

Introduction

Collections, Collectors and the Collecting of Knowledge in Education

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Specificities of Educational Media Collections and Collecting

In an age when both independent and institutionally affiliated scholars and educators aspire to unfettered access to sources of knowledge via digital platforms, it is timely to ponder the variety of mechanisms which govern the collection and distribution of these sources, in both the past and present. In spite, or even because, of our latter-day propensity to 'click and grab' (to paraphrase the name of the aptly named software ClipGrab),¹ the collection, organisation and distribution of the documents on which much academic study is based is neither transparent nor of great import to those who produce scholarship. This applies above all to documentation used for purposes of interpretation and the evaluation of interpretative hypotheses in the hermeneutic tradition, in particular when studying the production and transmission of knowledge in the fields of the social and human sciences. For if we expect the gesture of clicking to provide a document within seconds, then our interest in the process by which that document has been made available (including the people who collected it, and where and how it has been stored) is stifled by the convenience of immediate satisfaction of the goal of finding that document. The purpose of this collection of essays about collectors, the collecting and collections of educational media is therefore to explore what happens between the gestures of clicking and grabbing, and thus

to draw attention to the contingency of knowledge production and transmission both within and beyond the field of education.

What are educational media? The essays contained in this collection cover collectable objects ranging from traditional *teaching materials* such as textbooks, wall charts and audiovisual aids used for pedagogical purposes (Bennedsen and Hansen, Fuchs, Harbig, Gao, Engelhardt and Ruedel, Sharp, Sroka, Şans-Yıldırım) to materials documenting *school history* and the development of *teaching standards and methods* in the form of curricula or even glass slides illustrating teaching in rural residential schools (Reimers, Kissling et al., Madej-Stang) to *pedagogical literature* (Kissling et al.). These four types of educational media correspond to the types of knowledge they convey. On a basic level, textbooks and audiovisual aids act as '*media of knowledge*',² while documentation of the history of education and teaching methods, norms and possibilities convey knowledge about the *mediation* of knowledge and, finally, interpretative pedagogical literature places both media of knowledge and knowledge about this mediation in social, political and historical *contexts*. In many cases, educational media operate on more than one of these three semantic levels. Common to all of them, however, is that they do not merely represent knowledge of a given society. Rather, they also document processes of *knowledge transmission* on several levels.

In semiotic terms, for example, educational media collections draw attention to and encourage us to understand complex processes of meaning making. Once placed in a collection, a history textbook, to take the most well-known example, is not only a representation or a signifier of past facts and events, but an object of the collectors' desire to reveal its signifying utility as an agglomeration of words and images subject to the influence of authors, editors, graphic artists, publishing constraints and historically and socially determined pedagogical doxa. Hence educational media collections foster study of knowledge production via representations and of knowledge transmission via representations of representations. Educational materials such as textbooks and wall charts are thus in effect both primary *and* secondary documents. As objects designed for use in classrooms, they are like primary documents insofar as they testify immediately to specific educational, social and political functions; as hermeneutic compilations of authorial texts, quotations, and reproductions of documents, they are secondary documents.

We might also explain the specificity of educational media collections and collecting by conceiving of archives, educational media (above all textbooks, which are orchestrated textual and visual collections of knowledge) and collections of educational media in terms of three types of curatorship, according to which information and knowledge is gathered,

organised and made available. An archive is generally designed to store primary documents for an indefinite period and to address a broad range of users' interests, whereas a textbook is usually a narratively organised collection of primary and secondary texts and images selected not exhaustively, but with respect to curricular stipulations and a specified thematic framework such as contemporary European history, which give expression to 'ideological choices'.³ By contrast, collections of educational media are effectively *metacollections* insofar as they constitute archives of curatorial types. Hence the main distinction between collections of what may conventionally be called primary and secondary materials of knowledge production may be defined as a distinction between what (in an archive) constitutes a society's self-knowledge and how (in an educational media collection) that knowledge is transmitted. The latter are arsenals not only of knowledge, but also of knowledge transmission types, as depicted in different didactic methods, material supports (films, notebooks, maps or textbooks, for example), within a given political or social regime. The difference between knowledge and knowledge presentation and transmission is not absolute, of course, insofar as they differ in the degree to which they draw attention to the methods and processes of knowledge transmission.

By contributing towards and guiding knowledge about learning, collections of educational media have socio-epistemological consequences for societies run by state, group or individual authorities. One of the richest legacies of the history of twentieth-century historiography is the insight it has provided into the contingency of the knowledge on which judgements about everyday life, politics, society and history are made. Knowledge is not given but determined by the evidence made available to those who produce it and pass it on to others in the public sphere. As the historian Marc Bloch noted, societies use archives in order to rationally organise 'knowledge of themselves'.⁴ The knowledge they contain is not absolute and exhaustive, therefore, but expedient. However, collections of educational media differ from other collections insofar as they show not only a society's knowledge of itself, but knowledge of knowledge and how this has been passed on to successive generations. In contemporary western societies whose economies no longer primarily produce 'crystalised work' but rather 'crystalised knowledge',⁵ such collections therefore increasingly serve not only to document and mirror, but also to deepen and guide our understanding of how societies form knowledge of themselves or exchange such knowledge with others.

In sum, educational media are collectable because, as objects of study, they may contribute towards knowledge about the expediency

of knowledge and of knowledge production and transmission. As such, knowledge about their expediency is the responsibility of makers and users of collections who demonstrate that content cannot be considered independently of the form in which it is selected, stored, packaged and even restored or renovated for use by later generations.

The Aims of This Collection of Essays

In light of the specificities of educational media collections and collecting outlined above, this book aims to build upon recent approaches to collections and collectors by exploring how documentation of our knowledge of knowledge transmission has been collected and what avenues these collections open for future research in this field. We invited authors to address not only the objects of collections such as textbooks, atlases, teaching materials (objects and images, including wall charts and maps), curricula and teachers' and youth guidebooks, but also the structures of collections, the aims and motivations of public bodies and private persons who collect them, and the means by which they are collected, preserved, archived and disseminated. How and why are educational media conceived, selected, collected and managed? Who creates and maintains collections, and for whom? And what influence do modes of collecting have on researchers and their work and on our knowledge of the knowledge production and knowledge transmission process? We strove to break down the collection process into three component parts of conception, maintenance and usage. This subdivision is reflected in the three parts, 'Collectors and Collecting', 'Objects, Materials, and Old and New Media' and 'Access and Acquisition'.

The essays largely span the period from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day. This reflects the fact that teaching materials and standards familiar to us today evolved in close relation to the historical development of schooling institutions. It was at this time that state schooling and curricula gained acceptance in Europe alongside officially authorised teaching materials, which were consequently deemed to be collectable by enthusiasts and educationalists. It is therefore paradoxical that, until the present day, teaching materials have rarely been systematically collected. The reason for this omission may lie in the fact that, as noted above, they testify less immediately to a society's self-knowledge than to the means by which this self-knowledge is mediated and transmitted via authorial texts, quotations, and reproductions of documents. Another reason why teaching materials have seldom been collected in the past is that their inherent functionality has meant that they are generally

not made with high-quality materials and not made to stand the test of time. Teaching materials are objects produced largely without regard to elegance or material beauty. As tools designed to be worked with effectively, their value is not based on their users' aesthetic appreciation or a resulting sense of aura; frequent use often leaves them dog-eared, if not close to disintegration. Educational media are thus ephemeral objects which present a challenge to collection.

Since educational media have generally not been made to last and are not considered worthy of collecting, it is not surprising that they have not previously been addressed in studies about collecting in the fields of education or material culture. *Collecting Educational Media: Making, Storing and Accessing Knowledge* aims to introduce some major lines of enquiry on the basis of case studies of the places, spaces, times, agents, aims, methods and contexts, as well as the uses and users, of educational resources. All of the authors are practitioners of collecting or using collections and enhance their studies with interdisciplinary expertise. Their accounts should be of interest to authors and readers of educational media, librarians, people working in the heritage and museum sector and to educationalists and historians of education. In short, this collection of essays acknowledges the history of collections and processes of collecting which become apparent from the encounter between collectors and the collections in which they have been involved. This volume thus acknowledges recent research into collecting by not assuming, in a teleological vein, that collections were conceived with the aim we often impute to them today, which is to provide services to researchers.

The first part, devoted to collectors and collecting, traces collectors' biographies and their motivations. For collections often emerge from irrational impulses or by accident, as Elsner and Cardinal's work has shown, and are often exposed to the vicissitudes of inheritance, patronage, despoliation and censure before being gathered in the places and according to the structures familiar to us today.⁶ The main aim of this section is therefore to encourage enquiry into the role of human contingency in the collecting of educational media while acknowledging both the political and anthropological strands of collection research. The largely historical approaches adopted in this section reveal the extent to which collections of educational media from 1900 onwards were politicised. The close relationship between collecting and research at this time, which is most evident in Monika Mattes' account of Adolph Rebhuhn's 'dual identity', has today become a basic feature of research and special libraries and among private collectors. In this respect, Wendelin Sroka's contribution to this book provides invaluable insights into the critically competitive practice of private collecting.

The second part covers examples of the many different types of educational media, including glass slides, audiovisual documents or wall charts as well as textbooks and paper materials. The condition of wall charts kept in the Danish National Museum of Education, for example, testifies to the eventful history of a collection via traces of water resulting from leaks or flooding. As these durable consumer objects become more and more fragile over time, several authors appeal to a combination of physical preservation and digitalisation as a way of conserving these objects over as long a period as possible and of making them available over the long term. In addition to the technical and infrastructural measures required to counteract such problems digitally, the collection of curricula held at the Georg Eckert Institute shows that the current digital transformation is likewise impinging on acquisition and collection policies as they are applied to educational media, and that new collecting strategies are required in order to ensure that digital objects are adequately collected in the future.

The third part explores some of the hurdles faced when accessing educational media, in particular challenges faced by researchers when consulting collections. Collections can, for example, be torn apart by political circumstance and become the object of provenance research (see Fuchs). Or else scholars encounter arbitrary obstacles to the research process induced by fragmentary collections and inadequate archiving techniques in libraries or private collections, and therefore necessarily fall back on non-traditional sourcing and acquisition techniques (see Sharp). Zhipeng Gao similarly shows how ‘past and current ideological struggles’ make it necessary to develop ‘special methodological and interpretive strategies’ when consulting and interpreting collections of educational media in contemporary China.

The essays in this collection reflect the two main thematic trends of recent research into collections and collecting. One of these trends is political, focusing on stories of ways in which collections have been institutionalised in the service of national interests. Work by Mark Crinson about the use of collections in nation-building projects⁷ and by Eleanor Robson about claims to ‘own’ objects⁸ is also reflected in this volume. Collections of educational media were, as the historical essays in this book demonstrate, associated with expectations that they should underpin the emergence of national identities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Several collections likewise emerged in the contexts of reform pedagogy as a driving force of educational change, and in step with the professionalisation of teacher training during the same period.

Another trend is characterised by anthropological approaches to collecting that arose towards the end of the 1990s, represented by works

such as John Elsner and Roger Cardinal's *The Cultures of Collecting* (1994),⁹ which enquires not only into the history and theory of collecting but also into the human compulsion to collect. Susan Pearce aptly summed up this subjectivist approach when she observed, in 2002, that, 'We're interested in why people chose to collect what they collected – collecting as a social process'.¹⁰ Hence, the government-run Collection of Educational Historical Printed Materials at the Austrian Ministry of Education presented in this book was subject to a dynamic process characteristic of a time in which teachers were among the most frequent users of collections, and when educational practitioners actively contributed towards setting up and expanding collections. Personalities like Adolph Rebhuhn or the founders of the Polish school museum in Lviv were what we today would call 'networkers' with an array of contacts with professional people in politics and science and who provided indispensable support needed when constructing or expanding collections.

Dichotomies of Educational Media Collecting

One of the discoveries we made when putting together this collection of essays was the extent to which thinking about educational media collecting is governed by dichotomies. Authors characteristically understand accessibility to educational media, which is the focus of the third part of this volume, in terms of a dichotomy according to which access is either regulated or open, or else on a scale according to which regulation of access is more or less transparent or arbitrary (see Gao). A further classification distinguishes broadly between human intervention and passion (including personal preferences, intuition and affect) and formalised or even digitally guided automated processes (including rationalised classification systems). A number of other dichotomies derive from this basic opposition. For example, are reasons for the emergence of a collection expedient and therefore intentional, or rather accidental? Are collectors curators of knowledge and therefore creatively involved in collecting and organising educational media, or does their work increasingly involve the mere technical management of information? And does digitalisation partially obviate human influence on existing collections when collecting and research is increasingly determined by search engines?

Two contributions in particular explore the tensions between private and public collecting. Sroka explores the divergent motivations of private and public collectors of primers on the basis of their different motivations and funding mechanisms. At the same time, relations between private and public reveal ways in which personal preferences impinge

on institutional standards when, for example, private collectors donate materials to library collections or when they withhold materials. Sharp, by contrast, explores the experiences of private researchers as users facing restrictions imposed on access to public collections but likewise underscores the interdependency of private and institutional collectors as they vie to acquire rare historical materials via online auctions. These authors show that it would be wrong to consider that collections are either public or private because private collectors often donate their collections to public libraries, or because collectors representing public collections rely heavily on commercial sources of books and objects in auctions, a phenomenon which has blossomed with the aid of online auctions (see Sroka and Sharp). Conversely, institutional collections also impinge on private collecting. The public access policies of publishers and institutional collections, for example, not only determine whether a scholar may acquire items of information, but thereby also encroach on the interpretations of educational scholars, potentially causing bias or omissions in their analyses of past educational techniques or blueprints for new ones (see Sharp). Hence the private and public spheres are interdependent. As Sroka points out in his chapter about primers, affect or 'passion' is not the exclusive domain of private collectors who leave institutional collectors to adhere to rule-based scientific methods. Sroka thus debunks the dichotomy between affect and rationality, where 'collecting is seen as a private, individual passion removed from the public eye, whereas research represents a world of rationality and method, in full view of the research community and, when publicly financed, of state agencies'.

While Sharp and Sroka draw on their direct experiences with the collection and acquisition of textbooks, most authors in this collection address and break down these dichotomies historically. That is, they tell the stories of the emergence and development of collections, as in the contribution by Fuchs about the origins, spoliation, disbandment and reconstitution of the collection of the Breslau Rabbinical Seminary before and after the Second World War. At the same time, all contributions to this book underscore the transitory nature of collections, which perhaps never reach a point of stability, as all objects of collection are subject to circulation and transitory fixity as their place, classification and order on shelves or in databases is a subject of constant revision.

New Paradigms in Educational Media Collecting?

Akin to the recent development of scholarship about collections, which has shifted from a focus on the political expediency of state collections

to the anthropological study of ‘social processes’ underpinning collections, can we identify fundamental paradigmatic changes in the nature of collections themselves? Their waning role in the formation of national identity does indeed seem to be accompanied by changes in the nature of collecting itself. We can, for example, speak of a shift away from collections that serve the interest of creating or maintaining national heritage and towards topic-driven collections or subcollections within larger collections – driven by present needs of research or current topic fields like body, gender, migration or religion. Although the textbook collection of the Georg Eckert Institute was, from its very beginnings, put together in order to ideologically revise textbooks used during the National Socialist regime, internationally pertinent social topics increasingly play a central role in the acquisition policy of the library. Competition among researchers for funding and among foundations for the tutelage of politically effective (but not necessarily nationally driven) topics therefore determines in part what books and objects are now being collected.

The most obvious change in recent years has been brought about by the arrival of digital technology. Publishers worldwide are increasingly publishing digital educational media, and practitioners are also creating their own digital teaching materials. Institutions which make use of open educational resources (OER) are also committed to the open, digital transmission of knowledge. But the sheer quantity of collectable materials on offer, the frequently restrictive business and licensing models and, above all, the difficulty predicting users’ needs make it difficult for libraries, archives and museums to stock materials for future use as and when users need them. Libraries and similar institutional collectors have instead developed ways of collecting on demand with policies that respond to actual needs and requests as they are submitted.¹¹ If collections are now by definition incomplete and characterised by a paradigm of permanent inclusion or exclusion and of deficit corresponding to Judith Schalansky’s imagined inventory of known or unknown lost things or ‘losses’, which may be counted among a heritage worth preserving,¹² it becomes all the more necessary to ensure that principles of collecting (even collecting on demand) are transparent in order to provide a basis for dialogue with scholars and the public sphere about the meanings and imperatives of collecting. Hence the vicissitudes of digital knowledge collecting, not unlike their analogue forebears, are subject to choices governing the general management of heritage, of what a society decides to keep or to lose and thereby consign to either knowledge or ignorance.¹³

The idea that collecting is a ‘social process’ does not only mean that we should try to understand its historical origins and subsequent functions

in economy societies, but that collecting is a task to be carried out jointly by collecting institutions and their users at the same time (see Madej-Stang). The digital age offers the potential to induce the 'social process' of collecting educational media on a transnational scale and thereby to work towards a cooperative collection of objects and data. Internet portals such as the commercially run 'Textbook Database'¹⁴ in South Africa, which lists learning materials designed for universities, are setting standards with which information about educational media may be collected virtually in a data bank, and which allows books to remain dispersed geographically. The state-funded 'Emmanuelle'¹⁵ project in France also illustrates this trend towards non-physically placed collections. Such databases have dispensed with the national framework that guided Alain Choppin's conception of the Emmanuelle project in France. Digitalisation facilitates access to documents regardless of the location of the user and increasingly (via multilingual infrastructures, for example) regardless of the differences between the languages in which documents are written and with which they are searched.

Increased reliance on algorithms, for example, reduces the role played by contingency and personal whim outlined by Sroka and Sharp in this volume, such that scholars and educators are increasingly expected to 'research' for known documents rather than 'search' for unknown documents. A search engine requests users to supply specific terms and groups of terms which presuppose prior knowledge of the topic. The large number of electronically generated references to available materials then inhibits further searches and even partially thwarts curiosity, the use of cross-references and chance. The promise of an unequivocal correlation between what is sought and what may be found is part of ongoing work, instigated at the Georg Eckert Institute, which aims to create an international textbook catalogue that will facilitate the classification of collections regardless of the language in which a search word or sought document is formulated, so that documents in all languages may be found by using any search language. This process fulfils what Ossenbach has defined as a 'need for a vocabulary or "thesaurus" with which to search for equivalent concepts in the databases of different countries'.¹⁶ To this end, the classification system of the International TextbookCat¹⁷ is being designed to take account of historical and geographical variations in the development and denomination of school disciplines, which differ both from one country to another and over time in each of these countries! These digital classification systems certainly address and may well meet the challenge of denationalising educational research and of fostering contingency, cross-referencing and chance, much like the thesaurus demanded by Ossenbach.¹⁸

Despite the development of virtual collections and digital classification systems, few specialists of collections have assessed the effects, for collectors, collections and their users, of the quasi abdication of responsibility for collecting to algorithms, exemplified by web crawling and the use of digital tools. For the subjugation of the human mind to automated criteria according to which objects are collected or found presupposes a notion of scientificity according to which the human mind is fallible and automation infallible. By exploring the threshold between analogue and digital collecting, this collection of essays also aims to articulate critical questions for the future. What role does historical contingency play in a collection? And what role does the whim of an impassioned collector play in an age in which digitalisation promises the comprehensive collectability of materials and infallible use of collections?

The Literacy of Collecting

We hope that *Collecting Educational Media: Making, Storing and Accessing Knowledge* will encourage further research in this field. Much remains to be done, for example, to better understand the economy of collecting educational media as commercial products, small collections of materials used to teach unconventional disciplines such as home economics or health and safety, dominant Eurocentric traditions of collecting and gender aspects, including the almost complete absence of women as collectors in the history of collecting.

But since most of the authors in this book approach educational media collections historically, this volume may serve above all to encourage further interdisciplinary historical enquiry. Work remains to be done about collections that once existed but no longer exist; collections of educational media in formerly colonised countries which deal with the colonial period or its aftermath; collections of informal educational media or so-called grey literature which does not necessarily adhere to institutionally or state-approved educational goals; and the evolution of classification types as they evolve from material into (or are incorporated into) digital forms, including the impact of digital collections on readers (among them teachers and learners) and educational research.

The emergence of new paradigms of collecting outlined above also urges us to define a periodisation of educational media collecting. The fact that most collections of educational media, including the ones outlined in this volume, are confined to materials produced in the nineteenth century (a time when national movements strove to promote national cohesion via teaching within newly emerging state education systems

with accompanying educational materials¹⁹) means that scholarly work about collections is also largely confined to this period. Who collects premodern educational media at a time when divine right and absolute monarchs governed minds before the development of state education systems? And can the ongoing digitalisation of educational media be understood in the context of an evolution of the means of collecting and using media rather than considering digitalisation as a historical caesura? Little has been written about either premodern educational media collections or their transition to modern and digital collections. Nonetheless, continuities and discontinuities seem apparent. One example of a continuity is that currently emerging placeless virtual collections and premodern collections did not (and still do not) primarily serve national interests.

The overarching purpose of this collection should, we hope, be to encourage literacy among makers and users of collections. We today have at our disposal an ever more sophisticated array of digital tools with which to find every book, image and object and to assume that the found objects are exhaustive, if only the correct combination of search words is used. But can scientific quality be measured by the degree to which the scholar's evidence is exhaustive? This encyclopaedic aspect of contemporary collecting is potentially misleading when, for example, scholars deal with materials that were collected accidentally and without the use of digital technology by people who relied not on efficient collecting tools but on intuition and personal taste. Moreover, contemporary scholars' assumptions about the collections they use may diverge considerably from the aims and principles of the collectors. Hence this volume should promote collecting literacy by reminding those of us who assume that collections and their information retrieval techniques make exhaustivity almost self-evident, that in fact human affect, chance, failure and even price and caprice have in some measure contributed to the formation of the body of knowledge currently found in collections of educational media.

If educational media collections, as outlined at the beginning of this introduction, are unique insofar as they foster understanding not only of knowledge production, but also of knowledge transmission via meaning-making processes, it follows that our understanding of education and educational techniques in the past and present can be judicious only if we also understand the visual, textual and material means by which knowledge has been and is now transmitted. Without collections of antiquated materials, our knowledge of past methods (and, with it, visual, textual and material literacy²⁰) may disappear. By analogy, the

new visual, textual and material literacies demanded by the digital revolution can be acquired only if collectors ensure that participants in it are equipped with knowledge of the visual, textual and material knowledge-making processes and of the means by which the knowledge they acquire reaches them.

In short, collecting literacy entails knowledge of the collecting and preservation techniques of visual, textual and material objects and an ability to interpret and use these techniques in an articulate manner that can provide readers (whether teachers, researchers or political advisors) with the means to assimilate existing meanings in the context of a given field or discipline of learning, and to create new meanings. Yet collecting literacy also conveys a constant warning that the very act of placing a book or object in a collection effectively ‘destroys’ such artefacts by robbing them of their functionality and meaning by removing them from the context in which they had meaning for their original users.²¹ Scholars of educational media should therefore beware of the complacency inherent in our tendency to see present-day collections and collecting and classification techniques (including digital classification techniques) as the culmination of a linear development. In other words, we should take care not to perceive collections as a means of drawing attention to bygone technologies with which we reassure ourselves of our own functionality by declaring those technologies to be dysfunctional.

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Notes

1. See <https://clipgrab.org/> (accessed 15 September 2020).
2. Höhne, *Schulbuchwissen*, 17.
3. Crubellier, 'Manuels d'histoire', 433.
4. Bloch, *Apologie*, 70.
5. Gorz, *L'immatériel*, 31.
6. See Elsner and Cardinal, *Cultures of Collecting*.
7. Crinson, 'Nation-Building'.
8. Robson, *Who Owns Objects?*
9. See Elsner and Cardinal, *Cultures of Collecting* and Grijp, *Passion and Profit*.
10. Cited in Monaghan, 'Collected Wisdom'.
11. Anderson, 'Collections', 211.
12. Schalansky, *Inventory of Losses*.
13. See Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade*, 156–62.
14. <https://textbookdatabase.co.za> (accessed 20 May 2020).
15. <http://emmanuelle.bibliotheque-diderot.fr/web/> (accessed 20 May 2020).
16. Ossenbach, 'Textbook Databases', 172.
17. <http://itbc.gei.de/> (accessed 20 May 2020).
18. Ossenbach, 'Textbook Databases', 170.
19. *Ibid.*, 166.
20. Mills, *Literacy Theories*, chapter 6.
21. See Matthias Winzen's exploration of the musealisation process as a process of destruction by 'documentalisation' in his 'Sammeln – so selbstverständlich, so paradox', in Schaffner, Batchen and Winzen, *Deep Storage*, 10–19 (12).

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