

# Growing into epistemic knowledge through performance: Rosanna Raymond's "Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta" at Berlin's Ethnological Museum

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## Abstract

This article explores Rosanna Raymond's performative intervention titled "Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta" (Tread on the Sea—Tread on the Land). Today, many cultural institutions try to develop progressive strategies to facilitate "intercultural dialogue." In this endeavor, performative strategies are explored, some of which are developed in collaboration with experts from so-called "source communities." Such collaborations have longer histories in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, or Canada. In central Europe, and especially in Germany, this has been a more recent development. One prominent example is the one-month artist residency of the Pacific artist Rosanna Raymond (b. 1967) at the Ethnological Museum Berlin in 2014, which culminated in her "acti.VA.tion" entitled "Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta." My article analyzes how Raymond's performative intervention dramaturgically put different epistemic systems and "ways of knowing" into a contrasting relationship and thus enabled spectators to gain declarative epistemic knowledge, that is to say, knowledge about knowledge and different "ways of knowing."

## KEYWORDS

epistemic knowledge, indigeneity, interweaving performance cultures, museum performance, Rosanna Raymond (b. 1967), spectatorship

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[I]n the storied world, [...] things do not exist, they occur. Where things meet, occurrences intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story. [...] Yet, of course, people grow in knowledge not only through direct encounters with others, but also through hearing their stories told.

– Tim Ingold, *Being Alive*

## 1 | INTRODUCTION: PERFORMATIVE STRATEGIES IN THE MUSEUM

As artifacts, facilitators and legacy of Western appropriation and the European colonization of the world, ethnological collections and museums are contested sites today. As catalysts and beneficiaries of colonial “trade” spanning the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, many of these institutions currently see themselves facing a crisis (see Boursiquot, 2014). The result has been a more or less open and not always successful struggle to develop pertinent ways to examine and address the colonial trajectories of their collections and of their concomitant curatorial techniques of ethnographic representation. Today, many institutions try to develop progressive strategies to enable “intercultural dialogue” (Ethnologisches Museum Berlin, 2021). In this endeavor, performative strategies are explored as well, some of which are developed in collaboration with experts from so-called “source communities.” Such collaborations have longer histories in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, or Canada. In central Europe, and especially in Germany, this has been a more recent development. One prominent example being the one-month artist residency of the Pacific artist Rosanna Raymond (b. 1967) at the Ethnological Museum Berlin in 2014, which culminated in her “acti.VA.tion” entitled “Soli I Tai–Soli I Uta” (Tread on the Sea–Tread on the Land).

I participated as one of roughly 70 spectators in Raymond's acti.VA.tion. By subtitling the event in this manner, she highlighted the significance of the Samoan concept of *vā* for her art practice, a concept I will go into later. For me, as spectator, this one-off event indeed transcended the “museum's threshold or the moment of [...] observation” (Welsch, 1997, 91).<sup>1</sup> By entangling me in the network or, better, in the meshwork<sup>2</sup> of her acti.VA.tion, which skillfully intertwined the lifelines of people (at home in different cultures), objects (so-called “ethnographic artifacts”), and concepts (such as *vā*), Raymond initiated me (and maybe other spectators, too) into an ongoing practice of growing into knowledge about different “ways of knowing,” that is to say, into *epistemic knowledge* (knowledge about knowledge and “ways of knowing”).

In education studies, practical knowledge (knowing how) is often distinguished from declarative knowledge (knowing that). While the former category is defined as including sensorimotor and cognitive skills as well as dispositions to act in particular ways, the latter is defined as comprising descriptive facts and abstract knowledge, such as concepts, ideas, theories, schemas, principles, analogies, and so on. The term “declarative” is often used interchangeably with “theoretical,” “formal,” or “conceptual” in the context of knowledge. Declarative knowledge usually “starts from a prior, poorly articulated understanding and increasingly becomes more conscious, explicit, elaborate and abstract. The main outcome [...] is understanding” (Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2017, 81). Of course, practical and declarative knowledge are inextricably linked. But declarative knowledge (as “learning to understand”) does not automatically engender practical knowledge (as “learning to do”). I may have “an educated layman's understanding of Einstein's theory of relativity” but this does not “engender competence in manipulating tensors and the other mathematical tools of the relativity theorist” (Ohlsson, 1995, 50). While plenty of research exists on how practical knowledge is acquired, surprisingly little is known on how the process of growing into declarative knowledge unfolds (see Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2017, 82).

My essay's main argument is that the “energy” of Raymond's artistic work in Berlin's Ethnological Museum, which allowed it to transcend “the museum's threshold” (Welsch, 1997, 91), must be seen as the performative power to enable spectators such as myself gradually to grow into declarative epistemic knowledge, that is to say, into declarative knowledge about knowledge and different “ways of knowing.” I would like to define the latter as a dynamic repertoire and protocol of epistemic practices that can be shared by individuals, groups, communities,

or even entire societies. Picking up the notion of a “storied world” by the anthropologist Tim Ingold, my contribution’s argument and methodology can also be introduced as a story: The story of how, on April 27, 2014, the paths of people, objects, and concepts intertwined for the duration of maybe three hours inside Berlin’s Ethnological Museum, located in the district of Dahlem. Through this brief “binding” (Ingold, 2011, 152), skillfully orchestrated by Raymond, things occurred that engendered epistemic spectatorial processes of learning to understand better different “ways of knowing,” a learning process that continues—at least for me (and possibly for others, too)—to this day.

Numerous stories about Raymond’s “Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta” are circulating in print today. Written and published by people residing in different places, these stories unveil different perspectives on the event of April 27, 2014. One book, for example, talks about it from the perspective of its main initiators and organizers, who are based at Royal Holloway, University of London (see Gilbert & Phillipson, 2014). There are also stories told by the artist herself, in which Raymond reflects on the act within the context of her previous and subsequent works (see Raymond, 2016, 2018). Another story mentions Raymond’s work in the larger context of recent efforts by European ethnological museums to develop new “cultures of display” (Bachmann, 2017, 311). To my knowledge, no story has been published that attempts to tell the event’s story from the perspective of a spectator.

In *Being Alive* (2011), Ingold emphasizes the “peculiarly human ability to weave stories from the past into the texture of present lives.” It is in the “art of storytelling,” he claims, “that the key to human knowledgeability [...] ultimately resides” (Ingold, 2011, 164). I am quoting Ingold not only because Raymond has described herself as a storyteller, a “tusitala” (a teller of tales; Gilbert & Phillipson, 2014, 28), but also to highlight the importance of storytelling as an epistemic practice, which allows us to learn how we came to know what we know. Moreover, storytelling can offer listeners “guidance on how to proceed,” Ingold explains, but only if we acknowledge that “stories do not, as a rule, come with their meanings already attached [...]. What they mean is rather something that listeners have to discover for themselves [...]. Evidently, [...] people do not acquire their knowledge ready-made, but rather grow into it” (Ingold, 2011, 162).

Spectating means making (aesthetic) experiences, which is getting involved in the making of stories (not least about these experiences). Unraveling the many possible meanings of these stories means growing into knowledge. Ingold calls this a “process of following the trails” of stories “wayfaring.” It is “through wayfaring, not transmission,” he argues, “that knowledge is carried on” (Ingold, 2011, 143). This “carrying on” should, however, not be understood as the act of transporting knowledge from location A to location B, but as a process of its growth and transformation. In the following pages, I will tell my story of Raymond’s “Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta” in a way that provides information about how and why its mesh came about and how its dramaturgical texture fostered spectatorial processes of growing into epistemic knowledge. I will conclude by explaining why I think that it is important to rethink performances theoretically, as heterogeneous epistemic processes.

## 2 | THE PRODUCTION OF “OCEANIC ETHNOGRAPHIC ARTIFACTS”

Rosanna Raymond identifies as a New Zealand-born Pacific Islander. Her artistic work draws on her New Zealand, Samoan, and European heritage and ranges from installations and spoken word to body adornments, interweaving traditional Pacific practices with modern styles and techniques. In 2014, Raymond was invited to the Ethnological Museum Berlin to research and work with the “ethnographic artefacts”<sup>3</sup> comprising its Oceanic<sup>4</sup> collection. This raises the question of how these “ethnographic artefacts” came to be in Berlin in the first place.

According to the historian Rainer Buschmann, most of them were produced<sup>5</sup> in the three decades between 1880 and 1914, that is to say during the time of Germany’s colonial exploits and rule in the Pacific. During this period, about 250,000 objects were extracted from the Pacific and shipped to Germany. This German collection rush, Buschmann argues, “may be equal to or even exceed the combined [Pacific] collection activity of other nations” (Buschmann, 2018, 197–198). Currently, Berlin’s Ethnological Museum houses about 65,000 Oceanic

objects (p. 204). When it opened in 1886 as the Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde Berlin (Royal Museum of Ethnology Berlin), near Potsdamer Platz in the city's center, its Oceanic collection comprised fewer than 1,000 items. Around 1900, its Oceanic collection grew considerably, not least because of the "increasing German commercial penetration of the Pacific" (p. 199).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, several German companies flourished by exploiting Oceanic natural products, especially copra, and by producing Oceanic ethnographic artifacts, around which popular and scientific interest had grown since 1800. One example for such a business model is the company of Johann Cesar Godeffroy VI (1815–1885). Godeffroy's company, J. C. Godeffroy & Sohn, based in Hamburg, established a big shipping empire, which helped in the transfer of objects, and even owned a curated museum, opened in 1861. Godeffroy sent numerous zoologists and ethnographers as collectors to the Pacific, such as Johann Stanilaus Kubary (1846–1896), to whom we will return shortly. In the years between 1860 and 1879, Godeffroy's company dominated Germany's market for the production of Oceanic artifacts. In 1879, however, his company went bankrupt and sold its collection. This fueled a rivalry between German ethnographic institutions, which intensified after 1884—after Germany's imperial acquisitions in the Pacific (New Guinea and Samoa).<sup>6</sup> The largest part of Godeffroy's collection, about 5,000 objects, was sold to Leipzig's Museum of Ethnography (Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig; founded in 1869). The rest was integrated into collections in Berlin, Hamburg, Leiden, and Oxford.

After German unification in 1871 and the founding of Berlin's Royal Museum of Ethnology in 1886, officials decided to monopolize collections in the new nation's capital. This decision ultimately enlarged the museum's Oceanic collection to 65,000 items and came at a high price, as Buschmann explains. For it motivated officeholders in other cities to escalate their own collecting efforts, thus hoping to demonstrate their independence from Prussia. The result was that already existing Oceanic collections grew, such as at the museum in Munich (founded in 1862), Leipzig (1869), Dresden (1875), or Hamburg (1879), and that new Oceanic exhibits were opened, such as in Bremen (1887), Stuttgart (1889), Lübeck (1893), Frankfurt (1904), or Cologne (1906). The heightened state of competition between these institutions prompted the production of hundreds of thousands of Oceanic ethnographic artifacts around 1900—in the process of extracting all sorts of items from Oceania and shipping them to Germany in a "rush to collecting" (Buschmann, 2018, 210) that lasted until the Great War, which "resulted in the loss of the German colonies and consequently halted the flood of artefacts" (p. 213).

The Second World War led to the destruction and loss of many Oceanic artifacts in Germany. In Frankfurt, for example, an air raid destroyed about one-third of the museum's collection in 1944. In Stuttgart, about 10 percent of the collection was consumed in a fire. In Berlin, about 6,000 Oceanic objects were destroyed or went missing. After the Second World War, museums traded objects to refill their collections and even launched new expeditions, including Berlin's museum, for which the anthropologist Gerd Koch (1922–2005) organized ethnographic expeditions to Kiribati, Tuvalu, New Guinea, and the Santa Cruz Islands in the 1960s. Berlin's Ethnological Museum had been severely damaged during the Second World War, and its entire collection was subsequently moved to Dahlem, a district in the city's southwestern periphery. Storage units had already been built there in the 1910s and 1920s. In the 1960s and 1970s, additional buildings for research and public display were added and opened. This is the same space in which Raymond's acti.VA.tion took place in 2014.

Concluding this short summary of Buschmann's history of the German production of Oceanic artifacts, I want to focus on the post-extraction trajectory of one particular object, the *tino aitu* figure of the God Sope. This wooden figure was made on Nukuoro, an atoll in the archipelago of the Caroline Islands, located in the Western Pacific. For the Nukuoro people, *tino aitu* figures are one of many ways of representing deities.<sup>7</sup> The figure of Sope was transformed into an ethnographic artifact when Johann Kubary acquired it and 13 more *tino aitu* figures on Nukuoro in early 1877 on behalf of Godeffroy and shipped them to Hamburg, where they entered the Godeffroy Museum in 1881. After Godeffroy's bankruptcy, the *tino aitu* figures were dispersed. The figure of Sope moved to Hamburg's Museum for Ethnology in 1885. Nearly 80 years later, in 1962, it was traded for six other Oceanic objects and became part of the Berlin museum's new permanent exhibition in Dahlem in 1970 (see Melk-Koch, 2013, 104).

### 3 | GROWING INTO EPISTEMIC KNOWLEDGE IN “SOLI I TAI–SOLI I UTA”

In 2014, the Oceanic collection of Berlin's Ethnological Museum was displayed in the gigantic “Südsee und Australien Saal” (South Seas and Australia Hall). Today, the museum is closed for visitors because the entire exhibition has been moved back to the city's center, into the “new” exhibition of the Humboldt Forum.<sup>8</sup> As far as I can recall, the South Seas Hall in Dahlem had no windows. The walls, the ceiling, and even the frames of the display cabinets were all black. Thus, entering the hall felt like stepping into a space of perpetual night. Within this boundless gloom, the wooden parquet with its brownish color provided some orientation. Artificial lights, mostly placed inside the display cabinets, dramatically illuminated the objects. The objects seemed to emit light. The cabinets' brightly colored rear walls enhanced this effect. Each cabinet bathed its objects in a single color: green, amber, azure blue, purple, or yellow. Arranged to form a circular pathway, the cabinets guided visitors along a route that took them through different Pacific regions. Following this path, visitors had to walk through wooden gates, around complete houses, and past an area where several large waka boats were on display. At the end of this round tour, a huge staircase, with lights glowing inside the railing, penetrated the South Seas Hall like a lightning bolt and invited visitors to continue their journey in the galleries upstairs or downstairs.

Raymond's *acti.VA.tion* began with the repeated calls of a shell trumpet, which drew regular museum-goers to where the waka boats were on display. This act of summoning transformed individual museum visitors into an audience and into the spectators of Raymond's *acti.VA.tion*. The artist sat between the boats, cross-legged, eyes closed, with a wooden drum placed in front of her. The setting was dimly lit with bluish and reddish lights. The sound of crashing waves could be heard, mixed with the beats of contemporary club music. After some minutes, Raymond rose and began a slow walk through the exhibition, lifting her knees high as she walked. Heading toward the big staircase, her movement was punctuated by repeated halts. We spectators followed Raymond silently, all cautiously keeping our distance.

Following Raymond quietly and at a polite distance seemed highly appropriate during the entire process: the artist's gaze, her movements and utterances were always clearly directed toward the exhibits. It was obvious that she was addressing them and not us, the spectators. She moved and stopped for them, gestured to them, beat her drum, and sang and cried for them. And her intense gaze was directed solely at them. While moving between the showcases, Raymond's eyes, her head, and her body incessantly turned from left to right, where the artifacts were displayed in their cabinets. Whenever her movements stopped or accelerated, these changes seemed motivated by particular exhibits.

One could say that a “fourth wall” existed between Raymond and the spectators, to take recourse to a well-established theater term. We were on one side, quietly and cautiously following the artist. And on the other side was Raymond, who was addressing the exhibits, thereby opening up a very tangible field of energy between them and herself. It felt as if the exhibits were resonating and reverberating Raymond's movements and utterances. Experiencing this exchange (or dialogue) on my side of the “fourth wall” came as a surprise. At certain moments, it was an emotionally overwhelming experience. This occurred when Raymond herself seemed strongly affected, when her voice broke, when she seemed to grieve and cry, or when her voice and body suddenly seemed filled with pure joy. Even though I could not understand or actively participate in the exchange that was unfolding on her side of the “fourth wall,” I still had an intense emotional experience in those instances.

This “fourth wall” is significant because it became increasingly obvious that it marked the division between different knowledges and “ways of knowing.” Repeatedly, I caught myself quickly trying to read the captions referring to exhibits that Raymond had just acknowledged and addressed. But these captions were of no help. Of course, they named the exhibits and identified the dates and places of their supposed origins. Often, they also provided information on possible functions and meanings these objects might have had in the past. But none of this information helped me to comprehend the significance these objects might have *now* for a contemporary Pacific artist such as Raymond. The captions provided ethnographic knowledge; but Raymond activated a different knowledge

and practiced a different “way of knowing.” Thus, I experienced the “fourth wall” as an “epistemic border.” For me, experiencing this border meant growing into epistemic knowledge, in particular knowledge about my own habitual ways of knowing as they are encouraged by institutions such as Berlin’s Ethnological Museum. On my side of the “fourth wall,” I was learning to understand that my “natural” (i.e. trained and acquired since childhood) ways of knowing Pacific objects—admiring their beauty through looking alone and reading information about them on display captions—is just *one* rather limited way of knowing, a way that is obviously fixated on visual beauty and gaining geographical and historical information merely through reading. Moreover, I became aware in that moment that this way of knowing obviously enjoys a position of undisputed supremacy within Berlin’s Ethnological Museum. Raymond enabled me to learn this by ensuring that the “epistemic border” was never broken during the acti.Va.tion. Thus, she made me actively search for information on and a way of accessing her knowledge and ways of knowing. In my desperation in failing to find such access anywhere in this “temple of knowledge,” I was beginning to understand something about the unquestioned dominance of European knowledge and ways of knowing in Berlin’s museum, and about the emotions this fact can engender, such as frustration and anger.

After Raymond entered the visitor corridor between the well-lit showcases, she became fully visible. Her attire consisted mainly of what looked like black plastic raffia. It fluttered around her body, mostly concealing her tattooed skin from her shoulders down to her feet. Around her right wrist, Raymond wore a shell bracelet, which made a rattling sound when she moved, beat her drum, or gestured toward exhibits. The jawbones of an animal with impressive fangs adorned her neck. In comparing Raymond’s attire with colonial photographs of Pacific islanders, which was unavoidable because such images were on display and addressed in the acti.VA.tion, one could not but notice that it seemed to interweave traditional elements, such as braided raffia, with contemporary materials and fashion elements, producing a unique style.

To get a better idea of Raymond’s acti.VA.tion, I recommend watching the short video documentation that is available online (see Gilbert & Huarcaya, 2014). Unfortunately, it is only 5 minutes long. Nevertheless, it shows several key moments. Because I cannot describe the acti.VA.tion in full here, I will focus on three moments that are relevant for my argument. The first is the appearance of Jazmyne Koch and the clothing of Sope, the second is Raymond’s disrobing, and the third the Q and A session that followed the event.

The first moment occurred shortly after Raymond had ascended the stairs and passed the exhibit of colonial photographs of Samoa. Approaching exhibits from Hawai’i, Raymond was joined by a young dancer—who later introduced herself in the Q and A session as Jazmyne Koch, a dancer born on Maui, Hawai’i, now based in Hamburg, who brings “her background in cultural anthropology, ethnic studies and dance into her work on contemporary cultural identity and performance” (Gilbert & Phillipson, 2014, 89). Koch’s appearance was unexpected: the publicity material advertising the event had not mentioned her participation. I therefore experienced it almost as a miracle; it was as if Raymond had made Koch appear spontaneously in order to help her in the process. In my interpretation, the dramaturgical device of Koch’s sudden appearance stressed the transformative power of Raymond’s acti.VA.tion, which seemed to be able to generate new life, movements, relations, and connections. In the story of the acti.VA.tion told by its main organizers, Koch’s appearance and what transpired after it, is described in the following way:

Jazmyne takes over at the Hawaii exhibit with a soft prayer and a contemporary movement piece. As it concludes, Rosanna’s voice draws people through the upper gallery where both artists approach the “Sope” statue. Together they transform the raffia skirt taken from Rosanna’s regalia into a contemporary cape, an offering to the statue. The area is suffused with a fusion of contemporary drumbeat, waves crashing and Rosanna’s own voice.

(p. 100)

In my interpretation, these two moments, Koch’s appearance and the women’s act of adorning the *tino aitu* figure of Sope with Raymond’s raffia cape, told a story of exchange and transformation, of transformation through

exchange. Something had been received (Koch as collaborator) and something given back in return (the cape). This exchange visibly transformed both Raymond and the museum's collection. New relationships were created. Raymond looked different now, wearing only a raffia skirt. And to see the *tino aitu* figure adorned, probably for the first time in over 130 years, was a breathtaking sight. This was a key moment. For someone such as myself, who did not and does not share Raymond's knowledge and ways of knowing, it was enlightening. Of course, I was certain that Raymond knew what she was doing and achieving with her *acti.VA.tion*. Yet Koch's appearance and Sope's clothing seemed to *visualize* the transformative effects of the process and, thus, became particularly noteworthy. The conspicuousness of Sope's attire is perhaps also the reason why the video documentary presents this moment as the event's climax. The makers of the video and I seem to share a tendency to react strongly to visual impressions. In order to know, I (often) need to see. And is the museum not *the* place to gain knowledge by looking at things? Am I too dependent on epistemic practices of visualization? Why? Do eye-catching showcases, such as in the South Seas Hall, foster such a dependency? And does my bias in favor of visual practices of knowledge production make me ignorant for other epistemic practices? Asking such questions, even if one cannot answer them immediately or at all, means beginning to grow into epistemic knowledge about deep-rooted European "ways of knowing," because it means beginning to question practices, ideas, theories, and philosophies establishing (or critiquing) the "ocularcentrism" of ancient and modern European epistemologies.<sup>9</sup>

After Sope's adornment, Raymond and Koch descended the stairs in synchronic movements, a dramaturgical device that I interpret as yet another sign for the "creation of strong bonds." They led the audience into a studio below the South Seas Hall. Here, in one of the final moments of the *acti.VA.tion*, Raymond disrobed fully and placed her regalia (her raffia dress and necklace made of jawbones) on a museum plinth. This strikingly reversed processes we had experienced in the main hall and upper gallery. Up there, Raymond's actions had seemed to counter historical and contemporary practices of producing ethnographic artifacts by (re-)entangling them into contemporary Oceanic relationships and stories, which are not part of a museum's ethnographic knowledge summarized on its captions. In this final act, however, the opposite seemed to be taking place: the transformation of an object used by a working Pacific artist in her art practice, into a nothing-but-beautiful-and-interesting-to-look-at "Oceanic ethnographic artifact," which apparently had now lost forever its vitality and relevance for present and future practices of making dynamic Oceanic cultures. Transformed into an artifact, Raymond's regalia seemed now useful only for ethnographic practices of conservation, research, and, of course, visual consumption.

And the exhibit's ocular examination was, in fact, precisely what happened after Raymond and Koch had exited the room and, thus, ended the *acti.VA.tion*. I and many other spectators flocked around it, admiring it (and even touching it, very cautiously). It was announced that the Q and A session with the artists would begin in about 20 minutes. Almost all the spectators waited, a fact I retrospectively interpret as a symptom of the epistemic curiosity triggered by the *acti.VA.tion*, especially through dramaturgical devices such as: (a) the establishment of an epistemic "fourth wall," which created a stark contrast between different knowledges and ways of knowing; (b) the visual conspicuousness of repeated allusions to transformational processes, which generated not only a critical awareness for the ocularcentrism characterizing the habitual ways of knowing of many museum visitors, but also curiosity for non-visible transformations that might have occurred; and (c) the remarkable authority, self-confidence, and solemnity with which Raymond had carried out all her actions, which made one eager to learn more about her as well as the scope and protocols of her knowledge and ways of knowing. Finally, it is important to stress that the video documentary of Raymond's *acti.VA.tion* does not reproduce its dramaturgy. In the documentary, scenes showing moments of the *acti.VA.tion* are interspersed with scenes showing Raymond in conversation with an unseen interlocutor, providing information about herself and her art practice. This was not the case during the *acti.VA.tion*. No information on the artist or the *acti.VA.tion*'s aims had been provided prior to the event. And Raymond had never interrupted the process to explain what she was doing and why. This fact contributed greatly to the emergence of epistemic curiosity.

During the Q and A session, Raymond introduced not only herself but also concepts that are indispensable for her art practice, thus sharing information that could, afterwards, guide the "wayfaring" (Ingold, 2011, 143) of

interested spectators in particular (epistemic) directions. One of the first concepts she explained was the Samoan concept of *vā*. I don't have a recording or transcript of the Q and A session; therefore I am quoting from Raymond's published work. "*Vā*" is "a Samoan term for space." And this space of *vā*, Raymond explains, "is activated by people. It binds people and things together. It forms relationships, and reciprocal obligations" (Raymond, 2018, 404). In her writings about *vā*, Raymond also refers to the Samoan scholar and writer Albert Wendt, who (re)defined *vā* in his article "Tatauing the post-colonial body":

*Va* is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meanings to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the contexts change. [...] A well-known Samoan expression is "la teu le va"—cherish/nurse/care for the *va*, the relationships. (Wendt, 1999, 402)

Wendt's article was highly influential and fostered new theoretical interest in *vā* among many Pacific scholars, such as Hūfanga 'Ōkunitino Māhina or Tevita Ka'ili, who formulated (aesthetic) theories and philosophies of *tā* (time) and *vā* (see Māhina, 2010). These few references to literature must suffice here to demonstrate that a rich body of (declarative) Pacific Indigenous knowledge (concepts, theories, philosophies) is available to describe and analyze Raymond's *acti.VA.tion*, which differs significantly from my own approach. But my understanding of it is far too limited to dare such an attempt. Either way, my article's aim is not to demonstrate my expertise in Pacific Indigenous theories and philosophies. Its aim is to show how Raymond's *acti.VA.tion* fostered spectatorial processes of growing into declarative epistemic knowledge about different "ways of knowing." Above, I argued that participating in Raymond's *acti.VA.tion* meant, for me, learning to understand better certain characteristics and limits of "ways of knowing" that I and many other museum-goers habitually practice. But participating in Raymond's *acti.VA.tion* meant more than that: It meant being allowed to experience bodily a threshold opening up between Raymond and the Oceanic objects, feeling intensely the materialization of bonds coming to life between them. Experiencing this "betweenness" meant growing into experiential epistemic knowledge about Raymond's "ways of knowing." It did not produce a deep understanding, of course. But the learning process continued in the Q and A session, where Raymond introduced concepts such as *vā*. Suddenly, my experience of this betweenness received a name: It was *vā*. And I learned that concepts such as *vā* are always inextricably embedded in practices, theories, and philosophies as dynamic systems of knowledge (epistemologies), from which they "draw" their flexible meanings. I learned that learning about *vā* demands learning about *tā* and other Pacific concepts, too. In other words: Raymond's skilled epistemic practice of describing, explaining, and contextualizing her art enabled and fostered a growing into a "more conscious, explicit, elaborate and abstract" understanding of Pacific Indigenous knowledges. Thus, the experiential knowledge, which had been (dynamically, collectively, and relationally) produced during the *acti.VA.tion*, was complemented in the Q and A session with additional declarative knowledge—which is important, not only because it enabled spectators such as myself to speak about their experiences with more nuance, but also because it enabled me to go home and do further research and reading in order to learn more about Pacific Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.

Another important concept that Raymond introduced in the Q and A session was "taonga." Taonga is Māori for "cultural treasures," but Raymond employs the concept "more widely." I want to conclude this part with a quote from Raymond, in which she explains the situation of taonga in European museums and how she understands her art practice:

Inevitably, museum values remain firmly centered on those of Western knowledge and frameworks of expertise. As a consequence, many museum collections around the world have lost their agency. The mauri (life force, Māori) of the taonga have ebbed, lost through the silencing of the intangible histories that are intrinsically part of them. But the Western collector's voice and stories are always there; prominent and determining. [...] Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies are pushed to the



margins. Privilege is given to the institutions' modes of displaying and interpreting "their" collections. [...] The fact that I lived in the UK helped me to create a space through my art practice to challenge and engender change and become a part of the taonga. I do this by centralizing the Samoan Indigenous index of the Vā as an embodied practice [...]. I use it as an embodied methodology to decolonize the museum space. My Polynesian body is the vessel for the ancestors. It is the house of the ancestors. It is the space where genealogical matter comes together, binding the past with the present. My body brings the ancestors into the NOW... So, when I meet the taonga, I acti.Va.te the space between the past and the present. My body collapses time and space, bringing the ancestors in the NOW. (Raymond, 2018, 404)

## 4 | CONCLUSION: SPECTATING AS EPISTEMIC PRACTICE

This essay is part of my present research and book project on *Bridging Epistemologies of Spectating: Investigating and Theorizing Spectating as Epistemic Practice* (working title). One aim of this project is to critique and replace theories of spectatorship that conceive of performances as epistemically homogenous and harmonious environments and processes. Furthermore, it seeks to critique and replace ideas of "knowledge transfer," that is to say, the idea that knowledge can be "transferred" from performers to spectators (or vice versa) in performances. I want to conclude my contribution by stressing one central characteristic of Raymond's acti.VA.tion as an epistemic process, which has far-reaching theoretical consequences. In "Soli I Tai—Soli I Uta," Raymond put different epistemic systems and ways of knowing in a contrastive and even conflicting relationship. By inviting spectators such as myself to participate, she allowed me/us to grow into (experiential and declarative) epistemic knowledge about different "ways of knowing." On the surface, this might appear as a *transfer* of knowledge (from Raymond to me/us). But what I tried to show above is that spectators in fact *generated* new epistemic knowledge. Raymond used her tremendous expertise as an artist to shape dramaturgically and to form an interaction with objects, people, and concepts. Following this invitation and interacting with Raymond and the museum's exhibition enabled spectators to generate—actively to make—new epistemic knowledge. Raymond enabled me/us to experience and, thus, critically reflect on the limits and characteristics of my/our own habitual epistemic practices; and she encouraged me/us to begin "wayfaring" (Ingold, 2011, 143): to begin following the trails of stories, such as the story of the (aesthetic) experience of vā, a process that means growing into new epistemic knowledge and maybe even into new "ways of knowing." But this new epistemic knowledge and these new "ways of knowing" generated by our "wayfaring" will never be the same as Raymond's. Proceeding from this crucial insight—that performances foster the (re)generation of knowledge and not its "transmission"—one can start to develop a different theory of spectating as an epistemic practice that can interweave culturally different "ways of knowing" and give rise to new epistemic knowledge.

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### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "The energy of works always transcends their frame, the museum's threshold or the moment of their observation. The works open up new perspectives on the world—not only in the manner of their representation, but above all by generating new views of the world" (Welsch, 1997, 91).
- <sup>2</sup> Ingold explains the different semantics of the terms "network" and "meshwork" as follows: "We are now more inclined to think of it [the network, T.J.] as a complex of interconnected points than of interwoven lines. For this reason I have found it necessary to distinguish between the network of transport and the meshwork of wayfaring. The key to this distinction is the recognition that the lines of the meshwork are not connectors. They are paths along which life is lived. And it is in the binding together of lines, not in the connecting of points, that the mesh is constituted" (Ingold, 2011, 151–152).

- <sup>3</sup> For further information on the conditions of Raymond's artist residency in Berlin, see, in great detail, Gilbert and Phillipson (2014). The historian Rainer Buschmann applies the term "artefact" to "Indigenous objects acquired in the Pacific" (Buschmann, 2018, 205).
- <sup>4</sup> Conrad Malte-Brun (1775–1826) originally coined the term "Océanie" (Engl. "Oceania"), which is widely used today to designate an enormous geographical region and is often used interchangeably with the term "Pacific." As Lyons explains, both terms are "Western impositions, as are the divisions 'Polynesia' (many islands), 'Melanesia' (dark islands), and Micronesia (small islands), coined by Dumont D'Urville (1832), and the outmoded 'South Seas'" (Lyons, 2006, 201). Lyons prefers the terms "Oceania" and "Oceanic," not least because it is used by Oceanic thinkers such as Albert Wendt (born 1939). I use the terms "Pacific" and "Oceanic" synonymously. Another term frequently used is "Moana." The scholar Siosia Tofua'ipangai explains the term as follows: "Why Moana? There is some movement in New Zealand where we use the word 'Moana' instead of the word 'Pacific.' [...] Moana was probably the first term that was used for us. The term Pacific is OK, but it doesn't really reflect some of the fundamental truths of our island histories. Helu claims the name Samoa to originate from the *Sa Moanan* people, meaning people/lineage of Moana" (Tofua'ipangai, 2009).
- <sup>5</sup> "[E]thnographic objects are made, not found," Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues: "They became ethnographic through the processes of detachment and contextualization" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, 3).
- <sup>6</sup> "Initially annexed by Germany in 1884, German New Guinea included the northeastern corner of the world's second largest island as well as the Bismarck Archipelago and part of the Northern Solomon Islands. The purchase of Spanish Micronesia added to the territory" (Buschmann, 2018, 197–198).
- <sup>7</sup> "Kubary called the figures *tino aitu*, where *tino* means the material representation of a god. From his fieldwork on Nukuoro in the early 1960s, Vern Carroll said that the figures were called *dinonga eidu* (ghost spirit), with *dino* meaning soul or spirit in the modern orthography of the Nukuoro language" (Neich, 2013, 24).
- <sup>8</sup> The Humboldt Forum attempts to reconfigure the reconstructed Berliner Schloss (Berlin Palace) as a museum forum for the world. The project has been subject to much (inter)national scrutiny, critique, and protest, which contributed to bringing Germany's colonial past to the surface of a changing national commemorative culture (see Schorch, 2018).
- <sup>9</sup> Martin Jay provides a short history of criticism on ocularcentrism: "[T]here has been a remarkably pervasive and increasingly vocal hostility to visual primacy in France ever since the time of Bergson. Whether in the philosophy of a Sartre or a Lyotard, the film criticism of a Metz or a Baudry, the feminism of an Irigaray or a Kofman [...], one can find a deep-seated distrust of the privileging of sight. [...] But it is evident elsewhere, German thinkers like Wagner, Nietzsche and Heidegger must be accounted important voices in the chorus of iconoclasts" (Jay, 1988, 308–309).

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