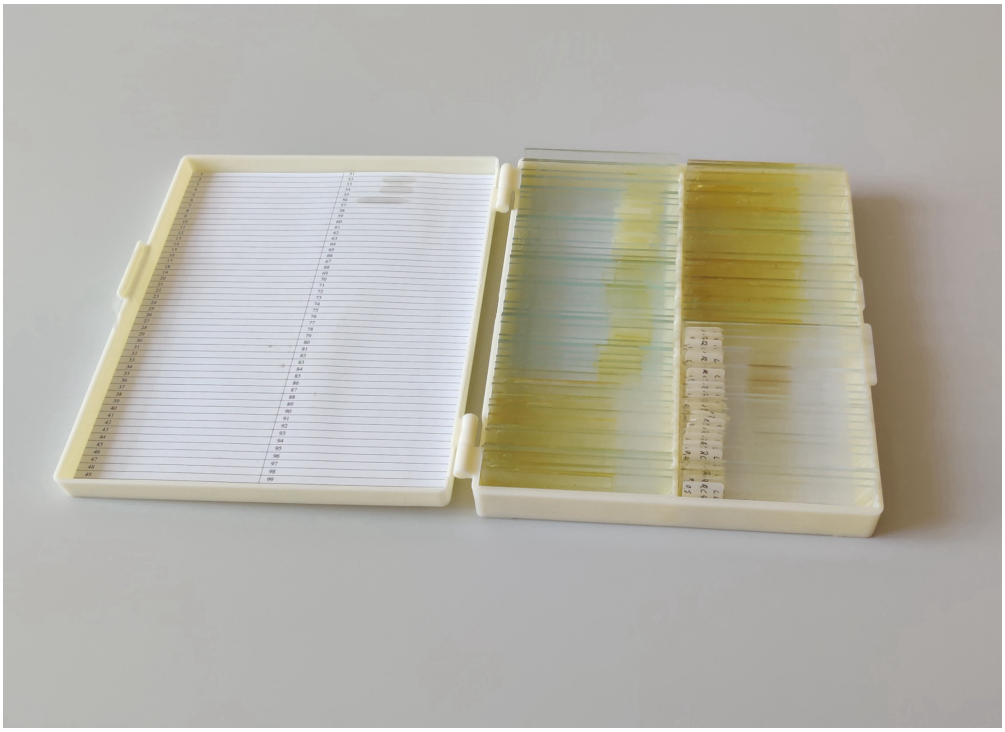
Lamont-Doherty Collection

An important long-term collection of micropaleontological slides



A box of micropaleontological slides of diatoms from the Lamont-Doherty Collection. (Image: Filippo Bertoni/MfN. All rights reserved.)

- Article type: material
- Author: Filippo Bertoni
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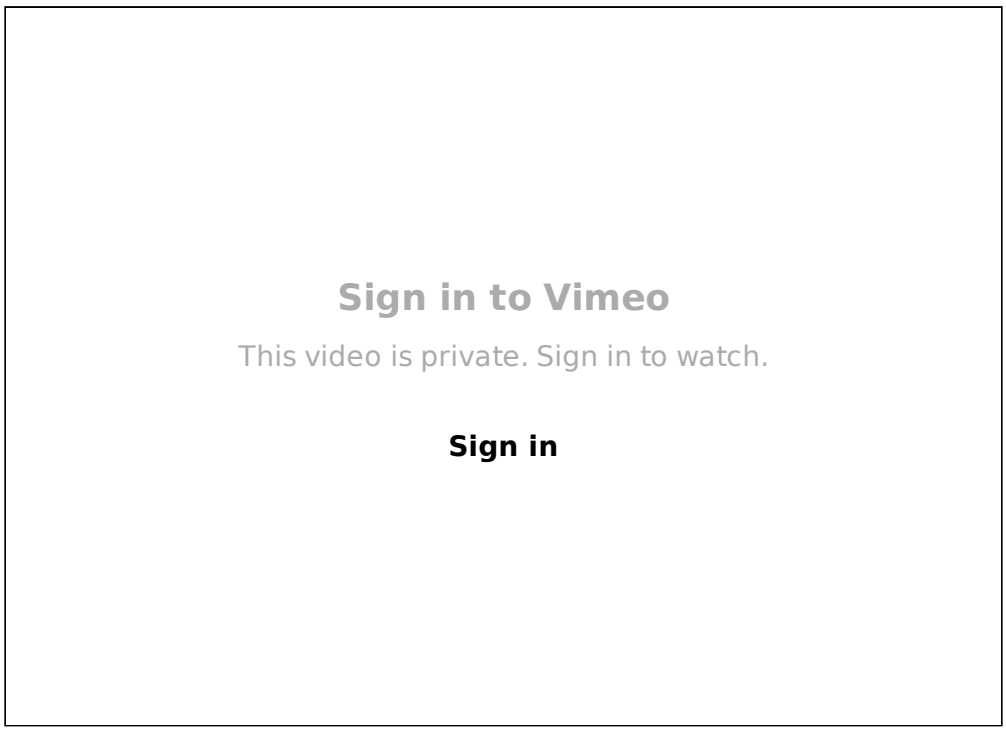
- DOI: 64y2-m311/39

The Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory[1] is a famous scientific research centre dedicated to the study of climate and earth sciences. It is located in New York and part of The Earth Institute at Columbia University. Since its foundation in 1949, it spearheaded research on the planet's history and dynamics, in particular through the collection and study of sediment samples from across the world's oceans. Gathering core samples since before the beginning of the various deep sea drilling programmes, the core repository in the Observatory is an archive of invaluable data on the planet's history, present, and future.[2] The data gathered and studied in this centre was instrumental in providing evidence in support of the theories of plate tectonics and continental drift, and it continues to support important research on planetary dynamics and climate change. Turning the fossilised remains of microorganisms and other animals into scientific objects, these long-term datasets allow scientists to highlight the interconnections of microbes and planets. Importantly, these connections have become part of transnational efforts to know the planet, but also to govern it: global protocols and regulations to curb climate change, for instance, rely on models that depend on this data – and the forms of life on which the data depends. While the digital afterlives of these microorganisms challenge traditional forms of scientific

authorship and authority, the models they ground take part in changing political ecologies and their technologies of governmentality.[3]

In June 2021, the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin received the Observatory's micropaleontology slide collection because the museum plays an increasingly important role in preserving a vast, transnational microfossil record of the Earth's past. Thanks to the work of David Lazarus, Johan Renaudie and the other micropaleontologists, the museum keeps consolidating its global role in the preservation, management, and study of microfossils.[4] This archive plays a crucial part in the ongoing understanding of micropaleontological formations. Holding millions of specimens of microorganisms from more than 70 years of research, prepared on microscopic slides – the most common microscopic media for microfossils – this collection enriches the museums's micropaleontological holdings. Because the Lamont-Doherty Collection brings together the physical specimens and samples under the same roof as its digital database in the NSB database, it opens up new avenues for the museum. As natural history becomes increasingly intertwined with digitisation, the management of the specimens as well as their afterlives as data is becoming an important new task for institutions like the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. It is a task that entails important changes in the way we know nature, but also – more broadly – how we relate to the planet and its life forms. Digitisation and the preservation of material culture are transforming the infrastructure and political economy of science, reshaping the interactions between society and nature, and bringing together past, present, and future – thanks to the ongoing and dedicated work not only of scientists but also of many others.



This video illustrates the work of the micropaleontology research group at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin by following the unboxing of the Lamont-Doherty Collection of slides. These fragile glass supports contain millions of individual specimens of microfossils retrieved from the bottom of the oceans, including diatoms, radiolarians and foraminiferans. The microscopic remains provide scientists with precious information about the history and dynamics of planetary transformations and form an important yet little known part of the museum's collection. (Video: Filippo Bertoni/MfN. All rights reserved.)

Footnotes

1. The Observatory is named after two wealthy New York families whose donations contributed to the foundation and development of the research institution. For more information, see “History of Lamont”. *Columbia Climate School*, no date. https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/about-ldeo/history-lamont (03.01.2022).↩
2. See “History of the Core Repository”. *Columbia Climate School*, no date. https://www.ldeo.columbia.edu/core-repository/about-us/core-repository-history (03.01.2022).↩
3. To better understand the implications of these transformations in global political ecologies, see Paul Edwards. *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010.↩
4. Learn more about the micropaleontology group at the micropaleontology collections of the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin. *Museum für Naturkunde Berlin*, no date. https://www.museumfuernaturkunde.berlin/en/science/micropaleontology-collections (03.01.2022).↩