so ingenious that the joins of the feathers are invisible, and even these repairs do not affect the whole. Although a feather looks as though it is a single object, it is in fact made up of many parts. As a brush consists of bristles and a handle, the feather similarly has a central spine, with bristles on either side. Upon zooming in closer still, further hairs on those bristles, which make it function aerodynamically, become evident, appearing whole when attached to the wing. Working at a minute scale, the hands of the *amanteca* would feed a thread between two barbs that grow along the spine of the feather without pressuring either side. A thread would be looped about and back into a simple knot that exerted enough pressure to hold, but not too much so as to break its delicate support. These feathers are then woven onto netting by the *amanteca* and incorporated into plumage, in imitation of the bird. In essence, the art of featherwork was to construct an image in feathers that was more magnificent than even a bird could grow on its own body.

Movement and durability could both be achieved by the Aztec *amanteca*, who were skilled in not breaking the delicate parts that make up one feather. The worst damage to the plumes in El Penacho was done by European insects that ate the feathers, gnawing a jagged asymmetry into the arc of the crown. Museum storage comes with attendant dangers. In the past, museum items were often sprayed with toxic chemicals to keep the insects at bay, with the sad result that when descendants of the objects' owners come to touch their heirlooms, they must wear rubber gloves and respirators for safety. But pesticides have been used in the museum in Vienna only since the 1960s, meaning there have been 360 years for the feathers to be eaten by insects in Austria.

Over the years the conservators in Vienna have produced a typology of the many knots that bind the feathers together. They discovered that there are ways of wrapping the spine of

the feather to tie it to the superstructure. The thread loops between small barbs of feather, finding space enough to hold what seems as light, and as difficult to grip, as air itself.

Movement

The feather headdress was made to move, to be worn—a function very different from being an object on display. When measuring the temperature index of the room, engineers found that El Penacho is so sensitive that it moves in response to heat generated by visitors. It was presumed in the engineering report that movement would equate to damage, and therefore, to avoid damage, one should never again move the crown. This was the expertise on which the invisible, but scientifically measurable, agency of vibrating movement was gathered by Professor Wassermann for the museum.

Wassermann's counterpart in Mexico was the engineer Alejandro Ramírez from UNAM. He explained the ingenuity of the Aztec featherworkers in their technique of knotting, which created a durable but also kinematic system for the feathers. In a series of drawings he illustrated how the "type of connection" achieved through particular knots in the design of the headdress mimicked the movement of the bird. "The people who designed the headdress wanted it to move naturally, to give an elegant aspect, the original knots never came apart (. . . but in the restoration [in Vienna by Hochstetter] they have already come apart, in just over 100 years)."[16] Ramírez's emphasis on movement in the manufacture of the crown stands in stark opposition to the polemics of the Austrian scientists intent on making it impossible for the crown to be moved from Vienna back to Mexico.

The Mexican engineers sourced one-hundred-year-old feathers from the zoology department of the university to simulate the load of movement that an airplane journey

would put on old feathers. It turned out that the vibrations created by visitors and cleaners in the gallery were much higher than those in an airplane and that a case could be built to buffer this "bad energy." (While this sounds like esoteric language, it is in fact the terminology used in the complex mathematical model making.) In the process, the Mexican engineers consulted experts from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Belgium, who all confirmed that vibrations were "not the issue." Their elegant equations explained the physics and mathematics behind this, but to no avail. "They were telling us no, it's not possible," a Mexican engineer told me with palpable frustration. "It was like two little boys, fighting with a toy in the middle. . . . The idea was to work together on a scientific project. . . . It's a political issue, not a scientific issue."

When museum visitors' imaginations are clearly predicated on identifying with and inserting their bodies into the vacancy below the crown, its lack of movement creates a difficult stasis. In the animist worldview, all material is moving and living at different speeds and within different systems. On the other hand, conservators study the microscopic life of materials and the ways in which their decay can be suspended. In the process of conservation, the physical structure of the crown was also shown to be designed for movement. The feathers are not fixed in their upper half, which allows them to fly and reflect light in motion. The gold and other colors of the feathers in the light are a large part of the visual impact of the piece. The gold sections are not knotted on, but shimmer in contrast to the blue feathers they are fixed to.

It is ironic that some birds that are most expert at flying can be very poor at landing. For example, there is a bird called the shearwater on the island in Oceania where I grew up that is particularly good at flying, but after completing a

whole lap around the world each year it crash lands, often perishing in the attempt. I am reminded of the shearwater as I listen to the engineers telling me about how the moment of an airplane's landing is when the vibration and impact is at its most extreme and will do the most damage to its cargo. The mysterious ability of a feather to make a bird's body aerodynamic results from the engineering capacity, flexibility, and mobility of the tiny barbs within it. The great mobility of such a feather crown and the danger to it presented by an airplane's landing, at least as presented by the Austrian scientists, seem contradictory conclusions; yet the science is not presented as something that can be questioned. It does not say, as scientific reports should say, that there are many avenues of research that these initial findings open up. In this case those include developing countervibration chambers in which fragile objects can fly, or rather "reland" themselves. "Relanding" could be another term for repatriation. If repatriation involves a highly ventilated, pressurized, and vibrating flight and eventual traumatic landing in the homeland, perhaps the term should more correctly be "homelanding."

The original owners, movers, and shakers of the crown feathers could be said to be the quetzal birds who grew them. In the Nahuatl language, the word *quetzalli* also means "precious." The way the quetzal bird's resplendent plumage hangs down, their green feathers mimicking the way leaves bow and dance, is not used merely for exaggerated decoration but as camouflage in the forest. Thin, elegantly twinned feathers dancing from the rump of the male birds are muted when seen in the context of the foliage, taking on the same green hue. When the quetzal flies out into the sun, the light amplifies the green of the whole surrounding in its tail feathers. As thin as palm fronds, these two feathers are more precious than a mass of shorter feathers on other birds. Who knows

what the genealogies of the feathers on the crown may be and how many, to return to the riddle, Motecuhzoma's there are among the quetzals!

The Arrogant Copy

The quetzal bird's centrality to the manufacture of the crown led to a drastic diminishment of the species population in Mexico. A state-led quetzal hunt was called on behalf of the postrevolutionary Mexican national museum, in order to manufacture a replica crown, resulting in the near-extinction of the quetzal. The lack of El Penacho's restitution therefore embodies another loss of both cultural and natural heritage from Mexico. Still, in the late Anthropocene, there is a material shortage of feathers due to the near-extinction of species that have been overhunted or face dwindling habitats, although more recently they have been bred in captivity.

Zelia Nuttal's 1888 research paper about El Penacho, "Standard or Head-dress?," was picked up by the news in Mexico in the early twentieth century when the president of Mexico, General Abelardo L. Rodríguez, tried to have the crown returned. When that attempt failed, Rodríguez began to prepare for a copy to be made for Mexico City. The archaeologist Eulalia Guzmán was employed in 1937 by the Ministry of Public Education to investigate the "great feather headdress." In the lead-up to World War II, there was a tense exchange of letters between Mexico City and Vienna about creating the reproduction headdress in Vienna. Mexico wanted to order a copy to be made based on the original. Among the correspondence (carefully kept in the Mexican museum archive but conspicuously absent in the Viennese one), a reply from Vienna includes a list of necessary materials that Mexico would need to supply for the copy:

1. The organics, such as fibers and herbs (and cotton), could be substituted with suitable material that exists here and would be indistinguishable from the original materials.
2. The gold ornaments are a problem only because of their cost. The existing solution employs fake gold. If you insist on using real gold, it would be necessary to have 600 grams. The shape of the gold ornaments makes them easy to reproduce.
3. Unless you look for a solution using fake feathers, getting the necessary feathers will present great difficulties given that the real feathers can be obtained only in exotic countries. The indispensable plumage:
   a) 600 long feathers from the tail of the quetzal. Of them 400 with length of 60 cms. The rest can be 40–50 cms long.
   b) 250 tail feathers with the white end of Piaya cayana.
   c) 50 complete heads of old males of the Platalea ajaja. In their place, you could use 40 skins without the heads.
   d) 80 beheaded skins of the turquoise bird [Cotinga amabilis] or, in its place, the Asiatic fishing parrot.[17]

When I talk to contemporary *amanteca* who know the conservators' stories about working on the crown, they are in awe. A look of somber respect crosses their faces, and they lower their eyes as they say with humility that they could not copy the crown. This is quite in contrast to the arrogance of the Viennese, quoted in the letter above, who think it "easy to reproduce" if they could order the precious materials: 600 grams of real gold; 600 long feathers from the tail of the quetzal; 3,000 shillings for the manufacture of the copy. Any gravity of respect for the ancient Aztec piece is completely missing.

In chapter 1, I discuss the flippant costumes in which Motecuhzoma entered the European theater and opera; these letters from the 1930s make it sound as if any copy made by the Austrians for Mexico would have been a similar the-

atrical costume piece. There is an important distinction between costume and regalia made for rituals. The Aztec feather headdress falls in the latter category, whether it was worn by a priest or Motecuhzoma himself. The former includes the copy Penachos available on etsy.com from a costume design shop in the Netherlands for the Mardi Gras price of $2,300 USD. To this day the world of professional tailoring earnestly upholds a distinction between historically and purposefully accurate tailoring (which skillfully understands the rank, technique, and material appropriate to each) and mere costume-making.[18]

When on July 19, 1938, the ethnologist Rose Kühnel and the museum's taxidermist, Karl Skalitzki, signed this list of necessary materials, who did they think could copy the ancient *amanteca*'s work in Vienna? Presumably they were thinking of doing it themselves, but they never got the chance because Hitler had annexed Austria in March 1938, some three months earlier, and Mexico had subsequently launched a protest at the League of Nations. The copy made for Rodríguez might have turned out even greater than the original, some twenty-first century Mexicans say with a sense of sarcasm, because it would have been "made in Austria."

The arrogance of those who discussed making a copy in Vienna is significant because it reflects the importance of the "humbling process" stressed by decolonial scholars from Latin America such as Rolando Vázquez and Walter Mignolo. Colonial arrogance and ignorance are not peculiarly Austrian, but in this case, they parallel the decline in Austrian power after the overthrow of Maximillian of Mexico. To presume the ability to reproduce a foreign crown of masterful manufacture from a vastly different time and place in precolonial Mexico without any of the cultural or artistic knowledge of the *amanteca* resonates with Xokonoschtletl's observation that the ethnographic muse-

ums are "mad and arrogant" in their dealings with him and the Mexican community.

But in 1938, one thing was clear even to the politicians: as much as the Austrians love to hunt down and shoot things, there are no quetzals in Austria. Despite their chutzpah, the Viennese realized that they could not source the quetzal feathers, as there was no market from which to obtain them. It was no longer possible to pick up a bundle from a merchant on the Zócalo. Modernization was in full swing in Mexico City, and the rise of fascism in Vienna was something no feathers could ameliorate. When the leftwing Mexican government lodged an international complaint at the League of Nations about Hitler's annexation of Austria, it ended any immediate possibility of collaborating to return the crown.

The biologist Isaac Ochoterena, who directed the institute at UNAM, replied to the museum director Luis Castillo Ledón on January 10 with photographs of the birds needed to remake the crown: "Quetzales (*Pharomachrus mocinno* or *quezaltototl*), (*quapachtotle*), (*Ajaia ajaja* or *tlauhquechol*) and the Contigua (*Contingua amabilis* or *xiuhtototl*)" and included the regions in which they could be found.[19] The following day, January 11, 1938, the Mexican national newspaper *El Universal* published ex-president Rodríguez's call to the Mexican people to help collect and deposit the necessary feathers.

At the same time, in January 1938, the newspapers in Vienna reported on an unusual rise in removal services. Jewish households were packing up and moving before the beginning of the purge that had already been announced. If 1938 was a good year for the removal company business in Vienna, it was also a good year for replica crowns as representations of political leadership.[20] While Kuehnel and Skalitzki waited for Mexico to reply to their list of materials, the whole city of Vienna was changing around them.

5

Collecting and Catastrophe

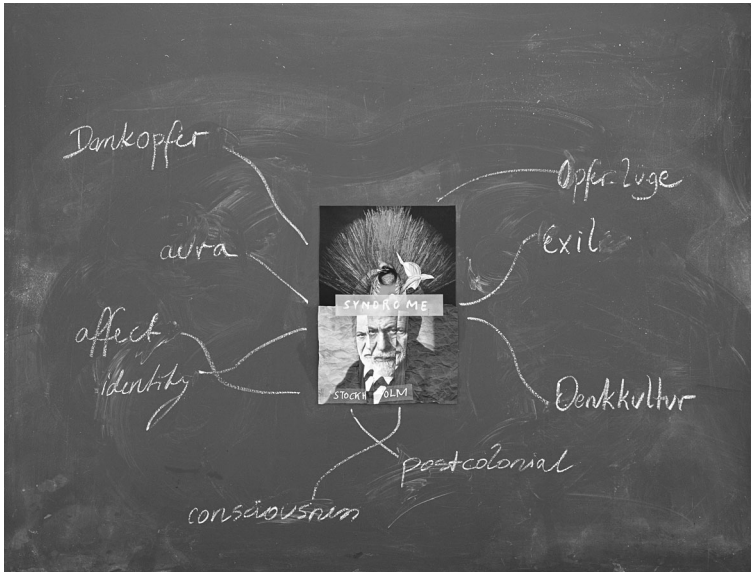

FIGURE 5.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

The histories of colonial occupation, war, genocide, and cultural destruction put repatriation claims into perspective. Arguments about the emotional, sentimental, and financial value of appropriated objects are core to the discussion of the moral right to ownership that the study of colonial collections

in postwar repatriation debates addresses. How is repatriation justified when it is complicated by reception history, or appropriation into political ideology? In the process of politicization in the postwar period, the image changes. But what of its material remains and historical contexts? The argument for a moral right to possessions, and their reparation for genocides committed, has similarities to the debate over El Penacho.

The entangled history of Motecuhzoma's crown can make sense of the relationship between the repatriation of fascist plunder and that of treasures appropriated during the colonial period. These are the result of different political agencies and have, for good reason, been treated in different terms in the past. The literature on restitution of WWII plunder is vast and has not been assessed together with the postcolonial discourse it has influenced. Colonial historians of repatriation are beginning to redress this balance, but there is work still to be done on how post-WWII historical consciousness bears on the popular image of loot and its conservation in museums, which in turn influence ethical judgments about repatriation.

Nazi Loot and Its Restitution History

It is often stated that Austria did not have any colonies. The Habsburg Empire, like the Roman Empire before it, is somehow assumed to have spread naturally across Europe and the Balkans, encountering no resistance, and it is difficult for the European historical imagination to classify such a process as colonization. Most Europeans know little about the Austrian colonization of Mexico, and if they do it is seen merely as part of Habsburg political puppetry. Colonialism "proper" is thought by many Austrians and Germans to be something undertaken by the British, Dutch, Belgians,

French, and Spanish. It is therefore by making a comparison to the Holocaust that a sense of the organized resource extraction, cultural destruction, and genocide involved in colonialism can be brought home to those European imaginations that struggle to understand what it might share with the Shoah.

What is at stake in making the comparison here is to harness the emotional energy and wisdom gained from the sensitive and important ways in which the Shoah is acknowledged as a shared tragedy and shame, as it has enabled communal mourning. This process of reckoning that German perpetrators and subsequent generations went through gave rise to a particular kind of Holocaust memorial culture (notably less so in Austria, the reasons for which I will discuss). I see the moral imperatives associated with the Shoah potentially reshaping our thinking and approach to restitution in this sense of contemporary cultural production.

Colonial genocides lack the same hard-won sense that denial is not an adequate response. The Shoah is sometimes used to reveal such denial. For example, a journalist asked a former museum director in Vienna in an (unpublished section) of an interview about the contested Mundurukú human remains, which were demonstratively put on display in the new hang of the permanent galleries in 2017. He asked whether the museum would similarly deny a Holocaust survivor's request for respectful treatment if it were their family's remains in the gallery. The museum director replied that he was not an expert in Holocaust studies. The blocking out of affect and identification with claimants in this way is no longer ethically viable. It is public monuments like Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Monument against Fascism* that provocatively reveal prejudices, which were inscribed on the very fabric of the monument before it was sunk into the ground like a time capsule.

Yet it is not only on this ethical level of comparative genocide that German and Austrian colonialism is linked to the Holocaust. A concrete historical connection is made, through the very history of the Welsers, with whom I began my family history, because Philippine Welser owned El Penacho in the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century, colonial fantasies circulated in Germany through publications that idealized the Welsers as pioneers. Despite their failure to govern Venezuela, "the Welser colony" stood for a yearning for colonies, later sought in Africa. The Deutsche Kolonialverein (German Colonial Society) published the nineteenth-century imperialists' interests in the history of the Welser Venezuela colony. For example: "If the genius of German tradition would descend today, along with the spirits of the Welsers, Fuggers, and the bold Hanseatic leaders, to prove the deeds and will of the people, how would he judge them? Well known to him are the historical facts of the recent past: how national consciousness has taken a specific form in the German people, how we have begun to have a breakthrough also in the economic realm."[1]

The Welser episode resurfaced when Imperial Germany began to colonize parts of Africa and the South Pacific, with a racial legitimization that links to later Nazi rhetoric. The loss of German colonies after WWI led to the Welsers being cast as an ethnic German national identity. An image of the Welsers as Aryan conquistadors "planting the seed of German nationhood on the American continent" continued in the writing published from 1938 to 1944.[2] Hence the imperial ambitions of the German nineteenth-century sources have been seen by Giovanna Montenegro, Dirk Moses, and others to prefigure the ambitions of the Third Reich.

The vast accumulation of material from around the world held in the museum stores of Europe gives a strong sense of what was lost in the process of its acquisition. The nature

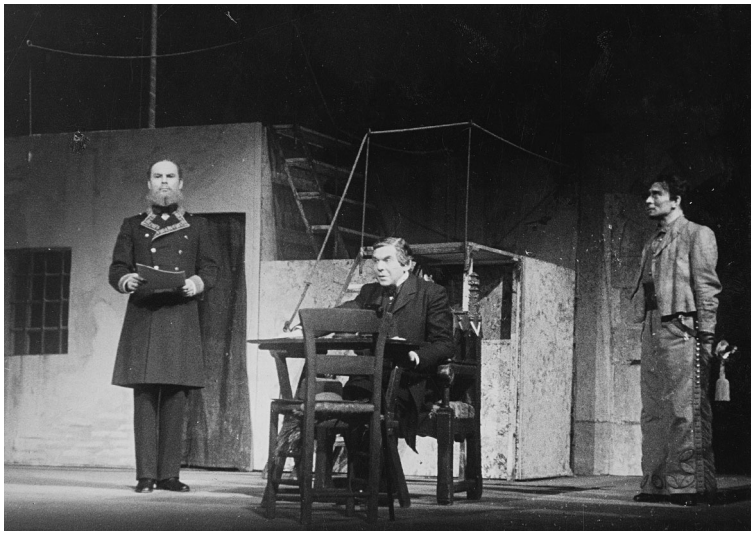

FIGURE 5.2 Bruno Volkel, scene from *Maximilian von Mexiko*, March 27, 1943. Photograph, 12.9 cm × 17.8 cm. Theatermuseum, Vienna.

of what constitutes cultural property was defined in international law by the Hague Convention in 1954 and by the UNESCO Convention in 1970. Nevertheless, cultural repatriation claims are most successful when they are backed up by the political will to carry them through. The definition of genocide formulated in response to the Shoah, and the moral imperative to pay reparations to its victims, mobilized political will in such a way that set a precedent for the return of cultural property taken during colonization.[3]

The definition of war crimes and genocide in international criminal courts in the later twentieth century importantly includes the looting of cultural heritage as part of the effort to erase target populations and political opposition. Under the Nazi regime, the plunder of valuable material, while only a part of the Aryanization campaign, was highly organized and precisely documented, giving a sense of the vast scale and range of looting that took place. In one salt mine in

Altaussee alone, the US military found 7,000 paintings and 3,000 art objects in 1945, and a further 1,140 works of fine art and 11,000 books in Berchtesgaden, where Hitler had his "eagle's nest" in the Berghof. To return this Nazi plunder was a major effort, conducted through euphemistically named "collecting points" set up to manage restitution. The Collecting Point in Wiesbaden took in 700,000 objects, and the Central Collecting Point in Munich contained over a million art works alone.

Appropriating Jewish financial assets was an effective means of funding the establishment of the Nazi state. Just as in the colonial situations Sarr and Savoy describe in *Relational Ethics*, where things are "acquired through inequitable conditions," the Third Reich rolled out a legal process for expropriating Jewish assets.[4] Already in 1933 the law of *Gesetz über die Einziehung volks—und staatsfeindlichen Vermögens* (withdrawing the wealth of enemies of the people and state) culminated in the Nuremberg Laws and justified the Aryanization of Jewish property. The historian Constantin Goschler explains that the "exclusion of Jews from the national community justified their expropriation without contravening the principle of private ownership."[5] Banned from gainful employment, Jews were forced to either sell or give up their estates and migrate. They were taxed 25 percent of their entire property when leaving the country by the aptly titled *Reichsfluchtsteuer* (Reich flight tax); further laws required that all money transferred to foreign banks be highly taxed, with the effect that by 1939, 96 percent of all Jewish funds transferred were owed to the Third Reich. The export of artworks was also forbidden, and emigrants were forcibly searched for "precious national goods" to embargo.

The trade in cultural artifacts from the colonies was often the result of violent force. Colonial military journals are full of stories of plunder from the dead on the battlefield, or from

around the necks of civilians. In the gifts from soldiers to public museum collections around the world are notes such as that written by Dresdner Lieutenant Buttlar-Brandenfels, who records that on February 25, 1904, he took jewelry from a Herero woman who was killed by grenade fire in the German colony of Namibia.[6] Centuries earlier, El Penacho was one of thousands of objects that entered the European market after the bloody conquest of Latin America.

A decree in 1938, *Verordnung über den Einsatz des jüdischen Vermögens*, ordered Jews to hand in their precious belongings to the "Reich's acquisition and collection point," where art dealers and museums could directly purchase pieces of interest.[7] The art market boomed due to the vast amount of valuable art works on sale. There are detailed accounts that show Jewish owners were compensated no more than a sixth of the actual value of the works sold. Ironically, the German word *Reich* is both a noun meaning "empire" and an adjective for "rich."

The poverty that resulted from the economic project of expropriation of Jewish goods and forced migration needed to be given a spin that the public could relate to; primitivism was used to give it an ideological aesthetic. "Good German art," according to Hitler, needed to be "purified" from foreign, non-Western influences. In his speech at the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst (House of German Art), he proclaimed:

> From now on we are going to wage a merciless war of destruction against the last remaining elements of cultural disintegration. Should there be someone among [the artists] who still believes in his higher destiny—well now, he has had four years' time to prove himself. These four years are sufficient for us, too, to reach a definite judgment. From now on, of this you can be certain, all those mutually supporting and thereby sustaining cliques

> of chatterers, dilettantes, and art forgers will be picked up and liquidated. For all we care, those prehistoric Stone Age culture barbarians and art stutterers can return to the caves of their ancestors and there can apply their primitive international scratchings.[8]

A traveling exhibition titled *Degenerate Art* that began in Munich in 1937, accompanied by a catalog with African-style font, presented modernist works as rough and grotesque primitivism (fig. 6.1, center). This opened one day after another exhibition, *Große deutsche Kunstausstellung* (Great German Art Exhibition, comprising eight exhibitions from 1937 to 1944).[9] However, in the attempt to classify what was or was not degenerate, the distinction between "great German art" and the array of Jewish, intellectual, Soviet, and foreign works fell apart. The supposed degeneracy of expressionism was particularly controversial, as it divided so-called moderates and more extreme nationalist groups who argued about the contradictions of truth and beauty in the paintings of Emil Nolde and Lyonel Feininger and in Ernst Barlach's sculptures, drawings, and texts. In the early days, high Nazi officials defended expressionism as a German style but soon abandoned this position. Artists like Nolde (fig. 6.1, right) attempted to rescue their careers by swearing allegiance to the Nazis, in the end to no avail, even though Joseph Goebbels and Albert Speer appreciated not only Nolde's art but also his (anti-Semitic) cultural politics.

Nolde had a collection of Pacific artifacts in his house that he had acquired during a visit to the German colony in Papua New Guinea. These sculptures became the basis for his paintings, much like the more familiar appropriations of African art by Pablo Picasso (still celebrated uncritically, most recently in an exhibition at the Musée du Quai Branly—Jacques Chirac in 2019). Similar to Albrecht Dürer looking

at the earliest collections from the Americas, Picasso in conversation with André Malraux said:

> When I went to the (Palais du) Trocadéro, it was disgusting. The flea market. The smell. I was all alone. I wanted to get away. But I didn't leave. I stayed. I understood something important: something was happening to me, wasn't it? The masks weren't like other kinds of sculpture. Not at all. They were magical things.[10]

Yet the wooden, painted, adorned, and revered effigies are not only labeled "primitive" but treated mostly with disparagement by the market for high art. "Tribal art" was relegated to the anthropology museum as evidence for the study of race and primitive society, in accordance with the racial science of which the rhetoric of fascism took full advantage

Modernism needed to produce the primitive to set up its own position of linear temporal progression (from primitive) to the ever more contemporary. This split in time structured both the Nazi and the modernist representation of a society of high-achieving individuals who had evolved from primitive communal structures. Therein a split of property relations is also enacted, where will to personal accumulation of possessions is prized over the maintenance of communities of beliefs and aesthetic forms. These ruptures continue to divide relationships to those spiritual objects and valuable commodities that are subject to repatriation claims. For the reduction to purely monetary value of goods appropriated during the colonial period makes little sense to those for whom they form part of a system of belief.

The process of looting Jewish-owned art and artifacts, organized along highly bureaucratic lines, was adapted specifically to each European nation that Nazi troops occupied, with the best works of art destined for Hitler's Führermuseum in Linz. The Anschluss, the invasion of Austria on March 15,

1938, was technically not an annexation but an incorporation that enacted laws made in Germany against "subversives," thereby circumventing the requirements of the Treaty of Versailles. This is legally important for art restitution. For example, the family of sugar magnate Ferdinand Bloch escaped to Switzerland before German troops crossed into Austria but had to leave behind their valuable possessions, including five paintings by Gustav Klimt. One of these, a portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer, was bought by Ronald Lauder in 2006 for $135 million. "This is our *Mona Lisa*," Lauder proclaimed proudly when I visited his Neue Galerie opposite the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He was posing for photographs in a black suit that matched Bloch-Bauer's hair, set off by a golden halo in the painting.

On the day I visited Neue Gallerie, a throng of Austrian government officials and an ambassador were in attendance, and all were posing for selfies with Lauder in front of *Adele Bloch-Bauer*, creating images that encapsulated the political art of restitution through the legal system and the restaging of pre-exile Austrian Jewish identity in New York. The portrait that Ferdinand Bloch-Bauer commissioned Klimt to paint of his wife is a rare surviving symbol in New York of a vanished modern Vienna, where the small circle of mostly Jewish patrons invested in a new generation of artists and hosted soirées and salons, an intellectual and artistic scene that has been largely absent in Austria since the war. In New York, Lauder has re-created something of this fin de siècle context in his Neue Gallerie, wherein he and Adele seem intimately related, as the selfies document. Lauder collects exclusively German and Austrian works, which typically have a Nazi provenance. There is a sense that the alienated painting that had been sold to fund the National Socialist war machine had been disalienated through repatriation; yet the question arises whether repatriation absolves art objects of their reception histories.

The repatriation history of items of Nazi loot from their appropriation through to their redisplay as evidence of cultural and legal triumph is a long and messy process of legal battles and clarifications that stretches through the decades of the twentieth century. Nazi Germany's capitulation provided a more definitive starting point for the restitution of private property taken from persecuted minorities than any from the ongoing forms of colonialism that persist as forms of global resource extraction and economic inequality. A provenance problem faces all investigations into mass expropriations, involving the tracing of thousands of objects back to their original owners.

The US military were the first to face the dilemmas of repatriation, when they came across storage areas for Nazi loot in salt mines and collection points in Germany which had not been absorbed into national museum collections through the art market. They enacted *das Militärregierungsgesetz Nr. 59* (military government act no. 59) to regulate restitution claims for property that entered into the possession of non-Jews during "Aryanization." The *Militärregierungsgesetz Nr. 59* retroactively made all financial transactions from 1933 onward with those deemed, on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or politics to be in opposition to National Socialism, illegal. This included pressuring a victim to sell or any other act of expropriation. It is these pressures to sell that remain difficult to justify in postcolonial claims, although the larger context of forceful economic gain is also historically evidenced in most colonial administrations. The statistics that Sarr and Savoy published in *Relational Ethics* provide clear evidence of the exponential gain in artifacts obtained by museums during colonial periods in each country. When cross-referenced with the records of individual collectors, colonial administrators, soldiers, scientists, and missionaries, a damning picture of economic opportunism emerges. In the letters and notes of the collectors, their awareness and

exploitation of the unequal situation is articulated shamelessly because their culturally accepted image of a "primitive society" morally justified their brutal appropriations.

It is interesting to look at the history of the battle for repatriation after the Holocaust in light of the current nascent discussions about colonial repatriation because, although seizures were made at different times and in very different contexts, in the late twentieth century many of the responses in Europe to repatriation claims on objects from both settings took a similar form. History does not shed a favorable light on the resistance that the German public felt to the *Militärregierungsgesetz Nr. 59* concerning the "Refund of Discoverable Assets to Victims of National Socialist Repression" out of fear of losing artworks they had acquired. Not to speak of the national institutions that saw themselves as rightful owners of the work: the few initial restitutions that were made were presented as "gifts." Repatriations currently under discussion by the Austrian government and similar returns in process by Germany and Britain to their former colonies are always framed in the form of "gifts" or loans, which in the best-case scenario become permanent. The justification given is the law, which could be changed but is unlikely to be when "deaccessioning" of collections is a precedent that museums do not want to set.

The process of civil justice that repatriated confiscated Jewish wealth was not related at the outset to questioning responsibility for the deaths of the Holocaust victims. Restitution cast as an "act of generosity" rather than an ethical necessity can be used to put a positive marketing spin on an institution, improving its public image and balancing the darkness in its heritage. Because those few museums, galleries, and cities that initiated restitution programs early on understood themselves to be the rightful owners of the objects in their collections, their gifts or ex-gratia payments

did not work as apologies. Yet the act of apology is vitally important in a situation where damage cannot be undone, or time returned.

From the outset, the restitutions that took place were set up on a financial basis alone; ethical, ideological, and personal aspects reaching far beyond the bare facts used in court were not addressed. The genocide had been professionally documented by the Nazis and provided a basis on which the individual Jewish claimants prosecuted the state that benefited from the war. In 1951 the Conference for Jewish Material Claims against Germany demanded, and won, 450 million German marks as replacement value for lost Jewish property in Europe. In German collective memory this became a synonym for reparation. The transactional nature of these proceedings renders the argument made by critics of repatriation—that it was purely demanded for financial gain—irrelevant in a context in which the laws for restitution were only enabled to deal with questions on this level. Nevertheless, the German media fueled hostility to repatriation by portraying Jewish claimants and lawyers as working solely for financial profit. As a result, in 1965, the *Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* (West German Federal Compensation Laws) gave restitution claims a deadline of December 1, 1969.[11] Despite this, affective forms of healing took place in terms of memorials, as well as in cultural and other related spheres.

The repatriation process then lay dormant until the 1980s when, after the forty-year statutory period, the state archives opened. Holocaust survivors who had rebuilt their lives finally had access to archives of their family histories. This coincided with a new "sensitivity to institutional oppression" as Andrew McClellan puts it.[12] The reunification of Germany in 1989 came with a thrust for unity and identity, and ironically the facts of the Holocaust did not threaten this cohesion but strengthened it. Neoliberalization encroached increasingly

on museums and the social welfare state regressed. A growing appreciation of private ownership led to the protection of private property, as it was less regulated by the state than before. In response, museums and galleries invested in researching their collections to identify looted Jewish belongings and publish their findings. The same center for German cultural heritage, Deutsches Zentrum Kulturgutverluste, that deals with Nazi loot opened a new department in 2019 for postcolonial restitution. This is significant as it offers a potentially long-term institutional approach, rather than one dependent on the whims of a politician. Other institutions, like the Germanische Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, have also published an extensive, ongoing database that sets an example of how to conduct provenance research in the face of a perceived threat to their collections from the wave of restitution claims during the late twentieth century.

What is the method of restitution? How are restitution claims made? These were President Macron's questions to Bénédicte Savoy and Felwine Sarr following the promise he made in 2017 to his family friend Roch Marc Christian Kabore, the president of Burkina Faso, to investigate the matter (fig. 6.1 left). In a speech at the University of Ouagadougou, in the capital of Burkina Faso, he stated, "I cannot accept that a large part of cultural heritage from several African countries is in France. . . . African heritage can't just be in European private collections and museums."[13] This statement created huge controversy, but since then the protests of the *gilets jaunes* (yellow vests) and other challenges to his popularity in France have meant that not even the first group of twenty-six objects have been returned to a new museum being built in Abomey, Benin (yet to open as of this writing). That is despite their being in the priority group set out by the five-year plan, a plan already delayed by a difficult phase of supporting museums in the cities in African countries that are slated to receive these gifts.

A year after receiving the report, to avoid appearing to have abandoned his promises, the prime minister presented a ceremonial sword that had belonged to the nineteenth-century Senegalese political leader, military commander, and Islamic scholar El Hadj Omar Tall to the president of Senegal before a crowd of dignitaries in Dakar. "Observers have been quick to point out, however, that the sword, which was returned for a period of five years (what Macron apparently meant by 'temporary restitution') had, in fact, already been on display in the Dakar museum, on loan from France," Sally Price writes.[14]

What is needed for the repatriation of colonial material is an equivalent to the Washington Principles, a statement drawn up when related problems were discussed in a meeting in Washington, DC, in 1998 regarding Holocaust repatriation. Forty-four state and several nonstate organizations met in Washington with the intention of adopting principles for research strategies on an international basis that would regulate restitution claims. Similar principles are slowly being formulated for looted colonial artifacts, but at the time of writing, these strategies and guidelines are not yet in place. A meeting of German national museums in Cologne in July 2019 began such a process, anticipated to take similar steps in the identification of plundered material, to locate its rightful owners and find a just and fair solution. Even though the Washington Principles were not legally binding, they established, according to Flavia Foradini, a standard of good practice for institutions.[15] It is significant that, where the legal right to claim has long expired, the principles state the grounds on which to demand the opening of archives and make efforts to contact the potential heirs of those dispossessed by the Nazis. The new confidence felt by the recently unified German state meant it was able to volunteer ethically driven agreements to repatriate expropriated assets. Structural change was also set out in the Washington Principles,

which stated that "commissions or other bodies established to identify art that was confiscated by the Nazis and to assist in addressing ownership issues should have a balanced membership." Thereby a generational change occurred in the attitude to public history, as topics that had been repressed in the past—Holocaust and colonialism—were brought into the light. Germany is at present engaged in re-examining its colonial past in Namibia, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, and elsewhere. This re-examination is directly related to having gone through a similar process with the Holocaust and is using what the state has learned from that recent catastrophe to allow older traumas to be addressed.

The case of *Stern vs. Bissonette* in Rhode Island (2007) first defined goods appropriated by the Nazis as stolen and made it illegal to trade in such goods.[16] The decision meant that any artwork that had been placed in an auction under duress during the National Socialist period, was legally equated with stolen assets. Hence Interpol lists expropriated artworks, such as those from the Max Stern collection, which Stern was forced to auction in 1937 because he was Jewish, and searches for them as they do for other stolen goods. Meanwhile in Germany, because of the thirty-year statute of limitation set by the *Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* (1965), claims relating to assets stolen under Nazi rule seemed to have almost ground to a halt—until the case of Cornelius and Hildebrand Gurlitt in 2013. That was when a discovery at the Swiss German border in 2012 became public: an elderly man was traveling on the train to Munich with a briefcase containing €9,000 in cash, payment received for an artwork he had sold in Switzerland. Selling artwork inherited from his father, Hildebrand Gurlitt, had been Cornelius Gurlitt's source of income. Hildebrand was one of Hitler's art dealers and he had wisely collected valuable "degenerate" expressionist art works for himself (among other art works), purchasing them

cheap at auction. His son inherited his vast collection and had hidden it in his apartment in Munich, and in another house in Salzburg. The public outrage resulting from the discovery that such a volume of Nazi loot was being hidden and sold in this way led to an outcry for clarification of the legal situation. The Federal Council of Germany announced legislation called Lex-Gurlitt, part of its efforts at the highest levels of government to be seen as addressing the heavily criticized legal process with which the Gurlitt collection was initially treated. The German right to inheritance of possessions no longer within the statute of limitations in common law meant this bequest was legal. However, a set of exceptions were added for property that had disappeared without trace since WWII (as was the case for Gurlitt); for property owned by a national institution; or when invoking the time limit is in violation of good faith. The national museums in Germany, in response to a related contract in 1999 called the *Gemeinsame Erklärung*, signed by the federal government, federal states, and municipal central organizations, began the restitution of all looted artworks in their collections.

The discussion of these shifts in German law and the ethical approach to repatriation was typically heated and polarized. That all artworks in museums should go back to their rightful owners before 1937 (or their heirs) created anxiety about the ripping apart of meaningful museum collections. The very core of German constitutional law was under threat from those who argued that the statute of limitation on claims should be abolished altogether. Others argued that only in cases of willful looting should the time limit be overturned.

Gurlitt refused to speak to the press. Pictures published in the media showed a shrunken old man living in a cluttered space, in which the lack of conservation standards was slowly destroying works by Renoir, Cézanne, Gauguin,

Manet, Delacroix, Rodin, Dix, Munch, Courbet, Kandinsky, and Klee, among many others. The collection had a strong focus on French artists because Hildebrand Gurlitt had traveled to Paris for Hitler to buy the best artworks for his Führermuseum in Linz, as well as acquiring works for himself. The tax Cornelius Gurlitt had evaded was the only illegality of the situation that the German state could find, and the confiscated collection was returned to him in 2014. A catalog of the collection was published, and the *Eigentümer* (the descendants of the owners) began to come forward in a process of restitution, which to date has seen five pieces returned: works by Henri Matisse, Max Liebermann, Carl Spitzweg, Camille Pissarro, and Adolph von Menzel.

The Museums' Response

Museums in Germany and Switzerland, such as Ludwig in Cologne and Kunstmuseum Bern, have responded to the growing interest in repatriation since the Gurlitt case. But it is articulated through an authoritative defense based on provenance research, which is displayed in their wall texts. In texts accompanying the exhibition *Modern Masters: Degenerate Art at the Museum of Fine Arts Bern*, the museum takes the title of the important auction of "degenerate art," *Gemälde und Plastiken Moderner Meister aus deutschen Museen*, to make the point that Switzerland received works Germany had defined as "degenerate" as modernist masterworks. Originally this definition had been used for marketing an auction where masterpieces were being sold far below market value, but that is not mentioned in the introduction to the 2016 exhibition catalog in Bern, which identifies the democratic freedom of Switzerland as the reason these modernist works can be shown in Bern. By 2019 this fallacy had been challenged, for example in Zurich, where the research on the provenance of the Kunsthaus's works on paper from

1933 to 1950 called *Provenienzen im Fokus* accompanied the exhibition *Stunde Null* (zero hour). The curator Joachim Sieber stated:

> During this period, some 10,000 works on paper were donated to or acquired by the Collection. The research project focused on some 3,900 items. None of the works showed clear evidence of having changed hands due to confiscation and therefore being Nazi-looted art. Approximately two thirds of the provenances can be classified as unproblematic and complete, or as incomplete but without any indication of questionable changes of ownership. In the remaining cases the previous owner at least was successfully identified, but there is a need for further research.[17]

Evidence of Switzerland's financial gains through fascism in the art market (and also in other economic markets) is slowly being published. This step will eventually allow the Swiss capital gains made through colonialism to become public.

Meanwhile in Bern, the museum defends itself with the argument that Swiss neutrality makes it a safe haven for artworks. Geneva is a tax haven full of storehouses in which valuable masterpieces are protected, and there is mounting pressure to have these hidden collections opened to a viewing public. Further background to this declarative exhibition about modern art's provenance in the collection is set by the fate of the Gurlitt bequest. When Gurlitt died soon after the discovery, he specified in his will that the collection should go to the Museum of Fine Arts (Kunstmuseum) in Bern. In the end the museum agreed to accept only those works from the Gurlitt collection for which the provenance was clear, leaving all others in Germany to be researched and potentially restituted.

The German approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (a process of accounting for and coming to terms with the

past) and attention to maintaining a memory of Nazi crimes through *Mahnmalskultur* (memorials) provide an inspiring precedent for global museums dealing with trauma after genocide. The National Museum of Australia (NMA), for instance, explicitly quotes the architecture of Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin. The floorplan of the First Nations Gallery of the National Museum in Canberra, where Aboriginal culture is exhibited, is a Star of David broken into the same lightning-flash zigzag, conflating through this architectural gesture the voids in the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the absence in Australia's capital of a memorial to the dispossession of the Aboriginal people through colonization. The building was opened in 2001 by Prime Minister John Howard, who through his entire term in office refused to apologize on behalf of white Australia to the Aboriginal people for colonial dispossession, trauma, and continuing inequality. Standing unwittingly in front of the facade that encoded the word "sorry" in Braille, the prime minister declared the National Museum, with its architecture of anger and imagination, open. Another Braille message, "Forgive us our genocide," also appeared on the building. Both were rendered illegible only ten days after the opening by Craddock Morton, the public servant in charge of the construction, to save face.

Libeskind's Jewish Museum extension to the Berlin Museum was commissioned by the German government as a memorial to the genocide of the Jews. The way Libeskind's voids had been presented in an exhibition in Melbourne a few years prior to the NMA commission led to an identification in Australia with the postmodern memorial, in which resonant emptiness symbolizes loss. Australians projected their own historical trauma into the voids that Libeskind designed. The reception of memorials to the Holocaust set the stage for the architectural firm Ashton Raggatt McDougall's

design of the NMA. For Howard Raggatt, "it is a legitimate strategy, put to work to make a comparison between the plight of the Aboriginals and the horror of the Holocaust." The artist Michal Glikson writes, "If mobilized and contextualized, the broken Star could become a 'footprint' that gives the unspeakable tragedy of Australia's past and present a presence; a map with which to navigate Australian dialogue into a global discourse."[18]

Cross-references to the Holocaust in arguments for recognition of colonial genocides are often criticized as anachronistic and illegitimate. The anachronisms of memory are forgiven more easily than those in history writing, which are assumed to form a logical line. Yet the Holocaust continues to provide a benchmark in the debate over recognizing genocide as such. This recognition is profound for the victims and their descendants. It is cited by those lobbying for recognition in the political sphere, and existing memorials like Peter Eisenman's Jewish Memorial in Berlin continue to inspire equivalents—the Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted under Nazism in Berlin, for example, which is periodically vandalized.

Libeskind made the long journey to Australia to fly in a helicopter over the NMA building to check the postmodern quotation, which he took to be "shocking, banal . . . plagiarism."[19] This is ironic coming from a starchitect adept at self-plagiarism, who has recycled his Star of David in Jewish museums the world over. In Warsaw, Libeskind's design for a Jewish Museum was rejected precisely because it was seen to buy into the branding and aesthetic "Holocaust-ization" of Jewish memory. It is amusing to imagine the scene as he circled high over Canberra to check the identical footprint of the postcolonial misquotation. He eventually decided it was not worth suing.

6

Monuments and Exile

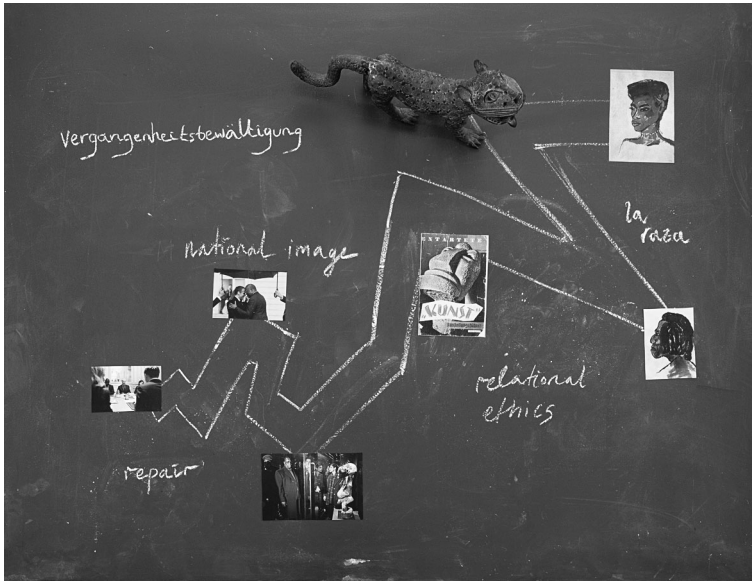

FIGURE 6.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

Among the strangest of episodes in this story is when Austria sought to remediate its postwar image problem through a gesture of gratitude to Mexico. In 1956, Vienna named one of its public squares "Mexikoplatz" in memory of Mexico's protest over the Anschluss in 1938.[1]

Prior to the Anschluss, many Europeans living in Mexico—exiles from the Spanish Civil War in particular but also intellectuals from Austria—had built an active and systematic support network there for political dissidents. Prompted by their efforts, Mexico submitted the only formal protest in writing against the "political death" of Austria following its annexation into the German state. (Other states, such as the Soviet Union, spoke out only verbally, and some only in bilateral talks.)

In 1985, Vienna invited the Mexican government to erect a memorial stone in this "Mexico Square" bearing the following inscription:

> In March 1938, Mexico was the only country that protested the annexation of Austria by National Socialist Germany at the League of Nations. In commemoration of this act, the City of Vienna names this place Mexikoplatz.[2]

It is through such *Gedenkkultur* (memorial culture) that the Holocaust has had an influence in creating a culture of acknowledging genocide internationally. Building lasting monuments on the sites of historical battles is not the invention of the postwar period; however, the Holocaust memorial typology has produced such a range of provocative and successful models that it has become a German export. Such memorials stand for a national and public apology, an essential ingredient of that which is sought through repatriation claims.

But apology was far from the postwar attitude of denial that Austria adopted toward repatriation claims for El Penacho. Any discussion of the case was put on hold while the nation rebuilt its economy. The case re-emerged only when restoration debates during the 1980s began to inspire a change in attitudes globally. In 1985, Greece submitted a formal request to the British Government for the return of the Elgin Mar-

bles. 1986 saw the "reburial issue" (concerning disinterred Native American remains) brought to the United States Congress, and a 1990 federal law declared that excavated Native American remains and cultural items must be returned to their respective peoples. North American museums have since been required by law to assess repatriation claims under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The Act has necessitated massive cataloguing of the Native American collections of many museums in order to identify the living heirs to remains and artifacts among culturally affiliated Indigenous organizations.

One argument against repatriation that the world's museums routinely present, which also serves as an excuse protecting their complacency, is that they cannot conduct the level of research necessary to respond to such requests. The North American museums' enforced compliance with NAGPRA offers a powerful counterexample (though NAGPRA applies only to federal agencies and institutions that receive federal funding). Hegemonies characteristically will not change until they are forced to do so; national legislation on the repatriation of cultural property is a demonstrably effective way to compel such change.

But museums have a patient relationship with time, and the repatriation trajectories of objects are burdened by delay, as evidenced by the complaints from communities of claimants. Accounts from museums, such as the Peabody at Harvard, reflect on the delays in response and extensions of NAGPRA deadlines.[3] For those in museums battling a lack of staff and the complexity of transferring agency to Indigenous people, delays conveniently deflate the energy behind repatriation. The German law that set a time limit on repatriation claims was a way for the government to stem the growing flood of Holocaust restitution claims. For their part, colonial cases show how long it can take for a community to

harness the case for restitution in order to regain their cultural heritage.

In Vienna, those who sought to avoid repatriating El Penacho used these long delays to disable the process. Protestors who had come to Vienna were forced to move back to Mexico, and the press turned to the next item of daily news. One of the great powers a museum has is time. The mission to keep objects in perpetuity will outlive any individual protestor. The tendency to claim universality for a museum collection comes from this same sense of time, in which all within the museum live encapsulated for eternity. In *The Function of the Museum* modernist artist Daniel Buren echoed older sentiments about the deadliness of indefinite periods of time when he wrote that the museum is "an enclosure where art is born and buried, crushed by the very frame which presents and constitutes it."[4]

Exiles in Mexico and Monuments to Protest in Vienna

Austria's international image problem, the result of its embrace of fascism during World War II, was already thought by some in the late 1940s to be solvable through a repatriation that would symbolize the state's gratitude to Mexico as the only nation that protested against the annexation of Austria in 1938. Bruno Frei, an Austrian journalist exiled in Veracruz, wrote a short story in 1947 titled *Der Kopfschmuck des Montezuma* (The Headdress of Motecuhzoma).[5] The story tells of a journey to the site of Cortés's first landing in Veracruz and of the poem "Vitzliputzli" by Frei's ancestor, the German writer Heinrich Heine.

Aber Montezuma starb,
Und da war der Damm gebrochen,

Der die kecken Abenteurer
Schützte vor dem Zorn des Volkes.

But poor Montezuma died there,
And the dam was broken down,
Which the bold adventurers
From the people's wrath protected.[6]

Frei remarks that, although Heine was never in Mexico, the poem paints the picture of the Vitzliputzli pyramid as the site of an Aztec victory over Cortés. An association is created with multiple waves of colonial plunder from Mexico through reference to a German expedition that stole figures from the temple walls (much as Malraux had done in Angkor Wat). Through this act of violent extraction by a German colonial expedition, the victimhood of the material artifacts, the sculptures and the crown in this case, are related to the victims of National Socialism living in exile in Mexico.

At the very end of the story, Frei imagines the return of El Penacho as a "gift of friendship" from Vienna to Mexico. He then quickly dismisses the idea as a heat-induced delirium, and the story comes to a sudden, unresolved close. This is the first written suggestion that the return of El Penacho might deflect or atone for Austrian guilt for having collaborated with the Nazis. In 1992, Frei's story was given a new twist. In anticipation of five-hundredth anniversary celebrations of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World, a proposal was put forward to return El Penacho to Mexico in a ceremony at the World Exhibition in Seville. Mexican demonstrations in Vienna became particularly intense at this time, and several protestors were beaten by police, imprisoned, and deported from Austria that year. The newspaper *Die Zeit* compared their activities to the Ottoman siege of Vienna of 1529, under the headline "Azteken vor Wien."[7]

The idea of alleviating Austria's postwar image problem through repatriation of objects held in museums has to be understood within the context of the Waldheim affair, to which it was an immediate response. Following criticism in 1986 from the World Jewish Congress in New York concerning the participation of the Austrian president Kurt Waldheim in Nazi war crimes decades earlier, the United States banned his entrance into that country.[8] The CEO of the Austrian National Tourist Office, Helmut Zolles, told me in an interview that the tourist economy suffered particularly badly from the resulting publicity, at what was otherwise an optimistic time of rebuilding Austria. To remedy the situation, the president who succeeded Waldheim, Thomas Klestil, argued for repatriations from museums that held objects of strong emotional or cultural significance. The Weltmuseum, however, feared that such a move would put all museums of its kind in question and rejected President Klestil's suggestion of returning El Penacho to Mexico. In 1996, at the one-thousand-year anniversary of the naming of Austria (originally as Ostarrichi, now Österreich), it was proposed that El Penacho be a *millennarisches Dankopfer* (millennial gift of thanks). While the suggestion did not lead to the repatriation of El Penacho, it did prompt discussion about the widespread misunderstanding that Austria was merely a victim of National Socialist crimes.

That the crown was not returned at this time does not undermine the effect within the logic of celebrity and brand culture in the period of late capitalism, which reimagines nations through images. The desired association in the public mind of El Penacho as a gift of thanks can be characterized in this case as a type of propaganda. The image of power that Austria acquires through association with legacies of global collecting serves to remind the public of the historic strength of the Habsburg Empire, while also recalling the alliance of socialist Vienna with Mexico. As complex and con-

tradictory as this set of resonant power relations may be, the idea persists that El Penacho could deflect or minimize Austrian guilt for having collaborated with the Nazis.

During the period known as Red Vienna, in which the city was governed by the socialist party (now the Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ), a global network of socialists formed the basis of those who would incite Mexico to protest about the Anschluss in 1938. As noted, there was active and systematic support in Mexico for political dissidents. President Lázaro Cárdena (1934–1940) made reforms that integrated the exiled intelligentsia. As fascism around the world was growing, Cárdena made Mexico a safe haven for persecuted socialists. He offered asylum to thousands of refugees after the fall of the Spanish Republic, and Mexico's postwar culture thrived from the contributions of immigrant philosophers, artists, academics, and poets. The Austrian Socialist political leader Bruno Kreisky has spoken of a virtual Mexican exile that was enacted at the Kreuz Kino cinema in Vienna in 1935 during a screening of a film about the Mexican revolutionary Francisco Villa.[9] Members of the banned SPÖ who had met at the screening cheered and chanted with raised fists: "Viva Villa! Viva la Revolución! Long Live Democracy! Legalization of the SPÖ!"[10]

Rubén Gallo suggests in his book *Freud's Mexico* that there is a postcolonial connection between Austria and Mexico on a subconscious level.[11] Gallo's creative associations between Freud and Mexico analyze Freud's own dreams of being Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. Freud recorded a dream that could be interpreted as being set in Miramare, the castle Maximilian built in Trieste and then replicated in Mexico City. Gallo argues that the execution of Maximilian was such a lasting trauma for Austria that Freud subconsciously dreamed himself into the role of the defeated. In the logic of Gallo's analysis, Austria has a national Stockholm syndrome, the phenomenon of sympathy or even love some victims feel

for their captors. If such a malady can be diagnosed at the scale of a nation-state, then this is one subconscious undercurrent in the Mexican protest against the loss of the political life of Austria in 1938.

The claim of the victimhood of Austria intensifies in its postwar denial of having been part of National Socialism. In his book *Re-Presentation of the Repressed*, Peter Weibel defines the "famous *Opfer-Lüge*," the lie of victimhood, as "the foundation of the second Austrian Republic."[12] In 1938 there was no resistance from the Austrian population to German tanks as they crossed the Austrian border. As part of the Third Reich, Austria administered Nazi law—which enabled expropriations and deportations. In the aftermath of World War II, Austria consciously tried to distance itself from fascism's crimes, a process of perceived purification that avoided regret and was characterized by denial and repression.

In both Austria and Germany, judges often had Nazi backgrounds, leading to postwar repatriation claims becoming mired in detail and drawn out through excessive attention to proof of provenance. A need for the independent review of repatriation claims arose because judges intentionally delayed the cases they did not want to support. Accountants who were working on the dispossession of Austrian and German Jews established a legal opinion in 1945 that also led to a lessening of repatriation claims. Kenneth Alford went as far as to condemn postwar Austria for having committed the same crimes as Nazi Germany: "They simply adapted laws that enabled them to keep the art that was returned to their countries by the victorious Allies."[13]

Image Actions

The migration of Austrian intellectuals to Mexico, the Stockholm syndrome–strength affection for Maximilian in both

Mexico and Austria, the fantasy of counter-colonization in Heine and Frei, and the Mexican protest against the annexation of Austria are just some of the possible ingredients in five hundred years of anachronistic postcolonial relations between Mexico and Austria. I use the notion of anachronism in this context to refer to the sense of living the past through the present, of interpreting history not as something gone but as something lived now. Anachronism is therefore another way of understanding the delay that the legal statute of limitations cannot account for in repatriation claims that come significantly later than when the looting occurred. In restoration claims, history and the forces of time confront the overwhelming legal and political pressures produced by demands for the return of plundered art.

It is illuminating to view El Penacho's repatriation biography as a prism of different moments in time, and the way those moments reflect the debates about inalienable rights, as well as the sociopolitical agency of objects. Surrogate versions of El Penacho include pictographic subway station signs in Mexico City, plastic merchandise in museums, bookshop postcards, track pads, coasters, folders, bookmarks, notebooks, bottle openers and refrigerator magnets. For the pilgrim to the museum in Vienna, these trinkets allow a bit of the aura of Motecuhzoma to be taken home. The merchandise is Made in China, designed in Vienna, and bought by Mexican tourists visiting El Penacho.

The Weltmuseum profits handsomely from the ever-expanding offerings of souvenirs, including fake gold pins, scarves, purses, and jewelry boxes, all available at the Sisi Shop, which has taken over the ground floor. The Penachos are plentiful on the shop floor, no longer just in the kids' Cowboys and Indians section but now also beside tattoos and PEZ dispensers featuring the Austrian King and Queen and kaleidoscopes that abstractly invoke the colors of El Penacho. #Imperial Boy and #Imperial Girl T-shirts share a rack

with those featuring conservation photo close-ups of Penacho feathers. This flood of merchandise spills over into in the Imperial Shop, annexed to the Corridor of Wonder in the Weltmuseum. The shop entrance features a split banner on which two halves of El Penacho are joined by Sisi (the infamous Habsburg empress) wearing *Penacho*-style green sunglasses. "Where Sisi would shop" is the slogan, and for the occasion Sisi's sunglasses appear to reflect El Penacho, as if to say "Sisi would buy the Penacho! Everyone can buy the Penacho!"

The marketing and merchandising also shifts the status of the thing, but not always in the way those observing from a European perspective might expect. The logic of the "image-action" is adopted by the museum and stays within the flattened space of easily distributed and absorbed ideas. Yet do the souvenir reproductions of El Penacho really lack the aura of the original, as Walter Benjamin argues in his seminal essay *The Work of Art in the Era of Mechanical Reproduction*? As became evident in my research with Indigenous communities of visitors to the museums that I recount in chapter 3, copies are not universally seen as void of the aura of the original. For those who make and wear copies of the featherwork, stage themselves in photographs "wearing" the headdress, or display a souvenir from the Weltmuseum on altars in their homes in Mexico, these copies are imbued with the power of the original. The continuum of reproductions from the headdress to thousands of its flattened, two-dimensional specters reaching across the globe does not stretch in a linear, radial way from center of power to periphery, as colonial culture was long conceived. Rather the copies are like avatars that keep the spirit of the original alive in the practices of people with these beliefs.

This level of engagement is different from the problem raised when recognizing that images become instrumental

to nationalist politics, wherein repatriation is also a form of political image-action. Looking carefully at reception, history can differentiate between ethically based repatriations and mere political spectacle and financial gain. As in the case of the Degenerate and Good German Art exhibitions, there is no purely formal or iconographic basis for judgment in these reception histories, as they are influenced by national history and ideology. Some darlings of Hitler's collection, such as Vermeer's *Allegory of Painting*, did not remain synonymous with Nazi art and ideology, whereas the works of artists like Adolf Ziegler or Rudolf von Alt are "burdened" by being seen as canonical Nazi art, described as such in the 2015 exhibition of von Alt at the Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

The legal situation surrounding Vermeer's *Allegory of Painting* has parallels with Klimt's *Adele Bloch-Bauer*. Neither painters are German nor do their works have any visual association with Nazi ideology, but the two portraits have nonetheless come to stand for postwar restitution policy. They became national emblems through protracted legal battles and Hollywood movies, which arguably shifted their intimate portraiture to an alienated sphere. In the political and economic overshadowing of intimate relationships between art and subject, repatriation does not necessarily resolve feelings of alienation. Repatriation claims are complex, and rather than a blanket legal decision on whether to return looted artwork, they call for close, skeptical, and cross-cultural analysis of the arguments.

Civil justice raises the question of the economics of repatriation and an all too human conflict between moral value and economic gain. Whether those who make applications can afford to conserve the cultural property they are reclaiming is often a concern, and often the reason given for rejection. The repatriation claim relating to the Elgin Marbles, for instance, was once rejected on the basis that Athens did not

have a museum equipped to house them. The Greek case suffered further from the argument that, in view of the later Ottoman and Christian desecration of the site, Lord Elgin had actually rescued them. Conservators maintain they would no longer exist had they not been removed from Greece in 1801. The suggestion that it is not in the best interest of a piece of art to be returned in case it is damaged is often backed up by raising suspicion about the moral argument for repatriation and the implication that the motivation of claimants is purely financial. The art auctioneer Henrik Hanstein's statement about the court case relating to the Stern estate—"unfortunately this case seems to be more about money than about moral repair"—falls into this category. Questioning the intentions of today's claimants in this way is driven by its own set of interests that must also be examined.[14]

Finkelstein, Koldehoff, and others have argued that ethics play no part in current repatriation processes. Finkelstein's *Holocaust Industry* laid out the evidence of cases in which guilt was leveraged and used as the legal basis for hugely lucrative outcomes. Yet concentrating solely on the purely mercenary aspects of repatriation is reductive in the Holocaust industry argument. Questions are often raised about an heir's emotional attachment to a painting they may never have seen. But who has the right to deny emotional attachment, let alone resale on the secondary market (which is what the sale of *Adele Bloch-Bauer* was, from the heir who won the legal case against Austria's Belvedere Museum to Ronald Lauder)? When the arbiters of an estate such as Stern's invest in expensive provenance research in pursuit of repatriation, does that undermine the heir's emotional attachment to the collection? The production of guilt is arguably just one stage in reconciling with the past and is not a foreclosure of all other affects and approaches. For instance, while insurance companies and art dealers were commer-

cially motivated to initiate the Art Loss Register—a huge database that records stolen artworks to "maximize their chances of recovery"—such an endeavor can also facilitate real cultural processes of historical repair.

I remember teaching at University College London, where many of the young British art history students were adamant that the Elgin Marbles are now as much part of their heritage as that of Greece. If Marx was writing *Das Kapital* in the British Museum of today, he might write about alienation from cultural production quite differently. Alienation in postmodern society has expanded beyond Marx's alienation of workers from the things they produce. In Marx's time, the British Library was located in the center of the British Museum, and he would have walked from his library desk through a few galleries to see the Elgin Marbles. If Marx visited today, he would notice that there is still no mention in the gallery guide of the embittered repatriation demands from Greece for the return of their national treasure.

And what would Marx make of tourists taking selfies with the Greeks' cultural patrimony? Would he see these photographs as tools for political self-identification? Greeks visually formulating their political consciousness in relation to their heritage might serve as an example of disalienation. With mass mobility increasing, vast numbers of people live as de-territorialized aliens. They visit museums to connect to their culture. They believe knowing where they are from will help them to feel less alienated from the culture of their contemporary world. Looking at material artifacts of human life holds the possibility of a connection to their own ancestors.

Yet a selfie or a simple pilgrimage to the museum does not reverse the alienation from the products of labor in the postindustrial age in the way Marx thought would be necessary. If Frantz Fanon joined Marx in his walk through the British Museum, the two might conclude that alienation

from ritual through collective struggles against colonialism resonate in gestures of disalienation today. Selfies are but fleeting disalienations, but in the urge to pilgrimage to the museum to be with the object of even an imagined ancestral past, there is the same power that provides the impetus for repatriation claims. Insisting objects are available via museum visits and websites falsely assumes that everyone has either the global mobility to visit a universal museum or a connection to the internet to access a virtual exhibit.

It is useful to draw attention to the comparison used by Elena Filipovic in her analysis of how the white cube accommodates the ideologies of the exhibition spaces of both Hitler's *Haus der Kunst* and MoMA. Nazism and Modernism clearly cannot be conflated, but as Filipovic writes:

> If the white cube managed to be both the ideal display format for the MoMA's and the Third Reich's respective visions of modern art, despite their extremely different ideological and aesthetic positions, it is because the display concept embodied qualities that were meaningful to both, including neutrality, order, rationalism, progress, extraction from a larger context, and, not least of all, universality and (Western) modernity. Their examples are relevant today not only because they laid the foundations for how the white cube came to signify over time, but also because the subtle and not so subtle political ambitions of their exhibitions remind us of the degree to which pristine architectonics, immaculate backdrops, general sparseness, and the strict organization of artworks on the walls matter.[15]

The inverted architecture of the Parthenon in which the British Museum displays the Elgin Marbles is ostensibly a white cube, alienating the marbles from the context in which they were originally made. While the Parthenon Museum in Athens is not literally at the Parthenon, it is situated with

a view of the Parthenon, which would make it a much less alienated site for display.

The vitrine that frames El Penacho in a modernist cube also claims the same rationality, universality, and rigorous scientific conservation of the white cube. Ideology is not intrinsic to an art object and its iconography. The target of power struggles is always the ideology itself, which is assumed to be embedded in the artwork. Consequently, the artwork in its entirety can become a cypher for different convictions. Since the Waldheim affair in the 1980s, the repatriation of El Penacho has been picked up by different Austrian political parties. In 2005 the Socialist party and in 2009 the Green party both tried to reach an agreement in parliament to repatriate. On each occasion, the opposition brought in historian Ferdinand Anders to undermine the Mexican claim on the basis of a lack of provenance. "There is nothing to give back. We got everything honestly," Anders says.[16] It is difficult to find a historical or philosophical basis for such a conviction, since acquisition rarely takes the form of gifts or exchanges and is typically the result of advantageous dealing. In the case of El Penacho, the opposition to repatriation is rooted in a desire to protect assets, albeit clothed in historical "truth" and national pride.

Holocaust and Colonial Transitional Justice

Since the 1980s, the restoration of Jewish cultural property and the question of colonial repatriation have been conflated, as can be seen in the examples of monuments to protest and to other genocides around the world. Is the Holocaust merely a screen narrative for guilty settler colonials, as Neil Levi, author of *Modernist Form and the Myth of Jewification*, observes in his comparison of the colonial and Jewish claims in an Australian context?[17] Or do the shared legal

structures and related questions around private ownership and national heritage make for a necessary comparison? Also common to both are the counterarguments that seek to undermine claims based on the time passed and the potential for financial gains. Ultimately, however, genocide and cultural destruction through dislocation are the common elements that form the basis for this comparison.

The European and American postwar address of the Holocaust brought with it a general sensitivity to crimes of dispossession and created an affective reference for postcolonial justice. Colonial claims otherwise struggle to gain traction because the worth of non-Western objects is not familiar to the Western audience. While the value and significance of a Gustav Klimt painting is common knowledge, that of El Penacho is more obscure.

Yet motivations for plunder bear striking similarities across time and space. The Hague tribunal on war crimes found evidence of cultural property being instrumental in targeted destruction. Attacks on cultural property are a means not only for accumulating finances but also for destroying an individual's social ties to a place. Plunder goes hand in hand with the act of killing. While the winner gains through annexation of art, loss contributes to the larger campaign of cultural degradation. Therefore, while legal cases concentrate on the demand for reparations, they are unable to account for the actual cultural and emotional healing that are sought through repatriation and the processes of transitional justice. As Thérèse O'Donnell has written in the *European Journal of International Law*:

> Holocaust-related claims and post-colonial repatriation demands illustrate . . . litigation offers little space for considering wider cultural implications and investigating what restitution actually means to claimants. In particular, domestic courts can

fail to recognize that restitution of representative cultural assets is central to reconciliatory transitional justice.[18]

The question of value underlies the conundrum of ontological difference, both affective and economic, in reparations. Both postwar and colonial cases can seek an ideal value that differs from their actual value. This means that usually repatriations cannot be resolved through monetary payment alone. Attempts to atone for relational violence with a monetary payment is a common solution in a world where suing is the legal alternative to revenge. Yet money cannot erase emotional pain and trauma.

During the Second World War and in colonial times, people suffered under a foreign occupation through which the occupying state benefited from the dispossession of cultural property. It is the unjust nature of these conditions that make the objects seized through war and colonial dispossession into monuments to protest. Because they represent the dominance of the state, the alienation of the object takes on a concrete, material, and hence monumental status during a repatriation claim. The material culture produced by this process of monumentalizing the contested object during protest need not be large scale. But the replication of the object, as the copy of El Penacho in Mexico City attests, can be both a cypher and a powerful site for protest.

However, it is a real transfer of ownership, usually associated with financial gain in the case of these expensive material artifacts, that the method of repatriation seeks to repair, and which a revisionist museum display in Europe cannot replace. Museums often argue that displays provide compensation and therefore justify the keeping rather than the repatriation of heritage. Some argue that revisionist displays redeem the need for repatriation, for example making the contextualized exhibition of El Penacho in Vienna a better

venue for seeing the object than could be provided in Mexico. These observations apply only to those who have the means to travel to visit the "universal museums" in Europe. While revisionist displays may go to some lengths to explain the controversy around the object, they typically do not manage to reconcile the image of the museum with the object/monument to protest. To some extent it is possible to enact a critique of imperialism within an institution that manages its legacy, yet that is but the first step in a process that would be deepened by the repatriation of looted property.

Individual cases of repatriation run from disparate past injustices into the present and toward a common future that may be restored, depending on our imagination and its ability to improve the present. The temporality of the past is more singular than that of the future, and thus memories of different sites of historical trauma have to be acknowledged as separate, though common, presences. Nevertheless, Holocaust victims have in many instances asserted their exceptional trauma. The provenance of dispossessions in cases like those of the Bloch-Bauers are well documented and hence repatriable to private ownership. The state-owned national heritage like El Penacho is much more difficult to repatriate because of the lack of provenance and the question of whether it should be kept in the Mexico City National Museum of Anthropology. Being of both individual and national patrimony leads to further uncertainty. As I have outlined, *Adele Bloch-Bauer* can shift from being Austria's *Mona Lisa* to the Neue Galerie's symbol of victory for the Jewish émigrés. Ironically the triumphalism of legal battles in this field has a warring quality that UNESCO has set out to neutralize.

In 2016 the South African artist Marcus Neustetter picked up on the Penacho story while creating a community-based performance in Mexico City. With thousands of colored glowsticks, he gathered people on the street to create a Penacho-

shaped light sculpture. After composing all the many little pieces into its unmistakable arc, the people then decided to sweep through the middle of it, reshaping El Penacho into a tree. A video of this performance shows El Penacho resolve and then dissolve again.[19]

In 2021 Claudia Peña Salinas mirrored one half of the copy crown to the other half of the "original" in search of a "third object." Initially in this process of representing the duality of the two, she laid digital images of each side by side, with the idea of mirroring them vertically. But, as she discovered, they are in fact different shapes and do not allow for a seamless vertical alignment. Instead, she made a horizontal cut and gave *Quetzalli*, her third object, the top from the copy in Mexico and the base from the "original" in Vienna. "All the work and variety of feathers is in the bottom part" she points out.[20] *Quetzalli* is installed in the front window of the DePaul Art Museum in Chicago (see fig. 6.2), where it hovered behind a huge but transparent curtain during the museum's COVID-19 closure.

FIGURE 6.2 Claudia Peña Salinas, *Quetzalli*, 2021. Vinyl, 140 in. × 167 in. Installation at DePaul Art Museum.

The urge for counter-conquest coupled with a latent fear of what form that may take in a foreign culture of mythologized blood rituals is carried through from Heine's "Vitzliputzli" to Frei's *The Headdress of Montezoma*. Yet the chimeric presence of potential repatriation in Frei's story appears as the fleeting sketch of an idea registered in the mind of the traveler, disappearing too quickly to be recorded. The intensity of the tropical heat and the trajectory of the Austrians on a historical journey with alpine rucksacks carry the story of Spanish colonial violence to an inglorious end.

7

Relational Ethics and the Future of Museums

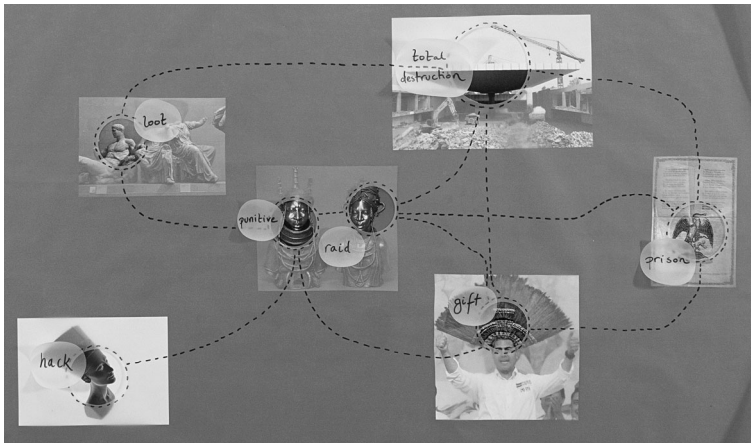

FIGURE 7.1 *The Restitution of Complexity*, 2020. Performance by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Nikolaus Gansterer.

To conclude the story of El Penacho, let us revisit it in light of the larger discourse around repatriation currently taking place around the world. A conference about collections in Vienna entitled The Museum in the Colonial Context, held at the Weltmuseum in 2019, and "The Aztecs" exhibition in 2020–21 are two of the most recent palimpsests in El Penacho's history.[1] At the same time, the Obrador government in Mexico made legal changes and requests at the UN and in a delegation to Vienna for the return of El Penacho.

Many countries and communities that have been subjected to imperial rule are now demanding the return of stolen artifacts, often meeting with skepticism and resistance from the museums, politicians, and general public in the countries now in possession of these objects. This response has evoked shock and often anger, particularly for those directly affected—the "generation that has only known restitutions by way of painful struggles."[2] A report released in France in November 2018, "The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics," immediately created international uproar. It began:

> Underneath this beauty mask, the questions around restitution also get at the crux of the problem: a system of appropriation and alienation—the colonial system—for which certain European Museums, unwillingly have become the public archives. However, thinking restitutions implies much more than a single exploration of the past: above all, it becomes a question of building bridges for future equitable relations. Guided by dialogue, polyphony, and exchange, the act or gesture of restitution should not be considered as a dangerous action of identitarian assignation or as the territorial separation or isolationism of cultural property. On the contrary, it could allow for the opening up of the signification of the objects and open a possibility for the "universal," with whom they are so often associated in Europe, to gain a wider relevance beyond the continent.[3]

Ongoing attempts at historical redress in public discourse are often met with virulent racism in newspaper reader comments.[4] Position statements by national museum associations such as Deutscher Museumsbund responded to the Relational Ethics report, as did organizations such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which serves as the basis for the discussion that follows.[5]

Talking as part of a conference about colonial collections in the Weltmuseum in 2019, the provenance researcher Claudia Spring asked the museum director how it was that everyone on stage could speak about restitution while sitting alongside a poster of El Penacho advertising the museum, but without acknowledging the ongoing denial of Mexico's claim on that very object. The director of the museum jumped up in defense and said that 14,000 Mexicans had visited the Weltmuseum in the last year and were pleased to have free entry to the museum to see their Penacho. Similarly, at the beginning of a day of workshopping colonial collections in Vienna, a participant asked about the museum's approach to collections such as those of Maximillian of Mexico in the context of nineteenth-century history. The question was answered with reference to El Penacho, and the director explained that after cooperation with Mexican scientists, all parties had clearly agreed that the crown was impossibly fragile and therefore should not be returned. Both these answers are partial truths. While those Mexicans able to travel to Vienna are indeed happy to see El Penacho, the majority of Mexicans regret their lack of access. That is a large majority, as Mexico currently has a population of around 123 million people. Indeed, fewer than a quarter million in total visit the Weltmuseum each year (240,000 in 2018). This faulty statistical argument is used to censor the Mexican perspective, to the same end as when the Austrian side of the binational commission arranged, published, and retained control over the research on El Penacho's transportability.

These questions about El Penacho at this meeting on restitution marked the return of the repressed. Despite a gaining sense that provenance is not the only authority or basis on which a claim might be made, El Penacho had conveniently fallen off the table in the five years since the binational commission. The tired features of the director's argument were

repeated statements fending off the question of what Mexico wants. In aesthetics, simplicity is often a virtue, but in a case like that of El Penacho, simplification of the situation and amplification of one point does not satisfactorily deal with the Pandora's box of problems already opened. It is fashionable at present to speak of decolonization, but it is starting to sound hollow when the rhetoric of museum directors, such as the British Museum's Hartwig Fischer, is not accompanied by any action. As Dan Hicks writes in *The Brutish Museums*,

> The new awareness among curators, refracted through a new enthusiasm for "decolonisation," in word if not in deed, comes not through some sudden enlightenment to the intertwined history of anthropology and empire, or to the processes of institutional racism, on the part of either the bureaucrats or the connoisseurs of these red-bricked, steel-girdered railway-station-like edifices. This new scramble for decolonisation throws up new dangers: of obfuscation, of tokenism, of the co-option of activists, of the appropriation of the labour of "source," descendant and diasporic African communities, of the cancellation of outstanding debt, of a hundred varieties of side-step that allow violence to persist. But there the loss can be seen in a new way, nonetheless. Why is this, why now?[6]

As answer, Hicks quotes from Sumaya Kassim's *The Past Is Now* exhibition at Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery, where she writes:

> Decolonising is deeper than just being represented. When projects and institutions proclaim a commitment to "diversity," "inclusion," or "decoloniality" we need to attend to these claims with a critical eye. Decoloniality is a complex set of ideas—it requires complex processes, space, money, and time, otherwise it runs the risk of becoming another buzzword, like "diversity." As

> interest in decolonial thought grows, we must beware of museums' and other institutions' propensity to collect and exhibit because there is a danger (some may argue an inevitability) that the museum will exhibit decoloniality in much the same way they display/ed black and brown bodies as part of Empire's "collection." I do not want to see decolonisation become part of Britain's national narrative as a pretty curio with no substance—or, worse, for decoloniality to be claimed as yet another great British accomplishment: the railways, two world wars, one world cup, and decolonisation.[7]

Arguably, even if every feather of El Penacho were to disintegrate on the way to Mexico, and those fragmented pieces were all that the Mexicans would then have, is this for those in Vienna to decide? The image of the broken feathers reminds me of Derek Walcott's statement about making and remaking poetry and culture, using the metaphor of the vase whose cracks, because they are visible, have an honesty:

> Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.[8]

The context of this section of his Nobel Prize lecture in 1992 was a reflection upon a transcultural ritual in Felicity,

Trinidad. His description of the performers could just as well be used as an analysis of the *Concheros* and the issues of truth to place and existence discussed in chapter 4. As was revealed, it is likely that El Penacho would not fall apart in transport. Engineers have found various technical solutions for its safe conveyance, and with political will and resources, more solutions would be found. For indeed, El Penacho came to Austria by ship and remained in one piece, so presumably the artifact could return overseas in an art transport container rather than an airplane, if the takeoff and landing vibrations really are too dangerous.

Underlying the resistance to self-determination is a desire for control—that is, continued control over signification, not just material: the power to say where and when El Penacho may move and why. Haunting the desire for control and power is a fear of losing face over unmet responsibility. To whom do the curators have a responsibility? The nation and the maintenance of its patrimony or the "traditional owners," as source communities are also called? If there is going to be a shift in consciousness, then it will result in a changed sense of responsibility through a new relationality that is lived rather than one that conserves colonial relations. It is of course the nostalgia for colonial relations that holds up this process. A 2014 YouGov UK survey in England found that 49 percent of the British public think that the colonies were better off under British rule, and 59 percent said they felt the British Empire was "something to be proud of."[9] In stark contrast, I have never met an Indigenous person who would agree.

Volumes of postcolonial literature provide ample details on the detriment of imperial rule. As the *Concheros* exemplified, contradiction in the commercialization of ceremonial culture, while simultaneously dismantling Indigenous rights, is experienced the world over. Before colonization,

customary design was often the intellectual property of the particular families or groups who created it. After the disruption of Indigenous social organization during colonization, the ownership of a particular design became a fraught subject. Territories organized by European council structures grouped different families during settler colonization. For example, the design of *hoe* (paddles) from New Zealand in the British Museum show that families living in an area now split into three *iwi* (groups) were closely interconnected when James Cook arrived aboard the *Endeavour*. The oral history of *whakapapa* (genealogy) records these connections, however the industry in Māori art has separated those entitled to use these designs. Hence, when the *hoe* were returned to New Zealand in 2019, a bout of horizontal violence broke out around rightful ownership and who was able to speak for them. In Mexico there was a similar argument over who was the legitimate heir of Motecuhzoma's artifacts. While not as closely related to the battle over who has the right to make a copy of El Penacho, or which *amanteca* has a valid intellectual property claim, there is a clear problem with the state of Mexico, which continues to oppress Indigenous groups, claiming restitution on behalf of the national museum.

A strong argument articulated across the globe, from Greece to New Zealand, is that repatriation is itself a conservative political move that only distracts from social problems and potential solutions. In Mexico the artist Eduardo Abaroa's *Total Destruction of the National Museum* project presents his reasoning for the destruction and removal of the highly symbolic national institution. Abaroa's exhibition (which has accumulated over years; I saw it in Puebla in July 2017) is replete with detailed plans for the different phases of explosive and manual demolition of the building, a video of the fabulated explosion and the remaining rubble, and his highly researched rationale for the destruction.

FIGURE 7.2 Eduardo Abaroa, *Total Destruction of the National Museum of Anthropology (installation detail)*, 2012. Mixed media installation at kurimanzutto. Photograph: Michel Zabe. Courtesy of kurimanzutto, Mexico City.

This question about the rightful recipient of returned loot recurs the world over, as in the recent case of the Bible and whip belonging to Hendrik Witbooi, a chief of the |Khowesin people in the nineteenth century and a national hero of Namibia. When representatives of the Nama people of Namibia explained to the Stuttgart repatriation delegation that they were not yet ready to receive these two precious relics belonging to the figurehead of the anticolonial resistance, the impatient German delegation turned to the Namibian government. Despite the protest of the Indigenous Nama people, the Namibian government accepted the Bible and whip and allowed the objects to tour the country. This traveling road show of sorts, which included human remains completely unrelated to Witbooi's Bible and whip, visited towns and cities across Namibia. The government's public relations team broadcast these efforts, while the perspectives of the protestors remained conspicuously unpublished. This

repetition of unjust reacquisition plays out the very relationships that it seeks to address. Finally, Witbooi's family, who had emigrated, returned to Namibia to chime in and claimed that the objects were family, rather than national, heirlooms.

There is a tendency for the powerful owners of cultural property and capital to try to use repatriation for their own ends. This, in turn, undermines the difficult processes of decolonization that Indigenous people are undertaking globally. Repatriations cannot be made only on the terms and within the time frames that suit European political whims, which often do not allow enough support to prepare the correct conditions for the objects' arrival. The destabilization of these peoples is today a complex interweave of familial, tribal, national government, and lobbying interests that did not exist at the time of the looting. This is why a considered approach based in ethical motives, research, and respect for the time and process needed at the receiving end is essential to the success of repatriations.

On the other hand, excessive delays and deliberations can frustrate those involved in claims; for example, in the repatriation to Nigeria of the famous Benin Bronzes, the colonial provenance of which is so clearly linked to the British punitive raid of the royal palace. The urgency of the action set out by Macron involved a "swift" five-year timeline. Critics, such as Zöe Strother, point to France's economic interests; for Macron's ongoing economic agenda to be effective, the perception of France in Africa must change quickly, and that means addressing the colonial legacy. France is losing the economic edge in its former colonies to China—for example, in the competition for lucrative oil contracts off the coast of Senegal. Macron deflected anger over these neocolonial activities as well as French immigration policy and the presence of French troops in West Africa with his pledge to repatriate.[10] The same criticisms of deflection from urgent social

FIGURE 7.3 Unknown Master of Bronze sculpture, Kingdom of Benin, *Relief with Horse Rider*, 16th/17th century. Edo, Kingdom of Benin, bronze, 29 cm × 35 cm × 6 cm. Photograph by Wilhelm Albert Maschmann. Kunsthistorische Museum, Vienna.

issues have been made of the Greek government's campaign for the Elgin Marbles and New Zealand's support of the return of Cook collections.

As a result of Macron's announcement, the question of repatriation has been centered once again for international negotiation, which moves the discussion on from where it has been in the last decades. From the presidential level in

France, this clear statement of support for repatriation was followed up with a report by Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy that is now forcing other nations to respond in kind. Although the UK has one of the strongest diaspora voices for repatriation, the retentionist policies of the country's major museums have been buttressed by the inalienability of national patrimony—a legal ban on giving possessions up permanently. However, this law could be changed—as promised but not enacted by Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2000.

What has changed is that Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and France have now dedicated funds and focus to actual cases and envisioned guidelines. Importantly, the staunch denial of the consequences of their extractive expeditions, colonial settlements, and neocolonial endeavors has given way. Indeed, the profits that countries like Austria made through colonialism are undeniable, as the historian of Africa Walter Sauer has made powerfully clear.[11] Since the Austrian government made repatriation a priority, there have been readers' comments in press articles declaring this an issue for France but not for Austria, because Austria "didn't have any colonies."

The question, therefore, is how to raise this general ignorance to a point of empathy with the real emotional impact of repatriation? The answer is to amplify, make visible and audible, voices that tell the stories of that impact. I think of the wailing sound the old women made at the recent ceremony for returning *taonga* (returning collections of cultural treasures) in Aotearoa, New Zealand. It was apparently a cry both ritualistic and with an intensity unheard before, to be voiced until the ancestors (embodied by the cultural artifacts returned) were laid to rest. These are funerals on a large scale, which allow the future to be unburdened by those Donna Haraway calls the "Speakers for the Dead."[12]

Legal questions loom large over apparent goodwill, and

proper repatriation laws are sorely lacking. European concepts of property were both constituted by and constitutive of imperial expansion, and therefore of international law.[13] Locke's famous labor-based account of private property, which still grounds liberal theory, sought to justify British dispossession of the Americas, and the imputed capacity of Indigenous populations to exercise proprietary rights was used by international lawyers to develop doctrines of conquest, occupation, and *terra nullius*.[14] The intimate historical relationship between concepts of property and the transition from imperialism to international law is increasingly well mapped with respect to "real property" or land but, with some notable recent exceptions, much of this work is yet to be brought into the literature on property rights pertaining to objects.[15]

> It's been less than a century since the world's leading collectors began acknowledging Indigenous Australian art as more than mere ethnographic artefact. Since then, the most enlightened, from Hong Kong to London, New York to Paris, have understood that when you purchase a piece of Indigenous art you become its custodian—not its owner. That image depicting a moment on one of the myriad songlines that have criss-crossed the continent during 60,000 years of Indigenous civilisation can adorn your wall. But you will never have copyright. Sometimes, not even the creator owns the painterly iconography and motif attached to particular stories that are family, clan or tribe—but not individual—possessions.[16]

A complex mixture of legal ideas that draw on transitional justice, human rights, heritage, and intellectual property law are at play in different national legal systems. Law, time, and a convenient silence have been the means by which national museums have protected themselves from

acting upon claims in the past. Another shift in the current climate is a recognition that hiding problematic collections in the storerooms of museums is not an option. Instead there needs to be a proactive agreement on behalf of the institutions to be open to access and facilitate work on the provenance of their colonial collections. Museums have responded defensively to Savoy's criticism by saying that many of the changes she recommends have already been put into action, albeit slowly. However, this applies to certain trailblazing museum directors and does not alter the fact that in many storehouses there are collections whose provenance is known, or suspected, to be loot and which the curators therefore intentionally keep hidden.

In time, an equivalent of the Washington Principles (guidelines for the repatriation of World War II loot; see chapter 5) would solidify an ethical agreement, but the European nations are far from the legal and political readiness which took almost half a century to be instated for Nazi loot.[17] The comparison is striking, and while it has been conspicuously avoided to date, repatriation to Holocaust victims provides a legal framework (in Austria particularly). This precedent legal system for repatriation and the attendant recognition of guilt and responsibility brings with it an ethical response to claims. Raising awareness of the different forms of ongoing profit from colonialism, the injustice and deep grievance it causes, are part of the symbolic value of repatriation. Skeptics claim that identarian politics are being instrumentalized, yet I have witnessed firsthand the emotional work to heal colonial wounds through the return of cultural artifacts (not to speak of human remains).

Indigenous scholars agree that the current convention on Indigenous rights, while providing a standard of behavior that is acceptable by law, is inadequate for the sovereignty they seek because it supports a possessive logic.[18] In a vacuum

of recognition, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007) is better than nothing. Yet its shortcomings are detailed by Indigenous legal experts who do not identify with the convention, which seeks to give rights of self-determination in matters of politics, religion, education, natural resources, land, language, and sovereignty, including also the restitution of spiritual property taken without free and informed consent.[19] These scholars say rights recognition works to assimilate political claims into Eurocentric legal terms but that the convention falls back on universal human rights rather than binding international laws. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues, it remains an "aspirational document with political and moral force but no legal force" in the states that assert the "possessive logic" by affirming "patriarchal white sovereignty."[20]

In some cases, the convention will be consonant with the claims of Indigenous groups. However, such instances are unusual and immediately expose the challenges of imposing such an exhaustive legalistic framework. While museums (for example, the British Museum and the Weltmuseum Vienna) appear receptive to contemporary Indigenous claims, they nonetheless uphold their own rights of property to prevent repatriation.

The laws impact the arts in highly influential ways, but each discipline is traditionally dealt with by its own experts. Until fairly recently, restitution material remained limited to online databases, inventories, and publications (for example, the National Archives, the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, and notably Hohmann and Joyce's set of legal object biographies in *International Law's Objects*, 2019). Now the mission of the museum is being rethought around the globe, in part on the basis of memorial cultures in the German-speaking world post-Holocaust.

How museums account for the development of their col-

lections and how they should be exhibited in order to be open and transparent about their histories is becoming imperative. Yet the value of possessions makes it difficult for museums to relinquish control. I recall the expression on Māori leader Jody Toroa's face as she shook her head at the pricing of the cultural treasures from her ancestors—how could these family members be costed? Random insurance amounts far beyond material or market values for such "tribal arts" were ascribed to them (i.e., 30 million pounds for the Cook collections) before they traveled "home." However, as soon as they arrived, these monetary values were irrelevant. "Have you read about these *taonga*?" an elder asked me at the ceremonial return of material from the UK to New Zealand in September 2019.[21] "Yes, have you?" I asked. She smiled and replied, "They are me."

The art handlers arrived in New Zealand with an array of neatly pastel-painted boxes that looked like very large confectionary, or indeed like coffins. These were lifted out of the inconspicuous truck outside the tribal meeting house and then opened and unpacked inside. There had been threats that the transport would be intercepted so the treasures could be "stolen back." It was a small gathering as a result, and while I had expected some sense of political triumph about the return, in fact the overarching feeling was of great sadness, like that accompanying a funeral. Those delivering speeches explained that the dead ancestors had returned in these objects and were being mourned. There was not a lot of attention given to the ceremony; it was as if the politics and fighting caused by getting the process this far had rendered the ability to create an aesthetic ritual either impossible or irrelevant.

The material selected from the British archives by the Māori communities consisted of weavings and carvings from various materials. After their arrival at the *marae* (tribal

meeting house), the *taonga* were brought to the local museum in Gisborne. The scale of this regional gallery is extraordinarily small in contrast to the British Museum that had lent nine of the Lieutenant James Cook provenance pieces on this 250th anniversary of the *Endeavour*'s first voyage. The enormous difference in size between these museums makes the artifacts feel like a few plankton from the belly of a whale. Before the exhibition opened, there was a week of closed-door access, during which gloves were optional and quivering Māori hands hovered over some objects and touched others, such as dog-skin cloaks. Conservation normally dictates that precious materials should not be touched, for reasons related to the dangers of moving delicate objects, transferring oils and so on from the skin, and picking up contaminants from poisonous conservation efforts. But in touching the objects, eagerly creating the *hau*, feeling the intermingling relations and sensing the *mana*, the power of these materials is experienced. One elder, Keita Morgan, donned the cloak Joseph Banks likely received from Tupaia.[22] Cloaking is a way of protecting a person through relationality in Māori practice. The act of wrapping the old, long-stored, and now resignified husk of history around the living descendant created an atmosphere of anticipation. "All of them were there [in the cloak, the ancestors that came with the cloak]. It was warm, but not heavy," Morgan tells me, beaming.[23]

It was a small gesture to take off the latex gloves on this occasion, and the cloak did not combust immediately, as conservators would have us believe. We were mostly so in awe of its presence that I, for one, did not feel the need to touch it. Notably it is the permission and possibility of coming into contact with such a treasured artifact, rather than the handling of it, that is significant. We could feel the invisible threshold of power shifting, and the change was palpable. Mostly the community took photographs of the *Taonga* dur-

ing the closed-door days and studied the details they could not see when the items were behind glass on display in the Tairawhiti Museum during 2020.

Latex gloves make ubiquitous appearances in the interventions in anthropology museums that have powerfully revealed the limitations of engagement in contemporary art practices of the past decades. Artist Judy Watson's film *The Keepers* (2016), for example, listens in on the voices of objects being handled in the British Museum's stores. During a fellowship at the University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (2010–2012), I engaged in a series of performances that used the gallery as a theater and the programmatic architecture that shapes its daily practice as the score for various conceptual and choreographic interventions, including for example the gloved polishing of vitrines (*That Breathed*, 2013) and the analysis of objects through a microscope (*Partial Proclamations*, 2012).[24]

To the oft-raised question of whether the Global South can look after its valuable material culture, the Ghanaian-Austrian legal advisor to the United Nations, Kwame Opoku, recently offered the amusing comparison of a thief stealing a car and, on being told to give it back, demanding to see the garage in which it would be parked upon its return. The reclaimed ancestral artifacts are obviously far more significant than an expensive commodity. Reducing claims to finances is absurd in the eyes of those who do not keep art works as investments but rather live with them as family of a kind.

The reader commentary in response to recent press reports in Austria about restitutions to African countries reveals an alarming arrogance on the part of the public, which seems to believe these countries cannot look after their own heritage. Austria's failures of stewardship, such as allowing destruction by insects and ignorant conservation decisions (as in the case of El Penacho), let alone the corruption in Aus-

tria itself, are not considered when charges of incompetence and corruption are railed at countries in Africa. Instead the Austrian public prefers a conservative approach of "hanging back and seeing what happens in France," rather than proactively leading the field. As I read these shamelessly racialized reader letters in the national press, which presume the inferiority of African people, I am reminded of the way the Mexican experts were treated while in Vienna.

In response to the legal hurdles and lack of political will that beleaguers repatriation, museums like those in England have adopted the long-term loan format. At best this format ties both parties into a relationship while avoiding changing the law of inalienability. A relationship maintains the responsibility of the European institutions to support the communities receiving these collections. Yet the gesture of a loan or gift does not make the same commitment as the transfer of ownership.

The immense gains that can be made in the process of repatriation come from the open contact with a system of knowledge or ontology that goes beyond our own. Supporting such knowledge through the circulation of the material vessels that are so important to Indigenous people is the best possible outcome, for conservation was long used as a technical excuse to disguise a lack of political will. It is telling that in the archives and collections of museums, non-Western objects are not understood on their own terms, nor written about or discussed in the language from which they came, nor connected to their original purpose. Through the exchanges made in repatriation claims grows a respect for the value of that which we cannot know, interpret, explain, and own.

It was with vehemence that the provenance researchers in Vienna who have sharpened their teeth on World War II cases, in which the Austrian state has only begrudgingly

restituted Nazi loot, have begun to recognize similar retentionist tendencies in the current debate about colonial collections. In Vienna, at the Weltmuseum workshop in 2019, there was clear restraint in the way the disaster of the Witbooi Bible restitution was described. It is not clear whether this was because being critical of the Stuttgart delegation's "good intentions" would seem to speak negatively about proactive restitutions or because of a desire to avoid perceived solidarity with the protestors, whose voices are unheard, as independent curator Susanna Wersing pointed out.[25] The conference was held in the Hofburg Palace, where we began this book's story, in a room full of European perspectives. For those who work outside of Europe and hear cosmology told in another way, it is clear that there is a striking lack of non-European views being exchanged in these fora. It appears too difficult and expensive because there is little knowledge of how to ethically and comfortably invite these voices in. Ironically it is precisely these perspectives that are needed to elaborate the parts of the argument for repatriation that come from knowledge with a depth of feeling, a sense of the horizon and stories from alternative ontology. The terms in which this argument is made might be incommensurable, yet there is a way of being inclusive and listening to a knowledge that includes new and important analytical frameworks. I am referring to cultural agents who are identified by their communities, who operate in the cultural sphere and whose value is not measured as knee-jerk political correctness.

Another often-raised point that resurfaced at the workshop was that of digital repatriation.[26] It is backed by the hope on one hand that technology will solve our social problems and on the other that creating a reproduction might placate the claimants. What will become of the fetish in the age of digital reproduction? Will digital files and prints become a kind of trans-medium, or is digital repatriation merely an

easy way of addressing the claims on the original? Is the original weighed down by its own value and would renewed access through digital technology open it out to new forms of agency? If, given a cultural process and proximity, the copy can become as agentive (or even holy) as the original, then these forms of sampling can be further explored. Whether in the digital language of hacking or of enacting performatively, there is a part for contemporary making to play in the resolution of repatriation processes.[27] For it is often in the process of copying, researching, or even re-enacting that a creative form is understood in its own material's terms. Artistic researchers argue that the best way to understand the creative form is in its own medium, therefore the process the *Concheros* enact, of making and performing the feather headdresses, is of value in understanding aspects of El Penacho.

These practices raise the larger question of what a copy can be. Copies can be based in material culture—for instance, drawing on environmental history to explain the quetzal birds' extinction. Or they can also be performatively, textually, or lens-based when the intangible cannot be represented through material. The feathers of El Penacho might one day be 3D printed with biomatter that moves with the flexibility of the original.

How do the copies relate to the biography of the original objects? Will they take on a new life, or will the objects gain multiple personalities? When the idea of object agency is pushed further through the production of contemporary copies, what are their agentic effects? How do the interactions and influences they have on people differ from the original objects? Our greater understanding of repatriation depends upon gaining this deeper grasp of what is at stake in human-object relations.

In 1885, Vanegas published a first-person narrative from the perspective of the *Piedra del Sol*, an Aztec calendar on

a stone disk.[28] The one Mexican museum object even more famous than El Penacho, the *Piedra* mourns the move to the museum from its place in the center of the city. The archaic masterpiece perversely hung on the facade of the cathedral that was built, as many superimpositions of Christian architecture, on top of the Aztec center of power.[29] If a cultural artifact could "speak" in the twenty-first century, rather than lamenting its departure to the lock-up of the museum, it might cry, "I'm going to the internet" and thereby find a way to new forms of existence.

El adiós y triste queja del Calendario Azteca

(The Farewell and Sad Complaint of the Aztec Calendar)

Adios, Montepío querido,	Farewell, beloved Montepío,
Adios, bella Catedral.	Farewell, beautiful Cathedral.
Me despido ya de ustedes	I say goodbye to you
Ya me llevan a encerrar	As they have taken me to be locked up.
¡Cuántos lustros yo pasé	Many lustrums I passed
Al pié de esta hermosa torre,	At the foot of this beautiful tower
Qué inexorable es el tiempo!	How inexorable time is!
¡Válgame Dios cómo corre!	How it runs! For God sake!
No hay cosa que no se borre	There is nothing that cannot be deleted
Y se pierda en la memoria,	Or gets lost in memory,
Ejemplo vivo es mi historia	Live example is my story
Que acertar nadie ha podido;	That nobody has been able to encode;
¡Ay, triste de mí, me voy:	Oh, sad self, I'm leaving:
Adiós Montepío querido!	Farewell Montepío my dear!
Como el Caballo de Troya	Like the Trojan Horse
Ya me llevan estirando	They've already been stretching me

Y los soldados me jalan	And the soldiers pull me
Entre gimiendo y llorando	moaning and crying
Mucho sudor voy costando	A lot of sweat I'm costing them
Porque algo pesado soy,	Because I am a little heavy,
Para el Museo yó me voy	I'm going to the museum,
Donde me van a encerrar,	Where they will lock me up,
Por eso digo llorando:	That's why I say crying:
¡Adiós, bella Catedral!	Farewell, beautiful Cathedral!

Ya no veré más el Zócalo,	I will no longer see the Zocalo,
Donde pasea tanta rota,	Where so many raggedy men walk,
Ni a ese muchacho atrevido	Not even that daring boy
Que echa el agua por la bota	That splashes out the water through his boot
No oiré más tocar la jota	I won't hear any more Jota playing
De la hermosa estudiantina,	By the beautiful estudiantina,
Me voy para la cocina	I'm going to the kitchen
Con permiso de usarcedes,	With permission from your Mercy,
Pero con gran sentimiento	but with great feeling
Me despido ya de ustedes.	I say goodbye to all of you.

Ya me despido también	I say goodbye too
De las demás fuentecitas,	to the other fountains,
De cocheros y lacayos,	Of drivers and lackeys,
Y de las lindas gatitas,	And of the pretty little maids,
Ya jamás oiré sus cuitas	I will never hear your troubles
Ni lances de sus amores.	Not even your love episodes.
Adios, árboles y flores,	Farewell, trees and flowers,
Adios, también barandal,	Farewell, also railing,
A la prisión del Museo	To the prison of the Museum
Ya me llevan a encerrar.	They already take me to lock up.
No se juzguen muy seguros	Do not judge yourself safe
Los que se hallan elevados,	From those elevated,
Miren que a mí me bajaron	Look how they lowered me
A impulso de los soldados.	with the power of the army.

Ya permitieron los hados	The goblins already allowed,
Sea por mi bien ó mi mal,	for my good or my bad,
El que triste me despida	That sad I say farewell
Del Gran Teatro Nacional.	To the Grand National Theater.
Lo mismo del Principal,	The same of the Principal,
Y del de Hidalgo, en Corchero,	And that of Hidalgo, in Corchero,
Adios, edificios todos	Farewell, to all buildings
Pues ya siento que me muero.	I feel like I'm dying.
Adios, kiosko de cristal	Farewell glass kiosk
Donde se venden las flores,	Where the flowers are sold,
Cerro de Chapultepec,	Chapultepec Hill,
Adios, panteón de Dolores.	Goodbye, Pantheon of Dolores.
Adios, portales queridos	Farewell, dear portals
De Flores y Mercaderes,	Of Flowers and Merchants,
A donde dejo á Martínez	Where I leave Martínez
Comerciando con papeles.	Trading papers.
Adios, chica Callejuela,	Farewell, little Callejuela,
También tú Diputación,	You too Deputation,
Ya me llevan arrastrando	They've already dragged me
A una lóbrega prisión.	To a gloomy prison.
Este último adiós postrero	This last goodbye
Se lo digo al que sin seso,	I say it to the man that, without brain,
Piense que peso cual pluma	Thinks that I have the weight of a feather
Y que me levante en peso.	And lifts my whole mass.
Adios, mexicanos todos,	Farewell, all Mexicans,
Si verme, tienen deseo,	If you have desire to see me,
Dentro de muy poco parado	Within a very short time
Me verán en el Museo.	You will see me in the Museum.

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Notes

Introduction

1. I recognize that *Quetzalapanecáyotl*, the proper Nahuatl name for El Penacho, is coming into more frequent use, especially in scholarly contexts. In this book, which is directed to a broad audience, I use El Penacho because the discourse surrounding this case up to now refers to the headdress as such.

2. I use the spelling "Motecuhzoma" rather than older transliterations except when referring to the title of a work about "Montezuma."

3. Marx, "The Intervention in Mexico," as quoted in Gusjenova, *European Elites and Ideas of Empire*, 15. On Manet, see Elderfield, *Manet and the Execution of Emperor Maximillian*.

4. Archim, *From Idols to Antiquity*, esp. 251–56.

5. Gusjenova, interview of the author, July 2020.

6. This is the first monograph in English about *El Penacho*. Prior to this publication, the main existing literature in English was an 1888 paper by Zelia Nuttall, "Standard or Head-Dress? An Historical Essay on a Relic of Ancient Mexico" (Archaeological and Ethnological Papers of the Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), which sparked Mexico's interest in the repatriation. Nowotny, *Mexikanische Kostbarkeiten*. See also the booklet by Ferdinand Anders and Peter Kann, "Die Schätze des Montezuma Utopie und Wirklichkeit," and the binational commission's research outcomes edited by Christian Feest, "Der Altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck in Europa," 5–28.

7. Broomhall, Davidson, and Lynch, eds., *Cultural History of Emotions*.

8. Charlotte Joy, conversation with the author, November 2020.

9. Joy, *Heritage Justice*, 26. Within the quoted excerpt, Joy cites Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983) and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983).

10. Soustelle, *Daily Life of the Aztecs on the Eve of the Spanish Conquest*, 66.

11. de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex*, 6:98.

12. Ferdinand Anders, interview with the author, Kloserneuburg, Austria, June 2019.

Chapter 1

1. Azoulay, *Potential History*, xiv.

2. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, liv.

3. "Passionate Politics" at University College London and historian Dina Gusjenova in particular. See also Broomhall, Davidson, and Lynch, eds., *Cultural History of Emotions*.

4. Mignolo and Vázquez, "Decolonial AestheSis.

5. *The Restitution of Complexity* toured around the UK in 2017 in venues at the Austrian Cultural Forum in London and IKON Gallery in Birmingham. It hasn't been shown, to date, in Vienna because the Weltmuseum has blocked it through a protracted process. What had been an invitation to present it within the museum and in front of El Penacho was eventually, when the critical nature of this book became clearer, rejected.

6. Author's interview with cultural historian Gunter Bakay, July 2019. See also Bakay, *Philippine Welser*.

7. Schorch and McCarthy, *Curatopia*.

8. For more on this subject, see Carroll, "Painting the Political in Oceanian Textile Cultures."

9. Gausset, Kenrick, and Gibb, "Indigeneity and Autochthony."

10. Gilchrist, ed., *Everywhen*.

11. Bosworth, Carroll, and Balzar, *Bordered Lives*.

Chapter 2

1. Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*.

2. Horst Bredekamp "Warum der identitäre Wahn unsere größte Bedrohung ist," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 3, 2021, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/postkolonialismus-schaedigt-antikoloniale-vernunft-17232018.html. "Guilt-religion" comes from Bredekamp, "Fanatiker der Reinheit" (conference paper presented at *Whose Heritage? Museums and Their Collections*, Bonn University, March 2016).

3. Sartre, Preface to Frantz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth," Marxists International Archive, https://www.marxists.org/ reference/archive/sartre/1961/preface.htm.

4. Ibid.

5. Bertolt Brecht, *Alienation Effects in Chinese Theatre* (London: Life and Letters To-Day, 1936).

6. Elizabeth Burns Coleman, "Repatriation and the Concepts of Inalienable Possession," in *The Long Way Home: The Meaning and Values of Repatriation*, ed. Paul Turnbull and Michael Pickering (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010).

7. Marx, *Das Kapital*, 2.

8. Savoy, "Eigentum und Bestiz." *Voelkerrechtsblog: International Law and International Legal Thought*, September 17, 2018.

9. Lilia Rivero, interview with the author, Palacio National, Mexico City, August 2017.

10. Benjamin, "Unpacking My Library."

11. Malraux, *Royal Way*.

12. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*.

13. Malraux, *Psychologie de l'Art*.

14. Felwine Sarr and Bénédicte Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage: Toward a New Relational Ethics*, trans. Drew S. Burk. French government report, November 2018, https://www.about-africa.de/images/sonstiges/2018/sarr_savoy_en.pdf.

15. David Berliner and Christoph Brumann, eds., *World Heritage on the Ground: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2018). Lynn Meskell, ed., *Cosmopolitan Archaeologies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Chip Colwell and Charlotte Joy, "Communities and Ethics in the Heritage Debates," in *Global Heritage: A Reader*, ed. Lynn Meskell (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2015), 112–28.

16. Severin Fowles, "The Perfect Subject (Postcolonial Object Studies)," *Journal of Material Culture* 21, no. 1 (2016) 9–27.

17. Charlotte Joy, *Heritage Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 43.

18. Sally Price, "Evolving Meanings: Political and Ideological Background(s) to Repatriation Debates," in *Archives, Collections and Practices of Knowledge-Making: Histories of Anthropology*, ed. Fernanda Areas Peixoto, Gustavo Rossi, and Christiano Tambascia (São Paulo: Biblioteca Guita & José Mindlin)

19. Corinne David-Ives, "Maori Heads in French Museum Collections: A Recent Controversy Illuminated by the Works of a Contemporary Maori Artist," *Journal of New Zealand & Pacific Studies* 1, no. 2 (October 1, 2013), 115–29.

20. Zoe Todd, "An Indigenous Feminist's Take on the Ontological Turn: 'Ontology' Is Just Another Word for Colonialism," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016), 4–22.

21. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

22. "Zerzauste Azteken-Krone: Der ramponierte Federschmuck aus Mexiko wird parlamentarisch gerupft," *WitschaftsWoche* 32 (August 6, 1992).

23. Mbembe cited in Sarr and Savoy, *The Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*, 34.

24. Artwatch, "Bill of Rights for Works of Art," 1992, http://artwatch.org.uk/archive/.

25. Lévy-Bruhl, cited in Hilary Chappell and William McGregor, "Prolegomena to a Theory of Inalienability," in *The Grammar of Inalienability: A Typological Perspective on Body Part Terms and the Part-Whole Relation*, ed. H. Chappell and W. McGregor (Mouton deGruyter, Berlin, 1996), 3.

26. Ibid.

27. Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (original pamphlet publication, Petrograd, 1917), https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/.

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29. James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

30. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History*, 145–46. "Declaration on the Importance and Values of Universal Museums" (Paris: ICOM, 2004), https://icom.museum/en/ressource/declaration-on-the-importance-and-value-of-universal-museums/.

31. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [1984] (New York: Verso, 2006). Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Anthony Kwame Appiah, "Whose Culture Is It?," *New York Review of Books*, February 9, 2006, 38. See Holland Cotter, "Who Owns Art?," *New York Times*, March 29, 2006.

32. See Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "Ready-Mades for Repatriation, Poetic Re-Enactments, and Comic Performances for the Camera," in *Julie Gough, Fugitive History: The Art of Julie Gough* (2018) ed. Terri-ann White (Perth: University of Western Australia, 2016); Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "Anachronically Archived: Time in Contemporary Art," in *The Archival Turn in Australian Aboriginal Art*, ed. I. McLean and Darren Jorgenson (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2016), 342–61.

33. Dan Hicks, *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution* (London: Pluto, 2020), 51.

34. Dacia Viejo-Rose, "Eternal, Impossible, Returns: Variations on the Theme of Dislocation" in *The Importance of Being Anachronistic: Contemporary Aboriginal Art and Museum Reparations*, ed. Khadija on Zinnenburg Carroll (Melbourne: Discipline, 2016), 103–33.

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36. Ferdinand Anders, interview with the author, Klosterneuburg, Austria, June 2019.

37. José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race*, trans. Didier T. Jaen (1925; Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 7–40.

38. Gayatri Spivak coined the term "strategic essentialism" in her 1984 interview with Elizabeth Grosz: "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution," in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 1–16.

39. Florian Rainer, interview with the author, Vienna, Austria, June 2019.

40. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Jesse Shipley, and Michal Murawski, "The Art of Dissident Domesticity: Julian Assange, King Prempeh, and the Prison House," *Social Text 133* 35, no. 4 (2017), 113–52.

41. Thomas Bunstead, Interview with Álvaro Enrigue, *White Review*, September 2017, https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-alvaro-enrigue/.

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Chapter 3

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2. R. Schacter, *Ornament and Order: Graffiti, Street Art and the Parergon* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

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10. Jesse Weaver Shipley, "Selfie Love: Public Lives in an Era of Celebrity, Pleasure, Violence, and Social Media," *American Anthropologist* 117, no. 2 (2015): 403–13.

11. Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié, *The Neo-Indians: A Religion for the Third Millennium* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2013). See also Susanna Rostas, *Carrying the World: Concheros Dance in Mexico City* (Boulder: Colorado University Press, 2009).

12. Gerald W. van Bussel, "Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck. Aspekte einer Rezeptionsgeschichte," in *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*, ed. Sabine Haag, Alfonso de Maria y Campos, Lilia Rivero Weber, and Christian Feest (Altenstadt: ZKF, 2012), 115–33.

13. Sally Price writes, "And in spite of a long list of visitors who would enjoy free entry to the temporary exhibits ("*étudiants de l'École du Louvre, amis du musée, demandeurs d'emploi, grands mutilés de guerre*"), there was no special offer for young visitors from Africa, Oceania, or the Americas. What this meant is that a student from the University of Bamako, visiting the museum with a friend from France, paid full fare (equal to an average week's wage in Mali) to see the museum's spectacular "crown jewel" (the "Djennenké" from Mali), while her French friend was granted free entry. And while the Malian paid full fare for the musée du quai Branly–Jacques Chirac's *Dogon* [Mali] exhibition of 2011." Sally Price, *Au musée des illusions: le rendez-vouz manqué du quai Branly* (Paris: Denoël 2011), 300.

14. Author's interview with Lilia Rivero, Palacio National, Mexico City, August 2017.

15. Author's interview with Steven Engelsman, Vienna, June 2015.

16. Sally Price, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

17. "Entmystifizierte Schmuckpracht: Voelkerkundemuseum zeigt restaurierte und 'entmythologierierte' Federkrone," *Wiener Zeitung*, November 15, 2012, 28.

18. Alessandra Russo, Gerhard Wolf, and Diana Fane, eds. *El vuelo de las imágenes: Arte plumario en México y Europa, 1300–1700* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, 2011).

19. Lynn Meskell, *Global Heritage: A Reader* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015), 6.

20. Sabine Haag quoted in interview with Constanza Lambertucci, "El penacho de Moctezuma también es parte del ADN de los austriacos," *El Pais*, October 22, 2020, https://elpais.com/mexico/2020-10-21/sabine-haag-el-penacho-tambien-es-parte-del-patrimonio-cultural-de-los-austriacos.html.

21. Translation from German by the author. Doris Kurella, Martin Berger and Ines de Castro, *Aztecs*, ex. cat. (Stuttgart: Hirmer, 2020).

22. Lambertucci, "El penacho."

23. Tony Horwitz, *Cook: Die Entdeckung eines Entdeckers* (Hamburg: mareverlag, 2004), 14–15. On the postcolonial critique of *Star Trek*, see Katja Kanzler, "'A Cuchi Moya!' *Star Trek*'s Native Americans," *American Studies Journal* 49 (2007), www.asjournal.org/49–2007/star-treks-native-americans/.

24. Lambertucci, "El penacho."

25. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, "Vitrinendenken: Vectors between Subject and Object," in *The Challenge of the Object*, ed. G. Ulrich Großmann and P. Krutisch (Nuremberg: Germanisches National Museum, 2013), 54–56.

26. Michael Taussig, *My Cocaine Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 315.

27. Author's interview with Kajuyali Tsamani, March 2016. I have heard this idea articulated by people in very different parts of the globe.

28. Felwine Sarr, "The Museum as a Device of Recolonization?," in *Look for Me All around You*, Sharjah Biennale 14, ed. Claire Tancons (Sharjah: Sharjah Art Foundation, 2019), 162.

29. Guillermo Schmidhuber de la Mora, *El Robo del Penacho de Moctezuma*, 1980. http://www.guillermoschmidhuber.com/. Translation by Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll and Rafael Donadio.

Chapter 4

1. Nelly M. Robles García, "Der Kopfschmuck in der oeffentlichen Wahrnehmung und Vorstellung Mexicos," in *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*, ed. Sabine Haag, Alfonso de Maria y Campos, Lilia Rivero Weber, and Christian Feest (Altenstadt: ZKF, 2012), 104.

2. Jacques Galinier and Antoinette Molinié, *Neo-Indians: A Religion for the Third Millennium* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 2013).

3. Birgit Meyer and Mattijs van de Port, eds., *Sense and Essence: Heritage and the Cultural Production of the Real* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2018) 22–23.

4. Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), xv.

5. Author's interview with Ernesto Garcia, Cabral, Mexico City, July 2017.

6. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquistade la Nueva España*, 7th ed., conforming to that of 1944 (1632; Mexico City: Porrúa, 1977).

7. María Olvido Moreno Guzmán and Bertina Olmedo Vero, "Die Nachbildung des altmexikanischen Federkopfschmucks in Museo National de Anthropología von Mexiko," in *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*, ed. Sabine Haag, Alfonso de María y Campos, Lilia Rivero Weber, and Christian Feest (Altenstadt: ZKF, 2012), 107–15.

8. Ferdinand von Hochstetter, "Ueber mexikanische Reliquien aus der Zeit Montezuma's in der k. k. Ambraser Sammlung," in *Denkschriften der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Vienna: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1884), 35.

9. Thomas Bunstead, interview with Álvaro Enrigue, *White Review*, February 2017. https://www.thewhitereview.org/feature/interview-alvaro-enrigue/.

10. Nina Hoechtl, *The Transcultural Legacy*, installation, sound, video, wrestling, 2011, http://www.ninahoechtl.org/works/the-transcultural-legacy/.

11. Sabine Haag, Alfonso de María y Campos, Lilia Rivero Weber, and Christian Feest, eds., *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*. See also Christian Feest's important article "Vienna's Mexican Treasures," *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, 1990.

12. Rolando Vázquez, "The Museum, Decoloniality and the End of the Contemporary," in *The Future of the New: Artistic Innovation in Times of Social Acceleration*, ed. Thijs Lijster (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018), 187–88.

13. Vázquez, "Museum," 182.

14. Author's interview with Rafael Gutierrez Donadio, the first director of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Vienna and former cultural officer of the Mexican embassy in Austria, Vienna, June 2020.

15. Bernadino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex—General History of the Things of New Spain*, 13 vols., ed. Charles E. Dibble and Arthur J. O. Anderson (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 1950–1969), 3:14; 10:166.

16. Author's interview with Alejandro Ramírez, Mexico City, August 2017.

17. From a letter sent from Vienna, June 19, 1937, to the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City. 14959 ADM-MUS 2/oct/1958 9/feb/1959. Partida de Museografía "C." Montaje de la copia del penacho de Motecuhzoma. Exp. 51 fs. 286–87. Translation by Jose Martinez.

18. Author's interview with Keith Levitt, head tailor of Henry Poole, Saville Row, London, February 2018.

19. The quetzal and other bird species have been identified as *Pharomachrus mocinno* (long green feathers), *Cotinga amabilis* (blue feathers), *Platalea ajaja* (pink feathers), and *Piaya cayana* (brown feathers). María de Lourdes Navarijo Ornelas, "Federn: Der Rohstoff," in *Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck*, 83.

20. Tim Bonyhady opens his family biography with this wry observation. *Good Living Street: Portrait of a Patron Family, Vienna 1900* (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2011), 3.

Chapter 5

1. *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (publication of the *Deutsche Kolonialverein*) is digitally available in the Hathi Trust Digital Library*: https://catalog .hathitrust.org* Translation by Giovanna Montenegro, cited in Giovanna Montenegro, ""The Welser Phantom": Apparitions of the Welser Venezuela Colony in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Cultural Memory," *TRANSIT*, 11(2), 2018, p. 32.

2. Giovanna Montenegro, ""The Welser Phantom": Apparitions of the Welser Venezuela Colony in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Cultural Memory," 22.

3. Sophie Schoenberger, "Restitution of Ethnological Objects: Legal Obligation or Moral Dilemma?," *Museumskunde*, Band 81, 1/2016, 45.

4. Sarr and Savoy, *Relational Ethics*, 61.

5. Constantin Goschler, "Zwei Wellen der Restitution: Die Rückgabe jüdischen Eigentums nach 1945 und 1990" in *Raub und Restitution: Kulturgut aus jüdischem Besitz von 1933 bis heute*, ed. Inka Bertz et al., 30–46 (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 31. Author's translation.

6. Bénédicte Savoy, public lecture, Bruno Kreisky Forum, Vienna 2019.

7. Jürgen Lillteicher, "Grenzen der Restitution: Die Rückerstattung jüdischen Eigentums in Westdeutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," 2003, conference paper, 1–2. See also Jürgen Lillteicher, *Die Rückerstattung jüdischen Eigentums in Westdeutschland nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Eine Studie über Verfolgungsverfahren, Rechtsstaatlichkeit und Vergangenheitspolitik 1945–1971* (PhD diss., University of Freiburg, 2002/2003), 8; Stefan Koldehoff, *Die Bilder sind unter uns: Das Geschäft mit der NS-Raubkunst und der Fall Gurlitt* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014, 59; Dieter Griesshaber, "Judenverfolgung 1933–1945," *Geschichtsverein Koengen*, http://geschichtsverein-koengen.de/Judenverfolgung.htm (accessed 10 March 2020).

8. Adolf Hitler, speech at the opening of the Haus der Deutschen Kunst, Munich, July 18, 1937; cited and translated in Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, *Art under a Dictatorship* (New York Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 76–77.

9. Neil Levi, "'Judge for Yourselves!'—The "'Degenerate Art' Exhibition as Political Spectacle," *October* 85 (Summer 1998), 41–64.

10. Picasso cited in André Malraux, *La Tete d'obsidienne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 17–19. Thank you to James Attlee, author of *Guernica: Painting the End of the World*, for this reference and help with this book.

11. Bundesgesetz zur Entschädigung für Opfer der nationalsozialistischen Verfolgung (Bundesentschädigungsgesetz—BEG), 18 September, 1953, Juris, http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bundesrecht/beg/gesamt.pdf (accessed 20 July, 2019); Bundesgesetz zur Regelung der rückerstattungsrechtlichen Geldverbindlichkeiten des Deutschen Reichs und gleichgestellter Rechtsträger (Bundesrückerstattungsgesetz—BRüG), 19 July, 1957, Juris, http://www .gesetze-im-internet.de/br_g/ (accessed 20 July, 2019).

12. Andrew McClellan, *The Art Museum from Boullée to Bilbao* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2008), 264.

13. Emmanuel Macron, cited by Sarr and Savoy, *Relational Ethics*, 1.

14. Sally Price, *Apollo: The International Art Magazine* (Jan. 2020)

15. Flavia Foradini, "Vienna museum director calls for time limit on Nazi-loot restitution claims," *Art Newspaper*, March 30, 2015, http://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/news/151356/.

16. In 2005, Baroness Marie-Louise Bissonette, who lives in the United States, tried to give her painting *Mädchen aus den Sabiner Bergen* by Franz Xaver Winterhalter to auction on eBay. The auction was the beginning of a series of events that finally lead to the identification of the artwork as being part of Max Stern's collection, which he had to sell as consequence of "silent Aryanization." Stern's testamentary executors instituted the lawsuit. The Rhode Island court held—for the first time in the history of restitution debates about Nazi-looted artworks—that "an artwork, which had been given into mandatory auction during NS-times, would have to be legally equated with stolen assets." Koldehoff, *Die Bilder sind unter uns*, 53–58.

17. Joachim Sieber, Private tour through the exhibition "Provenienzen im Fokus" at Kunsthaus Zürich, 5 Sep 2019, https://www.arsgraphica.org/single-post/2019/09/11/Private-tour-through-the-exhibition-"Provenienzen-im-Fokus"-at-Kunsthaus-Zürich-5-September-2019.https://www.arsgraphica.org/single-post/2019/09/11/Private-tour-through-the-exhibition-"Provenienzen-im-Fokus"-at-Kunsthaus-Zürich-5-September-2019. (accessed 10 March 2020).

18. Michal Glikson, *A Censored Discourse: Contradictions in the Structure of the Gallery of the First Australians*, http://www.anu.edu.au/polsci/marx/interventions/gallery.htm (accessed 10 March 2020).

19. Daniel Libeskind cited in http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2001/mar/04/featuresreview.review2 (accessed 10 March 2020).

Chapter 6

1. Contrary to the intention of the gesture, the majority of Viennese think the name of the square commemorates Maximilian's emperorship.

2. The plaque reads: "*Mexiko war im März 1938 das einzige Land, das vor dem Völkerbund offiziellen Protest gegen den gewaltsamen Anschluß Österreichs an das nationalsozialistische Deutsche Reich einlegte. Zum Gedenken an diesen Akt hat die Stadt Wien diesem Platz den Namen Mexiko-Platz verliehen*." See also: http://www.nachkriegsjustiz.at/vgew/1020_mexikoplatz.php. Note, however, that it was the Mexican taxpayers, not the Austrians, who had to pay for this tribute and apology of sorts. Similarly, according to Rafael Gutierrez Donadio, the first director of the Mexican Cultural Institute in Vienna and former Cultural Officer of the Embassy of Mexico in Austria, the Weltmuseum's offer of free entry for Mexican citizens is funded through A1 Telekom Austria at the behest of the company's majority stockholder, Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, though one could argue that ultimately the Austrian phone users pay for the Weltmuseum's gift to Mexico.

3. Isaac, "Implementation of NAGPRA"; Anyon and Thornton, "Implementing Repatriation in the United States."

4. Buren, "Function of the Museum," 68.

5. Frei, *Der Kopfschmuck des Motezuma*.

6. Heine, "Vitzliputzli" [1851], in Heine, *Werke und Briefe*, vol. 2.

7. Heiner Über, "Azteken vor Wien: Indianer gehen auf Protestmarsch durch Österreich: Sie verlangen eine geraubte Federkrone zurück," *Die Zeit*, May 15, 1992, https://www.zeit.de/1992/21/azteken-vor-wien/seite-2.

8. Tittmann, *Waldheim Affair*, 94. See also the Austrian Government's files in defense of Waldheim: *Kurt Waldhem's Wartime Years—A Documentation* (Vienna: Carl Gerold's Sohn, 1987).

9. Friedrich Katz, cited in Drekonja-Kornat, *Gabriel García Márquez in Wien*, 136–37.

10. Bruno Kreisky, cited in Drekonja-Kornat, *Gabriel García Márquez in Wien*, 136.

11. Gallo, *Freud's Mexico*, 325.

12. Weibel, "Re-Presentation of the Repressed," esp. p. 27.

13. Alford, *Hermann Göring and the Nazi Art Collection*, 181–82.

14. Henrik Hanstein, Kunsthaus Lempertz, Cologne, letter to Stefan Klodehoff, February 15, 2007. Translated by Paula Michalk.

15. Filipovic, "Global White Cube," in Vanderlinden and Filipovic, eds., *Manifesta Decade*, 63–84.

16. Author's interview with Ferdinand Anders, Klosterneuburg, June 2019.

17. Levi, "'No Sensible Comparison'?"

18. O'Donnell, "Restitution of Holocaust Looted Art and Transitional Justice."

19. Marcus Neustetter, *Sweep Mexico City* [performance], 2016, http://www.marcusneustetter.net/?p=1110.

20. Conversation with the author, March 31, 2021.

Chapter 7

1. The conference papers are published as Pia Schölnberger, ed., *Das Museum im kolonialen Kontext* (Vienna: Czernin, 2021). See also Doris Kurella, Martin Berger, and Ines de Castro, eds., *Aztecs*, exhibition catalog (Stuttgart: Hirmer, 2020).

2. Sarr and Savoy, *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*, 17.

3. Sarr and Savoy, *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage*, 17.

4. In recent press, these reader comments are in the articles' comments sections online. The University of Vienna's Zeitgeschichte Department has an archive of television programs, including many on the *Penacho* case. Christian Feest's personal archive has a list of these programs and news articles, which are condensed into van Bussel, "Der altmexikanische Federkopfschmuck. Aspekte einer Reszeptionsgeschichte."

5. See also Collison, Bell, and Neel, *Indigenous Repatriation Handbook, Canada*.

6. Hicks, *Brutish Museums*, 9.

7. Sumaya Kassim, as quoted in Hicks, *Brutish Museums*, 19.

8. Derek Walcott, *Nobel Lecture: The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory*, December 7, 1992. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1992/walcott/lecture/.

9. Will Dahlgreen, "The British Empire Is 'Something to Be Proud Of,'" July 26, 2014, YouGov, https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire.

10. Zoe Strother, "Eurocentrism Still Sets the Terms of Restitution of African Art: A Selective View of African Cultural Heritage Continues the Colonialist Paradigm," *Art Newspaper*, January 8, 2019.

11. Sauer, "'Nichts als die Liebe zur Forschung selbst'?"

12. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*.

13. Koskenniemi, "Sovereignty, Property and Empire."

14. Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property and Empire*.

15. Hohmann and Joyce, eds., *International Law's Objects*; Vrdoljak, *International Law, Museums and the Return of Cultural Objects*.

16. Paul Daley, "Preservation or Plunder? The Battle over the British Museum's Indigenous Australian Show," *Guardian*, April 9, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/apr/09/indigenous-australians-enduring-civilisation-british-museum-repatriation.

17. Van Beurden, *Trusted Hands*.

18. Watson, "2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples."

19. Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*; Moreton-Robinson "How White Possession Moves."

20. Moreton-Robinson, "Virtuous Racial States."

21. As a filmmaker and researcher, I am accompanying this process to make a longer version of *Te Haa Kui o Tangaroa (2019),* a short film about the knowledge regained from precolonial artistic practices and environmental management.

22. This is the subject of my forthcoming volume on the Cook's New Clothes project, *Tupaia, Captain Cook and* the *Voyage of the Endeavour* (Bloomsbury Press).

23. *Te Moana (2020),* the documentary film I made with these interviews and footage is available at https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/lcahm/departments/historyofart/research/projects/cooks-new-clothes/about.aspx.

24. The video accompanied Carroll, "That Breathed." *Partial Proclamations* is in on display in the MAA Tasmania permanent collection and at https://vimeo.com/44032596.

25. Susanna Wersing, comment at the Museen im Kolonialen Kontext conference, October 17, 2019.

26. See more on my approach to digital repatriation in Carroll, *Importance of Being Anachronistic*. See also Capurro, "Digitization as an Ethical Challenge"; Senier, "Digitizing Indigenous History."

27. Al-Badri, Carroll, Chakkalakal, Sebti, and Tinius, *Traces, Legacies, and Futures*.

28. Flyer written by an anonymous author published in 1885 by Vanegas now in the musée du quai Branly-Jacques Chirac Library. Also published in

Luján, "El adiós y triste queja del gran Calendario Azteca." Translation by Diego Olmedo.

29. Thank you to Margot Fischer of Mandelbaum Verlag Vienna for her ideas offered in the process of translating this book into German (*Mit Fremden Federn*, 2021).

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