

Decolonial Flânerie: Public City Walking as Collective Ethnography

AMO COLLECTIVE BERLIN:

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ABSTRACT

With *Decolonial Flânerie*, the Amo Collective Berlin has developed a format of public city walks that claims to be an ethnographic method of joint knowledge production. In the spirit of the new namesake of Berlin's former M*Straße, the Afro-German Enlightenment philosopher Anton Wilhelm Amo and his pioneering anti-racist position, the collective has tested and further developed this format four times between 2020 and 2023. In this article, we will present and discuss the extent to which the format makes it possible to perceive and explore urban space differently through walking together - that is, to read and experience the city's archives against the grain of their colonialist inscriptions - and thus to create space for excluded and silenced voices, bodies and histories. The paper includes tangible impressions of this collective research practice. Above all, we are interested in the question of whether and how this form of "collective ethnography" crosses academic boundaries of knowledge production, thereby opening up a "transacademic" field that holds new forms of collaboration with civil society for the further development of a public, engaged European Ethnology/Anthropology.

KEYWORDS

ethnography, European Ethnology, public anthropology, Anton Wilhelm Amo, renaming struggles, Decolonial Flânerie, Amo Collective Berlin

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Beginnings: Weaving Inclusive Philosophies into the Urban Fabric

The Amo Collective¹, to which all authors of this contribution belong, emerged from the decolonial struggle to rename ~~Mohrenstraße~~ (hereinafter referred to as M*straße) in Berlin-Mitte – the street where the Institute for European Ethnology at Humboldt University is located, which is also the workplace of several members of the Collective. Since at least the 1990s, Afro-diasporic and civil society groups have been campaigning to replace the street's racially connoted name with that of the Afro-German philosopher and legal scholar of the early Enlightenment, Anton Wilhelm Amo. In June 2020, the Institute for European Ethnology decided to support these demands with an open letter and a petition signed by more than 100 academics², many of them neighbours in former M*straße. In July 2020, the Berlin-Mitte district assembly followed suit with its decision to rename the street Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße. After a long period of persistent delay, the Berlin Higher Administrative Court ruled in July 2025 that the renaming decision is now final and nothing stands in the way of its implementation.

The joint, ongoing commitment to bringing Anton Wilhelm Amo back into a German public space was at the beginning of the Amo Collective – and the formats we have developed for public decolonial interventions. Much earlier than in the Western parts of Germany, Anton Wilhelm Amo was already made a subject of philosophy and academic discourse in the German Democratic Republic (see, e. g., Brentjes 1976). Since as early as 2013, a lecture series is dedicated to Anton Wilhelm Amo at the University of Halle³, where also Amo was based in his time.

Our own approach takes inspiration from Amo's early anti-racist criticism (Ette 2020; Menn/Smith 2020), which still raises forward-looking questions for our present day. How would Anton Wilhelm Amo walk through the streets of Berlin today? What would he notice, what would he think? Would he be able to drift through the crowd as a flâneur and reflect on convivial forms of coexistence – or would this position still be controversial, suppressed by our contemporary racism? What connections – often made invisible or not yet existent – can be developed along Amo's train of thought in an imaginary, shared space of anti-racist philosophy? How can we follow in his footsteps and explore these spaces of possibility today – in the truest sense of the word, by walking together through the streets of the city? What can we learn from this in order to apply it to comparable struggles for justice and equality in our time?

In our work in urban public spaces, we at Amo Collective Berlin are guided by these questions. They are particularly central to *Decolonial Flânerie*, a term coined by our member Adela Taleb (Garland/Maier/Taleb 2024), a format of public, performative walks that we have developed in communication with the urban community. In this article, we would like to present our methodological understanding of this format, which differs from conventional ideas of *knowledge transfer* through city tours. Instead, we understand *Decolonial Flânerie* as collective ethnography, id est as a form of collaborative, transacademic *knowledge production*.

¹ For more information, visit <https://amo-collective.org/>.

² For the text and signatures of the letter, see <https://www.euroethno.hu-berlin.de/de/forschung-1/labore/amo-salon>.

³ See <https://amo-lectures.uni-halle.de/de>, accessed on 30. December 2025.

After a short digression on the method of *Decolonial Flânerie* we will further explore this subject, including original material from the *Decolonial Flâneries* in 2022 and 2023 – they will appear in italics with references to audio and film files. We will discuss our collective research and performative practice along three principles that we consider central to it: 1) juxtaposition and imagination, 2) speculation and sensation and 3) intervention and interaction. This contribution thus differs in style and appearance from conventional scientific texts. With it, we try to give the readers an impression of our transacademic approach, which includes artistic methods as well as collective ethnographic practices, in order to allow for other ways of empirical and theoretical knowledge production.



Illust. 1 *Decolonial Flânerie* 2023
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Another principle - re-weaving historical and transnational perspectives - is also brought to bear here in the text when we allow the threads of the stories to intersect: just as the stories of the German-Jewish home seamstresses at Hausvogteiplatz intersect with the stories of the Ghanaian women's cooperative, whose fabrics we use in our performances and in the Anton Wilhelm Amo Salon, another Amo Collective project.

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Illust. 2 *Decolonial Flânerie* 2023
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Walking Otherwise: Introducing Decolonial Flânerie

The term *Decolonial Flânerie* invites us to reflect on how public space is used and which bodies can move freely and safely in the city. It draws our attention to the fact that there were not only white, bourgeois men, but also other people walking the streets and public halls of European metropolises in the period of flânerie. However, their traces tend to be erased in records of the 18th and 19th century Europe. Women, people of color, or those of Jewish or Muslim faith for example engaged in their own ways of wandering in the city (Dündar et al. 2020; Elkin 2016; Mózes 2020; Puwar 2010; Wolff 1985). *Decolonial Flânerie* is an invitation to follow the traces of their silenced presence and to explore the subversive potential of collective walking.

Key to our approach of *Decolonial Flânerie* is the practice of storytelling. Adela Taleb, together with spoken word poetess Savannah Sipho, led the *Decolonial Flâneries* of 2022 and 2023 through a narrative structure that weaved a rich multi-sensorial carpet guiding our path through the urban space, connecting one location to another. As conceptualized by Taleb, *Decolonial Flânerie* as a method (Garland/Maier/Taleb 2024, 177) draws on thinkers such as Sylvia Wynter, who views the human as “a storytelling species”, a “homo narrans” (Wynter/McKittrick 2015, 25). It furthermore builds on Saidiya Hartman (2008), who proposes critical fabulation as an innovative mode of engaging with gaps in archival records, to address the violence of silencing marginalized voices. Critical fabulation rearranges “the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view [... it thus seeks] to jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done”. It seeks to “tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling” (Hartman 2008, 11).

Both Wynter and Hartman make clear with their approaches that there lies a strong analytical force in storytelling. As an oral tradition, storytelling and its ability to mobilize the imaginative realm as a tool for knowing the world, carries a great decolonial epistemic potential. When we walk together through the urban space during our *Decolonial Flâneries*, we imagine Anton Wilhelm Amo to be present, walking beside us. Led by storytelling, *decolonial flâneurs* travel through time and space, and different marginalized stories are interwoven. This method aims at sensing the city otherwise, and offers an intersectional imagination of a different topography, laying bare the untold, buried archive within the urban landscape.

The renaming struggles through which the Amo Collective emerged can be read from the perspective of a transnational dialogue. The Akan naming tradition (or dinto) is a life-cycle ritual. It happens through the engagement with the ancestors and it is a communal and celebratory affair. Anton Wilhelm Amo was born in Nkulenim near Axim in today's Ghana (Hountondji 1996, 114), and has a Nzema (Akan) background. The word Amo in Akan means “Thank You”. As “Amo” is being taken on by a German street, this means it gains an identity which allows inclusiveness of ancestral spirits and philosophies that have been socio-politically detached from the urban configuration, policies and built environment narrative.

One of the main concepts of the Amo Collective (as expressed with the performative *Decolonial Flânerie*) is interactive connection at the public interface.

With ethnography which prioritizes practices of walking, listening, and storytelling as collective, performative, and decolonizing methods, that means a measure of activeness or activation is part of the process. Pondering over activation, we are reminded that activism cannot be in a passive stance. “Activism seeks action. Art seeks to move. Part of the success of artistic activism or activist art comes about when the body experiences the issue as a whole.” (Seabra 2011, 144).

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Juxtaposition & Imagination: Amo, Du Bois, Mendelssohn – Jewish and Black Traditions in German Critical Social Thought

We first tried out the practice of imagining, juxtaposing and interweaving diverse historical layers and positions in the guiding spirit of Anton Wilhelm Amo during *Decolonial Flânerie* 2022. We brought Anton Wilhelm Amo and W.E.B. Du Bois together in an imaginary dialogue: two Black thinkers who were present and influential in and around Berlin, albeit in different centuries.

Let’s walk along with Amo and Du Bois on our journey through time and space, listening to their words and digging in the archives of Berlin and beyond. Let’s open our senses and tune in to the experience of *Decolonial Flânerie*. Let’s walk together and learn more about a different city. A city that encourages multivocality and includes all.⁴

In 1895, Du Bois became the first Black sociologist to receive a doctorate from Harvard with a thesis on the transatlantic slave trade. From 1897 to 1910, he was a professor at the University of Atlanta. His close connection to the German sociologist Max Weber was and is just as much a secret in Germany as the memory of Anton Wilhelm Amo. Weber admired Du Bois’ theoretical and political work on “race” as the foundation of American society (Du Bois 1903). He saw “The Color Line”, as analysed by Du Bois in his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), as one of the most important problems of the 20th century. However, the memory of Du Bois, who was in Berlin and Germany during his doctoral studies and also met Weber there, and Weber, who came to the United States to meet Du Bois, has been actively concealed in the annals of German sociology (Mcauly 2019).

During a visit to Nazi Germany in 1936, Du Bois was one of the few direct external observers and became a sharp critic of German anti-Semitism and racism during the emerging Holocaust. Du Bois was shocked when he visited the site of the destroyed Jewish ghetto in Warsaw in 1949 and found that his worst fears had been exceeded. The analyses in Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* (1993, 111 ff.) and Michael Rothberg’s *Multidirected Memory* (2009, 111 ff.) show the extent to which W.E.B. Du Bois grappled with fascist anti-Semitism in the context of his own and many others’ experiences and reflections on racism. In Germany, however, there is virtually no public or academic memory of this Black critique of anti-Semitism. Only very recently were Du Bois’ reports on fascist Germany, which he visited in 1936, published in German translation (Du Bois 2020).

⁴ https://soundcloud.com/amosalon_berlin/stop-1-anton-wilhelm-amo.

During the *Decolonial Flânerie 2022*, we furthermore included Moses Mendelssohn in the imaginary encounter between Amo and Du Bois. Mendelssohn, almost simultaneously with Anton Wilhelm Amo (at the beginning of the 18th century), was involved in the philosophical discussions of the Enlightenment in Germany with his ideas of a German-Jewish Enlightenment, the *Haskalah*. We know from a recent study that Amo had a close Jewish friend, Moses Abraham Wolff, who later became a famous physician and with whom he shared ideas on religious and civil freedom in Halle (Menn/Smith 2020, 12 ff.). But even this early anti-racist intellectual friendship has been largely erased from the memory of German Enlightenment scholarship – just as Mendelssohn's ideas play only a marginal role in it.

These omissions were reason enough for us to bring to light the relationships between Black and Jewish critics of contemporary anti-Semitic and racist conditions. At *Decolonial Flânerie 2022*, we imagined, together with the participants, an encounter between these three important critics of contemporary racism and anti-Semitism – Anton Wilhelm Amo, Moses Mendelssohn, and W.E.B. Du Bois – as it might have taken place before, but probably not in, a prominent Berlin debating club during the Enlightenment. The meetings of this *Monday Club* took place at the English House, located at 49 Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße. Mendelssohn was able to attend the meetings, even though he was not granted membership as a Jew. It is questionable whether Amo and Du Bois, or rather their arguments, could have found their way into this circle of white men. Two blocks away from the English House, on a corner of Gendarmenmarkt, the *Decolonial Flânerie* performance took place, in which Amo, Mendelssohn, and Du Bois were reimagined on the basis of their probable exclusion.⁵

Decolonial Flânerie brings together different historical layers and different actors whose stories are usually told separately. What happens when we let them speak together? What kind of imagination is stimulated by the juxtaposition – or: the neighboring – of these different stories?



Illust. 3 *Decolonial Flânerie 2022* © Piero Trias, Amo Living Archive

⁵ See or listen to the audio walk of the *Decolonial Flânerie 2022*, Stop 2: https://soundcloud.com/amosalon_berlin/stop-2-meeting-amo-and-du-bois?in=amosalon_berlin/sets/audio-walk-decolonial-flanerie-2022.

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Imagine A Doorway to Public Interface

At the doorway of this collaboration, there was a shared vision that had taken many a hand and heart to unfold. Hereby, the doorway led to public space and not a suffocating room. Ghanaian artist and storyteller Kwame Aidoo was invited to *Decolonial Flânerie* 2022 to present an artistic piece at the open-air event.

The site-specific piece was a poetry performance over a soundtrack which ranged from Afro influenced electronic music, Afrobeat and experimental mixes of urban piano rhythms. The artist invited two random people, including the talented Amo Collective poet Savannah Siphon, from the audience to join in, and each was asked to hold a laptop which played a video the artist had made in Ghana specifically for the performance. The other person bearing a laptop as part of the performance installation was a young Ghanaian man affiliated to the Ghana Permaculture Institute who had travelled to Germany for a workshop. The visuals were abstract cinematographic compositions of kids in local neighbourhoods of Ghana, adorned with repurposed materials which portrayed them engaging with the burdens of contemporary life in a context where Amo and his teachings could serve as a portal for healing and reformation.

From the installed speakers, a tribute to Anton Wilhelm Amo was clearly heard as performed by the storyteller, and a sizable audience connected with the moving cadence. The following stanza was part of Kwame Aidoo's engaging poem:

*There's the colour line that forms into a tape for silencing
There are plentiful palisades that echo how to not belong
Our walk is our voice activating freedom and soul
Y& ma mo Amo (meaning "We give you Amo" or "We thank you")⁶*

* * * * *

At the *Decolonial Flânerie* 2023, under the theme *Archeology of the Neighbourhood*, we dug deeper into potential connections between a Black (as in Amo's) and a Jewish (as in Mendelssohn's) enlightenment. We imagined and juxtaposed traces of this relation in three destinations at three locations during our collective walk.



Illust. 4 *Decolonial Flânerie* 2023
© Inti Gallardo, Amo Living Archive

⁶ See the video documentary of the 2022 *Decolonial Flânerie* "Stretch their souls", directed by Michael Westrich: https://amo-collective.org/COLLECTIONS_LIVING-ARCHIVE_FilmFlanerie2022; the poem of Kwame Aidoo starts at 7:39.

Jägerstraße 54, just around another corner of our institute, was the home of Rahel Levin, later Rahel Varnhagen von Ense. There, she established a literary salon during the late Enlightenment, around the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries: a space of resistance, responding to the exclusions Rahel Levin faced as an unmarried woman and as a Jew. Just a 10-minute walk from the *Monday Club*, her salon was open to poets, naturalists, politicians, actors, aristocrats, and travellers from various social classes and professions, religious or political orientations, including women. Rahel Levin Varnhagen created an intellectual community outside the confines of the traditionally white, male academic world, an enlightenment of her own kind. What would Anton Wilhelm Amo have said if he had been invited to Rahel Levin Varnhagen's Salon? How would he have engaged with Levin Varnhagen, who strongly advocated for a Jewish emancipation through assimilation in German society?

On site, we imagined what Anton Wilhelm Amo might have said: *I once had similar hopes. I wrote my first dissertation on the legal status of Black people in Europe – practically on my own history and experience. In it, I was concerned with the equality of Europeans and Africans and with turning away from slavery – on this point I was in agreement with a few other Enlightenment thinkers of my time at Halle University. But I harshly experienced myself that we are not all treated equally. And I also observed it with my student and friend Moses Abraham Wolff, who faced exclusion and discrimination because of his Jewish faith. But Jewish and Black brothers and sisters aren't the only ones that are seen as inferior. I insist that there is not only one Christian theology, but many theologies of, as I wrote, "the pagans, the Turks and others according to the diversity of the peoples". In my philosophy, the freedom of the spirit plays a decisive role; a freedom that is sublime, even over bodily pain and over everything that is attributed to human bodies as difference.*⁷

And, perhaps, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, would have responded: *That is why I say: Thinking for yourself is what counts. Only the freedom of the spirit, and Enlightened reason, can help us to emancipate from discrimination, racism, Anti-Semitism and slavery. We are united in this struggle!*

Would Moses Mendelssohn have interfered with these words? *"The freedom to think is our noblest treasure." And that includes to think with and beyond religious and cultural limits. Religion and Enlightenment are no contradiction if they respect each other. "Since all human beings must be destined by their Creator for eternal bliss, an exclusive religion cannot be the true one."*⁸

As we continued on to Hausvogteiplatz, which is just around the next corner, the narrative shifted to imagining what the former hotspot for German-Jewish fashionistas must have been like: In the 1920s the "Konfektionshäuser" (clothing/fashion manufacturers and department stores) that surrounded this same square were not just commercial enterprises but also spaces where Jewish creativity and identity were encouraged and expressed through garments. Berlin was the world capital of fashion next to Paris (Westphal, 2019). The clothes crafted and worn here represented more than just urban style of the 1920s'; they symbolized emancipation.

During the November pogroms in 1938 (the so-called Reichskristallnacht), the Nazis destroyed the shop displays and took over the Jewish ready-made clothing stores at Hausvogteiplatz. Most of their owners tried to flee from Germany in the coming

⁷ See Menn/Smith 2020, 14.

⁸ Mendelssohn 1783, 139.

months, yet many were deported and killed in concentration camps. Hausvogteiplatz was bombed during WWII (cf. Westphal 2019). Almost the entire square – where we stood during *Decolonial Flânerie 2023* – was destroyed. Since 2000, special “memorial signs” designed by Rainer Görß have been attempting to remind passers-by of this history⁹: the names of the owners of several clothing stores, house numbers, and dates can be read on the front of the steps leading up from the Hausvogteiplatz subway station. And at the upper end of the square, mirrors have been installed to remind passers-by, who look at themselves in them of the mirrors in the changing rooms of fashion stores. However, these signs seem rather decontextualized; they do not tell much about the history they represent.

The approach we took at *Decolonial Flânerie 2023* focused on a linden tree on Hausvogteiplatz – because one could imagine that the roots of this tree still reach back into the erased history of the Jewish neighbours around Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße. Eliana Pliskin Jacobs, a transdisciplinary artist whose great-grandparents once crafted garments and made business on the streets of Berlin, created two coats for two descendants who have inherited the responsibility of bearing witness to what happened: one coat for the tree of Hausvogteiplatz and one coat for her. Coats are an external marker of identity, the external layer that hints at the person wrapped underneath it. Coats are the symbol of the roaring 1920s high fashion. Eliana’s family fabricated coats. It was on coats that Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. It was coats that the Nazis burned at Hausvogteiplatz. Inspired by the Judaica (traditional Jewish) craft technique of papercutting, the artist created two paper coats in white paper, referring to ghostliness and absence. The 1920s-style design is based on an illustration by a Jewish designer, featured in the book *Modemetropole Berlin 1836–1939: Entstehung und Zerstörung der jüdischen Konfektionshäuser* by Uwe Westphal (2019).

On the coat destined for the linden tree, Eliana wrote and cut the names of Jewish owners of department stores and clothing businesses directly on Hausvogteiplatz, individuals whom the tree’s parent knew.



Illust. 5 and 6 Wearing history: Coats for the Linden Tree and the Artist, *Decolonial Flânerie 2023* © Inti Gallardo, Amo Living Archive

On the coat that the artist wore, she painted the names of Jewish fashion business owners and workers whose workplaces were in M*str. 41, the building that now houses the Institute for European Ethnology.

⁹ See <https://www.bpb.de/themen/holocaust/erinnerungsorte/503390/denkzeichen-modezentrum-hausvogteiplatz/>, accessed on 30 December 2025.



Illust. 7 and 8 A cosmopolitan Shabbes celebration in the backyard of Hausvogteiplatz 5-7 and Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße 40/41, *Decolonial Flânerie* 2023 © Inti Gallardo, Armo Living Archive

At the end of the Flânerie, we all returned with both coats to the backyard of our institute's building. There we celebrated a cosmopolitan Shabbes ritual, re-inhabiting the space with the diversity and Jewish tradition that disappeared along with the individuals whose names are borne by the ghost coats.



Illust. 9 A collection of materials presented at the Public Assembly, June 2023 © Elisa Virnau, Armo Living Archive

As with this table, which we presented at a public assembly, we collected materials and ideas for the *Decolonial Flânerie* in discussions with interested visitors, bringing together different historical layers and different actors whose stories are often ignored or told separately. Which stories, which voices are still missing? What kind of imagination is stimulated by imagining and juxtaposing—or: neighbouring—these diverse, different stories?

The approaches of juxtaposition and imagination that we employ have their origins in both art and anthropology: George E. Marcus and Michael Fischer present juxtaposition as a central method in their remarks on “Anthropology as Cultural Critique” (1986). They understand it as the result of the fundamental anthropological process of cultural comparison. In our use of juxtaposition, however, we are not so much concerned with cultural differences as with hidden, imaginary relationships that connect the various levels and actors. Here we draw on the Caribbean poet and postcolonial thinker Edouard Glissant (2021) and Moses März (2020), who, following Glissant,

developed a similar concept of mapping imaginary relations. März's approach, similar to Saidiya Hartman's (2008) concept, can be understood as a search for relationalities that have been made invisible and therefore need to be reimagined – against the grain of a Western tradition of thought that insists on divisions and impermeable categories, genres and boundaries.

We also draw on George Marcus' (1995) concept of research imagination, which is always necessary when it comes to designing a field of research. For such a field does not simply exist “out there,” but must first be invented in order to postulate possible interconnections between different places, which can then be investigated. Furthermore, we refer to Arjun Appadurai's (1995) concept of “imagination as social practice” when we attempt to explore the archives for traces of such social imaginations that have been lost in the prevailing discourse. The search for such forgotten imaginations becomes a search for past futures that can be rediscovered for the present.

Speculation & Sensation: Chocolate Tasting – From Theory to Practice and from Practice to Theory

“What ancestral knowledge dances on your tongue? The soil, the hands, the wind, the sun. We taste all of the elements. We will use our senses to connect to the people, context, and conditions.” Nicole Pearson, Introduction to “From Bitter to Sweet: A Decolonial Chocolate Tasting”

We experimented with the methodological principle of “speculation and sensation” at *Decolonial Flânerie 2023* in a performative, interactive exploration of chocolate as a “colonial commodity.” This principle is about bridging the gap between academic, artistic and activist spaces through the co-production of knowledge.

The *Decolonial Flânerie* took us to the Rausch Schokoladenhaus on Gendarmenmarkt in Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße, which became the starting point for our exploration of chocolate and the sensory and colonial entanglements of taste, cocoa harvesting, marketing, trade and migration movements. We connected the past/present coloniality of chocolate with the abilities of speculation and sensation through a performative and participatory moment: a collective chocolate tasting. Through the sensory perception of taste, we can raise awareness of the complexity of chocolate and the connections between people's individual experiences, the social dimensions of taste, its historical connections and the dynamic nature of these connections.

The chocolate tasting was a direct result of the research we conducted. We recognised the need to create a form of perception in order to break with the colonial framework of imposed knowledge. We saw that this was possible through the senses. We chose two modalities – taste and sound – and played with how they reinforce and inform each other, creating knowledge that is often dismissed. Our methods (mapping, field explorations, temporary architectures) are based on sensory decisions and inspired by our transdisciplinary backgrounds in poetry, theatre and sound.



Illust. 10 Participants partake in the chocolate tasting, *Decolonial Flânerie 2023*
© Inti Gallardo, Amo Living Archive

According to the enlightenment philosophy of Anton Wilhelm Amo, sensation and the ability to sense belong to the body. We referred to the anthology *The Faculty of Sensing* (Hillgartner/Kaczmarek/Ndikung 2021), which was published to accompany an artistic exhibition on Anton Wilhelm Amo at the Braunschweiger Kunstverein (2020) that in 2021 moved on to be shown at the art space SAVVY Contemporary Berlin. According to Anton Wilhelm Amo, the body is the place where we engage with the world. Sensation, the result of this encounter, becomes the material for knowledge. Amo refined and expanded Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" beyond a strict, literal separation of mind and body to a dynamic relationship (Hountondji 2021, 238).

Chocolate Tasting as Embodied, Collective Ethnography

What are the inspirations, aspirations, sensory knowledges that we may take away from the chocolate tasting, and how can we carry on in the spirit of Anton Wilhelm Amo's philosophy of "I feel therefore I am"? Through the methodological principles of speculation and sensation, chocolate tasting has been revealed as a decolonial praxis, and a collective ethnography. This collective ethnography is manifested as an emplaced, and embodied ethnography that weaves multiple stories and narratives, and multiple pasts together in a way that leads to diverse presents and futures. This also relates to the significance of what Michael Rothberg (2009) terms "multi-directional memory" – in contrast to competitive memory, which has been dominating public and also academic discourse. It is through acts of speculation and sensation that we found ways of (re)imagining the city, and, with the guidance of Amo's thinking, reimagining how we want to live together in the future.

To come back to the notion of *Decolonial Flânerie* as a method, anthropologist Sarah Pink argues for an "emplaced ethnography that attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds, and the materiality and

sensoriality of the environment” (Pink 2015, 28). Pink also emphasizes that this requires us to reflect on these engagements, to conceptualize their meanings theoretically, and to seek ways to communicate the relatedness of experiential and intellectual meanings to others. It is this kind of a collective ethnography that helps establish new ways of understanding the products of storytelling, tasting, listening and walking as methods – across all research phases: from collecting data, to producing knowledge, to knowing in practice (Garland/Maier/Taleb 2024).

This collective ethnography is being developed by the Amo Collective also through a speculative and sensorial “co-production of knowledge” and a transacademic endeavour in which speculation and sensation also worked as a way of bridging the divide between academic, artistic, and activist spaces and multimodal practices. With anthropologists Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaak Marrero-Guillamón, we ask

“what these media *do* [and we would add to ask *what these methods do*, such as walking, listening, storytelling] in our anthropological encounters and how they may enact the possibility of another anthropology – more public, more collaborative, more political” (Dattatreyan/Marrero-Guillamón 2019, 221).

Kiosk Culture as Multisensorial Communal Placemaking



Illust. 11 and 12 *Kiosk Batakari* by Kwame Aidoo and Ngarin Weaving, Tamale. Commissioned by Amo Collective Berlin © Carla J. Maier

*Kiosk Batakari*¹⁰ is an architectural and multimedia contemporary art extension, first installed on Coop Disco’s pavilion at the Institute for European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Berlin. It entails the reimagining of urban kiosks and dynamic culture of placemaking. *Kiosk Batakari* is a site-specific textile design installation

¹⁰ Kiosk Batakari installation as part of Amo Salon is by Kwame Aidoo with hand-on-loom woven cloth from Ngarin Weaving Village-Tamale, co-fabricated in Berlin by Bolley Clothing with curatorial support from Carla Maier and with the additional support of Berliner Projektfonds Urbane Praxis, Amo Collective Berlin, Decolonial Flanerie, IfEE and Regina Römhild.

recasting West Africa's autochthonous kiosk culture, local forms of abstraction and the dynamic spirit of placemaking. As installed on Anton-Wilhelm-Amo Straße and in proximity to Hausvogteiplatz, it engages the complicated histories of the prominent mid-to-late 19th century Berlin-Mitte textile industry. With inspiration from Coop Disco's pavilion at Humboldt-Universität Berlin at the Institut für Europäische Ethnologie, this extension acts as an open access intersection for living memories, to coexist with trans-academic collaborations within and beyond Decolonial Flânerie and Amo Salon. *Kiosk Batakari* is a tribute to the late Ghanaian painter and curator Atta Kwami.

The hand-on-loom woven textiles are crafted by indigenous women from the Ngarin Weaving Village project in Tamale, Ghana, using age-old traditional methods. The multisensorial additions, that is an audio and video station, further engage the historical, socio-political and environmental connections. In Accra, street vendor kiosks are inadvertently born out of "art as resistance" by the commons navigating internal migration placemaking. The kiosks are used for petty commerce, makeshift accommodation and street exchanges. *Kiosk Batakari* brings architecture, sculpture, textile art and community methods of making together, and the inclusion of sound and visual facets expand on the relevant potential for student accessibility, interactive education, dialogue and expressiveness.

A kiosk refers to a small "temporary," stand-alone booth which has shaped street culture around the world. Though kiosks in Accra and many parts of West Africa and beyond are targeted for demolitions by the ruling power, they have important functions to avail space aside street aesthetic and design culture due to their vibrant colour paintings. Moreover, reconstruction after demolitions ensures the prolongation of their "permanent-temporary" lives. The street vendor kiosk as a public usage structure naturally grabs your attention, behaving like the town crier who makes public pronouncements as required, whether in a busy street corner or the community market space.

Batakari is popular in Northern Ghana and its origins can be traced from parts of West Africa. The iconic fashion element has been used for traditional occasions and social performance rituals for many centuries. Rooted in strip-woven fabric or textile patterns, Batakari culture is endowed with colour, texture, composition and more to express identity and heritage. *Kiosk Batakari* is an addition to the Amo Salon contributing to the design of a safe space for dialogue, exhibitions, installations and interactions for rethinking postcolonial coexistence. The space has artistic, academic and socio-cultural potential sparked initially by the Amo Collective collaborative endeavours connecting what has been achieved, what is currently being explored and what is pending.

Intervention & Interaction: The Renaming of M*Straße – From May Ayim to the Present of Decolonial Flânerie

About 30 years ago, in the early 1990s, writer and activist May Ayim, together with many Afro-diasporic civil society groups, campaigned against the racist name of M*Straße and the underground station of the same name. May Ayim was one of the

founders of the “Initiative of Black People in Germany” and a very strong voice of Black activism in (West)Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. Maria Binder’s 1997 documentary film “May Ayim: Hope in the Heart” shows her in front of the M*Straße underground station eating a white “Schokokuss” chocolate bar in front of the camera. This act can be understood as “eating white supremacy,” a subversive response to the name of the street and the underground station.¹¹

The long history of the collective struggle to rename M*Straße in Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße is not yet over. Immediately after the renaming was officially decided and implemented in July 2025, new debates about its legitimacy were sparked: In September 2025, historian Michael Zeuske claimed in the *Berliner Zeitung*, based on new source findings, that Anton Wilhelm Amo himself came from an African slave-owning family and was therefore not eligible for renaming.¹² This claim and the consequences derived from it triggered a renewed exchange of arguments.¹³ The verification or falsification of Zeuske’s theses is still pending today. This example shows that the debate about postcolonial rethinking in Berlin continues today, especially after a noticeable shift to the right in cultural policy, and that now more than ever, it is necessary to defend the formerly established liberal-democratic values of decolonizing urban space – even if the renaming of streets has already created a *fait accompli*. For the Amo Collective, this ongoing story is a crucial element in our collective ethnography of *Decolonial Flânerie*, which aims to jointly explore and uncover the hidden historical layers of the urban neighbourhood.

For *Decolonial Flânerie 2023*, we selected artefacts and slogans as links to this and other stories of urban resistance, understood as the materialisation of decades of activist and community struggles.¹⁴ We called the 12 posters we took with us on our public walk “artefacts of neighbouring social struggles.” These artefacts passed through many hands as we walked through the city space, moving back and forth between the stops on our walk. When we stopped, they became part of the action and contributed to the interventions at each destination. The images and texts on the posters included “Amo is present,” a quote from a poetic speech by Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung and Arlette-Louise Ndakoze at the first *Decolonial Flânerie* in 2020, “Neighbourhood struggles,” “Wake up, wretched of the earth / Arise, wretched of the earth,” “No Racism on our doorstep,” the title of the open letter sent out by the Institute for European Ethnology in 2020, “Amo-Fest Decolonize Berlin 22 August 2021 / 22 August / Haitian Revolution 22 August 1791 / Past Present Futures,” “I feel therefore I am,” “Racism kills!”.

The images, sourced from Decolonize Berlin and other initiatives, vividly capture the rich protest history of the streets. By placing them on protest signs, we introduce the concept of a “mobile archive” – an archive that comes to life as these signs move through urban space. The QR codes on some of the posters direct passers-by to our website,

¹¹ See <https://amo-collective.org/RENAMING-HISTORY>.

¹² <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/mohrenstrasse-exklusiv-historikerfund-wirft-zweifel-an-umbenennung-auf-li.2359647>, accessed on 30 December 2025.

¹³ <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/berlin-debatte-ueber-strassenumbenennung-war-anton-wilhelm-amo-sohn-eines-sklavenhaendlers-a-fa129992-34a4-4a21-9eb7-8d5f67343214>; <https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/mitte/article410107495/war-anton-wilhelm-amo-ein-sklavenhaendler-experten-klaeren-auf.html>; <https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/mitte/article410167241/anton-wilhelm-amo-diskussion-um-strassennamen-geht-weiter.html>; <https://www.morgenpost.de/bezirke/mitte/article410167241/anton-wilhelm-amo-diskussion-um-strassennamen-geht-weiter.html>, accessed on 30 December 2026.

¹⁴ See images and further text: Melanie Garland/Ingri Pavezi/Eryn Staiblin (2023): Artifacts of neighbouring social struggles. In: Amo collective: *Decolonial Flânerie 2023*, public intervention. https://amo-collective.org/COLLECTIVE_LIVING-ARCHIVE_Artifacts, accessed on 24 August 2024.

where the “Amo Living Archive” is located, a digital space dedicated to documenting these struggles. As part of the Amo Salon, this archive serves as a platform for documenting transdisciplinary, multimodal research processes and promoting social debate.¹⁵

Building on the method of *Decolonial Flânerie*, the concept of slogans and posters as tools of collective protest is closely related to the concept of the “polyphonic body.” (Garland/Maier/Taleb 2024, 177). As a collective movement of flânerie, it forms a contrast to the traditional image of the lonely, male, white flâneur wandering through European cities. We are inspired by Stephanie Loveless (2020), who explores walking as a critical, feminist, collective and ecological practice. Loveless contrasts the idea of the detached flâneur with a feminist perception of the engaged flâneuse, who is deeply connected to her surroundings. By understanding walking from a sensory and physical perspective, flânerie becomes a performative act of engaging with the urban environment, especially for those whose bodies are marginalised.¹⁶ What happens when these bodies – feminist, engaged and conscious – carry artefacts that symbolise protest? In other words, what happens when this collectively moving body intervenes in urban space with elements that represent activist struggles?

By using protest signs as artefacts, we seek to open up new channels of communication and amplify the ongoing struggles of activists. This endeavour goes beyond the simple production of signs; it becomes a conscious medium through which we explore, capture and materialise our political interests. The process transforms the production of signs into a performative practice in which each sign becomes not just a symbol but an active participant in public interaction. This intervention is closely linked to the collective choreography of walking through the city, moving from one place to another. In this context, the intervention in urban space develops into a form of collaborative ethnography. The collective act of carrying these signs becomes an experiment in which the juxtaposition of past and present struggles in the same urban space is tested and explored.

Visual anthropologist Sarah Pink highlights how ethnography can be used to explore “the relationships between the body, mind, materiality and sensory experience of the environment” (Pink 2015). This approach aims to develop new forms of experiential and intellectual communication. As we engaged with the artefacts during the *Decolonial Flânerie*, we were accompanied by Anton Wilhelm Amo – as announced on one of the posters: “Amo is present.” What does it mean to encounter this statement on a street that now bears his name? How do the personal stories of the participants in the *Decolonial Flânerie* interact with Amo’s history? What do these different human minds and hearts think, feel, imagine, and remember? As we held this sign and acknowledged his presence, we could speculate about how Amo would perceive our actions. This polyphony of questions, ruptures, and connections became elements of a collective ethnography. Instead of answering a specific question, we collectively amplified the voices and possibilities of imagining and questioning in our shared anti-racist struggle.

¹⁵ <https://amo-collective.org/LIVING-ARCHIVE>, accessed on 5 January 2025.

¹⁶ See Garland, Melanie (2026): Chapter 4: Artifact, in: Melanie Garland: Somewhere Inbetween. Bielefeld: Transcript, in publication.

Experimenting with Ethnography

Being experimental means embracing uncertainty, new questions and challenges, which are fundamental to ethnographic research, as the ethnographer is confronted with the unpredictability of the field. It is about “staying with the difficulties” because “we encounter each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations” (Haraway 2016). This corresponds to our principle of “juxtaposition & imagination” when, for example, we entangle the positions of Black and Jewish Enlightenment thinkers in a fictional dialogue about the conflicts of their – and our – time.

Through the chocolate tasting, we remind ourselves how knowledge is embodied. Through our use of the principle of “speculation & sensation,” we ask the question: What happens when we try to overcome the separation between mind and body?

The principle of “intervention & interaction” brings to the fore the demands and actions of activists who are fundamental to the emergence of *Decolonial Flânerie*. Our ongoing collaboration with activist organisations and our goal of “neighbouring struggles,” as demonstrated through the use of protest signs, are consistent with Public Anthropology’s commitment to social change. Interventions remind us of the political construction of our environment and the resistant bodies that inhabit it.

The public city tour of *Decolonial Flânerie* thus becomes a counterpart to the traditional ethnographic monograph. “Informants” become co-researchers. Science becomes sensual. The body intervenes in science. Emotions become a source of insight.

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LIST OF IMAGES

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