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# Assembling Things Right. The Material Dimensions of West German Diplomacy (1950s to 1970s)

**Abstract:** *This article investigates the material dimensions of international relations by analysing West German diplomacy after 1945. First, it focuses on the meaning of individual objects in communications and encounters between two states. Second, diplomatic practices are understood as attempts to create and shape specific atmospheres, as assemblages involving various objects, persons and practices. Diplomacy is thereby emphasised as a construct repeatedly connected to the material. Third, at the meta-level, individual diplomatic objects and assemblages are embedded in an international system of materiality. It is argued that the material participates in the construction of international regimes of perception. Overall, the different material dimensions make it evident that objects are fundamentally involved in the history of relationships between states – at the micro-level (individual objects), at the meso-level (assemblages) and at the meta-level (patterns of systems).*

The end of a president's and a government's term in office initiates the making of a balance sheet. Actual achievements and deeds are checked against political promises, state representatives' articulated goals and expectations. The balance sheet may take shape prosaically in long speeches and newspaper articles; or it may find its way into the language of numbers with various kinds of statistics. In the case of foreign policy and diplomacy, it may also turn up as a balance of objects. Such was the case at the end of the term of Heinrich Lübke, West Germany's second federal president, who held office from September 1959 to June 1969. *Der Spiegel*, Hamburg's weekly news magazine, in its 2 June 1969, issue summed up the material legacies of Lübke's two terms.<sup>1</sup> These were the objects that Lübke had received as gifts during his fourteen visits to thirty countries, along with the souvenirs that foreign guests had presented to him in the course of their numerous visits to the president's residence in Bonn. The range of gifts extended from "sandals, leather bags and textiles" to "lances, shields, sculptures and objets d'art", from valuable tapestries and vases to animals, including lions, cheetahs, monkeys and cranes, which had been directly transferred to zoos. The president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mobutu Sese Seko, actually

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<sup>1</sup> For what follows, see: Das Ding, in: *Der Spiegel*, 2 June 1969.

honoured Lübke with an uncut diamond worth 100,000 German marks (DM). At the end of Lübke's term, many of these gifts were passed on to museums or government institutions or else were transformed into charitable donations to residents of retirement homes and orphanages.

Such presents brought by guests highlight a specific material dimension of state representation and diplomacy: They emphasise how important individual objects may be in communications and encounters between two states. These gifts point to the principle of reciprocity, which is both characteristic for diplomatic relationships between states and generally marks the relationship between a guest and a host. But as this chapter will elaborate in its first section, there are additional reasons for why single objects are important to diplomacy. That is, although these individual items may be of great diplomatic importance, they still represent only one of several material dimensions of diplomacy. Indeed, the variety of the gifts that Lübke amassed indicates that seldom did a thing have only one unique meaning. Rather, diplomacy is characterised precisely by the methodical interplay of several things and people in the framework of so-called 'assemblages'. As the second section of this chapter shall reveal, it is the skilful combination and spatial arrangement of objects that create diverse atmospheres and thereby determine the setting in which diplomatic actions are performed. The criteria according to which these settings are produced are due to more than just general guidelines and situative decisions concerning staging and representation: for instance, they may confer a particularly splendid aura on a certain situation or, conversely, create a more intimate setting. In fact, as argued in the third section of this chapter, these things and assemblages reflect how the international state system has always also been a material system. Merely by taking into account Lübke's extensive collection of gifts, we become aware of how the material dimensions of diplomacy might pose great challenges to governments, as summed up in the final section of this chapter.

## Diplomatic Objects – Gifts from Guests and Government Limousines

Although Marcel Mauss developed his theory of gift-giving with reference to archaic societies,<sup>2</sup> one nonetheless finds in it an important key assumption that

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<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss: *Essai sur le Don. Forme et Raison de l'Échange dans les Sociétés Archaïques*, in: *L'Année Sociologique* N. S. (1923–1924), 30–186 (engl.: *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*. London 1966.

may also hold true for the diplomatic practice of exchanging objects: namely, the exchange of gifts takes place within a system of exchange – of giving, taking and returning. This principle of reciprocity also characterises diplomatic gift-giving.

Subsequent to the re-ordering of Europe upon the end of Napoleon's reign, the European community of states maintained the rule that communication between states should accord an honour which would be aptly reciprocated. Equality in rank between the states was expressed by an equivalence of mutually performed symbolic acts as well as of mutually exchanged gifts.<sup>3</sup> This ground rule set the framework for how a government would treat ambassadors and envoys of foreign countries and how heads of state of two countries would encounter one another. Although this rule has so far lasted for approximately two centuries – surviving changes of regimes and systems – processes of change in the principle's concrete application may still be observed.

Speaking of which: the Federal Republic of Germany, particularly in its early years, found itself challenged to take up the existing rules once more in order to establish itself as a fledgling state in the international arena; and yet, it did not want too strongly to resemble its predecessor, Nazi Germany.<sup>4</sup> Taking West Germany as a case study allows us then to observe in exemplary detail how a young state searched for its own diplomatic forms, all the while confronting national traditions and the expectations of its population as well as the practice of other states. In this way, the Federal Republic's set of diplomatic rules becomes recognizable as emerging from a gradual process. Repeatedly reformulated guidelines document its strong need for regulation in this transformation. The customs for initiating and planning diplomatic acts, including the sequence of events and decorative arrangements – ranging from table to dress codes – were noted in detail.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, there were also fixed rules for the exchange of objects. For instance, decorations were only exchanged reciprocally and between those of equal rank; moreover, in order to avoid any unpleasant surprises, Bonn's protocol department even endeavoured in the run-up to state visits to prearrange the exchange of gifts. Indeed, it was precisely when gifts were presented under the premise of equal state rank that a path of particular peril opened up: what if

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<sup>3</sup> On the ceremonial of state visits, see, in general, Jürgen Hartmann: *Staatszeremoniell*, 2nd ed. Köln 1990, 270–293.

<sup>4</sup> See, in general, Simone Derix: *Bebilderte Politik. Staatsbesuche in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1990*. Göttingen 2009.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Ref. LR von Rom: Guidelines for the preparation and implementation of state visits and events, 1 August 1957, PA/AA, NL Pappritz, Bd. 7. Circular Schwarzmann: Guidelines for the protocol preparation of state visits in the Federal Republic and abroad, 23 June 1970, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167689.

a present turned out to be too special or too valuable or, conversely, compared poorly to the guest's reciprocal gift?

Gifts thus also became a test of the diplomatic skill of the givers and receivers, in which both sides easily risked losing face. In this situation, the international inexperience and/or lack of self-confidence of states was at risk of becoming apparent. This becomes clear when looking at events in 1969, in the run-up to Mobutu's state visit to West Germany: The representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who were inexperienced in questions of protocol, reacted with "piqued silence" when Franz-Josef Neumann, the German ambassador to the Congo, inquired about the planned gifts.<sup>6</sup> The precious uncut diamond was apparently only considered at a later date. As a counter-example, it seemed advisable for Bonn's protocol civil servants themselves to take particular caution in the selection of gifts for Emperor Hirohito: In the light of the complicated Japanese custom of gift-giving, in which there were said to be three categories of gifts and gifts had to be allocated precisely according to this scheme, they saw the risk that – in their eyes – Germany might disgrace itself in this process.<sup>7</sup> As both of these examples clearly show, the concrete practice of gift-giving was not only marked by a consistent international set of rules, but also other factors played additional roles. This could be the age or perceived 'seniority' of the government in question (the new Democratic Republic of the Congo versus the old Empire of Japan) or cultural status, which was attributed to a country implicitly or – as we shall see later on – explicitly: for instance, the culturally superior Japan versus the culturally inferior Congo.

With its presents, West Germany not only re-integrated itself into the international community of states but also pursued further-reaching objectives. The idea was that the "exchange of gifts and honours could create lasting personal memories of visits, which might complement and at times even outlast other impressions."<sup>8</sup> Particularly suited for this purpose seemed to be either photo albums with images of a visit or else a film that recorded a visit's most important moments. Guests with whom the Federal Republic sought a particularly close relationship were also presented with the president's signed portrait, an honour accorded only to a few, and which at the same time pointed to pre-modern gift-giving traditions in diplomatic contexts.

For a long time there was one issue that was paramount in the debate on Mauss' theory: whether gift-giving, in spite of its embeddedness in exchange

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<sup>6</sup> See Report Neumann, 25 February 1969, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 1601.

<sup>7</sup> See Memorandum Ederer, 3 June 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 102196. On the complex practice of gift-giving in contemporary Japan, see Katherine Rupp: *Gift-giving in Japan. Cash, Connections, Cosmologies*. Stanford 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Circular Schwarzmann, Guidelines.

relationships, could be understood as distinct from economic relationships, as Mauss had it; or, whether the symbolic character of the exchange did little more than veil the exchange's real economic character, as Pierre Bourdieu, for instance, argued.<sup>9</sup> In the case of West Germany, the economic dimension of gift-giving occasionally came to light, as the state visit in 1960 of Thailand's imperial couple well exemplifies. On the occasion of this visit by King Bhumibhol and Queen Sirikit, the West German ambassador recommended honouring them with a generous gift, due to the fact that Thailand reliably supported West Germany's position in the East-West conflict.<sup>10</sup> At the insistence of the chancellor, the necessary financial means were made available from the Development Fund – monies that had actually been budgeted for other objectives – in order to present Thailand with an x-ray diagnostic unit produced by Siemens-Reininger and worth 110,000 DM.<sup>11</sup> The Federal Republic could only provide gifts of this scale in exceptional cases: that is, when “political expediency” appeared to justify “such a gift”.<sup>12</sup>

It was not only the things that were given that performed diplomatic services for the Federal Republic; it was also the things that state guests used during their stays in the Federal Republic. A very essential role was played in this context by the government limousines in which the guests were chauffeured. Automobiles continued to count as an important status symbol in the post-war era, by which both individuals could demonstrate their social position and governments could demonstrate their economic potency. A successful state's self-representation implied the use of a “representative automobile”.<sup>13</sup> This held true, more or less, for decades.<sup>14</sup> It appeared to be all the more threatening therefore when state guests pursued the plan to arrive with their own flagship vehicle, as for instance Liberian President William S. Tubman wanted to do by driving around in his own Cadillac at times during his visit in 1956, whereas the Federal Republic had at its disposal a Mercedes, a prestigious West German make of international

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**9** Pierre Bourdieu: Die Ökonomie der symbolischen Güter, in: Frank Adloff and Steffen Mau (eds.): *Vom Geben und Nehmen. Zur Soziologie der Reziprozität*. Frankfurt a. M. 2005, 139–155 (engl.: Pierre Bourdieu: The Market of Symbolic Goods, in: ead.: *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*. Columbia 1984, S. 1–34.).

**10** See Report Bidder, 12 May 1960, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 226.

**11** See the documents in PA/AA, B8, Bd. 226.

**12** Remarks by Michelsen, 25 May 1960, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 226. A comparable case occurred with the state visit to Bonn in 1959 of Ahmed Sékou Touré, the first president of the independent People's Republic of Guinea; see PA/AA, B8, Bd. 230.

**13** Telegram from Jess to the Foreign Office, 4 October 1956, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 129.

**14** See, for instance, Podewils' plan, Ref. ZB2, 10 May 1970, Notes of von Podewils for the bureau of the minister, 17 December 1971, concept of letter by von Vacano to the minister's bureau, 4 January 1972, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167632.

renown.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Thailand's Prime Minister Plaek Phibunsongkhram, the protocol of 1956 took care that he was driven around Bonn with the fastest Mercedes model, one that he also drove in his home country.<sup>16</sup> Prior to his own visit to West Germany four years later, Thailand's King Bhumibol especially requested that Daimler-Benz AG make a car for him "for ceremonial events" in Thailand that was based on his own particular wishes.<sup>17</sup> That they accommodated these wishes was interpreted by the West German government representatives as "taking pains for the soul of the Oriental peoples" or as "effectively looking after Orientals".<sup>18</sup> (This also indicates a cultural differentiation in the international state system, which will be addressed separately below.) What is remarkable about the example of Thailand is that its own preference for a German Mercedes was politically grounded. The Thai king deliberately sought for his representative purposes a specific brand of car: from his perspective, from a "politically neutral country". West Germany complied insofar as Germany had never "come forward with colonialist aspirations" for Thailand – unlike to Great Britain in the past, which was why the king did not desire an English car, which could have given rise to the impression "that the court based on an earlier tradition would follow too closely the British model". Likewise, an automobile from the United States was deemed inappropriate, since the king wished symbolically to keep his distance from this Cold War superpower.<sup>19</sup>

A more intensive treatment of government limousines not only opens up new perspectives on the concrete relationships between two states, but also new insights into how the conditions for diplomatic action changed during the post-war decades. This held true above all for the part of diplomacy that was perceived by the population. Until the mid-1960s, state visits were not only a matter of selected representatives: at least in part they also took place in the open, in the streets.<sup>20</sup> Of course no later than the failed attempt to assassinate Charles de Gaulle in August 1962 and the successful assassination of John F. Kennedy in November 1963, the potential of danger of the street for state representatives came into focus. De Gaulle had been driven in an unarmoured limousine and Kennedy in an open-topped car. Until that time the protocol had sought to allow in open convertibles so that foreign state guests could be presented to the West

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**15** See the Telegram from Jess to the Foreign Office.

**16** See Consul General Link to Bek, 23 May 1955, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 49.

**17** Diplomatic cable Böhling, embassy Bangkok, 15 December 1959, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 225.

**18** Generalkonsul Link to Bek, 23 May 1955, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 49 and Diplomatic cable Böhling, embassy.

**19** Diplomatic cable Böhling, embassy Bangkok, 7 October 1959, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 226.

**20** For the trends of visibility in public streets, see Derix, *Bebilderte Politik*, 221–264, 286–331.

German people (or vice versa). Then in 1964, when new automobiles were to be ordered in the run-up to the queen of Great Britain's visit in 1965, security and visibility had to be combined. Ideally, the new cars had to be bulletproof and at the same time permit a window to open in order for the dignitary to be able to wave at the people.<sup>21</sup> The protocol department, which planned every step of a state visit in detail, endeavoured above all to maintain or enhance the functionality of the vehicles: that is, seats with adjustable height, roll-up windows, sunroofs, grip handles in case the guest wished to stand during the drive, folding seats for the interpreters and thermal containers for small snacks during long journeys. However, the Ministry of the Interior and the security experts who were involved vetoed any windows that could be opened and which therefore could no longer fully guarantee a passenger's safety from gunshots.

## The Material Dimension of the Atmosphere – Societies and the Countryside

The discussions about the government limousines demonstrate that the individual object marked only one facet of the material dimension of West German diplomacy. The government limousine itself was an amalgamation of various things (apart from the vehicle as a material ensemble, for instance, the aforementioned thermal tanks or mounts for the banners), which were combined to become a diplomatic ensemble of things. These were to function intentionally as much as possible in the interplay with the persons involved in diplomatic actions, such as politicians, interpreters, protocol and security civil servants as well as – in the case of the limousines – the people at the roadside.

Many of the methodological and theoretical approaches that have focused on international politics over the last years have reflected the fact that people and things may be understood as an ensemble in diplomatic acts and that they have to be investigated in terms of their specific interplay. Whether it concerns rituals or ceremonies, there are always objects involved in the acts.<sup>22</sup> Stagings that aim at bringing something to light, work with an arrangement of people and things, too.<sup>23</sup> Most recently, the theory of international relations uses the notion of assemblage

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<sup>21</sup> See the documents in PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167632.

<sup>22</sup> For reflections on state ceremonies, which he conceives of as “formalised sequences of acts”, see for instance Hartmann, Staatszeremoniell, 57–62, 108–109, 112–119; quoted on 34.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Heiner Wilharm: *Die Ordnung der Inszenierung*. Bielefeld 2015 on the importance of objects in various types of and theories on staging.

coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, which likewise is based on a changeable ensemble of persons, objects and practices which in their interplay creates new social spaces.<sup>24</sup> The concept of “aesthetic work” also implies materiality by focusing on the “activity which [...] shapes things, spaces and arrangements with respect to the state of affective concern, through which an observer [...] is meant to experience this activity.”<sup>25</sup> Ideally, this work results in a specific and desirable atmosphere.<sup>26</sup> Although these theoretical approaches vary in their emphasis, they are nonetheless united by the insight that people can act socially and politically only in the interplay with things.<sup>27</sup>

The employees of Bonn’s protocol department, which was responsible for the framework of West Germany’s diplomatic activities, were aware of this dependence on things. By 1957, the West German protocol civil servants had made their first experiences with the organisation of diplomatic events and considered how very necessary it was “that their political importance became ‘optically’ recognizable by an appropriately dignified framework.” Thus according to the department, very often it was “‘trivial things’ that were decisive for the mood of the guests”.<sup>28</sup> The civil servants likewise noted down in great detail the many ‘trivial things’ to which attention had to be paid: for instance, those that were relevant for the first impression at the arrival and a last impression at the departure of the state guest. Accordingly, a red carpet, barriers, flags, banners, marquees and canopies created a specific atmosphere of state dignity. The devil was in the detail here, too, since apart from the standard tools of the diplomatic ceremonial, there was a need for skilful flower decorations and the right selection of refreshments, snacks and tobacco products. In the case of West Germany

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**24** The approach is based on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *Mille Plateaux*. Paris 1980 (engl.: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis 1987). Referring back to it, Manuel DeLanda has developed a new social theory – see Manuel DeLanda: *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London 2006 – which among other things emphasises the importance of materiality for ‘the social’. For the reception of the theory with regard to international relations, see Michele Acuto and Simon Curtis (eds.): *Reassembling International Theory. Assemblage Thinking and International Relations*. Basingstoke 2014.

**25** Gernot Böhme: *Asthetik. Vorlesungen über Ästhetik als allgemeine Wahrnehmungslehre*. München 2001, 53.

**26** See Gernot Böhme: *Atmosphäre. Essays zur neuen Ästhetik*. Frankfurt a. M. 1995.

**27** In general, see Arjun Appadurai (ed.): *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge 1986; Tony Bennett and Patrick Joyce (eds.): *Material Powers. Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*. London 2010.

**28** See, also for what follows: Guidelines for the preparation.



– which established restraint<sup>29</sup> as the basic guideline of government representation, also in view of a sometimes critical public – this ideally meant, “that [at the arrival] no specialities such as lobster, caviar, oysters, champagne, etc. were to be served; rather, only simple refreshments such as those found in restaurants.”<sup>30</sup> Also social events such as banquets or gala evenings were to be “held in a dignified and impressive manner” and at the same time “within moderate financial limits”. In this context as well one had to make the right choice out of a wide range of possible things. The “offering” should be “truly good” without appearing “excessive”. What this meant was expressed by protocol experts in their 1957 guidelines by way of a negative example: “The use of live sea lions, goats or of hundreds of tiny birds (*Zwergvögelchen*) as decorations for a ball in the embassy may be mentioned here for the sake of curiosity, but its imitation is not recommended.” The protocol experts had very precise notions about which things could be arranged tastefully. This meant choosing the appropriate style and material as well as the perfect arrangement. This becomes apparent in the meticulous instructions for flower decorations during meals, for instance. With the selection of flowers one had to be careful that their scent was not too strong and that they did not fold up due to a lack of light. “Silver baskets, antique bowls, soup tureens, sauce-boats and copper vases (only for flowers with strong colours)” were considered appropriate containers. As table decoration, they were to be arranged as “middle decorations or middle strips”, combined “with candles or other decorative pieces made of silver, glass or tin”, whereby attention still had to be paid to it that the candles were placed “at eye level”. Similarly sophisticated were the considerations for the selection of chairs, crockery and cutlery.

When foreign guests travelled around the Federal Republic, objects of course had to be in the right places during the ceremonies and social gatherings. On top of that, inspections were carried out at all the places that the guests could pass or see. For many state visits the locations to be visited were arranged especially for that purpose. For Japanese emperor Hirohito’s stop in West Germany during his 1971 tour of Europe, the following measures were undertaken in the city of Cologne, whose cathedral Hirohito was to visit:<sup>31</sup> The railway platform on which the Emperor arrived had to be entirely rearranged: the ventilation ducts had to be

<sup>29</sup> See Johannes Paulmann: *Die Haltung der Zurückhaltung: Auswärtige Selbstdarstellungen nach 1945 und die Suche nach einem erneuerten Selbstverständnis in der Bundesrepublik*. Bremen 2006.

<sup>30</sup> See, also for what follows: Guidelines for the preparation.

<sup>31</sup> See also for what follows: Record of Cologne’s tourist office, 22 September 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 102196.

removed or covered up, and the edges of the platform's roof had to be repainted. Even the habitual material setting of the square in front of the cathedral had to be rearranged: a work platform was removed and the souvenir stands had to cover their displays with greenery. Changes were undertaken on the entire route that Hirohito was driven through: construction pits and sites were covered up; fences were camouflaged with greenery; flagpoles were decorated; and traffic signs were partly removed. A firm that was located along the route was required to tidy up any objects dispersed on its grounds. This tour is only one among many examples that document how much it mattered to the Federal Republic to appear orderly, down to the finest detail – as if one could thus prove that the new democracy had all things, in the truest sense of the word, under control.

In this context, the Japanese emperor's visit presented a particular challenge. Firstly, a democracy was welcoming a monarch. The Federal Republic would go a little further out of its way for crowned heads and use more magnificent displays of self-representation. Secondly, Hirohito had sat on the 'chrysanthemum throne' since 1926 and was also Japan's supreme commander-in-chief during the Second World War, when the empire had been allied with Italy and the German Reich. He thus embodied the continuity of precisely that historical past from which the Federal Republic sought to distance itself. Thirdly, Hirohito's visit took place in the context of a particularly strongly perceived intercultural difference. The entire preparations portrayed the sense that the Japanese imperial dynasty, with its long tradition of complex ceremonials of reception, came with demands that were unfathomably fine or subtle. Every wrong West German word or every form of diplomatic usage of things, therefore, from the perspective of the Federal Republic, bore the risk of being an affront. Correspondingly, not just any flower arrangement would do in the Tennō's West German bedchamber: it had to be an ikebana floral arrangement.<sup>32</sup> In addition, this cultural difference was conceived contemporaneously in a broader context: Not only in the protocol but also in the West German mass media, at stake here was the "relationship of a white state to a non-white one".<sup>33</sup>

The combination of the monarchy, the fascist past, subtlety and the non-white appeared to be a dangerous mix to the West German planners of the visit. It became essential to weigh carefully which things and people would be brought together and how. A state visit, according to a West German programme, had to

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<sup>32</sup> See Lieselotte Gladbach to Auswärtiges Amt, 19 October 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 102197.

<sup>33</sup> See the radio commentary (SDR) on the visit, 14 October 1971, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, B37, Bd. 614. It would certainly be worthwhile here to look at the perception in Japan.

lead guests beyond the classic diplomatic settings (negotiations, banquets, social events) to locations that embodied particular facets of what was supposed to constitute the Federal Republic. This for instance included industrial facilities as the epitome of economic prosperity or the Berlin Wall as a symbol of divided Germany. In the case of the Japanese emperor, questions of Germany's present as well as its immediate past were to be excluded in the spatial settings in order to avoid the possibility of jeopardising the Emperor's position as a nationally and religiously connoted symbol for the Japanese government. Accordingly, a timeless, extra-temporal 'eternal Germany' was to be exhibited, which apart from the cathedral in Cologne as a symbol for "German art", also included a riverboat ride along the Rhine that should count towards the exploration of the "German nature".<sup>34</sup> For the 'average Japanese', the Lorelei Rock was the embodiment of the typical German countryside and the romanticism that was associated with it. The visit to this landscape became the main item on the programme of Hirohito's visit. Yet the performance of the visit proves once more how much a purportedly natural setting changes when one either leaves things out or adds to them. In this case it was the Japanese flag that was hoisted onto the rock, which decisively altered the material setting. Hirohito – wishing to go unaccompanied by West German politicians – glided through the countryside to Heinrich Heine's Lorelei song, which rang out from the ship's PA system. Many Japanese experienced it as a dreamscape, which through the presence of their flag initiated, at least temporarily, a symbolic connection with Japan.<sup>35</sup> This specific landscape ensemble sent the Tennō, according to the view of the West German press, into an "almost 'ideal world'", which apparently remained almost unspoiled<sup>36</sup> – since political demonstrations against Hirohito occurring at the same time were restricted to the centre of Bonn. In front of the Japanese Cultural Institute in Cologne there were also "isolated red flags among applauding crowds of people". Just in time – that is, before his arrival – the police removed a "banner with insults directed at the Emperor".<sup>37</sup> Such material details could be decisive for the atmosphere and the lasting impression of a visit. In this case both the Japanese guests and the West German hosts were quite pleased with their careful arrangements.

<sup>34</sup> See also for what follows: Diplomatic cable Roehreke, Tokyo, 27 February 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 102198.

<sup>35</sup> See Podewils' notes, 7 July 1971/29 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 102197.

<sup>36</sup> Sten Martenson: Rhein, Wein, Beethoven und der Dom, in: *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 14 October 1971.

<sup>37</sup> See Berendonck's decree to the Tokyo embassy, 15 October 1971, PA/AA, B37, Bd. 614.

## The International System as a Material System

The exposition so far suggests on the one hand that there were general guidelines regarding which things the Federal Republic wanted to welcome their guests with. On the other hand, it seems that the objects mentioned represented only a type of stage setting, which varied according to necessity and was attuned to the particular needs of the respective visitor as well as to diverse diplomatic purposes and contexts. Yet further distinctions existed between the general rule and the specific case, which significantly contributed to the decision as to which things were presented and in which context. The system of the international state community thus seems to be also a system of objects or a material system. In what follows, I shall reconstruct this material dimension of the international system based on a West German as well as European perspective. In so doing, it is only the European or (at the most) the trans-Atlantic understanding of this system that is put into focus. It may be assumed that research into the perceptions of Asian and African governments would yield results that conflict with the trans-Atlantic understanding. Yet only such research would enable an analysis of the reciprocal relationships and transfers between the various sets of perceptions.

One main distinction was made according to government type. West Germany accorded monarchies more splendour than it did democratic republics. This does not mean, however, that the Federal Republic did not exhibit any splendour towards its democratic guests. Just as a republic such as France – which maintains the Élysée Palace as the president's official residence – deliberately used and lavishly displayed the material legacies of the monarchy for its own self-representation, so too, accordingly, did the Bonn protocol orient itself stylistically and organise magnificent gala evenings in the Rococo Augustusburg Palace, for instance. For those governments, however, whose democratic orientation was aligned to simplicity, a comparable framework could also be found in modern and functionally maintained halls in Bonn and its environs.

At the beginning of the 1970s a simplification of western European ceremonial forms of diplomacy was discussed, and it turned out that state classification was much more complex than simply along the lines of the type of government (that is, monarchy or democracy). For instance, the age of a state (how old or young it was) and the circumstances of its foundation were also of great importance.<sup>38</sup> In countries that were decolonised and became independent only after 1945, western European protocol experts noticed a general predilection for the “*cérémonies anciennes de l'Europe*”, which comprised material decoration; this

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38 Length of service [Anciennität] is still today an important criterion in diplomatic protocol.

in turn points to aspects of state representation that had not been decolonised.<sup>39</sup> What made it especially difficult for some of the western European states, on principle, to renounce such pomp and splendour was that the Soviet Union, the Cold War's major competitive system, readily accommodated these needs in its own diplomatic protocol. Internal European arrangements to undertake more modest décor and the like in visits had already failed by the late 1950s, since greater expenses were incurred by by "more distant powers".<sup>40</sup> Finally, in 1973, a simplification was reached, although it was limited to inner-European ceremonial forms.<sup>41</sup> Surrounding selected guests with magnificent things seemed a tested means of foreign policy, even in the early 1970s, and only a few states were prepared to renounce it.

A worldwide survey conducted at West German embassies documented the diverse government attitudes. It reflected both the direct inquiries the ambassadors made in their respective countries and their own assessments. The results demonstrated scepticism across the board. This was especially true for the Eastern Bloc states: Moscow signalled no tendency towards simplification, and this set the tone.<sup>42</sup> Yet the leading nonaligned states appeared disapproving, too: Yugoslavia had for a while practiced "greater restraint" with regard to street decorations for their guests, but it had since reverted to its former practices due to its guests' touchiness. In addition, the West German ambassador in Belgrade commented on Yugoslavia's "lively diplomatic visits, which were surely an expression of its claim to leadership within the group of nonaligned states." "Through the shaping of the protocol framework", the country was said to have excellent skills in "marking the status of a visit within its foreign political coordinate system". It was therefore "not to be assumed that the Yugoslavian leadership desired to renounce this tool by limiting protocol expenditures."<sup>43</sup> Egypt and Ethiopia, too, refused any reductions:<sup>44</sup> Those who might have taken up a generally different orientation for the Western states were generally unsuccessful. In April 1971, the West German Chief of Protocol, Hans Schwarzmann, still assumed that

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<sup>39</sup> See also for what follows: *Coopération Politique Européenne*, La Haye, 4 September 1972, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>40</sup> Note by Vacano, 13 October 1972, with handwritten note by Braun, 23 October 1972, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>41</sup> On 9 March 1973, the protocol chiefs of the six EEC Member States and of its four candidate countries submitted to their governments recommendations on simplifying the protocol: Cf. Note of the results by Podewils, 15 March 1973, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>42</sup> Report Embassy Moscow, 20 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>43</sup> Report Embassy Belgrade, 20 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>44</sup> Report Embassy Cairo, 9 July 1971 and Report Embassy Addis Ababa, 19 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

the “openness to simplicity and streamlining in central and northern Europe as well as in the United States and Canada” could be “taken for granted”.<sup>45</sup> Yet even here there were qualifications: Although the initiative was generally met with approval in London, its realisation only seemed possible in the absence of the Queen.<sup>46</sup> France was also apparently prepared for simplifications, as long as no general standardisations resulted. Indeed, the West German diplomats noticed that France in particular had a pronounced “Sens d’Etat” and an “authentic need for appropriate representation”.<sup>47</sup>

Thus the necessity for intensive decorations during state visits and other diplomatic events depended on a considerable number of factors: type of government, relative age and specific ceremonial traditions, affiliation to political blocs and respective situation in international relationships. A final and especially important factor were the attributions that certain countries experienced in being assigned to certain ‘cultures’ or cultural spheres.

In fact, parallel to the categorisations mentioned so far, one may observe in the Bonn protocol a division of the world into diverse zones of materiality. Since the early days of the Federal Republic, West German government representatives and civil servants conceived of the appearance of their own country on the arena of the international community of states as tending towards moderation and restraint. The right selection of things could serve to demonstrate this to the outside world. Such self-descriptions arose in distinction to a stereotypically conceived other. For the young Federal Republic, this other included the so-called Orient, which was associated with splendour and exuberance. Indeed, the material as well as ceremonial expense with which international diplomacy was conducted during the first West German presidency was a constant annoyance. Above all else, Theodor Heuss complained about the volume of gifts, which he gladly would have reduced in the framework of international discussions. At the same time he presumed with his typical understatement that this arrangement would probably “hardly be possible” vis-à-vis “the Orient, where that kind of thing is part of the ‘custom’, based on what I learned from Karl May.”<sup>48</sup>

Fifteen years later there was no more talk of the ‘Orient’. Instead, according to Karl Moersch, FDP/DVP (Free Democratic Party/Democratic People’s Party) politician and permanent secretary in the Foreign Office in 1971, it was of the

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<sup>45</sup> Record Schwarzmann, 23 April 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167629.

<sup>46</sup> Report Embassy London, 9 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>47</sup> Report Embassy Paris, 26 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>48</sup> Transcript from Heuss to Adenauer, 8 October 1956, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 532. On the relevance of Karl May for the German image of the Orient, see Nina Berman: *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne. Zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900*. Stuttgart 1996.

“coloured majority of the UN members”, whose “exotic mentality in spite of all their recently gained enlightenment” was very receptive to outward display.<sup>49</sup> Western capitalist states apparently concurred with Eastern communist states in this assessment, since Moersch reproached the latter for instrumentalising “this vanity for their own purposes”. Of interest in this context is the change of perspective when one includes voices from what was regarded as ‘oriental’. The West German embassy in Islamabad reported in the same year that Pakistan already operated with very little expense. The diplomats there drew the attention of the West Germans instead to Africa and appeared convinced “that precisely young African states set great store on substantial protocol expenditure and that they were very sensitive in this respect.”<sup>50</sup>

It becomes clear in these statements that the international community of states was divided into zones according to the criterion of representational needs along with the appropriate material expenditures. In addition, it becomes apparent that this subdivision was bound to one’s perspective. Very diverse regimes of perception emerged, which led to a quite different drawing up of the borders between cultures. Significantly, I am only tracing the West German perspective in this chapter, and it should always be kept in mind that it cannot be generalized and essentialised as a European or even Western viewpoint: cultural stereotypes are consistent neither within continents – in the sense of Europe versus Africa – nor within states. Nonetheless, this point of view was surely not only limited to West German state representatives and civil servants, but had many intersections with general images of Africa, the Middle East and of the Far East, which in turn partially overlapped with conceptions of the “Third World”.<sup>51</sup> Thus it was a

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<sup>49</sup> See also for what follows: Moersch to Focke, 19 January 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167629.

<sup>50</sup> Report Embassy Islamabad, 15 July 1971, PA/AA, Zwischenarchiv, Bd. 167628.

<sup>51</sup> See Jürgen Dinkel: “Dritte Welt” – Geschichte und Semantiken, Version: 1.0, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, [http://docupedia.de/zg/Dritte\\_Welt?oldid=106406](http://docupedia.de/zg/Dritte_Welt?oldid=106406) [06.10.2014; 16.03.2016]; Daniel M. Mengara (ed.): *Images of Africa. Stereotypes and Realities*. Asmara 2001; Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Sunna Gieseke (eds.): *Koloniale und postkoloniale Konstruktionen von Afrika und Menschen afrikanischer Herkunft in der deutschen Alltagskultur*. Frankfurt a. M. 2006. The history of these stereotypes has developed since the publication of Edward Said’s “Orientalism” in the 1980s into an independent and very prolific field of research. See, for instance, Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria (eds.): *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt 2002. It was pointed out early on that inter-culturality is constitutive for the production of self-images; likewise that “national cultures were often ‘invented’ only in reciprocal exchange” in: Johannes Paulmann: Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer: Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts, in: *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649–685, here 682.

widespread notion among states that a country's material orientation became a factor in a country's foreign political evaluations and in the perception of difference between cultures.

Typically, the receptivity for the material's allure was not limited to the description of a general cultural peculiarity of the 'Oriental' or of the 'African'; rather, it was exemplified by way of concrete persons. This personification of a stereotype may well be observed in the example of Liberian President William S. Tubman. Tubman was considered by the West German Foreign Office in the 1950s to be one of Africa's strongest political personalities, who until then had proved a "loyal and reliable partner of the western world" and whom it was necessary to court in the face of Soviet strivings in Africa.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, this "reliable partner" was characterised as very sensitive as regards "national sentiment" and "racial pride". Having a "marked sense for dignity and splendour", he was described as foreign and exotic – also in his attitude towards the material: He was said to be "according to national customs very receptive to honours and to presents from the host or from guests".<sup>53</sup>

It immediately becomes apparent in the descriptions of Tubman that a demonstrative interest in and an explicit display of material goods signified something negative. This might seem initially to be rather surprising, since the Federal Republic itself took great pains to display its newly acquired economic prosperity, summoning up all available material resources: from the industrial plant to polished up show-pieces as well as to highly valuable industrial products, which were proffered as gifts to guests. The difference lay in the fact that the Federal Republic, in its own self-perception, apparently sought to materially overwhelm its guests in a *subtle* way, thereby avoiding any *ostentatious demonstration*. By contrast, for instance, the material demonstration of power by Congolese President Mobutu in 1969 appeared almost indecent to the West German state representatives. The things with which this potentate surrounded himself revealed – from the perspective of the Federal Republic – profound insights into the character of the man, who had additionally asserted his position of power with violence. In October 1969, Karl Theodor Paschke, who had worked in the West German embassy in Kinshasa since 1968, composed a profile of Mobutu, which was immediately classified.<sup>54</sup> Paschke identified Mobutu's helicopter as a major key to his character. In this way, according to Paschke, Mobutu was

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<sup>52</sup> Von Tschirschky: Record, 8 December 1955, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 128.

<sup>53</sup> Bottler: Confidential note on the report by the Monrovia embassy, 4 May 1956, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 128.

<sup>54</sup> For the following, see: Report Paschke, Embassy Kinshasa, 10 October 1969, PA/AA, B8, Bd. 1601.



said to be more than a Congolese Saint-Exupéry. The helicopter symbolised his style of government, accommodating the way the president saw himself: As he descended onto a football field, stepping down as it were from Mount Stanley – with his residence situated in the hills above Kinshasa – “making wind” with a thundering engine; when leaving the cockpit with a sporty and springy jump, yet with dignity, too, slowing down and entirely embodying ‘le leader éclairci’, ‘le père de la révolution’. At the same time Mobutu probably also imagined himself in such moments to be a man of the people.

According to Paschke, Mobutu sought close proximity to his people, but he did not feel at ease in this role. For this, too, the helicopter provided the right clue: since Mobutu gained a sense of security only in the shelter of his helicopter; otherwise, he often felt ridiculed. Paschke ascribed to Mobutu an inferiority complex, which he said was to be found everywhere in Black (Sub-Saharan) Africa, and yet was especially widespread in the Congo. Hence the Congolese president was said to be very sensitive particularly with regard to white people. Against this backdrop, Paschke acknowledged Mobutu’s state visit to the Federal Republic in the spring of 1969 as a great success “since Mobutu was honoured there in an impressive way as the legitimate representative of a friendly people; since one did not put his dignity into question but rather underlined it.” If Paschke assessed Mobutu’s self-doubts as “likeable”, he thereby also simultaneously documented his own sense of superiority. Indeed, his text makes it very clear that a white diplomat with a purportedly superior character was speaking about a black politician, whose demonstrative use of prestige objects – be they helicopters or expensive limousines – merely revealed his inner weaknesses.

Paschke’s profile impressively demonstrates the extent to which objects were fundamental for diplomatic regimes of perception. Things in the public perception too, up until now, are important indicators for categorising state representatives as well as the state and political systems that they represent. Material abundance in official representation tends to be regarded as a sign of non-democratic and dictatorial regimes.<sup>55</sup> In this context, the visible material wealth of dictators in most cases is set in relation to the exploitation of a population

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<sup>55</sup> See Peter York: *Dictator’s Homes. Lifestyles of the World’s Most Colorful Despots*. London 2005. The indication of object abundance is also used in order to criticise the West German political system. To this end, sociologist Hans-Georg Soeffner observes a negatively connoted “need of [the political] profession, to raise itself above those whose representatives they claim to be via privileges (official cars, business and first-class tickets [...]), insignias and representative accessories”: Hans-Georg Soeffner: *Gesellschaft ohne Baldachin. Über die Labilität von Ordnungskonstruktionen*. Weilerswist 2000, 289.

lacking possessions.<sup>56</sup> Without neglecting the exploitative character of dictatorships – which after 1945 also continued as a European phenomenon – the issue here is to point out that the unjust nature of political regimes is addressed both in diplomatic circles and in the mass media by a precise focus on the world of objects.

## The Diplomatic Use of Things as a Governmental Challenge

Against this backdrop, we find that governments are confronted time and again with the challenge of finding the right way of dealing with diplomatic things. Returning once again to Heinrich Lübke's collection of gifts, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, it becomes clear that the political challenge consists not only in finding the right object for a diplomatic act or in creating the ideal atmosphere via an assemblage, but also in dealing with what happens with unused diplomatic objects. Where are the silverware, the crockery and the government limousines kept?<sup>57</sup> One may also ask where the gifts reserved for the guests are stored. In the case of particularly expensive gifts, additional questions arise regarding how such gifts should be insured or otherwise protected. These in turn raise legal questions: To whom exactly do these gifts belong? Who has to take care of them? Who is entitled to sell them?<sup>58</sup>

So far there has been no binding rule concerning these issues in (West) Germany. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, at his own discretion, decided which gifts he considered personal and which belonged to the state. By contrast, Theodor Heuss declared in 1956 that he was “absolutely determined” “not to treat any of the things that landed my way or would do so as private property”, which was why “the Federal Republic would accumulate the strangest gallery

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<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Corinna Kolbe: Diktatorengattin Imelda Marcos: Die Kleptokratin von Manila, in: *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/imelda-marcos-die-kleptokrat-in-von-manila-a-1067889.html> [23.12.2015; 13.03.2016].

<sup>57</sup> This addresses a logistical problem, whose relevance is brought into focus by a visit to the Imperial Furniture Collection in Vienna, which archives the material remnants of Austrian empresses and emperors.

<sup>58</sup> An impressive example of the problem that gifts could pose is the ‘white elephant’. Being presented with such a rare animal was considered a great honour in former Siam [Thailand]. But its maintenance could be an enormous financial burden to the owners. See Rita Ringis: *Elephants of Thailand in Myth, Art and Reality*. New York 1996.

of rarities (*Raritäten-Kabinett*).<sup>59</sup> Thirteen years later, Heinrich Lübke, shortly before the end of his term of office, believed himself to be in a legal quagmire and had Volkmar Hopf, the president of the Federal Audit Office, prepare a “general legal opinion” on government gifts. This opinion sanctioned, firstly, the practice of passing on any donated consumer item to persons in need. Secondly, it recommended a provision for those objects which an outgoing state representative him- or herself wanted to continue using. In Lübke’s case this concerned for instance an old French tapestry, which Charles de Gaulle had presented to him in 1962.<sup>60</sup> Lübke was to retain the tapestry “for life as a long-term state loan”. The charged issue of possession and ownership of government gifts has continued to concern the Federal Republic, especially in the attempt to avoid any appearance of material profit-seeking in office and thus potentially also of corruption. In this way one addressed as well the issue to which extent a politician was given a gift as an individual person or as a representative of the people. To this end, the question of the right way of dealing with government gifts has also always been an issue of the Federal Republic’s political self-image.

Against this backdrop, the things themselves could also pose challenges to the state. This was true for other governments and not just for the Federal Republic: At the beginning of this chapter it was mentioned that among the gifts given to Heinrich Lübke was an uncut diamond, which he received from Mobutu. In 1968, US Vice President Hubert Humphrey likewise received an uncut diamond from Mobutu, which according to the US Constitution he had to declare to Congress (the same held for every present valued at over \$50). Such gifts did not end up in the private coffers of the US recipient either. Instead, they were usually exhibited in Presidential Libraries, in order “to function there as it were as a gift to the American people”.<sup>61</sup> But Humphrey was not accorded such a facility in his honour. In 1974, he ended up handing the diamond over to the White House’s protocol department. Today it can be found in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC.<sup>62</sup> Lübke too faced the problem of how he should proceed with his own uncut diamond. Ultimately he did not exhibit it, because doing so would have required “expensive security measures”. At the same time the government could not sell it and donate the proceeds, for that would risk offending the Congolese.

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<sup>59</sup> A transcript from Heuss to Adenauer, 2009/10. See Meinrad M. Grewenig (ed.): *Staatsgeschenke: 60 Jahre Deutschland*. Völklingen 2009. For insights into the collected gifts that the Federal Republic has so far received, see also the exhibition in the Völklingen Ironworks.

<sup>60</sup> Also for the following, see: Das Ding.

<sup>61</sup> Christine Brinck: Schwierigkeiten mit Geschenken, in: *Die Zeit*, 16 February 1968.

<sup>62</sup> See Sen. Humphrey Returns Diamond Valued At \$100.000, in: *Herald Tribune*, 18 June 1974.

One of Lübke's advisors therefore suggested something pragmatic: simply pass the problem on to the next president.

## Conclusion

This chapter set itself the goal of analysing the materiality of West German diplomacy. In doing so it became clear that the combination of foreign policy and things reaches far beyond the symbolism and use of individual objects, whereby at least three material dimensions of diplomacy may be distinguished.

Firstly, single material objects do indeed fundamentally mark communication between governments. They deal not only with things that are given, which negotiate the relationship between state guest and host, but also with things that are used, for instance the government limousines, which are specifically designed for the needs of state guests. Moreover, it turned out that these single objects served not only as a medium in the relationship among state representatives but were also situated at the intersection between foreign and West German state representatives and the population. In accordance with diplomatic logics, governmental gifts were also subject to the reservation that they had to be stored, which resulted in governments having to discuss who was really entitled to have such items at his disposal and who was ultimately responsible for them.

Secondly, this chapter has emphasised that diplomacy should always be understood as interaction, as an arrangement among several things, persons and practices. In dealing with this, scholars have begun using the useful terms *assemblage* and *atmosphere*. Diplomatic spaces, an expression one could use following the concept of social space, are to a high degree intentionally created by deliberate 'shaping decisions' (*Gestaltungsentscheidungen*) and by the selection and arrangement of things and persons in space. They are thereby in a peculiarly charged relationship to chance and to the possibility of an unplanned event. This way of putting things into perspective accentuates the character of diplomacy as a construct in its recursive connectedness to the material.

Thirdly, at the meta-level, the single diplomatic objects as well as the diplomatic assemblages are embedded in an international system of the material. Through an arrangement and selection of things, this international system marks differentiations according to type of governments, their relative age, the ceremonial traditions of individual states, and to the bloc alignments during the Cold War; it also reflects the respective current situation in the international community of states. Simultaneously it subdivides the world at its core into different zones of materiality, as has been explored in an exemplary way for West

Germany. Continents and countries were ascribed different material orientations (frugal functionality vs. splendour and abundance), which became in turn important factors for their assessment in terms of foreign policy. Significantly, evidence was obtained for this pattern of order in the eyes of contemporary protagonists by the behaviour of individual government representatives and by their dealings with concrete objects, as becomes apparent for instance with the identification of the Congo with abundance, Mobutu and his helicopter. The material is thereby solidly participating in the construction of international regimes of perception.

Combining these three dimensions of material makes it evident that things are quite fundamentally involved in the history of relationships between states – on the micro-level (individual objects), the meso-level (assemblages) and the meta-level (patterns of systems). The analysis of material dimensions can provide new insights into the specific texture that shapes the interrelations between states. It can deepen our knowledge of fundamental processes in (international) politics – processes of rapprochement and convergence, of dissociation and alienation as well as of establishing hierarchies – thereby essentially modifying our understanding of international relations.