Articulated Absences and Silenced Souvenirs:

exploring Switzerland's complicity in the trading of Nazi gold through a counter-archive

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ABSTRACT

Switzerland functioned as a ‘gold hub’ during the Second World War, accepting vast amounts of gold from the Reichsbank in exchange for hard currency and thus playing an indispensable role for the Nazis. However, this financial complicity was concealed after the war. Instead, the Swiss government constructed an official narrative celebrating the sacrificial efforts of the Swiss Army as the reason the Nazis did not invade Switzerland. Alongside in-depth historical research contradicting this grand narrative, this patriotic wartime memory has persisted.

My practice-led research responds to this historical invisibility through a counter-archive of objects and material interventions, in order to facilitate an alternative engagement with Switzerland’s contested past and encourage critical discourse about the impacts of state secrecy on cultural memory and national identity. With a focus on the drawing of conceptual and symbolic connections, this argument is discussed by analysing my practical experiments with gold interventions on souvenirs and military memorabilia, objects that have reinforced Switzerland’s romanticised perceptions and solidified the ideological manipulation of its historical narrative. Gold can be melted and remelted countless times to disguise its origin fully and thus represents a secret. Drawing on Clare Birchall’s notion of an ‘aesthetics of the secret’, the concept of *articulated absences* is introduced to consider these objects as symbols for the memory gaps perpetuating Switzerland’s innocent wartime image.

The counter-archive provides a framework for the ordering of these *articulated absences* while questioning the institutional authority assigned to archives as collections of historical evidence. Using an archival method in artistic practice highlights the vulnerability of archives to being used as instruments to uphold master narratives, marginalise histories and obliterate unfavourable facts. The counter-archive thus emphasises archival exclusions to invite questions about the impact of political objectives on our remembrance of Switzerland’s past. It reflects on the reciprocal relationship between archives and political, social, and cultural factors to highlight their interconnection and understand their influence on collective memory.

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

Switzerland's historical complicity with the Third Reich during the Second World War was extensive and multifaceted. This chapter of Switzerland's past has long been kept secret – carefully guarded and hidden – and has been replaced by an idealised nationalistic version of these events. As a Swiss national, living in Switzerland all my life before moving to London in 2018, this established narrative of a supposedly innocent small state in the middle of war-torn Europe shaped my perceptions of homeland. Focusing on these historical events in my research thus not only implies a reassessing of a previously instilled view, but also a rethinking of Swiss values and identity, and thus a reckoning with the historical responsibility and guilt implied by national affiliation.

During my studies in the MA in Photojournalism and Documentary Photography at London College of Communication, I began to engage with methods to visually unpack the patriotic narrative in order to reveal the hidden underneath. Initially focusing on Switzerland's extensive involvement in the obtaining and reselling of looted art by the Nazis, I began to engage with the country's central role as a gold hub for my major project. Switzerland accepted vast quantities of gold from the Allies and the Axis powers during the war and, among other things, received gold bars made up of monetary gold co-mingled with victim gold from the Reichsbank (ICE, 1998).[1] Such 'tainted' gold evidentially ended up in the vault of the Swiss National Bank (Eizenstat and Slany, 1997, p. ix). Archival documents from both the Reichsbank and the Swiss National Bank (SNB) allowed researchers to gather data and draw connections regarding the composition of gold bars, leading them to identify some 'tainted' bullions that were sold to the SNB during the war. However, because of the imperishable quality of gold, it can be melted and remelted countless times, allowing for its original form to be reshaped and its origin disguised (ICE, 1998). Consequently, it is impossible to assess the full extent of victim gold that ended up in Switzerland during the war.

[1] ICE stands for the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War, a commission of historians investigating Switzerland's role during the Second World War. I will discuss their formation and draw on their findings throughout my thesis, but I will continue using the abbreviation ICE for referencing. When drawing on their reports written in German, I use UEK, the abbreviation for the German title of the commission: 'Unabhängige Expertenkommission Schweiz – Zweiter Weltkrieg'.

In my previous research for my major project, I engaged with the fate of such victim gold after it reached Switzerland. In the post-war years, the Swiss National Bank provided the Swissmint with gold acquired from the Third Reich during the war for the minting of *Vreneli* – an infamous Swiss gold coin – mostly given away for special occasions, such as baptisms or significant birthdays.[2] *Vreneli* were initially minted from 1897 until 1935 and were used as a means of payment. However, in 1936, following the world economic crisis and the global currency devaluation, the Swiss parliament decided to devaluate the Swiss franc by 30 percent. The parity of the Swiss franc was reduced from 290 mg fine gold to 190-240 mg fine gold, thus relieving the SNB of its obligation to redeem banknotes for gold. The value of the 20 francs *Vreneli* increased to 28 francs, and it was consequently not used for payments anymore (Swissmint, 2014, p. 8).

Because of the vast amount of gold acquired during the war, the minting of *Vreneli* was resumed after the war. Initially, the SNB only provided the Swissmint with pre-war gold holdings. These *Vreneli* were not marked with their actual minting year; instead, they were labelled with 1935. The 1936 currency devaluation of the Swiss franc did not provide a fixed gold parity and, according to the official explanation, marking these *Vreneli* with 1935 would indicate the same quality as *Vreneli* minted up to 1935. It was also intended to circumvent speculation relating to the provenance of the gold. An L for *lingot,* the French word for bar, was added in front of the year number for the *Vreneli* minted in post-war years to distinguish them from the *Vreneli* previously minted in 1935. At the beginning of 1947, the prewar gold reserves were depleted, and the SNB began to supply the Swissmint with gold purchased from the Reichsbank during the war. Furthermore, following the signing of the Washington Agreement in 1946 – a diplomatic negotiation between Switzerland and the Allies, settling financial matters in relation to the war – led to the suspension of the controversial backdating of the *Vreneli,* and from March 1947, the *Vreneli* were marked with their actual year stamp. Therefore, during three months at the beginning of 1947, German gold was used for the minting of *Vreneli* with the L 1935 backdating (Swissmint, 2014, p. 9).

[2] There are three different kinds of *Vreneli*: the 10 francs, the 20 francs, and the 100 francs *Vreneli*. The 20 francs *Vreneli* is considered the 'real' *Vreneli* and is the most popular and widely produced of the three (Swissmint, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, when discussing the *Vreneli* coin, I am referring to the 20 francs *Vreneli*.

Year	10 Fr.	20 Fr.	100 Fr.
1897		12 E	
1897		400,029	
1898		400,000	
1899		300,000	
1900		400,000	
1901		500,000	
1902		600,000	
1903		200,000	
1904		100,000	
1905		100,000	
1906		100,000	
1907		150,000	
1908		355,000	
1909		400,000	
1910		375,000	
1910/11	56 E		
1911	100,000	350,000	
1912	200,000	450,000	
1913	600,000	700,000	
1914	200,000	700,000	
1915	400,000	750,000	
1916	130,000	300,000	
1922	1,020,000	2,783,678	
1925		400,000	5,000
1926		50,000	
1927		5,015,000	
1930		3,371,764	
1935		175,000	
L1935*		20,008,813	
1947		9,200,000	
1949		10,000,000	
Total	**2,650,056**	**58,634,296**	**5,000**

Legend:

E = Essais/Samples

1) including 29 coins consisting of lighter Gondo gold

2) Year 'L 1935' (L = lingot = Bullion)
Minted in years:
1945: 3,500,000 coins
1946: 7,108,813 coins
1947: 9,400,000 coins

3) Total inclusive tests

Table 1 *Vreneli minting list in detail* [3]

In an article for the Sonntagszeitung, Swiss historian Peter Kamber draws on archival documents and historical research to map the journey of gold bars that were sent to the Swissmint. In his findings, he exposes how gold shipments – previously proven to include gold bars containing victim gold by cross-referencing records from the Reichsbank and the SNB – were almost certainly used by the Swissmint for the minting of *Vreneli* with the year numbers 1947 and 1949 (Kamber, 1998). As previously established, it is impossible to prove how much victim gold ended up co-mingled with other gold in gold bars that were sold to Switzerland; it is therefore also impossible to establish the amount of victim gold that was processed for the minting of *Vreneli*. Drawing on the minting list (Table 1), the total number of *Vreneli* that could potentially include victim gold is 28.6 million. Furthermore, in three years, from 1946 to 1949, the Swissmint produced double the number of *Vreneli*

[3] 'Vreneliprägung im Detail' table translated by me (Source: Swissmint, 2014).

previously manufactured from 1897 to 1935 (Swissmint, 2014). It is therefore likely for *Vreneli* owners to be in possession of a coin minted in the post-war years.

It was a family tradition for my maternal grandparents to give me a *Vreneli* for every birthday until I turned twenty. They did the same for my two sisters and three cousins. Once my younger sister turned twenty, they had bought a total of 120 *Vreneli,* of which 80% could potentially include victim gold. From the 21 *Vreneli* I own – 20 given to me by my grandparents and one a gift from my mother – 16 were minted in the post-war years and could thus potentially include victim gold.

However, the possibility of victim gold in *Vreneli* was barely discussed in public, or, as was the case in a speech given by the Swiss chancellor, Christoph Blocher, in 1997, it was vehemently denied. For my major project, I focused on *Vreneli* minted in the post-war years, and their location within the private space of their owners, considering this as a place of aftermath. Because of their value, people generally hide these gold coins with other treasured possessions. I photographed a total of 28 hiding places as part of my major project, and none of the owners were aware of their potentially precarious provenance (Fig. 1). Similarly, when sharing my findings with my grandmother, she voiced her frustration about the silence that surrounded this topic, and how, if she had known, she would not have given us the *Vreneli*. After discovering their potentially precarious provenance, the gold coins – once considered treasured objects and cherished memories – have now taken on an abstract and devious character.[4]

[4] Due to the possibility of Holocaust victim gold, these gold coins could carry a traumatic history. As I will further discuss in Chapter 2, all gold represents a potentially traumatic materiality driven by the historical and contemporary desire and subsequent violence over gold through conquest, looting, and extraction. The unspeakable trauma of the Holocaust is an intrinsic aspect of the gold transactions between the Reichsbank and Swiss banks because of the remelting of Holocaust victim gold and the potential of the gold trades providing the necessary economic conditions for the Nazis to continue their warfare. While it is essential to acknowledge this traumatic presence of gold, I will concentrate on its unknown materiality in my thesis, to explore how it mirrors the silence after the war and the impact of this secrecy on Swiss collective memory and national identity.

Fig. 1 *Hiding places* (2019)

This shift in connotation led me to engage further with the notion of absence and invisibility in relation to materiality; I became interested in the materiality of gold, its paradoxical state of tangibility and absence. Furthermore, questions about the extent of the historical complicity arose, and how the deliberate suppression of past wrongdoings has shaped Switzerland's image and national identity. Inspired by this previous research, I endeavour to study the materiality of secrecy and memory, while artistically exploring the representational power of objects in corroborating Switzerland's established narrative.

INTRODUCTION

In 1974, Swiss writer Max Frisch gave an acceptance speech at the Schiller Prize awards. In his presentation, titled *Die Schweiz als Heimat?* [Switzerland as homeland?], Frisch considered the multifaceted notions of 'Heimat', discussing it from a personal and nationalistic angle. 'Heimat' does not have a direct English translation. It means home or homeland; however, neither of these expressions encompasses the emotive connotation of 'Heimat' (2024), a place not solely reduced to a geographical location but instead a place where one belongs and feels emotionally connected (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2 *Heimat* (2013)

Therefore, a personal definition of 'Heimat' draws on nostalgic feelings of home and is intrinsically linked to identity and memories. Frisch explained how these connotations differ from a national and personal perspective. 'Heimat', in a national context, is subject to ideological manipulation and entails a political component. Frisch (1990, p. 509) contextualised the notion of 'Heimat*'* and described how people have become reluctant to use the word because it reminds us less of the country or city where, according to the Duden dictionary, one is at home, than of an ideal world and thus of a falsification of history as local history.

Here, Frisch referred to the growing critique in the 1970s that increasingly questioned the dominant Swiss narrative about their role in the Second World War. Besides being generally perceived as a neutral bystander, Switzerland was heavily involved in the war and was an invaluable collaborator for the Nazis. However, after the war, the Swiss established an official narrative – often referred to as 'Reduit-Mythos' [redoubt myth] – celebrating the sacrificial efforts of the Swiss Army and

emphasising the country's provision of humanitarian aid (Ludi, 2006, p. 276).[5] Their involvement in the development of the J stamp, the dealing of looted art, and the trading of gold, as well as their aiding and abetting of the Nazis in their genocidal war – such as allowing them to use their railway tracks – was strategically excluded from this carefully crafted myth (ICE, 2002).[6] Switzerland's complicity is far-reaching and complex; through the strategic silencing of historical information, the Swiss managed to uphold their mythical version of these historical events for over 40 years (Ludi, 2006).

Secrecy is still an inherent characteristic of Switzerland's banking landscape today. To this day, bank secrecy laws continue to protect the capital of criminals from all over the world, as became evident in February 2022 in a leak containing client data from the – at that time – internationally renowned Swiss bank, Credit Suisse.[7] The leak revealed the 'hidden wealth of clients involved in torture, drug trafficking, money laundering, corruption and other serious crimes' (Makortoff, 2022). Credit Suisse rejected these allegations and deemed them historical. However, it was proven that most of the accounts in question were opened after the turn of the century, and some were still actively used at the time of the leak (Chulov *et al.*, 2022). Secrecy concerning financial matters is thus not only an immoral characteristic of Switzerland's historical past but persists in a contemporary context. Like Switzerland's economic cooperation with the Third Reich, this recent scandal raises questions about moral obligations concerning financial transactions.

In 2014, the common reporting standard (CRS) was introduced, an agreement to share information concerning the financial matters of the participating nations' taxpayers. Besides being unprecedented, the CRS was especially significant because of Switzerland's participation, consequently obligating Swiss banks to partly suspend their bank secrecy (Makortoff, 2022). However, as *The Guardian*'s

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[5] The expression 'Reduit-Mythos' [redoubt myth] refers to Switzerland's defensive plan during the Second World War: The Swiss National Redoubt. I will expand more on this military strategy in Chapter 1.4.

[6] Switzerland was heavily involved in the dealing of looted art by the Nazis. There was renewed critique of this in 2021, following a display of the infamous *Bührle Foundation* art collection in a new extension of the Kunsthaus Zurich. The reason for the renewed discussion is the controversial founder of the collection, Emil G. Bührle, and the provenance of the paintings presented, including at least thirteen artworks looted from Jewish collectors in France during the war (Weissmüller, 2021; Buomberger and Magnaguagno, 2015).

[7] In 2023, UBS (Union Bank of Switzerland) acquired Credit Suisse with liquidity support worth up to 100 billion by the SNB. Additionally – in the case of financial loss – the Swiss government assured the UBS support of up to 9 billion Swiss francs (Eidgenössisches Finanzdepartement EFD, 2023).

banking correspondent, Kalyeena Makortoff (2022), explains, the CRS merely ensures an exchange of information between the participating countries and is, thus, reduced to clients' information in predominantly 'industrialised' countries. However, 'potentially dubious clients' from the 90 countries not part of the CRS can still deposit their wealth in Switzerland without their information being reported (Makortoff, 2022).

In Switzerland, Swiss bank secrecy is exempt from the freedom of the press. The Bank Secrecy Act – Article 47 – states that anybody who violates bank secrecy, even if disclosing the information is in the public interest, can be persecuted and sentenced to prison (Munzinger, Obermaier and Obermayer, 2022, p. 202). Initially, this part of the act only applied to bank employees; it was, however, tightened following incriminating leaks in 2015. According to this broadening of the law, 'any third party' breaking Article 47 could face up to three years imprisonment (Lewis, 2022; Munzinger, Obermaier and Obermayer, 2022, p. 202). If financial gain occurs from the leak of data, a prison sentence of up to five years can be imposed (Lewis, 2022). According to this, a newspaper selling newsprint containing leaked bank client data would act against the law, and the reporting journalist could thus potentially face persecution (Munzinger, Obermaier and Obermayer, 2022, p. 202). Consequently, under Swiss law, criminals hiding their wealth in Swiss banks are afforded more protection than journalists disseminating facts of public interest.

The historian Sébastien Guex (2000, p. 237) discusses the historical significance, political dimensions and financial applications of Swiss bank secrecy, investigating it as 'the subject of widespread, impassioned conflicts and debates'. He explains how bank secrecy traditionally existed in the Swiss financial landscape before 1934 in the form of 'several laws' (Guex, 2000, p. 237). However, some of these laws only applied to public banks in specific cantons, which later 'formed the legal basis' for Article 47 to become part of Swiss federal law (Guex, 2000, p. 237). Bank secrecy became a refuge for the Swiss banking sector because global economic struggles significantly impacted Swiss banks. As a result, 'a temporary loss of confidence in the banks' had 'an effect at the political level too' (Vogler, 2006, p. 12).

However, in 1966, a myth began to circulate that Switzerland had introduced the bank secrecy laws in response to national socialist espionage against Jews. This

fiction was introduced by a quarterly report from Credit Suisse in mid-November, where they wrote:

> Interestingly it was also the intense espionage activity aimed at finding Jewish money that prompted Switzerland in 1934 to protect the persecuted by firming up the rules on banking secrecy, which had previously been a matter of custom rather than law […], and to make infringement of banking secrecy a criminal act (Vogler, 2006, p. 91).

This blatant fabrication is especially striking considering that Switzerland's dominant narrative of wartime innocence was challenged and only became subject to profound historical investigation because of international pressure following a class action lawsuit filed in 1995 against Swiss banks by the World Jewish Congress in New York. Swiss banks were accused of withholding funds belonging to Holocaust survivors in so-called dormant accounts (Hocking, 2000). However, Swiss bankers were confident that requests regarding assets had been settled in post-war years; they insisted on pursuing legal routes, requesting various documents, and asking for death certificates from victims of concentration camps even though 'in Auschwitz such documents were not issued' (ICE, 2002, p. 449). The unethical and ignorant behaviour demonstrated by the Swiss led to growing international pressure, and their officially established image was increasingly questioned (Wurz, 2013).

Eventually, in-depth historical research was carried out by a governmentally appointed commission of historians and lawyers: the Independent Commission of Experts – Switzerland Second World War (ICE). The ICE gained access to previously concealed documents and archives; their findings exposed the extent of Switzerland's complicity with the Nazis and revealed precarious immigration politics. Additionally, the revelation of the magnitude of Switzerland's involvement in the gold trade and its instrumental function as a gold hub during the war contested the previously established narrative. Swiss banks, and in particular the Swiss National Bank (SNB) (Fig. 3), played an integral role in aiding the Nazis in their war efforts (ICE, 2002). The image of Switzerland as an innocent nation amid war-torn Europe, supposedly deterring the Nazis from invading because of its challenging mountainous terrain and the willpower of the Swiss Army, began to crumble. However, the ICE's historical reports were barely acknowledged on a political level, nor were they accepted as a crucial component of Swiss history (Ludi, 2013).

Fig. 3 *Swiss National Bank* (2019)

In 2014, sociologists Nicole Burgermeister and Nicole Peter published a study about intergenerational memory in Switzerland to investigate the impact of the ICE's historical and legal investigation. They interviewed various individuals about their memory of Switzerland's role in the Second World War, and their findings exposed still emotional and normative reactions towards the topic, causing controversy and conflict among the interviewees (Burgermeister and Peter, 2014). Some participants made connections between the Holocaust and Switzerland's responsibility because

of restrictive refugee policies and Swiss complicity in economic interdependence with the Nazis, while others demonstrated a defensive tendency to protect Switzerland from alleged international and historical critique (Burgermeister and Peter, 2014, p. 302). Such patriotic reactions were not exclusively displayed by older generations but could be observed among all age groups and, therefore, the memory of Switzerland's wartime position is still contested. Overall, the study revealed that the historical analysis by the ICE was mainly perceived as too academically abstract (Burgermeister and Peter, 2014).

It becomes evident that such a denial of historical involvement shapes how we perceive the present. While Switzerland was not militarily engaged in the war – using armed neutrality in a political act of assumed impartiality – their involvement, as proven by the findings of the ICE, should not be underestimated. Memory studies scholar Michael Rothberg (2019) argues in his book *Implicated Subject* that we should move away from the reductive narrative of victim, perpetrator, and bystander and instead explore the concept of implication. Thinking about the more nuanced position of the 'implicated subject' will allow us to investigate the dynamics between past and contemporary injustices and raise broader questions about responsibility and accountability. Rothberg's concept is particularly relevant in the historical context of Switzerland's wartime involvement. The Swiss have oscillated between identifying as passive bystanders or innocent victims surrounded by Axis powers. This notion of implicated guilt resulting from immoral cooperation only became more broadly associated with Switzerland's historical role after the ICE published their final reports. However, because of the lack of engagement with these findings, Switzerland has neither reflectively examined its past nor acknowledged its responsibility. As becomes evident in the contemporary Swiss banking landscape, such an unwillingness to address past wrongdoings involves an ignorance of history and runs the risk of contemporary immoral conduct.[8]

My research thus aims to highlight the importance of historical accountability, critically examining the integral role of dissemination and accessibility to challenge a failed reckoning with national history, while drawing attention to persisting

[8] Apart from national accountability, Rothberg's concept is also applicable when considered in the context of personal responsibility relating to the ownership of *Vreneli* coins and their possible provenance. Based on this example, the widespread net of guilt and complicity implicates the individual.

contemporary patterns. Therefore, I am centring materiality and form to address Switzerland's role as an *implicated subject* and challenge the continued influence of Switzerland's *Reduit-Mythos* on national memory and identity, while – informed by Switzerland's integral position in the financial market – critically questioning neglected responsibilities today.

By focusing on secrecy as a determining factor, I examine the potential of artistic and material exploration to invite a critical engagement with the past. While drawing on their historical findings, my research moves away from the too academically abstract reports published by the ICE, and the subsequent touring exhibition presenting some of the findings. Instead, I am critically examining and challenging the ideological manipulation of the past by drawing on nationalistic sentiments instilled and confirmed through objects and materiality. By focusing on conceptually relevant material and evocative objects – contextualised in a counter-archive – my practice-led research explores novel ways to engage with Switzerland's historical complicity. Situating the main aspects of the investigation in their broader theoretical context, while drawing inspiration from different artists with varying practices, studies the potential of art in questioning political systems and institutional powers through performative techniques, conceptual frameworks, and metaphorical materials. My practice-based inquiry is located within multiple contexts: the wartime gold trade, aspects of secrecy concerning Switzerland's obfuscation of its complicity and the materiality of gold, memories concerning the constructed narrative and the evocative potential of objects, and the hierarchical knowledge frameworks in which historical analysis is situated, manipulated, and idealised.

In Chapter 1, I examine the formation, research, and publication of the ICE findings and the failure of the government and Swiss citizens to develop a constructive engagement with the reports. To provide the historical context of my research, I draw on these reports to analyse the role of Swiss banks in the trading of Nazi gold and to broaden the discussion of its precarious provenance. Furthermore, by unpacking Switzerland's *Reduit-Mythos*, I discuss its identity-forming significance.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the multifaceted properties of gold, from its mystical effect on people and its religious significance to its hazardous extraction methods to its influential status in society, the financial market, and the tech industry. Furthermore,

I discuss the symbolic potential – representing a secret – of gold's imperishable materiality to contextualise its significance for my practical investigation. The possibility of concealment impacted the historical and contemporary significance of gold, as well as its precarious mining conditions – the reason for human rights violations and ecological destruction – resulting from its material assets. Incorporating gold within my practical experiments thus further explores an aspect of hiding. I draw a parallel between the glorified impressions of gold and the idealised image of Switzerland as a small, innocent state with an untainted history. Furthermore, I discuss Switzerland's significant involvement in the contemporary gold trade. By studying the work of three practitioners who have used different approaches to exploring the physicality of gold, such as the layering methods used by Robert Rauschenberg and Yves Klein, and a study of the socio-political role of gold through an extensive visual research project by Lisa Barnard, I explore different artistic and conceptual engagements with the material.

In the three main chapters – Chapters 3, 4, and 5 – I position my practice among theoretical discussion and artistic explorations of the three fundamental aspects of my research: secrecy, memory, and the archive. The notion of secrecy features dominantly in my inquiry; it is a central aspect of gold's materiality, an integral element of Switzerland's contested past, and critical in securing its contemporary status as a financial centre and a gold hub. The suppression of unfavourable facts and constructions of identity were the determining factors in Switzerland's memory politics and are deeply ingrained in the making and unmaking of its dominant narrative. Thus, I concentrate on a critical reading of secrecy, its conceptual potential and aesthetic exploration in Chapter 3. Here, I draw on Eva Horn's (2011) analysis of the political secret, its inherent power dynamics and far-reaching consequences to contextualise Switzerland's post-war politics.

Clare Birchall's (2014) concept of an 'aesthetics of the secret' provides a theoretical framework to conceptually explore the secrecy aspect of my research through an alternative reading of the collected objects and the materiality of gold. By introducing three categories – *tangible unknowns, mapped secrets*, and *poetic (in)visibility* – I broaden Birchall's thought to further discuss its aesthetic and conceptual value. Within these categories, I situate the practice of artists and position my practice in relation to their approaches. In *tangible unknowns,* I examine the material

manifestation of the secret, its documentation, and symbolic translation through a collaborative project by Edmund Clark and Crofton Black, the practice of Trevor Paglen, and *The Spy Project* by Jill Magid. For *mapped secrets,* I draw on the works of Mark Lombardi, Forensic Architecture, and Hans Haacke to explore the capability of artistic revelation. In this context, I also discuss the potential of institutional critique for inviting questions and making hidden systems visible. Furthermore, in the third category, *poetic (in)visibility*, I draw on Derrida's (1994, p. 245) 'secrecy effect' in exploring the impact of the unknown, and its deliberate application found in the artworks of René Magritte, Yves Klein, Marcel Duchamp, and Kurt Schwitters.

In the following chapter – Chapter 4 – I analyse how memory and identity are closely intertwined and inform each other. Therefore, I discuss how the Popular Memory Group (1982b, p. 1) conceptualises memory as a 'form of political practice'. Furthermore, I draw on their term 'historical apparatus' to critically examine the ideological foundations of historical knowledge construction in an institutional context (Popular Memory Group, 1982b, p. 5). Through a brief review of Benedict Anderson's (2016) case study of Switzerland, I study how collective principles, cultural myths, and shared traditions are integral in the making and unmaking of nationalism. The example of Switzerland's historic national exhibition, *Landi 1939*, provides further insight into the importance of tangible representations of mutual beliefs and cultural symbols for forming and solidifying a shared identity. Materials carry meaning, which can be incorporated and thus conceptually applied in an artwork. In my research, I purchase and incorporate various second-hand objects, which hold either a pre-existing mnemonic function or a representative role in relation to Switzerland, or things which have become relevant because of references to Switzerland's dominant narrative based on assumed military power. Inspired by Marius Kwint's (1999) classifications of material memories, I introduce *articulated absence* as a concept to contextualise the collected objects of my research, initially acquired or kept for their evocative qualities by individuals, but stripped of their mnemonic capabilities following an anonymised online transaction. By focusing on the latent commemorative function of these objects, their relevance in the archive is not tied to their reminiscent qualities, but to their symbolic significance as memory gaps. The great potential of artistic inquiry into contested pasts and evocative material is considered by discussing the practice of two artists. Denise Bertschi's multidisciplinary projects reveal the efficacy of artistic investigations in exposing

Switzerland's hidden histories and challenging its representative image. By focusing on Doris Salcedo's installations, I explore how her use of private objects – formerly belonging to persons now deceased – encompasses a haunting and eerie quality of absence.

In Chapter 5, I investigate how museums, archives, and libraries shape our historical understanding while being subjected to ideological manipulation. Through a discussion of the theory of Achilles Mbembe (2002), the notion of the archive is established as a contested place of power: a unification of absence and presence. Drawing on Mbembe's reading of the archive thus reveals how an archival framework can further explore the notion of the hidden and the excluded. Working with an archival process in my research, creating a counter-archive thus mirrors the archive's aesthetic frameworks to incorporate its institutional authority while configuring it as a dichotomy of remembering and forgetting.

To reflect on the application of an archival framework in my research, I draw on the practices of different artists to discuss how creative mirroring, unpacking, or rethinking explores the inherent power structures of the archive and has the potential to highlight its ideologically induced incompleteness. Through artistic interventions at the German Pavillon for the Venice Biennale by Hans Haacke in 1993 and Maria Eichhorn in 2022, as well as through Bea Schlingelhoff's exhibition at the Freulerpalast at the Museum des Landes Glarus, I consider the performative approach of uncovering and removing to critically question how the very structures which function as supposedly neutral spaces of presentation frame our interpretation of history. Further exploring the role of institutions, I draw on, and situate my research among, the practice of various artists. I analyse the works of Fred Wilson and Yinka Shonibare to explore the potential of reordering and recontextualising, as well as the symbolic use of material to highlight the narrow institutional representation of the past. Through an analysis of Susan Hiller's project, *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1996), and Walid Raad's imagined collective, *The Atlas Group,* I examine how the mirroring of archival structures and processes – such as presentation, categorisation, and labelling – instil these artworks with institutional authority and thus highlight their decisive role in influencing our historical perspective. Furthermore, the imagined characteristics of these projects reveal the

potential of a fictional approach for understanding the governing reality of institutional power.

While I contextualise the conceptual underpinning of my research in the first five chapters through historical analysis, reviewed theory, and the practices of the artists examined, I reflect on the experimentations and artistic processes in more detail in Chapter 6. Here, I discuss how experiments and inspiration inform my methods, how I approach the catalogue and order structure, and the numerous location-specific options for installing the work in an exhibition context.[9] The potential continuation and ideas for the extension of the counter-archive are included in the conclusion of my thesis.

By focusing on the symbolic, conceptual, and material manifestations of secrecy and memory, my research aims to invite a novel engagement with Switzerland's involvement in the gold trade during the war. The research seeks to illuminate the country's historical economic complicity while posing questions about the immoral financial landscape of Swiss banks today. Working with gold allows me to incorporate its material, historical, and symbolic significance and its seductive effect on people. Like Switzerland's successfully established image, the gold represents a façade, which is progressively unpicked until that which is hidden underneath – a layer of a contested past – is revealed. This research thus focuses on a conceptual, metaphorical, and performative exploration of the hidden to encourage a critical engagement with the notion of secrecy in relation to historical knowledge. It draws on innocuous representations and discarded memories to explore the material manifestations of presence and absence. By contextualising my collected objects and material interventions in an archival framework, the research raises questions about how institutional frameworks ideologically manipulate and control the archival process to decide what is recorded and thus remembered, in contrast to what is excluded and thus forgotten.

[9] Documentation of the entire collection of objects of the counter-archive and their catalogue entries can be found in the appendix.

1 THEN AND NOW

1.1 Contradictory evidence

In February 2012, Lukas Bärfuss, Swiss author and dramatic advisor, wrote a play entitled *Zwanzigtausend Seiten* [Twenty thousand pages], which was directed by Lars-Ole Walburg and premiered at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich. At the beginning of the play, a box full of written reports is thrown out the window by a historian gone mad. The box falls on the head of the main character, Tony, leading him to unintentionally memorise the information from its 20,000 pages. Tony knows the content of every page in every volume, and even though the report's findings were previously unknown to man, nobody wants to hear Tony's newfound knowledge. He increasingly suffers from remembering every horrible detail, such as a letter by the Jewish refugee Oskar H., who was sent to Auschwitz from the Swiss border.[10] The box filled with 20,000 pages in Bärfuss' play refers to the reports published by the ICE at the turn of the century. However, the play is not about the specific findings of the ICE but rather about a lack of historical consciousness, an exploration of societal remembering and forgetting, and is thus a critique of Switzerland's disengagement with its past (Keller, 2012).

As previously discussed in the Introduction, the Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War (ICE) was founded by the Swiss parliament because of considerable international pressure following a lawsuit by the Jewish Congress in 1995. The Commission obtained legal access privilege to all documents and files relating to 'the fate of assets which reached Switzerland as a result of the National Socialist Regime' (ICE 2002, p. 9). Their reports covered various aspects of Switzerland's collaboration with the Nazis and Swiss attempts to hide it to shirk accountability, such as the selling of looted art, hidden transfers, foreign trade policy, and various other forms of financial relations. Furthermore, the ICE thoroughly investigated the cases of dormant accounts and exposed the country's careless asylum politics (ICE, 2002). Although the ICE uncovered countless collaborative aspects, Switzerland's integral role as a gold hub during the war was the most severe discovery (Ludi, 2006). Research about Switzerland's involvement

[10] The recount of Oskar H.'s experience is not fictional; he was a Jewish refugee who was denied asylum in Switzerland in 1938. His tragic fate was uncovered as part of the ICE's investigation (ICE, 1999, p. 128).

in gold transactions during the Second World War has been carried out since the 1960s; however, due to the ICE's unlimited access to all the bank archives, their reports uncovered extensive new evidence.[11] The ICE issued several interim reports, published their 25 studies as books in either German or French, and concluded their research with the publication of a final report in 2002 (ICE, 2002).[12] Even though the ICE based their analysis on historical and legal evidence, their findings were only successful on the fringes.

According to the Commission's president, Jean Francois-Bergier, Swiss politicians demonstrated a lack of interest and avoided debates about the Commission's research (Wurz, 2007). Another commission member and colleague of Bergier, historian Jacob Tanner (2003, p. 275), referred to the ICE investigation as a 'Schadensbegrenzungsmassnahme' [measure to limit damages] to circumvent further international scrutiny. According to Bergier, the Swiss public – especially the younger generations – initially demonstrated a great interest in this critical re-examination of Swiss history; countless events were organised to discuss the Commission's findings, and the touring exhibition of the reports proved successful (Wurz, 2007). The exhibition encompassed various facets of the ICE's investigation and – according to Bergier – illustrated the findings of their final report ('Tagesschau – Ausstellung', 2003). However, as demonstrated by the study by Burgermeister and Peter, Switzerland's role during the Second World War is still contested among different generations.

In 2000, the Diplomatic Studies Programme of the University of Leicester published the lecture series, *The Diplomacy of Image and Memory: Swiss Bankers and Nazi Gold*, by Professor Brian Hocking. In his lectures, Hocking (2000, p. 13) exemplifies the vital role that the image of a country plays in the 'establishing of identity'. The ICE's findings thus presented an 'attack on the traditional image of the country as a neutral state whose domestic and international credentials were unimpeachable'

[11] For research published prior to the ICE reports, see Bonjour (1970-1976), Frei (1969), Bourgeois (1974), Utz (1980), Durrer (1984), Jost (1986), Perrenoud (1987/1988), Tanner (1986), and Rings (1996).

[12] See Bonhage (2001), Bonhage, Lussy and Perrenoud (2001), Fleury and Kropf (2001), Forster (2001), Francini, Heuss, and Kreis (2001), Frech (2001), Hauser (2001), Hug (2002), Huonker and Ludi (2001), Imhof *et al.* (2001), Karlen *et al.* (2002), Kleisl (2001), König (2001), Lussy, Bonhage and Horn (2001), Meier *et al.* (2002), Perrenoud *et al*., 2002), Perrenoud (2002), Perrenoud and López (2002), Ruch, Rais-Liechti and Peter (2001), Spuhler (2002), Straumann and Wildmann (2001), Thürer and Haldemann (2001a), Uhlig *et al.* (2001), Unabhängige Expertenkommission Schweiz – Zweiter Weltkrieg (2002), and Zeugin and Sandkühler (2001).

and called into question 'fundamental aspects of their identity' (Hocking, 2000, p. 10). The research of the ICE directly contradicted the collective memory and experience shaped by the dominant narrative of the Swiss population. In his book *Die Schweiz, das Gold und die Toten* [Switzerland, the Gold and the Dead], Swiss sociology professor Jean Ziegler (1997) reflects on how the revelations of Switzerland's complicity personally affected his father, who was part of the so-called 'Aktivdienstgeneration' [generation serving in the Swiss military during the war]. Ziegler (1997, loc 412) describes how his father and his entire generation were terribly deceived by the people in power in Switzerland. Further focusing on this betrayal, he writes about the hundreds of thousands of men who stood armed at the border for years, ready to give their lives in the fight against Nazis barbarism, and how they all believed that Hitler did not dare to attack Switzerland because he feared its powerful and sacrificial army (Ziegler, 1997, loc 450.).

Such feelings of betrayal and deception reveal the broad impact and success of Switzerland's carefully crafted wartime memory and expose its integral role as an identity signifier. Among the many critics of the ICE, the contemporaries were the most outspoken. They claimed to have epistemologically superior access to the past based on their personal experiences and memories and critiqued the commission for not involving their recounts in the inquiry (Ludi, 2013).[13] While oral history can play an integral role in contributing to an understanding of the past, in the context of Switzerland, whose financial collaboration with the Nazis was broadly hidden from the public, such experiences need to be considered through a lens of incomplete knowledge – forcefully imposed – through the hiding of information. In this context, it becomes evident that collective memory is always political because our perception of the past is intrinsically linked to the information that is made available to us.

Besides the findings of the ICE, the rhetoric and the *Reduit-Mythos* continued to be celebrated. On 5 September 2009 – seven years after the publication of the ICE's final report – then Federal Councillor and head of the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS), Ueli Maurer, gave a speech at the

[13] As a response to the non-involvement of contemporaries in the ICE's investigation, the Swiss filmmaker Frédéric Gonseth initiated the association *Archimob* – abbreviated from *Archives de la mobilisation* [archives of the mobilisation] – in 1998. For *Archimob* Gorenth collaborated with over 40 historians to conduct and film interviews with 555 contemporaries, talking about their experience of the Second World War in Switzerland. The catalogue of the *Archimob* archive is accessible online, and the interviews were exhibited in 15 Swiss cities (Archimob, no date).

commemorative event to mark the 70th anniversary of the mobilisation for war on 2 September 1939. His speech was titled *Widerstand fürs freie Vaterland – Dank den Frauen und Männern, die unserem Land Frieden und Freiheit bewahrt haben* [Resistance for a free fatherland – thanks to the women and men who have preserved peace and freedom for our country]. In his speech, Maurer thanks the *Aktivdienstgeneration,* for if it had not been for them, he would not have been able to grow up in an intact and undamaged country, but instead he was able to grow up in a country free of rubble and ruins (Maurer, 2009). Maurer also addressed criticism that had been voiced 20 years earlier, on the 50th anniversary of the mobilisation, which equated the commemoration with a glorification of the beginning of the war on 1 September 1939, when the Nazis attacked Poland. According to Maurer, such a critique ignores factual historical information and amounts to 'Geschichtsblindheit' [historical blindness] because it equates perpetrator and victim (Maurer, 2009). Maurer's choice of words – *Geschichtsblindheit* – when describing the critics of the commemorative mobilisation event – is especially significant when considering that his glorifying speech about Switzerland's military service during the war recycles the same rhetoric used by the Swiss government in the post-war years and blatantly ignores the ICE's research carried out in the previous decade. Maurer's speech shows how the glorification of Switzerland's position during the war – the *Reduit-Mythos* – is corroborated in Switzerland's memory politics through nostalgic tales of the past.

Furthermore, it reveals the reductive power of the binary classification of victim and perpetrator and provides a space to apply Rothberg's previously discussed concept of the *implicated subject*. Switzerland's integral participation in the gold trade with the Nazis, and the accompanying profit gained from these transactions, further emphasises the importance of such a critical framework and finding a different approach to engage with the past. Before focusing on the main aspects of secrecy, memory, and the archive that inform my practice-led research, it is crucial to gain an overview of the complex and multi-layered history of Switzerland's involvement in the gold trade with the Nazis and the subsequent memory politics in post-war Switzerland.

1.2 The Nazi's bankers

The original strategy of the Nazis to become completely self-sufficient by the 1940s was unsuccessful, and due to the failure of this plan, they became heavily reliant on the import of raw materials. Moreover, the untimely start of the war in 1939 – as opposed to the extensively planned military deployment three to four years later – presented a further challenge for the Germans. They were not adequately prepared and were faced with a considerable deficit in imported commodities after the outbreak of the war (James, 1998).[14]

Furthermore, because the Reichsmark became worthless after the outbreak of the war, the Germans were forced to acquire freely convertible currency or use gold to pay for the import of essential goods from other countries (ICE, 1998, p. 24).[15] Until 1941, major Swiss commercial banks were heavily involved in the gold transactions with the Nazis.[16] However, following a request to conduct their gold transactions exclusively through the Swiss National Bank (SNB), the Reichsbank ceased its transactions with Swiss commercial banks.[17]

These gold transactions with the SNB were essential for the Third Reich, allowing them to exchange gold for hard currency to buy and ensure the continuous supply of crucial goods for their warfare (Hocking, 2000).[18] However crucial for the Nazis, the Swiss were also profiting from this close financial bond – putting the country in a strategic position in the European gold trade – and securing the gold cover of the Swiss franc (Rings, 1996). Switzerland's role in the wartime gold trade became even more significant in 1941 following the blockade of continental European assets in

[14] These imported materials included bauxite, iron ore, oil products, tungsten, and industrial diamonds. Switzerland supplied Germany with weapons and the necessary engineering tools for their warfare (James, 1998).
[15] The Swiss commercial banks bought Escudos in exchange for Swiss Francs from the Portuguese central bank in the first two years of the war. The Nazis would then buy the Escudos from the Swiss Commercial Banks in exchange for gold and use it to buy tungsten in Portugal. Afterwards, the Portuguese central banks exchanged the high amount of Swiss valuta for gold with the SNB (UEK, 1999, p. 10).
[16] Other private financial institutions included lawyers, insurance companies and asset managers (ICE, 1998, p. 153).
[17] This was agreed upon because 'Switzerland's role as a hub for international trade in gold and foreign currency had brought about a decline in gold reserves that undermined the country's exchange rate policy' (ICE, 1998, p. 191).
[18] One example is the import of tungsten, which was predominantly mined in Portugal, and was a highly sought-after commodity for the Nazis. Portugal refused to accept German gold in exchange for tungsten from 1942 onwards. However, the Reichsbank could rely on the willingness of the SNB to exchange their gold for hard currencies, thus allowing the Third Reich to acquire 63% of its required tungsten from Portugal continually (Rings, 1996, p. 52).

the United States, which made the Swiss franc the only freely convertible currency in the world:

> It therefore took on functions previously performed by the dollar and, before that, by the British pound. Gold and franc operations became an important part of Switzerland's elaborate network of financial and economic ties with Germany and Italy, the Allied countries, and neutral countries (ICE, 1998, p. 12).

Switzerland became Germany's most important financial partner; 79% of the Reichsbank's gold shipments were sent to Switzerland, of which 13% were traded with Swiss commercial banks and the remaining 87% with the SNB, totalling approximately 1.7 billion Swiss francs in 1945 (ICE, 1998, p. 191). Considering inflation, this equals to approximately 8.9 billion Swiss francs in 2023 (Federal Statistical Office, 2024).[19]

The SNB's indispensable role for the Nazis becomes apparent in the interim report of the ICE (1998, p. 129):

> Important representatives of the Third Reich as well as neutral observers mentioned again and again the substantial significance of the Swiss franc for the German armaments industry.

Another example revealing the significance of their financial relations with Switzerland for the Nazis can be found in an account by the Third Reich's Minister of Economics, Karl Clodius, quoting a statement by Minister of Economic Affairs and President of the German Reichsbank, Walther Funk, in which he said that he 'could not continue even for two months without carrying out foreign exchange transactions in Switzerland' (ICE, 1998, p. 130).

In 1943, the Reichsbank corroborated the central importance of the SNB when rejecting polemics in the newspaper *Das Reich*, published weekly by Joseph Goebbels, the chief of Nazi propaganda, which used the term 'Goldland Schweiz' – 'gilded country' (UEK, 2002, p. 38; ICE, 1998, p. 25). A year later, the Reichsbank further stressed how damaging an 'economic war' with Switzerland would be, arguing that without Switzerland's support in converting gold into Swiss francs, it

[19] Calculation made using the inflation calculator by the Swiss Consumer Price Index, a service provided by the Federal Statistical Office (2024).

would become impossible for the Nazis to acquire 'military and other non-commercial matters', and their 'gold would therefore be worthless for all purposes of interest' to them (ICE, 1998, p. 25). Germany could not risk sabotaging its crucial financial cooperation with the SNB; thus, invading Switzerland was not strategically feasible.

In January 1943, the Allies expressed concerns about 'looted assets from the Nazi-dominated territories' acquired under 'gross violation of international law' and urged the banks of neutral countries to halt financial dealings with the Reichsbank (ICE, 1998, p. 91; Vogler, 1984, p. 1). Consequently, most neutral countries participating in trades with the Third Reich and offering commodities in exchange for gold – such as Sweden and Portugal – stopped accepting the Reichbank's compromised gold. The SNB, however, became the Nazi's sole financial partner and pursued financial relations with the Reichsbank until the end of the war.[20] Even though the SNB was aware of the looted gold held by the Reichsbank by 1941, they continued to treat their financial dealings with them as nothing out of the ordinary (ICE, 1998, p. 192).

The Reichsbank also supplied the SNB with what U.S. attorney and diplomat Stuart Eizenstat and historian William Z. Slany (1997, p. xi) referred to as 'tainted gold', in their study titled *U.S. and Allied Efforts to Recover and Restore Gold and Other Assets Stolen or Hidden by Germany During World War II*. Processes of melting and remelting allowed the Nazis to co-mingle monetary gold with victim gold taken from individual civilians in occupied territories and from concentration camp victims. Such gold bars, mixed with victim gold, were sold to the SNB (ICE, 1998).

Before focusing on *tainted gold* and its moral implications, it is important to distinguish between the different kinds of gold sold to Switzerland by the Reichsbank throughout the war. Among the shipments were gold bars which had been legally acquired and were in the possession of the Reichsbank prior to 1933 (ICE, 1999, p. 8). However, these reserves were insignificant, and most of the gold

[20] The last shipment of gold from the Reichsbank to the SNB happened – with the consent of the Swiss Federal Council – on 13 April 1945, less than a month before the unconditional surrender of the Nazis on 8 May 1945 (ICE, 1998, p. 116).

shipped abroad was looted.[21] Based on the provenance of the looted gold, the ICE distinguished between three categories of gold sold to the SNB by the Reichsbank:

- Gold that was looted from other central banks by the Nazis during the war, such as those of Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands (UEK, 1999, p. 8).[22]

- Gold that was looted by the National Socialist Regime from 1938 onwards from private persons – including opponents of the government, but predominantly dispossessed Jews – in Germany and occupied territories (UEK, 1999, p. 8).

- Gold that was plundered from concentration camp victims, such as jewellery, wedding bands, and dental gold; this was also referred to as victim gold (UEK, 1999, p. 8).

[21] On 7 January 1939 – 9 months before the outbreak of the war – German Reichsbank director Dr Hjalmar Schlacht informed Hitler that the gold and foreign exchange reserves were exhausted (Rings, 1996, p. 35).
[22] According to the report by the ICE, the SNB received the highest amount of gold from this category.

1.3 Tainted gold

At the end of the war, U.S. troops found crates full of looted valuables of concentration camp victims. As well as wedding rings (Fig. 4), they also found 'watches, precious stones, eyeglasses, and gold teeth fillings' (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2017). SS-Hauptsturmführer Bruno Melmer strategically looted and collected victim gold in extermination camps in Eastern Europe and shipped it to the Reichsbank in Berlin.[23] Melmer collated more than $2.9 million worth of gold bars and coins.[24] Some Melmer gold bars remained unaltered, while others were remelted and co-mingled with Dutch gold in the Prussian Mint (ICE, 1998, p. 48). According to documentation found in the archives of the Reichsbank, unaltered Melmer gold bars with a total value of $134,428 were shipped to the 'Reichsbank's depositary at the SNB in Bern', three of which were sold directly to the SNB in January 1943 (ICE, 1998, p. 48).[25] However, considerably more Melmer gold was sold to the SNB co-mingled with looted Dutch gold. Here, '[i]t is not possible to determine the extent to which the Melmer bars, combined and smelted together with other gold products, were distributed among the newly-smelted bars' (ICE, 1998, p. 48).

[23] The stolen gold predominantly belonged to victims of the extermination camps Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and Lublin-Maidanek (ICE, 1998, p. 43).
[24] However, '[i]t would be incorrect to assume that the gold designated as "Melmer" included all of the gold stolen in the extermination and concentration camps' (ICE, 1998, p. 43).
[25] The remainder of these unaltered Melmer gold bars were sold to commercial banks in Germany, Degussa, and the Italian Aerospace Network (ICE, 1998, p. 48).

Fig. 4 *A soldier dips his hands into a crate full of rings confiscated from prisoners in Buchenwald and found by American troops in a cave adjoining the concentration camp* (1945) (via the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Because the funds of the Reichsbank were exhausted, 'victim gold became an important source of foreign exchange for the Third Reich' (ICE, 1998, p. 191). At the beginning of the war, many European central banks transported their gold depositories overseas to protect their gold holdings, and only the absolute minimum for day-to-day operations was kept in the vaults (Rings, 1996, p. 47).[26]

It was common knowledge among the central banks that the Reichsbank did not have the supposedly 'German' gold bars it was selling abroad at the beginning of the war (Rings, 1996, p. 47).[27] Even though SNB authorities were aware of the precarious provenance of the looted gold in Germany, they 'made no effort to distinguish between legally obtained and looted gold supplied by the Reichsbank' (ICE, 1998, p. 192). The governing board of the SNB even deliberated hiding its

[26] In 1940, the US received gold shipments worth 21 billion Swiss francs from European central banks (Rings, 1996, p. 47).
[27] The SNB also hid some of its gold in the national redoubts: the military fortifications in the Swiss mountains.

tracks through a process of 'melting down and recasting gold received from Germany' (ICE, 1998, p. 192).[28] Therefore, they were considering a similar approach to the one the Nazis were taking with the remelting of victim gold.

In 1943, the SNB became nervous about assuming responsibility and about the potential repercussions of their continued transactions with the Third Reich.[29] In internal meeting minutes, it becomes apparent that the SNB governing board was developing a defence strategy to 'refute Allied accusations' (ICE, 1998, p. 192). They brought forward three arguments; firstly, they claimed that at the time of acquisition, they believed that the gold from the Reichsbank 'was of impeccable provenance' and thus acquired in 'good faith' (ICE, 1998, p. 192). Secondly, they put forward the argument of Swiss neutrality, arguing that they were following its principles in carrying out gold transactions with both the Axis powers and the Allies. Lastly, they argued that the continued transactions with the Reichsbank mitigated the 'risk of a German invasion' (ICE, 1998, p. 192). Secrecy was thus not only an intrinsic aspect of Nazi policies in relation to their economic warfare but also played an integral role in the internal politics of the SNB to hide their complicity.

That the SNB's failure to assume responsibility for their acquisition of precarious gold had – apart from implicated complicity – direct consequences on the general population becomes evident in their selling of gold on the domestic market. During the war, the steadily growing gold holdings of the SNB created a risk of inflation, thus leading them to start selling gold coins to the Swiss population. These gold coins – Lator coins – were acquired by the SNB from Germany, which had previously looted them from the vaults of the Belgian central bank. In the meeting minutes of an SNB board meeting, it becomes evident that these coins were not only sold to combat inflation but also to get rid of these 'dubious holdings as quickly as possible' (ICE, 1998, p. 92). Internal knowledge of the suspicious origin of the coins is also further confirmed in the meeting minutes of the bank committee

[28] Whether such a process of re-founding gold bars took place could not be proven by the ICE (1998, p. 133, footnote 304).
[29] The extent to which federal officials were involved in the decision-making of the SNB is difficult to establish. While there was a 'close cooperation' during the war, both sides issued blame in the post-war years (ICE, 1996, p. 129). The federal government condemned the SNB for withholding 'important information on gold transactions with the Reichsbank', while the SNB criticised the government for its failure to provide concrete guidance in relation to the Allied warnings about the German gold operations in 1943 (ICE, 1998, p. 129).

meeting in November 1943, when Paul Rossy, member of the SNB Governing Board, said the following:

> The British and American threat of investigating the provenance of neutral gold holdings at the end of the war is perhaps a certain risk for anyone buying gold today. The danger is more of a theoretical nature. In reality, it hardly exists at all, as it is virtually impossible to identify gold coins so as to hold their owners responsible. Unlike banknotes, coins, which are not numbered, disappear in the overall circulation like drops of water in a river (ICE, 1998, p. 92).

However, in this context, the coins' provenance could be traced because the German pre-war holdings of gold coins were known, and the Lator coins and the number of coins acquired exceeded these holdings.[30] Ignoring such suspicions of illegal acquisition, and even withholding concrete knowledge, comprises the buyer of such Lator coins; they are deliberately made an accomplice in the precarious financial cooperation between the SNB and the Reichsbank.[31] However, the Swiss population was not only deceived by the acquisition of looted gold bought on the domestic market but also by disinformation circulated by the Swiss government in the post-war years, which demonstrated a blatant lack of engagement with the financial and moral consequences of Switzerland's function as the Nazis' bankers during the war.

[30] While the provenance of the coins was established, the provenance of the gold used for these coins is still unknown because the origin of gold cannot be traced; I will write more about this in Chapter 2.
[31] As mentioned in my Preface and Introduction, the risk of becoming – as per Rothberg's definition (2019) – an *implicated subject* to Switzerland's financial collaboration with the Nazis exists to this day through the purchasing of *Vreneli.*

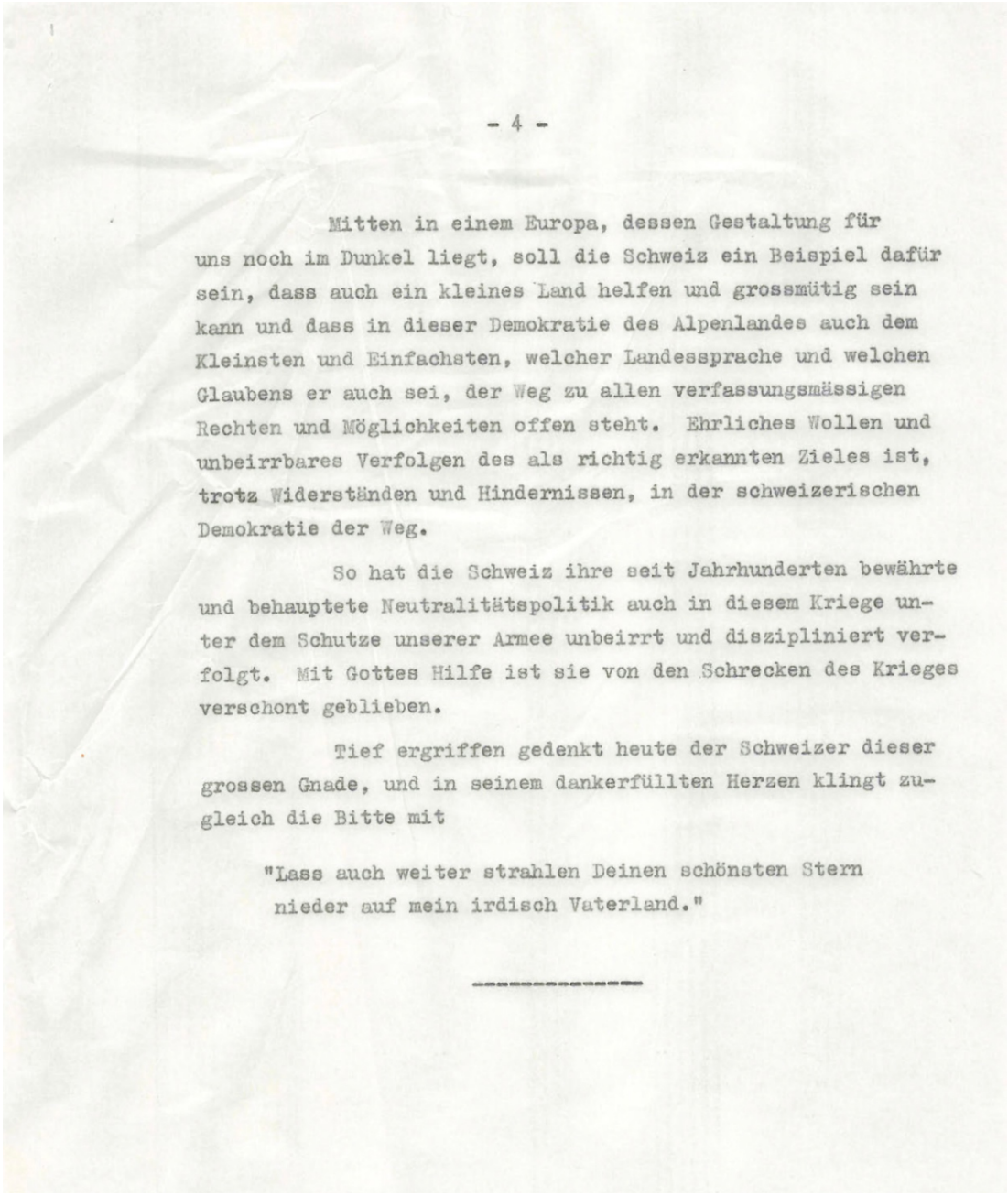
1.4 Patriotic wartime memory

After the war, in 1946, the Washington Accord between the Allies and the Swiss sought to settle matters related to the acquisition of gold from the Reichsbank by the SNB, and the Swiss frozen assets were released in the United States. The accord obligated the Swiss to return looted gold worth 250 million Swiss francs and to contribute 50 million Swiss francs in reparations to a fund supporting the resettlement of war refugees. Even though legally obliged, the Swiss failed to meet the terms of the contract and repeatedly raised objections. They did not return the looted gold to the Netherlands – although this was its proven provenance – and instead of the previously agreed 50 million, the Swiss only paid 20 million into the refugee resettlement fund (Slany and Eizenstat, 1997, p. viii). After several negotiations, a final agreement was reached in 1952, although only because the difficulties of the Cold War outweighed continued debates with the Swiss (Hocking, 2000, p. 9).[32] Slany and Eizenstat (1997, p. vii) describe Switzerland's failed adherence to the Washington Accord and their continuing attempts to renegotiate as a persisting '"business as usual" attitude', which was 'most inexplicable' after the war. Referring to the ignorance of the ethical implications of the financial relations between Switzerland and the Third Reich, they wrote: 'Neutrality collided with morality; too often being neutral provided a pretext for avoiding moral considerations' (Eizenstat and Slany, 1997, p. v).

The Swiss government not only refused to take responsibility in diplomatic negotiations but also concealed its financial complicity with the Nazis from the general public. Instead of critically engaging with their past and participating in rebuilding efforts, Swiss politicians portrayed the country as an innocent island in the heart of Europe. According to their post-war rhetoric, the country was successfully protected by the steadfastness of the Swiss Army and the territorial challenges deriving from Switzerland's mountainous landscape; the indispensable role the SNB played in the financial transactions of the Third Reich was not disclosed (Cowell, 1996; Rings, 1996).

[32] The SNB published a report in 1946 on a par with the Washington Agreement, which, however, 'ignored embarrassing questions about the SNB and political institutions, or simply provided rationalizations' (ICE, 1998, p.13).

To mark the end of the war in May 1945, Federal Councillor Eduard von Steiger addressed the Swiss public (Fig. 5). In his speech, Steiger thanks the Swiss people for their persistent will, praises the strength and endurance of the Swiss Army, and highlights supposed humanitarian efforts taken by Switzerland to alleviate the hardship of those in need. He describes the resonating evil of individuals who, through their arrogance, violence, and deceit ruined even hard-working and capable nations, before clarifying that this was not the case with Switzerland because the mission of the Swiss is to help, to alleviate need, and to do good (Steiger, 1945). Such a statement is highly ironic, considering that the cooperation of a very small number of individuals and their subsequent cover-up has deceived and lastingly impacted the collective memory of a nation. Instead, Steiger emphasised the role of the Swiss Army in his speech, noting that Switzerland had continued to pursue its policy of neutrality, which had been maintained for centuries. He further stresses that this war was no different, because of the unswerving and disciplined efforts of the Swiss Army, which was spared the horrors of the war with God's help (Steiger, 1945).



- 4 -

Mitten in einem Europa, dessen Gestaltung für uns noch im Dunkel liegt, soll die Schweiz ein Beispiel dafür sein, dass auch ein kleines Land helfen und grossmütig sein kann und dass in dieser Demokratie des Alpenlandes auch dem Kleinsten und Einfachsten, welcher Landessprache und welchen Glaubens er auch sei, der Weg zu allen verfassungsmässigen Rechten und Möglichkeiten offen steht. Ehrliches Wollen und unbeirrbares Verfolgen des als richtig erkannten Zieles ist, trotz Widerständen und Hindernissen, in der schweizerischen Demokratie der Weg.

So hat die Schweiz ihre seit Jahrhunderten bewährte und behauptete Neutralitätspolitik auch in diesem Kriege unter dem Schutze unserer Armee unbeirrt und diszipliniert verfolgt. Mit Gottes Hilfe ist sie von den Schrecken des Krieges verschont geblieben.

Tief ergriffen gedenkt heute der Schweizer dieser grossen Gnade, und in seinem dankerfüllten Herzen klingt zugleich die Bitte mit

"Lass auch weiter strahlen Deinen schönsten Stern
nieder auf mein irdisch Vaterland."

Fig. 5 *Ansprache des Bundespräsidenten* (1945)[33] by Eduard von Steiger

Historian and former member of the ICE, Regula Ludi (2006, p. 212), describes the celebration of the Swiss Army and the *Aktivdienstgeneration* in the context of Switzerland's wartime remembrance as a 'myth of national resistance'. To uphold the myth, 'instances of economic collaborations and political concessions to the Nazis' were concealed and humanitarian shortcomings were transformed 'into a narrative of achievements and generosity towards refugees' (Ludi, 2006, p. 212). According to Ludi (2006), these post-war memory politics ideologically underpinned

[33] [Speech by the Federal Councillor]

the national consciousness. They were strategically used as a 'metaphor for the challenges' during the Cold War era and thus remained unquestioned (Ludi, 2006, p. 212). Referring to Switzerland's constructed memory of the war, she uses the term 'patriotic wartime memories' – a phrase first coined by Belgian author Pierre Lagrou in his book *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation* (2000).

The Swiss post-war memory rhetoric specifically emphasised the land and its link with military resistance. According to Ludi (2006), using the Swiss landscape as a strong focus can be further attributed to the memory politics of the wartime commander of the Swiss Army, Henri Guisan. In the 1940s, following France's defeat by Germany, Guisan held the infamous 'Rütli gathering': 'a meeting of several hundred high-ranking officers on the Rütli, a meadow in the mountainous area of central Switzerland' (Ludi, 2006, p. 210) (Fig. 6). During this meeting, Guisan announced the controversial defensive plan for the *Réduit national* [the Swiss National Redoubt]. The plan for the *Réduit national* entailed the fortification of the central Swiss Alps as a retreat for the Swiss Army to defend the country against foreign invasion (Senn, 2010). Holding this meeting in this specific location – the Rütli – is especially significant because, according to a Swiss national myth, this was the place where the 'Rütlischwur' [the Rütli oath] was taken to solidify the foundation of the Old Swiss Confederacy 'in an act of resistance to feudal lords' (Ludi, 2006, p. 215). The significance of this location thus allowed Guisan to draw a connection to the 'popular Swiss mythology of freedom and independence' (Ludi, 2006, p. 211).[34] Furthermore, because of his skilful memory politics, Guisan became a symbol of Swiss resistance and was widely celebrated.

[34] The Rütli is an open field. Thus, gathering high-ranking military personnel in this location posed a considerable risk, making them vulnerable to an enemy's airstrike. Ludi (2006, p. 211) argues that taking that risk further 'reinforced the impression of the general's bravery'.

Fig. 6 *Auf der Rütliwiese versammelt General Henri Guisan die Armee-Offiziere zum Rütli-Rapport und erläutert den Grundgedanken des Réduits* (1940)[35] Photographed by Theo Frey

According to Ludi (2006, p. 213), '[r]epresentations of the past generally depend on a frame of reference informed by present needs, concerns, and values'. Therefore, the 'forging of national myths' offers a productive political tool for 'national self-definition' (Ludi, 2006, p. 213). Focusing on national myths consequently neglects an engagement with past wrongdoings. However, such memory politics are not unique to Switzerland but have been a 'common European pattern' (Ludi, 2006, p. 211). Countries would hide 'controversial aspects while emphasizing resistance at the cost of collaboration or adaption' (Ludi, 2006, p. 211). In her book *Censorship,* Professor of Media and Communication Sue Curry Jansen (1988, p. 29) offers a comprehensible explanation of historical negligence about critical reappraisals of national histories in 'capitalist spheres'. According to her, nations like Switzerland were using the unspeakable crimes of the Nazis like a 'cathartic sponge' to clean themselves of their own wrongdoings (Jansen, 1988, p. 29). Such ideological comparisons prohibit a critical engagement with historically and contemporarily committed crimes and violence by a nation. Jansen (1988, p. 26) further explains how, in order to construct a more favourable narrative, 'memories, documents and

[35] [General Guisan gathers army officers on the Rütli meadow for the Rütli Rapport and explains the fundamental idea of the National Redoubt]

testaments are filtered through perceptual linguistic, organizational, and hierarchical grids which are skewed by prevailing patterns of power-relations'. Such exertions of control over knowledge to pursue a political objective – like the forming of national myths – reveals how ‘power and knowledge are bound together in an inextricable knot’ (Jansen, 1988, p. 181).[36]

[36] I will further discuss how power and knowledge are linked in Chapters 3 and 5.

2 PREC(AR)IOUS METAL

2.1 Myth, tradition, and material properties

Gold is seen as a symbol of 'value, beauty, purity, greed and political power', holding an important status in history, and is considered the noblest metal (Barnard, 2019). It has played an influential role throughout history; during the dynasties of the pharaohs, gold 'gained a high religious significance' and was recognised as the metal of the Sun God; it was offered in the worship of gods and was buried with pharaohs to ensure a wealthy afterlife (Pieth, 2019, p. 34; Wagner, Rübel and Hackenschmidt, 2002, p. 121) (Fig. 7). Such spiritual connotations of gold are shared among the major religious groups, which use it for decorating artefacts and architecture, such as 'the domes and interiors of mosques, synagogues, temples and churches' (La Niece, 2009, p. 92). The spiritual and material characteristics of gold also feature prominently in alchemy; some alchemists focused on its chemical qualities, while others considered gold as a symbol of purity and incorporated it in their practice for their 'main pursuit was inner purification' (Roob, 2014, p. 14).[37]

[37] Apart from its representation of beauty, purity, and the divine, gold also symbolises the worthy and the desirable in language and is a prominent feature in sayings such as 'to strike gold', 'to be as good as gold', and 'to have a heart of gold' (*Cambridge international dictionary of idioms*, 2002, p. 157-158; p. 185).

Fig. 7 *A close view of the gold funerary mask of the pharaoh Tutankhamun* (2022) Photographed by Kenneth Garret

Anti-corruption expert and Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Basel Mark Pieth (2019) gives a brief overview of the history of gold in his book *Gold Laundering*. He dates the start of the fascination with gold back to ancient Egypt, 5000 BC, when 'settlers along the Nile found nuggets at the bottom of the seasonal river' (Pieth, 2019, p. 34). They discovered gold's malleability, started hammering it into leaves, and used it to create jewellery. Pieth (2019, p. 34) further explains how the strategic approach to locating gold sources and developing and

refining the mining process started during pharaonic times. Historical analyses of gold tomb decorations provided an insight into gold mining and separation processes in ancient Egypt; it revealed that these early methods and techniques share similarities with contemporary gold mining approaches. In ancient Egypt, trades were made by means of exchange, and while gold was not treated as a currency, it was used as a good in exchange for imports from other countries. However, such exchanges were solely carried out by the pharaohs, who oversaw and controlled the extraction and collection of gold (Pieth, 2019, p. 36). Before gold was minted into coins and became a means of financial exchange, it was 'used only for adornment and decoration', and 'most of the available gold was owned by monarchs and priests' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 10). In these contexts, gold was 'a medium for advertising power, wealth, eminence, and proximity to the gods' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 10). Following the invasion and the establishment of the Ptolemaic Kingdom, as well as the imperial province of Roman Egypt by the Roman Empire, the 'sovereign prerogative' over gold shifted (Pieth, 2019, p. 38). These imperial powers invented coinage, and gold became a currency. The increased demand for gold depleted gold mines in Europe.

Consequently, the Middle Ages faced a gold shortage during the 14th and 15th centuries, the 'Great Bullion Famine', and merchants travelling for trade – 'carrying sacks of gold and silver' – became lucrative targets for displaced peoples living in the woods (Pieth, 2019, p. 39). A private guarantee system was invented to circumvent the risk of being looted, allowing merchants to travel without their valuable load by obtaining a certificate (Pieth, 2019, p. 40). The Great Bullion Famine ended after Christoph Columbus 'discovered' the Americas and returned with precious stones and gold; the imperial greed was 'sparked', and the 'paradigm changed from trade to conquest' (Pieth, 2019, p. 42). European countries were captivated by the sheer potential of wealth that could be obtained; gold was declared the main objective, leading to violent wars and looting (Pieth, 2019, p. 42). Indigenous peoples were slaughtered, and their 'beautifully crafted artefacts' were sent back to Europe to be melted and recast as gold bars, destroying their craftsmanship and erasing their history (Pieth, 2019, p. 46).

Financial historian Peter L. Bernstein explains that the value of, and obsession with, gold partly stems from its scarcity; if it 'were more plentiful on earth (…) it would be

far less valuable and interesting, despite its unique physical attributes and beauty' (Bernstein, 2000, p. 9). Apart from its aesthetic allure, gold also has various unique material characteristics that further consolidated its status within societies throughout history. It is malleable, and thus – alongside its aesthetic appearance – lends itself to being shaped into forms, like jewellery and precious artefacts. According to a scientific researcher at the British Museum, Susan La Niece, because of this malleability – gold being a soft metal – copper and stones presented a more durable option for the making of weaponry and tools. La Niece argues that this might be the reason why gold only became significant for societies whose 'links between status and display were well developed' (La Niece, 2009, p. 8).

Furthermore, gold does not react with other substances; it is chemically inert and thus imperishable. It holds an intrinsic value; it can be melted and remelted countless times but does not cease to exist. Bernstein (2000, p. 3) illustrates: 'Unlike any other element on earth, almost all the gold ever mined is still around'.

2.2 A secret in itself

Gold does not degrade over time, making it an easily recyclable material; thus, the provenance of gold remains generally unchallenged (George, 2015). The process of mining gold often involves precarious methods and is the reason for human rights abuses. Because of that, it is classified as a conflict mineral under the Conflict Minerals Regulation of the EU, together with tin, tungsten, and tantalum. The regulation came into force in 2021 to 'stem the trade' in these minerals, 'which sometimes finance armed conflict or are mined using forced labour' (European Union, 2021). Gold and violence have always been connected because – as previously discussed – the hunger for gold has been the catalyst for many brutal wars in history beyond its violent extraction process (Pieth, 2019, p. 29). The value of gold is directly tied to its precious status in society and 'goes far beyond its properties as a metal or even its use in trade' (Pieth, 2019, p. 29). Pieth further illustrates the precarious conditions caused by the desire for gold:

> Gold plays a significant role in organised crime, money laundering and tax fraud. But the most visible and shocking risks in the gold supply chain are human rights violations: working conditions, the dispossession of indigenous populations, child labour, violence against women and many more (Pieth, 2019, p. 30).

Makeshift mines are known for precarious labour circumstances, employing processes harmful to human health and the environment, such as using hazardous mercury in the separation process – called amalgamation – to isolate the gold from the ore (Pieth, 2019, p. 20). At the beginning of his book, Pieth describes the dire conditions of *La Rinconada,* a mining town in the Peruvian Andes. It is the 'largest gold-mining shanty town', with a population of over 60,000 people (Pieth, 2019, p. 16). Air and water are polluted with mercury residue, stunting children's growth. Besides the dangerous health implications of mercury contamination, women live in particularly precarious conditions. They are banned from the mines and are either forced into prostitution or are carrying out labour – as '"pallaqueras" which roughly translates as "gold-pickers"' – on already heavily chemically contaminated leftovers from the amalgamation process (Pieth, 2019, p. 24; Taj, 2020) (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8 *A pallaquera searches for gold as she strikes rocks extracted from a mine* (2020) Photographed by Nacho Doce

When I attended a conference about recycled gold in Basel in October 2022, one of the panel members, Mariella Meyer, Senior Manager of Sustainable Markets at WWF, was asked what she would consider the ideal solution to mitigate environmental pollution and human rights issues deriving from gold mining. In her response, she emphasised that the only resolution of these issues would be to stop mining gold altogether (Meyer, 2022).

According to an article published by the media agency Swiss Radio and Television (SRF), the sustainability and ethical working conditions achieved by Fairtrade Gold are barely considered by goldsmiths or consumers. The estimated number of goldsmiths working with Fairtrade gold worldwide is only 250 (Siegert, 2021). While Fairtrade mines exist, and many NGOs advocate for a more responsible supply chain, the real 'gatekeepers' for achieving accountability and change are the refineries (Pieth, 2019, p. 30). However, it should also be considered how governmentally imposed regulations could facilitate more transparency in relation to the gold trade.

As previously discussed, once gold is melted, it is impossible to establish its provenance. The composition of a gold bar in the bank vault of the SNB could,

therefore, consist of blood gold mined in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Holocaust victim gold. Gold is a secret matter; its past is *hidden in plain sight*. There are many conceptual, material, and symbolic parallels between gold and the framework of my investigation. The material characteristics of gold – a secret in themselves – correlate with Switzerland's silenced past. At the same time, its untarnished quality and romanticised reputation mirror the idealised perceptions of the country, informed by its patriotic wartime memories. Therefore, the use of gold leaf in my research functions like a visual metaphor for hidden histories and idealised interpretations.

2.3 The Swiss and the gold

Switzerland only had a minute amount of naturally occurring gold, and its last goldmine – located in Ticino, in the southern part of Switzerland – was depleted and closed in 1961. Nonetheless, four of the seven largest gold refineries are on Swiss soil, and 50-70% of the gold refining worldwide occurs on Swiss territory, amounting to up to 3,000t of gold per year, making it 'the biggest gold trader in the world' (WWF, 2021; Pieth, 2019; Mariani and Nguyen, 2015). With such an instrumental position in the global gold market comes considerable responsibility. In 2018, the 'Society of Threatened Peoples (STP) Switzerland' – an NGO protecting the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples – handed in a claim based on the federal Freedom of Information Act, requesting information about the amount of raw gold imported by seven companies and two banks over four years, from 2014 to 2017. The Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS) granted the request; however, it was appealed by the four major Swiss refineries. In November 2023, the Federal Court eventually rejected the plea based on business and tax secrecy laws. Considered a key ruling, this decision by the Federal Court will inform future claims regarding transparency and the regulation of the provenance of imported unrefined gold (Vogel, 2023). Considering the essential role of Swiss refineries – processing unrefined gold in huge quantities – concerns about the unethical aspect of gold mining are an inherently Swiss problem. Transparency in the supply chain needs to be established to fight these issues and create lasting change.

In 2017, the consulting firm EBP published an expert study, commissioned by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), titled *Expert Study on the Swiss Gold Sector and related Risks of Human Rights Abuses.* For this study, EBP carried out 112 interviews with refineries and lobbyists and concluded that Switzerland is profiting from its respectable image as a gold hub because it is 'manufacturing excellence' and offering 'reliability, reputation, the Swiss brand, the secure and stable business environment, low financing and insurance costs, respect for confidentiality agreements, and clear custom regulation' (EBP, 2017, p. 112). The competent image of Switzerland is thus furthering its position in the global finance market. However, in correspondence with my research, just focusing on the image of Switzerland is misleading and reductive. Only focusing on high-quality production and reliability inevitably ignores the underlying issues, inasmuch as Swiss stereotypical souvenirs only perpetuate an idealised image of the nation

without depicting its complex socio-political structures. Pieth (2019, p. 198) stresses that Switzerland's importance in the global gold market not only stems from 'its attractive business environment and craftsmanship, but also its commercial opportunism', which comes at the cost of ethically and sustainably mined gold. Through this 'commercial opportunism', Switzerland has not only abetted human rights abuses and furthered the destruction of ecosystems; it has also undermined collective efforts to fight abuses of power and indiscriminate acts of violence (Pieth, 2019, p. 198).

This is not only evident in the SNB's disregard of Allied warnings about the provenance of Nazi gold but also in Switzerland's undermining of the UN-implemented sanctions against the South African apartheid regime through its continued import of South African gold. It is estimated that 80% of the imported South African gold was remelted in Swiss refineries and 'sold on the world market as "Swiss gold"' (Pieth, 2019, p. 198). Such a cover-up of unfavourable traces is still a problem today because there is no obligation to declare the country of origin for unrefined gold. The refinery of precious metals is considered a form of processing; the country in which the gold is processed will be declared its country of origin (Fischer and Froelicher, 2022). There is thus a lack of Swiss regulation to ensure ethically sourced gold. The Swiss refinery Valcambi could import gold from the previously mentioned gold mines in La Rinconada – gold which was mined under brutal and inhumane circumstances – melt and cast it into gold bars in its refinery in Ticino, and eventually sell and export it as neat gold bars marked with the Valcambi Suisse emblem, having Switzerland as its certified origin (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 *100 g gold bar 999,0* (2024) (via Valcambi Suisse)

An example of commercial opportunism in recent years is the continued import of Russian gold, even though Switzerland agreed to sanctions against Russia. Following the exclusion of Russian refineries from the London Bullion Market Association (LBMA) on 7 March 2022, the Swiss Precious Metal Control – part of the Federal Office for Customs and Border Security (FOCBS) – announced that Russian gold refined after 7 March 2022 would be excluded from trading in Switzerland. Nonetheless, in July 2022, the FOCBS flagged three tonnes of Russian gold imported into Switzerland. This import gained considerable international attention, forcing the Swiss government to release a statement. However, the Swiss government once again relied on legal argumentation, reasoning that the sanctions against Russian gold were aimed at third parties, such as banks and investors, not against institutions holding a smelter's licence. On this basis, the four gold refineries in Switzerland can continue to import unrefined Russian gold despite the sanctions. At a time when such sanctions should exert pressure on Russia because of its violent aggression against Ukraine, Switzerland continues to import one of Russia's

most significant export products (Christie, 2022).[38] It becomes evident, in a contemporary context, how past concerns about the questionable provenance of victim gold that found its way into the vaults of the SNB are fundamental issues of the present and the future.

[38] Furthermore, since the outbreak of the war, gold imports from the United Arab Emirates have increased. This is especially problematic because the UAE is famous for trading gold of precarious provenance. *Swissaid* – a Swiss relief organisation – voiced suspicion that Dubai is being used to cover the origin of the gold and is thus further facilitating the import of Russian gold into Switzerland (Fischer and Froelicher, 2022).

2.4 Gold and artistic practice

Gold in artistic practice and craft has a long tradition, as part of the pharaoh's funerary rituals in ancient Egypt, in decorating Islamic manuscripts and Buddhist relics, and in being applied to icons to visualise the 'divine light' (La Niece, 2009; Wagner, Rübel and Hackenschmidt, 2002, p. 121). In the 20th century, gold was also explored as a material by various artists for different purposes, such as the infamous *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* by Gustav Klimt (1907) (Fig. 10), or Joseph Beuys' performance at Documenta 7 in 1982, for which he melted a copy of the golden crown of Tsar Ivan the Terrible to cast a golden rabbit and a sun from it.

Fig. 10 *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907) by Gustav Klimt

American artist Robert Rauschenberg also incorporated gold into his practice. He was famous for combining sculpture and painting, an approach that he

called *Combine*. Through his *Combines*, Rauschenberg wanted to challenge the viewer's conception of traditional forms of painting or sculpture. He explored the 'gap between art and life' in his artworks and dissolved the restrictive conceptions separating them (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2015). By marrying conventional art materials and everyday objects – from canvases to newspaper clippings to taxidermy – he studied their recontextualisation to create a different experience of the incorporated materials and to invite new readings through their bizarre compositions (The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2015).

Throughout his artistic practice, Rauschenberg used a breadth of materials and approaches, initially beginning with monochrome paintings. During his studies at Black Mountain College in Asheville, North Carolina, Rauschenberg was taught by Josef and Anni Albers, both of whom had previously taught at the infamous German art school, Bauhaus. Rauschenberg's monochrome paintings were a response to the education of Josef Albers, who 'taught that one color was supposed to make the next color look better' (Rauschenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 34). However, Rauschenberg was more interested in the colours in their own right and began working on his black paintings (Rauschenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 34). These black paintings incorporated a technique of layering, which became a characteristic element of Rauschenberg's practice.

Adding layers onto a surface was also Rauschenberg's approach for his *Elemental Paintings.* However, in this context, he used atypical materials 'outside the realm of painting', such as grass, dirt, paper, and gold (Rauschenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 401). Here, he was interested in the 'matter of meaning' – the transformation of the artworks over time – the growing of the grass, the dirt which eventually started to mould, and the delicate gold leaf which 'fluttered and flaked' (Rauschenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 401). *Elementals* was a critique of hierarchical structures concerning artistic supplies and challenged the notion of paint as a superior material. For his golden *Elementals,* Rauschenberg questioned the value associated with gold by creating an equivalent for each, using toilet paper instead of gold leaf. This simple act was a way of him 'testing the market', because 'gold stays and toilet paper gets thrown away' (Rauschenberg *et al.*, 2016, p. 401).

Rauschenberg explored the symbolic connotation of materials, which he included in his art. Former collaborator and founder of *Graphicstudio*, an art studio at the University of South Florida, Donald Saff explained how Rauschenberg did not favour one material over another in his art: ‘There was no hierarchy of material. Dirt was as important as gold’ (Sinclair, 2019, p. 78) (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11 *Dirt Painting (for John Cage)* (ca. 1953) by Robert Rauschenberg

For the method of gilding, gold leaf is applied to a surface previously treated with oil size. After the application, the gold leaf, which does not stick to the surface, can be easily brushed off with a soft gilding brush. This is due to the delicacy of the gold leaf (2024), which is usually hammered to a thickness of 0.1 μm. In Rauschenberg’s gold paintings, the gold leaf is roughly applied and not brushed off, thus creating a fragile, transforming artwork. His messy application lends the artwork a sense of incompletion and turbulence. While gilded surfaces are generally never static because they reflect the light, the dynamic in Rauschenberg’s paintings derives from its rough surface. The painting is in constant flux because of its creases, gaps, and the jutting gold leaf (Fig. 12). Through this untraditional application of gold leaf, Rauschenberg managed to create a radical material transformation of gold, challenging its divine connotations by emphasising its fragility and robbing it of its

polished appeal through its unconventional application. He was not interested in the allure and beauty of the gold but rather in its impermanence as part of the artwork.

Fig. 12 *Untitled (Gold Painting)* (1955) by Robert Rauschenberg

Another artist working with gold leaf is French artist Yves Klein. In his practice he incorporated gold because he was interested in its spiritual connotations and its central role in alchemical praxis. Klein was taught by a gilder in London how to handle the delicate material in the late 1940s, and gold became, alongside blue and pink, a principal colour of his monochromes (Weitemeier, 2016, p. 69). For some of his *Monogold* paintings, which he started to create in the late 1950s, Klein used a similar approach to Rauschenberg; he applied the gold leaf so that it would not entirely stick to the wooden surface (Fig. 13). Instead, it is sticking out and would thus respond to the slightest movement. In other *Monogold* works, Klein treated the wooden surface to create slight irregularities, which were still visible through the thin layer of gold leaf, thus giving the gilded surface a unique dynamic (Weitemeier, 2016, p. 70).

Fig. 13 *Untitled Monogold (MG 8)* (1962) by Yves Klein

Eventually, Klein became interested in the immaterial and created *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility* (1959), which he sold in exchange for gold:

> Seven series of these pictorial immaterial zones all numbered exist already. For each zone the exact weight of pure gold which is the material value correspondent to the immaterial acquired (Klein, 2007, p.182).

The transaction for such an immaterial zone in exchange for gold was only completed once Klein had thrown half of it either into 'the ocean, into a river or some other place in nature where this gold cannot be retrieved by anyone' (Klein, 2007, p. 182). However, as previously established, gold is imperishable and thus, in its continuous materiality, stands in direct contrast to Klein's zones of the immaterial.[39]

Fig. 14 *Ex-voto dedicated to Santa Rita de Cascia* (1961) by Yves Klein

Klein harboured a deep interest in rituals and considered religious customs an intrinsic part of a fulfilled life. In 1961, Klein created an ex voto dedicated to Santa Rita de Cascia, a monastery in Cascia, Italy (Fig. 14). Since childhood, Klein had felt drawn to and protected by Saint Rita and thus dedicated this votive offering to her (Weitemeier, 2016, p. 70). The ex voto is made up of a plastic box containing pigments of the colour pink and Klein's infamous blue, the international Klein Blue (I.K.B), as well as gold leaf, a note, and three gold ingots previously acquired through his sales of the *Zones of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility*. Klein did not disclose his identity when he delivered the votive offering in the early 1960s, and the ex-voto was only rediscovered during restoration works of the monastery in 1980 (Weitemeier, 2016, p. 70).

[39] I will analyse Klein's engagement with the *immaterial* in more depth in Chapter 3.2.4.

In contrast to the works of Rauschenberg and Klein, artist Lisa Barnard has not directly included gold in her practice but has instead created a multi-layered research project – made up of text, archival documents, and photographs – to map the various facets of gold and its socio-political impact. Barnard travelled to different places globally (Fig. 15) and eventually published her multi-faceted project in a book and a website (discontinued), as well as presenting it in exhibitions (Fig. 16). In her project, she documents the horrendous conditions in gold mines, the significance of gold in a technological context, and its symbolic characteristics and mystical stories. Barnard was originally inspired to begin her research after the financial crisis in 2008 because of its 'exposure of the Western world's determination to accumulate wealth' (Barnard, 2019, p. 189).

Fig. 15 *Artisan gold-mining tunnel, Andes, Peru* (2016) by Lisa Barnard

Resembling an archive – dedicated to mapping the diversified notions of gold – Barnard's project explores its material application and impact on humanity. In the context of gold's materiality, the work could be read as an attempt to fill the gap originating from its physicality: an absent history of its own material provenance. The book starts with the mystical tales around the material and progresses into the

violent reality brought about by the yearning for gold.[40] It is subdivided into seven chapters, and each segment contains a different story – ranging from historical facts to the retelling of legends – through which the different aspects of gold are explored.

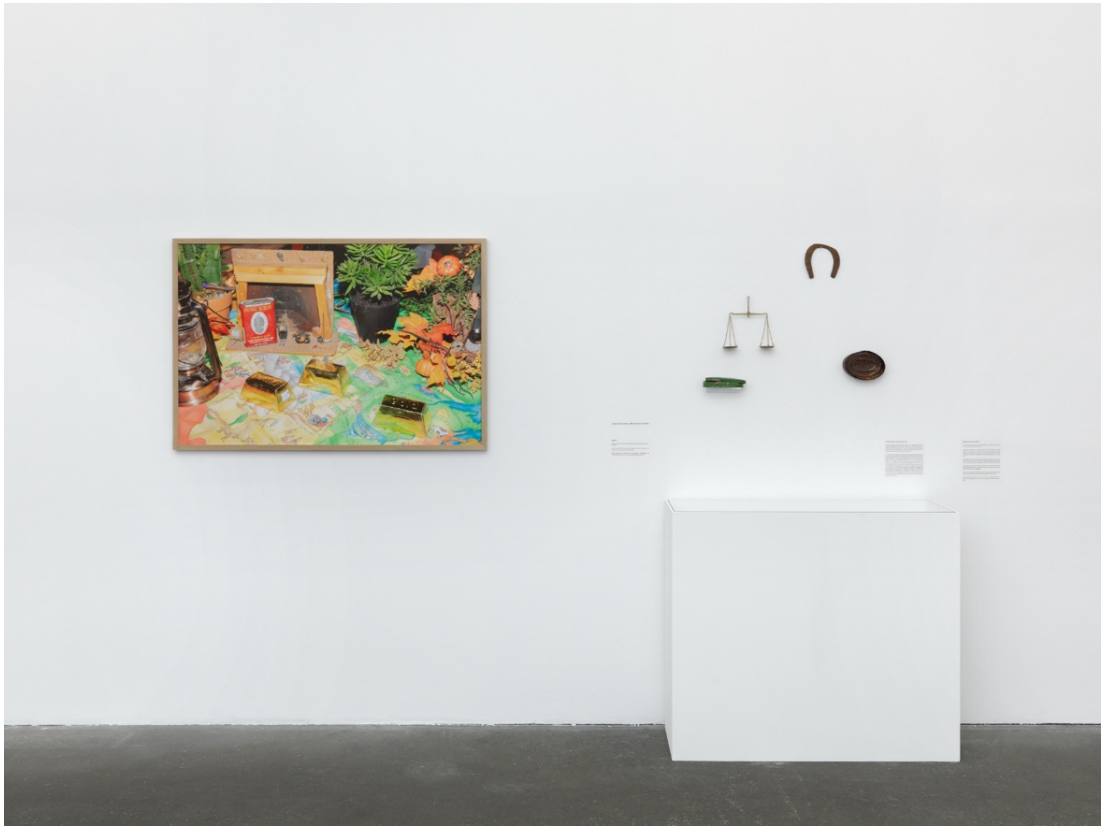


Fig. 16 Exhibition view of *The Canary and the Hammer* (2016) by Lisa Barnard at the Centre de la Photographie Genève, Switzerland, 2022

Because of its multi-layered character, *The Canary and the Hammer* reflects the complex socio-political impacts of gold and attitudes towards it in order to unpack its complexity and offer a more critical reading of the noblest metal. In her project, Barnard embraces stories 'too vast to comprehend' (Barnard, 2019, p. 198). She considers the addressing of 'themes that are invisible, unfathomable, chaotic and unimaginable', a necessity to 'create order out of the chaos, bring a voice to those who are silenced, and reflect on contradictions inherent in the infinite wonder of gold' (Barnard, 2019, p. 198). The fragmented character of *The Canary and the Hammer* thus deliberately fails to present an 'overview of the history, economic significance, and political implications of gold' (Barnard, 2019, p. 189). Instead, Barnard embraces the 'difficulty of organising fragments of the past and present into

[40] Other photographers have documented the violence of gold mining, such as the project *Serra Pelada* (1982) by photojournalist Sebastião Salgado.

one articulate and truthful event'; she invites new questions and further mirrors the convoluted relationships with – and various applications of – gold (Barnard, 2019, p. 189).

Gold is significant in my practice for different reasons. Firstly, because of its relevance in a historical context. Secondly, because of its application as a decorative element to embellish architectural structures, artworks and objects. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, 'to embellish' means 'to make something more beautiful by adding something to it' or 'to add or change some details of a story, usually to make it more interesting or exciting' ('embellish', 2024). When considered in the context of Switzerland's Reduit-Mythos, this notion is thus also applicable because the Swiss *embellished* the story of their true wartime involvement by highlighting specific aspects while altering and silencing others. Therefore, using gold leaf for material interventions draws attention to how Switzerland's history was manipulated through the embellishing of stories in order to create a dominant narrative. Thirdly, gold holds further metaphorical significance because it essentially represents a secret and thus closely relates to the notion of secrecy as an inherent characteristic of Switzerland's post-war memory politics. Lastly, despite its precarious socio-political status, gold mirrors the readings of supposed Swiss innocence because of its compelling effect. Returning to the term *tainted gold* – introduced by Eizenstat and Slany (1997) to refer to gold bars mixed with victim gold – adding gold leaf to an object, in my research, is *tainting* its appearance while simultaneously obfuscating some of its characteristics. These objects thus draw on the allure of gold to draw people in, raising questions about their materiality and effect and instrumentalising them as a subversive tool to challenge pre-existing misconceptions about Switzerland. Using gold serves different purposes in my investigation and poses questions about Switzerland's involvement in the contemporary gold trade. The provenance of the gold used in my research is unknown; I deliberately decided against the use of Fairtrade gold because I wanted to further draw on the conceptual exploration of the secret regarding the provenance of the gold. The gold leaf could thus potentially be gold violently looted from the Inca Empire by Francisco Pizarro in 1533 (Pieth, 2019,

p. 45).[41] Any gilded object in my research, no matter how innocent it might appear, thus carries an intrinsic violence (Fig. 17).

Fig. 17 *Gold leaf used in research* (2021)

[41] In Chapter 3, I will elaborate further on the importance of the unknown in relation to my practical and theoretical research.

3 HIDDEN POLITICS

3.1 Secrecy and power

As established in the introduction, secrecy is a fundamental aspect of contemporary Switzerland, in the form of bank secrecy, the materiality of unrefined gold and its provenance, as well as the historical framework. In this context, notions of silence were an inherent characteristic of the concealment of collaborative efforts – when 'Swiss federal authorities suppressed the dissemination of knowledge' – and a public policy during the war (Ludi, 2006, p. 221). The Swiss government put press censorship and media control in place and promoted silence as a defensive tool to undermine German espionage efforts and protect Swiss military strategies (Kreis, 2011; Fuhrer, 1982). The use of secrecy was thus layered and found in different areas of application; it represented a powerful tool to protect Switzerland from external military threats, avoid national scepticism and prevent international accountability. Furthermore, the Swiss implemented army censorship to prevent 'the publication of information on the Holocaust' (Ludi, 2006, p. 221) (Fig. 18).

Fig. 18 *Wer nicht schweigen kann schadet der Heimat – Qui ne sait se taire nuit à son pays – Chi no sa tacere nuoce alla patria* (1940)[42] Design by Max Bucher

[42] [Those who cannot remain silent harm the homeland]

Secrecy is a tool of control and, thus, is power. However, solely focusing on this interconnection would reduce secrecy to a condemnable instrument of authority and disregard its varied scope of application. From an epistemological point of view, the secret is a complex and multifaceted word with various meanings and connotations. The philosopher and ethicist Sissela Bok (1982, p. 7) discusses numerous terms for 'secret' in different languages to illustrate the diverse 'shadings' of the word – describing 'something sacred, intimate, private, unspoken, silent, prohibited, shameful, stealthy, or deceitful.' While 'hidden' is the common denominator of these terms, Bok (1982, p. 27) stresses their distinct meanings and individual applications. She rejects absolute readings of secrecy 'that invite approval or disapproval'. Instead, we should study its various forms and meanings individually to draw conclusions about its moral considerations (Bok, 1982, p. 27).

This ambivalence in the reading of secrecy is evident in the context of the *political* secret. Professor of German and Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna, Eva Horn (2011), has engaged extensively with the political secret to explore its genealogy and to unpack its complex structures. Through her historical and theoretical mapping, Horn illustrates the ambivalent 'political status' of the secret and its shift from being regarded as an essential, governmental instrument for the conservation of power in the past to a growing suspicion towards secrecy, triggered by 'the modern ideal of complete public transparency' (Horn, 2011, p. 104).

Two Latin terms for the secret – *arcanum* and *secretum* – provide a conceptual framework for Horn's study of these 'two fundamental logics of secrecy' (Horn, 2011, p. 42). While *arcanum* accepts political secrecy as a 'legitimate dimension of government' to ensure its security and efficiency, *secretum* takes on an 'antagonistic view', characterised by a 'profound mistrust' towards state secrecy due to its morally dubious status. Horn describes her 'modern' conceptualisation of *secretum* as a 'secrecy effect', a concept first introduced by philosopher Jacques Derrida to highlight the 'relation between the known and the unknown' and how such an imbalance of knowledge impacts socio-political structures (Horn, 2011, p. 105; Derrida, 1994, p. 245). The *secrecy effect* is thus not about the knowledge kept from the public but about the suspicion generated by the awareness that a secret exists (Horn, 2011, p. 105). This conflicting feeling of suspicion is further explained by Bok (1982, p. 6):

> The separation between insider and outsider is inherent in secrecy; and to think something secret is already to envisage potential conflict between what insiders conceal and outsiders want to inspect or lay bare.

However, this separation between known and unknown – insider and outsider – is only manifested through a revelation of the existence of a secret. For anthropologist Michael Taussig (1999, p. 58), this act of partial exposure destroys 'true secrecy' and instead renders it a 'public secret' – 'an entity now perceived from the outside by all as a secret, yet with its content inviolate'. Drawing on a quote by writer Elias Canetti (1978, p. 290) – 'secrecy lays at the very core of power' – Taussig (1999, p. 7) explains the political dimension of the 'public secret'. According to him, it is not only secrecy, but public secrecy that derives from power. To come back to the concept of the *secrecy effect*, it is thus this awareness of the hidden and its deriving suspicion that render the (public) secret an effective tool of control. In this context, the hidden 'indicates a certain "aggregate state" of knowledge, a form of looming latency or potentiality that is more powerful than its actual content' (Horn, 2011, p. 109).

Besides the difference between Horn's two fundamental logics of the political secret – accepting a functionalist use of secrecy (*arcanum*), in contrast to a suspicious position invoked by the *secrecy effect* (*secretum*) – they share an awareness of the relation between power and secrecy, because 'stability and preservation of power require a withholding of knowledge and a refusal to communicate' (Horn, 2011, p. 107). This power is manifested and reasserted through a lack of accountability for actions concealed and knowledge withdrawn from the public. Horn (2011, p. 106) explains:

> Secrecy serves to protect and stabilize the state, and as such it is the precondition for the functioning of the law; but at the same time secrecy opens a space of exception from the rule of law, an exception that can breed violence, corruption and oppression.

This ambiguity is created by modern democracies using political secrecy as an instrument for protection and security while not being held accountable to one of its fundamental elements: the law. Therefore, political secrecy exists outside the realm of the law, offering a protective shield to power. Because of this, 'power is that which is neither subject to debate nor forced to justify itself' (Horn, 2011, pp. 107-108).

Therefore, accepting secrecy as a necessary instrument of the state implies the toleration of unknown activities and inculpability. A ‘misguided reaction’ would be to ‘give up asking questions’ (Horn, 2011, p. 116).

3.2 Aesthetics of the secret

As Horn (2011) has pointed out, a functionalist attitude towards secrecy, simply accepting it as a necessary instrument for governments to ensure efficiency and efficacy, would be to ignore its unaccountability to the law and the accompanying risk of abuse. On the other hand, following her advice to keep asking questions brings about its own set of challenges because secrecy is inherently opaque and amorphous, making it impossible to grasp and interrogate.

The conceptual and material exploration of secrecy is a key concern of my practice-led research. In a paper by Professor of Contemporary Culture at Kings College, Clare Birchall (2014), in which she discusses how artists have created an 'aesthetics of the secret', I have found inspiration for my conceptual and artistic approach to explore the hidden aspects of my subject of study. According to Birchall (2016), a different approach is needed to facilitate a critical reading of the complexity of secrecy and its socio-political dimensions. A prevailing engagement with the 'hermeneutics of the secret' – defining the secret as 'a problem to be solved through revelation and interpretation' – disregards the various political layers and hidden power dynamics of the secret (Birchall, 2014, pp. 25-26). She argues that we should instead engage with an *aesthetics of the secret*, focusing on what the 'secret *as* secret' reveals about the wider distribution of information or lack thereof, so that we might 'be better able to form a radical political response' (Birchall, 2014, p. 26).[43] Her argument is underpinned by Jacques Rancière's concept of aesthetics as a 'distribution of the sensible', a system which defines the modes of what is 'visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done' (Rancière, 2010, p. 85). It is both inclusion and exclusion and specifies what is hidden, silenced and muted, as well as what cannot be said, thought or made. The *distribution of the sensible* is thus also the defining factor for which groups are granted access to

[43] To underpin her argument, Birchall (2014, p. 25) discusses the lack of substantial change achieved by Edward Snowden's revelation of the US's National Security Agency (NSA) mass surveillance programme. Debates have 'stalled on matters of regulation and reform which treat secrecy, securitisation, and surveillance largely as procedural terms' (Birchall, 2014, p. 25). She argues that the predominant focus on the revelation of these top-secret documents and their implications – the violation of individuals' privacy – configures these hidden practices as a problem that could be solved through reform (Birchall, 2014, p. 25). Bok (1983, p. 7) put it fittingly: 'in secularized Western societies, privacy has come to seem for some the only legitimate form of secrecy; consequently, the two are sometimes mistakenly seen as identical.'

information and knowledge and who is excluded from participating in that knowledge.

Drawing on this Rancièrian concept, Birchall argues that artists who have artistically incorporated the *aesthetics of the secret* have focused on its 'distributive' and 'affective force', while considering various influential factors. Therefore, 'they present secrets as processes operating within a particular delimitation of space, time, the visible, the sayable, the audible, and political experience (…) the distribution of the sensible' (Birchall, 2014, p. 26).

Instead of exposing the secret and the accompanying generated knowledge, Birchall (2014, p. 26) suggests focusing on the 'secret as processes' – operating within a 'distribution of the sensible'. An artistic exploration should thus concentrate on the secret in its entirety: the hidden knowledge, the political consequences of hiding such information, the historical context, the geopolitical aspects, and its socio-political significance. Birchall (2014, p. 29) further explains that the secret 'opens the way for a purely aesthetic response' because of its inherent characteristic of being unknown and thus resisting 'cognitive judgement'. This creates a paradox because aesthetics is defined by what we perceive, deriving from visual and audible sensations. The secret challenges the aesthetics in its very definition and offers a novel way of reading the invisible to 'interrupt a dominant discourse surrounding secrecy' (Birchall, 2014, p. 28). Here, the secret explores what Horn (2011, p. 109) has described as 'a form of looming latency or potentiality that is more powerful than its actual content'. Thus, it is not the primary goal of the *aesthetics of the secret* to find answers but to invite questions. Configuring the secret as an unknown facilitates a critical understanding of its opacity and raises questions about its political dimension.

DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWLEDGE

A	B	C	D
Known Known	Unknown Known	Known Unknown	Unknown Unknown
Revelation/ Presentation	Lost / rendered invisible	Open secret / half secret	Secret
Aesthetics / Anti-aesthetics	Anaesthesia	Aestheticised	Non-Aesthetic

DISTRIBUTION OF THE SENSIBLE

Table 2 *Map distribution of knowledge – distribution of the sensible* (Source: *Aesthetics of the secret*, 2014)

To support her argument, Birchall has mapped the various layers of the secret and its interconnectedness with knowledge and aesthetics (Table 3), enabling a differentiation between forms of engagement with the visible and the invisible. The four categories are defined as follows: a revelation of the secret, a *known known* (A); something that has been withdrawn from us, an *unknown known* (B); an art practice which explores the secret *as* secret, a *known unknown* (C); and the secret which is not known, an *unknown unknown* (D).

Drawing on Birchall's map, the 'unconditional secret', the *unknown unknown* (category D), or the 'unknowable', exists outside our realm of comprehension (Birchall, 2011, p. 21). Derrida (1989, p. 25) would describe it as the 'secret as such'. It does not exist; 'it is a negation that denies itself' (Derrida, 1989, p. 25). Therefore, no artwork could ever fit into the *unknown unknown* category because allocating it to this category implies knowledge of its very existence and instead rendering it a *known unknown*. If it were truly an 'unconditional secret', we would not be aware of it, but also, we would not 'know that we do not know' (Birchall, 2014, p. 44).

Birchall (2014, p. 30) defines the *unknown known* as a context in which something has existed but has been 'lost'. Raphael's *Portrait of a Young Man* (1514) is an example of an artwork that fits this category. The Nazis looted the painting in Poland during the Second World War, and it has not resurfaced since (Buomberger, 1998). There is an awareness and documentation of this painting's existence, but it has been 'withdrawn' from us and thus 'rendered invisible' (Birchall, 2014, p. 30).

Another fitting example for this category is *Relics* (1972-2019) by the artist Susan Hiller, for which she burned some of her paintings and gathered their ashes in small chemical containers (Fig. 19). From 1972 until she died in 2019, Hiller burned one of her previous artworks every year to add a new glass vial to her growing project. According to Hiller (1996, p. 244), the function of these containers is to 'measure and contain what can't be contained.' These artworks have become an *unknown known*; they existed in the public sphere but were destroyed, and their previous depictions have become invisible. However, because Hiller collected their remains, the work has acquired a new dimension. The paintings might have become an *unknown known,* but their ashes are evidence of their previous existence, although not visible to us, and thus the work in its new form could also be considered a *known unknown*.

Fig. 19 *Hand Grenades (from paintings made in 1969)* (1972) by Susan Hiller

Category B can only exist artistically through a symbolic and conceptual engagement, while categories A and C can be aesthetically explored. Most artworks exist in category A because they present ‘something’ (Birchall, 2014, p. 31). Even though artworks in this category might engage with the secret, they would still be considered a *known known* because they are a ‘process to be witnessed, an idea communicated through medium, an abstraction, a study in form’ (Birchall, 2014,

p. 31). In contrast, the *aesthetics of the secret* is used by artworks that 'bring the secret into the realm of the sensible' and thus exist in category C (Birchall, 2014, p. 33). Secrets in this category imply an awareness of the hidden and are thus considered an 'open secret' or a 'half secret' (Birchall, 2014, p. 33). Birchall distinguishes between four kinds of *open secrets*. The first kind is a scenario where the knowledge of a secret exists, but its content is inaccessible. Another type of *open secret* would be a suspicion that is shared among a group of people but cannot be proven. The third and the fourth are linked. The third is an *open secret* that has been a secret, which 'has been revealed, but the revelation has had no discernible effects in the world, does not behave or resonate as a revelation' (Birchall, 2014, p. 33). Here, Birchall connects the fourth expression of the *open secret* – drawing on the 'public secret' of Taussig, who defines it as 'that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated' (Taussig, 1999, p. 50).

To further understand how Birchall's concept has influenced my practice, it is critical to locate how Switzerland's historical past fits within the outlined categories and sub-divisions of the *open secret*. In this context, Switzerland's forgotten past would be located within the third category of the *open secret*, because the revelation of its extensive involvement in the gold trade with the Nazis has neither generated a critical engagement with the country's history nor has it invited questioning of the contemporary Swiss gold trade. Birchall (2014, p. 11) lists 'political whitewashing' among the reasons for a lack of palpable impact and continuous change as a result of such revelations. In this context, the truth was and still is unfavourable and was in direct competition with Switzerland's public image. To challenge this *half secret*, Birchall's model offers a productive framework to question the – once exposed but not fully grasped – role of Switzerland's complicity in the gold trade during the Second World War through artistic practice.

3.2.1. Tangible unknowns

According to Birchall (2014), an aesthetic configuration of the secret is possible when exploring an *open secret* – a *known unknown* – or, as per Taussig's (1999, p. 50) definition, a *public secret*. As opposed to the *unknown unknown*, the *open secret* articulates a presence of information which is unavailable to us, and 'this acknowledgement of knowledge's fallibility and accommodation of its lack leaves space that can be filled by the aesthetic' (Birchall, 2014, pp. 32-33). Before focusing

on how such *open secrets* can be artistically explored, it is key to understand how such secrets move into the realm of the senses in the first place through their material traces.

In a written contribution to the book *Negative Publicity: artefacts of extraordinary rendition,* Eyal Weizman (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 286), Professor of Spatial and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London and founding director of the interdisciplinary research group Forensic Architecture, explores the 'material infrastructure' of the secret, explaining that 'every secret operation exists in the world and has to intersect and interact with the world around it'.[44] The artist Trevor Paglen has described such an interaction through the imaginary scenario of constructing an invisible aeroplane. Assuming the building of an entirely invisible aeroplane was possible, the aeroplane would still have to be manufactured in a factory that would not be invisible but would be available to the senses. The secret would thus become perceptible (Paglen, 2014). Therefore, the secret – no matter how carefully guarded and invisible to us – will still manifest through tangible traces, which can become the focus of art practice. Therefore, the *aesthetics of the secret* is the unknown in a material manifestation, enabling the secret to be 'apprehended by the senses' (Rancière, 2010, p. 85).

In my practice, the secret becomes tangible in its material form by including gold in the practical interventions. Gold is a secret because of its chemical composition and could thus be considered in the context of Birchall's definition of the *aesthetics of the secret*. As previously established, despite its tangibility as a material, its provenance remains intangible. It is thus the very definition of a secret that can be 'apprehended by the senses', and because of its secrecy, it can also be considered in the context of Derrida's *secrecy effect* (Rancière, 2010, p. 85). The *secrecy effect* is especially relevant in the historical context. In the Preface, I explained that the SNB provided the Swissmint with gold bars acquired from the Reichsbank to mint *Vreneli* coins.

Furthermore, I discussed in Chapter 1 how the ICE has found documentation proving that Switzerland received gold bars from the Reichsbank which included melted victim gold taken from Holocaust victims. While the 'secrecy effect' is manifested throughout the practice through acts of obfuscation and the inclusion of

[44] From now on, I will use the shortened title of *Negative Publicity* to refer to the work.

gold, its looming latency is probably the most immediate in the presence of the *Vreneli* gold coin in the collection of the counter-archive (Fig. 20). Because Switzerland used German gold in the post-war years to mint these coins, there is a possibility that this specific *Vreneli* could include victim gold.

Fig. 20 *Vreneli coin* (2022)

Relating this to Paglen's comparison of the invisible plane, the *Vreneli* might then represent the factory where the invisible aeroplane – the secret – is constructed. Therefore, the *Vreneli,* or gold as a material in general, represents the material infrastructure of the secret of origin while also being the secret itself. In this context, the information about the *Vreneli's* provenance is both palpable and simultaneously untouchable – a paradox – *hidden in plain sight*.

The interdisciplinary collaboration between the artist Edmund Clark and investigative journalist Crofton Black offers a conceptual exploration of the notion of *hidden in plain sight*. Their book, *Negative Publicity* (2016), examines the material infrastructure of the war on terror through numerous business invoices, legal documents, and photographs, presenting the various traces of the CIA's secret

prison programme while still maintaining a hidden layer to represent ‘the material processes that create secrecy’ (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 285).

The book contains numerous, sometimes heavily redacted documents (Fig. 21). In relation to these acts of censorship, Weizman has introduced the notion of ‘negative evidence’, which occurs ‘when the very act of redaction is evidence in itself’ (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 287). Therefore, such an act of concealing creates an *open secret*, hiding the information in plain sight.

Fig. 21 Double page spread depicting *CIA Inspector General, Special Review: Counterterrorism Detention and Interrogation Activities (September 2001-October 2003), dated 7 May 2004. Declassified in redacted form in August 2009* (2016) by Crofton Black and Edmund Clark

Negative Publicity also explores the *aesthetics of the secret* through Clark’s photographs of ‘black sites’ and other places which have facilitated the implementation of extraordinary rendition in various ways. These images depict mundane spaces (Fig. 22); they do not show the violent acts of torture that were inflicted upon the detainees. The pictures solely depict a façade, and the buildings function like ‘architectural redactions’ (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 287). The viewer remains an outsider, unaware of the protocols happening beyond these walls because photography cannot ‘unveil the mask’, it can merely reveal ‘the presence of the mask’ (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 287). An artistic

exploration of this ‘liminal state between revelation and concealment’ invites a critical reading of political secrecy and encourages the audience to scrutinise its powerful repercussions (Birchall, 2014, p. 41; p. 29). Such artists have found ways to display the power of secrecy and how it enables governmental institutions to carry out sometimes incredibly violent processes in the shadows. Through either a symbolic interpretation of the secret or through documenting tangible traces of covert operations, these works encourage the audience to find a critical engagement with a hidden world, making it less abstract in the process.

Fig. 22 *View from a window, room 11, Skopski Merak hotel, Skopje* (2016) by Crofton Black and Edmund Clark

Overall, the book is both a research artefact and a provocative artwork. Even though it provides background information about the relevance of the places depicted, it is still an engagement with the *known unknown*. The work raises awareness of how we are surrounded by the material infrastructure of the secret, 'a system hidden in plain sight', while incorporating the secret *as* secret at its very core (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016).

Visualising the invisibility of the secret services is also a primary concern of artist Trevor Paglen's work. He uses various approaches to show the hidden and revealed world of American intelligence services and military organisations as part of his multi-layered practice. In an essay for his book *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes*, writer Rebecca Solnit describes how 'secrecy and invisibility are at the heart of modern warfare' (Paglen and Solnit, 2010, p. 9). She further explains that warfare is deeply ingrained in modern society; it becomes invisible to us and creates 'a shield seldom ruptured' (Paglen and Solnit, 2010, p. 9). In his work, Paglen explores the materiality of secrecy, thus uncovering this shield metaphorically while simultaneously expanding and building it virtually. Paglen has used various approaches to capture the 'landscape of war', such as 'munition factories, mines, ships, barracks, bases, recruiting centers, and afterward veterans' hospitals' (Paglen and Solnit, 2010, p. 8). In his projects, he has explored the material infrastructure of the secret to investigate the invisible through its tangible form.

This is also the case in his project *Limit Telephotography* (2005-2007), for which Paglen photographed classified military bases (Fig. 23). Because these bases are 'so remote that the unassisted human eye cannot see them', Paglen used astrophotography lenses to document them (Birchall, 2014, p. 37). The photographs are blurry and confuse more than they expose. Birchall (2014, p. 37) describes them as 'suggestive and abstract rather than evidential.' However, they still reveal the existence of absence. They present an *open secret* because they – similar to Clark's photographs – reveal the secret's material infrastructure. Inspired by the famous American landscape photographs of Ansel Adams, Paglen portrays the landscape of American warfare (Birchall, 2014, p. 37). However, while Adams' images instil a sense of American pride and beauty, Paglen's images 'unsettle and dismantle the national pride and identity' (Birchall, 2014, p. 37). Such an unpacking of national identity through a subversive artistic approach closely relates to my work with popular Swiss symbols to question historical complicity.

Fig. 23 *Chemical and Biological Weapons Proving Ground; Dugway, UT; Distance approx. 42 miles; 11:17 a.m., 2006* (2007) by Trevor Paglen

Another of Paglen's works, *Symbology* (2006-2009), is also interesting in the context of Birchall's concept of the *known unknown* and my approach to archiving. For this project, Paglen has been collecting military insignia for 'programs, units, and activities that are officially secret' (Paglen, 2010, p. 9). According to Birchall (2014, p. 9), Paglen's work 'invites us to encounter the limits of visibility and experience secrecy's form, rather than find meaning or content through total revelation'. Paglen has exhibited the patches and published their photographic documentation in a book titled *I could tell you but then you would have to be destroyed by me: emblems from the Pentagon's black world* (2010). The individual military patches, as well as the archive overall, represent an *open secret*; we have information about their size, materiality, and appearances, but we are kept in the dark about what they signify. Instead, they 'reveal a secret world of military imagery and jargon, where classified projects are known by peculiar names' (Paglen, no date) (Fig. 24). Because of their

cryptic and mysterious appearance, Paglen's collection of military insignia represents a *tangible unknown*.

Fig. 24 Detail from *Symbology, Volume III* (2009) by Trevor Paglen

The artist Jill Magid also focuses on 'government secrecy and obligatory silence', but by applying a more symbolic and performative approach (PopTech, 2015). An interesting example is *The Spy Project*, an artwork originating from a commission by the Dutch Secret Service (AVID) in 2005. For this project, Magid conducted interviews over three years to obtain a sense of the intelligence service's employees. Even though the purpose of the work was to 'improve AVID's public persona', the process was an 'oscillation between granted and refused access' (Birchall, 2014, p. 38; Magid, no date). Magid was repeatedly censored by the

organisation, eventually leading her to explore the ‘tensions between concealment and revelation, access and denial’ (Birchall, 2014, p. 38).

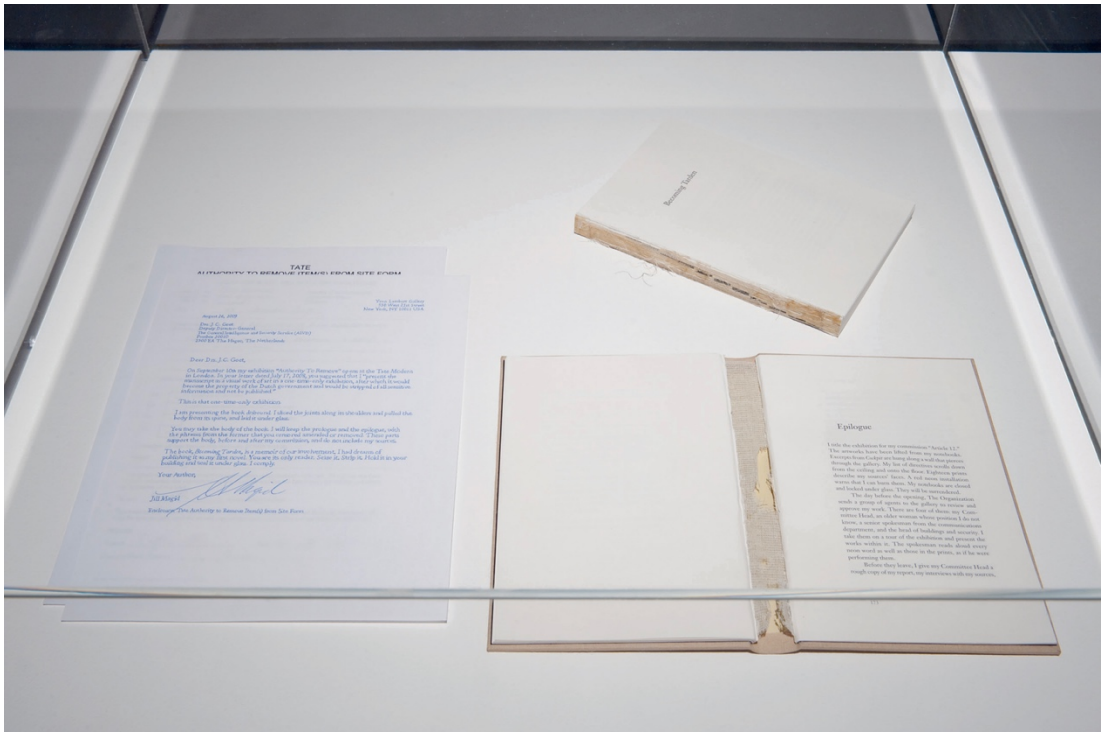


Fig. 25 Installation view of *Hacked Book* (2009) by Jill Magid at the Tate Modern, London, UK

Magid created different outputs for *The Spy Project*, such as sculptures and framed text works. She also wrote a report at the end of her commission about an alternative persona – called *The Organization* – informed by the notes from the interviews (Magid, no date). However, AVID heavily redacted the report because it supposedly revealed too much information. To further explore the tension between the visible and invisible – the accessible and inaccessible – Magid obtained AVID’s permission to present the unredacted version of the book as a ‘visual work of art in a one-time-only exhibition’ titled *Authority to Remove* at Tate Modern in 2009 (Magid, no date). The report was presented within a vitrine (Fig. 25) and was permanently confiscated by AVID at the end of the show (PopTech, 2015). Magid turned the unredacted report into an *open secret*, prohibiting the revelation of its content and provoking the audience with inaccessible information. According to Magid (no date), the work in ‘its penultimate state’ explores ‘what it means to have a secret but not the autonomy to share it’. The project is another example of how presenting the hidden in plain sight draws on the power of the *secrecy effect*, thus offering more questions than answers. Through this simple act, Magid explores the symbolic

qualities of the secret while exposing its function as a tool of control. Furthermore, while the work revealed the existence of the secret – turning it into an *open secret* – the information was still inaccessible behind the glass of the vitrine exhibited at Tate Modern. Therefore, *Authority to Remove* also implicated the institution in the continued perpetuation of withholding of information.

Because secrecy is, per definition, an unknown, activities carried out under the guard of political secrecy exist in 'a space of exception from the rule of law' (Horn, 2011, p. 106). Therefore, inquiries into political secrecy must incite a critical evaluation of accountability and complicity. The idea of complicity in connection with withholding information has been of fundamental interest in my research. The question of complicity is evident in relation to banks that traded with the Nazis, as well as the Swiss government, who decided to withhold evidence of the banks' actual involvement after the war. I would argue, however, that there is an additional dimension to this, which can be found in the *unknown complicity* brought about by the secret materiality of gold and the deliberate hiding of information. In this context, I am also interested in how an institution, such as the Swiss National Bank, becomes complicit – an *implicated subject* – in the war crimes of the Nazis through their acquisition of gold bars that contained remelted victim gold. While the board of the SNB vehemently denied any previous knowledge of the gold's provenance, they were still complicit, even though not entirely aware.[45] Using the German gold bars to mint *Vreneli* which were then sold to the Swiss population massively increased the number of people implicated in this act of complicity. However, in contrast to the employees of the SNB, who were directly involved in the gold trade and were in possession of more information about the gold's potential provenance, the buyers and receivers of these gold coins were uninformed and thus involuntarily *implicated*. Discussing the risk of unknown implications as a direct consequence of secrecy further proves how secrecy informs and confirms power. This becomes evident in the projects of Black and Clark, Paglen and Magid; all three artists have drawn attention to the hidden processes of different secret services. Since these intelligence agencies are governmentally run institutions, taxpayers are unknowingly complicit in the state's covert and sometimes illicit operations.

[45] It is important to mention that the SNB was warned that the gold was looted from occupied territories under gross violation of international law as early as 1942.

3.2.2 Mapped secrets

The idea of complicity – especially in the context of institutions – is a central concern in Hans Haacke's practice. His work has been highly influential for my research and inspired me to broaden Birchall's concept of the *aesthetics of the secret*. Even though Birchall (2014, p. 26) strongly argued for engaging with the 'secret *as* secret', other groups and artists – such as Haacke – have effectively used artistic approaches to expose hidden systems and concealed incidents. By overlapping the *known known* and the *known unknown*, their approaches involve sophisticated research and factual evidence to facilitate an understanding of highly complex structures and multi-layered political processes. Even though they do not fit Birchall's concept of the *aesthetics of the secret*, these artistic approaches 'represent important historical and political acts' to initiate a 'radical political response' (Hobbs, 2004, p. 12; Birchall, 2011, p. 26). Such artworks centre around the revelation of the secret, marrying factual documents with various aesthetic processes to expose the concealed and thus create new knowledge. Philosopher Walter Benjamin once wrote, '(…) truth is not a process of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it' (Benjamin, 1998, p. 31). I would argue that through the meticulous gathering of information, drawing connections and tracing documents, these artists have successfully interrogated, disassembled, and reconfigured the secret, discovering its true revelation in the process.

Methodical research and meticulous tracing were integral features of Mark Lombardi's work. In his pencil drawings, which he called *Narrative Structures*, he studied financial transactions and linkages between numerous influential parties to create 'compelling portraits of twentieth-century corruption' and expose 'serendipitous channels of power' (Hobbs, 2004, pp. 13-14). His sophisticated maps depicted power abuses and financial fraud, visualised through relationships between 'multinational, individuals, criminals and politicians that constitute the operations of the State and the public sphere' (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 22; Hobbs, 2004, p. 14) (Fig. 26).[46] One of his drawings – *BCCI-ICIC & FAB, 1972-91 (4th version)* – revealed financial connections between Khalid bin Mahfouz, the former Director of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI), and his brother-in-law, Osama bin Laden. His incredible investigative skills and the quality of

[46] Similarly, a research group called 'OpenSecrets' is investigating current financial transactions and their impact on policies and elections in US politics.

his research even supported an FBI agent in her ‘preliminary inquiry’ into the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in September 2001 (Hobbs, 2004, p. 11).

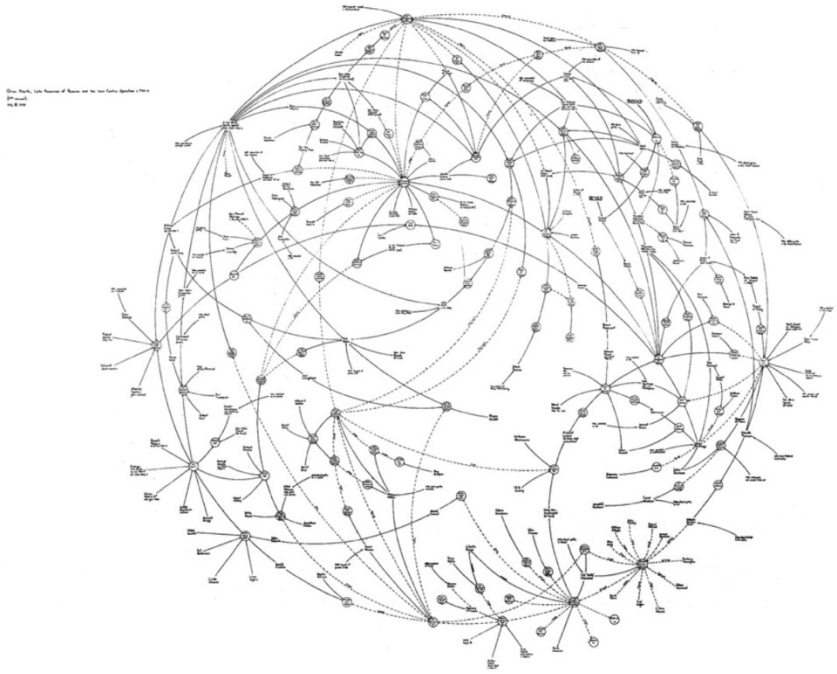


Fig. 26 *Oliver North, Lake Resources of Panama, and the Iran-Contra Operation, ca.1984–86 (fourth version)* (1999) by Mark Lombardi

In the present day, forensic approaches to exposing hidden crimes and misdeeds of institutions, agencies and public bodies have gained popularity and are widely used by individuals and collectives, such as Forensic Architecture. The group uses various sophisticated research techniques and the architectural mapping of spaces to expose crimes, uncover human rights abuses, and create new insights. Their work has been incorporated in legal battles as evidence and exhibited in various art institutions (Weizman, 2017). In their approaches, they gather numerous media, such as videos, images, and sound recordings, and align them with different testimonies. This process allows them to review a ‘wide multiplicity of situated perspectives’ to construct the required ‘fabric of verification’ (Weizman, quoted in Syms, 2021). Through their interdisciplinary research – using complex technology and sophisticated methods – Forensic Architecture presents ‘an alternative way of truth production’ to challenge the established ‘truths’ of the ‘main gatekeepers’

(Weizman, quoted in Syms, 2021). Therefore, their approach is 'not only a scientific or technical endeavour, but a cultural, ethical and political one' (Fuller and Weizman, 2021, p. 8).

How the work of Forensic Architecture could be considered a *radical political response* – enabling change – became evident in their exhibition at the Whitney Biennial in 2019. For their contribution, they investigated the board of the Whitney Museum of American Art; they focused on the vice chair, Warren B. Kanders, who was previously exposed as the owner of a weapon manufacturing company called the Safariland Group. Forensic Architecture analysed various videos and used 'computer-vision classifiers' to identify the presence of the 'Triple Chaser', a teargas canister manufactured by the Safariland Group. Applying machine learning enabled Forensic Architecture to verify the use of the canisters against 'civil society and social movement protests around the world' (*Triple-chaser*, 2019; Fuller and Weizman, 2021, p. 11) (Fig. 27). In collaboration with filmmaker Laura Poitras, Forensic Architecture presented the outcome of the investigation as a film at the Biennial.[47] Several artists withdrew from the exhibition following the revelation of Kanders' complicity in human rights violations. The pressure eventually forced him to resign from the Whitney board of trustees and led to 'his ultimate disinvestment from teargas' (Fuller and Weitzman, 2021, p. 11).

[47] The film is available to watch here: https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/triple-chaser

Fig. 27 Screenshot of *Triple-Chaser* (2019) by Forensic Architecture

Using art practice and research to explore how art institutions are implicated in human rights violations is the predominant focus of artist Hans Haacke. In his practice, he examines social and political systems and encourages public discourse about the socio-political dimension of art. Haacke investigates the museum as an inherently 'political institution', controlled and run by powerful individuals (Haacke, 2016, p. 118). His installations explore how the personal interests of corporate sponsors influence what a museum exhibits and collects (Haacke, Gioni and Carrion-Murayari, 2019). Haacke's critical installations have started an art movement called 'institutional critique', which uses artistic practice to engage with the 'economic and ideologically driven' networks and interdependencies of museums and galleries (Haacke, Gioni and Carrion-Murayari, 2019, p. 74).[48] [49]

Because of their highly political character, some of Haacke's installations have been censored in the past.[50] This was the case with an installation that Haacke created for an upcoming solo show at the Guggenheim in 1971, critiquing the vast differences in housing and living conditions in New York City. For his project, he

[48] Forensic Architecture's *Triple-Chaser* is also a form of institutional critique.
[49] Apart from Haacke, the 'leading exponent of institutional critique', Daniel Buren, Michael Asher and Marcel Broodthaers have been central figures in the movement (Tate, 2021).
[50] Despite the repeated silencing of Haacke's work by leading museums, it has been 'tremendously influential within and beyond the world of visual art, even without the institutional representation it deserves' (Haacke, Gioni and Carrion-Murayari, 2019, p.7).

looked at the housing situation of people living in Harlem and the Lower East Side to investigate factors that are widening the gap between the rich and the poor.

The outcome of this research was a project with the title *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) [51]. The installation presented data covering approximately the twenty years leading up to 1971 and aimed to raise awareness of the control held by 'Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings' on the property market and the great extent of the corporation's influence on urban spaces in Manhattan (MACBA, 2021). It presented how the stakeholders instrumentalised real estate acquisition for tax advantages. The strategic selling and re-selling secured this advantage and masked the current owner. The living conditions for the tenants were poor, and many of the houses violated building codes (Haacke and Cohn, 2016).

Fig. 28 Installation view of *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) by Hans Haacke at the 38th Venice Biennale, 1978

The installation is a forensic documentation of owned properties and transactions made by the corporation and consists of various components: 142 architectural photographs of the relevant buildings and corresponding typewritten information

[51] Because of its long title, I will refer to this project as *Shapolsky et al.* for the remainder of this document.

sheets (Fig. 29) adding context in the form of addresses, current and prior owners, the value of the land, mortgage balances, and dates of acquisition (Luke, 1992). Furthermore, Haacke marked up the buildings on two maps – one depicting Harlem and the other the Lower East Side – and included six charts to provide context about the real estate group's various business relations (Haacke, 2016).

Haacke gathered this extensive and detailed information from the New York County Clerk's office and marked up the maps and photographically documented the buildings to visualise the extent of the corporation's influence on the New York property market and to expose its instrumental networks (Haacke, 2016, p. 45).[52] The work presented the 'underhand business dealings' of the slumlords of New York and revealed their connections to 'several art institutions' (Hermes, 2007). Besides media suspicion that these connections included trustees of the Guggenheim, it remains unknown whether there have been any links (Grasskamp, Bird and Haacke, 2004). Even though Haacke carried out rigorous research and created factual documentation, the Director of the Guggenheim at the time, Thomas Kessner, described the work as an 'alien substance' against which he 'protected' the 'art museum organism' (Grasskamp, Bird and Haacke, 2004, p. 50). Kessner eventually cancelled the exhibition following Haacke's refusal to withdraw the project.[53]

In the end, Kessner's act of censorship only increased the works' popularity – partly fulfilling its purpose of exposing the secrecy – though later than initially planned.[54] To this day, *Shapolsky et al.* is considered a highly influential conceptual artwork and 'far ahead of its time as political art' in 1971 (Haacke, Gioni and Carrion-Murayari, 2019; Luke, 1992, p. 155). In an interview with *Kunstkritikk*, Haacke (2015) talked about how, over time, his works become relevant in different ways, triggering 'new and raw reactions'. This is also applicable in the case of *Shapolsky et al*. When Haacke created the work in 1971, it exposed the hidden processes behind real estate in New York. However, the work is still relevant as a critique of

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[52] While Haacke was creating *Shapolsky et al*., he was also working on another exposé: *Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971). Similarly to *Shapolsky et al*., this installation was about real estate dealings in Manhattan, in this instance focusing on the partnership between two corporations: Sol Goldman and Alex DiLorenzo.

[53] Kessner's act of censorship caused upheaval in the artist community in New York, leading to demonstrations in front of the Guggenheim organised by the Art Worker's Coalition in May 1971.

[54] The work was not exhibited in New York until Haacke's solo show at the New Museum, titled *Unfinished Business*, in 1986. However, the installation has been widely exhibited in Europe from the 1970s onwards (Haacke, 2016).

gentrification – a process where wealthier people move to poorer neighbourhoods, increasing rent prices and property values in the area, and consequently causing the displacement of poorer communities (Madden and Marcuse, 2016). At the core of the project is the fight against the establishment; thus, the installation can symbolically stand for the accelerating gentrification in other neighbourhoods of New York and in various cities around the globe, such as London.

Fig. 29 Detail view of *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971) by Hans Haacke

The work has a forensic quality through its sober presentation of information without any form of 'evaluative comment'; it does not invite an emotional reaction (Haacke, 2016, p. 42) (Fig. 29). Similarly to Clark's photographs in *Negative Publicity* (2016), the photographs present the façades of the buildings, creating – as described by Weizman – 'architectural redactions' (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016, p. 287). What is redacted here are the lives of the anonymous tenants suffering in poor living conditions. These images mirror the business aspect of real estate: the financial gains to be made, the transactions and the tax advantages, and the ignorance towards its residents.

Furthermore, Haacke challenges perceptions of apartment buildings as places of homes and neighbourly relations and counters the romanticised ideas of art

institutions as spaces solely dedicated to championing art and culture, but instead highlights their financial links, revealing morally compromising ties to real-estate slumlords. *Shapolsky et al.* creates a counter-narrative through the examination of inherent political structures. I am pursuing a similar aim in my research: to confound popular opinions and offer critical readings. However, while Haacke has pursued the act of revelation, my practice is further exploring and embracing the *known unknown.* The archival quality and organised presentation of *Shapolsky et al.* is an important reference for the planned end-presentation of my experiments as a counter-archive.

Forensic Architecture, Mark Lombardi, and Hans Haacke use a factual approach to forensic presentation for their research, so it becomes a revelation. In contrast, Paglen, Magid, and the collaboration between Clark and Black have continuous question marks, leaving the artists *and* the audience with blank spots that cannot be filled due to a lack of access. For similar reasons Forensic Architecture has configured an approach of creating new evidence by including citizen media. However, it is important to note that this would not be possible for the subject matters explored by Paglen, Black, and Clark, because the information is not available in the first place and would only be accessible through further leaks originating from within the intelligence services.

Magid's work sits within this category, because of her inability to disclose information without incriminating herself. It is therefore important to note that while these two categories are distinct from each other, their impetus might be similar because artists in both categories aim to inform and raise awareness. However, full disclosure was not attainable for the artists in *tangible unknowns*. Therefore, they have been drawing on the *aesthetics of the secret* by presenting the *known unknown*. Thus, these two approaches might only be distinct in their ability to resolve and reveal, not in their intention to exercise political criticism.

In relation to my practice, the inclusion of gold through the method of gilding could be situated in the category of *tangible unknowns.* However, while secrecy is an important aspect of the research, informing the audience about the fact that the actual involvement of the Swiss with the Nazis was kept a secret is not the primary purpose of the work. It should not raise awareness about the secret but inform about

its previous, ineffective revelation. In this context, my practice differs from the work discussed in *tangible unknowns*; it is closer associated with the incentive to expose complicity that can be found in the works of the artists in *mapped secrets.* My work is situated in the in-between; it draws on the concept of the *aesthetics of the secret* through the inclusion of gold and the method of gilding to *form a radical political response* and raise questions about political secrecy.

Meanwhile, the incentive of the work is considered a *known known* because the work is 'an idea communicated through medium' (Birchall, 2014, p. 31). It has thus the clear aim to inform through a conceptual approach considered a *known unknown*. Furthermore, the work draws inspiration from acts of connecting, ordering, and situating methods found in the practices of artists in the *mapped secrets* category.

3.2.3 Poetic (in)visibility

While secrecy was utilised as a political tool in the context of the historical subject of study, I have engaged with the secret in various configurations, drawing on its multitude of meanings and richness of metaphorical potential. Because of that, I would like to introduce *poetic (in)visibility* as part of my discourse on an aesthetic exploration of the hidden. Artists in this category have included 'some qualities' of the secret in their work but have 'replaced the usual exchanges or readings with something more difficult and awkward; where the viewer's gaze is refused or made contingent and access is not given' (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 13).

In my research, I have included deliberate acts of hiding through the method of gilding because adding gold leaf to an object is also a form of masking and concealing (Fig. 30). Returning to Weizman's concept of *negative evidence*, masking is an act of censoring while simultaneously supplying information, for adding material reveals that the very act of hiding has taken place.

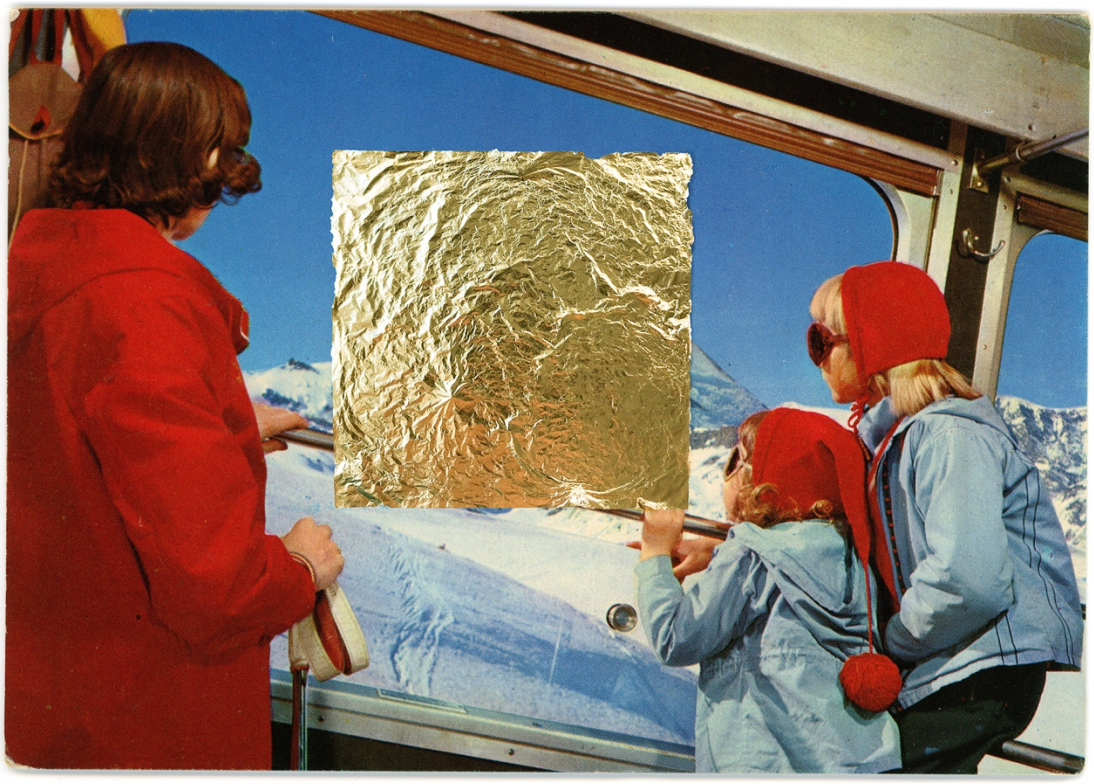

Fig. 30 *Gold leaf on postcard* (2022)

A comparison could be drawn to a famous painting by René Magritte, titled *The Son of Man* (1964): a self-portrait which depicts a simple image of a man (Magritte) wearing a black suit and a hat (Fig. 31). However, the man's face is hidden by a green apple, adding a mysterious quality to the painting. Magritte explained the intention behind the idea for *The Son of Man* as follows:

> At least it hides the face partly. Well, so you have the apparent face, the apple, hiding the visible but hidden, the face of the person. Everything we see hides another thing, we always want to see what is hidden by what we see. There is an interest in that which is hidden and which the visible does not show us. This interest can take the form of a quite intense feeling, a sort of conflict, one might say, between the visible that is hidden and the visible that is present (Magritte, quoted in Skidmore, 2016).

Magritte, therefore, consciously engages with the *known unknown* – 'the visible that is hidden' – and the *known known* – 'the visible that is present'. While the apple obscures the features of the man's face, it also reveals itself as a mask. However, even if Magritte solely added the apple to the painting as a component of concealment and confusion, its presence nevertheless provides additional information as an extra element in the painting. This is similar to how the gold leaf

not simply obscures but expands the object – introducing new layers of material – while hiding some of its features and simultaneously accentuating its overall form by removing details.

Fig. 31 *The Son of Man* (1964) by René Magritte

Challenging the viewers' gaze is a prevalent characteristic of various paintings by René Magritte. He referred to his works as 'visible images which conceal nothing'

but ‘evoke mystery’, which, according to him, is ‘unknowable’ (MoMA, no date). Assistant Professor of Art History at The George Washington University, Lisa Lipinski (2019, *The Mystery of the Visible* section) further explains how ‘Magritte understood the human impulse to want to see things, to penetrate them through vision’. In the context of *The Son of Man*, the *known unknown* is the face of the man hidden behind the apple, generating a tension between the visible and invisible. Thus, Magritte produces what Birchall (2014, p. 29) categorised as an *open secret*. Such an intersection of presence and absence is also explored in motifs such as *The Lovers* (1928), *La Décalcomanie* (1966), and *The Great War* (1964). Magritte uses acts of concealment ‘to address the complexities of vision and the theoretical problems of painting’ (Lipinski, 2019, *The Mystery of the Visible* section). He was not interested in explaining ‘the invisible in terms of form and sight’; instead, his main goal was to explore the ‘profound problem of confronting a metaphysical dilemma’ (Lipinski, 2019, *Inspired Thought* section).

Therefore, Magritte’s approach contains a performative dimension, in which he explores the underlying challenges of the secret to establish a metaphorical engagement with it. The deliberate hiding and destruction of evidence by Swiss officials and bank employees in an attempt to cover up the financial collaboration with the Nazis during the war holds the performative quality of intentionally creating secrets. It has informed my decision to use gilding as a method in my practice. It pronounces an absence through material characteristics and performative gestures, allowing me to draw on notions of state secrecy and its interdependence with control and power. While shrouding the object in secrecy, the gold simultaneously exposes complicity because of its contextual relevance, and thus, the act of gilding creates a dichotomy of revelation and concealment.

I have also drawn on the work of artist Yves Klein. Like Magritte, he was interested in the secret’s *metaphysical dilemma*. In 1959, Klein gave a lecture at the Sorbonne in Paris, describing the ‘immaterialization of art’ as the ‘ultimate and consciously attained’ destination of his practice (Klein, 2007, p. 71). For him, the ideas for his artworks were more important than their material sensation. He was thus not interested in creating visual sensations or representing physical objects; instead, his art should function as a vehicle to capture the spiritual essence of the world

(Weitemeier and Klein, 2016). Writer and historian Rebecca Solnit (2017, p. 169) described the aspirations of Klein's practice as follows:

> Throughout his work, Klein sought to transcend or annihilate representation itself, which is always about what is absent, for an art of immediacy of presences, even if it was the presence of the immaterial, the void.

The Void [*Le Vide*] was also the title of Klein's infamous exhibition at the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris in 1958. He emptied the whole gallery space for the exhibition and painted the walls white (Weitemeier and Klein, 2016) (Fig. 32). As a next step, Klein sold some of this empty space in a *Ritual for the Relinquishment of the Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility Zones* (Klein, 2007, p. 182).

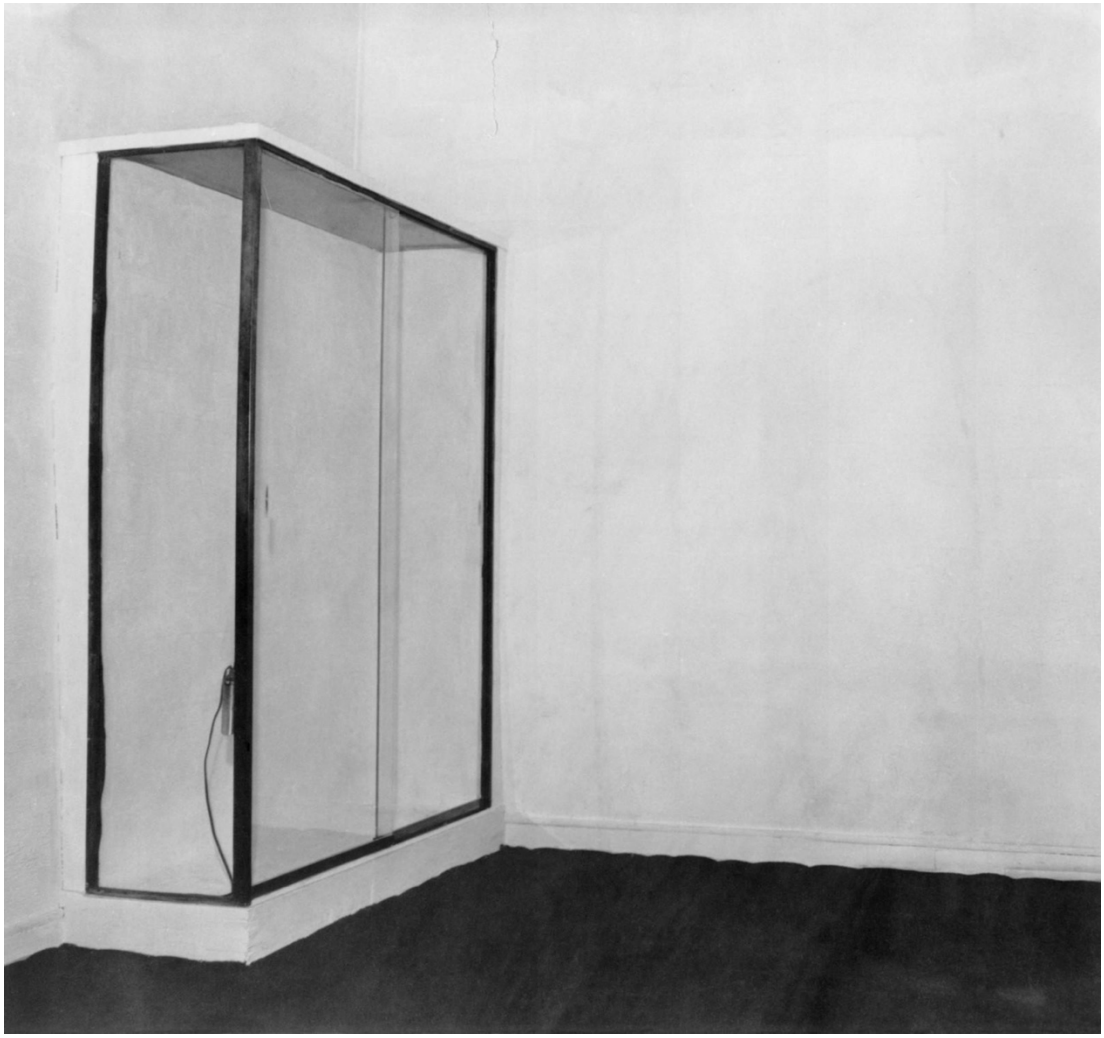

Fig. 32 Exhibition view of *The Void* (1958) by Yves Klein at the Iris Clert gallery, Paris, France

Concerning the Rancièran concept of the *distribution of the sensible* – encompassing what is present to our senses and what is absent – it could be argued that Klein's approach is trying to capture this absence, the nothingness, the invisible. His approach to and study of the immaterial might thus function as a symbolic representation of the *unknowable.* Klein aspired to transcend the problematics of art and free it from its objective and subjective ties. Instead, he wanted his art to explore the immaterial in all its mystical qualities, fleetingness, and invisibility. Through his conceptual approaches and performative acts, Klein was formulating the presence of immateriality, the 'pictorial sensibility'. Therefore, as opposed to artists investigating the material structures and process of the secret, Klein's approach is at the other end of the spectrum. He rid his art of any materiality to explore the purest form of the invisible: the secret's immateriality.

Perception and deception could thus be considered an important aspect of Klein's engagement with the immaterial. His work has also influenced my reading of gold, not only as contextually relevant material but as an unsolvable puzzle: a representation of the unknowable – an unknown in its materiality and immateriality – its secrets. However, because of its romanticised perception, gold is considered beautiful and desirable. In this context, this perception of gold closely mirrors the generally idealised image of Switzerland in relation to the Second World War. It was carefully maintained through the hiding of realities and the establishing of a deceiving wartime memory. In my research, the use of gold functions like a façade. Because of its monetary worth, it turns the objects of memory – once a signifier for a time past – into something more financially valuable. In tandem with the increase in financial value, the unknown dimension of the object becomes bigger. Here, the idea of deception and gold as a *known unknown* becomes relevant again. In this context, the gold leaf is not only a mask that hides but itself a secret and a deception; a sole focus on its monetary worth neglects the predicament of its obscured provenance. Because of its romanticised perception, gold is also very inconspicuous in its potentially violent history and could thus be considered a symbol of deception and 'beautification'. Its chemical composition introduces a moral conundrum, and thus, the act of gilding pronounces an absence through material characteristics and performative gestures while also allowing me to raise questions about the interconnectedness of political secrecy and ethical obligation.

Another work that utilises predominantly deceptive elements and falls into the *poetic (in)visibility* category is artist Marcel Duchamp's final work, *Étant donnés*. Like Magritte, Duchamp drew on the mystical qualities of the secret. However, whereas Magritte's paintings maintain the secret and refuse revelation, Duchamp's *Étant donnés* partly reveals itself to the audience. The work is a mixed-media assemblage comprising a large wooden door with two peepholes. The scene installed behind the door consists of a headless nude female body lying on the ground holding an illuminated lantern in her left hand. The background depicts a picturesque landscape of trees and a waterfall (Fig. 33). The view of the scene is initially hidden from the audience and can only be encountered in a voyeuristic act when looking through the two dedicated peepholes in the door. However, Duchamp's *Étant donnés* reveals itself only partly, while maintaining most of its 'carefully controlled clues and insinuations', and 'plays a controlled game of hide and seek with the viewers' visual expectations' (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 38). The assemblage is a riddle that continues to be the focus of scholarly research to this day.[55] *Étant donnés* is both a *known known* and a *known unknown*. It reveals the scene initially hidden behind the door, but the viewer is still presented with various mystical clues that cannot be decoded. This was precisely Duchamp's intention. Working in secrecy on the assemblage for 20 years, he only released the instructions for the artwork after his death, making it impossible to confirm any interpretation of these hidden meanings.

[55] To investigate some of the hidden clues, the artist Serkan Okzaya built a replica of *Étant donnés* in Duchamp's former art studio in New York in 2017. He claims to have discovered new meanings through this research process (Mewshaw, 2017).

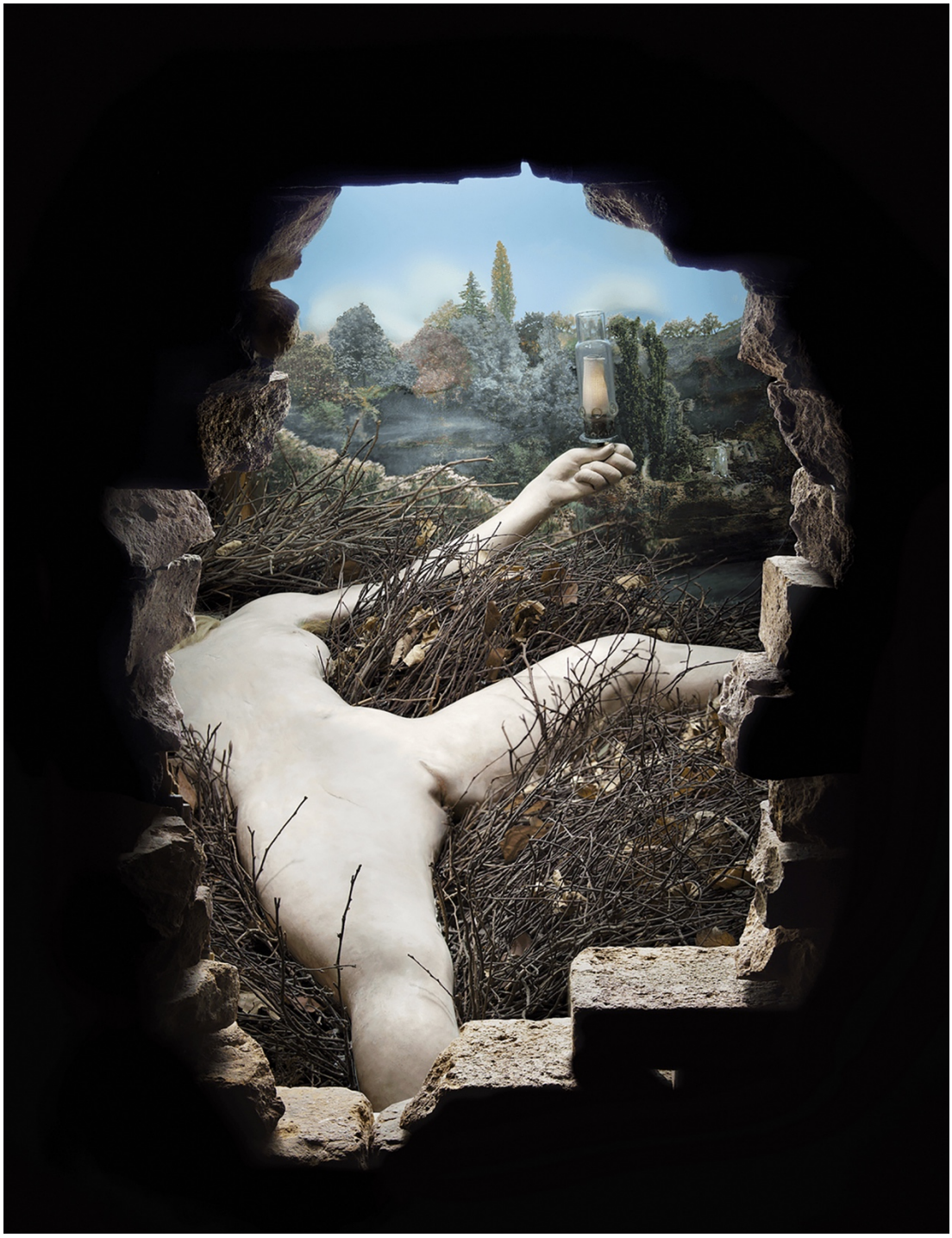

Fig. 33 *Étant donnés: 1° la chute d'eau, 2° le gaz d'éclairage . . . (Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas . . .)* (1946-1966) by Marcel Duchamp

In the context of the mysterious and the hidden, the *Merzbau* by Kurt Schwitters is another compelling example that engages with the hidden and the mysterious. It was created over 20 years and comprised various media, such as collage, sculpture, and architecture. Schwitters constructed the work within his house in Hannover, and by the end, it had taken over most of the living space. In 1943,

the *Merzbau* was destroyed when the Allies launched a bombing attack on Hannover. Besides Schwitters' substantial time commitment and the extensive size of the work, it was a well-guarded secret and was only seen by a few chosen people. Schwitters whitewashed the windows, and even where the *Merzbau* extended beyond the house, he ensured that it would not be seen from the outside. Therefore, if we consider the *Merzbau* a secret, Schwitters' house, which accommodated the hidden 'grottos, caves and shrines', is thus the material infrastructure of the secret (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 30).

In the past – before its destruction – the *Merzbau* was an *open secret*, a *known unknown*, because, even when it was still intact, it was a 'closely guarded secret' (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 31). After its destruction, Schwitters did not reveal the various layers of mystery that made up the fabric of its installation, and there is also little photographic documentation and no coherent accounts (Grayson, Carolin and Cardinal, 2006, p. 31). Thus, once the Allied bombs destroyed the work, it was 'rendered invisible' and became 'unavailable to perception' (Birchall, 2014, p. 32). By destroying the material infrastructure of the secret – the house – the *Merzbau* became an irrevocable secret. Like Klein's 'pictorial sensibility', the *Merzbau* became immaterial, invisible, and an equivalent to nothing. Perhaps this inability to ever be revealed has given the *Merzbau* its final shape and purpose: to become an *unknown known* that will remain an eternal secret.

Schwitters' *Merzbau* and Duchamp's *Étant donnés* have maintained their mystical and poetic qualities, and their creators' deaths have made it impossible for anyone to receive the gratification of uncovering the works' hidden layers to solve the irrevocable secret. Both works are immune to revelation and will remain secrets entirely. However, according to Horn (2011, p. 109), 'a secret locked into a single mind that is not at least potentially "shareable" is not a secret at all' but instead a 'mysterium'.

Birchall (2014, p. 29) describes the secret as 'the ideal aesthetic object for, in being by definition that which is unknown, it resists cognitive judgement', and this inherent absence of information makes it available for a 'purely aesthetic approach'. However, Birchall also notes that an artwork 'that engages with particular senses and prompts affect' should be placed in the *known known* category (Birchall, 2014,

p. 31). With the artists discussed in this section – *poetic (in)visibility* – Birchall's clear distinction is difficult to apply because the artists themselves have *created* the secret.[56] Therefore, regarding Derrida's *secrecy effect*, the tension between *known* and *unknown* is between the artist and the audience. In contrast, in the works previously discussed in *tangible unknowns* and *mapped secrets,* the artist and the audience were outsiders of the secret(s) investigated. As already established, there is an inherent power imbalance between the *insiders* and the *outsiders* of the secret, because 'secrecy structures social or political relations of exclusion and inclusion; by separating those who know from those who do not' (Horn, 2011, p. 109). However, while this is crucial when raising awareness about the violence of political secrecy, it does not necessarily apply to the artworks in this section. Instead, the *poetic (in)visibility* artists have explored the invisible through its mystical and spiritual qualities. These works include the secret in 'a form of looming latency or potentiality that is more powerful than its actual content' (Horn, 2011, p. 109).

Artworks in both categories – *poetic (in)visibility and tangible unknowns* – imply existing knowledge, which, with varying likelihood, could potentially be disclosed. In contrast, the evidence in relation to the provenance of gold used in my research and the resulting *secrecy effect* exist in a static position, rendered permanent by the impossibility of revealing the secret, and thus forever remaining a *known unknown*. In this context, hierarchical power structures do not exist in the same way because it is impossible to establish the origin of the gold. Therefore, everybody – artist and viewer – regardless of status, expertise, and knowledge, could be considered outsiders. My work thus invites a condition of collective non-knowledge.

[56] Except for the additional layer of secrecy that was created through the bombing and consequent destruction of the *Merzbau*.

4 REMEMBERING THE PAST

4.1 History, memory, and identity

As previously discussed, secrecy can function as a tool to reinforce and confirm political power by covering up uncomfortable truths. Our historical understanding is, therefore, influenced by descriptions and interpretations of the past, as well as gaps in knowledge. People in power have deliberately created absences through the silencing of narratives, the refusal to record, miscommunications of historical events, or the destruction of evidence concerning a specific period.

Professor of Cultural Theory at the University of South Australia, Susannah Radstone, and Professor of Cultural History at the University of East London, Katharine Hodgkin, describe these gaps as 'holes in the fabric of memory' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2014, p. 237). While such memory holes are omnipresent, their shape, size, and position might change. The past is not fixed but in constant flux; it is questioned, twisted, re-evaluated, and distorted. Because remembering is an act of engaging with the past in the present, memory offers a way to construct and reconfigure the past to support contemporary interests. As Hodgkin and Radstone (2014, p. 1) have pointedly explained, 'contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present'. Therefore, such fluctuations in how history is conceived in the present invite manipulation to pursue political objectives.[57]

Memory is a connector between the past and the present. It is thus essential to consider the institutional powers and governmental forces at play when discussing the sociological implications of remembering and forgetting. Not considering this intrinsic political layer of memory would mean neglecting its ability to define the contemporary socio-political landscape. After the Cold War, the past became increasingly significant as a common denominator for identity. As a result, studying memory within a sociological framework in reflection of the influence and interconnection with history and politics became an important subject of scholarly research (Ludi, 2006; Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy, 2011). Drawing on the concept of 'collective memory' – first introduced by Maurice Halbwachs (1980) – an

[57] A passage from George Orwell's book *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949. p. 47) comes to mind: 'All history was a palimpsest, scraped clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary.'

increasing number of scholars have studied how memories are shared and influenced amongst a group of people and how memories shape collective identity, as well as how the memory of a group of people is influenced by various factors, such as cultural representation, political agendas, and sociological environments.[58]

Political processes and control, inherent in establishing dominant memories and silencing histories, were the focal point of the Popular Memory Group.[59] The PMG was founded by British cultural theorists who convened at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK from 1979 to 1980. The aim of the group was to investigate how historical consciousness is 'not just a gift of professional historiography but is produced through a variety of media and institutions' (PMG, 1982a, p. 254). In 1982, the group published a paper summarising their collaborative work about the socio-political dimensions of memory and their concept of 'popular memory'. While drawing on Halbwach's definition of collective memory, the PMG (1982b, p. 1) has focused on memory as a 'form of political practice' for the creation of 'dominant memories'. They emphasise the political dimension of historical understanding, arguing that control over historical representation is an intrinsic part of 'political domination' (PMG, 1982a, p. 258). Popular memory is characterised by the struggle between 'real processes of domination in the historical field' – brought about by institutional authority and cultural power – and the resulting marginalisation of individual memories (PMG, 1982b, p. 4). Therefore, the PMG studied how the hierarchical forms of knowledge affect how history is written, enacted, and confirmed. Although different actors produce sometimes contradicting representations of the past, some agencies hold more credibility than others (PMG, 1982b). In this context, the PMG (1982b, p. 5) introduced the term 'historical apparatus' to refer to such agencies and explain how they are usually linked – but not reduced – to political power, such as 'government and parliamentary systems'. Because of their political dimension, *historical apparatuses* do not necessarily produce a reliable record of the past but are instead driven by ideological trajectories. Other agencies can become *historical apparatuses* if they contribute to the 'public historical sphere and control access to the means of publication' (PMG, 1982b, p. 3). Institutions like museums, art galleries, and

[58] To name a few: Assmann and Assmann (1994), Assmann (2011), Tota (2003), and Wagner-Pacifici (1996).
[59] Going forward I will use the abbreviation PMG to refer to the group's work.

archives; education facilities like schools and universities; and broadcast and print media, such as television and radio programmes, as well as books and newspapers, could fall into this category. Consequently, dominant narratives are directly tied to their cultural form and historical representation, while histories are silenced due to a deliberate lack of form and representation.

While I will draw on some of the PMG's concepts, such as the *historical apparatus*, when discussing Switzerland's involvement in the Second World War, I will refer to it in the context of national memory. How a nation remembers and forgets is heavily influenced by how history is communicated and is thus directly linked to cultural memory. Considered a form of collective memory, cultural memory focuses on a shared culture and its related commemorative practices, which further shape a resulting collective identity (Assmann and Assmann, 1994). National memory is also heavily influenced by cultural forms of remembering, such as commemorative events and monuments, as well as the media, such as films, newspapers, magazines, and books. It is not only the form of remembering that is decisive but also the language used to narrate the past and power structures affecting how it is reported, understood, and thus remembered. Like cultural memory, national memory thus draws on sociological and representational aspects influencing what a group recognises as their history and how a collective identity is established through memory but confined to shared interpretations of a nation's past (Wertsch, 2017).

A precondition for national memory is thus the formation of a nation-state. In his book *Imagined Communities* (2016), political scientist Benedict Anderson explored the concept of nationalism and the formation of modern nations through the examples of different countries. He defines nation-ness and nationalism as 'cultural artefacts of a particular kind' (Anderson, 2016, p. 15). He argues that to fully grasp the concept of nationality, it is crucial to analyse its historical purpose. Anderson (2016, p. 16) states that a nation 'is an imagined political community' and further explains:

> It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson, 2016, p. 16).

This is particularly interesting in the context of Switzerland because the country identifies as a 'politische Willensnation': a political nation united by will (ICE, 2002), or what Anderson (2016, p. 101) would refer to as an imagined nation 'without linguistic communality'.[60] Through his key concepts and ideas, Anderson discusses how nations are constructed through shared languages, cultural symbols, and the media. In one chapter of his book, Anderson focuses on the countries which have joined nationalism comparatively late. He also discusses Switzerland, among a majority of formerly colonised areas in Africa and Asia, and concludes that Swiss nationalism occurred late because the population did not share a common language. Eventually, the 'communications revolution' manifested in 'print capitalism' – originating from newspapers and novels – in the 20th century, facilitated a representation of 'the imagined community in ways that did not require linguistic uniformity' (Anderson, 2016, p. 27; p. 100; p. 103).

Drawing on Anderson thus illustrates how a nation as an 'imagined community' is heavily reliant on a communal feeling of belonging affirmed through language, cultural codes, shared values, and narrative. He further highlights the crucial role of the state in 'instilling nationalist ideologies' (Anderson, 2016, p. 90). This is especially relevant in the context of a historic political-cultural movement in Switzerland. The 'Geistige Landesverteidigung' [Spiritual National Defence] was officially introduced by the Swiss government in 1938 to protect against the growing fascist, National Socialist, and communist totalitarianism by strengthening Swiss spiritual values (Jorio, 2006). According to the Swiss government, these principles were anchored in Switzerland's cultural diversity, its direct democracy, and its devotion to human dignity and freedom. The movement was considered a strategy to be implemented by Swiss citizens. Still, it was widely supported by Swiss cultural institutions, such as the foundation Pro Helvetia, which was specially founded for this purpose and was subsidised by the state.[61] During the Cold War, the original intention of defence became increasingly secondary. Instead, the 'Spiritual National Defence' became a backdrop to promote anticommunism and thus distanced itself

[60] *Politische Willensnation* draws on the concept of 'civic nationalism' – a concept first introduced by Ernest Renan in a lecture given at the Sorbonne University in 1882. Switzerland considers itself a *politische Willensnation* because it has no common language or shared religion but is a nation united by choice. The collective impetus is the maximum of political freedom (ICE, 2002, p. 62).
[61] Pro Helvetia is still the most important public foundation for culture. For the years 2021, 2022, and 2023, they were granted a total of 132.6 million Swiss francs by the Swiss government (Pro Helvetia, 2021; Pro Helvetia, 2022; Pro Helvetia, 2023).

from one of its core ideas of strengthening Swiss democracy. The movement eventually ended in 1969, following critique from Switzerland's left political party, which condemned it as a tool of ideological indoctrination and social disciplining. In the years that followed, it became apparent that this movement had shaped the national identity of Switzerland, driving it into isolationism and creating a sense of superiority over other countries (Jorio, 2006).

Drawing on this historical movement, it becomes apparent how the Swiss heavily relied on the idea of cultural values and symbols considered to be Swiss to reaffirm their identity. In the context of Anderson's study, Switzerland may have felt especially threatened by the looming totalitarian states on its borders because it could not rely on a mutual language or shared culture. The Swiss form of nationalism – being a *politische Willensnation* – implies a voluntary notion based on collective values. This further explains the importance of maintaining an intact image of their carefully moulded national identity. Thus, the Swiss government established a strategy to actively rekindle the values that unite the nation and that lie in their diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the *Geistige Landesverteidigung* offered a productive strategy to confirm the Swiss identity through cultural symbols.

4.2. Materiality of the past

The influential role of cultural symbols for national identity is also apparent in an article by historian Ewa Domanska (2006b). In her article, 'Return to Things', she advocates for 'things' to become an integral part of the development of 'counter-history', thus moving away from official narratives and arguing for a 'repossession of history' (Domanska, 2006b, p. 171). Domanska (2006b, p. 172) specifies a reason for the increasing interest in the presence of 'things' and how we relate to them in a 'crisis of identity'. Here, she defines 'things' as central in identity constructions to 'determine who we are'. In a group context, they 'help build and strengthen interpersonal relations as they serve to connect people' (Domanska, 2006b, p. 172). Therefore, to counter dominant historical events, it is crucial to understand the significance of cultural symbols in the form of 'non-human' matter and their reciprocal connection with an established identity (Domanska, 2006b, p. 171).

While values are fundamental, they are also abstract in their tangibility. In this context, the Swiss government relied on *things* to facilitate their representation of Swiss values during the *Geistige Landesverteidigung* movement, such as the national exhibition titled *Landi 39*, which was hosted in Zurich in 1939. *Landi 39* included various attractions and exhibitions, ranging from a cable car over Lake Zurich, to a traditional Swiss country village – constructed especially for the exhibition – to artworks by famous Swiss artists, who were commissioned to create work for the national exhibition. Even though *Landi 39* was the subject of many controversial discussions, it greatly influenced the Swiss collective memory because of its implementation and enforcement of cultural symbols (Abplanalp, 2022). In the *Geistige Landesverteidigung* context*, Landi 39* symbolised patriotism, solidarity, and Swiss defensiveness (Jorio, 2006). How Switzerland and its history were presented served the national identity the Swiss government was trying to establish. *Landi 39* thus further confirms how representations are never neutral but are always subject to the political objectives of the present.

Fig. 34 *Cable car across Lake Zürich at Landi 39* (1939) Photographed by Louis Beringer

Notions of presence and absence in relation to cultural representation and historical deprivation are intrinsically linked to shaping our understanding of the past. There is, thus, a correlation between the inherent power dynamics of public memory and political secrecy and their defining factors of presence and absence. Therefore, the different articulations of the secret – as defined by Birchall (2014) – could also be considered in the context of public memory. The *known unknown* thus correlates to what cultural historian Luisa Passerini (2014, p. 239) describes as the 'paradox of memory'. This paradox exists because it is impossible to 'look for something we have lost unless we remember it at least in part'. However, a lack of memory – amnesia – is not just an *absence* of memory; it is a *reaction* to it. Amnesia could not occur without memory inasmuch as transparency cannot exist without secrecy. Secrecy and memory thus form the constitutive element without which a reaction in the form of negation would not be possible in the first place. However, unlike secrecy, memory can never go beyond the *known unknown* because memory implies a presence, whereas secrecy implies an absence.

Nevertheless, memory could also be defined by the Rancièrian concept of the *distribution of the sensible*, because both memory and secrecy are influenced by the presence as well as the absence of what can and cannot be formed in thought or

expressed in words, images, and sound. This interconnection between absence and presence in the context of remembering and forgetting is also described by Passerini (2014, p. 240):

> [W]hen trying to understand connections between silence and speech, oblivion and memory, we must look for relationships between traces, or between traces and their absences; and we must attempt interpretations which make possible the creation of new associations.

Considering these defining conditions of presence and absence in the context of contested pasts creates a vantage point which invites an alternative approach to creating new associations. However, how could we create a form for repressed, forgotten, or ignored memories if they have been forgotten, mainly because they have not had a suitable form in the first place? While a secret is, per definition, *formless,* an *open secret* – as previously established by Weizman and Paglen – it still interacts with the world around it through its material manifestation (Black, Clark and Weizman, 2016; Paglen, 2014). This could also be applied when engaging with the absence of memory or, as defined by Birchall (2014, p. 33), a secret whose exposure has not had any 'discernible effects in the world'. It is, thus, imperative to find a tangible form for such an *absent* history.

Inspired by *Landi 39*, I decided to explore the material presence of memory to study how national identity is established through its physicality in public representations of the past and the present. The form of memory is central to its purpose as an act of remembering. In the context of my practice, I was interested in how cultural symbols shape national identity and the role of memory in confirming such identity constructions and perceptions of a country. Therefore, I have been collecting various objects that function as carriers of memory. Marius Kwint, a Reader in Visual Culture at the University of Portsmouth, explains the relationship between memory and objects. He distinguishes between three categories of material memories in Western traditions. In the first category are objects which 'furnish recollection', because objects allow us to build 'pictures of the past' and are thus an essential component of memories (Kwint, 1999, p. 2). However, objects can also evoke memories, as explained by Kwint in the second category. Here, objects 'stimulate remembering' – such as souvenirs or monuments – 'bringing back experiences which otherwise would have remained dormant, repressed or forgotten' (Kwint,

1999, p. 2). The third kind of objects are things that 'form records', because they embody an indexical relationship with memory (Kwint, 1999, p. 2). For example, a book that has been read countless times will show signs of wear and tear, such as scuffed edges, a cracked spine, discoloured pages, and notes in the margins. The book is an archive of traces and, thus, a carrier of its memories.

4.2.1 Forgotten pasts and interrogated narratives

For my research, I have acquired pre-owned memory objects, which I either bought on flea markets or e-seller platforms or, in one instance, received from a friend who found some things while clearing out the house of her grandmother. I have collected various kinds of objects, such as Swiss military memorabilia from the Second World War, personal objects formerly belonging to Swiss soldiers serving during the war, and souvenirs portraying stereotypical Swiss subjects, such as Edelweiss flowers, cowbells, and depictions of the Matterhorn.

The word *souvenir* derives from the Old French word *souvenir,* which translates as an 'act of remembering*'* in English ('souvenir', 2023). Souvenirs are a medium of memory, usually without great financial or material value. Instead, the owner of the souvenir assigns meaning to the object through nostalgic connotations, thus allocating meaning to memory. Instead of a historical relic, a souvenir might function as a symbolic reference to the past, a placeholder for a memory (Samida, Eggert and Hahn, 2014). As opposed to a memento or a keepsake, the term souvenir defines an object that was bought or kept as a reminder of a past journey, an event, or a holiday. While more specific, the kind of object that falls into this category is broad; it encompasses a pebble kept from a beach on holidays, a birthday card from a loved one, a picture of a fellow traveller, a dried flower from a hike, or a chalet magnet, bought from a souvenir shop in Interlaken (Fig. 34). While the value of all the above examples lies in their close association to a place or a person, the chalet magnet also serves a broader socio-political interest because it depicts a cultural symbol. Such souvenirs uphold a popular image and reduce a country to a romanticised representation. Because of that, they exist as cultural symbols, both to inform and confirm a national identity. For my research, I have focused on this form of souvenir to further study the interconnection between identity and representation.

Fig. 35 *Souvenir shop in Interlaken, Switzerland* (2023)

Furthermore, I have drawn on the work of Swiss artist and researcher Denise Bertschi. In her practice, Bertschi questions Swiss neutrality and how some pasts are strategically silenced while an image of sovereignty and innocence is upheld. Through the study of archives, landscapes, and environments, she investigates how silence and obfuscation in relation to specific events in Switzerland's past impact our knowledge of the country's history and are instrumental in understanding its contemporary political landscape. Focusing on historical events allows her to 'contemplate present-day national attributions and economic power structures' (Bertschi *et al.*, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, she has been investigating Swiss colonial ties in Brazil, Switzerland's complicity in the South African apartheid regime, and the Swiss involvement in the North and South Korean proxy war. Even though it is clearly defined in its diplomatic, political, and economic functions, neutrality remains intangible in its visibility. In her work, Bertschi finds ways to visualise the invisible to interrogate past missions of 'neutrality' and expose historical complicity. She is thus principally challenging Swiss neutrality to configure it as a fictional imaginary.

Equally rigorous in her factual and conceptual interpretations, Bertschi conducts meticulous research and follows a systematic process of collecting, documenting,

and presenting. Initially, she begins her research in archives, gathering and organising historical information. Informed by her acquired knowledge and visual references, Bertschi begins her recording process, finally finding relevant ways of exhibiting or publishing her work.

Investigating a hidden history and the notion of absence concerning Switzerland's foreign affairs and raising questions about representation and image were also the focus of Bertschi's long-term project about the Swiss involvement in the monitoring of the 'ceasefire of the proxy war between North and South Korea' in the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in 1953 (Bertschi, 2021, p. 5). Bertschi has worked with the military archive in Bern, where she had access to an extensive collection of archival photographs, Super-8 film stills, and diary entries from the 1950s to the 1980s, documenting the daily lives of the Swiss 'neutral' mission in the DMZ. The pictures were taken by Swiss soldiers involved in the mission, and the photographs depicted mundane situations, such as gardening (Fig. 36), images of the interior of the Swiss camp, and soldiers sunbathing (Bertschi, 2021). During her archival research, Bertschi gathered images, film stills, and diary entries, which she eventually published in a book titled *State Fiction – The Gaze of the Swiss Neutral Mission in the Korean Demilitarized Zone* (2021).

Fig. 36 Double-page spread from the book *State Fiction – The Gaze of the Swiss Neutral Mission in the Korean Demilitarized Zone* (2021) by Denise Bertschi

Bertschi also found pictures of Korean men, women, and children in her archival research. In this context, she studied the colonial gaze and power imbalance – inherent in documentary photography – occurring between the photographer and the photographed. Some soldiers wrote about how 'their subjects were not content with their photographs being taken' (Bertschi, 2021, p. 256). The awareness of such discontent further pronounces the imbalance in power. Through small bribes and deals, the soldiers would persuade their subjects to pose so they could be photographed in a 'stereotypically ethnographic' way (Bertschi, 2021, p. 256). Bertschi deliberately disregarded those portraits in her book so as not to reproduce the colonial gaze. She further iterates that her interest is not in the 'aesthetic appreciation' of the image but in the 'soft practices of power' (Bertschi, 2021, p. 256).

As a continuation of the project, Bertschi has further explored these 'soft practices of power' and thus worked with archival photographs of flowers taken by soldiers during their military mission in the DMZ. She examines how a seemingly innocent photograph of a flower becomes political because it was photographed in a highly political context. The 'prospering' flowers exist in direct contrast to their historical

and environmental context, flourishing in the 'open wound' of the DMZ (Franke, 2020, p. 27). Bertschi challenges the idea of documentary photography and its claim to *document* a status quo. The flower images draw a parallel with neutral impartiality and highlight the boundaries of objectivity. They are thus like the borders of the DMZ; 'they cannot be depicted as "objective" when viewed from the outside' (Franke, 2020, p. 27). Bertschi uses these photographs to explore the invisibility of borders while simultaneously configuring the 'proverbial neutrality' of Switzerland 'as a conflict zone' (Franke, 2020, p. 27). Besides symbolising 'Swiss subjectivity', the photographs also reference a 'nature fetish' and 'national myth' in relation to Switzerland's national identity (Franke, 2020, p. 27).

This is also an essential aspect of my work, in which I am drawing on the same *nature fetish* and the *national myth* of innocence and neutrality to investigate how the portrayal of a country is instrumental in forming and reaffirming national identity. In an essay written about Bertschi's work, German curator and writer Anselm Franke further alludes to the integral role of nature in the Swiss national identity and public image:

> The apparent cosmological integrity of the Swiss self-image, conveyed through pictures of naturalness, of nativeness, of the value of nature, has produced a perhaps unique (…) identity of self-image and tourist marketing, of image, conspicuous materiality and broken reality (Franke, 2020, p. 29).

Drawing on such innocuous illustrations of Switzerland serves as a protective shield to facilitate the hiding of past misdeeds. Franke further explains how the photograph not only captures the innocence of the flower but also portrays the invisibility of the DMZ and the Swiss involvement in it. Instead, with all its romanticised association, the flower becomes a symbol to make visible the invisible (Franke, 2020, p. 27).[62] While neutrality implies a passive stance through an absence of a political favouritism – an in-between – Bertschi illuminates the impossibility of remaining passive in the context of these soldiers' mission. These images give the neutral mission visibility. However, the visibility itself defeats its neutral purpose. Through this work, it becomes apparent that exposing the missing – the absence implied by neutrality – does not strengthen neutrality as a concept but instead exposes its

[62] Franke (2020, p. 27) further highlights how the documentary image itself could be considered a paradox, a 'social construct of the visible', while drawing on the effect of its materialising visibility.

fragile status. Here, we could draw a parallel with how using the *aesthetics of the secret* does not facilitate the exposure of the secret but instead makes secrecy more vulnerable to critique and questioning. Bertschi references the silenced and the hidden in two ways: through the subject matter of the prosperous flower and through the presentation format of the photographs, printed on textiles usually used in Korean entryways. According to Franke (2020, p. 29), using these textiles allows Bertschi to reference the gender order and stereotypes of 'women in modern militarised, nationalised societies' and to highlight their invisibility in historical representation. The textiles represent the 'barriers and links between exterior and interior spaces, delimiting thus the realms of public and private life' (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 3).

Bertschi's project and my work pose similar questions about popular representation and invisible histories. In her project, she dissects official sources to move beyond the obvious through symbolic reference, thus letting her work silently but potently question deeply ingrained perceptions. Here, Bertschi's practice and my research are similar in their emphasis on metaphorical visibility. Specifically, her incorporation of flower photographs as a reference to Switzerland's foregrounding of nature and myth in connection to their identity is a central aspect of my practice, particularly concerning my engagement with postcards. Using postcards as a basis for my material interventions draws on their purpose as an object of remembrance while depicting representative imagery.

Notions of neutrality and innocence are a fundamental characteristic of Swiss wartime remembrance and are essential in maintaining the national identity. The Swiss picture postcards are a romanticised and idealised presentation of the country and symbolise these stereotypical Swiss characteristics (Fig. 37). Focusing on the gilding of mountains on these postcards further debunks Switzerland's national myth of resistance by highlighting its supposedly 'insurmountable' territory. Furthermore, it refers to the hiding of Swiss gold reserves in the national redoubts – the military fortifications in the Swiss central Alps – during the war to protect them from looting in case of an enemy invasion. Therefore, the gilding of the mountains functions like a mnemonic code, a reminder of Switzerland's economic ties with, and their importance for, the National Socialist regime. Postcards are popular souvenirs, but in contrast to objects bought as personal mementos, their primary purpose is to

provide a platform for sending messages to friends and relatives from abroad. Therefore, postcards offer an opportunity to send communications and share stories, allowing another person to participate in a memory. The act of writing and sending a postcard is a very personal gesture. However, unlike letters, postcards are not sent in envelopes; thus, without this added layer of privacy, anyone who gets hold of a postcard can read its content. Like Bertschi's flower curtains, the postcard juxtaposes the public and the private, the hidden and the revealed. Furthermore, incorporating such personalised objects in the context of historical critique also invites questions about the interconnectedness of the personal and the political.

Fig. 37 *Postcard from 1945* (2022)

As previously mentioned, the personal became political in connection to Switzerland's involvement with the gold trade because of the potentiality of victim gold ending up in *Vreneli* coins. This idea of broader complicity and historical neglect, becoming – as per Rothberg's (2019) definition – an *implicated subject*, is also brought about by political secrecy and denial. As previously established, political secrecy and memory politics play an integral role in what is remembered of the past and how. The artists discussed in *tangible unknowns* have provided a concept of how an engagement with the hidden could be facilitated. In the next part of this chapter, I discuss how Bertschi has made hidden complicity perceptible by

illuminating its repercussions and thus challenging its invisibility in a contemporary framework.

Incorporating spaces and their historical significance is an important aspect of Bertschi's practice. In 2018, she was invited to exhibit a project at the Jacob Johannes Museum in Zurich, for which she created *Helvécia, Brazil* (2017-2018). It was exhibited among educational displays in an exhibition entitled *Kaffee aus Helvécia* [coffee from Helvécia], and curated by journalist Eduardo Simantob, as well as curator Marcelo Rezende. The museum was a coffee museum until 2021 and was established by the Jacobs Foundation, founded by Klaus J. Jacobs, a Swiss-German merchant working in the coffee and chocolate industry (Rezende, Simantob and Johann Jacobs Museum, no date; Johann Jacobs Museum, 2021).[63]

The exhibition centred on the history of the village Helvécia, located in Bahia, Brazil. Helvécia is unknown among Brazilians and is named after a coffee plantation that Swiss immigrants managed in the 19th century. It was a part of the colony of Leopoldina, one of the largest coffee plantations globally, and was established in 1818 by Swiss and German merchants suffering from poverty in their own countries (Pèlerin, 2017). Switzerland is not generally associated with the context of colonial profits and complicity; however, even though Switzerland did not possess colonies as such, several Swiss individuals played an integral role in the 'colonial economic system' through their involvement in governing and controlling plantations and raw goods trading (Afschar, 2020, p. 11). For her project, Bertschi studied official documents specifying the possessions of Swiss slaveowners and examined records detailing the 'circumstances on site' (Afschar, 2020, p. 12).

Drawing on her archival research, Bertschi installed a festively decorated dining table – laid with high-quality porcelain and extravagant napkins – as part of the exhibition. However, instead of the typical Swiss eyelet embroidery in a flower shape, the embroidery on the tablecloth of the dinner scene specified the names of Swiss slaveowners and the number of enslaved people they owned (Pèlerin, 2017). Furthermore, the embroidery visually references the documents Bertschi studied in the archives in Brazil, which were decayed and riddled with holes due to the tropical

[63] Until 2021, the museum focused on exhibitions to educate people about trading routes and colonial complicity in the context of various raw materials, such as coffee, cacao, opium, and silk (Johann Jacobs Museum, 2021).

weather conditions (Rezende, Simantob and Johann Jacobs Museum, no date). The bourgeoise dinner scene alludes to the rise of the social status of Swiss tradespeople who emigrated to Brazil, who, prior to their colonial engagement, had lived in poverty in Switzerland but who had become wealthy by profiting from slave labour and the lucrative coffee trade.

Fig. 38 Video still from *Helvécia, Brazil* (2017-2018) by Denise Bertschi

Alongside her dinner installation and some large-format photographs, Bertschi also exhibited a video installation on three screens, documenting the aftermath of the Swiss colonies in Helvécia. The videos featured interviews and testimonies that she had gathered from descendants of enslaved people working on the plantations, as well as recordings of the village and surrounding landscape (Fig. 38). Following the ban on slave labour in Brazil, the coffee plantation vanished – overgrown by eucalyptus trees, which were planted as part of colonial cultivation. Nature reclaimed the land, and most traces of colonial history disappeared (Afschar, 2020). Apart from some indications, such as an abandoned cemetery and a deserted port, Bertschi's videos capture absences and thus symbolically reference this forgotten history; these absences are countered, however, through the sharing of personal memories by descendants of enslaved people who had worked on the former plantation.

Bertschi's works evolve around complicity and gaps in historical knowledge. In the exhibition, her installations were contrasted with serene paintings of Leopoldina and

romanticised statements by the Swiss scientist Johann Jakob von Tschudi, who deemed slave labour integral to the colony's success and highlighted their predominantly 'humane treatment'. The exhibition also featured devices to control enslaved people violently, such as a wrought-iron muzzle (Pèlerin, 2017). Exhibiting these contradictory artefacts together challenges dominant imperial narratives in their nostalgic and romanticised portrayal and raises questions about the silencing of inconvenient histories. The exhibition furthermore highlighted the reciprocal cultural influence following the colonial project, such as a Black doll dressed in a traditional Swiss christening gown with eyelet embroidery, or information about the export of knitting machines to the region of the former colony, in which eyelet embroidery is popular to this day (Pèlerin, 2017).

The traces gathered and recorded by Bertschi, paired with the concrete evidence of the Swiss cultural impact in the region, present the story of a disengaged part of Swiss history through the lens of historical remnants and contemporary documentation. While the exhibition *Kaffee aus Helvécia* is crucial from an educational point of view – informing about Switzerland's colonial ties – it also draws on powerful contradictions, encouraging the audience to question what is considered *historical truth.* Such contrasts were a dominant feature in the exhibition and also appeared in Bertschi's project. Her dinner table installation – a symbol of wealth and privilege – is contrasted with the inconspicuous embroidery of the tablecloth, which exposes the complicity of Swiss merchants in the exploitation of slave labour for personal fortune. Furthermore, the video recordings of the former colony appear muted and absent, symbolising the unknown and the silence about this topic. These images are countered by the testimonies of slave descendants, whose narrations contradict deceptive legends and uncover a silenced and traumatic history. Bertschi thus situates the romanticised, almost fictitious presentation in a contemporary context to reveal its consequences.

Instead of echoing the biased stories spread by the colonisers and recorded in archives, Bertschi's work confronts the viewer with the unadorned and violent truth of Switzerland's colonial history in Brazil. She unpacks an established image and fills the gaps in historical knowledge, or, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2014, p. 237) describe it, 'the holes in the fabric of memory'. In a contemporary context, Bertschi's work not only illuminates these *memory holes* but also raises questions about

Switzerland's 'national imaginary' and its 'strong sense of exceptionalism', rooted in the idea that 'Switzerland did not take part in the overarching process of European imperial expansion' (Schär and Nicacio Lima, 2020, pp. 45-46). Through her project, she critically questions the predominant image of Switzerland as a small, self-contained state in the middle of Europe. Instead, *Helvécia, Brazil* uncovers the 'global dimension of Swiss history' that has not been associated with its national identity and thus 'remains largely "forgotten" to this day' (Schär and Nicacio Lima, 2020, p. 46).

Creating juxtapositions to challenge deceptive appearances is also a central aspect of my practice. The Swiss Alps and the generally tranquil photographs of Swiss landscapes are often portrayed on postcards. Using such serene imagery for my gold interventions thus allows me to create an ambivalence in order to draw a parallel with Switzerland's morally compromising complicity with the Third Reich (Fig. 39). Furthermore, applying gold leaf adds value and another layer of *beauty* while referring to a historically precarious involvement. However, the gold functions like an admission of guilt, and – as previously discussed – adding it to seemingly innocent symbols of Switzerland, deliberate commemorative objects, and objects belonging to Swiss soldiers during the war could thus be understood as *tainting* their appearance. In this context, the critique is not solely tied to how a country is depicted but also poses questions about how the national memory – stripped of past wrongdoings – has been moulded to fit a dominant historical narrative and national ideology that still resonates today. Therefore, the gold not only refers to past, immoral complicity but also raises questions about Switzerland's morally corrupt banking landscape and the country's enduring prominence as a hub for the global gold trade.

Fig. 39 *Gilded postcard from 1981* (2022)

A controversial role in relation to the gold trade and the Swiss banking business is also explored in *Neutrality as an Agent*, in which Bertschi investigated Switzerland's financial involvement in the context of the South African apartheid regime. To create

this artistic work, she examined various sources, such as archival material and architectural references, and travelled to South Africa to document buildings and contextually significant places on video and in images. Bertschi has exhibited this project in various forms and contexts. For this analysis, I will focus on a video installation titled ~~*CONFIDENTIAL*~~ (2018) (Fig. 40).

As noted in Chapter 2, Switzerland abstained from participating in any international initiatives, such as sanctions or regulations, to put on pressure against the institutional racial segregation and accompanying violent discrimination faced by the non-white majority of the South African population during the apartheid regime. Instead, the Swiss continued their 'business-as-usual' attitude; companies continued exporting arms, and Swiss banks continued giving out loans and trading gold. Such complicity undermines the aim of boycotts and sanctions to form systematic pressure on a government, forcing it to create lasting change. While most Western countries participated in the international sanctions imposed on South Africa, Switzerland 'never ceased to invoke neutrality and use smokescreens to uphold the status quo' (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 4).[64] The Swiss seemed to be content with their *neutral* political stance. However, in 2003, a historical commission – tasked with a thorough investigation of Switzerland's economic involvement with the South African apartheid regime – was prohibited access to relevant documents in the federal archives. Because of the general inaccessibility of archival material in Switzerland, Bertschi resorted to the South African archives to research Switzerland's ties. There, she found documents about gold trading between the former Société de Banque Suisse, known today as UBS, in the 1950s. Such gold trade deals 'took place over secret networks that bypassed the official regulatory authorities' (Afschar, 2020, p. 14). Bertschi travelled to the 'sites of these transactions' and filmed six buildings in the former Central Business District (CBD) in Johannesburg for her video work (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 4).

[64] This reminds us of how the Swiss were the only neutral country that refused to stop trading gold with the Nazis after Allied warnings in 1942.

Fig. 40 Exhibition view of the video installation ~~*CONFIDENTIAL*~~ (2018) by Denise Bertschi at Alte Fabrik Rapperswil, Switzerland

Mirrored in her footage are the architectural influences and aspirations for this area, which 'seemed destined to become an entirely white "African New York City"' (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 4). Instead, most of these buildings are abandoned, and businesses have ceased operating. According to Swiss curator Claire Hoffmann, these scenes, recorded by Bertschi, capture 'the striking absence of a history carefully buried behind the official version of the past' (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 4). Bertschi's meticulous documentation of these places explores their historicity and highlights the aftermath of the gold trading. She considers these buildings – and, in general, any objects and material included in her artistic work – as 'silent witnesses of the past' (Afschar, 2020, p.15). Working with these *silent witnesses* thus allows 'the ghosts of forgotten and unresolved machinations of Western cultures' to become part of her projects (Afschar, 2020, p. 15). Through her inclusion of specific materials and methods, symbols and references, Bertschi is establishing connections to question Switzerland's identity and self-image, and 'turns the images of wishful innocence inside out, to better dissect the often so conniving construction of news and views' (Hoffmann, 2021, p. 4).

While using different approaches, Bertschi's and my practice are very similar in their aim of questioning the power structures that deliberately neglect histories through political secrecy and cultural portrayal and thus shape the Swiss public memory and national identity. Bertschi uses the archive as a point of departure by examining the invisible and the visible. The gathered archival materials provide the foundation for her research, which she later complements or counters through documentary records or interventions to question how history is portrayed and what is remembered. Like the works of the artists discussed in the previous chapter, Bertschi conceptually explores the notion of invisibility through specific performative or symbolic acts. However, because of her different methods and approaches, she cannot be easily located in one category. Her work combines features from all three; she focuses on political invisibility, the gathering of archival traces, and the metaphorical engagement with an absence. Her factual approach and collecting process could thus be compared to those of artists in the category of *mapped secrets* in the previous chapter. However, Bertschi also finds a way to reconfigure some of the documents in her mapping process by highlighting their symbolic relevance to referencing the invisible. Her work does not entirely fit Birchall's concept of the *aesthetics of the secret* because it does not treat the 'secret *as* secret'; however, her exploration of the invisible in the context of political secrecy and historical knowledge shares similarities with the artists discussed in *tangible unknowns* and could be considered a 'radical political response' (Birchall, 2014, p. 26). She has focused on how the unseen, such as Swiss neutrality, can be made palpable, and thus an exploration of the invisible is a significant feature of her practice.

Bertschi has influenced my research because of her engagement with the hidden and unseen in the context of Swiss history and because of her archival engagement. Even though my work is more focused on the act of building a counter-archive, her process could also be considered a counter-archival practice because, while she is drawing on archival documents, she is not configuring the archive as a static institution but as a living *thing* that needs expanding and intervention to understand the notions of presence and absence in Switzerland's historical context.

4.2.2 Articulated absences and haunting presences

As discussed previously, gold is a material whose past is *hidden in plain sight*. Therefore, the method of gilding an object is not only an act of concealing due to the covering up with the gold leaf, but also because of the physicality of gold itself. However, this is not only the case with gilded objects. A similar phenomenon occurs with other objects I have acquired for my counter-archive, which I have deliberately not gilded. In contrast to gold, traces of the object's past might still be evident, such as marks, scratches, or the fading of colour. They still embody a hidden element in the form of a memory that remains inaccessible to us. Using gold as a material has been a very explicit choice in the historical context of study. However, the choice of objects that I have been working with might initially appear elusive in relation to the hidden. Drawing on Kwint's third argument, objects and materials carry traces from the past – like scars on the skin – and every trace follows the same conceptual logic of a reminder: to invoke memories. Because these records on the objects are distinct memories, some of these traces might be intentional – like a date and a place written on the bottom of a figurine – while others are unintentional, like a scratch from not handling it carefully enough. Either way, these traces exist as layers of inscription on the object.

This can be further explained by closer examination of an individual object in my research: a wooden cow. It was among other possessions in the box that I got from a friend after her family had cleared out her grandmother's house in Appenzell, a canton in Switzerland. Such wooden cows are popular souvenirs and are sold in most souvenir shops in Switzerland. However, this cow was evidentially not new; it had various scratch marks, patches where the paint had started to wear off, and both of its horns and one ear were missing.

Even though I have no knowledge of the relevance of this cow to my friend's grandparents, I have imagined a story to illustrate how such memory objects can become growing archives of different memories. In this scenario, the cow was given to my friend's grandparents' – let us call them Helga and Peter – by a friend passing through Switzerland on her travels in 1998. The friend, Marie, was a close friend of Helga's sister, Elisabeth, who died of cancer in the early 1990s. Marie stayed at Helga and Peter's house for a few days on her way to Austria; to show her gratitude, she gave them a wooden cow she bought in a souvenir shop in Gruyère, which she

thought fitting because she remembered Helga's upbringing on a dairy farm. In this scenario, the cow carries various memories for Helga; it signifies the time Marie spent at Helga's and Peter's house. It might invite further memories connected to the political climate of the time, discussions they had and stories they shared during Marie's stay. It symbolises Helga's and Marie's friendship and reminds Helga of her deceased sister, Elisabeth, who introduced the two.

Furthermore, the cow is connected to Helga's identity, for it serves as a reminder of Helga's childhood on a dairy farm. Ever since Marie's visit, the small wooden cow has been a cherished object, and over the years, it has gathered various traces evidencing its existence in Helga's and Peter's house. For a couple of years, it was placed close to a window, thus leading its coat of paint to faint in certain places. In 2001, it lost its left horn because the cat shoved it off the bookshelf. Its other horn broke after Helga accidentally pushed it off the shelf when she was trying to reach a book. It eventually lost its ear when Helga and Peter's great-grandchildren were playing with it during a visit in 2021.

Creating such an imaginary scenario illustrates how the cow informs and facilitates memory while continually accumulating new memories. The missing ear might invoke fond memories of Helga's grandchildren, and the faded paint might remind her of warm summer days when the sun was relentlessly shining through the rear window in the sitting room. In this context, as a material memory, the cow fits all three of Kwint's categories; it 'furnishes recollection', 'stimulates remembering', and gathers 'records' (Kwint, 1999, p. 2). Therefore, the wooden cow illustrates how Kwint's classifications are sometimes interconnected in a web of material memories, each fulfilling the active role of informing and the passive role of being informed by each other.

This example of the cow also further illuminates how the gold leaf is not only conceptually relevant because of its materiality but also through its appropriation as a mask. The gilded objects of memory function like a microcosm; they are small archives bearing traces, evidence, and connotations that give way to the symbolic reappropriation of the object in becoming part of a counter-archive. The layer of gold, however, hides its unique characteristics – obscures signs of wear and traces of its past – and thus further abstracts it through its transformation into a

monochrome material. Some, if not all, of its traces – symbols of memories – become hidden once more (Fig. 41).

Fig. 41 *Gilded Cow* (2023)

Essentially, we do not know the memories this cow signifies nor the stories of the traces it has gathered. While, in this instance, I could ask my friend, and it might be possible to acquire more information about it, this knowledge would indefinitely alter the cow's meaning in the counter-archive. Returning to Derrida's *secrecy effect*, the not knowing invites a more powerful response. In this context, the unknown holds more metaphorical significance, and this absence of memories is conceptually relevant to my research.

These objects carry their own memories because of their previous history and personal dimensions. The value of these objects is assigned to them through meaning, and their worth is directly linked to the memory they represent. Once given away or sold on e-selling platforms and in flea markets, their stories, the memories contained by these objects, their provenance, and their personal significance become absent; they are stripped of their story and past, only a tangible archive of its traces – mere marks on a surface – without any contextual explanation. In the

context of my research, I refer to these objects as *articulated absences*. Like gold, they persist in their tangible form; however, their provenance and memory remain inaccessible to us, thus rendering them a *known unknown*.

Fig. 42 *Water bottle from a Swiss soldier serving during WW2* (2021)

The same applies to the personal objects previously belonging to soldiers serving in the war. In this context, the memory might be more evident historically, but the exact experience and significance for the person it belonged to remains hidden. Like the souvenirs, these objects also have a political dimension, although more nuanced and less obvious. While they might have been important to their owners, functioning like representations of a momentous period in their lives, the Swiss government's celebration of the Swiss Army – deeming it the reason the Swiss were not invaded in the war – has imparted them with another dimension of emotional weight: a pride imparted by the tribute of a nation. In this context, these objects might then be more closely related to what Kwint (1999, p. 2) defines as the first category of memory objects; they are creating 'pictures of the past', as opposed to being a placeholder for a past that would otherwise become 'repressed or forgotten'. They function not only as keepsakes of a significant time but as extensions of the self, creating and confirming their owners' sense of identity. Here, Domanska's argument becomes relevant again – these objects 'determine who we are' (Domanska, 2006b, p. 172). It might be because some of these objects were not originally intended as keepsakes or because of their close interlinks with a person's identity, instead of with a place or a holiday, which lend these objects a more haunting, lingering feeling of absence and are thus a more compelling *articulated absence* (Fig. 42).

Furthering this idea of an object as a placeholder of an absence and an archive of memory traces is especially interesting when discussing the work of Columbian artist Doris Salcedo. Her work is informed by extensive research into socio-political subject matters to create labour-intensive – mostly large-scale – installations and sculptures which feature everyday objects and materials, such as clothing, furniture, needles, concrete, and organic matter, like skin, grass, water, and wood. Salcedo's projects are responses to violent acts from the past; through her artworks, she offers an insight into the intensity of traumas and their aftermath. Initially, her installations appear muted and distant, in contrast with more direct visualisations of violence, such as photojournalistic images of war zones. However, their loudness becomes apparent when witnessing her works through their intense necessity and inescapable reverberation. Salcedo is interested in hiding the 'spectacle of violence' but making it perceptible through 'its proximity' (Salcedo and Villaveces-Izquierdo, 1997, p. 238). In a survey of Salcedo's work, American art historian Nancy Princethal explains how she finds 'forms that are eloquent of both massive,

inescapable acts of violence and of the nearly imperceptible damage they leave' (Princethal, quoted in Salcedo *et al.*, 2000, p. 40). Even though focusing on grief, loss, trauma, and pain, Salcedo's practice has been an essential reference for my work because of her conceptual exploration of the invisible through objects and traces, as well as her performative processes and material interventions.

For *Untitled* (1989-2016), Salcedo focused on the victims of political violence. Therefore, she collected everyday objects originally belonging to the murdered individuals to explore how such objects 'start screaming the absence of that person' (Glenstone Museum, 2022). The former presence of the person is inscribed in their 'daily touch', and their memory is 'imprinted on that object' (Glenstone Museum, 2022). Their purpose – previously used as an everyday object – has ceased and has been replaced by a sudden dysfunctionality that has been forcefully imposed by the loss of a life. Salcedo is interested in these objects because they 'articulate that kind of radical silence that is death and that radical pain' (Glenstone Museum, 2022). To further visualise that, Salcedo created material interventions with concrete, inspired by the concrete's characteristic as a brutal and irrevocable material (Fig. 43). Once concrete is added to an object, it is impossible to extract it again. Some of Salcedo's *Untitled* sculptures feature clothing, 'once worn and kept there, but now forever still and petrified' (Beyer *et al.*, 2023). Other furniture seems to be trapped in the concrete or to carry the weight of it as a permanent burden.[65] For me, these interventions symbolise the paralysing feeling of grief endured by the descendants of the victims. Salcedo considers the act of adding concrete to the furniture 'useless actions', highlighting our inability to bring back the 'presence of the victim, to our own present time'; instead, these sculptures represent a 'pure absence' (Salcedo, 2023, p. 44).

[65] As I am writing this, in November 2023, the Israeli government is carrying out an ongoing bombardment of the Gaza Strip and pictures of innocent civilians – trapped under the immense weight of the rubble of their own homes – are circulating. In this context, concrete as a violent and destructive material is further exacerbated. Originally intended to create shelter and facilitate safety, the concrete has become the opposite – a lethal material.

Fig. 43 Installation view of *Untitled* (1989-2016) by Doris Salcedo at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, US, 2015

In another work, Salcedo has drawn on the same conceptual idea of a haunting presence and a tangible absence in relation to the enforced disappearance of people. For *Atrabiliarios* (1992-2004), she gathered shoes originally belonging to victims of political persecution. Such ‘enforced disappearances’ in Columbia are understood as ‘widespread means of intimidation against civilians in civil wars’ *(*Beyer *et al*., 2023). However, instead of depicting their presence, the imprints of their former wearer create a negative space and depict an absence. For her installation, Salcedo embedded the shoes into the wall and covered them with semi-transparent animal fibre, which she stitched to the wall with surgical thread (Fig. 44). The use of surgical thread implies the double meaning of ‘tending to a wound’ while simultaneously implying a ‘violent aggression of the skin’ (Beyer *et al*., 2023). The covering of animal skin is both a protective layer and a concealment; it partially obscures the view, blurring the shoes behind it and thus lending the installation a ghostly dimension. To further reference absence and grief, *Atrabiliarios* draws on the Latin term ‘Atra bilis’, which describes the 'melancholy associated with mourning' (Beyer *et al*., 2023).

Fig. 44 Detail view of *Atrabiliarios* (1992-2004) by Doris Salcedo

Most of Salcedo's installations are based on and informed by dialogues with descendants or victims of violence, and she creates her pieces in response to their

personal histories and memories (Salcedo *et al.*, 2000, p. 13). In this context, Villard Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, Andreas Huyssen (2003, p. 110), has introduced the concept of 'memory sculptures'. Such artworks draw on 'lived memory', which is 'located in individual bodies, their experience and their pain, even when it involves collective, political, or generational memory' (Huyssen, 2003, p. 110). The difference between such 'memory sculptures' and memorials or monuments is that they draw on lived memories instead of portraying an official memory. They connect on a personal level with the viewer, thus making the personal political. According to Huyssen, such memory sculptures powerfully inscribe a 'dimension of localizable, even corporeal memory into the work' (Huyssen, 2003, p. 110). Here, Kwint's distinction of material memories becomes relevant again. Monuments exist to commemorate official memories, whereas the materials used for 'memory sculptures' do not exist for the sole purpose of facilitating a memory but instead carry and embody memory in their materiality. In my research, this distinction between lived and official memory could also be applied to the different categories of objects I have collected. The souvenirs, as well as the commemorative coins and objects, are perpetuating an official memory or perception. These objects function like monuments; they intend to commemorate a dominant version of history or solidify a stereotypical image.

In contrast, the objects in my collection which initially functioned as commodities of Swiss soldiers during the war relate more closely to Huyssen's definition of living memory. They carry the memories of their former owners; their connotation is inscribed in them. However, their meaning has also changed, and their significance has heightened due to the popular wartime memory crafted by the Swiss government. Therefore, the politics of memory also extend to these objects, proving how the political becomes personal. The lived and official memories thus form an inextricable knot.

Nevertheless, the personal touch and traces of the former owners are embedded in all objects in the counter-archive. Here, we could refer to what Kwint (1999, p. 2) described as the third category; these objects 'form records' and become what Bertschi would call *silent witnesses*. However, besides the visible traces, the objects also suggest a lingering ghostliness of the past. Both the furniture in *Untitled* and the shoes in *Atrabiliarios* carry 'the daily touch of the person who used them' and

'imprinted on that object a certain memory' (Glenstone Museum, 2022). These objects thus symbolise physical persistence while simultaneously representing spiritual discontinuity.

This idea of an object depicting an absence, a secret, through its tangible presence, relates to the *aesthetic of the secret*. There are parallels between Salcedo's approaches and how the artists previously discussed in *tangible unknowns* have explored the unknown. However, these artists have generally focused on the perpetrators of violence and silence, whereas Salcedo is centring the victims thereof.[66] Furthermore, the artists in *tangible unknowns* have explored specific blind spots and drawn on the knowledge that these exist. Salcedo, on the other hand, is interested in a 'type of knowledge that is greater than oneself; which is so broad spatially, and in terms of its volume and comprehensiveness, that one cannot even grasp its meaning' (Salcedo *et al.*, 2000, p. 11). Her sculptures explore 'what is beyond the human sphere', the reverberating violence and ghostly presence of certain materials, and the unmeasurable emotions and intangible feelings of loss. While sharing the impetus to highlight political violence and wrongdoings, Salcedo's work explores the unknown not through a lack of information but through the disappearance of bodies, thus drawing on the unknown through a haunting absence and a ghostly presence. The notion of a ghostly presence could also be considered in relation to the potential provenance of the gold used to mint the *Vreneli* coins. The mere possibility that a *Vreneli* contains traces of the suffering and violence inherent in victim gold generates a prevailing haunting suspicion that is impossible to overlook and forget. Through her sculptures, Salcedo explores a feeling of the hidden, a loss the eyes cannot see, to create an atmosphere riddled by absences, making the feeling of loss palpable. Her work is highly political, not through the questioning of what is hidden from us but through concrete examples of what has been violently removed. Because of that, her installation would fit – conceptually and symbolically – into the *unknown known* category. However, aesthetically, Salcedo's work could be classified as a *known unknown* because the significance, the purpose, and the relationships of the person using these things remain unknown to

[66] Bertschi's practice is a mixture of both. She draws on historical information and includes archival documentation of Switzerland's past misdeeds while also incorporating the perspectives of people who were affected and suffered from the consequences.

us. The objects included in her installations could thus also be considered *articulated absences*.

The act of forgetting, or disremembering, implies a former presence of memory, a knowledge that cannot be recalled ('forget', 2023). While the objects in Salcedo's work stand for the forgotten and for the loss of a person, the objects in my research symbolise the absence of a memory. This absence was induced because the extent of Switzerland's complicity with the Nazis has not been publicly known. Once it was revealed, its revelation failed to generate what Birchall calls 'discernible effects in the world' (Birchall, 2014, p. 33). Salcedo's work proceeds from the personal to the political, while my work is doing the reverse.

The objects in her installation are significant because they belonged to someone who had fallen victim to a violent political act. On the contrary, my practice embraces the absence of concrete, personal connotations and investigates how the political becomes personal by interrogating what these objects represent. The objects in the counter-archive are politicised not because of the person they belonged to but because they endorse a popular representation. The objects in Salcedo's installation gained significance due to the disappearance of their owners; they were stripped of their function and have become passive. Including them in these installations, however, gives them an active role in depicting an absence and rendering them political in the historical context. The objects I am working with had an active function and political implications from the outset; they were an instrument for sustaining identity constructions, for celebrating the commemoration of a dominant narrative, or they were used in the context of war, becoming more significant due to Switzerland's wartime myth. Salcedo engages with personal memory to create works that question what is collectively forgotten, and her works are thus both commemoration and critique. In my case, I am engaging with national memory to question what has not been remembered in the first place. Therefore, forgetting and an absence of memory – due to political secrecy – are contrary positions.

5 COLLECTING HISTORY

5.1 Presence and absence in the archive

As discussed in the previous two chapters, various forms of state power play an influential role in establishing a historical narrative through political secrets or the shaping of national memory in the form of cultural symbols and commemorative practices. Studying the archive as a socio-political concept and aesthetic framework provides a model for understanding how both aspects are equally essential in supporting the ideological underpinnings of historical knowledge production.[67] Simultaneously, it symbolises a contested space to explore the convoluted relationship between memory and secrecy.

Mike Featherstone, Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, deems the archive integral to the shaping of national memories of modern states. He describes how, historically, 'the archive was part of the apparatus of social rule and regulation, it facilitated the governance of the territory and population through accumulated information' (Featherstone, 2006, p. 591). It has long been perceived as a place of evidence, enabling an understanding of the past through various artefacts such as documents, maps, photographs, and recordings. The concept of the archive as a neutral space – passively accumulating historical facts – has been increasingly challenged by postmodernist theorists (Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1996).[68] Professor in Literary Studies Ernst van Alphen describes their critical evaluation of the archive as the 'postmodern turn' in archival sciences. This newly imposed conceptual engagement with the archive invited a rethinking of the role of archivists, identifying them as 'active agents who shape cultural and social memory' (van Alphen, 2014, p. 14). The archive thus does not provide a neutral framework where artefacts are accumulated and history is recorded. Instead, it is a space established to store fragments of the past, with the incentive of giving them a place to be remembered.

Because of that, the archive is often closely associated with and discussed in the context of memory. However, an archive is also always a selection, a collection

[67] Scholars have broadened the concept of the archive beyond a physical space for the accumulation and ordering of tangible items (such as objects, documents, and artefacts). In this study, I focus on the definition of the archive as an institution, indicating a physical collection within an architectural structure.

[68] Foucault (1972) has challenged the concept of the archive as a physical space. Instead, he defined it as a discursive model determining what can and cannot be said.

of things considered worthy of archiving. As previously discussed in the concept by the Popular Memory Group (1982b, p. 5), institutional archives function as a *historical apparatus* and are thus always a space of power and contestation. Like the political secret, an archive is a place of premeditated selection, determining what information is disclosed, what is kept secret, and which information is emphasised. While this is unintentional in some cases, in other cases, the incentive to record some things – while disregarding others – is created through the prism of state interest and thus becomes a political act. Political theorist Achille Mbembe (2002, p. 20) has fittingly described archiving as an act of privileging certain documents through 'discrimination and selection'. Further challenging the notion of the archive as a neutral recording system, he concludes, 'the archive is, (…) not a piece of data, but a status' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20).

According to Mbembe (2002, p. 20), this status is tied to the archive's 'material' and 'religious nature'. In the context of a physical archive, records obtain power through their tactility; 'a universe of the senses: a tactile universe because the document can be touched, a visual universe because it can be seen, a cognitive universe because it can be read and decoded.'[69] At the same time, the authority of the archive is further confirmed through its 'imaginary status', created through its architectural dimension – a building housing the archive – and the 'rituals' of archiving, following defined principles of collecting, ordering, and preserving, to make the documents 'the property of society at large' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20).[70]

Systematic rituals and the perception of belonging to the collective instead of to the individual, while contained within architectural boundaries and going through a process of 'discrimination' and 'selection', as well as retention and disclosure, create an 'instituting imaginary' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19). This 'instituting imaginary' reads the archive as a steadily growing repository of documents, static in its process and purpose of preserving the past for the future, instead of critically questioning its regulatory nature informed by ideological objectives.

[69] The material status is relevant in physical collections and does not extend to digital collections, such as online databases.
[70] Curator Okwui Enwezor (2008, p. 16) describes this interplay as follows: 'The archive achieves its authority and quality of veracity, its evidentiary function, and interpretative power – in short, its reality – through a series of designs that unite structure and function.'

The archive is a regulatory system that functions like a microcosm of memory and secrecy. Memory is manifested through *selection*, while secrecy is symbolised through *discrimination*; memory is represented through the artefacts chosen to become part of the archival collection, while secrecy is the artefacts that have been disregarded or deliberately obscured. However, the mere presence of selected artefacts does not necessarily reveal their significance in the archive. How they are recorded and archived, in which part of the archive they exist – how prominent they are – influence how widely shared and 'popular' they become. This is comparable to how memories are not necessarily truthful but are influenced and shaped by various factors. In the archive, a single document exists in a wider collection, representing a fragment which has obtained *privileged status*. The *discriminated* records are part of a story that has occurred, but they were not selected to be remembered in the future and eventually they become secrets of the archive.[71]

Those absences impact how we acquire knowledge; they shape our perception of the past. Therefore, if we think of the archive as a potential for knowledge, the awareness of gaps in knowledge allows us to further think about what we do not know and how the awareness of *not knowing* is intrinsically linked to *knowing*. In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost,* writer Rebecca Solnit (2015, p. 161) uses old, incomplete maps of the earth as a metaphor to describe the limits of knowledge. During a time when satellite images from space did not exist, cartographers left spaces to represent unknown territories that had not yet been explored. On these maps, such places were labelled 'Terra Incognita' (Solnit, 2015, p. 161).

According to Solnit (2015. p. 163), readily labelling the unknown as what it is does not imply failure because an 'awareness of ignorance is not just ignorance; it's awareness of knowledge's limits.' The secret – the hiding of knowledge – also implies *knowing* that knowledge is absent. Therefore, knowledge is not necessarily limited by *not knowing.* Instead, the awareness of *not knowing* – paired with an awareness of the political configurations which impose such gaps in knowledge – facilitates a critical awareness of how knowledge is created and disseminated in the

[71] Like a photographer capturing a moment in time, the resulting photograph is influenced by framing, manipulation, and interpretation. As a result, the image alone may not present a factual documentation or an accurate depiction of reality, nor does it necessarily facilitate an understanding of the situation captured.

first place. It gives insights into the various layers that hide and distort information due to unconscious bias or the active pursuit of political objectives.

In the context of the archive, secrecy is therefore read as an indicator of its absences – the gaps, the disregarded, the missing – the cumulation of things that have not been archived. Therefore, the archive is simultaneously a place of presence but also of absence, and could thus also be considered through the Rancièrian notion of a *distribution of the sensible*. Configuring it as a space that is defined as much by the selected as it is by the disregarded allows for a critical discussion of its powerful status in historical knowledge production. Therefore, instead of being an all-encompassing *known known*, it becomes a *known unknown*.

However, secrecy manifests itself in the archive not only through the premeditated exclusion of certain documents from collections but also in the methodical disappearance or inaccessibility of documents. The latter enabled Switzerland's grand narrative to persist for over forty years, until it was countered by the investigation of the Independent Commission of Experts – Switzerland Second World War (ICE) in the nineties. As also previously established, the extent of the involvement of Swiss banks in the trading of gold with the Nazis, the fate of cultural assets coming to Switzerland, and the Swiss migration politics during the war, have only been uncovered because the ICE was granted special access to archives, which would have otherwise remained inaccessible. Such issues of access further challenge the idea of an archive belonging to the public, while raising questions about how this permits a lack of accountability.

In 1999, the Swiss government introduced the *Federal Act of Archiving* to establish a mandatory process for the collecting, cataloguing, and storing of official documents by various federal bodies in Switzerland. Even though this law has been in force for over twenty years, important documents still go 'missing' in the Swiss Federal Archives (Gossenreiter and Frei, 2020). Among them are files concerning state security, the Swiss Federal Office of Police (fedpol), and secret services. According to historian Jakob Tanner, the disappearance of such files does not happen coincidentally. Instead, they are removed from the Federal Archives and held indefinitely by the Federal Administration to prevent historians and media representatives from accessing controversial information. In some cases, files have

been destroyed before they became part of the archive or attempts have been made to destroy them by the Swiss Federal Council to conceal precarious state affairs (Gossenreiter and Frei, 2020).[72]

Thinking about the archival gaps deliberately created by documents disregarded, destroyed, or removed from the archive provokes a lasting uneasiness.[73] Coming back to Derrida's *secrecy effect*, the gaps in the archive invite imaginary scenarios, thus creating a more powerful response and lingering suspicion of the archive as a place of historical evidence while also inviting questions about the magnitude of state control over an institution whose function is based on the preservation of facts.

Mbembe elaborates further on the paradoxical relationship between a state and its archives. He describes the fundamental role of the archive as a 'public institution' – 'one of the organs of a constituted state' – while emphasising the danger that archives pose in preserving and recording past violence, corruption, and crimes (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20; p. 23). Because of that, the archive is a crucial space for a nation to record its history and thus reaffirm its authority. At the same time, the 'ritual' of archiving poses the risk of remembering past misdeeds, and therefore 'the very existence of the archive constitutes a constant threat to the state' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20; p. 23).

[72] In one instance, the former Swiss intelligence chief Peter Regli arranged for evidence of intelligence and military cooperation between Switzerland and the South African apartheid regime to be destroyed. In another instance, the Swiss Federal Council attempted to destroy an archive of files collated during an extensive spy mission carried out by the fedpol during the Cold War, which violated the privacy of several hundred thousand Swiss people (Gossenreiter and Frei, 2020).

[73] When mentioning disregarded documents, I am not referring to limits imposed by resources, spaces, or time, but to the deliberate elimination and destruction of inconvenient records.

5.2. Archival practice in the arts

As previously established, the notion of the archive as a space of evidence and historical facts is contested because of its function as an extension of state power and control. Because of that, archival processes are often mirrored by artists using factual material or imagined artefacts to counter popular narratives and question political structures. Some of the artists previously discussed have methodically ordered and newly configured existing data and items to facilitate a new understanding of hidden systems. Such an engagement can be found in Paglen's *Symbology*, *Negative Publicity* by Black and Clark, Haacke's *Shapolsky et Al.*, in the artistic research by Lombardi and Forensic Architecture, and Bertschi's practice.

Generally, archival techniques feature significantly in contemporary artworks.[74] Various artists have consulted archives, included archival artefacts, or have employed principles of classification in their practice to critically examine the institutional authority of state archives and to de-stabilise the notion of the archive as a repository of historical truth (Gibbons, 2007). Therefore – because of its close association with history – artists working with archival processes not only critically reflect on how archives collect, order, and store knowledge, but they expose the fractionality of the archive in remembering the past. Their practice itself could thus be understood as an act of reclaiming fractions of history. According to the late curator Okwui Enwezor (2008, p. 18), these artists 'interrogate the self-evidentiary claims of the archive by reading it against the grain'. In her book *Contemporary Art and Memory*, Gibbons (2007, p. 118) discusses the methods employed by artists to question how 'memory is dependent on knowledge' and thus directly affected by authoritative structures and their influence on institutions specialising in the transmission of knowledge, such as museums, libraries, and archives. Here, artists have found ways to 'offer alternative or oppositional views of received history, noting that issues of ideology are constantly at stake' (Gibbons, 2007, p. 118).

Furthermore, because of the inherently selective method of archiving, an artistic archival approach offers a framework to combine material explorations of memory

[74] Art critic Hal Foster (2004, p. 3) termed this pull towards practices of ordering and classifying the 'archival impulse'. He also explains that it is not a phenomenon of contemporary art but was already being adopted by artists of the prewar years, such as Alexander Rodchenko and John Heartfield (Foster, 2004, p. 3).

and secrecy, as well as conceptual engagement with these notions deriving from the reciprocal practice of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, it draws on the 'status and power of the archive' to create an 'instituting imaginary', which, according to Mbembe (2022, p. 19), derives from its interplay of physicality and archival 'rituals'.

As Mbembe (2002, p. 20) further explained, the archive holds material status because of its tangibility, preserving objects which are 'inscribed in the universe of the senses'. Considering things as archives because they are themselves a recording system of traces offers a productive way to expand the definition of the archive. Reading the archive as a mere accumulation of traces renders the tangible an archive itself. Therefore, broadening the archive's definition allows for it to be considered an aesthetic device – not because of its palpable substance, but because of its function as a recording system. Within Kwint's categories of material memories, an object is thus always a record of memories, an archive of records. Thus, regardless of its function, it is always a symbol of the past. Drawing on this concept of capturing traces, every *thing* might then be considered an archive because it collects – sometimes invisible – marks. A bar of remelted gold from various sources would then function as an inaccessible archive. The bar itself is a tangible record of its provenance, but it is *hidden in plain sight* and is thus another symbol of presence and absence.

5.2.1 Collected traces and ideological frameworks

Hans Haacke's work *Germania* (1993) is especially relevant when considering tangible things as accumulations of traces and, thus, as archives themselves. The project was part of the Venice Biennale in 1993 and is considered one of Haacke's most iconic works (Fig. 45). For this installation, he directly included architectural and material features of the German Pavilion to refer to its historical connection to the Nazi era and to comment on Germany's political changes during the nineties (Muir, 2009). Following a visit in 1937, Hitler ordered the renovation of the German Pavilion to fit the 'new national corporate identity' of the Third Reich and to display the culture and values of the National Socialist regime, characterised through 'power and self-confidence' (Haacke, 2009, p. 13).[75] For this undertaking, he appointed the

[75] Art was a crucial tool for propaganda and was of great importance in the Third Reich. The Nazis had a clear vision of what constituted Nazi-worthy art. Artworks which did not align with Nazi ideals, such as modernist styles, were marked as 'Degenerate Art'. Modern and Jewish artists fell into that category; they were mocked and persecuted (Cotter, 2014).

Bavarian architect Ernst Haiger, who replaced the original parquet floor of the pavilion with marble and added ‘GERMANIA’ in a simple font on the entablature above the portico. Furthermore, above the entrance, the addition of the national emblem of the Third Reich, an eagle and a swastika, was also part of the pavilion’s renovation (Bourdieu and Haacke, 1995). During the biennale in 1938, it housed art that had been ‘handpicked’ by Hitler and presented at the ‘Great German Art Exhibition’ in 1937 in Munich (Cotter, 2014).

Fig. 45 Installation view of *Germania* (1993) by Hans Haacke at the 45th Venice Biennale

For *Germania,* Haacke placed a disproportionately large Deutsche Mark coin above the entry of the pavilion, in the same spot where the swastika and eagle were initially placed under Hitler’s order. The coin stated the minting year of 1990 to reference the reunification of Germany in the same year, thus creating a link between the past and present of Germany in one significant gesture (Muir, 2019). The Deutsche Mark coin symbolises the ongoing issues of the time, similar to how my use of gold raises questions about the persisting significance of Switzerland’s role in the contemporary gold trade and the global banking landscape, its fundamental lack of accountability, and the resulting shortfall in moral consideration.

Furthermore, Haacke positioned an enlarged photograph of Adolf Hitler on a red-painted wall immediately at the entry of the German Pavilion. The image was taken during Hitler's visit to the German Pavilion in Venice in 1934, and underneath the photograph, Haacke added the caption: 'LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA, 1934'. According to the Director of Collection, International Art, at Tate, Gregor Muir (2019, p. 86), the significance of the photograph and its caption was to remind the visitors that 'Hitler has once stood in the same spot.' Haacke further referenced National Socialist ideology through the incorporation of the colours red, white, and black: the same colour scheme used for Nazi propaganda.

Once the visitors moved beyond the wall and entered the large exhibition space, they were confronted with a replica of the word 'GERMANIA' from the entablature of the entry, on the back wall, and a broken floor made up of big marble slabs; this was the same marble initially put into the pavilion during its renovation in 1938 (Fig. 46).[76] The visitors were invited to walk over the marble slabs, to pick them up, and to break them, to interact with this part of the installation physically, and therefore create a soundscape that would echo from the walls (Muir, 2019).

Apart from the historical photograph of Hitler's visit to the pavilion, this project of Haacke differs significantly from his investigative project *Shapolsky et Al*.
For *Germania,* Haacke did not directly include documentation as part of his critique, but instead used material remains and drew on past and contemporary references. He created a 'clash between symbols, metaphors and iconic representations' to trigger a public debate (Haacke, 2015). According to Enwezor, the installation engages with the 'crisis of the idea of the national space' caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union – which had previously split the world into two ideologies before its dissolution in 1991 – and exposes Germany's 'ideological foundation' as 'the dark core of the nation' (*Okwui Enwezor discusses Hans Haacke at MoMA New York*, 2012). A reference to present national principles is the oversized Mark coin above the entry, placed where the Nazi emblem used to be and functioning as the latest symbol of the new national identity. The visitors must move beyond the first two

[76] The work has been repeatedly compared to Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice* (1823-1824), inspired by the political movements towards democracy during the 19th century. Although this was not Haacke's intention, there are parallels between Haacke's and Friedrich's work. Both engage with political matters through the application of symbols (Haacke, 2009).

installation components to be confronted with the destructive potential of nationalism.

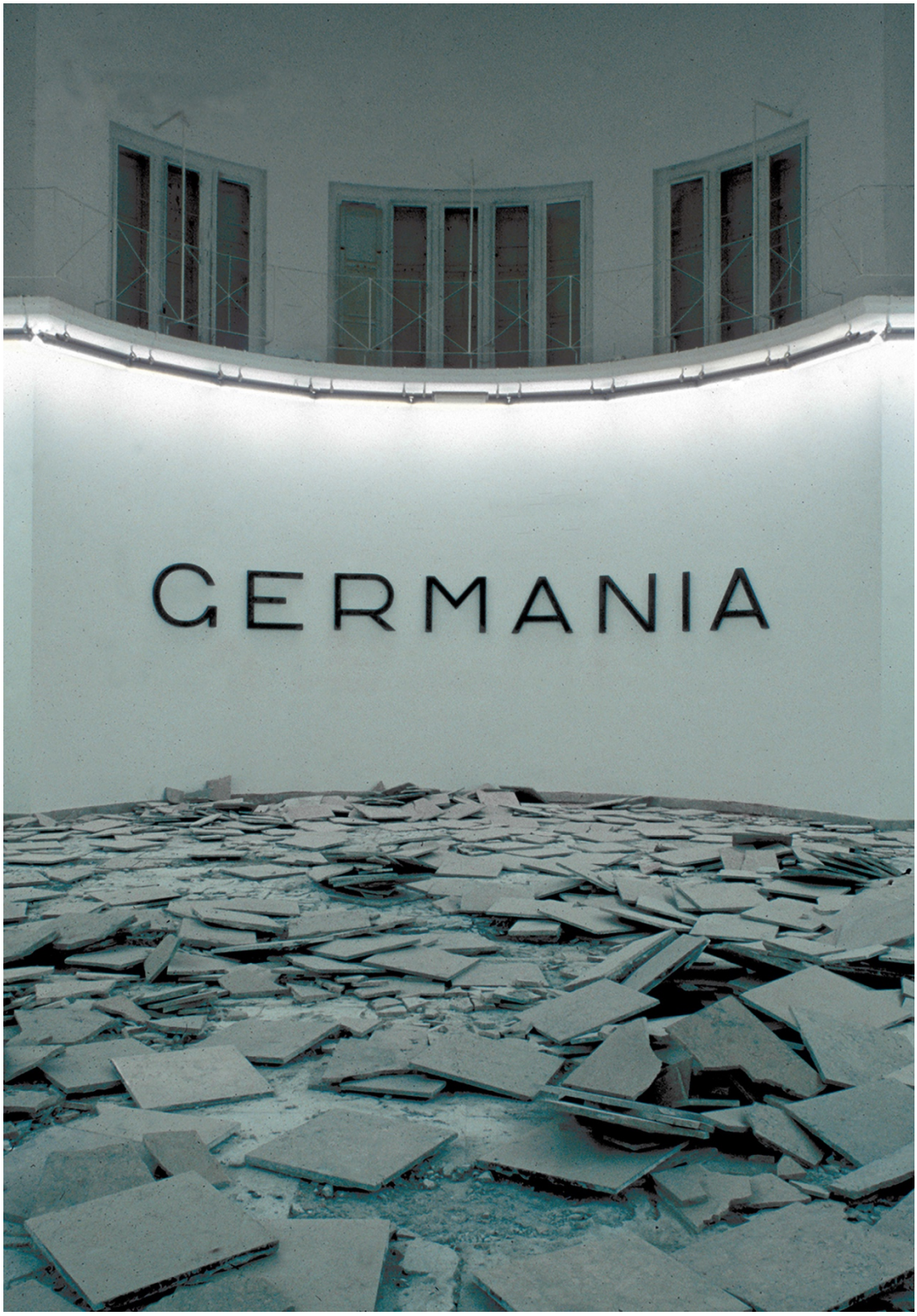

Fig. 46 Installation view of *Germania* (1993) by Hans Haacke at the 45th Venice Biennale

Using materiality, form, and function to explore national ideologies and cultural values closely relates to my conceptual engagement with objects politicised because of their representational meaning. Furthermore, Haacke's study of material traces as tangible reminders of a forgotten past shares similarities with my configuration of objects as the accumulation of traces and memories. Haacke focuses on the ideological underpinnings of both the historical significance of symbols and the monumental character of the pavilion's architecture.

There is a performative aspect in Haacke's act of destruction – inviting the audience to shatter the marble floor, and thus the 'Nazi cultural policy', further (Muir, 2019, p. 87). He is thus actively removing the remaining characteristics of nationalism from the pavilion and transforming it into a 'mausoleum of the dead ideal', a symbol of a history of destruction (Muir, 2019, p. 87). Haacke uses the pavilion as a subject of inquiry, uprooting its characteristic as a 'contested space' and symbol of nationalism while posing provocative questions about the future of Germany after its reunification in 1990 (*Okwui Enwezor discusses Hans Haacke at MoMA New York*, 2012). In Haacke's installation, the German Pavilion represents the metaphorical remains of history still lingering in the present. If the pavilion's historical, fascist idealistic state symbolically presents the past in this scenario, then Haacke's installation re-interpreted the past. Creating a provocative piece to send a political message enables art to question deeply rooted histories and the national identities associated with such narratives. Furthermore, *Germania* juxtaposes past and present to question prevailing ideological foundations.[77] This is also an essential aspect of my research, applying representative imagery, historically significant materials, and symbolic objects to unpack and explore their power.

Although it was a temporary exhibition, Germania continues to explore the commemorative demands of the past symbolically and questions the political consciousness of the present. The key concepts the work scrutinises continue to be relevant today in reference to growing xenophobia and the rise of far-right movements. Haacke's installation configures the pavilion as a contested space, turning it into a place of resistance through a performative act of destruction. The

[77] Haacke has further explored architectural remnants from Nazi Germany in his project *DER BEVÖKERUNG* (1999), a participatory installation in response to an inscription of the German Bundestag.

pavilion functions as a reminder of a shameful history and past ideals while adding a question mark about the nation's instability and its implicit future consequences.

In a similar performative act, artist Maria Eichhorn explores the architecture of the pavilion in her work, *Relocating a Structure*, for the German Pavilion 2022 as part of the 59th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia (Fig. 47), with a focus on process and the performative quality of removing 'layers of plaster' from the pavilion's walls 'to expose the joins between the earlier structure and the remodelled building' (German Pavilion, 2022).[78] In her installation, Eichhorn studies the history of the German Pavilion and references the two main structures: the Bavarian pavilion constructed in 1909 and the extension by the Nazis in 1938. Therefore, Eichhorn's installation reads the German Pavilion like a palimpsest, uncovering the door openings and windows to reveal 'the original' structure, rendering it 'visible and tangible' in the process (German Pavilion, 2022). Her initial idea was to remove the pavilion from its geographical location – getting rid of its physical presence – for the duration of the Biennial to capture an absence and simultaneously free up additional 'space for movement, reflection, and an examination' to question the frameworks in which 'art is exposed in the context of the Biennale with its national pavilions' (German Pavilion, 2022). Removing the pavilion would have allowed Eichhorn to question further how 'national-territorial and geopolitical, global-economic, and ecological developments' are shaped through the relationships among the national pavilions and how the physical removal of the German Pavilion would have impacted that (German Pavilion, 2022).

[78] Apart from the similarities of their installations for the German Pavilion, Haacke and Eichhorn have both engaged with different aspects of Germany's National Socialist past, such as questions about the ownership and restitution of looted art.

Fig. 47 Installation view of *Relocating a Structure* (2022) by Maria Eichhorn at the 59th Venice Biennale

Eichhorn also organised guided tours as part of her project – taking visitors to places either signifying remembrance or resistance in Venice – to commemorate the local perpetration of violence against Jewish refugees, as well as significant places for anti-fascist resistance movements (German Pavilion, 2022). Haacke and Eichhorn share an understanding that the pavilion is historically significant and should be 'preserved as a monument' (Eichhorn, 2022). Thus, both artists treat the building as what Bertschi would refer to as a *silent witness of the past*. Both artists have focused on the metaphorical potential of the physical space in holding traces of the past to symbolically and performatively reveal persisting national ideologies. Through their interventions, they have explored how the pavilion can simultaneously reference the past and critique its echoing influence in the present.

On a smaller scale, artist Bea Schlingelhoff has focused on the exhibition space as a contextual framework in which artefacts are presented and perceived; through performative interventions, she has explored how established conditions and structures shape our perceptions. For an exhibition in the Freulerpalast at the Museum des Landes Glarus in 2019, Schlingelhoff created two components with

the titles *Piece of Glass* and *PAX.* For *PAX*, Schlingelhoff engaged with the permanently exhibited militaria collection – showcasing uniforms, rifles, flags, and insignia in large vitrines – at the Kunsthaus Glarus. Originally commodities of warfare, their purpose has shifted; they have become historically elevated artefacts showcased in vitrines. For her intervention, she removed the acrylic glass of the vitrine to question their principal purpose of showcasing and highlighting precious objects in the context of public and private spaces such as museums and homes (Fig. 48). The removal of the glass also entailed the removal of a protective layer; the exhibits became vulnerable to human touch. At the same time, due to the nature of the collection, the visitors are exposed to potentially dangerous objects, such as rifles and pistols. Schlingelhoff's simple act of removing a cover of transparent matter changes the exhibition's atmosphere. Thus, she not only deconstructed the vitrines physically but also dismantled them conceptually. In a press release for the exhibition, the museum wrote:

> Vitrines isolate, frame, protect, sublimate, and domesticate. They create presence; aspects of political or social realities are legitimized and conveyed (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 1).

The vitrine is furthermore referred to as a 'predecessor and metaphor of the museum' – functioning like a microcosm of its showcasing model, as well as being a place of careful curation and fundamental legitimacy (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 1). We could thus also consider this reading in the context of the archive, a space where a selected fraction of the past is presented in the context of institutional authority. Here again, we can draw on what Mbembe (2002, p. 21) defined as the archive's material and 'religious nature': the presence of physical matter and its imagined status, brought about by archival processes and architectural frameworks. Comparing this with the vitrine, removing the vitrine glass could thus be equated to removing the architectural structure of the archive, consequently weakening its agency.

Fig. 48 Installation view of *PAX* (2019) by Bea Schlingelhoff at the Museum des Landes, Glarus Freulerpalast, Näfels, Switzerland

A similar phenomenon occurs due to the absence of the vitrine's glass; the previously untouchable exhibits are now within reach and their purpose shifts. Before, they were presented as historically significant artefacts, safely stored behind glass; however, once the glass is removed, they lose their status as exhibits, and the objects – especially the firearms – seem to become objects of daily use again, waiting to be utilised; 'the weapons are surrendered to the visitors and beg to be touched', and thus, their 'fetish character' is highlighted (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 1). However, for health and safety reasons, the firearms had to be equipped with new safety measures to prohibit visitors from picking them up (Fig. 49). Therefore, they were again rendered incapable of their intended shooting purpose and became museum exhibits once more. The removal of the protective glass, however, still invites an atmosphere of proximity and immediacy that has not previously transpired. A process of recontextualisation is taking place, altering the significance of the exhibited objects. As previously discussed in the context of *articulated absences*, this shift is also observable in my research with objects. While I previously discussed an imperceptible transformation in their mnemonic meaning, there is also a change in how they are identified, valued, and acknowledged as significant material because of the framework in which they are presented. They obtain a historical substance by being collected,

ordered and contextualised within an archival structure. Through Schlingelhoff's minimal intervention, the immediate transformation from exhibit to commodity reveals the authority imparted to museums and archival institutions as places where history is uncovered and established. A state of untouchability has a persuasive effect, similar to how secrecy is powerful in its psychological influence. Elevating a thing or information through physical or mental inaccessibility thus increases its significance.

Fig. 49 Installation view of *PAX* (2019) by Bea Schlingelhoff at the Museum des Landes, Glarus Freulerpalast, Näfels, Switzerland

For example, a ring of little value appears immediately more valuable when securely placed in a vitrine behind glass, thus rendering it inaccessible. It exists right in front of us in its tangible form; however, it is removed from touch. The distance created between the viewer and the object thus instils the object with more significance, similar to how the word 'hello' becomes more mysterious and important if redacted in a text. Both things exist right in front of us; however, we cannot fully access them.[79]

[79] Like Magid's installation of the report for the *Authority to Remove* exhibition, safely stored it in a showcase behind glass. In this case, removing the glass of the showcase containing the book would have rendered the information contained in the book accessible and thus undermined its conceptual significance of being *hidden in plain sight*. Furthermore, contrary to the previous two examples, in this case the information in the report was of great significance to the Dutch Secret Service.

For the other component, *Piece of Glass*, Schlingelhoff has installed the vitrine glasses in the museum's back rooms. Exhibited in a way that is reminiscent of a storage arrangement but still professionally lit, the cases are 'almost transformed into minimalist sculptures' (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 1). The illumination simultaneously exposes 'the patina of usage – dust, scratches, traces of dirt, and the inscriptions' (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 1). By exhibiting them in such a way, Schlingelhoff exposes how these glass panels 'form records'; they are, as per Kwint's (1999, p. 2) definition, an accumulation of traces and thus archives of their area of application. Recontextualised in the previously secluded rooms, the installation also highlights the interconnectedness of public and private. While the previously privately owned military objects are left in the dedicated exhibition spaces of the opulent Freulerpalast, the glass panels of the vitrines, predestined for the exhibition context and designed to provide a protective layer, are stripped of their purpose and intended context. Such a juxtaposition of public and private is interesting for my work, where personal objects, initially destined for private use, have become part of a larger public critique.

Fig. 50 Installation view of *Piece of Glass* (2019) by Bea Schlingelhoff at the Museum des Landes, Glarus Freulerpalast, Näfels, Switzerland

Schlingelhoff's exhibition is in dialogue with the location and physical space in which it is presented. Such an interplay between context and her exhibited work – presenting while simultaneously challenging – is typical of her practice.[80] Through her different components, Schlingelhoff raises questions about two distinct issues: *PAX* interrogates the museum's role and responsibility in portraying history while questioning how a permanent exhibition of military objects can be situated in the peace movements of the 20th and 21st centuries. *Piece of Glass* explores the artist's role in emphasising socio-political queries while considering how the 'structural and economic conditions of the institutions' are featured in their 'artistic production process' (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 2).

Schlingelhoff's focus on how the perceptions and purposes of objects shift through conceptual interventions is relevant to my research. Through straightforward interventions, she 'shows what the collected object can be beyond its static persistence' (Museum des Landes Glarus Freulerpalast, 2019, p. 2). Simultaneously, her critical engagement with the permanent exhibition of the military collection further reveals Switzerland's dedication to the image of a well-fortified country. *Pieces of Glass* raises questions about the artist's responsibility to expose the hidden structures of institutions. Thus, it fits within my research to expose Switzerland's financial complicity while highlighting aspects of the control and concealment inherent in (historical) archives.

Through their interventions, Haacke, Eichhorn, and Schlingelhoff critique how ideologically driven histories are continually perpetuated by the framework in which they are presented. Therefore, they have highlighted the importance of contexts and frameworks in creating meaning and influencing our reading of what is presented to us.[81] From Haacke's and Eichhorn's large-scale interventions in the German Pavilion to Schlingelhoff's subtle intervention in the Freulerpalast, they have posed questions about the materiality of exhibiting structures, and how, in highlighting their power and purpose, they perpetuate ideological representation. Through their performative removal and deconstruction of exhibition frameworks, they have

[80] Other examples of Schlingelhoff's artistic responses to exhibition spaces are *No River to Cross* (2021), which she exhibited at Kunstverein München, and *Accounting Confessions* (2023/2024) at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k).
[81] While my analysis of these works predominantly derived from the material infrastructure of these frameworks, the hidden political structures and their socio-political impacts – as explored through institutional critique – are also highly influential in how a work is presented and thus read.

critically illuminated how socio-political foundations shape the institutional context, thus refuting the possibility of a *neutral* space.

5.2.2 Recontextualised objects and investigated institutions

How the presentation and contextualisation of objects and artefacts in the museum – as well as their symbolic significance and materiality – impact our perception of history are core concerns of the practice of artist Fred Wilson. Working in the Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art during his studies, Wilson became aware of the differences in display, contextualisation, and framing of cultures in the two institutions. Drawing on the 'didactics' of the museum, Wilson produced his first intervention, *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993), at the Maryland Center for History and Culture, formerly called the Maryland Historical Society (MHS) (SFMOMA, 2020). For this installation, he created juxtapositions between various artefacts from the museum's collections, such as exhibiting silver tea sets among slave shackles (Fig. 51).

Fig. 51 Detail view of *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993) by Fred Wilson at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland, US

His upbringing as a Black child in predominantly white neighbourhoods strongly influenced Wilson's practice. '[B]eing an observer (…) rather than a participant'

mirrors Wilson's experience as a young Black artist in New York in the 1970s and 1980s (Wilson, 2003, p. 22). There was 'an unspoken segregation (…) a blindness that amounts to bias' (Wilson, 2003, p. 22). Wilson thus created his work from a position of invisibility, brought about by the European artist-dominated art world and his reality of living in the US, affected by racist segregation laws from previous centuries. His personal and professional experience thus influenced his practice, leading him to focus on issues that have been silenced and are thus 'marginal or invisible to the majority' (Wilson, 2003, p. 22). Bringing such marginalised histories to light, Wilson thus engages with what Hodgkin and Radstone described as the 'holes in the fabric of memory' (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2014, p. 237). Deriving from a point of silence and invisibility, his practice could also be considered in an expanded reading of Birchall's concept of a *known unknown*: a secret which has been revealed, but its revelation has not had any 'discernible effects in the world' (Birchall, 2014, p. 33). While Wilson's work has been predominantly about the erasure and silencing of racial experiences and cultural narratives, he describes his practice as more far-reaching, raising more significant questions about how ideological foundations influence how histories are recorded or eliminated in the first place (Wilson, 2011).[82]

For his work *Mining the Museum*, Wilson focused on such hidden and invisible histories by reordering the collection of the MHS. He arranged the objects in new categories, such as labelling the vitrine mentioned above – featuring the silver tea set and slave shackles – *Metalwork 1793-1880* (Fig. 51). Thus, Wilson drew on archival processes to raise awareness about the hidden aspects of history and the influential powers of ordering, organising, and contextualising collections and archives. Using this rather subtle approach, Wilson was interested in causing the audience 'to have to do some work' (Houston, 2017).[83]

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[82] In later works, Wilson continued to engage with these questions, focusing on metaphorical conclusions from using specific materials and objects, such as his creation of *black tears* using glass – a material which is in a constant state of liquid – and the colour black to symbolically reference the Black racialised experience, imposed and perpetrated by racist Western stereotypes. His choice to use glass thus reflects the ever-changing landscape of Black culture – constantly shaped and reshaped by imposed, external stereotypes (Fred Wilson in 'Structures', 2005; Wilson, 2003, p. 24).

[83] There is a similarity to the juxtapositions presented in the previously discussed exhibition *Kaffee aus Helvécia*. Both exhibitions focus on questioning narratives by presenting two seemingly contrasting worlds. However, presenting these artefacts side by side in the exhibition reveals the reality of them existing in the same period and geographical location, thus illuminating how the gain of fortune on one side came at the expense of others. Therefore, the simple act of recontextualising existing artefacts invites critical questions about the presentation of culture, history, and race.

Fig. 52 Detail view of *Mining the Museum* (1992-1993) by Fred Wilson at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland, US

In another intervention, Wilson placed a trophy awarded for 'truth in advertising' at the exhibition entry (Houston, 2017). Emblazoned with the word 'TRUTH', the trophy symbolically questioned the notion of truth in historical representations and invited the audience to interrogate perceptions of the 'museum's role as a nominally objective arbiter' (Houston, 2017). Wilson created further symbolical suggestions between different artefacts, such as the hood of a Ku Klux Klan robe folded in a baby stroller, to signify that 'racism is learned, inculcated, or even nurtured' (Houston, 2017) (Fig. 52). Wilson's exhibition at the MHS greatly impacted the public, and following the inherent institutional critique in *Mining the Museum,* the museum had to change and 'learn from its past' (Houston, 2017).[84]

[84] For example – in another intervention for *Mining the Museum* – Wilson focused on a painting by Justus Engelhardt Kühn. The painting depicts a White boy called Darnell in the centre and a Black boy wearing a metal collar in the background on the left. However, the Black boy was not mentioned in the description of the painting, leading Wilson to place a spotlight on him to highlight his presence. Drawing attention to this lack of acknowledgement, the MHS changed the label, now identifying the Black boy, however, merely as the 'slave' of Darnell (Houston, 2017). Wilson's simple intervention further emphasises the crucial function of descriptions and identification in marginalising and erasing histories.

His focus on objects kept in storage – the forgotten and neglected – in the museum's collection is especially relevant to my research. There is a parallel with archival practice, drawing on the distinction made by Mbembe (2022) between the *discriminated* and the *selected* objects. This also applies when considering the objects I have collected for my research. Choosing a specific object to become part of the counter-archive implies a form of discrimination. These objects were sold because they were not wanted (anymore), or the prospect of financial gain outweighed their continued possession. In this context, the counter-archive is an accumulation of the forgotten and the disregarded. Focusing on the irrelevant thus questions the fundamental organising principles of the ideological manipulation of archives. However, in the context of the counter-archive, these objects are not irrelevant; they follow the conceptual selection of my practical research. Wilson's project uses a similar approach of revising objects excluded from collections and displays, recontextualising them to draw attention to the systematic silencing of histories. Such minimal, context-specific interventions as in *Mining the Museum* can also be found in the previously discussed works, *PAX* and *Pieces of Glass.* These projects by Wilson and Schlingelhoff do not provide the audience with specific answers but pose new questions about how history is presented, in what contexts and behind what *protective* shields.

An institution's role in understanding how history is presented, narrated, disseminated, and perceived in the context of race and class is also a core concern of the artist Yinka Shonibare CBE RA. In his practice, he uses 'citations of Western art history and literature to question the validity of contemporary cultural and national identities' (Shonibare, no date). Shonibare's work is a revision of established histories, a critical engagement with contemporary culture, and a 'vehicle for fantasy' (Gibbons, 2007, p. 67). Through combinations of historical and cultural symbols, Shonibare creates counter-histories and imagines an alternative version of the past.[85]

For his project titled *The British Library* (2014), he installed bookshelves across three walls, filled with several thousand books covered in 'Dutch Wax' printed cotton (Fig. 53). Shonibare has used this material in many of his works to draw on the

[85] To name just a few: *Diary of a Victorian Dandy* (1998), *Mr and Mrs Andrews without their Heads* (1998), and *Nelson Ship in a Bottle* (2004)

textile's 'complicated history' and 'postcolonial identity' (Gibbons, 2007, p. 69). His use of the fabric further underlines his method of reappropriating cultural symbols through material interventions to facilitate historical revision and create moments of fantasy. His work functions like a mirror to inform us about how history has been filtered and carefully selected. Many of the book spines in *The British Library* contain, in gold lettering, the names of immigrants who have moved to the United Kingdom and have had a lasting impact on 'British culture and history' (Brown, 2019). Other books feature 'prominent figures who have opposed immigration at various times', such as Oswald Mosley and Norman Tebbit (Brown, 2019). A table, chairs, and tablet computers are also part of the installation, allowing visitors to access the project website to find information about the immigrants mentioned on the books, their cultural contributions, and information about immigration laws and processes.

Fig. 53 Installation view of *The British Library* (2014) by Yinka Shonibare at the HOUSE Biennial and Brighton Festival, The Old Reference Library, Brighton Museum, Brighton, UK

Absences, in the form of books without authors, are also part of the library (Fig. 54). According to Shonibare, these symbolise how the story of British Immigration is still 'unwritten' (Brown, 2019). In the context of the institutionalisation of knowledge, they could also be interpreted as deliberately created absences of cultural awareness to serve ulterior political motives. Alternatively, the books by unknown authors could

point to the numerous immigrants who were denied a life in the United Kingdom due to drastic immigration policies and who were prevented from making their contribution to British culture. Shonibare applies a 'conceptually poetic lens' to highlight how diversity is a fundamental feature of British identity (Brown, 2019). The installation is still relevant in a post-Brexit world with the British immigration process becoming increasingly more hostile.

Fig. 54 Detail view of *The British Library* (2014) by Yinka Shonibare at the HOUSE Biennial and Brighton Festival, The Old Reference Library, Brighton Museum, Brighton, UK

Through its setup and title – referring to the national library of the United Kingdom – Shonibare questions how knowledge is produced and disseminated. Furthermore, using the Dutch wax printed cotton in conjunction with the title raises concerns about cultural appropriation and contested artefacts looted from colonial territories in collections of British institutions. *The British Library* oscillates between critique and praise to reflect on the past and the present. It criticises British immigration politics and scrutinises how ideology is an intrinsic feature of institutional knowledge. At the same time, Shonibare employs a primarily institutionalised educational strategy in the form of a study space to encourage audience participation. The installation is

rich in elements, forms, and materials, which both appropriate and challenge standard modes of Western knowledge production and invite a reconsideration of the definition of British culture.

It becomes evident that museums, libraries, and archives share not only their significance in drawing relations to the past but also their vulnerability to ideological manipulation due to the institutionalisation of knowledge. Drawing an analogy between museum and archive was the core interest of Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers in his conceptual art piece, *Museum of Modern Art. The Eagles.19th-Century Section (Musée d'Art Moderne. Les Aigles. Section XIXe siècle)* (1969).[86] Considered one of the leading proponents of the institutional critique movement, Broodthaers initially exhibited the installation for a year in his studio in Brussels (van Alphen, 2014, p. 64). According to Gibbons (2007, p. 121), this was potentially the most 'radical gesture', because Broodthaers removed the institution from the 'museum'.

Over three years, Broodthaers exhibited the work in different contexts and configurations. For this brief analysis, I will focus on the final presentation of the installation at the 1972 Documenta in Kassel. The display was a peculiar assortment of objects, documents, and images, with 'no classificatory coherence' apart from their common feature of representing eagles (Gibbons, 2007, p. 123). The exhibition was devoid of any other apparent system or underlying logic of classification or structuring. Nevertheless, each piece was accompanied by a label with the statement 'This is not a work of art'. Here, Broodthaers references the infamous Magritte painting depicting a pipe and the declaration 'Ceci n'est pas un pipe' [this is not a pipe], as well as Duchamp's ready-mades (Gibbons, 2007, p. 123) (Fig. 55).

[86] I will refer to this project as *Museum of Modern Art. The Eagles* for the remainder of this document because of its long title.

Fig. 55 Detail view of *Museum of Modern Art. The Eagles. 19th-Century Section* (1969) by Marcel Broodthaers at the Documenta in Kassel, Germany, 1972

With the lack of an apparent classification system for the eagle artefacts, Broodthaers criticises how the 'historical and cultural specificity' is frequently ignored by institutions, not only regarding the cultural symbols which are on display but also the institutional context in which they are exhibited (Gibbons, 2007, p. 123). The work engages with how 'art is framed by the ideologies and agendas of institutions but also with the institutionalisation of knowledge itself' (Gibbons, 2007, p. 121). Like Shonibare's installation, this becomes evident in the title of the work; it adds a level of absurdity because a department of eagles would not become part of the internal structure of a museum of modern art (Gibbons, 2007, p. 121). At the same time, Broodthaers' incorporation of 'department' in the title points towards an archival structure of compartmentalisation (van Alphen, 2014, p. 64). Through his installation, Broodthaers has successfully questioned how art institutions order, classify, and display and how the lack of criticality of the museum's historical and cultural positions affects the presentation of the exhibited object.

Using Broodthaers' concept to draw an analogy between an archival collection and an exhibition in a white cube offers further insights into the contextual relevance of institutions. The term 'white cube' was first introduced by artist Brian O'Doherty in 1976 to critique the predominant way of presenting artworks in gallery spaces in the 20th century. The white cube is characterised by its white walls and was initially intended to create a neutral space in a gallery – devoid of distracting elements – so that the artwork would be 'isolated from everything that would detract from its own

evaluation of itself' (O'Doherty, 1986, p. 14). Like the archive, the neutrality of the gallery was increasingly challenged by postmodernists because of the sometimes hidden mechanisms that influence which artwork is selected and how it is perceived. The decisions of the curatorial team regarding how to present an artwork and among the work of which other artists further affect how it is viewed and understood.

Furthermore – as critically demonstrated by Haacke and various other artists applying institutional critique – layers of political processes are part of the ulterior strategies of the museum. People holding authority within the institution, such as board members or sponsors, pursue their own interests and control which artists are represented in exhibitions. Additionally, the respectability of the institution exhibiting the work further influences how well-attended the exhibition will be and who will see the work. Various documentation and background information found in captions, catalogues, magazines, and newspaper articles further affects how the artwork is perceived.[87] Using this example, but replacing the museum with a state archive, the white cube with an archival collection, and the artwork with an archival artefact, it becomes evident how similarly both types of institution function. Here again, referring to the concept of the Popular Memory Group (1982b, p. 5), both are considered *historical apparatuses* controlled by hidden mechanisms and political objectives.

How an object is presented in the archive, its contextual relevance, order, and classification, its location within the collection and contextualisation among other documents are highly influential for how this object is read, decoded, and interpreted in the first place. The work of Wilson, Shonibare, and Broodthaers configures places of institutional knowledge not as neutral spaces in which to experience history but instead as having an active role in perpetuating master narratives. Similarly, I draw on archival processes to explore and question the institutional authority assigned to museums and archives. Using such approaches encourages the audience to consider the active role of these systems in shaping our understanding of the past. Furthermore – as Haacke has extensively emphasised in his work – complicity and

[87] In this context, the exhibition of art deemed 'degenerate' by the Nazis comes to mind. These artworks were deliberately arranged in 'unflattering ways' to mock them and underline their supposed inferiority to National Socialist art; '[t]hey crowded sculptures and graphic works together. Paintings were suspended from the ceiling by long cords with little room between them. Many works were even left unframed and incorrectly labelled' (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020).

institutional ties determine whether an object is exhibited and how it is displayed in a show, following the same process of discrimination and selection found in archival procedures as highlighted by Mbembe (2002). The projects discussed here thus further illuminate the similarities between archives and museums while exposing the hidden structures at play.

5.2.3 Fictionalised realities and imagined stories

How museum collections are closely associated with and connected to archival practices also becomes evident in an artwork by artist Susan Hiller. She created *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1996) for a commission by Book Works and the Freud Museum, installing fifty archival boxes over two shelves in a vitrine (Fig. 56). The boxes are filled with items from Hiller's personal collection, to which she has assigned new significance through her presentation.[88] Drawing on archival methods, Hiller combined different objects in these boxes, titled them and added other items, such as maps, drawings, and images, to contextualise and generate new 'symbolic links' (Hiller, 1994, p. 46). The title of the work invites the presumption that the objects are from Freud's extensive personal collection of objects and artefacts displayed in the museum. Instead, Hiller chose personal items and images with various purposes and functions. Hiller describes the incentive for choosing her objects as follows:

> Individual items in my collection range from macabre through sentimental to banal. Many of the objects are personal, things I've kept for years as private relics and talismans, mementoes, references to unresolved issues in earlier works, or even as jokes (Hiller quoted in McShine 1999, p. 93).

While Freud's collection of objects inspired Hiller's selection, they also stand in stark contrast because Freud's collection consists of 'rare and valuable' artefacts, while Hiller describes her objects as random or disregarded items, which had – up until that moment – not found a place in her art practice (Hiller, 1994, p. 43). With this project, Hiller has given these objects a new purpose. Deeming them *archivable*, she has assigned value and has given them – as Mbembe called it – *privileged status*. Acknowledging their previous futile existence invites a different evaluation of museum classification systems. The ritual of archiving – a process of categorisation,

[88] Hiller has a background in archaeology. Her previous occupation thus influences her practice of collecting diverse objects and becomes further noticeable in her use of archaeological collecting boxes (Hiller, 1994, p. 44).

cataloguing, and presentation – is associated with knowledge and has thus provided these items with a newly found meaning. At the same time, Hiller is referencing the unconscious because the assortment of these items signifies her response to the Freud Museum, and she describes her process of ordering and assigning objects to a box as 'very dreamlike' (Hiller, 2006, p. 41).

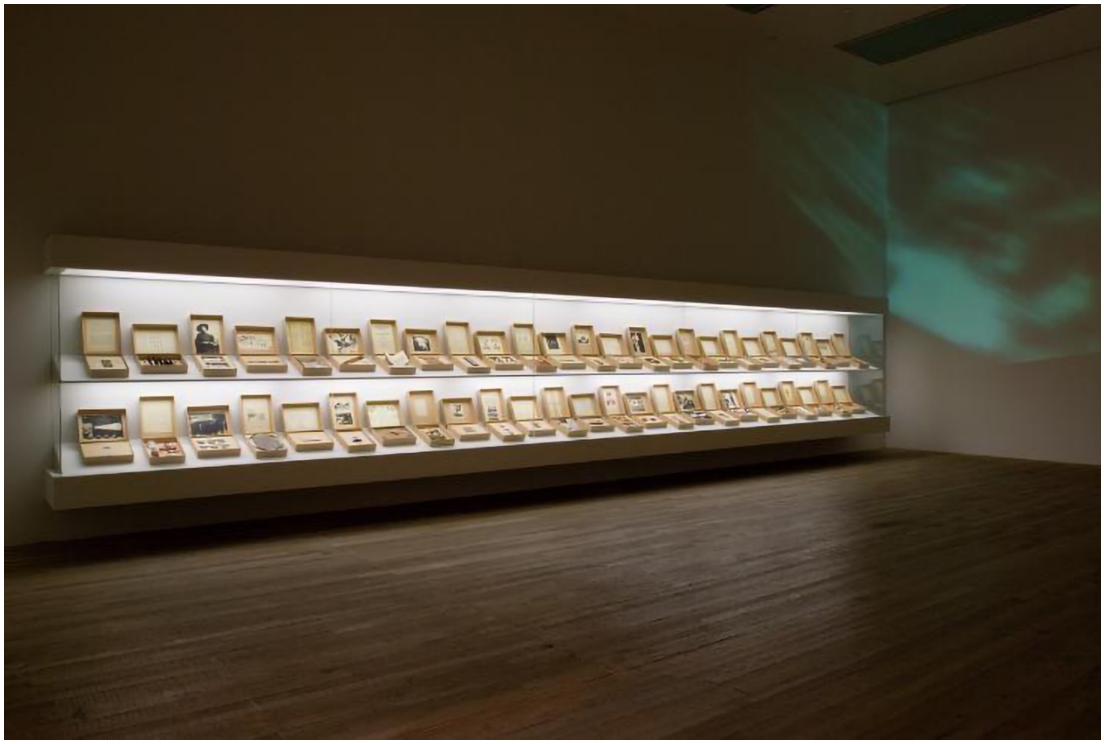


Fig. 56 Installation view of *From the Freud Museum* (1991-1996) by Susan Hiller at the Tate Modern, London, UK, 2011

While she believes that a 'conscious configuration of objects tells a story', she is also aware of how the story – initially created by herself – will always differ from the story perceived by the audience (Hiller, 1994, p. 42). Hiller's awareness of how outside perception and interpretation always differ from intentions allows her to draw on this dynamic and make it part of her artistic process. This is particularly interesting in the context of the archive and its intended function of recording and presenting information *neutrally*, simply making it available to outside utilisation. As previously established, the archival process is intrinsically biased, making it impossible for an archive to be considered a neutral space. The self-evidentiary claims of the institutional archive lend it almost an *unconscious* dimension, informed by an automatic accumulation of documents. However, archiving is an active process driven by *conscious* selection and methodical configuration and guided by established principles. Such strict rules do not apply to a creative engagement with

the archive, which allows artists to push boundaries and discover their unique approach, like Hiller, who let her unconscious guide her selection of objects. Hiller (1994, p. 42) further draws on Freud's definition of the dream, which is established through 'a manifest and a hidden content'. This notion of the *manifested* and the *hidden* are also apparent in the archive, as presence and absence – the *selected* and the *discriminated*.

Hiller's process of selecting the objects was further influenced by the confines of the available vitrine in the exhibition space at the Freud Museum. Here again, there is a parallel to how a selection in an archive is bound to constraints of resources and space and how – apart from ideological objectives – many documents are not archived because of physical limitations. Furthermore, Hiller was interested in the Freud Museum because it is itself a personal archive. The museum is housed in the former home of the Freud family and is thus devoid of the architectural structure that would usually be deemed a generic archival building. Furthermore, the Freud Museum is filled with items that were initially Freud's personal objects but that have become institutionalised. Mbembe (2002, p. 20) describes this transformation as a 'process of despoilment and dispossession'. The object no longer belongs to Freud's succession but is now in the possession of the public and 'anyone can claim access' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 20). In the case of the Freud Museum, this applies to its collection of documents and objects, as well as to the building in which the archive is housed, an archive of traces left by Freud and his family.

Using imagination and fantasy to question institutional practices of ordering and displaying can be found not only in Hiller's work but also in Shonibare and Broodthaers' projects. Such an engagement is also at the core of The Atlas Group. The Atlas Group is a fictional collective created by Lebanese artist Walid Raad to facilitate access to Lebanon's contemporary history. In an invented archive – *The Atlas Group Archive* – documents, artefacts, and research relating to these historical events from 1989 until 2004 were gathered. With a specific focus on the Lebanese wars (1975-1990), the collective *created* evidence for the archive. Here, The Atlas Group questions how fact and fiction are intertwined and how fictional approaches facilitate access to reality.

In an interview with The Atlas Group, they explained how the 'truth of documents we archive/collect does not depend for us on their factual accuracy' (The Atlas Group, 2003, p. 179). They therefore argue that the factuality of an object is not determined by its tangibility but rather by the framework in which it exists, thus posing the question: 'How do we approach facts not in their crude facticity but through the complicated mediations by which facts acquire their immediacy?' (The Atlas Group, 2003, p. 179). Their perception of factuality further supports the previously discussed perception of the archive as a *historical apparatus*, drawing on institutional authority to create a façade of *truth*. The Atlas Group argues that fixating on the 'conventional reductive binary, fiction and non-fiction' ignores the complexity and extent of stories, which 'circulate widely and capture our attention and belief' (The Atlas Group, 2003, p. 179).

The variety of collections in the archive is especially interesting; it contains news clippings, documents, photographs, notebooks, collages, and videos. Apart from the breadth of formats and materials, there is also a breadth of different (imagined) provenances and authors, such as notebooks contributed by historian Dr Fadl Fakhouri (Fig. 57), evidence submitted by Raad himself, or Operator #17, a Lebanese Army Intelligence Officer, alongside collected photographs by anonymous sources and a documentation of investigations conducted by The Atlas Group. The archive establishes access to the public realm through performative lectures and artist talks about the material created and gathered. A part of the archive is also accessible on a dedicated website.

Fig. 57 *Notebook volume 38: Already been in a lake of fire* (1991/2003) Attributed to *The Atlas Group Archive* by Dr Fadl Fakhouri

Through this wide variety of contributions, *The Atlas Group Archive* highlights the cruciality of including different voices and stories in an understanding of the past. While *The Atlas Group Archive* invokes a sense of institutional authority because of its archival structure and process, the archive's selection of artefacts reflects the group's views on factuality, thus further highlighting the selectiveness of archives in considering what is relevant and what is not. Journalist and critic Kaelen Wilson-Goldie describes these artefacts as follows:

> But those documents – some found, others produced – function not as emblems of fact or scraps of evidence to support the assertions of history, but rather as traces, as symptoms, as strange structural links between history, memory, and fantasy, between what is known to be true and what is needed to be believed (Wilson-Goldie, 2004).

Some artefacts in *The Atlas Group Archive* present the mapping of destruction. In this context, the collective's work shares similarities with artists in the *mapped secrets* category. Comparing these two forms of artistic investigation reveals how the form and method of ordering, assigning, and meticulous mapping afford the work its factual character, not the actual mapped content.

An example is *Festival of Gratitude*, a photographic collection of cakes and tarts by an anonymous source (Fig. 58). Enclosed with the photographs is a statement by a photographer who documented cakes of a pastry shop in Beirut called *Noura*. In the retelling of their experience, the photographer recalls how, following the documenting of a birthday cake at *Noura,* which was potentially intended for the then President of Lebanon, Amine Gemayel, they had the idea of baking and poisoning twelve birthday cakes and sending them to warlords. However, they never ended up delivering them. The collection's photographs depict these twelve cakes, which were baked, poisoned, and photographed by the author of the statement, who concludes his letters with two questions: 'Maybe you can be less cowardly? And deliver my cakes for me?' (Anonymous, 2003). Imagining this fictional persona wanting to poison warlords thus captures the genuine anger of civilians towards people responsible for the war.

Fig. 58 *Festival of Gratitude: Omar* (2003) Anonymously attributed to *The Atlas Group Archive*

Nele Wynants, an art and theatre scholar at the University of Antwerp, also discusses the idea of using fiction to create an understanding of reality. In her book *When Fact is Fiction*, Wynants writes:

> The power of a text, an image, or a work of art may lie precisely in its presentation of a worldview that closely corresponds to our experience of reality, even though we know full well that its empirical basis is dubious or fictional (Wynants, 2020, p. 10).[89]

Therefore, The Atlas Group's approach incorporates the sentiments, emotions, and fears of individuals living through the war while raising questions about which stories are recorded and archived. Canadian arts and culture writer Chris Hampton describes Raad's methodology as follows:

> He devised the foundation as a tool to ask questions about authority and authenticity in the production of knowledge. He is not trying to dupe his audience, instead he invites them to look more closely. Not everything they'll find is false (Hampton, 2020).

The Atlas Group explores how history follows imagination and fantasy to construct a version that serves contemporary interests. Through their archive, the fictional element of how history comes into being is simultaneously explored and critically questioned. The Atlas Group's work discovers unknown stories; it explores 'unexplored dimensions' of Lebanon's civil wars while critically engaging with how these events have been presented to and perceived by the wider public (Wilson-Goldie, 2004). The collective poses two contrasting questions: what needs to be preserved to tell a story about the past? Moreover, what is preserved to serve ideological objectives and contemporary aims? The Atlas Group and my research thus pursue the same goal of challenging dominant narratives and questioning the underlying power structures of historical selectivity.

In Raad's engagement with the civil war(s) in Lebanon, there is no all-inclusive knowledge of the events. Instead, he is creating a worldview in which such comprehension is impossible, instead focusing on the 'right to speak' of the victims (Wilson-Goldie, 2004). Here, he is interested in the attention given to victims while, simultaneously, their accounts seem to fall short in dismantling dominant narratives. Raad described this as follows:

> They can be listened to but they will not necessarily be heard. Just like the buildings. You can go to Furn al-Shubbak, photograph it as much as you

[89] Similarly, philosopher and writer Albert Camus (quoted in Collier, 1995) once said: 'fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth'.

> want, document it exhaustively – I'm not sure what you will know, and the same goes for the victims (Wilson-Goldie, 2004)

Raad thus implies a silence that materialises, although an act of speaking occurs. Using the building for such a comparison is again similar to Haacke's and Eichhorn's exploration of the German Pavilion and Bertschi's notion of *silent witnesses*. However, while Haacke, Eichhorn, and Bertschi focus on the ability of these *silent witnesses* to *communicate* a story, Raad questions their ability to achieve an actual impact through such documentation. Instead, through The Atlas Group, he focuses on cultural documentation, the personal experience of people who have lived through these events, to capture their feelings (Wilson-Goldie, 2004). Here, Raad also refers to his own childhood experience of growing up in Lebanon during the war. The Atlas Group provides a conceptual framework and identity, providing Raad with the necessary platform to capture the multiple perspectives informed by imagined individuals affected by and suffering through the wars in Lebanon. To highlight this, Raad drew on the power of fiction to capture the unconscious impact of these events on people, manifested in 'facts, objects, experiences, and feelings that leave traces and should be collected' (Wilson-Goldie, 2004). This idea that the traces are accumulated in people's minds – the unconscious collecting traces – is similar to Kwint's category of memory materialising in traces on objects; the mind thus, like the object, becomes an archive of traces.

Through his fictional collective and counter-archive, Raad fabricates, records, and orders to turn his ideas from imperceptible into perceptible matter. Here again, we could return to the material infrastructure of the secret and the materiality of memory. Finding a tangible output for his imagination, Raad challenges an invisible history by materialising his memory. Thus, he is not only accentuating the invisible but also obscuring the already visible – the previously accepted *facts* – and making it more ambiguous.

As previously discussed through the writings of Mbembe (2002, p. 21), the archive's role cannot only be reduced to an ideological configuration of history but presents – in its function – the threat of remembering the past. The state's power over the archive thus allows it to 'anaesthetise the past' to free itself from 'all debt', such as political, social, financial and moral accountabilities (Mbembe, 2002, p. 21). Therefore, archives are ideologically manipulated and riddled with the suppression

of uncomfortable histories. Simultaneously, the archive's authority is established by its 'instituting imaginary' granting it its 'power and status' (Mbembe, 2002, p. 19).

A re-interpretation of the archive, using similar systematic and visual codes, thus benefits from this inherent authority that we associate with the archive as a holder of evidence and presenter of the *truth*. Wynants (2020, p. 10) also explains the potential of fiction to 'imagine other realities, explore new perspectives (…), or represent something that is hard or even impossible to represent otherwise'. Drawing on this notion, my counter-archive facilitates new access by including different materials and objects (Fig. 59), creating a fictional space for the invisible to interrogate the contested past and pose the question: What is fact, and what is fiction?

Therefore, the counter-archive has the potential to question accepted *truths*, reappropriate them, and allow new insights. It directly references the patriotic wartime memory constructed in post-war years by the Swiss government – highlighting humanitarian help and claiming that the Swiss Army protected the nation from an invasion: a fictional narrative refuted by the archival research of the ICE.

Fig. 59 *Edelweiss pin* (2021)

Shonibare, Haacke, Wilson, and Raad use different approaches – from material interventions and uncovering hidden structures to the reorganisation of museum collections to an imagined archive – to counter dominant narratives and resist the oblivion of marginalised histories. While they share this common aim, Raad's work uses a distinctive approach to highlight the unknowable, thus configuring history as an unseizable, slippery matter that never fully encompasses the *truth.*

While all the artists discussed in this chapter have highlighted the integral role of contextualisation through placement, description, and framework in creating meaning and telling stories, Wilson, Broodthaers, Hiller, and Raad have used archival processes of collecting, reordering, and cataloguing. However, it is not only their archival approach that makes their practices relevant to my research but also their role as archivists.

Artistic approaches revising or mirroring archival processes question what is deemed worthy of collecting or what even has the right to be collected.[90] Creative explorations thus offer a space to question the authority to assemble, curate, and order through an exposure of the imminent biases originating from the artist's identity itself. Drawing on fiction and fantasy, these artists reveal the authority instilled in archival frameworks and question their impact on historical knowledge through a playful approach.

It is also essential to reflect on my role as an archivist. In the selection process, I deemed specific objects significant for my research because of their conceptual connection. However, there were also underlying motivations that drove me to collect particular objects and disregard others. Over time, I have developed and applied a system drawing on the fundamental concepts of my research. Nevertheless, this structure was informed by a period of organic collecting of things that I deemed interesting at the time. I only started establishing such connections following reflections on my previously acquired objects. Thus, the research was informed by notions of memory and secrecy and a conceptual engagement with Switzerland's history, as well as being previously informed by biased and pre-existing ideas. The process was not linear but changed throughout my artistic research and theoretical engagement. Because of that, it is important to highlight my connection with the subject and its wide-reaching influence on my practice as an artist and researcher. Reflecting on one's tendencies offers a productive framework to discuss the correlation between an archive's intent and its institutional affiliations. Here, we become aware of how objectives guide and inform the process of selecting material.

Concerning my role as an artist and archivist – deciding what will be shown, highlighted, and thus disclosed – in contrast to what will remain hidden and silent, a quote by Russian poet and essayist Maria Stepanova comes to mind. In her book, *In Memory of Memory* (2021), Stepanova explores her family's cultural and personal memory. At the beginning of the book, she sifts through objects and documents from

[90] This is also closely connected to identity. For example, Hiller has been influenced by her previous archaeological profession, Wilson was influenced by his upbringing as a Black kid in a white neighbourhood, and Raad was influenced by his childhood experiences of the Lebanese Civil War. My Swiss identity and how my upbringing in Switzerland has shaped my perceptions of it have also been a critical influence in my decision-making regarding what to collect for the counter-archive.

her recently deceased aunt, looking through past familial possessions. For some of these objects and artefacts, she recalls memories; some seem familiar, but their memory is distorted through the prism of her recollections; others are anonymous in their significance and connection to the past. Based on these personal associations, Stepanova thus assigns meanings to certain objects while disregarding others. Reflecting on this process, she writes:

> I would become a stranger, a teller of tales, a selector and sitter, the one who decides what part of the huge volume of the unsaid must fit in the spotlight's circle, and what part will remain outside in the darkness. (Stepanova, 2021, p. 37)

Stepanova's reflection offers an insight into how our experiences shape the process of selection and disregard, and can be used as a mirror of how – through the prisms of identity – individuals and institutions are biased in their archiving process. Neither the archivist nor the archive could thus ever be considered *neutral*.

6 PRACTICAL EXPERIMENTS AND MATERIAL INTERVENTIONS

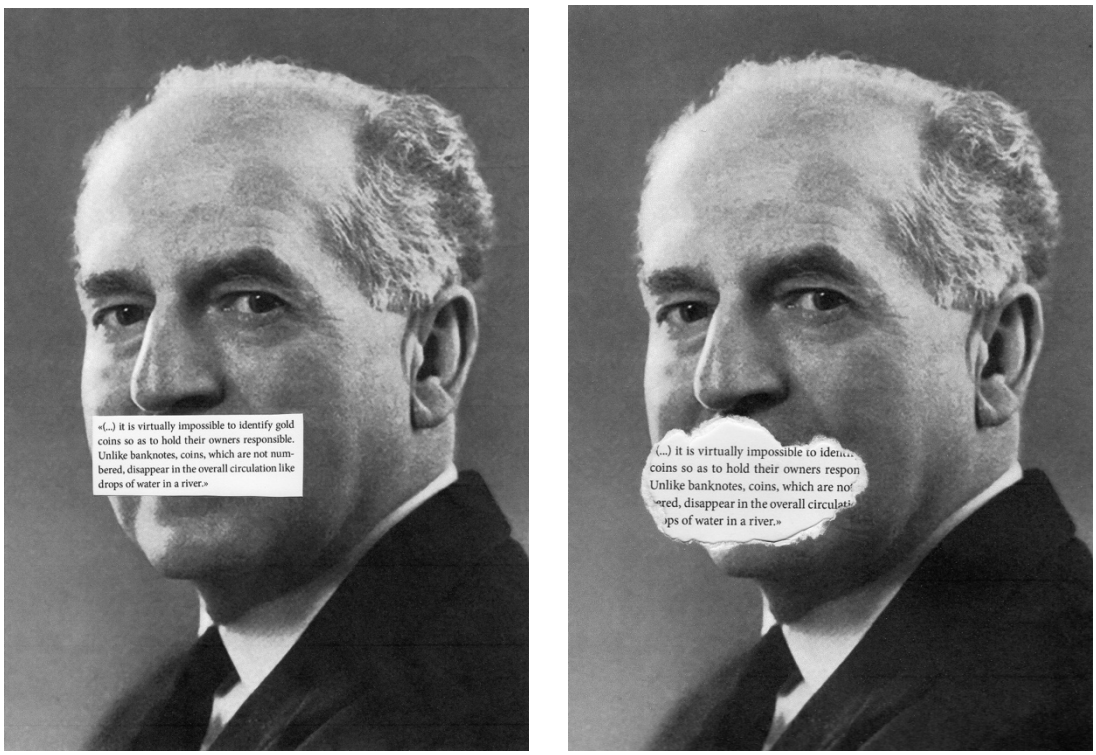
6.1 Experiments and process

Birchall's (2014) concept of the *aesthetics of the secret* was an integral reference for my research since the beginning. Influenced by my background in photography, I initially worked with contextually relevant imagery and used techniques of hiding and taking away – in the form of montages and décollages – which later solidified my method of gilding. For my experimental approaches, I was further inspired by the previously mentioned quote by Hodgkin and Radstone (2014, p. 237), which refers to collective forgetting caused by contested pasts as 'holes in the fabric of memory'. In the historical context, these gaps were initially created and strategically overshadowed by the dominant narrative established in Switzerland's post-war politics. The wide celebration of General Guisan as a hero has further supported the establishing and maintaining of Switzerland's *memory holes* in relation to its historical complicity in the gold trade with the Nazis. Therefore, I started using a hole punch to create interventions on images of General Guisan (Fig. 60/61).

Figs. 60/61 *Experimentation with hole punch on an image of General Guisan* (2020)

Apart from creating absences, I was also interested in manually removing information and taking it out of context. At this point in the project, I had not developed the concept of the counter-archive as the final framework of my research; however, reflecting on my exploration of selection and recontextualisation, these experiments present a fitting visual representation of the selectiveness of an archive. The image on the left could be considered a symbol of the historical events, whereas the picture on the right represents the archive, a visualisation of the records selected as worthy of remembering.

Inspired by General Guisan's prevalence as a significant figure in the patriotic wartime narrative, I became interested in his counterparts, the central individuals of the hidden history: the governing board of the Swiss National Bank. Here, I experimented with a technique of layering, allocating quotes from internal meetings found in the ICE report to the relevant persons (Fig. 62/63). Focusing on performative acts of hiding and revealing, I aimed to create a new visual language by combining two different elements.



Figs. 62/63 *Experimentation with décollage and cutouts on a portrait of Paul Rossy, member of the SNB Governing Board, Department II from 1937 – 1955* (2020)

As previously mentioned, the reports of the ICE provided the foundation for the historical context of my research. While these publications offer significant

information and data, they are devoid of imagery. Since the research also partly responds to an absence of visual documentation of the gold trade, I have started to further engage with existing material endorsing the dominant narrative in the form of military images and recordings. Focusing on such content eventually inspired me to incorporate military objects into the counter-archive because of their historical visibility.

At the beginning of my research, I collected images found in magazines and newspapers. Via E-Periodica, an online archival platform for Swiss journals and a service provided by ETH University, I was able to conduct a substantial part of my research into media representations before, during, and after the war. Apart from their mnemonic influence, I was also interested in these magazines because the Swiss government implemented press censorship during the war to restrict what could be published in the Swiss media. However, as highlighted by historian and member of the ICE, Georg Kreis (2011, p. 42), this control of the media did not impose ignorance on the Swiss population about economic wartime cooperation and the systematic persecution of Jews. If desired, a thorough engagement with contemporary events was still possible despite the censorship. Instead, press censorship was applied as a foreign policy tool to ensure media restraint towards contemporary wartime politics. According to these guiding principles, it was not permitted to discuss the Swiss government or their neutrality politics or to criticise the army, to avoid damage to their image (Kreis, 2011, p. 42). Therefore, the censorship created a biased framework for media coverage, and its prohibiting of any critical evaluation of Swiss military operations further laid the groundwork for Switzerland's post-war memory politics. Beyond press censorship, the government further implemented press control, thus directing the content of newspapers. Especially after the German invasion of France in June 1940, news stories were adjusted so that the main proposition would acknowledge the achievements of the German army instead of condescendingly attributing the successful invasion to military superiority in machinery and technology (Kreis, 2011, p. 42).

Consequently, controlling information was not only an intrinsic aspect of Swiss post-war memory politics but also influenced the media landscape and public opinion during the war. Restricting political views and commentary deprived the public of critical analysis and established a patriotic wartime rhetoric of idealised military

resistance. While researching magazine articles, I realised how the media constructed a favourable image of the Swiss military in the pre-war years, celebrating it as an integral part of Swiss identity – referring to the collective of the Swiss people as the army – and calling the Swiss Army the epitome of the people (Zürcher Illustrierte, 1938). In articles, headlines, and covers, Swiss soldiers were awarded the roles of patriotic heroes, portrayed as devotedly guarding the freedom of the Fatherland (Brunner and Schumacher, 1938) (Fig. 64).

Fig. 64 *Der Weg zum Soldaten* (1938)[91] (via Zürcher Illustrierte)

[91] The top image shows recruits enlisting for military service in Aarau. The caption of the image describes how the soldiers arrive, dressed in good clothes – for it is a serious and festive day – while holding their suitcases and travel baskets; they sense the significance of the hour and are called to guard the freedom and honour of the Fatherland. The caption further explains how it is the pride of the Swiss to sacrifice themselves for the Fatherland voluntarily, while others consider it a compulsion, and that, without such dedication and goodwill, the Swiss would hardly survive (Brunner and Schumacher, 1938). The image below shows a soldier with an infantry cannon. The corresponding caption describes how the mere weeks of military service transform the recruits into soldiers and how their rigorous

Drawing on this conscious establishment of public conception about the Swiss military, I used the military images and newspaper screenshots gathered to create gilding sketches on my tablet, using different layers (Fig. 65/66).

Figs. 65/66 *Examples of two versions of digital sketches on a magazine cover from 1938* (2021)

Using the same approach, I started creating digital sketches of postcards I found online (Fig. 67). Since the beginning of my research, I had been planning to work with stereotypical objects because of their purpose as a keepsake – a symbol for memory – but also because of their innocuous appearance.

service allows them to become free; only those who can master themselves have nothing to fear from others; through the service, they have become men, knowing their duty and responsibility. Thousands of Swiss young men go through this school of manliness every year and experience this transformation. Once their military service is over, they remain Swiss soldiers, even in civilian clothing (Brunner and Schumacher, 1938).

Fig. 67 *Digital sketch of gold intervention on postcard* (2021)

Eventually, I began experimenting with imitation gold leaf; it is made from metal, easier to handle than real gold leaf, and considerably less expensive.[92] Because of its materiality, it is also firmer than real gold leaf and does not require specific tools – beyond the metal leaf and the dedicated adhesive – nor any specialist knowledge. Using metal leaf allowed me to experiment with objects to understand how gold interventions would aesthetically alter the objects that I had begun collecting. Therefore, I started gilding some small objects, such as an edelweiss pin (Fig. 68). I also began experimenting with interventions on black and white (Fig. 69) and colour postcards.

[92] I paid £5.99 for 100 sheets (14 x 14cm) of imitation gold leaf. For the gold leaf – sold in packs of 25 sheets (8 x 8cm) – I paid between £33 and £38.

Fig. 68 *Process of gilding an edelweiss pin with imitation gold leaf* (2021)

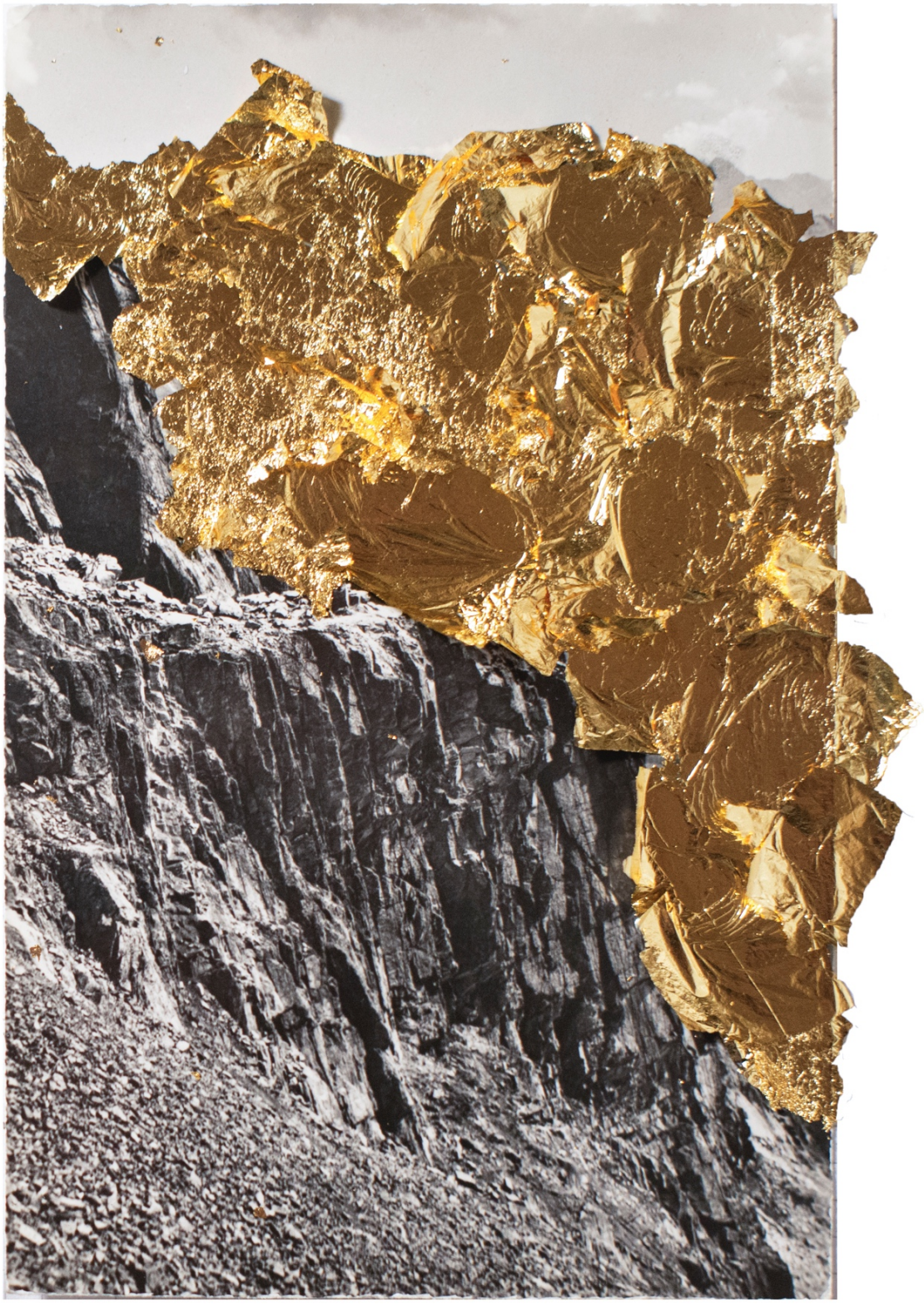


Fig. 69 *Experimentation with metal leaf on postcard* (2021)

Working with imitation gold leaf allowed me to visualise how the objects would be transformed through an extra gilded layer and was thus a logical first step at the beginning of my practical research. Through this experimentation, I was able to

explore the performative quality of obscuring by adding a new layer of material, which would become further relevant to my methodology.

By participating in a gilding workshop taught by professional gilder Clare Kooy-Lister, I learned about the tools and craft of gilding. Gold leaf is incredibly delicate, each sheet is beaten to a thickness of only 0.1 micrometre, which equals 0.001 mm (‘gold leaf’, 2024). However, the delicacy of gold leaf is in direct contrast to its durability. The persisting untarnished quality of gold also makes it essentially superior to imitation gold leaf. Because my research explores aspects of secrecy and notions of deception, I briefly considered the possibility of including objects gilded with imitation gold leaf. However, I decided against this option because, firstly, the imitation gold leaf started to tarnish and lost its deceiving factor. Secondly, unlike real gold, imitation gold leaf does not materialise as a secret.

Further inspired by the performative quality of gilding as an act of hiding, I started to experiment with digital overlays of gilded postcards on screenshots of a documentary about Switzerland during the Second World War (Fig. 70). The documentary featured video material of the Swiss Army during the war, again painting the soldiers as the nation’s saviours. Here, I was interested in pairing the romanticised images of Switzerland, embellished with gold leaf – an extra layer of beauty – in stark contrast with the black and white military footage. However, in this juxtaposition, the vernacular imagery symbolises the reality of Switzerland’s financial complicity, while the military documentation endorses the patriotic wartime memory.

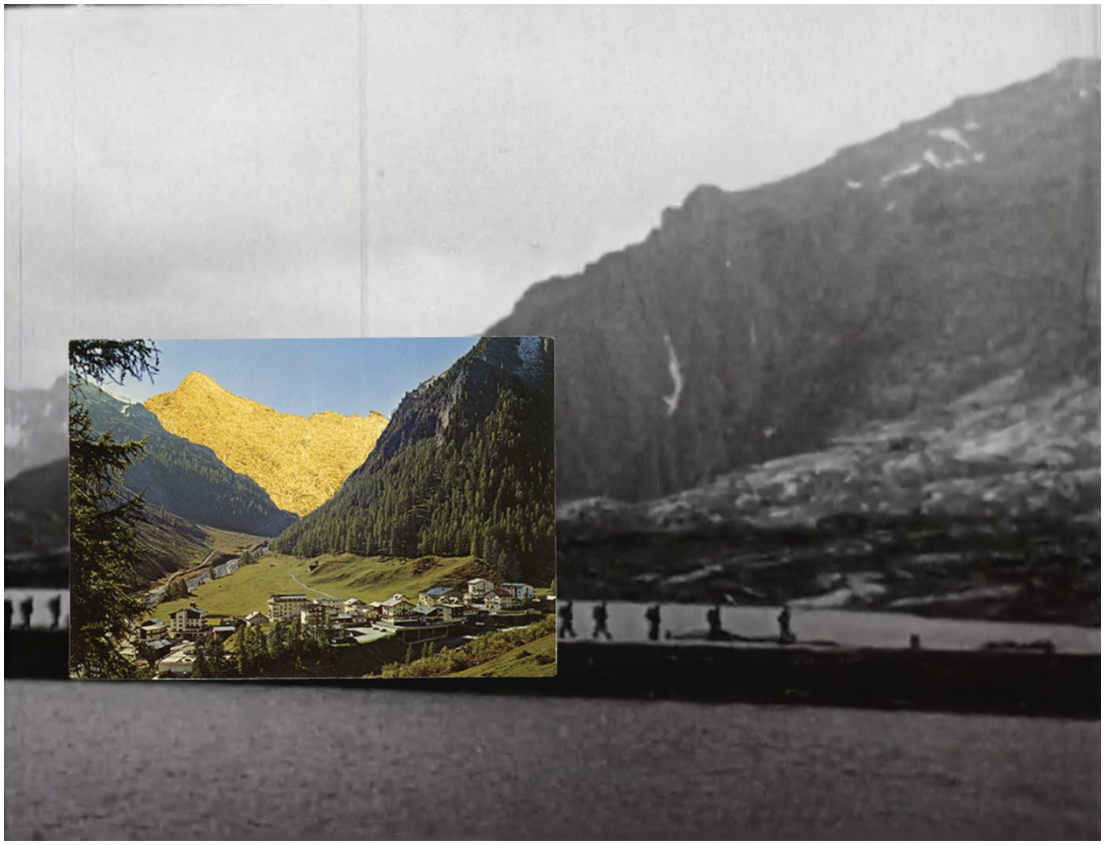


Fig. 70 *Video documentation of the Swiss Army during the Second World War overlaid with gilded postcard* (2022)

6.2 Collecting and gilding

Throughout my experimentation, I acquired objects on online reselling platforms, such as eBay, Etsy, and their Swiss equivalent, Ricardo. Initially, I collected postcards of picturesque Swiss landscapes, pins featuring edelweiss, the Matterhorn, and other stereotypical Swiss symbols, and small objects, such as a wooden music box in the form of a Swiss chalet and a small cowbell. Later in the process – inspired by the previously mentioned research into historical magazines and newspapers – I began to explore the potential of military objects. Again, I was interested in juxtaposing the romanticised vernacular objects and the military paraphernalia, everyday objects belonging to Swiss soldiers serving during the war, such as helmets, flashlights, insignia, and regulations. Additionally, I started to collect commemorative objects in memory of the war. Most of these objects either reference the supposed achievements of the Swiss army during the war or highlight humanitarian efforts carried out by Switzerland after the war.[93]

Inspired by my purchase of postcards, I became increasingly curious about their duality of public and private. As mentioned in Chapter 4, postcards are designed to be sent without an envelope, thus permitting anyone to read their messages. Therefore, sending a postcard in an envelope – adding it as an additional protective layer – became an act of hiding by safeguarding. In Swiss German, envelope translates as 'Kuvert' (2024), deriving from the French verb *couvrir*, which means to 'cover'. Because of postage stamps and date stamps, postcards accumulate traces of their journey; once the postcard is sent in an envelope, it becomes displaced without any documentation of its postage. However, the envelope it is sent in becomes a new record documenting its journey and revealing information about its previous owner, such as handwriting, choice of envelope, postage stamps, and sometimes even a return address. The envelope is thus both obfuscation and revelation. Inspired by this additional layer of the hidden and the revealed, I started to collect and document the envelopes (Fig. 71). This idea of collecting material traces as an indicator of an object's journey eventually led me to retain all the packaging material of the objects I acquired throughout my research.

[93] However, as mentioned in Chapter 1.4, the Swiss failed to fulfil their pledged financial contribution to the refugee resettlement fund and only partially returned looted gold to the Netherlands (Slany and Eizenstat, 1997, p. viii).

Fig. 71 *Selection of envelopes in which postcards were sent* (2022)

Once I started buying and collecting objects, my research process became driven by the materiality and symbolism of these items. Thus, the development of specific searches and broader search terms, as well as the archival ordering structure, was organically informed in response to previously acquired objects. For this reason, the counter-archive will never be completed; instead, it will remain an ever-growing repository of newly added components and objects.[94] The accumulation of objects for the counter-archive was informed by my historical research on the ICE's findings and my theoretical research of the cultural significance of objects and material memories. Besides these references, the more significant challenge was to develop a structure imposing some much-needed limitations. Therefore, archival limitations, which I previously highlighted as part of my critique to counter the notion of all-encompassing archival knowledge in Chapter 5, needed to become part of my counter-archival structure. Establishing a counter-archive was a conscious decision to critically include and engage with these factors as part of a broader institutional

[94] I will discuss potential ideas for future components of the counter-archive in the Conclusion.

critique. Reflecting on my own process further reveals how strategic collecting, ordering, and categorising influenced the selective process of acquiring specific objects.

As previously discussed in Chapter 4, I was not only interested in stereotypical souvenirs because of their popular representational quality or their historical significance, but also because of their duality of symbol and secret. In their visibility, these objects endorse the ideologically rendered imagery of innocence; however, in their invisibility – their purpose – they have become a secret, an *articulated absence*, stripped of their commemorative intention. The potential for financial profit gained through their sale has outweighed their mnemonic capacity. In contrast to these stereotypical souvenirs, the personal military objects had a previous purpose that was not tied to memory. However, because they have been kept and – presumably – remained unused in a non-military context, they have become objects of memory. Their function does not determine their quality as a tool, but instead, they have become significant as a symbol of a previous life experience. The commemorative objects combine aspects of stereotypical souvenirs and military paraphernalia; they work as a mnemonic device – functioning like monuments – to actively construct and impose a sentimentalised image of Swiss military resistance during the Second World War. They do not symbolise a personal memory of Switzerland or a nostalgic reminder of a past rendered significant due to contested memory politics; instead, they actively reinforce the national wartime myth. Through such a conceptual reading of the mnemonic perseverance and its absence, I have identified three main classifications of objects: the stereotypical souvenirs, the military paraphernalia, and the commemorative devices. This categorisation marked a critical point in my research because it introduced an ordering structure for my selection process and a guiding factor for the continued collecting of objects.

The initial decision to create a counter-archive provided a much-needed framework; however, the endless possibilities of objects that could become part of its collection still posed a challenge. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Switzerland's complicity with the Nazis and dubious politics during the Second World War was not limited to the gold transactions. For instance, the Swiss also granted the Nazis access to Swiss rail tracks, thus allowing them to establish essential links to transport goods from Germany to Italy and occupied France. Over a short period, I

intended for the counter-archive to cover the breadth of Swiss wartime complicity. Inspired by this aspect of historical collaboration, I started collecting postcards, maps, and cuttings relating to Swiss railways. However, once I engaged further with a critical reading of the archive and established that exclusions and incomplete histories are an inherent part of the archival process, I realised that embracing the incompleteness of the counter-archive was a necessary step for my critique of hierarchical knowledge structures. Therefore, these absences are not externally imposed limitations but instead are a conceptually conscious decision.

Fig. 72 *Swiss soldier helmet from the Second World War* (2023)

In addition to deciding what to collect, I also needed to determine which objects to gild. This process was again influenced by various factors, such as the object's materiality, its historical significance, and its position among other objects.

Fig. 73 *Image of me gilding* (2023)

There are two different kinds of gilding processes: water gilding and oil gilding. The former is more complicated, involves considerably more steps, and allows for the gilded surface to be polished; thus, a foundation coating is added, which ‘serves as a cushion; for the polishing with an agate burnisher’ (Chambers, 1973, p. 18). Oil gilding is less complex but does not allow for the gold leaf to be polished and is thus

less shiny. For this method, oil size is applied to a surface, and depending on the chosen size, the drying time varies from 3 to 12 hours. Once the size has dried, the gold leaf can be applied, and any additional gold leaf not sticking to the size can be brushed off. During the gilding workshop, Clare taught me both gilding processes; however, I only used the oil gilding method in my research because it was more suitable for the surfaces of the materials I was gilding (Fig. 73). Even though oil gilding is considerably less complex, I had to acquire a new skillset and purchase specialist equipment and gold leaf.

As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the materiality of the gold allows for its provenance to be fully concealed, and thus – according to Birchall's concept analysed in Chapter 3 – it could be considered a *known unknown*, an open secret. Therefore, adding gold leaf to a particular object covers it in a layer of secrecy. Through the gilding, these objects – which were already stripped of their emotional value as memory objects through the reselling process – are further anonymised by the gold leaf. Simultaneously, their material value increases due to the added layer of gold. Gilding is an expensive craft, not least because of the cost of gold leaf. Due to this financial aspect, I decided that the cost of the research would become a relevant component in the counter-archive, drawing a connection to Switzerland's economically driven wartime involvement and its contemporary role as a finance and gold hub. Incorporating this idea of being driven by financial gain further inspired the ordering structure of the counter-archive.

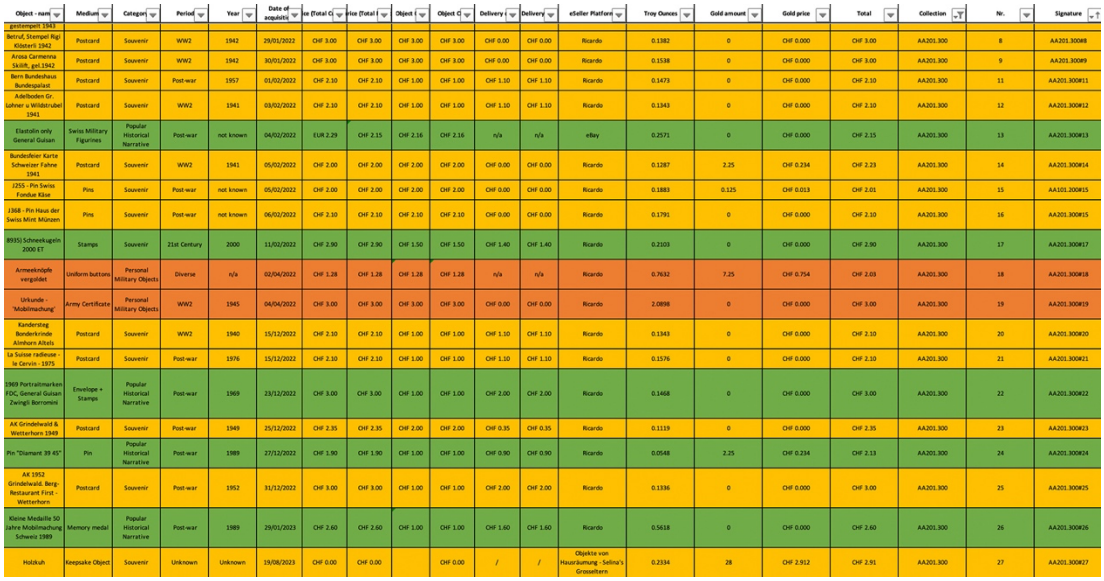
6.3 Ordering and cataloguing

For the classification structure of the counter-archive, I started to research archival processes and systems, drawing inspiration from different archives, with a primary focus on the Swiss Federal Archive (SFA). The SFA uses the 'International Standard of Archival Description (General) ISAD(G)', an archival development standard established by the International Council on Archives (ICA), which defines four principles outlining the information of archival records that need to be catalogued (Tögel and Borelli, 2009). According to guidance from The National Archives (2016), archives are generally organised by provenance and original order. The principle of provenance, also referred to as 'respects des fonds', was already being applied in the 19th century in archives in France, Germany, and England (Franz, 1999, p. 46). According to this standard, the provenance of archival records, 'the history of ownership related to a group of records or an individual item in a collection', is maintained by keeping these documents together in the collection (The National Archives, 2016, p. 7). There are different ways of creating meaning between objects. If we imagined an archive ordered by materials, the documentation of Klein's *Monogolds* could be found in the *Gold Collection* among images of Rauschenberg's gold paintings. However, in an archive organised by the provenance principle, photographs of Klein's *Monogolds* would be found in the *Klein collection*, among examples of his other works, and Rauschenberg's gold paintings – together with further records of his practice – would be found in the *Rauschenberg collection*. In their publication, The National Archives further explain the importance of following these standards because the relationship between archival records is more important than the significance of individual items:

> Unlike books, archival records are not understood on their own as individual items. Their meaning comes from their relationships with other records and the people or organisations that created and used them (The National Archives, 2016, p. 8).

The process of cataloguing these archival records thus functions as a tool to 'describe and preserve these relationships' (The National Archives, 2016, p. 8). Therefore, how the object will be perceived is determined not only by its individual features but also by how it is conceived in relation to the other archival entries in the collection. In my research, this process again revealed an inherent characteristic of the archive: the importance of framework and relation in accumulating and curating

knowledge. I initially followed categories inspired by the ISDA(G) to create an accession register – a spreadsheet containing different categories and filter options – to document and map the objects I had acquired for my research; this became a record which I updated throughout the process (Fig. 74). The accession register further evolved throughout the research – with the addition of new categories and a colour coding system – informed by the acquisition of new objects and the development of an ordering structure.



Object - nam	Medium	Categor	Period	Year	Date of acquisitio	ce (Total C	rice (Total	Object	Object C	Delivery (	Delivery	eSeller Platform	Troy Ounces	Gold amount	Gold price	Total	Collection	Nr.	Signature
geheimpelt 1943																			
Betruf, Stempel Rgt Klösterli 1942	Postcard	Souvenir	WW2	1942	29/01/2022	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	0.1382	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 3.00	AA201.300	8	AA201.300#8
Arosa Carmenna Skilift, gel.1942	Postcard	Souvenir	WW2	1942	30/01/2022	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	0.1538	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 3.00	AA201.300	9	AA201.300#9
Bern Bundeshaus Bundespalast	Postcard	Souvenir	Post-war	1957	01/02/2022	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.10	CHF 1.10	Ricardo	0.1473	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.10	AA201.300	11	AA201.300#11
Adelboden Gr. Lohner u Wildbrubel 1941	Postcard	Souvenir	WW2	1941	03/02/2022	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.10	CHF 1.10	Ricardo	0.1343	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.10	AA201.300	12	AA201.300#12
Elastolin only General Guisan	Swiss Military Figurines	Popular Historical Narrative	Post-war	not known	04/02/2022	EUR 2.29	CHF 2.15	CHF 2.16	CHF 2.16	n/a	n/a	eBay	0.2571	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.15	AA201.300	13	AA201.300#13
Bundesfeier Karte Schweizer Fahne 1941	Postcard	Souvenir	WW2	1941	05/02/2022	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	0.1287	2.25	CHF 0.234	CHF 2.23	AA201.300	14	AA201.300#14
J255 - Pin Swiss Fondue Käse	Pins	Souvenir	Post-war	not known	05/02/2022	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	0.1883	0.125	CHF 0.013	CHF 2.01	AA201.300	15	AA101.200#15
J368 - Pin Haus der Swiss Mint Münzen	Pins	Souvenir	Post-war	not known	06/02/2022	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	0.1791	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.10	AA201.300	16	AA201.300#15
8935) Schneekugeln 2000 ET	Stamps	Souvenir	21st Century	2000	11/02/2022	CHF 2.90	CHF 2.90	CHF 1.50	CHF 1.50	CHF 1.40	CHF 1.40	Ricardo	0.2103	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.90	AA201.300	17	AA201.300#17
Armeeknöpfe vergoldet	Uniform buttons	Personal Military Objects	Diverse	n/a	02/04/2022	CHF 1.28	CHF 1.28	CHF 1.28	CHF 1.28	n/a	n/a	Ricardo	0.7632	7.25	CHF 0.754	CHF 2.03	AA201.300	18	AA201.300#18
Urkunde - 'Mobilmachung'	Army Certificate	Personal Military Objects	WW2	1945	04/04/2022	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00	Ricardo	2.0898	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 3.00	AA201.300	19	AA201.300#19
Kandersteg Bonderkrinde Aimhorn Alteis	Postcard	Souvenir	WW2	1940	15/12/2022	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.10	CHF 1.10	Ricardo	0.1343	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.10	AA201.300	20	AA201.300#20
La Suisse radieuse - le Cervin - 1975	Postcard	Souvenir	Post-war	1976	15/12/2022	CHF 2.10	CHF 2.10	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.10	CHF 1.10	Ricardo	0.1576	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.10	AA201.300	21	AA201.300#21
1969 Portraitmarken FDC, General Guisan Zwingli Borromini	Envelope + Stamps	Popular Historical Narrative	Post-war	1969	23/12/2022	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	Ricardo	0.1468	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 3.00	AA201.300	22	AA201.300#22
AK Grindelwald & Wetterhorn 1949	Postcard	Souvenir	Post-war	1949	25/12/2022	CHF 2.35	CHF 2.35	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 0.35	CHF 0.35	Ricardo	0.1119	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.35	AA201.300	23	AA201.300#23
Pin "Diamant 39 45"	Pin	Popular Historical Narrative	Post-war	1989	27/12/2022	CHF 1.90	CHF 1.90	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 0.90	CHF 0.90	Ricardo	0.0548	2.25	CHF 0.234	CHF 2.13	AA201.300	24	AA201.300#24
AK 1952 Grindelwald, Berg-Restaurant First - Wetterhorn	Postcard	Souvenir	Post-war	1952	31/12/2022	CHF 3.00	CHF 3.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 2.00	CHF 2.00	Ricardo	0.1336	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 3.00	AA201.300	25	AA201.300#25
Kleine Medaille 50 Jahre Mobilmachung Schweiz 1989	Memory medal	Popular Historical Narrative	Post-war	1989	29/01/2023	CHF 2.60	CHF 2.60	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.00	CHF 1.60	CHF 1.60	Ricardo	0.5618	0	CHF 0.000	CHF 2.60	AA201.300	26	AA201.300#26
Holzkuh	Keepsake Object	Souvenir	Unknown	Unknown	19/08/2023	CHF 0.00	CHF 0.00		CHF 0.00	/	/	Objekte von Hausräumung - Selina's Grosseltern	0.2334	28	CHF 2.912	CHF 2.91	AA201.300	27	AA201.300#27

Fig. 74 *Accession register of counter-archive* (2024)

Following my research on the ISDA(G) guidelines, I started experimenting with different ways to organise the objects. As previously highlighted by The National Archive, the relationship between the objects is central to creating meaning. However, challenging these widely applied principles offers the potential to raise new questions and counter existing archival structures. This became evident in the project *Mining the Museum*, discussed in Chapter 5.2.3, in which Wilson formed new connections to critically reframe the past. Inspired by such approaches, I explored alternative ordering methods to examine fundamental aspects of my research and challenge accepted hierarchies and knowledge structures.

To further reference the notion of the secret – mirroring the unknowable origin of gold – I decided to establish my own archival principles. Because the provenance of the gold and the memories connected to the collected objects are *known unknowns*, I decided to explore this absence of provenance through the ordering structure of

the archive. Therefore, the objects – stripped of their nostalgic value – are ordered by material value and, thus, financial worth. I assigned the objects to different categories defined by a value range, based on the amount of money I spent on their purchase. Therefore, the archive counters Switzerland's dominant narrative as well as established and accepted archival principles.

A challenging part of applying a cataloguing structure was determining the amount of information that would be conceptually and contextually relevant. The cataloguing process further positions the artefact within a collection and offers additional information, situating it in a historical and contemporary context. Here, I had to carefully reflect on whether additional information would add to the work or whether an overflow of information – imitating the complicated system of archival structures – including dossier and collection numbers could be an interesting approach, creating an overwhelm of data, and constructing a *hidden in plain sight* system, something that I encountered and struggled with when carrying out archival research.

At the start of my research, I planned to visit numerous archives and include archival material in my practical approaches. However, the thorough theoretical engagement with historical knowledge production, the significance of the archive, and the process of collecting conceptually relevant objects led me to engage with counter-archival approaches as a structure for my artistic investigation. Thus, the archival research became less prominent but still informed my artistic methods. In contrast to the initial plan, I did not directly include the found archival material in my research but was instead inspired by how the archive collections were ordered, how documents were stored, and the process by which they were made available to me. These visits to different archives and the preliminary research on which archival documents to access inspired the organising principles and aesthetic configuration of the counter-archive.

After a visit to the SNB archive, I was inspired by their documentation of the gold bars acquired from the German Reichsbank for my cataloguing of the objects. In a numbered specification statement, the SNB recorded the date of acquisition, weight and financial value of these gold shipments. Drawing on this, I decided to include the same information in my catalogue – date of acquisition, reference code,

monetary value, and exact weight of each object.[95] The gold price is set twice daily by the London Bullion Market Association (2024) in US Dollars per fine troy ounce; therefore, I indicate the weight in troy ounces in the catalogue entry. However, because the Swiss franc played such an integral role for the gold transactions, and I acquired most of my objects paying in Swiss francs, the monetary value will be specified using this currency. For the gilded objects, I calculated the amount of gold leaf and added it to its purchase price.

[95] The reference codes of the objects in the archive comprise three components, which can be best explained using an example, like the reference code for the Swiss Army helmet depicted on page 182 (Fig. 74): AA2501.3000#4. The AA stands for articulated absence; the two following numbers – separated by a full stop – indicate the price range of the helmet's affiliated collection; in this case, the object is part of the collection spanning the value of 25.01 - 30.00 CHF. The number at the end, here it is #4, denotes the objects' number within their collection and follows the order of their date of acquisition.

6.4 Documenting and exhibiting

For the documentation of the objects, I chose a uniform and neutral setting, mirroring the visual recording of objects in archival collections. Therefore, I acquired a portable lightbox with integrated, dimmable lighting strips. Working with such a backdrop and lighting system allowed me to create a subtle surrounding, keeping the focal point on the objects while capturing their contours and physique. Apart from its advantages for documenting, I was also interested in the portable lightbox because of its customary utilisation of shooting products (Fig. 75). Photo studios like these are advertised online to improve sale opportunities when shooting products to be sold online. Therefore, using such a lightbox for photographing the counter-archive objects shares similar aesthetics with images of products offered for sale on online platforms and thus further features characteristics of financial transactions.

Using a Fujifilm GFX 50s – a medium format with high resolution – further allowed me to capture the structure and surface of the objects thoroughly and thus offers the opportunity to enlarge parts of the images for a more detailed view. Besides attempts to capture the appeal of the gilded objects, the most fascinating part of their physical quality cannot be captured. They are never quite static; their golden surface reacts to the light and is thus always dynamic. Digital reproduction of these objects thus misses the allure of the gold, creating a different experience of the work, which is partly stripped of its fascination and beauty.

Fig. 75 *Studio set up* (2024)

Fig. 76 *Safety deposit boxes storing counter-archive* (2023)

Furthermore, the curatorial considerations of a physical installation invite a different engagement with the counter-archive and thus influence its perception by the audience. An example of this is the inclusion of safety deposit boxes, functioning as archival boxes for the objects in the counter-archive, representing an additional reference to the financial context and a symbol of the hidden (Fig. 76). The inclusion

of these boxes was further inspired by the notion of safekeeping through hiding and *hidden in plain sight*; vaults filled with safety deposit boxes symbolise an archive of secrets – each box containing something of great value – however hidden from view and safely stored away. The viewer is presented only with the box's exterior. Like the gilded objects, the boxes reflect light. However, due to their polished surfaces, they also function like a mirror, returning the viewer's gaze and creating an environment of constant flux and movement.

Throughout my research, I have been inspired by artists who have either raised critical questions about the context in which their works were displayed or have used their practice to directly critique the institution where they were invited to exhibit. Haacke's practice – creating projects functioning as revelatory critiques of the institution where the work is showcased – critically illuminates hidden systems and raises more significant questions about how ideological foundations influence what is presented in the first place. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, an integral part of the counter-archive is the way in which the records relate to each other. The framework in which it is presented is thus an extension of these relationships and creates further meaning. Because of the inherent critique concerning knowledge, any museum, archival, or library display proposes a conceptually relevant context.[96]

Furthermore, the research challenges Switzerland's externally perceived romanticised image just as much as it engages with the Swiss national identity and its contested memory. Therefore, it is essential for the work to be exhibited in Switzerland as well. In Basel, a building formerly housing the Swiss Volksbank (SVB) was repurposed and currently houses a café. In the basement, the bank's former vault is still intact and rentable as an event space (Fig. 77). The bank was also involved in the trading of gold during the Second World War, buying foreign gold coins and gold bars from the Swiss National Bank (ICE, 1998, p.167). In the ICE's findings, it becomes evident that the SVB bought looted Belgian gold coins from the SNB and then sold them to Swiss customers (ICE, 1998, p. 167).

[96] As previously analysed through Shonibare's *The British Library*, libraries follow the same process of archival selection; they present a curated collection of books, and thus, selective knowledge is an inherent characteristic that influences which histories are highlighted and which are obscured. I will potentially have the opportunity to display some objects of the counter-archive in the library vitrines of the London College of Communication. Presenting my work in a library context will thus not only be conceptually fitting but will also further induce a process of curation and selection. Due to spatial restraints, this notion of selective presentation is inherent in most physical exhibition contexts and presents another interesting aspect of physically showcasing the counter-archive.

Therefore, the opportunity to have an exhibition in this vault places the work in a historically significant location: a place of aftermath.

Fig. 77 *Tresorraum* (no date) (via Unternehmen Mitte)

Planning to exhibit the work entails a careful engagement with how I want the audience to interact with the objects. Will they be presented in a vitrine, protected

from external influences behind glass? [97] Or will the exhibition feature a participatory element, inviting the audience to open the safety deposit boxes to view the objects, which thus becomes a performative act? Would the interaction with the project depend on the framework in which the objects are represented and be influenced by institutional context and geographical location? Would the dual reading of the archive – one of outsider perception versus one of a challenged national identity and collective memory – affect how the objects are presented? In such a context, it could be argued that a passive perception of the objects in a vitrine stands in direct contrast to an active engagement with the objects in a participatory manner. Therefore, challenging the views of the audience encountering the work from the perspective of an outsider who reads Switzerland as an innocent picturesque country is different from the engagement with the work from people identifying as Swiss; thus, considerations of national identity and implications of historical guilt are at stake. Would it make sense to create a more personal engagement with the work for the latter group, inviting them to discover and touch the objects instead of giving them a more detached presentation of the work? Moreover, if there is an audience participatory element, what would the restraints be in touching the objects? Would there be gloves, or would it be conceptually more interesting to let the audience directly touch the objects, thus leaving traces on their surface, to further explore the notion of the object as an archive? Do the objects need to be displayed? Or could the *known unknown* be further incorporated if the objects exist in locked safety deposit boxes and are thus hidden from view? Could such a presentation of the archive explore a different notion of repressed histories and inaccessible memories?

Asking myself such questions has shown me that there is no correct answer or ideal presentation of the work. Instead, I will further question the boundaries imposed by rigid, archival regulations by allowing the archive to be in perpetual motion and I will decide on its curation in response to a place, not on the basis of a predetermined concept.

[97] Schlingelhoff's interventions at the Kunsthaus Glarus further led me to question how such a showcase would impact how the objects would be perceived and how a seemingly simple act of removing this protective layer would further affect the audience's interpretation of it.

CONCLUSION

In 1959, the Swiss military published a booklet for newly recruited soldiers, the 'Soldatenbuch' [soldier book], with the following quote on the first page: 'Wer seine Heimat verteidigen will, muss sie kennen und lieben' [those who want to defend their homeland must know and love it] (Eidgenössisches Militärdepartement, 1958). I initially acquired the booklet to make it part of the counter-archive and was intrigued by the terminology of the quote; it sets the precedent that in order to protect Switzerland – the *Heimat* – one must cherish and understand it. The opposite of the known is the unknown, the secret, and this notion of *knowing* a country implies an absolute truth – a knowledge accessible to all – and thus contradicts Switzerland's historical and contemporary politics. How can one know a country whose economic and political significance is intrinsically linked to secrecy? A nation that has not taken enough steps to refute a former wartime myth and whose secrecy laws infringe on free speech?

Simultaneously, the *loving* part of the quote reveals how Switzerland uses ideological representations to strengthen its patriotic foundations while deviating from its hidden history. It further confirms the objective of moulding a national identity based on pride in state affiliation and national sentiments while outwardly emphasising nostalgic depiction. This quote thus encompasses the main aspects of my research, defining core values and emotional requirements as a fundamental necessity for safeguarding Switzerland's obscured past, while sustaining its contemporary geopolitical role.

The aspect of *knowing* is especially prevalent in conjunction with the predominant elements of secrecy in my research: the invisibility of the wartime gold trade, the secrecy shrouding these events, and the material characteristics of gold. Here, Birchall's concept of the *aesthetics of the secret* and its accompanying map has offered a framework to explore the secret artistically, and has provided an overview of the different states of knowing, situating the *open secret* – the *known unknown* – among other categories implying knowledge or non-knowledge (Birchall, 2014). Inspired by Birchall's argument, I introduced three categories to discuss the potential and breadth of artistic approaches with regard to the secret. Through the work of various artists, I have explored how aesthetic, indicative, and performative readings of the hidden offer diverse interpretations and explore different aspects of secrecy.

Derrida's *secrecy effect* further inspired me to explore the efficacy of not knowing; I incorporated it in my research through the inclusion of the secret materiality of gold and the unknown provenance of the objects in the counter-archive.

Furthermore, my study aimed to use patriotic representation, the sentimentalised aspect of – and *love* for – Switzerland, to unpack its façade, expose its role as an *implicated subject*, and raise questions about the unknown. Framed within the hierarchical knowledge structure of the counter-archive, I have collected stereotypical souvenirs, military paraphernalia, and commemorative objects and created material interventions with gold to investigate the country's historical complicity while raising questions about notions of secrecy and memory. Working with such objects in a structure based on institutional authority has allowed me to engage with Switzerland's carefully shaped memory culture, question its mediated nostalgia, and critique the historical frameworks of knowledge production. In this context, Kwint's (1999) different material memory classifications have provided a basis for my conceptual and symbolic reading of the objects and their function within the archive. Furthermore, engaging with notions of material presence and mnemonic absence through the study of *silent witnesses* in Bertschi's work and the *memory sculptures* – as per Huyssen's definition – in Salcedo's practice has further inspired my interpretation of the objects in the archive as *articulated absences*, tangibly present but stripped of their mnemonic function, and thus representing archival gaps.

The notion of *knowing* is especially interesting in the context of the archive when one considers how archival collections are always a fraction. This aspect was further discussed through Mbembe's analysis of the inherent power structures of the archive, reading it as an 'instituting imaginary' – deriving from its rituals of archiving and its architectural dimension – following processes of *selection* and *discrimination*. Drawing on Mbembe's concept, I have configured the archive as an accumulation of secrecy and memory, equating the *discriminated* with the *hidden* and the *selected* with that which is *remembered*. Therefore, the notion of *knowing* implies an acknowledgement of the *discriminated* – the deliberately created gaps – inherent in archival structures. Through an analysis of various artists, I have focused on multifaceted approaches in order to reflect on different aspects of the archival process in my own practice. Here, I have discussed the institutional frameworks,

hidden powers, and nuances that affect how we perceive exhibited artworks, the significant impact of ordering, contextualisation, and presentation in highlighting and silencing specific histories, and the potential to draw on the institutional authority of archives by mirroring their structures, while simultaneously questioning their claim to veracity through ambiguous elements, fictional documents, and imagined stories.

The different facets of my research challenge the patriotic notion of defending a country by *knowing* and *loving*. Instead, I argue that knowing implies an engagement with the limits of knowledge, a consideration of what we do not know, and thus a need to find a more critical approach to how Switzerland's history is perceived and interpreted. Finding such an approach moves away from the too academically abstract reports of the ICE and offers a foundation for a continued engagement with the country's history. Instead of finding a different way of presenting the findings of the ICE, conceptually applying the *aesthetics of the secret* offers a different approach to form – what Birchall (2014, p. 26) calls – a ‚radical political response', raising underlying questions of implicated complicity through secrecy. While the exhibition of the research by the ICE in 2003 has been popular among the Swiss population, its limits in achieving a critical engagement with the fundamental problems of secrecy has not been facilitated. To this day, corrupt business is carried out behind Switzerland's veil of bank secrecy. Thus finding an engagement with not just the historical events, but highlighting the secret as a necessary tool to facilitate such immoral economic relations, offers a different approach to understand the past and the present.

Through the counter-archive, I invite questions instead of answers about Switzerland's historical complicity in the gold trade. I challenge ideological representation through former mnemonic objects while inviting a symbolic engagement with the secret; through poetic interpretations and the conceptual incorporation of its material manifestation, I highlight the gaps and the strategically crafted unknowns. As discussed through the writings of Hodgkin and Radstone (2014) and the Popular Memory Group (1982b), how memories are shaped and influenced is inherently political and always subject to contemporary political agendas. Perceiving the past not as static but in constant flux requires continued historical reflection and assessment of the socio-political impact of past events in a contemporary context. Therefore, I would argue that to *defend* and *love* a country –

and essentially *know* it – one must ask critical questions and facilitate an alternative historical engagement to protect it from repeating past mistakes.

As previously discussed through the writing of Horn (2011), the *knowing* aspect – in the context of the political secret – is heavily influenced by imbalanced power dynamics. Thus, in many cases, knowledge is not facilitated in the first place. Still, once an unknown becomes a *known known* or a *known unknown* – as was the case once Switzerland's financial entanglement was exposed – consequences and potential future actions in response to this revelation depend on an enduring effort of critical engagement. Political theorist Wendy Brown describes this as follows:

> Nor are the silences constituted in discourses of subordination broken forever when they are broken once. They do not shatter the moment their strategic function has been exposed, they must be assaulted repeatedly with stories, histories, theories in alternate registers, until the silence itself is rendered routinely intelligible as an historically injurious force (Brown, 1998, p. 134).

Brown's quote thus highlights the importance of secrets being 'assaulted repeatedly' by challenging them through different forms of engagement. I therefore consider it imperative to continue my artistic research, extend the counter-archive with new documents, and experiment with different approaches to presentation. Furthermore, a continued exploration of the *aesthetics of the secret* provides an opportunity to focus on and expose the secret's 'strategic functions' to invite a more critical reading of its inherent power dynamics.

A continuation of the project offers ways to adapt to the ever-evolving readings and manipulation of the past, influenced by the various political factors and power dynamics of the present. For my practice-led PhD research, I have focused on Switzerland's financial complicity with the Nazis and explored the material efficacy of reevaluating an established history and constructed image. The counter-archive of *pre-existing* objects symbolising tangible presences and mnemonic absences represents the countering of established history and preconceived ideas by highlighting secrecy in a symbolic conceptualisation of the objects – as *articulated absences* – and the inclusion of gold in material interventions. For the extension of the counter-archive, I plan to focus on creating *new* archival entries with an emphasis on fictional approaches and deceptive additions. Instead of unpacking the

past through the recontextualisation of already existing things, the continuation of the research will foreground the conceptualisation of new documents to explore further the notions of fact and fiction in relation to historical knowledge production. Drawing on the artistic artefacts created by The Atlas Group and returning to Wynants' (2020, p. 10) quote, such approaches allow us to 'imagine other realities, explore new perspectives (…), or represent something that is hard or even impossible to represent otherwise'. Focusing on fictional methods would have gone beyond the scope of my research in the context of my PhD. Therefore, drawing on Brown (1998, p. 134), I now plan to explore new avenues and find different ways through which the inherent silence of Switzerland's past can be 'assaulted repeatedly' to highlight its 'strategic functions' in the future. These approaches could take on many forms, like extending the catalogue entries of pre-existing archival objects with imagined narratives of their previous mnemonic significance, or establishing a fictional provenance for the gilded objects to explore how an object is read and contextualised in relation to historical events.

Moreover, I am planning to explore the notion of the hidden in Switzerland's landscapes. The Swiss military strategy – an expansion of the national redoubt – and the army's withdrawal from the cities into the mountains is a prominent feature of the patriotic wartime memory. The fortifications in the Alps were top secret and were equipped to cover the needs of the Swiss Army in case of an invasion, to defend the country at all costs, leaving the civilian population virtually unprotected (Ludi, 2006, p. 220). Most of the locations and entry points into Switzerland's fortifications in the mountains are not fully disclosed; however, maps and archival documents reveal some of their geographical positions, while others are accessible as tourist attractions. For the expansion of the counter-archive, I plan to document these and the landscapes in which they exist.

Further inspired by Paglen's project *Limit Telephotography* and Clark's photographs in *Negative Publicity,* I am interested in the notion of *hidden in plain sight*. In these photographs, the mountains function like a redaction of Switzerland's military strategy and, thus, its dominant narrative. Here again, Derrida's concept of the *secrecy effect* becomes applicable. This – paired with a notion of deception – could be further explored by photographing landscapes where no fortifications are present, thus also drawing on Raad's approaches of creating *evidence* for *The Atlas Group*

Archive. Furthermore, focusing on these mountains is also relevant in the context of the gold trade because – as previously mentioned – the Swiss National Bank hid some of its reserves in a national redoubt during the war to circumvent the risk of looting in the case of an invasion. Therefore, such photographic documentation draws also on the notion of *safekeeping through hiding,* applicable to both the hiding of the gold and the retreat of the army. Engaging with the Swiss landscape also questions the central aspect of Switzerland's patriotic wartime memory: its invincibility.

The more I engage with Switzerland's history, the more I become interested in the army's role in making and unmaking national identity. During the Cold War, Switzerland's fortitude and army continued to be fundamental aspects of Swiss identity and an intrinsic element of its political rhetoric (Ludi, 2006). A maxim during that time was that Switzerland does not have an army; Switzerland *is* an army (Tribelhorn, 2014). For my continued research, I will explore how such axioms have further confirmed Switzerland's *Reduit-Mythos* and continually influenced its national identity. Even though, politically, Switzerland operates under its self-proclaimed neutrality, the fear of imminent invasion appears to be deeply ingrained.[98] During my research, I acquired a VHS tape documenting the military function 'Diamond' in 1989, fifty years after the military mobilisation on 2 September 1939 (Tribelhorn, 2014). The Federal Military Department organised the event and information about the proceedings and exhibitions was widely circulated, aiming to educate the population about the importance of armed neutrality in safeguarding peace and freedom during the Second World War, while highlighting its value in mitigating future threats (Tribelhorn, 2014). The title 'Diamond' refers to a poem by Swiss writer Gottfried Keller, describing Switzerland as a diamond because of its 'unzerstörlich alldurchdrungne Einheit' [indestructible all-pervading unity] (Tribelhorn, 2014).

Focusing on the military aspect of the research also allows me to further engage with the historical and contemporary implications of collective awareness and engagement with the past. The VHS tape not only documents the event of 1989 but also contains filmic documentation of the Swiss Army serving during the war. To continue my research, I intend to focus on interventions with the film material, either

[98] To this day, military service is mandatory for men holding Swiss citizenship.

working with screenshots, as I have in previous experiments, or physically altering the films through material interventions to continue the performative approach of silencing. Drawing on this method, I aim to further draw on the rhetoric used by politicians and army officials to illuminate how they have aided and confirmed Switzerland's dominant narrative. Speeches given during and after the war have been filmed, voice-recorded, and published by media outlets. Simply removing the sound from these speeches would not only silence them but strip them of their power, while countering their integral role in constructing national myth. In order to explore this notion of contradictions further, the muted videos could be supplied with subtitles, stating historical findings from the ICE reports, thus creating a new fiction and challenging the notion of 'truthfulness'.

At the beginning of my research, I focused on creating a more 'truthful' access to the historical events in which Switzerland was implicated during the Second World War. However, drawing on theoretical texts, conceptual artworks, and historical documents, I have found that facilitating access to these historical events does not lie in providing answers. Instead, it may lie precisely in the questions that arise from a critical reading of the socio-political, institutional, and material infrastructure which allowed for Switzerland's *Reduit-Mythos* to be constructed in the first place. While planning to provide a 'solution' – an easier access to Switzerland's past complicity in the wartime gold transactions – I have found that a conceptual engagement with the notions which have allowed for the hiding and the perpetual silencing in the first place offers a more productive approach to inviting an audience to critically reflect on their perceptions of historical knowledge production, collective memory, and identity.

Throughout my research, I have positioned my practice among artists who have used their artworks to make visible the hidden, critically examine the gaps in historical narratives, and treat silence as a form of violence persistently perpetuated in contemporary frameworks, heavily influencing perceptions and maintaining ideologies. Based on these analyses, it has become evident that art offers a productive way to uncover the inherent power structures of knowledge production and raise questions about the political dimensions of controlling such knowledge. It is thus integral to continue an artistic engagement with these complex and multi-layered topics, to reveal hidden systems or to critique political dynamics. For my

own research, I have moved away from the initial impetus to use my artistic approaches to educate an audience about the details and extent of Switzerland's financial complicity. Instead, I have used the counter-archive as a vehicle to invite a critical engagement with the underlying power systems at play, drawing attention to the historical gaps, questioning the reverberating cultural influence of the representation of national innocence and emphasising Switzerland's role as an *implicated subject.* The counter-archive might thus be similar to how Hiller (quoted in McShine 1999, p. 93) described her artistic engagement with 'museological formats':

> [M]y '"museums" have concentrated on what is unspoken, unrecorded, unexplained, and overlooked – the gaps and overlaps between content and context, dream and experience; the ghosts in the machine; the unconscious of culture' (Hiller, quoted in McShine 1999, p. 93).

Similarly, the counter-archive presents the 'unspoken, unrecorded, unexplained, and overlooked'. It does not provide answers but draws attention to the limits of knowledge and its ideological and political manipulation. It does not seek to achieve a 'truthful' reading of the past but instead poses the question: How do the presences and absences of our past shape our understanding of the present? Moreover, how are such dominant narratives and blind spots re-iterated or created anew to pursue contemporary political interests?

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Object: AA000.050#1
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.41 CHF
Weight: 0.1205 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#2
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.42 CHF
Weight: 0.1255 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#3
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.43 CHF
Weight: 0.1584 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#4
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.28 CHF
Weight: 0.1567 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#5
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.28 CHF
Weight: 0.1573 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#6
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.31 CHF
Weight: 0.1377 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA000.050#7
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.48 CHF
Weight: 0.2572 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/10/2022

Object: AA000.050#8
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.48 CHF
Weight: 0.2271 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/10/2022

Object: AA000.050#9
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.48 CHF
Weight: 0.0994 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/10/2022

Object: AA000.050#10
Collection: 0.00 - 0.50 CHF
Value: 0.48 CHF
Weight: 0.2367 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/10/2022

Object: AA051.100#1
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.51 CHF
Weight: 0.1433 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#2
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.64 CHF
Weight: 0.1529 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#3
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.67 CHF
Weight: 0.1525 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#4
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.57 CHF
Weight: 0.1399 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#5
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.57 CHF
Weight: 0.1416 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#6
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.65 CHF
Weight: 0.1546 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#7
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.65 CHF
Weight: 0.1543 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#8
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.66 CHF
Weight: 0.1370 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA051.100#9
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 0.83 CHF
Weight: 0.1599 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2022

Object: AA051.100#10
Collection: 0.51 - 1.00 CHF
Value: 1.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1265 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/12/2022

Object: AA101.200#1
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.06 CHF
Weight: 0.1226 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA101.200#2
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.32 CHF
Weight: 0.1519 t oz
Purchase Date: 13/08/2021

Object: AA101.200#3
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1651 t oz
Purchase Date: 30/01/2022

Object: AA101.200#4
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1141 t oz
Purchase Date: 30/01/2022

Object: AA101.200#5
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1210 t oz
Purchase Date: 31/01/2022

Object: AA101.200#6
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1133 t oz
Purchase Date: 02/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#7
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1379 t oz
Purchase Date: 03/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#8
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1569 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#9
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1500 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#10
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.05 CHF
Weight: 0.1570 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#11
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.2343 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#12
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 2.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1351
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA101.200#13
Collection: 1.01 - 2.00 CHF
Value: 1.34 CHF
Weight: 0.1242 t oz
Purchase Date: 15/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#1
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.51 CHF
Weight: 0.1413 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/02/2021

Object: AA201.300#2
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.05 CHF
Weight: 0.1286 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/08/2021

Object: AA201.300#3
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.66 CHF
Weight: 0.1392 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/10/2021

Object: AA201.300#4
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.4642 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#5
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1346 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#6
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1301 t oz
Purchase Date: 28/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#7
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1369 t oz
Purchase Date: 28/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#8
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1382 t oz
Purchase Date: 29/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#9
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1538 t oz
Purchase Date: 30/01/2022

Object: AA201.300#10
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1343 t oz
Purchase Date: 03/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#11
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.13 CHF
Weight: 0.2571 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#12
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.23 CHF
Weight: 0.1287 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#13
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: CHF 2.01
Weight: 0.1883
Purchase Date: 05/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#14
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1791 t oz
Purchase Date: 06/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#15
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.90 CHF
Weight: 0.2103 t oz
Purchase Date: 11/02/2022

Object: AA201.300#16
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.7632
Purchase Date: 02/04/2022

Object: AA201.300#17
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 2.0898 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/04/2022

Object: AA201.300#18
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1343 t oz
Purchase Date: 15/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#19
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1576 t oz
Purchase Date: 15/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#20
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1468 t oz
Purchase Date: 23/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#21
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.35 CHF
Weight: 0.1119 t oz
Purchase Date: 25/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#22
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.13 CHF
Weight: 0.0548 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#23
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 3.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1336 t oz
Purchase Date: 31/12/2022

Object: AA201.300#24
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.60 CHF
Weight: 0.5618 t oz
Purchase Date: 29/01/2023

Object: AA201.300#25
Collection: 2.01 - 3.00 CHF
Value: 2.91 CHF
Weight: 0.2334 t oz
Purchase Date: 19/08/2023

Object: AA301.400#1
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 3.60 CHF
Weight: 0.1608 t oz
Purchase Date: 03/10/2021

Object: AA301.400#2
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 3.76 CHF
Weight: 0.0938 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA301.400#3
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 4.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1202 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA301.400#4
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 3.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1359 t oz
Purchase Date: 30/01/2022

Object: AA301.400#5
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 4.00 CHF
Weight: 11.8958 t oz
Purchase Date: 09/04/2022

Object: AA301.400#6
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 3.35 CHF
Weight: 1.7319 t oz
Purchase Date: 21/12/2022

Object: AA301.400#7
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 4.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1105 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/12/2022

Object: AA301.400#8
Collection: 3.01 - 4.00 CHF
Value: 4.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1649 t oz
Purchase Date: 19/08/2023

Object: AA401.500#1
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 5.00 CHF
Weight5 0.1226 t oz
Purchase Date: 05/10/2021

Object: AA401.500#2
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.63 CHF
Weight: 0.0544 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA401.500#3
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.84 CHF
Weight: 0.0890 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA401.500#4
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.88 CHF
Weight: 0.1265 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA401.500#5
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 5.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1693 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA401.500#6
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.56 CHF
Weight: 0.1641 t oz
Purchase Date: 30/01/2022

Object: AA401.500#7
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.80 CHF
Weight: 0.1089 t oz
Purchase Date: 01/02/2022

Object: AA401.500#8
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1440 t oz
Purchase Date: 01/02/2022

Object: AA401.500#9
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.86 CHF
Weight: 0.2804 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/02/2022

Object: AA401.500#10
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.18 CHF
Weight: 0.2667 t oz
Purchase Date: 14/03/2022

Object: AA401.500#11
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1315 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/10/2022

Object: AA401.500#12
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 5.00 CHF
Weight: 0.1921 t oz
Purchase Date: 29/12/2022

Object: AA401.500#13
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 5.00 CHF
Weight: 0.0539 t oz
Purchase Date: 07/08/2023

Object: AA401.500#14
Collection: 4.01 - 5.00 CHF
Value: 4.46 CHF
Weight: 0.1555 t oz
Purchase Date: 25/04/2024

Object: AA501.1000#1
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 5.65 CHF
Weight: 14.2749 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/12/2020

Object: AA501.1000#2
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 9.50 CHF
Weight: 0.1286 t oz
Purchase Date: 06/05/2021

Object: AA501.1000#3
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 5.30 CHF
Weight: 0.1589 t oz
Purchase Date: 12/08/2021

Object: AA501.1000#4
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 9.32 CHF
Weight: 2.8771 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA501.1000#5
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 5.63 CHF
Weight: 0.1112 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA501.1000#6
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 5.80 CHF
Weight: 0.0723 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA501.1000#7
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 7.61 CHF
Weight: 0.4791 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA501.1000#8
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 9.64 CHF
Weight: 0.1608 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/10/2021

Object: AA501.1000#9
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 6.10 CHF
Weight: 0.1009 t oz
Purchase Date: 31/01/2022

Object: AA501.1000#10
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 6.50 CHF
Weight: 1.3105 t oz
Purchase Date: 07/04/2022

Object: AA501.1000#11
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 8.90 CHF
Weight: 0.1905 t oz
Purchase Date: 18/04/2022

Object: AA501.1000#12
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 7.04 CHF
Weight: 0.0123 t oz
Purchase Date: 12/05/2022

Object: AA501.1000#13
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 8.40 CHF
Weight: 0.0976 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/10/2022

Object: AA501.1000#14
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 7.03 CHF
Weight: 0.4755 t oz
Purchase Date: 17/12/2022

Object: AA501.1000#15
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 5.90 CHF
Weight: 0.1906 t oz
Purchase Date: 29/12/2022

Object: AA501.1000#16
Collection: 5.01 - 10.00 CHF
Value: 7.58 CHF
Weight: 0.1901 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/08/2023

Object: AA1001.1500#1
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 10.10 CHF
Weight: 0.4251 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#2
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 10.76 CHF
Weight: 1.3953 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/02/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#3
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 10.76 CHF
Weight: 2.0576 t oz
Purchase Date: 04/02/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#4
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 12.10 CHF
Weight: 27.9068 t oz
Purchase Date: 20/03/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#5
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 13.00 CHF
Weight: 108.3802 t oz
Purchase Date: 11/04/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#6
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 11.12 CHF
Weight: 0.0300 t oz
Purchase Date: 21/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#7
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 15.07 CHF
Weight: 0.3858 t oz
Purchase Date: 21/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#8
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 13.97 CHF
Weight: 0.6832 t oz
Purchase Date: 23/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#9
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 14.51 CHF
Weight: 1.0172 t oz
Purchase Date: 24/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#10
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 13.41 CHF
Weight: 2.9900 t oz
Purchase Date: 24/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#11
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 11.90 CHF
Weight: 1.4372 t oz
Purchase Date: 26/12/2022

Object: AA1001.1500#12
Collection: 10.01 - 15.00 CHF
Value: 10.40 CHF
Weight: 3.8902 t oz
Purchase Date: 02/06/2024

Object: AA1501.2000#1
Collection: 15.01 - 20.00 CHF
Value: 15.64 CHF
Weight: 5.8193 t oz
Purchase Date: 11/10/2021

Object: AA1501.2000#2
Collection: 15.01 - 20.00 CHF
Value: 19.00 CHF
Weight: 7.0732 t oz
Purchase Date: 22/12/2022

Object: AA1501.2000#3
Collection: 15.01 - 20.00 CHF
Value: 18.85 CHF
Weight: 130.9500 t oz
Purchase Date: 29/01/2023

Object: AA1501.2000#4
Collection: 15.01 - 20.00 CHF
Value: 19.00 CHF
Weight: 9.3880 t oz
Purchase Date: 19/08/2023

Object: AA2001.2500#1
Collection: 20.01 - 25.00 CHF
Value: 22.00 CHF
Weight: 3.4723 t oz
Purchase Date: 11/12/2021

Object: AA2001.2500#2
Collection: 20.01 - 25.00 CHF
Value: 20.15 CHF
Weight: 9.4845 t oz
Purchase Date: 10/12/2023

Object: AA2501.3000#1
Collection: 25.01 - 30.00 CHF
Value: 28.00 CHF
Weight: 2.0576 t oz
Purchase Date: 27/01/2022

Object: AA2501.3000#2
Collection: 25.01 - 30.00 CHF
Value: 26.00 CHF
Weight: 13.1497 t oz
Purchase Date: 02/04/2022

Object: AA2501.3000#3
Collection: 25.01 - 30.00 CHF
Value: 26.00 CHF
Weight: 11.2206 t oz
Purchase Date: 21/12/2022

Object: AA2501.3000#4
Collection: 25.01 - 30.00 CHF
Value: 28.70 CHF
Weight: 39.6740 t oz
Purchase Date: 19/02/2023

Object: AA2501.3000#5
Collection: 25.01 - 30.00 CHF
Value: 26.50 CHF
Weight: 17.2006 t oz
Purchase Date: 08/08/2023

Object: AA4001.5000#1
Collection: 40.01 - 50.00 CHF
Value: 42.70 CHF
Weight: 58.0964 t oz
Purchase Date: 24/03/2022

Object: AA4001.5000#2
Collection: 40.01 - 50.00 CHF
Value: 43.40 CHF
Weight: 7.7483 t oz
Purchase Date: 02/06/2024

Object: AA30001.40000#1
Collection: 300.01 - 400 CHF
Value: 363.00 CHF
Weight: 0.2074 t oz
Purchase Date: 22/06/2022