The essay focuses on an unsighted archive of migration that preserves numerous discarded objects from undocumented migration into Europe. This “trash” was recovered and stored by the artists Massimo Ricciardo and Thomas Kilpper, for whom the objects signify one of the most urgent societal challenges of our time. In the installation “Objects of Migration—Photo Objects of Art History,” Ricciardo introduced some of these objects into the physical space of the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz to engage in a dialog with the photographic documents of this art-historical photo archive. That physical encounter between two completely different archives and objects raised questions about the significance and value of such objects of migration and their archive in regard to cultural memory and temporalities of cultural heritage.

ARCHIVES ON THE MOVE

What connects objects such as scraps of life-jacket fabric, SIM cards, shoe soles, letters or notebooks lost or discarded by undocumented migrants on their perilous journey to Europe, and documentary photographs from a photographic collection of art history? At first glance, it seems they have little in common. The mix of survival materials and very personal belongings evokes the almost daily news in the press about the arrival of new migrants, discussions about border violations and quota allocations, reception camps, and regulatory measures. The photographs, mounted on cardboards and carefully labeled, present works of art and architectural monuments from the canon of Western art historiography and primarily serve art historians as study material for their research.

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Massimo Ricciardo

is an artist who lives and works in Turin. He has exhibited works at (among others) Gallery FUTURA, Prague (2021); KHI, Florence (2017/2018/2020); Karlskirche Karlsplatz/documenta 14, Kassel (2017); and Palazzo Dona Brusa, 56th Venice Biennale (2015).

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However, the Sicilian artist Massimo Ricciardo has allowed these supposed antipodes to enter into a temporary dialog in an installation in the rooms of the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz—Max Planck Institut (KHI), curated by Costanza Caraffa and myself, Almut Goldhahn. The Photothek, headed by Costanza Caraffa, is where I work as a research collaborator and archivist, but it has already ceased to consider itself a mere repository of art-historical documentary photography; rather, it positions itself as a living archive in which various protagonists act and interact and where knowledge is sedimented, generated and negotiated (Cook and Schwartz 2002; Edwards 2001, 2011; Caraffa 2011, 2012). Here we not only deal with the preserved photographs but, following the material turn, also reflect on them, trace their itineraries, decipher their multi-layered biographies, and examine and question their respective positions within the overall archival structure (Bärnighausen et al. 2019, 2020; Caraffa 2020a, 2020b). The reflections and debates that develop from this on a meta-level address, among others, issues about the embodiment of cultural memory inside and outside archives; about concepts of values and value systems manifested in the archives; and based on this, not least also issues about criteria for definitions of our cultural heritage (Caraffa 2019, 2020a).

In this discursive ambience of the photo archive, Massimo Ricciardo found an inspiring setting to present a small selection of objects from his collection of objects of migration, thus focusing on the issue of undocumented migration as a pressing societal and political challenge of our times and drawing attention to an archive he has built up together with the Berlin artist Thomas Kilpper. This archive as a whole has so far remained largely invisible and, provisionally packed in boxes and distributed across various locations, it is in a similarly transitory state as the objects that it includes. Through Ricciardo’s temporary installation in the Photothek it has however briefly emerged from its invisibility. Its physical encounter with an archive long established in (art-historical) research—in its space and with the objects preserved there—stimulated reflection on the relevance and potential but also the boundaries of this migratory archive and its objects.

An archive is already per se an appropriate place to reflect on different forms of migration in respect of movement from one place to another. In any archive issues of migration are implicitly negotiated due to the archival practices adopted: the documents stored in it reach the archive from different contexts and may be rearranged and get discussed there upon their arrival. The data created and collected in the archiving process migrate into other data systems, enter into various synergies, and dissolve again. Despite what is still widely believed, an archive is anything but static; rather, it is decidedly dynamic (Cook and Schwartz 2002; Dercks and Goldhahn 2020). Moreover an art-historical photo archive is appropriately placed to address the topic of migration—provided that it makes its own boundaries permeable by questioning its archival categories and, if necessary, reading them “against the grain.” This is because art history itself is part of a history of migration: artists have moved from one place to another, from one country to another, from one continent to another—something that also applies to the artworks themselves that transmit and disseminate themes and forms. The art historian Burcu Dogramaci recently
argued that, following the visual and material turn that postmodern art history has undergone, we should also start to think about a migratory turn within the discipline (Dogramaci 2019). In doing so, she is concerned with an increased focus on artists whose life and works of art are decisively shaped by the existential experiences of (forced) migration, as well as with a critical questioning and redefinition of the art-historical canon (Iskin 2017), which in turn fundamentally shapes our understanding and definition of cultural heritage.

The Photothek, with its collection of art-historical documentary photography, and as part of an institutionalized research organization, represents parts of this art-historical canon which, as Hubert Locher has pointed out, is an “expression of collective identities and values” (2012, 33). Against the backdrop of current societal changes Massimo Ricciardo’s artistic intervention in the Photothek has put the primacy of these values up for discussion and invites reflection upon the two archives on the relevance of this migratory archive, as well as the various values of its objects and the temporalities of cultural heritage.

The following article aims to detail this project of an experimental encounter between two fundamentally different archival collections. Furthermore, written from the perspective of an artist and an art historian working in and on archives, it draws attention to the (thought) stimuli for archival and migration studies that can be found in such a creative encounter.

THE ARCHIVES

The impulse for building up the collection of objects of migration came from a joint stay by Kilpper and Ricciardo on Lampedusa in November 2013. Like Lesbos in the Aegean Sea, this Italian island had long become associated with undocumented migration into Europe across the Mediterranean route. Since the early 2000s many thousands of refugees have reached the tiny island by boat. Owing to its geographical proximity to the North African coast and Italian nationality, Lampedusa island has become a destination point for the migrants (Barocco 2015; De Schwert, Schacht, and Masini 2015). Many people did not survive the dangerous journey—most of them resting on the sea floor, with only a few in the cemetery on Lampedusa. The Italian government, together with the EU, responded to this situation by increasingly militarizing the island: a migrant detention center was set up, and the island was turned into a border fortress of Europe with the support of Frontex (Bassi 2018; Cuttitta 2012; Kasparek 2017/2019, 80–95).

During their joint stay, Kilpper was working on his project "A Lighthouse for Lampedusa!" in order to draw attention to the dramatic situation in the southern Mediterranean, while Ricciardo began to document photographically the presence of refugees and the military, images which had equally inscribed themselves into the everyday life of the island. His photograph of the boat cemetery just behind Lampedusa’s football field is almost iconic (Figure 1). This collection point for the trafficking boats that were confiscated by the authorities, where the boats were “disposed of” in jumbled-up piles, can itself already be seen as a symbol of Europe’s management of the numerous
unresolved issues of global migration. In the wrecks of these boats Ricciardo found the first objects that were later to become the basis of his and Kilpper’s collection: tetra packs of juice and milk, tins of food, prepackaged pieces of cheese, a box of tiger balm, a plastic cap, a music tape—almost all items that were needed for a migrant’s immediate survival during the sea crossing, but which had become useless after arrival in Lampedusa (Figures 2 and 3). Initially it was rather an intuitive impulse that pushed Ricciardo to salvage these objects, preventing them from slowly rotting away. But the apparent garbage pile of food packages and goods of prime necessities left behind not only testified to the arrival of the migrants on Italian soil. For Ricciardo the objects epitomized equally a cultural value in which the artist was profoundly interested. The labels in unfamiliar languages and lettering linked them to former owners, bringing to mind the similar migratory backgrounds of the objects and their relation to a collective experience of people who had made their way to Europe in search of a better future.

In 2015 the collection of migrant objects began to increase when Kilpper was invited by the city of Wroclaw to present his "Lighthouse project" in Venice. While hunting for more objects for the Venice exhibition Ricciardo came into contact with an employee of the Syracuse prosecutor’s office (in Sicily) who was working in the field of illegal immigration. From him the artist obtained about 70 items from a collection of materials recovered by the authorities from boats in the port of Portopalo, south of Syracuse. These included mobile phones, loose SIM cards, water bottles, medicine, life rings and life jackets, but also very personal belongings such as photographs, small photo albums, letters, notebooks, devotional objects, and copies of the Koran and the Bible (Figures 4–6).
These objects had been partially inventoried by the authorities so Ricciardo also obtained some linked information (such as the name of the boat whence the object came, its date of entry into Italian territory, and the number of refugees arriving on this boat—sometimes also with gender details and nationalities). Further objects came from the port of Pozzallo, where Ricciardo picked them up in a van in February 2016 (Figure 7).

Other items now included in the collection came from abandoned trafficking boats that the artist came across on the beaches around Augusta in April 2016. Currently the archive contains between 2,000 and 3,000 items.
Figures 4 Various objects arriving from Portopalo, left for the artists in 2015. (Photograph © Massimo Ricciardo)

Figures 5 Notebook arriving from Portopalo, left for the artists in 2015. (Photograph © Massimo Ricciardo)
A more precise quantification is almost impossible: Ricciardo’s inventory does not list all the pieces, and there is also the question as to whether a wallet with coins, photographs, notes, etc. should be considered as a single object or as multiple items. The physical dispersion of the collection also makes it difficult to keep an overview, as well as to get access to the objects, which are now stored in boxes and divided between Berlin, Turin and Capo d’Orlando in Sicily (Figure 8).

Although the artists have already displayed the objects in exhibitions several times, the collection’s visibility and outside knowledge about it are very limited. People interested in the collection have to get in touch with the artists, who see themselves not as owners of the objects so much as administrators. Hence, even for migration studies, which have recently reflected on the “materiality of the phenomenon [of undocumented migration] and its sensorial and mnemonic dimension” (Hamilakis 2018, 7), Ricciardo’s and Kilpper’s archive remains an unsighted one.

At the same time, we must also raise the question as to what impact establishing and opening up the collection would have on the materials preserved in it, and whether this would really increase their visibility. A closer look at the Photothek, where Ricciardo presented some of the objects, will show how much institutional orientation and scholarly interests and questions determine the structure of an archive, the selection and preparation of the materials stored in it, and last but not least their visibility.

In contrast to Ricciardo’s and Kilpper’s collection, the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut, where Ricciardo presented his installation, is an
Figure 7 Objects recovered by Ricciardo at the port of Pozzallo in 2016. (Photograph © Massimo Ricciardo)

Figure 8 One box with various objects from Ricciardo’s archive, stored in Turin. (Photograph © Massimo Ricciardo)
established and institutionalized archive in which a very different kind of object is preserved (Figure 9). Since 1897, the founding year of that Institute, the Photothek has been collecting images primarily documenting Italian art from late Antiquity to the modern era. For almost a century however its focus was on Medieval and Renaissance art. Photographic documentations of Baroque works are already in the minority here, the 19th century is only marginally represented, and the 20th century barely features at all. The composition of the holdings reflects the main research fields at the Institute until the early 2000s, and furthermore the focused interests of the discipline until well into the second half of the 20th century, which decisively shaped the understanding of the art-historical canon. In the meantime, the collection—mounted on cardboard, inventoried, labeled, and catalogued in a database—has grown to over 627,000 photographs (as of March 2021), which constitute the analog holdings of the Photothek. Since 2010 the collection has been located on two floors of Palazzo Grifoni, a historic building in the center of Florence, where scholars from all over the world have free access to the material stored in boxes on open shelves. A team of 13 people is currently involved in the preservation and expansion of the collection and its scientific processing. This team provides user support, answers enquiries, assists scholars in their research, and itself does research with and about the archived objects. The Photothek’s Digital Photo Library has almost 65,000 items and enables online consultation of part of the holdings, thus

Figure 9  Photothek, Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, Palazzo Grifoni, Florence. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Stefano Fancelli)
Contributing to the visibility of the collection beyond the physical space of the Palazzo Grifoni. The Florentine Photothek can be seen as a place of research, where knowledge is sedimented, produced and discussed (Caraffa 2020a), but also a place of encounter: of people, of objects, and of people with objects. The temporary encounter between the objects of migration and the photo objects of art history is but one example of this.

**Encounters, or How to Create a Dialog Between (Photo) Objects of Art History and Objects of Migration**

For over two decades there has been a growing interest in the archive among artistic practitioners. This *archival turn* refers to the inclusion of archival materials in artistic works, and—following the theoretical reflections of Foucault ([1969] 1981) and Derrida (1995)—above all to the intellectual engagement with the archive as a conceptual entity and political construct that can function equally as a repository of knowledge and memory and represent claims to hegemony (Azoulay 2019; Bühler 2016; Callahan 2017; Enwezor 2008; Foster 2004; Rosengarten 2012).

Massimo Ricciardo was not the first to bring the Florentine Photothek into the purview of such artistic engagement with the archival topic (Figure 10). Artists like Armin Linke, Joachim Schmidt, Elisabeth Tonnard, Akraam Zaatari, or the artist group JUTOJO, have already been invited to work in and with the collection of the Photothek.6 Their outside perspective on the Photothek’s collection keeps motivating and encouraging us there to reflect critically on our archival rules and practices (Caraffa 2020c) and to open up space for topics and materials that at first glance seem to have nothing to do with themes of our discipline or the subjects of our holdings. In terms of a “socially engaged art history” (Persinger and Rejaie 2021), we seek to engender a productive dialog about political and social issues by opening up academic boundaries and by looking for intersections between current socially relevant topics and subject-specific issues of our archive.

That was particularly the case in the Photothek’s collaboration with Massimo Ricciardo, who had been invited in 2017 by Costanza Caraffa to present his archive at the conference on “Encounters: Handling, Placing and Looking at Photographs in Relation to Migration.” It soon became evident that it was not only Ricciardo’s archive that dealt with the topic of migration; in fact, migration—as movement of people and objects and, in a broader sense, of data and knowledge—represents a constant theme in the Photothek as well. We archivists are constantly forced to deal with migrating (photographic) objects arriving from bequests, donations, acquisitions or photographic campaigns, and to which we have to assign a place within our archival system. However, these objects are also on the move within our collection. If the attribution of an artwork changes because of new research, the corresponding photograph changes its position and physically moves from one box to another, or perhaps even from one room to another. Within our archival practices such as cataloging, digitization or storage, we also produce further data connected to the objects. Again, these data migrate from our archival systems into other systems, where they are able to create new
interconnections. The archive is therefore a place where archivists have to negotiate questions and issues of migration on a daily basis (Dercks and Goldhahn 2020).

Furthermore, in an art-historical photo archive the topic of migration is already ubiquitous through its materials, since it is impossible to think of art history without thinking of a history of movement, of appearances and disappearances, and of circulation and transformation—whether of works, content or forms. The mobility of the artists themselves plays an equally important role; frequently artists work in different places, crossing regional and national borders. Mindful visitors to the Photothek can already get a first hint from the standardized labels on the photo boxes, which, in addition to the names of the artists, often also contain the various locations of their works, which are commonly spread across the entire globe. The art historian Aby Warburg, who spent some time in Florence at the Kunsthistorisches Institut and in the Photothek (Hubert 1997, 35), had already placed various forms of mobility at the center of his reflections on the afterlife of antiquity with concepts such as “Bildwanderung” (image migration) and “Bilderfahrzeuge” (image vehicles; Dogramaci 2019, 22–24). In doing so, he prepared the ground for thinking about the migratory turn advocated by Dogramaci more than in terms of the art of the 20th and 21st centuries, thus going far beyond and taking into consideration the entire art-historical time frame (Bayer et al. 2018).

In recent years, research projects at the KHI, such as “Art, Space, Mobility in the Early Age of Globalization: The Mediterranean, Central Asia and the

Figure 10 Massimo Ricciardo at the Photothek; on the table various objects from the archive of migration; January 16, 2020. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Bärbel Reinhard)
Indian Subcontinent 400–1650,” stirred up the traditional art-historical canon. This canon, whose constitution was pushed by the KHI itself and its research topics, is represented by the historically grown holdings of the Photothek and its classification system, dating back to the early decades of the Institute. The potential of archives as “history-making institutions” that manifests itself here, and which Dogramaci critically considers in relation with the migratory turn (2019, 17), stimulated both Ricciardo and us to start thinking together about migration and mobility in our society. In addition the material turn recently undertaken by the Photothek in its scholarly engagement with its own holdings (Caraffa 2019, 2020b) made it possible to relate the fundamentally different objects of the two archives for further reflection.

Until a few years ago the photographs archived in the Photothek were mainly considered by scholars as a pure visual documentation of artworks depicted in it. Nowadays however we consider them as three-dimensional photographic objects with their own biographies. These have inscribed themselves in the photographs through material traces such as inscriptions, cuts, imprints, traces of glue, etc. By analyzing the objects in every detail, these biographies can be uncovered and narrated (Caraffa 2020a; Edwards and Hart 2004; Edwards 2012). Likewise, the objects of migrations have their own biographies, and the material traces of migrants have already been in the focus of anthropologists and modern archaeologists working on issues of forced dislocation and undocumented migration (De León 2013; Harrison, Appelgren, and Bohlin 2018; Soto 2018).

From these methodological approaches there has emerged the joint concept of the artist and the curators to exhibit the objects from Ricciardo’s archive and to bring them into a dialog with objects of the Photothek through a juxtaposition. The goal was to generate new and perhaps unusual reflections with and about the objects of migration. Archival practices came into focus, as well as queries about the sedimentation of knowledge, the biographies of the objects, and last but not least their (cultural) value. In the end, all these reflections fostered the essential question of who should have access to and deal with this still unsighted and equally unlocated archive of migration, as presented here by an artistic installation.

But let us take a closer look at the installation. The physical structure of the archive is immediately perceptible on entering the rooms, with its sequence of catalog cabinets, shelves, homogeneous photo boxes and the long wooden consultation tables. This not only formed the framework for the art project but became a fundamental part of it. Nevertheless, the clear order of the archive was repeatedly interrupted by Ricciardo placing visual stumbling-blocks (Stolpersteine) or embedding “material signatures” (Soto 2018, 14) in each room: fabric scraps from life jackets in the signal colors orange and green, trapped between the photo boxes on the shelves (Figure 11); a dollar note in the box labeled “Painting. Topography. Africa” of the card catalog, in reference to the economic predicaments and dependencies of the migrants’ countries of origin, one of the many causes of flight, as well as to the horrendous sums people have to pay for their journey (Figure 12); an Arabic newspaper on the windowsill; or a flyer with “Italy” printed on it and some handwritten numbers, an imaginary connection between the beginning
Figure 11   Installation view. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Bärbel Reinhard)

Figure 12   Installation view. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Bärbel Reinhard)
Another, albeit acoustic, *Stolperstein* was a sound installation between the shelves. Based on African, Middle Eastern and Western music (pop, traditional music and prayer chants) extracted from the SIM cards of Ricciardo’s collection, this “noise” was intended to break the habitual acoustic silence of the archive.

The encounter between the two archives, however, was concentrated on the five wooden worktables arranged in the four succeeding consultation rooms. Here, on every table, one or two pairs of objects selected by Ricciardo were on display (Figures 13–14).

| Table 1 |
| --- |
| Tiny plastic bag containing soil | Photograph (albumin print) representing a plaster-cast of a Pompeii victim of the Mount Vesuvius eruption in AD 79 |
| **Provenance**: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | **Provenance**: unknown |
| **Date of arrival**: 12 Sept. 2007 | **Date of inventorying in Photothek**: 28 Oct. 1982 |

| Table 2 |
| --- |
| Map of the southern Mediterranean with various handwritten travel annotations | Photograph (barytpaper) of a historical map (17th century) of the Kingdom of Sicily |
| **Provenance**: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | **Provenance**: KHI photographer |
| **Date of arrival**: 12 Oct. 2007 | **Date of inventorying in Photothek**: 15 July 1974 |
| Hand-drawn map of the Mediterranean area between Libya and Italy wrapped in cellophane with various geographic coordinates | Collotype of a Venetian portolan (navigation manual) |
| **Provenance**: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | **Provenance**: unknown |
| **Date of arrival**: 12 Sept. 2007 | **Date of inventorying in Photothek**: 17 June 1942 |

| Table 3 |
| --- |
| Five SIM cards | Card mount with five photographs (barytpaper) of monuments and architectural fragments, Damascus |
| **Provenance**: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | **Provenance**: Friedrich Wilhelm Deichmann donation |
| **Date of arrival**: unknown | **Date of inventorying in Photothek**: 30 March 1942 |

| Table 4 |
| --- |
| Notebook with phone numbers and a personal drawing of Christ crucified. The drawing left an imprint on the facing page. | Photograph (collodion print) reproducing Andrea Previtali’s John the Baptist and *recto* of a second Photothek card mount with catalytical print left by the Previtali photograph |
| **Provenance**: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | **Provenance**: Gustav Ludwig bequest |
| **Date of arrival**: unknown | **Date of inventorying in Photothek**: 1907/1911 |

(CONTINUED)
The compilation of the objects was mainly based on contextual or visual analogies. One of these pairs was composed of a collotype depicting a Venetian portolan and of a cellophane-wrapped handwritten route map (Figure 15). Both objects are nautical charts for spatial orientation and cartographic fixation of a specific route in the Mediterranean. With help of the portolan, seafarers in the 15th century steered their ships from one port to another in safe proximity to the coast, moving people and goods along as they did so. In 2007 human traffickers used the handwritten chart, whose plastic cover protected it from wetness and deterioration, to take 28 migrants by boat from the North African to the Italian coastline.

The juxtaposition of the two objects stimulated very different chains of association about knowledge sedimentation in the objects: the portolan, which has been preserved as a woodcut in the Louvre in Paris, is an important primary source on the history of navigation in the Mediterranean and widely studied cartographic practices (Bischoff 2015; Baumgärtner et al. 2019). The traffickers’ chart is a document that contains information about migration routes across the Mediterranean. It is also a direct testimony to the humanitarian crisis of our present time. Through the perspective of possible future research questions, it is already a document of historical value. If the photograph of such an object were to enter our photographic archive today, we archivists would certainly not sort it out but, because of its iconographic content, would place it in the same box where the image of the portolan is already kept. The chart would fit quite naturally within the category of the box labeled “Landkarten” [maps]. Even if it is not an artwork, in accordance with Warburg’s principle of “fortunate neighborhoods” (Dercks and Goldhahn 2020, 228) the chart would be able to generate new and interesting thoughts for scholars interested, for example, in issues of cartographic

| Eight color photographs (15 × 10 cm, arranged in two packs on a Photothek card mount) | Card mount with traces of detached images |
| Provenance: unknown | Provenance: unknown |
| Date of arrival: 25 June 2007 | Date of inventoring in Photothek: 14 Jan. 1933 |

| Holy Books (Bible and Koran, both encrusted with sea salt) | Photograph (albumin print) reproducing the interior of Santa Sofia, Istanbul |
| Provenance: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | Provenance: Joseph Croquison donation |
| Date of arrival: 16 June 2007 | Date of inventoring in Photothek: 23 Nov. 1967 |

| Shoe insole with handwritten phone numbers | Photograph (barytpaper) reproducing a standing foot on a globe, sculpture fragment from the tomb of Marco Benavides, Eremitani church, Padua (destroyed in World War II) |
| Provenance: Portopalo di Capo Passero (Sicily) | Provenance: Hans Werner Schmidt |
| Date of arrival: 18 Sept. 2007 | Date of inventoring in Photothek: 14 May 2013 |
Figure 13  Massimo Ricciardo working on the display of the object pairs (January 16, 2020). (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Marco Rabatti)

Figure 14  Installation view. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Bärbel Reinhard)
representation. Nevertheless it is questionable what kind of information related to the chart would “survive” within the context of an art-historical photo collection. The archival practice of the Photothek is to (at least) indicate the provenance and current location of depicted objects on the cardboard. In the case of the traffickers’ map the reference to Ricciardo’s archive would anyhow leave a mark on its original context. Thus archives not only have auto-referential structures but also constitute “flexible Wissensnetzwerke” (flexible knowledge networks; Bexte, Bührer, and Lauke 2016, 7), where objects can interact with each other as well as with other places and archives, beyond spatial and thematic boundaries.

Not all object pairs in the installation however were based on analogies in regard to contents. Dichotomies were equally interesting, as they challenged us even more in our reflection. A box labeled “Fehlende Fotos” [missing photos], containing cardboard from which mounted photographs had been stolen or otherwise lost, inspired us to think about absent and present information in relation to the objects—a fundamental reflection in the context of the migratory archive about whose objects we have (if at all) only rudimentary information. Although the photos are missing their visual content can be reconstructed, at least in most cases, due to the inscriptions on the cardboard. The one chosen by Ricciardo was bleached in a rectangular shape in two places: traces of the photographs formerly mounted on it (Figure 16). According to the inscriptions these were two images from an illuminated manuscript of Dante’s Divine Comedy kept in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice. For the installation the artist

*Figure 15  Hand-drawn map of the Central Mediterranean between Libya and Italy, wrapped in cellophane, with various geographic coordinates//Collotype of a Venetian portolan, installation view. (Photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut; photograph by Bärbel Reinhard)*
juxtaposed this cardboard with two overlapping stacks of photos from his collection, arranged on one of the cardboards of the Photothek (Figure 17). The upper photographs (the only ones visible to the audience) depicted young Africans in different contexts (a single young man in a closed room looking at photos; a group of two young men posing with a bicycle in front of trees). In contrast to the lost images on the cardboard, however, any information is missing here. We do not know who is depicted, where the photos were taken, how they were stored, which way they had come, or what meaning the photos held for the people who owned them. The answers to these questions would exhume the biographies of these (photo) objects—but at the moment we are lacking the right tools. In contrast the information on the inventoried cardboard in the Photothek offers traces that make it possible to trace the fate and biography of this photographic object. Based on the inventory number and inscriptions on the cardboard, it soon became clear that the missing images were not photos at all but original sketches that had been detached for conservation reasons and had migrated to the Photothek’s special collection, “Original Drawings.” The cardboard was not thrown away but, considering it an integral part of the archive, was moved to the archive’s “edges.” Since the box called “Fehlende Fotos” [missing photos] where the cardboard is currently stored does not belong to the holdings of the Photothek’s Open Access area, it is therefore neither visible nor easily accessible to most users. Thus both objects

Figure 16 Card mount with traces of detached images. (KHI, Photothek, Inv. Nr. 87135; photograph © Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz–Max-Planck-Institut)
circulate, albeit in different ways, around themes of dispersion: of objects and of knowledge but also, in the case of the stacked photos, of people. Furthermore the cardboard discarded from the Photothek’s central collection draws attention to archival practices that must be considered when looking at any archive: archives are not neutral and hierarchy-free depositories of material but rather are decisively shaped by the protagonists who act within them (Cook and Schwartz 2002). These actors are the ones who assign a place and thus also a valuation to objects within the hierarchies of the archive. They also decide (not least through the way things were catalogued) on the objects’ level of accessibility for users, and thus on the visibility of the objects for any kind of research.

DISPLAY

What is the potential of Ricciardo’s installation? What is the significance of a temporary encounter between objects as different as those of the Photothek and the migrant archive, and what questions does the installation trigger? What role does the materiality of the objects play in this? To answer these questions it may be useful to look at displays of similar objects of undocumented migration in a museum context, especially in any museums that are explicitly dedicated to the topic of migration. The past two decades have seen migration museums open in Europe. Museums such as the emigration museum
BallinStadt in Hamburg, the MEM (Memoria e Migrazione) in Genoa, or the Irish Emigration Museum in Dublin focus primarily on the emigration history of their own countries, generating a narrative of (mainly) success stories of migration (Cimoli 2018). The topic of undocumented (im)migration, however, which has meanwhile touched every European country due to the onward journeys of refugees, has been integrated into many exhibition concepts in recent years. However, despite all the current debates, this usually only takes up a small part of the permanent exhibition space. The objects of undocumented (im)migration on display are often embedded in the respective narratives of the museums as an appendix to the theme of national emigration. Even if they are not used illustratively (as at the MEM, for example), displayed as single objects, or furnished with information, their presentation is already the result of a selection by curators, which influences the visitors’ reading and interpretation of the objects (Cimoli, Ciaccheri, and Moolhuijsen 2020).

This selective approach to the objects was one of the reasons why a significant project dealing with migrants’ objects was eventually abandoned. As early as 2009 the grassroots association Askavusa (Sicilian for “with bare feet”), which was formed on Lampedusa and campaigned for the rights and visibility of the migrants (and through which Ricciardo was also inspired to develop his own project), had begun systematically salvaging objects from the boat cemetery that migrants had left behind. Together with other associations committed to the interests of refugees and their recognition and social integration, this association was also involved in the project of establishing a museum and documentation center on Lampedusa dedicated to the topic of undocumented migration: the objects recovered by Askavusa were to become part of this (D’Ambrosio et al. 2014; Gatta 2016; Vecchi 2016).

However, after a first exhibition on Lampedusa, entitled “Gli oggetti dei migranti” (the objects of migrants), was organized in 2013, the museum project, also supported by the (at the time, left-wing) Sicilian regional government, fell. Members of the association had refused further cataloging, indexing, and (as in the case of photos or salt-encrusted books) the restoration of objects. For them these archival habits were an attack on the “essence” of particular objects. In their eyes any interaction with the objects through museological practices that included archiving and restoration was tantamount to a colonial appropriation. For Giacomo Sferlazzo, one of the initiators of the movement, the objects were untouchable, “pure”: as he understood it, nobody had the right to take possession of them, not even by archival indexing. In a sort of manifesto which Sferlazzo published on his website under the title Gli Oggetti [The Objects], he did not reject the objects’ capacity for agency, or the interaction between people and the objects and between the objects themselves (Gell 1998; Latour 2014). He wanted this however to be limited to the immediate moment of encounter without any external intervention, whereby the objects were assigned a kind of “aura,” in the understanding of Walter Benjamin (Weindl 2019). But it is precisely their capacity for agency, however, that shaped and inscribed the biographies sedimented within the objects (Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986); and their biographies can help us to reveal, stratum by stratum, the value of objects, which could also be seen in part as trash.
Eventually, Askavusa moved the migrants’ objects that they had preserved to their own exhibition space, PortoM, where they were presented without any prior cataloging or labeling (Mazzara 2018). However, the typological arrangement of the objects on the shelves there—cooking utensils/food/life jackets, etc.—shows that a minimum of archival classification criteria was also applied here. This is not astonishing, for each collection requires a criterion of classification in order to make it manageable, presentable and consultable. But inevitably this always signifies an intervention by collectors or archivists, people who select the objects and establish criteria for organizing the respective collections, and who thus already set the constraints for an initial interpretation of the material (Cook and Schwartz 2002; Yakel 2007).

Similarly, Ricciardo’s archive is based on (very basic) criteria of order established by the artist himself: it is organized according to find-spots, which already provides a topographical mapping, albeit very partial, of the various stations of undocumented migration in Sicily. In the open format of the Florentine installation, however, the migrants’ objects were detached from this archival structure, reassembled and, above all, displayed without a prevailing narrative of documented or undocumented migration. The curated encounters of objects from such different contexts as art history and migration also aimed to offer to the visitors one (of many) possible approach(es) to the (sometimes disturbing) objects of Ricciardo’s archive. From our perspective, the “comfort zone” of a “traditional” archive dealing with more familiar material (photographic documentation of artworks) has constituted a fruitful starting-point to extend our reflections on migration, and to include the many issues of undocumented migration. For this purpose too Ricciardo had incorporated the premises of the photo archive into the installation: with all its shelves, boxes and catalog cabinets, this represented a system of order and valuation.

The Photothek, as a place in which both the history(s) of Western art history is (or are) negotiated, the biographies of the (photo) objects are investigated, and fundamental questions and problems of the archive are discussed (Caraffa 2012; Caraffa 2019), was transformed into an experimental space of thoughts that forced open the boundaries of the photo archive. Ricciardo’s installation established a contact zone, “a borderland between different worlds, [and] histories,” as James Clifford had argued with regard to the ethnological museums (1997, 188–219). The paired objects were shown directly on the wooden tables (and not in showcases, as, for example, in Kilpper’s and Ricciardo’s installation “Inventuren der Migration” at the Gorki Theater in Berlin in 2015, which immediately evokes a “musealization” of the objects). On these tables the Photothek’s daily routine normally takes place; it is where photographs are taken out of their boxes, closely studied and compared, where users and archivists of the Photothek continuously produce knowledge in dealing with the multitude of photographic objects stored here. It was this working atmosphere that invited us to reflect in various ways upon the selected pairs of objects on undocumented migration, and also on fundamental questions related to Ricciardo’s archive (Figure 18). One particularly pertinent question was, “whose stories are the objects telling?”
TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN—OR, FROM TRASH TO CULTURAL HERITAGE

Several times during the guided tours through the installation Ricciardo was asked whether he had not tried, at least in some cases, to track down the former owners of the objects? In fact some of the objects do include information that would allow at least an attempt: telephone numbers in a diary or on the insole of a shoe, or a name and address on an envelope (though that object was not in the installation). But for the artist, building up the collection was never linked to any intention of searching for owners: Ricciardo was primarily concerned with preserving the objects from loss and deterioration. Despite everything he has a vision that one day the archive will anchor itself in one place; it will become structured in a way that allows migrants, but also scholars who deal with issues of migration, to access the objects.

In the documentary film To Whom It May Concern (2013), the Somali journalist Zakaria Mohamed Ali, who himself had arrived on Lampedusa as a refugee in 2008, addresses the value of these objects for the migrants and their journeys, and shows how closely questions of identity and memory are connected with the objects (Gatta 2016; Triulzi 2016). That film tells the story of Ali’s
return to Lampedusa a few years after arriving in Italy. In advance of that trip the journalist is asked by a compatriot to search the island for his wedding photographs, which had been confiscated by the Italian authorities. These photos are not only a bridge back to his family but also a document that testifies to his social status as a married man; he has no other documents to prove his marriage. If we relate this episode to Ricciardo’s archive it is unlikely that anyone would be interested in tracing a torn lifejacket or a tetra pack of juice. However, as the film makes clear, very personal belongings such as photographs, diaries, letters, or a little plastic bag containing native soil, could one day become the subject of such a search. To whom it may concern—this is far more than a question of individuals; rather, it addresses groups—referring here to the group of migrants for whom the objects (even if they may not represent directly personal things) are related to a shared existential experience.

A striking example of migrant experiences and biographies is the Archivio delle Memorie Migranti in Rome, which emerged from a joint initiative of migrants, activists and academics. Since 2004 it has been working with migrants to gather and archive their personal stories: intangible belongings that might document individual fates but that are also capable of capturing the phenomenon of undocumented migration to Italy as a whole. Another important project is Storie Migranti, an online platform that also collects personal stories. Based on oral history, both projects aim to preserve individual stories as a collective memory for the migrants themselves, but also for future generations, in order to create identity through (shared) memory (Triulzi 2012). Both personal and collective memory need reference points and for this reason require archives where these are preserved.

In their entirety, from lifejacket to photo album, the objects of migration represent a shared and drastic experience that calls for a collective form of memory, but also a collective point of reference. Such reference points are included in the various forms of cultural heritage. In the last few years this term has been widely discussed by also revealing the political and economic interests that have influenced the definitions and thus also the canon of cultural heritage (Throsby 2006; 2019). The temporalities of cultural heritage however should also be increasingly considered (Harvey 2001; Avrami et al. 2019), because “cultural heritage undergoes a continual process of evolution” (NARA 2015, 145). With the inclusion of intangible cultural heritage on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 2008, new ways to preserve culture beyond canonical (i.e., artistic, esthetic and historical) criteria have been adopted at an institutional level—although these are also still subject to the influence of political and economic global players. This breakdown of the traditional canon can in turn help to initiate a thought process that includes the objects of migration in a concept of common cultural heritage. The migrants once arrived are already part of our present society, and they will play a decisive role in shaping its character.

When we were preparing the installation in the Photothek, we were not yet fully aware of the considerations this might lead us to. However, the longer we contemplated the migrants’ objects next to our (photo) objects in the spatial environment of the archive, the clearer it became that every object contains its
own individual histories, which represent tangible and intangible values worthy of preservation. These values have been already recognized by Giuseppe Basile, one of the most renowned Italian conservators, who—besides the Giotto frescoes in Assisi and Padua, Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper” in Milan, and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo—also restored some of the migrants’ objects, as he was closely involved in the never-realized museum project on Lampedusa (D’Ambrosio and Meli 2014). The Florentine Photothek does not only preserve such cultural values or contribute to their preservation, since the works of art can be studied here alongside the photographs (and, obviously, images of Giotto’s frescoes or Leonardo’s masterpiece are included in the holdings). As a dynamic place of intellectual exchange an archive such as the Photothek can also contribute to the process of thinking and establishing new manifestations of cultural value and heritage.

CONCLUSIONS

It is our task, as Susanna Guerini (2015/2016) has underlined, not to define cultural heritage as limited to a retrospective perspective but rather to act courageously from within our own time in a perspective of a futura memoria. Ricciardo’s archive, with its objects that became briefly visible through the installation, has the potential to provide access, at least in part, to this future memory. By presenting the collection in an art-historical photo archive, where the visual content of the photographic objects already addresses issues of cultural heritage, the issue of the objects’ value within a societal value system also becomes relevant. The construction of cultural heritage is a process (Palumbo 2011), as can be seen in photography itself—a discipline that was added to Italy’s list of cultural assets worthy of protection by the Ministry of Culture as late as nearly 20 years ago (Guerini 2015/2016, 79). If we want to become engaged in this process we should understand the “objects of migration” as part of a cultural heritage defined from our present time, along which cultural memory can be developed. This contributes significantly to the cultural identity of social groups, in this case the migrants whose departure for Europe materializes and manifests itself in all the objects, no matter how different they all are.

The fact that the migrants may not only have lost the objects on the journey but also may have discarded some or simply left them behind after arriving in Sicily (such as soles of shoes, SIM cards, etc.) does not mean that these remain forever insignificant to their previous owners. For the literary and cultural studies scholar Aleida Assmann the temporary loss of personal but also more generic objects is rather a way to initially forget (or repress) often drastic events associated with them. She considers this temporary forgetting and subsequent rediscovery to be an indispensable prerequisite for the construction of cultural memory (Assmann 2010, 105–06). Archives as depositories of objects and documents are thus also bulging memory repositories. But as we have seen, since every archive is subject to selective criteria in its structuring and orientation, and objects and documents are inevitably ordered and recontextualized through archiving, the threat of transforming, obscuring or even
rendering the content unrecognizable is also always present. At the workshop “Aesthetics and Materiality of Knowledge—(Un)sighted Archives of Migration” initiated by Cathrine Bublatzky and Fiona Siegenthaler in Heidelberg, where we presented the archive in November 2018, we had the opportunity to talk to members of the Migration HUB network. In that joint discussion about some of the objects we brought with us, their unknown owners once again came into focus. The fact that photos, diaries or letters are very personal objects (Thomas and Znaniecki 1974) leads to the ethical, if not legal, question as to how freely we can dispose of this material, even in the context of an archive that is assumed to be protective and diligent with its objects. Who should have access to the objects of migration? To whom do they now belong? Especially in relation to objects from ethnological collections, this question has been the focus of increasing public debate and has led to substantial restitutions in recent years (Sarr and Savoy 2019). Regarding the objects of migration, however, a prime challenge would be to track down the original owners. Therefore there exists already a need to establish a place that would not only allow a scholarly engagement with the material objects, but above all would constitute a reference point for the migrants and their relatives in their search for lost personal objects along with the information and identities related to them. Their active participation in the process of thinking, shaping and defining such a place should be taken into consideration seriously, and should be the final objective of such a pursuit.

In this way it would be possible to prevent the appropriation of the topic of undocumented migration, the archive, and the objects. In this regard, the Archivio delle Memorie Migranti in Rome already represents an important milestone: here migrants themselves are involved and have an influence on the archiving process and the selection of the material to be archived (in this case, their personal stories). Through their own stories, migrants give themselves visibility and a voice that they have thus far been largely denied in political circles—for an archive always has a political dimension as well. Adopting a postcolonial approach, however, one could also think about whether an archive of migration, such as the one Ricciardo presented in the Photothek of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz, should be located, for example, in one of the migrants’ countries of origin. This is important so that not we but they themselves can make the decision as to how and on the basis of which objects the history of their migration shall be written. With regard to the archive and its role as a “history-making institution”, and as Jacques Derrida had already remarked, “present choices determine future history, selecting the materials available for future historians” (1995, 17).

NOTES

1. We use the term “undocumented migrants” in reference to unregulated and state-controlled migration; Hamilakis (2018, 2) discusses the term further.

2. The installation was shown for the first time as part of the conference “Encounters: Handling, Placing and Looking at Photographs in Relation to Migration,” which took place at the KHI during October 12–13, 2017: https://www.khi.fi.it/de/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/2017/10/encounters-handling-placing-looking-photographs.php [last
accessed 03/24/2021]. Since then it has been presented three more times in the Photothek, for half a day each time. A book publication is in preparation.

3. This project was based on the idea of building a lighthouse on Lampedusa, whose guiding light might reach as far as the African coast, only 80 nautical miles away; it was intended to indicate the way across. The project also intended to integrate a cultural center into the lighthouse: https://www.kilpper-projects.de/en/category/lampedusa-en/; https://www.euractiv.de/section/eu-innenpolitik/news/fluechtlingskrise-ein-leuchtturm-fuer-lampedusa-in-bruessel [last accessed March 24, 2021].

4. The boat cemetery was set on fire by unidentified offenders on June 5, 2020. The temporal proximity to the defacement of the memorial “Porta d’Europa” [Gateway to Europe] a few days earlier makes a politically motivated act highly probable. The memorial was erected in 2008 by the artist Mimmo Paladino on the beach of Lampedusa, and was dedicated to the thousands of people who had died trying to reach Italian shores.

5. Parts of the collection were on display at (inter alia) the Gorki Theater in Berlin (“Inventories of Migration,” 2015), at the Kunsthana Dresden (“Baustelle Europa,” 2016), at the Patrick Heide Gallery in London (“The Sea is the Limit,” 2017), at the KHI in Florence (2017/2018/2020), and at the Gallery FUTURA in Prague (“Inventories of Escape. 2014–2020,” 2021).

6. Some outcomes of this artistic exploration were on display in the exhibition “Unboxing Photographs. Working in the Photo Archive” at the Kunstbibliothek in Berlin (Feb. 6–May 27, 2018). Armin Linke’s explorations in the Photothek became part of a publication (Balduzzi 2020).

7. https://www.berliner-herbstsalon.de/en/zweiter-berliner-herbstsalon/kuenstlerinnen/thomas-kilpper-massimo-ricciardo [last accessed March 24, 2021].

8. www.archiviomemoriemigranti.net [last accessed March 24, 2021].

9. www.storiemigranti.org [last accessed March 24, 2021].

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