Archive Framework and Manifesto - 2023

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INTRODUCTION

"TALKING OBJECTS" is a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production. It is a curated archive and has no claim to completeness. Based on selected objects or collections, the Western canon is expanded to include further schools of thought and epistemologies.

The project aims to create and experiment with new contexts of meaning, names and reclaimed rituals. Centering the everyday, spiritual and metaphysical, African philosophy and history, we embark on a path of academic research required to dismantle Eurocentrified knowledge paradigms. In this freedom experiment, sciences and artistic reflections will be included on equal terms.

Acknowledging the Pain of loss in the countries of origin and repercussions, we hope to grow new mythologies in the face of the loss of memories[1]. Therefore, in order to undertake this audacious freedom experiment, we have drawn up a manifesto that acts as a map that will guide us through the design, implementation and success of the Talking Objects Archive. It will also form the basis on which the technical and functional scope of the project will be designed and measured according to available tools, infrastructure and resources[2].

Some of the key reasons we are undertaking this project include:

1. **Reclaiming our dignity as individuals, intellectuals and creatives living in the Global South without access to Western Archives who want to imagine generative archival futures.**
   "I think for us, the dignity is being able to ask questions like- 'How many more epistemologies have to be deconstructed?'" ~ Njoki Ngumi

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[1] Annotated from Talking Objects Project description.
[2] Extracted from the "Proposal for Digital Curation of Talking Objects Lab.

2. **Untying, delinking and de-privileging the canon through disrupting Western hegemonic knowledge paradigms and instead centring Indigenous knowledge systems.**

   "I'm interested in how this untying-process could look like. The disrupting and dis-linking and also de-privileging." ~ Isabel Raabe

3. **In the end, we are freeing ourselves from hegemonic knowledge and methods of knowledge production through exploring, imagining and remembering multiple indigenous epistemologies**

   "Decolonizing knowledge means deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge in epistemic plurality– and looking at how this epistemic plurality can be redefined vis-à-vis hegemonic knowledge." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

DEFINITIONS & SHARED UNDERSTANDINGS/ PRINCIPLES

In order to ground ourselves in a shared vision and mission, we explore some shared principles and understanding generated from various Talking Objects think tanks and workshops convened with prolific African and Afro-diasporic thinkers, writers and poets.

Decolonization

Decolonization is a two-pronged process; physical decolonization through the end of occupation and settler colonialism, and the decolonization of our imaginations; ways of being and ways of thinking. We explore the concept of decolonization as expressed by Dr. Sylvia Tamale who views it as "restoring the dignity of African people." This is done through the deconstruction of persisting colonial structures, both in the politico-economic realm and the psychological realm.

Decolonization, however, is not only pure deconstruction but also a reconstruction of the African identities, along with the relationship between Africans and Colonial powers[3].

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[3] From Tamale, S. (2020). The Basics of Decolonization and Decolonial Futures. In S. Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (pp. 17-27). Ottawa: Daraja Press.

Thinking in this tradition, El Hadji Malick Ndiaye gives us the definition of decolonization in the epistemological field.

"Decolonizing knowledge means deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge in epistemic plurality – and looking at how this epistemic plurality can be redefined vis-à-vis hegemonic knowledge[4]." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

Decolonial Archive

As a researcher in Cultural heritage and African philosophy, one of my favourite definitions of the decolonial imagination of the archive comes from a poem by Koleka Putuma, an award-winning poet, playwright and theatre director. - Muthoni Mwangi

TEACHINGS[5]
***Transparency* (n): a weapon used to exorcize a lineage of silence.**
***Talk* (n): a medicine used to heal years of silence.**
***Writing* (n): a doctrine used to deliver one from the ills of silencing.**
***Share* (n): a tool used to dismantle learnt behaviour of suffering in silence.**
***Publishing* (v): a middle finger to the erasure and silencing of womxn like me.**
***Archiving* (v): a FUCK YOU to the canon**

In the same vein, talking objects contributors explore the concept of a decolonial archive as one outside the realm of Western hegemonic knowledge, as an archive and memory-bank built outside the Western colonial gaze that 'others' indigenous people and epistemologies.

Their insights[6] include:

Distinguishing our role and reclaiming our intellectual labour from Western paradigms of knowledge production. We are doing this through the radical approach of re-directing our labour (physical and intellectual) to processes that make sense to and serve us as people

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[4] From TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022.
[5] From Collective Amnesia (p.81) by Koleka Putuma, 2017, Manyano Media.
[6] The Insights highlighted in blue were contributed by respective individuals at TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022.

living in the Global South.[7] This breaks the cyclical intellectual production energy expended (unnecessarily) in current debates around repatriation.

"Western museums shouldn't be applauded for returning an object that isn't theirs – Returning one object shouldn't be a press release. That should be a Zoom call... those who own the archives should do the decolonial work and build the decolonial archive." ~ Njoki Ngumi

"African intellectuals spent the post-colonial moment in the 60s, 70s and even 80s and 90s writing back to the empire. *How much more intellectual labour must go into deconstructing epistemologies?*" ~ Neo Musangi

"Decolonization labour cannot be shared with the architects of the set canon." ~ Jim Chuchu

Thinking about an archive as fiction and imagination, and thus mutable and re-makeable(constructable) into multiple counter narratives.
"Is archiving a natural societal urge? Or a product of the very dominating, controlling Western archive and its urge to reserve?" ~ Jim Chuchu

"Speaking of *re-memorying*, Toni Morrison (bless her!) reminds us that archives and history are fictitious; a reminder that *it is not over for those still struggling to write the genealogies of their people and to keep a historical consciousness alive....* archival work is always a work of fiction. I am aiming for more imaginaries." ~ Neo Musangi

Distinguishing our diverse and collective experiences in the construction and contribution to the archive as grief work and wake work, acknowledging that "memory work is wake work[8]" (Christina Sharpe)

Wake work as in" ... a mode of inhabiting and rupturing this episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives.[9]"

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[7] From "Community is All we Have." ep. 5 of The Development Myth, 2022.
[8] Contributed by Neo Musangi at TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022.
[9] From *In the Wake* (p.18), by Christina Sharpe, 2016, Duke University Press.

african digital heritage

"…an archive that honors the living. Contemporary culture, communities and aesthetics. African diasporas are so ephemeral - this needs to be honored." ~ Jim Chuchu

"Our continued grief (and our lives) as a build-up to this archive. We are doing wake-work." ~ Neo Musangi

"…this is not the way to continue. But what happens if we begin to grieve lost objects? What happens if we start acting as if the objects are dead? What ties do we want to cut? What do we want to let go? What do we want to heal?" ~ Njoki Ngumi

"We need to let go. We need to build new things. A new world-making and life-giving project." ~ Neo Musangi

Moving away from rationalisations and categorisations within the archive by allowing space for ritual and the occult and the mythical. Adopting Glissant's theory of opacity as "The need to keep some things opaque (not necessarily secret) and probably unknowable." This allows the archive to maintain the mysteries of indigenous knowledge and rituals according to the different community's needs and preferences.

Viewing the object as an archive and exploring the concept of the object beyond ethnological understandings and into real indigenous imaginations and knowledge.

"If the Western archive is exhausted, all the objects, our archive of life, our archive of experiments, should be revisited, to explore and resume many sorts of lost knowledge" ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

Objects as archives of knowledge!
"the object as a placeholder – what comes with it etc – the process surrounding it is important" ~ Mahret Ifeoma Kupka

Talking Object as an approach and a product

"TALKING OBJECTS" is a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production.
"the decolonial archive as a site of knowledge, a tool of mediation, and a dynamic platform of exchange of ideas" ~ Isabel Raabe

It is a curated archive and has no claim to completeness. Based on selected objects or collections, the Western canon is expanded to include further schools of thought and epistemologies.
"an archive that simultaneously allows for digital all-knowledge and play, alongside opacity and ritual and the occult and internal. Can an object within such an archive truly be known and accessible, and also un-knowable at the same time? I know there's a pervasive idea about the digital being infinite in their availability, but...I wonder." ~ Jim Chuchu

New contexts of meaning need to be created, names, rituals need to be reclaimed: the quotidien, spiritual and metaphysical, African philosophy and history, new academic research to dismantle euro-centrified sciences and artistic reflections will be included on equal terms.
"plurality of knowledge. knowledge is everywhere. knowledge can be found in the imaginary, in the academic, in the administration, and also, importantly, in practice, encompassing art and activism." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

The Pain of loss in the countries of origin and repercussions (new mythologies or the loss of memories is very important in this context."
"this is not the way to continue. but what happens if we begin to grief lost objects? what happens if we start acting as if the objects are dead? what ties do we want to cut? what do we want to let go? what do we want to heal?" ~ Njoki Ngumi

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Having grounded into shared principles and understandings, we can explore the theoretical underpinnings of the Archive and the technical implementation of these ideas. The

contributions below are shared from the Talking Objects lab Workshop of Jan 11, 2022, and were summarised as follows:

1) **deconstruct/ walk away** from the Western concept of archive altogether – incl. the objects. Questioning the term "archive" itself.

2) **speaking of** *rememorying*, Toni Morrison reminds us that archives and history are fictitious

3) central questions: for whom is the archive meant? To whom does the object speak? What objects are interesting to whom? And to whom is the object defined as such?

4) **cutting the ties, grieving the objects**, letting go: "our continued grief (and our lives) as a build-up to this archive. We are doing wake-work."

5) what could this 'counter-archive' uniting multiple truths look like: **an archive that honors the living; contemporary culture, communities, and aesthetics**. Moving away from the object entirely. An archive that simultaneously allows for digital all-knowledge and play, alongside opacity and ritual and the occult and internal.

6) **acknowledging the digital platform as a site of struggle:** not performing but enacting and building the digital archive in the present analogue world, in contemporary communities. World-making instead of archiving.

7) If the archive itself is a colonial construct, we have to **question the need of archiving and the word "archive" itself**[10].

How can the insights around knowledge production and plurality on African heritage be translated into a technical archive?

What else can we do besides send our grief towards an archive of evil?

The archive as construction of a digital landscape

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[10] From TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022 ith Njoku Ngumi, Jim Chuchu, Neo Musangi, El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, Isabel Raabe and Celina Baljeet Basra.

"Why the landscape? Because it is for me a useful image to understand the relationality of things and actors. Objects and actors form relationships with each other, but especially in the (historical) contexts in which they live, have lived, will live. That's what it's all about: "landscape" is an image of living objects and contexts. But what is a landscape of information, of knowledge? ~ What is the map, the plan, the topography, the topology[11]?" ~ Erik Stein

Maybe it looks like an experiment in intellectual cartography. **We are talking about a website. A website is looked at, and is read, questioned, and interactivity can be described as "moving inside". Visiting a website is a movement of thought. It is like moving through an imaginary landscape.**

The archive as a space for world making/ imagining/ remembering[12]
"(hoping) for an archive that honors the living. contemporary culture, communities and aesthetics. African diasporas are so ephemeral - this needs to be honored.

who wants to archive grief - we want to live our lives, not keep records of nonsense. We want to make things and USE them, not stick them on walls and auction them and temperature-control them." ~ Jim Chuchu

"Our continued grief (and our lives) as a build-up to this archive. We are doing wake-work." ~ Neo Musangi

We are **de-privileging rationalism by centering play and embodied knowledge and other approaches such as poetry and oral histories.** We are doing this through unlearning mainstream database practices and learning/ experimenting with ways to represent this multiplicity within the archive.

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[11] From Epistemological Landscapes: Databases, archival websites and the nature of information. By Erik Stein, Dakar in January 2023.
[12] From TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022, with Njoku Ngumi, Jim Chuchu, Neo Musangi, El Hadji Malick Ndiaye, Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, Isabel Raabe and Celina Baljeet Basra.

"There is the hierarchy of knowledge, science will always fit on top of mystery and poetry. And yet, mystery and poetry are the things that have kept human beings going when there was no scientific knowledge." ~ Jim Chuchu

Through observing the Object as the entry point it acts as an opening to a vast archive of indigenous knowledge systems. It acts as an opening to other multiple epistemological landscapes. Beginning with our lived experiences captured through contemporary artistic reflection, traditional spirituality and sitting with the meaning and grief of loss in communities of origin we engage in wake work as claiming our experiences as true as centre, as the only truth that matters to us we enter the process/ liminal time and space of worldbuilding.

What approaches to knowledge sharing and preservation have been identified by TO contributors across the world?

"how can an archive take into account the objects?" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina
Beginning with the meditation above, we are interested in exploring experimental approaches to knowledge sharing and preservation identified below:

1.   Using objects as the starting point and foreground; an invitation into wider cultural contexts and indigenous knowledge

This archive is the result of: **"[Being] stuck in a dialogue industry curating exchanges, dialogues, events but no objects move." ~ Jim Chuchu**
"Objects are not the only thing we want back." ~ Njoki Ngumi
Talking Objects is an approach and a product. We are interested in redirecting our labour towards dream work instead of engaging in the constant dialogue of repatriation and the return of objects
"Why is this conversation on retribution so centred around objects?" ~ Njoki Ngumi

Understanding that engaging in this dialogue that seems to be running in circles is not our labour, thus we are moving away from directing our energies towards decolonising the Western archives-that is not our work. We are interested in dreaming, imagining and remembering and representing new, lost, forgotten paradigms.

"moving away from the object entirely so it would speak to me. It could be conversations, the element of play, the memory of a beautiful game." ~ Njoki Ngumi

Our approach to exploring objects completely decentres and rejects Western aesthetics and interests

""What objects are interesting, to who?", rather. Because the aesthetics and interests of Western societies are mainstreamed, formalized and given structure at the expense of 'indigenous aesthetics' to pick up on the thought Malick had." ~ Jim Chuchu

Creating room to explore the multiplicity of indigenous aesthetics and interests.We are interested in completely moving away from the western voyeuristic gaze.

"Objects in a Western archive have nothing to do with Western. Western came later. And if Western came later, we can remove Western." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

In this way, the archive aims to move away and beyond ethnological understandings of objects and into the real indigenous imaginations and knowledge by looking at objects through the lenses of African philosophies, African history, African spirituality, etc.

"In the past the significations of objects were connected with astronomy, astrology, things that are in the sky and that are the imagination of another world. But now we are limited in our imagination because we are in the space of [an] ethnological archive." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

2.   Anti-colonial approaches to archiving and de-privileging rationalist epistemologies
"If we need an emotional relation to an object in order to understand it (to speak with Souleyman Bachir Diagne), how can we create this in digital space?" ~ Isabel Raabe

In Keguro Macharia's article, *Archive and Method* he considered the silences and exclusions from Western Colonial Archives. He looks at the unknowability and the restraints of an encounter with this archive but also reminds us, "Intellectual production and activism meet at the archive. What kind of encounter is produced? "Thinking with Keguro Macharia's Archive and method - the archive as a place where art and activism meet - what type of encounter is produced - what would an honest encounter/encounters look like? What emotions would they

elicit? Knowing that the audience should have an emotional connection to the archive, we are employing an autoethnographic[13] approach to knowledge production and knowledge sharing.
 "[I] struggle to incorporate experience and spoken knowledge, i.e. in academic papers – including different kinds of knowledge remains tied to positions of power" ~ Mahret Ifeoma Kupka

This archive is an experiment Ontological agency-where we ask ourselves "what happens when we decide what is remembered"- and create a curated collection
"archival work is always a work of fiction. I am aiming for more imaginaries." ~ Neo Musangi

"epistemic shift, turning upside down what knowledge means, implementing other forms of knowledge and other systems." ~ Neo Musangi

"whose memory? who decided what is remembered?" ~ Jim Chuchu

The Talking Objects Archive is centering Multiplicity in the archive; cultural and linguistic multiplicity. Epistemic multiplicity (African history, philosophy etc) to give a multi-perspective exploration of an object and its relations with actors
"There is the hierarchy of knowledge, science will always fit on top of mystery and poetry. And yet, mystery and poetry are the things that have kept human beings going when there was no scientific knowledge." ~ Jim Chuchu

"The contemporary comprehension of knowledge I have is that the knowledge can be everywhere. Knowledge can be in literature, in fictionality, in imaginary. Knowledge can also be in practice - first of all in artistic practice and in activism." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye

We are interested in Participatory and community-based research through oral history, cultural heritage practices, and re-imagined anthropologic tools. We are opting for World making instead of archiving

"archival work is always a work of fiction. I am aiming for more imaginaries.

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[13] According to Adams et al. (2015): Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of academic writing that draws on and analyzes or interprets the lived experience of the author and connects researcher insights to self-identity, cultural rules and resources, communica-tion practices, traditions, premises, symbols, rules, shared meanings, emotions,values, and larger social, cultural, and political issues.

not performing, but enacting and building the digital archive in the present analogue world, in contemporary communities. world-making instead of archiving." ~ Neo Musangi
"We need to let go. We need to build new things. A new world-making and life-giving project." ~ Neo Musangi

Metaphysical understandings of the archive from the perspective of indigenous knowledge systems

Rememory-ing

An archive is always memory work; a site of remembering. The decolonial archive offers us a liminal space where the (colonial)pasts, the (neo-colonial) present and(decolonial) futures can meet.

> **"Archives are always memory work" ~ Neo Musangi**
> **"Archives as the site of remembering" ~ Isabel Raabe**

In the decolonial archive we are interested in centering memories of indigenous objects, communities and thinkers.

We are interested in using objects as an entry point to different cultural contexts.

> **"Memory as construction." ~ El Hadji Malick Ndiaye**
> **"what is the strategy to navigate this? Guerrilla/Robin Hood strategy of 'doing our thing' within a structure which just intends to extract work and knowledge after all?"**

Approaching the concept of the archive using Guerilla theory, we envision the decolonial archive as a space where we can Africanize the history of an object thus moving away from the Western eurocentric gaze. Acknowledging the plurality of African heritage the archive takes a multidisciplinary/multi perspective approach subversing hegemonic paradigms of archiving. The archive as a site to reclaim our memories and construct stories, (counter)narratives and identities that make sense to us.

> **"Whose memory?"**
> **"What objects are interesting, to who?", rather. Because the aesthetics and interests of Western societies are mainstreamed, formalised and given structure at the expense of 'indigenous aesthetics' to pick up on the thought Malick had." ~ Jim Chuchu**

Re-memory is a collective process allowing us to think together and learn together. We envision a playground or garden with diverse co-dreamers, "co-conspirators in play." tapping into communal archiving allows us to explore communal memories, giving more insights into the relationality between objects and their cultural contexts. One of the tenets of indigenous ways of knowing is the primacy of communal thinking, world building and knowledge sharing. We don't think alone in isolation, we think with each other

> **"Who are we inviting into that work of imagination? Who are we imagining with?" ~ Neo Musangi**

Re-memorying invites us to ask ourselves; what do we remember? What do we want to continue to remember and what do we want to forget? Where do we remember?
Thinking with Saidiya Haartman's critical fabulation we are applying narrative restraint which is the "refusal to fill in gaps and provide closure" thus acknowledging that we are still living within (the aftermath of) these wounds

> **""Memory-work is wake-work"~ Christina Sharpe. So, sometimes memorialising and re-membering is a funeral. It is a revisiting of the scene of crime, and it is in many ways painful (Thinking of Dionne Brand's "A Map to the Door of No Return" and Saidiya Hartman's visit to the door in Ghana). Going back to Njoki's ideas of grief and letting go. Perhaps thinking also of how imaginations needn't be shared or circulated. Imagination as ritual and the occult and internal." ~ Neo Musangi**

The exercise in rememory invites us to ask questions like: How do we transmute grief in a way that allows us to let go? What are our shared grieving rituals?

> **"this is not the way to continue. But what happens if we begin to grief lost objects? What happens if we start acting as if the objects are dead? What ties do we want to cut? What do we want to let go? What do we want to heal?" ~ Njoki Ngumi**

Opacity

> **"Glissant's opacity comes to mind. The need to keep some things opaque (not necessarily secret) and probably unknowable." ~ Neo Musangi**

african digital heritage

Embodied Knowledge & relational technology

Thinking of it in two terms- 1. the autoethnographic approach; where we root ourselves in our experiences as sources of knowledge and 2. Approaching The object as a body interacting with other bodies - relationality with cultural contexts and histories to assist in the process of experiencing the knowledge and artefacts as opposed "intellectual" knowledge dumps

With this in mind, we invite Neema Githere's voice into the room, we ground our work in Guerilla theory that **"examines the political, ontological, and technological underpinnings of the guerrilla in the digital humanities (DH)" which is useful for us who bear the "fatigue of not seeing the truths I experience being represented—specifically in the academy and in more formal institutions**[14]." (On Guerilla Theory as Liberatory Practice)

Further, they invite us to explore the concept of afro-presentism as **"a genre fusing archival, documentary, and fine arts through new media in the expression of an Afrofuturist lived reality." (2017) and further developing into "embodied practice, thinking beyond genre, beyond conventional art: What does it mean to be an African body that has survived until this point—that has survived centuries of genocide and erasure and colonization, to still be here now? What are we doing with that legacy right now? And time is essential, it's a core part of that. "(2022)** In this tradition we choose to believe ourselves, our bodies, and our embodied experiences as valid sources of knowledge. Reconnecting with presence in the face of systems that benefit from our alienation

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

How does the archive take these perspectives into account?

Beginning with the thesis that; **"If the aim is to create a decolonial digital archive, i.e. a collection database and an editorial website, then the technical basis must also be seen as an elementary component of the project. We must therefore understand digitality extended by the idea of an open aesthetic and structure and rethink its technical implementation in**

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[14] From an Interview with Bomb Magazine, Issue 159, 19/4/2022. Found here: https://bombmagazine.org/articles/neema-githere-and-ethel-tawe/.

order to allow not only hegemonic, canonized knowledge but also the representation and recording of unknown, almost forgotten and local knowledge and thinking[15]."

We acknowledge the need to ideate an information architecture that takes into account the theories and praxis around decolonial knowledge production. Further acknowledging that **"the digital platform of a site of struggle[16]"** Thus the need to create and experiment with imaginations of decolonial information technology to generate an archive that reflects our values and ethos. Additionally, understanding that the current archetype of the archive does not include indigenous knowledge systems, we see the need to unlearn mainstream database and cataloguing practices and explore alternative ways of data representation.

A technically constructed database or archive therefore requires an information model. We can also call it a data model, or better yet: **an information architecture.** Due to the nature of this freedom-experiment, our information architecture can only be executed using decolonial information technology as an approach to worldmaking and decolonial knowledge production.

This includes developing an archive for, of, and by the people, exploring open ways of storing information, centering (participatory)research by involving communities and including oral histories etc. We are therefore developing an open information architecture to provide freedom and room for play, having many catalogues, not only to bypass the dilemma of cataloguing but also allow Talking objects to live as a hybrid archive: a database and a website, playful approach and professional database displaying not just one truth but polyperspectivity.

"Archives are never neutral. We have to be aware that compiling a collection means developing a narrative[17]." ~ Isabel Raabe

Decolonial information technology allows us to develop (counter) narratives outside Western hegemonic Knowledge thus allowing us to de-link with and de-privilege cannonic principles and explore a field of possibilities and ideas that reflect indigenous realities, spiritualities,

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[15] From TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Decolonial information technology Workshop 7 December 2021.
[16] Contributed by Isabel Raabe at TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Imagining a digital archive for decolonial knowledge production Workshop 11 January 2022.
[17] From TALKING OBJECTS Research LAB Decolonial information technology Workshop 7 December 2021.

histories and philosophies. In order to fully conceptualise this Decolonial Information technology infrastructure we need to ask ourselves some key questions[18]:

1.   What do we mean by archival ethics and a non-hegemonic IT?

Building an archive by the people and for the people. But who are the people? our target audience being researchers, thinkers, culture workers and artists from Africa and the diaspora as well as all theorists and researchers interested in making honest work about Indigenous knowledge paradigms in Africa and the diasporas ("Co-conspirators in play")

"knowledge seeker archive? Memory keeper archive? A specialist archive?" ~ Isabel Raabe
The Talking Objects Archive is a freedom experiment allowing for freedom to think and apply a playful approach

"is it an archive? Or a project? Or an artwork?" ~ Mahret Ifeoma Kupka

an experiment - freedom to think

"playful approach" ~ Erik Stein

2.   What does "content" mean? What does "technical" mean?

Our definition of technical:

"An interesting "database of thought" needs a technical basis which allows manifold information around objects" ~ Erik Stein
For the TO Archive Content means the objects themselves and the contexts and different perspectives of looking at the object, representing multiple relationships between objects and communities of origin.

"How can digital technologies bring people and objects together?" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

3.   How can we overcome hierarchical technology structures that influence/shape content?

Creating an archive that allows for complexity and does not simplify contexts acknowledging that we won't reach everyone and everything.

The question then is **How to develop an open structure and aesthetic to represent and record "forgotten" or under-represented knowledge and thinking and How to display multiplicity**

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[18] Contributions in this section are extracted from the above source.

"Envisioning an archival space that accommodates stories in many forms, linear and nonlinear" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

"Process of experiencing the knowledge and artefacts, rather than viewing it all at once - moving away from the 'overview' model" ~ Erik Stein

Centering the process of learning by envisioning embodied processes of knowledge acquisition thus creating room for audiences to form emotional relation to the objects. We aim to do this by taking the audience on a journey rather than an information dump.

"An emotional relation to the object (Souleymane Bachir Diagne) – is this even possible in a digital space?" ~ Isabel Raabe

"Research is the key! Doing research with communities in different places – what do <u>you</u> want? To know about an object?

E.g. include oral history
include sources in their respective original language" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

In the end, we aim to provide a digital system where one can witness manifold relations playfully

"restriction of having one label vs. having many stories attached to the object. (this is an) attempt to establish a digital system where you can visualize manifold relations in a Playful process." ~ Erik Stein

4. Rethinking terms and cataloguing practices

"the idea that you can have a standard catalogue for the whole world is ridiculous" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

" we should never just talk about <u>one</u> vocabulary, <u>one</u> thesaurus. We need many" ~ Erik Stein

"We do need a catalogue – however we decide to structure it – a way to find information in the database" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

"Attempt to establish a digital system where you can visualize manyfold relations (through a) Playful process"

"make it manifold – many catalogues, many fragments" ~ Erik Stein

5.   Ideas for dynamic formats of storytelling

"a database of many things – not just the objects but their context and interconnections – in a magazine-like format" ~ Erik Stein

We can do this by using local methods of knowledge dissemination such as Zine-making as a method of knowledge sharing and production amongst artists and intellectuals in Kenya and the diaspora. (Anthony Muisyo, Rosie Olang', Zine Me a Song, Ndoota, Down River Road, Flood Tide Zines, Muthoni*). While zine making is an analog form of storytelling, we have the capacity to explore digitizing zines through the use of Digital storytelling tools such as XR, 360 ° filming, Animation, Volumetric capture, 3D modelling.

"interested in the knowledge of a post-colonial archive, capturing the Zeitgeist of a severely local community" ~ Jim Chuchu

"Digital storytelling is a big thing in terms of accommodating stories in different forms, being linear or nonlinear" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

Further, digitising multimedia installations and dreaming/ imagining exhibitions in the digital realm offers another interesting opportunity to experiment in non-linearity and re-memory such as:

Amplitudes of Dawn
Exhibition Amplitudes of Dawn - Nairobi
Amplitudes of Dawn

Thinking of the Archive as A digital garden invites us to begin thinking about a long-term perspective of stewardship and care.

Long-term perspective: who will take care of the garden/ archive? How long will the archive live?

 "Consortium of partners from different fields in several African countries" ~ Isabel Raabe

"identifying possible partners to ensure long-term engagement and participation" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina

We acknowledge that must have A participatory and interactive model to allow for dynamism in the archive

> **"How can we keep it dynamic according to the dynamic character of objects ("Objects are things in translation" Nana Oforiatta Ayim)" ~ Isabel Raabe**

> **"participatory approach: free download of content, allowing people to work and play with the content and to give us back their results" ~ Erik Stein**

> **"Open-Source Software, Feedback Loops, Downloadable Information etc. - but: fully interactive interface technically and budget-wise not feasible" ~ Erik Stein**

> **how "care-full" do we need to be in sharing the info's/material surrounding the objects?" ~ Chao Tayiana Maina**

6.   Where, how, by whom is the data stored?

As agreed, the server located in Germany

"practicability - i.e. in Germany €10 per month" ~ Erik Stein

The talking objects team is still exploring what data storage is used?

7.   Usability and accessibility

Thinking about the utility of the archive, we explore the question of the primary target audience

"Who is the target group for the archive, who is using it? If I am looking for information as a researcher, I would be quite annoyed if I cannot use it to find the infos I need." ~ Mahret Ifeoma Kupka

"people should feel invited in – balance between openness and usability" ~ Mahret Ifeoma Kupka

Secondly, we look at the question of language

- include oral history
- include sources in their respective original language

Lastly, we are interested in creating an archive that honours Glissant's theory of Opacity

dare to be opaque: radical approach of including infos that are not accessible to everyone

8.   New Technological solutions; Open-source software as the basis for a Sustainable Knowledge Infrastructure.

While creating this archive, the Talking Objects team is experimenting with Pandora

How can they be translated into technical infrastructure?

When thinking of the ways in which we can translate the above perspectives on decolonial information technology into a technical infrastructure we must focus on[19]:

Rethinking terms and cataloguing practices
_a collection/database works with classification/categories: what categories would be important to have?
Can we imagine the catalogues as maps of a digital landscape?
if we want to represent »forgotten«/under-represented memories, stories, etc. we propose different views of the database (view all, view all annotations, view objects only, view connections between objects, view connections between annotations)

Multiple stories of an object
dimensionality could represent that there are multiple (sometimes overlapping) stories of an object → you would have to unfold them (engaging with the user → mediation with users)

A tool for mediation
interact with users/»draw them in«/tool of empowerment for research with an intelligent search engine
Thinking of how we can achieve interactive models of data presentation through collaborations with New Dimensions Lab (or Fellows/ partner organisations like Black RhinoVR)

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[19] From Talking Objects Archive - Structural thoughts.

What core features must it have?

1. **Digital Pluralism** that allows for different structures, i.e. *ordered/linear, chaotic/ unorganised, decentral archive*, *central archive, symbolic, numerical, geographical, chronological*; different ways of looking at the object, i.e. fanned out, *situational, decontextualized, contextualised, connected, focus on annotations, focus on object, rhythmical, dynamical.*

2. **Epistemic and Cultural pluralism**, centering the object as the archive. Doing this through; *Positioning, Overlaying, (dis)connecting, Embedding, Abstracting, Describing, Irritating, rotating, connecting, zooming in & out, focusing, annotating, extracting*

3. **Dynamic storytelling** tools that create an interactive and participatory experience of the archive

4. **Accessibility and usability**; respecting language barriers as part of our diversity by providing descriptions in original languages and relevant translations, overcoming technological barriers through the use of open software and storage, catering to audiences with disabilities by using digital storytelling tools such as sound guided tours and developing both professional and playful forms of the archive.

5. **Sustainability**. There needs to be tools and a plan for long-term stewardship and care for the archive as well as updates based on feedback loops and further contributions

What must it avoid?

1. Data dumps that don't allow the user to experience the knowledge in an interactive way.
2. Using Western hegemonic epistemologies of rationality and unnecessary complexity to marginalise and silence certain audiences
3. The trap of re-creating the Western archive just in a different form through intentional care and reflection
4. Singularity within the archive by centering one single outlook.
5. Static catalogues

What gaps and absences lie within existing datasets?

1. Missing and omitted metadata. In service of the eurocentric gaze, some of these archives offer non-descriptive and non-contextual metadata
2. Providing metadata without care or critical reflection

3. Missing multi perspectivity
4. Tech barriers and geographical barriers

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Conceptual framework can be found at the link [here](#).

MANIFESTO STATEMENTS

1. **The Talking Objects archive is an experiment in an auto-ethnographic approach to exploring cultural objects through creating curated collections that form a decolonial archive for knowledge production.** It is both the process of building, maintaining, and making within this digital decolonial garden/landscape and the products of these explorations.

2. **The Talking Objects archive lives because (we) as thinkers, theorists, and culture workers from the Global South need to redirect our labour from cyclical conversations around restitution and invest our intellectual labour into doing the wake work**. That is, **"inhabiting and rupturing this (western)episteme with our known lived and un/imaginable lives,"** thus causing an epistemic shift that turns the western archive upside down.

3. **The Talking Objects Archive is interested in creating a space for collective and multidisciplinary modes of knowledge production and knowledge sharing.** The archive invites African and Afro-diasporic peoples, (and those with whomst we share the immensely deep wounds of colonial nostalgia) researchers, thinkers, culture workers, and artists as well as all theorists and researchers interested in making honest work about Indigenous \knowledge paradigms in Africa and the diasporas to be our "Co-conspirators in play"

4. **The Talking Objects Archive is a living archive. It is not an archive of death and colonial atrocity.** It is a generative archive that honours the space of grief work and ritual work while firmly grounding us in the present moment, in our bodies where we can access and live out our freedom dreams and decolonial imaginations. What epistemological ideas inform our archiving process?

5. **The Talking Objects Archive is a digital landscape/playground/garden/open field of unknown/forgotten epistemologies.** The archive offers the object as an invitation, aperture, and rupture into the vast cosmos of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Therefore, Talking Objects is:
- Creating decolonial knowledge through centering Indigenous epistemologies
- Acknowledging and Exploring the object as archive
- Unlearning mainstream databases
- Exploring and questioning ontological and aesthetic questions around the theme of digital
- Working on and imagining ways to record and preserve local and situated, unknown and forgotten knowledge

In order to create:
- An archive that is an open partition into diverse worlds of knowledge- a crack, an opening
- A poetic archive
- A living archive x digital garden
- An archive that views the object as a cosmos