

Knowledge Space(s) of Globalization. Musealizing Things, People and Spaces of Global Trade.

Ruhkopf, Melcher, HafenCity University Hamburg

How do the spaces of global trade fit into a museum space? Whose story is told and how can art-based methodologies help to open the knowledge spaces of globalization? These are the key questions addressed in this ethnographic-artistic PhD-project.

Research object and cooperation partner is the future *German Port Museum* in Hamburg, one of the best-funded and most-discussed museum projects in Germany at present. It will be located on three sites including a newly constructed building in the prospective neighborhood Kleiner Grasbrook, a historic warehouse in the Hamburg port area, and the early 20th century four-masted barque *Peking*.

The museum's aim is to not only narrate the historic dimensions of ports and seafaring via the presentation of historic ships, artefacts and stories, as most traditional port museums do worldwide. Instead, the *German Port Museum* seeks to address ports and maritime trade as a model that helps the understanding of a globalized world. It is supposed to provide a space for discourse on globalization as an inherently contemporary matter, involving complex economic, social and cultural relations. The museum thus aims at establishing a *knowledge space of globalization*.

Space, in this regard, can not only be understood as a mere container of knowledge production, but has to be considered an element of epistemic contingency. This is especially true for museums: Considering their explicit stakes in collecting, organizing and sharing knowledge, they can fairly be considered epistemic spaces par excellence. At the same time, space is no *a priori* precondition for human action in general and knowledge production in particular. Rather, it has to be considered product *and* substrate of the social, being constructed through as well as constituting social practice (Lefebvre 1991).

In addressing ports as hubs of globalization, the *Port Museum* again deals with inherently spatial issues. Global trade and relating processes of socio-cultural exchange, as well as disparities and inequalities between north and south, create a powerful spatial fabric. They engender a global assemblage involving an almost infinite number of human and non-human actors, facilitating the virtually seamless flow of goods through global spaces (Cowen 2014). This spatial assemblage, now, has to be transformed into the museum. It has to be folded and compressed until it fits the exhibition spaces. This happens through contingent processes of translation and mediation (Latour 1999): Museal artefacts, academic discourses, visual and literal inscriptions, spatial designs, institutional structures and exchange processes between actors within and outside the museum form another complex and heterogeneous network of relations. This network's specific configuration determines how globalization is presented in the museum, i.e. what kind of a *space of globalization* is constructed and musealized.

The PhD-project seeks to disentangle and to intervene into this space-producing network of human and non-human actants that shape the *Port Museum* as a knowledge space of globalization. It does so employing a two-phase research design combining ethnographic and participatory art-based methodologies.

In a first research phase taking place right now, the museum's formation process is researched using ethnographic means of qualitative field research. Semi-narrative interviews are

conducted with key actors of the field to gain insights in how they imagine the future port museum and how they make sense of the planning process. Based on the interview data, the human and non-human actors participating in the process are mapped, exploring their interdependent relations and their role in the spacio-epistemic production process. The process is furthermore researched through participant observation of selected events that reveal negotiation and translation processes constitutive for the museum. Another important resource are literal and visual inscriptions such as space plans, collection concepts or other concept papers, that fix spatial and epistemic parameters.

Based on this first research phase, I will turn to *implicated actors* in the field, i.e. actors who are constructed in the discourse or are part of the field in other ways, without actually being present and being able to take active part in the institutional production of knowledge and space.

Implicated actors regarding the discourse on globalization and global trade are the seamen and -women that play key roles in moving cargo through the “seamless corridors and gateways of logistics space” (Cowen 2014, 19) without hardly ever being seen or heard by the public. Their own freedom of movement, unlike that of the containers they ship, is radically restricted by international security protocols, national border protection and corporate policy. They only have very limited means of participation and articulation inside the space of globalization they help producing. This discrepancy between the almost limitless freedom of stuff and the harshly restricted freedom of people will be addressed in a second research phase through means of art-based research and experimental collecting.

This will take place in a space where the otherwise invisible and unheard human actors of global trade appear: the *Duckdalben international seamen’s club* at the center of Hamburg’s container port. Surrounded by staggering stacks of containers and roaring motorways, the *Duckdalben* is often the only place seamen get to see when they berth in Hamburg. It provides them internet access, drinks, a room of silence for various religious observance, basic entertainment and an opportunity to make conversation with people beyond the 20-men-crew of their own ship. The *Duckdalben* can be considered some kind of interspace between sea and land, ship and city, global north and global south. It thus provides an opportunity to open the museum’s knowledge space towards non-hegemonic perspectives on global trade.

Art-based methods will be used to involve and explore the “corporeality, materiality, situatedness and performativity of knowledge” (Peters 2013, 8, own translation) and to mobilize non-academic bodies of knowledge. Collaborating with the *Port Museum*, a series of experimental setups will be realized in the *Duckdalben* to collect objects and narrations and to explore the participatory dimensions of performative collecting (Lorey 2014). These setups can include various formats of assemblies of people and things, live and mediated conversations or medial recordings. The precise implementations are to be developed with the cooperation partners and will be discussed at the conference. All setups will address the question: What do the invisible actors of global trade have to say about globalization? Which objects and discourses produce a knowledge space that meets their space of globalization?

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Design Driven Research

While stemming from a humanities-background instead of an architecture- or design-based context, the PhD-project applies participatory art-based methods to design the research process more inclusive and to explicate tacit knowledge of non-academic actors. The aim is to intervene into the design process of the *German Port Museum* in terms of its powerful production processes of knowledge and space. This is realised by creating specific situations that enable non-academic actors to take part in the research process and thus rendering them co-researchers or co-designers of the museum. Performative moments of collecting – meaning the gathering of material as well as ephemeral items such as narrations or emotions, and their collaborative (re-)ordering and presentation as collection – explore non-hegemonic views on globalization that reconfigure the museum’s spacio-epistemic formation. The research design thereby parallels main principles of Practice & Design Driven Research as proposed by CA²RE, emphasizing the „transformative and innovative power“ of artistic research strategies. The project employs experimental research setups to supplement well-established ethnographic methodologies and to highlight new ways of opening the research process, while explicitly impinging upon the object of research.

Keywords

Knowledge Space
Museum
Globalization

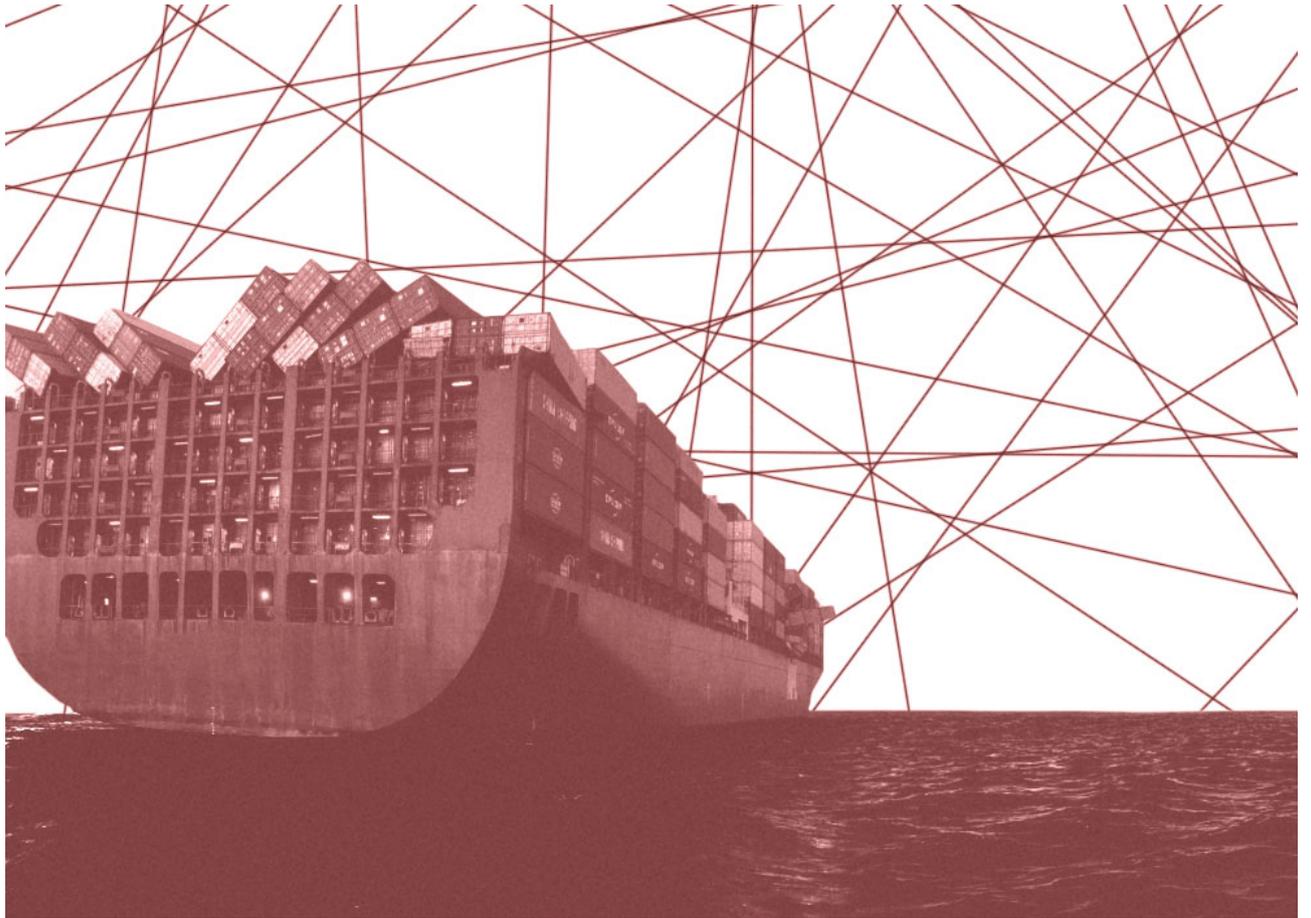
Bio

Ruhkopf, Melcher
PhD-candidate at HafenCity University, Department for Metropolitan Culture
Stage of Research: Initial/Intermediate

Since 2019: PhD-scholarship funded by Claussen-Simon-Stiftung, associate member of the research project “Participatory Art-Based Research” (PABR) conducted by HafenCity University, Kampnagel K3 and Fundus research theatre

2016 – 2019: Master of Arts “Culture, Arts and Media”, Leuphana University Lüneburg,

2012 – 2016: Bachelor of Arts “Metropolitan Culture”, HafenCity University Hamburg



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