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The Museum as a Body

Clémentine Deliss: The Metabolic Museum.

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1. *The Metabolic Museum* written by Clémentine Deliss is an autobiographic and conceptual thesis about the period when Deliss directed the *Weltkulturen Museum* in Frankfurt from 2010 until 2015. She directed the ethnological museum as a British contemporary artist with a background in cultural anthropology as well.
2. The colonial past of the Weltkulturen Museum, its ethnographic collection, consisted of looted artefacts and sensitive objects and had not been revisited critically until 2010. Deliss sought to conduct a transition process of the museum into a post-ethnographic museum, both in its infrastructure and working methods. The *Metabolic Museum* published in 2020, five years after she left the museum, introduces this transformation process. Deliss reflects on her role in the museum as an outsider because of her academic background in contemporary art. Meanwhile, her background made her suitable for challenging the dominant discourse of the museum, though she remained alone in her criticism within the institution.
3. In the first years of Deliss' directorship, she was asked to manage the expansion of the museum through a new facility. The spatial concept she introduced to the international jury in 2010, followed the idea of creating a post-ethnographic museum. She argued that the museum should no longer depict ethnos through examples of material culture, but needed a change of medium, experimenting in ways of describing, interpreting, and displaying. She stated that fieldwork does not take place on distant lands, but within the museum: therefore, the methods of knowledge-production and the design of the facility should enable fieldwork within the museum. She introduced the idea of an interventionist laboratory in the museum, a location for trying out new concepts and methods with invited artists, curators, scholars and students.
4. According to Deliss, the museum is like an ailing body, which needs to be cured. Deliss placed anthropologist Paul Rabinow's concept of 'remediation' at the forefront of the transformation process. Interpreted by Rabinow, remediation means healing the injuries and occlusions of the past. In the remediation process, Deliss redefines the artist's and ethnographer's roles. Artists are like mediators, they select artefacts from alternative aspects, create new constellations and meanings, challenging the normativity of ethnographical identifications. Based on new meanings, authors once undocumented by ethnographic discourse can be renamed. Artistic research can encourage the object to 'perform' and generate new meanings – referring to Latour's ideas about the performativity of ethnographic collection. In contrast, she perceived ethnographers' 'intermediary' role as authoritative, which focuses on historical contexts, with the aim of constructing authenticity.

5. Based on the above-mentioned ideas, Deliss initiated and conducted a post-ethnographic laboratory for artists in the museum in 2011 that would be capable of re-mediating the museum's collection. Her aim was to enable artists, students, academic researchers conducting fieldwork within the museum: to have the possibility of open and unmonitored access to the collection, and work in the laboratory. It also included infrastructural changes, creating residences so that artists can live in the museum facility. The outcome of the projects were workshops and exhibitions, available for public engagement as well.
6. Deliss discusses the challenges of working with the artists as well. Deliss hoped that new objects and artefacts can be treated equally within the museum and the two together can generate discussions, but she experienced barriers and conservatism within the museum. The new objects questioned the authority of the museum's classificatory regime, therefore the museum staff resisted bringing the new objects through the classificatory and conservation procedure in the same way as artefacts.
7. *The Metabolic Museum* loosely follows chronology, but it also switches between times. Deliss discusses her own previous experiences of working with artists and publishing the journal *Metronome* out of their works from 1996 until 2007. *The Metabolic Museum* ends with describing the Museum-University model. She first introduced the idea in 2017 in Kiev, after she left Frankfurt, but based on the experiences in the Weltkulturen Museum. The Museum-University model would mean a contemporary infrastructure within the museum that is inclusive for artists, curators, academic researchers, and students from all over the world and can generate critical conversations within the museum. communicating under the name AfricaMuseumThe Metabolic Museum is framed by two manifestos, both of them written by Deliss. One in the beginning *for the Post-Ethnographic Museum*, and one at the end *for Rights of Access to Colonial Collections Sequestered in Western Europe*. The manifestos draft demand in critical tones, remediation and the creation of museum-universities.