

# ADVANCING MUSEUM PRACTICES

EDITED BY  
FRANCESCA LANZ  
ELENA MONTANARI



Allemandi & C.



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UMBERTO ALLEMANDI & C.

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*Edited by Francesca Lanz and Elena Montanari*

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## ENGLISH EDITING

Alessandra Galasso

Susanna Powers

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## *Scientific Committee*

### **DOMINIQUE FERRIOT**

Professor of Museology and curator with a long-standing expertise as director of several French museums, she is member of the Haut Conseil Culturel Franco Allemand (HCCFA, Franco-German Cultural High Council), member of the Académie des Technologies (Technology Academy), member of the board of the International Committee of the ICOM for the University Museums (UMAC) and former president of the French section of the ICOM.

### **ALESSANDRO MARTINI**

Adjunct Professor in History of Contemporary Architecture at Politecnico di Torino, where he discussed in 2004 the PhD thesis *The New Museum in Italy in the 20th Century*. He is Museum News Editor at *Il Giornale dell'Arte* and correspondent from Italy for *The Art Newspaper*. Since 2009 he has been in charge for concept and contents of MuseoTorino ([www.museotorino.it](http://www.museotorino.it)), the online Museum of the City opened in 2011. His research interests focus on Urban History and Contemporary Museology and Museography.

### **GIOVANNI PINNA**

Professor in Paleontology, museologist and founder director of the six-monthly journal *Nuova Museologia*, since 1996 he have been collaborating with Natural History Museum in Milan as curator and director, has been actively involved in ICOM, and has broadly investigated museums within several publications recently turning his attention to the social aspect of museums and to the intellectual organisation and the mechanisms for the production of culture in museums.

### **ILARIA PORCIANI**

Professor of Modern and Contemporary History and the History of Historiography at the University of Bologna, she is member of the scientific board of the journals *Passato e Presente*, *Journal of Modern European History*, and *Nazioni e Regioni*, and member and founder member of several Historic Research Associations; currently her research interests focus on the relationship between public history and museums.

### **CHRIS WHITEHEAD**

Professor of Museology at The International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies (ICCHS) at Newcastle University, and member of the University's Cultural Affairs Steering Group and the Great North Museum's Board, his research activities focus on historical and contemporary museology and on education and interpretation practices in art museums and galleries; he has carried out several research project and published extensively in the field of museums studies.

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## *Acknowledgments*

This book grew out of a series of conferences, seminars and events promoted by Project MeLa - *European Museums in an age of migrations*, a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded in 2011 within the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) by the European Commission under the Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities Programme.

Adopting the notion of ‘migration’ as a paradigm of the contemporary global, multicultural reality, MeLa has been analysing the role of museums in 21st century Europe. The mission, strategies and tools of these institutions are being significantly challenged by the complex phenomena that characterise contemporaneity - such as the significant changes in demographic flows; the accelerated mobility and the resulting layerisation and hybridisation of societies and identities; the fluid circulation of information, ideas and cultures, and the consequent improvement of cultural encounters and cross-fertilisations; the politic, economic and cultural processes related to the creation and consolidation of the European Union. By considering their evolution both as cultural spaces and physical places, the main objective of the MeLa Project is to identify innovative museum practices that aim to enhance mutual understanding and social cohesion, as well as to build a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity.

Since its launch in March 2011, during a symposium held at the Musei Capitolini and MAXXI in Rome, MeLa has been promoting a widespread circulation and use of the knowledge advancement produced by the research, by providing open access to all its publications and facilitating dialogue and exchange through the organisation of several events. A number of conferences, seminars and brainstorming sessions have brought together scholars and museum practitioners from different countries, in order to help sharing various experiences, findings and perspectives, to favour the dialogue between people from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds, and to foster the coalescence of theoretical and practical problems, tasks and outcomes.

Among the events promoted by MeLa, the Midterm Seminar at the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris ('Let the Museum Speak', 24 September 2013) represented an important milestone fostering introspection, dissemination, and a collection of new findings and stimuli. By triggering a multi-disciplinary and multi-perspective critical debate about the transformations of contemporary museums, the Seminar was conceived to capture the complexity of these processes, while favouring a cross-fertilisation between the scientific outcomes developed by the scholars involved in the MeLa Project and the innovative experiences promoted by some pioneering museum directors and curators who conceived and updated them.

This volume offers an overview of the most innovative experiences that were gathered through the exchange opportunities promoted by the MeLa Project.

The editors would like to thank all the scholars who contributed to this book with their ideas and suggestions, as well as all the museums and their staffs who made the realisation of these events and this publication possible.

# Contemporary Museums between Theory and Practice

LUCA BASSO PERESSUT

Museums are *real* places: architectural and display spaces in which the physical conditions are created for exhibiting artworks, artefacts, installations, and performances. Museum exhibitions are the physical framework that enables the interpretation and representation of tangible and intangible heritage. In museums, narratives are *staged* through the practices of curatorship and architectural and exhibition design, and *truths* – different, uncertain, contested – (Fromm et al., 2014) are handled in the different narratives they are related to (e.g. history, science, art, nature, technology, etc.). It is taken for granted that these truths are corroborated by the authenticity of collections, artworks, objects, and documents; when displayed in a museographic setting, they are presented to the eye and intellect as manifestations of a defined relationship – at that time and in that space – between theory and practice.

The question of the relationship between theory and practice in museums is not new, and rather it is part of their history (Genoways and Andrei, 2008). Nevertheless we can say that in our present era, in which the relationship between the museum and society is becoming increasingly complex, new theoretical concepts and practices are needed (Marstine, 2006) to cross the social, cultural, and disciplinary borders which have been at the core of the construction of the theoretical frame of museum narratives over the past two centuries. This should be done by comparing different positions and points of view, and critically investigating how power is exercised – the power of organisational structures, internal hierarchies, political influences, or the pressure of public opinion, which are confronted with the rationales of scientific research. In relation to the question of ‘Who is speaking on behalf of whom?’ in museum exhibitions, James Clifford has written that ‘[t]he solution is inevitably contingent and political: a matter of mobilized power, of negotiation, of representation constrained by specific audiences’ (Clifford, 1997, p.208). As the outcome of this negotiation, the museum setting represents a provisional step forward in the process of knowledge advancement, and can be used either briefly or over a longer period as a tool for communication and convincement, stating a position that is legitimated by the institutional and statutory nature of the museum.

Today, the relationship between theory and practice is not only related to the ‘academics–museum professionals’ polarity. In fact, many of the figures involved actually have a foot in both camps. In many respects, university research and research in museums

come across using disciplinary structures that back to a long time ago but which are increasingly interacting and intertwining so as to create new configurations. In particular when it comes to conceive, organise, and create a display or a new museum, the interdisciplinary feature of work in museums is reshuffling the relationship between theory and practice, in the light of those actions which are *par excellence* design-related and, consequently, creative and prefigurative.

Theories relating to the contemporary museum provide a horizon of reference for exhibition design practices and outline the objective of these activities through a two-way tension that is addressed to the continuous re-founding of this institution in relation to the transformation of society. Since museums can no longer be ascribed only to the Foucaultian category of heterotopia (which, as institutions responsible for the dissemination of the dominant ideologies, historically favoured their development as privileged places for the allocation of economic resources), and because they now are in the ‘arena’ of the cultural and social conflicts of the modern world, they have lost the *aura* stemming from their role as guarantors of history. At the same time, museums have acquired a new democratic and pro-active role in the construction of identities and social memories, as well as in the development, production, and transmission of knowledge, which may be useful for the ‘being in the world’ of the citizens of a global territory that is undergoing profound transformations.

As an institution ‘at the service of society’ (according to ICOM’s statutes), the museum must first ask, and then re-ask, itself about the social structures it should represent, the type and composition of its public, and its expectations in terms of operation and proposals. Half a century after the studies by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Dardel, new systematic research at the European level may be required to understand the ethnic, religious, generational, cultural, and gender features which characterise the contemporary museums’ visitors. This initiative could be developed through the construction of a co-ordinated network, based on common and comparable formats collecting information and data about these aspects, building up a database at the European scale. These tools would significantly help to understand current trends and outline the new tasks for a cultural institution that is so strategic for the formation of social and community values. Nevertheless, we must not forget that there exists a hiatus between the dynamics of theoretical reflection and what can actually be done: a hiatus that has to do with the times and ways in which things are implemented, and with possibilities, desires, available resources, and the capacity to give shape to proposals. The museum world has long been stabilised by its historical roots and the inertia that is inherent in all institutional structures, as well as by the physical solidity of museum buildings; and these are amongst many factors that inevitably slow down, or even obstruct, the processes of change. It follows that addressing the theory-practice relationship in museums, does not only mean to investigate the purpose of the museum in society, but above all to find out how to concretely pursue that purpose in a way that society can perceive and understand. This

also means looking at the outcomes and effectiveness of the museographic representations once they have been completed. As Iain Chambers recently wrote, '[b]eyond mere adjustment and modification, the museum as a critical space needs to become something more, something else' (Chambers, 2014, p.243). That may be so, but can all of it be possible without deconstructing and rethinking the meaning of the museum as an institution? And how should this be done? This is certainly one of the most significant challenges that museums already have to deal with and that will have to continue to be addressed in years to come.

As stated in the program of the European Research Project MeLa - Museums in an Age of Migrations,<sup>1</sup> the redefinition of the museum's role in contemporaneity is a key component of current political agenda, because the museum institution emerges as the one that can hold together the tensions between local and global, self and other, inclusion and exclusion. It is here that the complexity of our inter/multi/transcultural society acquires a visible form. This is especially true for those museums that focus on such themes which were born out of the post-colonial and post-industrial age, when great national narratives have given way to a multiplicity of stories and voices. Yet, as the consequences of migrations and globalisation are so pervasive of all aspects of present day life, the whole museum world seems to be called into question, involving history museums, ethnographical, archaeological, identitarian, art, science, local, city museums, and many more at once.

In the light of the global transformations occurring in this new millennium - migration, mobility, the nomadism of people, ideas and things - museums are scheduling a very hectic agenda including the recognition and representation of minorities and 'other' cultures (for instance, in ethnographic and anthropological museums, and in *musées de société*), the inclusion of 'difficult' or 'hot' topics (e.g. wars, racism, slavery, diaspora, violence, human rights, etc.), and the participation of social groups in running the museum, or in 'co-creating' exhibitions and events.<sup>2</sup> More generally, it is also possible to perceive a growing need to enable visitors from different origins and cultural backgrounds to recognise values and narratives in *all* kinds of museums, irrespective of how deeply (in relation to the genealogy of the institution) their organisation and content are rooted in Western history and culture.

Within this scenario, it is becoming increasingly clear that museums are powerfully committed to the theme of representing contemporaneity and its complexity. In general, complexity now affects every field, from sciences, to politics and knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to develop a culture of complexity. In particular, in museums complexity should be dealt with as an area of investigation that is continuously in progress, and is not limited to amassing information but repeatedly redesigns the network holding together knowledge and skills that are always moving.

It is true that the use of the past in museums has always been *in the present*, serving

ideologies that were active when they were first set up. Nevertheless, when dealing with compelling contemporary issues (what is happening at the moment or has recently happened), museums have to tackle with significant theoretical and practical issues concerning the selection of heritage and the related narratives. Within the framework of a condition which, by compressing the period it covers, annuls the historical perspective that has been the analytical and interpretative paradigm of the traditional museum, a new perspective needs to be developed on a different basis. In such areas as the arts, the physical sciences, the social sciences and the historical disciplines, it will be important to implement interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches, that tend to intertwine multiple points of view and reasoning processes. To mention some examples: several city museums have added new sections that address not only the physical changes but also the social transformations occurring in the metropolis; some natural science and technology museums have included new issues related to sustainability, pollution, climate change, and the impact of scientific discoveries on society and lifestyles. For example, as reported by Denis Chevallier, MuCEM in Marseille deals with such matters as 'AIDS care and how the disease is socially perceived; changes in gender-related rituals; job salaries in contemporary cities; wearing veils and headscarves; football fan culture; aspects of worship and pilgrimage shared by the various monotheistic faiths; waste-based economies.'<sup>3</sup>

As was recently discussed during an international conference held at MuCEM,<sup>4</sup> the question is: how can museums create ways of exhibiting contemporaneity that are active tools reflecting the *becomingness* of the events and transformations that are taking place? In other words, how can museums respond to the challenge of contemporaneity? What should they put on display? What should a museum be narrating?

And moreover, what sort of contemporary material should be collected? In this regard, the selection criteria for defining the inclusion or exclusion of artefacts and documents pose new problems of merit and method, especially when dealing with the immediacy of representing everyday life. In 1992 the Director of the Science Museum in London, Neil Cossons, was already raising the acquisition policy issue: 'I suspect we should actually be collecting a lot more contemporary, perhaps ephemeral in the long term, material, having what I call a "transit shed" approach to acquisition. [...] We don't have either the natural selection of the past which has left us only a small portion of its relics from which to collect, nor do we have the perspective of time with which to determine what is, and is not, significant in the longer term. What we have got is the real stuff, immediately available to us, and for virtually nothing. We could put it into a store for a very, very low cost per cubic foot and leave it there for as long as we like for very, very little cost. Then, at the end of twenty five years or fifty years or whenever we feel like it, we can get it out again, evaluate it and so on, and it is still new.' (Cossons, 1992, p. 129) The wide-ranging approach to acquisitions described by Cossons is now being applied in various museums, for instance, as in the experience of the Écomusée du Val

de Bièvre,<sup>5</sup> through specific calls for the donation of objects from the community, in relation to the areas covered by the museum, in order to promote temporary exhibitions or expanding existing collections.

These issues raise the question related to the role of the curator when selecting material that might be extremely heterogeneous and of unpredictable value. Furthermore, they introduce the problem of the creation of special buildings provided with adequate storage spaces to hold these collections, which have become so important that their integration in the new museums' project has become an architectural paradigm.

For example, in parallel with the construction of the main museum building, the realisation of MuCEM included a separate site, the 'Centre de Conservation et de Ressources (CCR)', which is a 13,000 square metre storage and archiving space designed by Corinne Vezzoni and André Jollivet. This building houses 'a total of almost 250,000 objects; 130,000 paintings, prints, and drawings; 450,000 photographs; almost 100,000 books and periodicals, as well as paper, audio and audio-visual archives.'<sup>6</sup> In the United States, the Cultural Resources Center in Suitland, Maryland, completed in 1998, serves as the storage and archive facility for the Native American collections, providing two museums - the George Gustav Heye Center in New York and the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington<sup>7</sup> - with exhibitions and events. This space can be considered an interesting example for the organisation of participatory projects, not only in relation to the promotion of events but also in architectural terms. In Switzerland, the Schaulager at Münchenstein in Basel is presented as 'a new kind of space for art,'<sup>8</sup> serving not only as storage for the collections of the historical Kunstmuseum, but also as an innovative place for temporary exhibitions.

At the dawn of the new millennium, one important issue in the organisation of museums concerns the relationship between museological disciplines, museum design and museography, against the background of a reflection on the theory and practice of colonialism in the modern age, and on the possibility to overcome them within the context of the multi- and transcultural condition which is affecting every area of thought and social action.

Today nationalism, meant as theory and practice of the 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983), still represents a way of 'being in the world', although it is obviously not the only one. Another is localism, intended as a sense of belonging to a more or less extensive community that is strongly rooted in a territory and its traditions. Other ways of belonging are now becoming more visible. In a context characterised by diaspora, migration, nomadism, mobility, being in the world today may be ascribable to the Heideggerian condition of *Unheimlichkeit*, to a sense of disorientation or 'not feeling at home' (Heidegger, 1927). This state may be intended as a fundamental aspect of the ceaselessly moving human condition. It brings about the need to *appropriate* the places in which we find ourselves living, though temporarily, and thus to claim our entitlement to be visible,

to declare our existence, and to be recognised as individuals or members of a group or community (Taylor, 1992). Indeed, compared to just a few decades ago, the concepts of identity and citizenship among individuals, groups or communities now consist less of similarities and more of differences; they have become composite and contaminated, and have hybridised into the multiplicity of possible affiliations and differences.

Moreover, museums are places that are ‘inhabited’ by their visitors. By using the museum spaces, they manifest their presence as active subjects, and develop particular relationships with the exhibited content, and with its relevance in their everyday activities and experiences.

The decolonisation of museums, the recognition and representation of the various cultures, which were the subject of subjugation and are now part of a multiethnic Europe, have become core topics in the process of constructing the European identity. The ongoing post-colonial transformation of ethnographic, anthropological and ‘colonial’ museums is related to a specific social stance concerning the message these museums convey to a globalised public, which is now tending to overcome the superseded Eurocentric vision of the world (Thomas, 2010). Since ‘far from being “negotiated”, “reinvented” or “forgotten”, the colonial past is just transferred and re-written into a present global concern’, as stated by Nélia Dias (2008, p.309), the conception of a post-colonial museum in our ‘age of migrations’ requires historical and critical reflections on museographic theories and practices. These reflections may be developed, for example, by means of innovative strategies fostering involvement and participation, in relation to the fact that, when those ‘colonised others’ move to Europe, they become part of ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities that claim their own entitlement to be recognised as social actors (Chambers et al., 2014).

Anyway, the post-colonial museum cannot be separated from its point of origin. In one way or another, every historical museum in the Western world originated from colonial beginnings that were both internal and external to the nations that were colonised: conquests, despoliations, acquisitions poisoned by strongly unbalanced power relationships, and so on. In general, contemporary museums, particularly those dedicated to ‘other’ cultures, suffer from that ‘original sin’ of having been historically created and grown up in the shadow of the colonial theories and practices developed by European states (as illustrated by the Musée Napoleon, or the thefts of works of art which took place in early nineteenth century Europe and during the Second World War) (Wescher, 1976; Nicholas, 1994), as well as by the non-European countries that were conquered and colonised *manu militari* (Barringer and Flynn, 1998; Bennett, 2004).

This issue raises an important question: the undermined approach to the colonial facet of the European cultural and political history, which some museums have already implemented or are implementing, may conceal the possible deletion of such important aspect. Undoubtedly, the history of the colonial era is not an easy topic to deal with, but

the ways in which these museums once represented the colonies and the relationships between the settlers and the colonised are part of what we know about the policies and ideologies of that particular era (Dias, 2000). In the post-colonial representation of the history of colonialism, this story should be kept and critically re-interpreted. In practical terms, the former colonial museums that have been reorganised in a post-colonial sense should still have space in which to retain at least parts of their original displays, which bear witness to that specific past and to the ways in which it was trumpeted in Europe in relation to an ideology we now abhor, by creating a sort of ‘museum of the history of colonialist ideology’ within post-colonial museums. As stated by Susan Legène, the ethnographic and colonial collections cannot only be used as sources of information about non-Western cultures, but can also be considered as ‘archives documenting how European societies and their ideologies were established, which may thus have a role to play in post-colonial societies’ (Legène, 2000, p. 101).

On the other hand, museums are also representations of *themselves* in the historical facet or their organisation and structures. They are in fact a heritage that testifies the culture of an era which has materialised in the particular ‘form of the museum’, in its organisation, its exhibition devices, its *décor*, typology, and architecture. Therefore, why should these museums not recount the colonial past and the strategies of communication used by colonialism, perhaps also re-reading and re-interpreting the original displays? Would that not be the best way to sustain a critical discourse on colonialism, on its heritage, and on contemporary forms of colonialism and imperialism, thus activating an intercultural dialogue without deleting the history of a representational model that is now considered obsolete? (L’Estoile, 2007).

In Paris, the conversion of the colonial museum first opened in 1931 (as the *Musée des Colonies*) into a museum of the history of immigration, together with the renovation of another important anthropological and ethnographic museum (*Musée de l’Homme*), and the related transfer and relocation of parts of their collections into a new museum (*Musée du quai Branly*), represent in my opinion an exemplary case study in the contradictions between what it is desired to do, what can practically be done, and what actually happens in the framework of the post-colonial renewal of contemporary museums, particularly in view of the considerable financial resources and the richness of the collections that are available. As if to demonstrate how controversial the strategies are for transforming the post-colonial legacy, a clash that took place entirely within the theoretical debate on the new characteristics and themes of the new museum made it impossible to give the *Musée du quai Branly* a meaningful name other than that of the street that passes in front of it (Clifford, 2007; Dias, 2008).

The end product of the *Musée du quai Branly* is an aestheticising exhibition space which looks like an ‘Ark of Cultures’, an initiatory journey through time and space immersed in the kaleidoscopic setting designed by Jean Nouvel. Although it has met with great success in terms of visitor numbers, this outcome does not seem entirely effective.<sup>9</sup>

I find the *Pavillon des Sessions* at the Louvre (opened in 2000) a more convincing alternative to the Musée du quai Branly – rather than a mere ‘antenna’, as it has been called – because of the clarity and consistency in the selection of artefacts and the quality of the installations designed by Jean-Michel Wilmotte, which are free of any metaphorical and ideological redundancy.

At the same time, the decision to restore and maintain the colonial architectural character of Albert Laprade’s *Palais de la Porte Dorée* and its extraordinary decorations, as the setting for a new narrative, was certainly a positive way of creating a dialogue between past and present – and had the unforeseen effect of creating a sense of identification between the *sans-papiers* immigrant workers who occupied the museum at the end of 2010 and the colonial frescoes in the central hall, against which the workers photographed one another, sending the pictures to relatives in their countries of origin as if to say ‘here we are, represented in these paintings!’.

Yet, the *Palais de la Porte Dorée* still has no section dedicated to the 1931 Colonial Exhibition, of which the traces can still partly be seen in the Bois de Vincennes, nor to the history of the Musée des Colonies, that was intended to remain as the only permanent element of the 1931 Exhibition (Morton, 2000). Had this been done, the dialogue between past and present would have been more precise and better documented.<sup>10</sup>

The impression remains that the new post-colonial condition has actually been acting as censor, by trying to use the narration of the history of immigration to avoid any need to discuss the often tragic aspects of the French colonial period. As underlined by Camilla Pagani, this may be symptomatic of the fact that ‘in French cultural policies there is still no awareness of our colonial history’ (Pagani, 2014, p.343).

Another worthwhile example of the new approach to post-colonial stances is the Royal Museum for Central Africa at Tervuren, near Brussels, often referred to as ‘the last colonial museum’.<sup>11</sup> Within the ongoing extensive renovation, which includes the complete preservation of the building and 60% of the original exhibition settings, the historical architecture and displays are becoming ‘evocative of colonial memories as a testament to the museographic culture of the time’.<sup>12</sup> The physical distance this project leaves between the historical building and the new wing, containing the entrance and the spaces for temporary exhibitions, emphasises the critical distance between past and present – but does not erode the memory of the museum’s past. If the project is developed according to this approach, we shall have an interesting example of how a new model for the post-colonial museum can be installed within a former colonial museum and can exist alongside it.

Against the crisis of rating systems based on clear separation between disciplines, as adopted by modernity to organise knowledge and the political structures relating to power hierarchisation and social class differentiation, nowadays museums have to travel – through ‘inclusions’ and ‘exclusions’ – new roads to exhibit and tell stories. This involves enacting practices that draw on a number of design and communication

disciplines, while highlighting the need of an ever-changing museum model, where some elements are more stable – the architecture, the collections – whilst others – the exhibitions – are more mobile.

Hence, contemporary art enters the historical-anthropological or naturalistic museums to ‘undermine’ well-established knowledge and interpretations, while science and technology open up new visions within fine arts museums, the photo reportage conveys life immediacy to city museums, and theatre performances involve the visitors’ participation in knowledge appropriation (e.g. cultural events held in the National Museum of the American Indian’s rotunda in Washington) (Lonetree and Cobb, 2008). All of them are practices geared towards breaking up settled interpretative models, stimulating new points of view, and encouraging different ways of creating culture.

Identifying the temporary exhibitions as past and current integral part of that renewal process affecting the idea of museum that has occurred over the last century, today we see that the temporary exhibition models can be the expression of exciting cultural investigations, actual workshops<sup>13</sup> operating in the front line within a dialectic interchange between the stability of museum spaces and the research of new forms of representation. Theme-based temporary exhibitions and multidisciplinary practices have become experimental forms of museum-related communication, which have the potential to investigate and test new ways to represent a number of themes connected with contemporary museums. Among others, the following are worth mentioning, such as the ‘Le Musée Cannibale’ exhibition, organised in 2002–2003 at the *Musée d’Ethnographie de Neuchâtel* (MEN), which displayed the historical desire to feed on others, that led to the creation and development of the museums of ethnography (Gonseth et al., 2002); the contribution of artists, such as Mark Wilson at the Maryland Historical Society in 1992 (‘Mining the Museum’), soliciting ‘a more open, inclusive relationship between cultural institutions and the communities they serve’ (Corrin, 1994), and Mark Dion at the Oakland Museum of California in 2010 (‘The Marvellous Museum: Orphans, Curiosities & Treasures’) examining how museum practices have shifted over time (Dion et al., 2010); to conclude with the examples presented in a recent essay by Marco Borsotti, who highlighted these lines of research (Borsotti, 2013).

It is no accident that the most challenging aspects of the Musée du quai Branly programme are connected with the relevant content conveyed by temporary exhibitions, conferences, films and performances. The sequence of about sixty temporary exhibitions that were held so far, starting from the very first, ‘D’un regard l’Autre’ in 2006 (Le Fur, 2006), evidences the role these initiatives played in implementing and integrating the permanent exhibitions’ narratives, thus turning the museum into a privileged place for research and experimentation, and fostering the continuous renovation of its mission. Museums should be increasingly organised as spaces designed for ever changing exhibitions, that is as a mere frame for works to be exhibited in rotation, characterised by uninterrupted rebuilding of the exhibition structures that are actual *narrative theatres*,

where space, time, body, movement, memory, emotion make up the substratum for the various levels in which communication operates.

We may also wonder: how crucial is the museum's exhibition dimension, as traditionally seen in its physical expression of architecture and installations, or rather is it still the best way to communicate? Should we not devise new forms of representation which may go beyond the traditional museographic form?

Immaterial heritage, oral and visual evidence, document digitalisation techniques are now part of a new collection and exhibition typology, which requires strategic approaches to archiving, management and transmission of information, and lead to a completely new interpretation of the museum physical structure. All of the settled products and heritage belong to that 'archives of the world', making up the substratum from which museums draw documents. They are the words required to build multiple discourses and narratives, ranging from those of individuals, families, groups and communities, up to those concerning the History of peoples and countries. The *Memory of the World* Unesco Programme, states that 'the world's documentary heritage [the documented, collective memory of the peoples of the world - their documentary heritage - which in turn represents a large proportion of the world's cultural heritage] belongs to all, should be fully preserved and protected for all and, with due recognition of cultural mores and practicalities, should be permanently accessible to all without hindrance.'<sup>14</sup> All tangible and intangibles collections should be considered as complete archives from which to extract the documents required, from time to time, for the creation of new communication campaigns, the development of new curatorial practices, and the conception of new narratives.

The opportunities offered by research on the fields of advanced technologies find practical applications in the creation of exhibitions that allow intersections and cross interpretations, recreating dynamics that pass over the fixity of architecture and display. The use of ICT may foster multiple approaches to exhibitions (also those more sedimented from a historical point of view), as it allows building tailored and subjective routes, provides new information layers from which an individual selection of new routes and multidisciplinary investigations is available, creates new types of relationships between geographically remote museums, and finally brings together different information, documentation and knowledge.

Today, it is already possible to exhibit real objects and, at the same time, to connect them (their images, information, documents) through multimedia and network communication devices, to build connections with the objects included in other museums, as well as to represent and process the progress of research on them. From this point of view, a case is particularly revealing, that of the Parthenon marbles scattered across Athens (Acropolis Museum), London (British Museum), Paris (Louvre), Copenhagen (National Museum of Denmark), Munich (Glyptothek), the Vatican Museums,

the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and the University of Würzburg. In fact, it would be possible to organise exhibitions and installations with reproductions (maybe holographic) that could complete the original versions from different museums, thus creating an organic reading of split fragments.

Beside the initiatives promoted by the British Museum (i.g. the 2003 virtual reality exhibition of the Parthenon Marbles and the 3D modelling of the Olympian gods of the frieze), a little though meaningful example of the use of ICT can be found in an initiative promoted by the Nationalmuseet of Copenhagen, where the archaeological section today includes two small heads which were part of a metope that is now in London. Here, a video presents the story of the acquisition, shows the virtual re-composition process of the whole element that was possible due to an initial laser-scanner survey of the separate parts, and illustrates the likely original hue according to recent archaeological studies. Implemented on a large scale, this exhibition solution could offer a comprehensive and comparative view of all the sculptures of the ancient monument, and contribute to new reflections concerning the long-standing disputes about repatriation of such finds to Greece. Many other cases can be treated the same way, and not only in the archaeology and art fields, for example through strategic projects aimed at virtually reunifying scattered collections or links of knowledge between types of objects that cannot be moved from where they are (because they are strictly related to local communities or museums, or are part of the architectural heritage).

Architecture has always played a distinctive role in moulding the museum experience. Its forms and languages have characterised the institution identity: the classical style of the very first art museums, or the regional style of ethnographic museums in the late nineteenth century; the 'Modern Style' of the twentieth-century museums; the architectural 'extravaganza' of colonial museums, the redundancy of certain global contemporary museums, above all in the contemporary art field, the so-called museums of hyper-consumption, spaces of the 'new conformism' as well as of the 'conflict' between artistic production and economic interest (Purini, 2006, p.55).

Actually, architecture is a form of sensitive-rather-than-discursive narrative (Psarra, 2009) which, when it comes to museums, takes on a specific connotation depending on the content. It is indisputable that, in such cases as the Musée de la Grande Guerre du Pays de Meaux,<sup>15</sup> the Museum of quai Branly, the Jewish Museum of Berlin and so on, the symbolic role of architecture is a key component of museum communication and of its influence in the relationship with visitors.

Referring to what Michael Ames wrote twenty years ago concerning museums, that 'are undergoing further changes which will likely produce a new kind of museum by the twenty-first century resembling only vaguely what we know today' (Ames, 1992, p.11), the issue related to museum-form and museum-space as tangible expressions of a new way for the museums to be in the civil space, is increasingly of great interest. From an architectural viewpoint, the nineteenth century-styled hall and gallery (with

the typical use of *décor*, colours and upholstery), the modernist white cube (with its minimal aesthetics and ideology) and the multimedia black box, leave the way open to free experimenting with the functional reuse of existing buildings' space (warehouses, power stations, disused factories) where the current cultural production finds its expression through new relationships between object, subject and space, and define now (and in future) the museum as a place for action and activity, rather than a place for aesthetic contemplation.

If we consider the relationship between architecture, interior space and exhibition design in new museums, it is as if we were in front of a double 'shell': the external fixed part corresponding to the architecture of the city and its image, and the changeable, adjustable one, corresponding to interior space (or spaces), that is the modifiable frame (as if it were theatrical machinery) containing different exhibition sets or artists' installations. The idea of the museum as a *stage set* for a collective drama, which becomes itself a new advanced form of representation, is increasingly catching on.

Furthermore, today museums express their positioning in the public place sector as 'machines' aimed to intensify the experiences shared by the city life based on a network of mixed, erratic, net-like relationships, according to a dot-like morphology of lifestyles, spaces, objects and new architectural configurations. As mobility redesigns social structures as well as contemporary landscape forms, the museums are delocalised on the territory or at the infrastructure junctions themselves (railway stations, airports, underground stations), intersecting the connection networks that make new - even cultural - centres possible and geographically diffused.

Similarly to what happens with contemporary art, that appropriates urban spaces through interventions in abandoned areas, on the buildings' blank walls, within the disused factories' fences and in public squares, by means of installations, shows and combining their own messages with those of advertising mega-posters, museums exhibition spaces migrate to discover new references between 'interior' and 'exterior'. Museums located at different sites become a socially valuable strategy of intervention. They have proved to potentially be an urban and regional re-generation tool, according to a line of 'border-crossing or rather, involvement of all visual practices' (Celant, 2008, p.3), geared towards a cultural and aesthetic project applied to the environment surrounding us.

Within the current global communication context, the museum aspires to go 'out of itself' so as to stage the metropolitan and regional spaces with fragments and splinters of its no longer operating historical typology. The 'sprawling' museum interweaves a map by strategic points, bringing the 'art of exhibiting' in again as an ongoing and fruitful search for a close relationship between artefacts and humanised contexts, that leads us to new connections between theory and practice in museums, and thus to their institutional and architectural metamorphosis.

<sup>1</sup> Wescher, P., 1976. *Kunstraub unter Napoleon*. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Urlag.

See the MeLa Project website: <<http://www.mela-project.eu>> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>2</sup> Jannelli and Thiel, here pp.64-72.

<sup>3</sup> Here p.103.

<sup>4</sup> See the International conference held at MuCEM (5th - 7th December 2013), ‘Exposer, s’exposer: de quoi le musée est-il le contemporain? / Exposing, exposing oneself: what are the museum’s contemporaries?’. [Online] Available at: <<http://www.mucem.org/fr/node/1643>> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>5</sup> Delarge, here pp.56-63.

<sup>6</sup> [Online] Available at: <http://www.mucem.org/en/mucem/one-museum-three-sites/centre-conservation-and-resources-ccr> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>7</sup> ‘The architectural program and design for the building were the result of numerous consultations and collaborations with NMAI staff, design professionals, and a cross-section of Native peoples from throughout the Western Hemisphere and Hawai’i.’ The architectural program, ‘The Way of the People’ was developed by a team of consultants led by Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates. The architectural design was developed by the Polshek Partnership of New York, Tobey + Davis of Virginia, and the Native American Design Collaborative, a consortium of Native design professionals and cultural consultants.’ See website: <<http://nmai.si.edu/explore/collections/crc>> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>8</sup> The Schaulager project by Herzog & de Meuron was completed in 2002. See website: <<http://schaulager.org/en/index.php?pfad=schaulager/konzept>> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>9</sup> As the designer stated: ‘In a place inhabited by symbols of forests and rivers, by obsessions of death and oblivion, it is an asylum for censored and cast off works from Australia and the Americas. It is a loaded place haunted

with dialogues between the ancestral spirits of men, who, in discovering their human condition, invented gods and beliefs. It is a place that is unique and strange, poetic and unsettling.’ (Nouvel, 2006) To James Clifford, Quai Branly ‘is making theater, not writing theory’ (Clifford, 2007, p.6), to Herman Lebovics the museum is above all ‘a performance’ (Lebovics, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> The two great Paris exhibitions of the Thirties, the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale* (1931) and the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques dans la Vie Moderne* (1937), appear to be complementary events, epitomising myths and values of that time: the scientific and technological progress connected with the colonialist practices of resource appropriation in non-European countries, disguised as modernisation ideologies, according to the colonialism-civilisation-progress triad, with a unique theme interchange between the two whose heritage we can see in the following museums: the *Musée des Colonies*, now *Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration* at Port Dorée and the *Palais de la Découverte* at Grand Palais.

<sup>11</sup> Ceuppens, here pp.83-99.

<sup>12</sup> ‘The museum building is protected, as are some of its more contested colonial objects, including the four golden statues in the rotunda, the plaques commemorating Belgians who died in the Congo Free State, and the old glass cases that were created to parcel up Congolese nature and culture on a taxonomic basis. The museum thus faces the immense challenge of creating a postcolonial exhibition in what remains essentially a colonial building.’ Ceuppens, here p.91.

<sup>13</sup> See the Stadtlabor of the Historical Museum Frankfurt, in Jannelli and Thiel, here pp.64-72.

<sup>14</sup> See website: <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001256/125637e.pdf>> [Accessed March 2014].

<sup>15</sup> See Rouger, here pp.137-147.

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# Authors' Profiles

## FRANCESCA LANZ and ELENA MONTANARI

Francesca Lanz and Elena Montanari, PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design, are post-doc research fellows in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, and adjunct professors of Interior Architecture at the School of Architecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano. Since 2011 they have been investigating the evolution of contemporary museums in the framework of the EU founded Project MeLa - *European Museums in an Age of Migrations*.

## CÉCILE AUFAURE, *Curator, Musée de l'Homme*

Cécile Aufaure is Curator at the Muséum national d'Histoire Naturelle, where in 2012 she has been appointed as Director of the team programming the renovation of the Musée de l'Homme. Her experience within the museum realm includes the direction of several local museums (from 1991 to 2004) and the engagement in institutional roles (as consultant for the Directions régionales des affaires culturelles de Picardie and, subsequently, d'Île-de-France, from 2004 to 2011).

## LUCA BASSO PERESSUT

Luca Basso Peressut, Architect, PhD in Architectural Composition (IUAV, Istituto Universitario di Architettura, Venezia), he is Full Professor of Interior Architecture, Exhibition Design and Museography at the Politecnico di Milano, coordinator and member of the Academic Board of PhD in "Architectural, urban and interior design." He is co-founder and former Director of the Master course "IDEA in Exhibition Design." He is Director of the International Workshop of Museography and Archaeology "Villa Adriana-Premio Piranesi" held in Tivoli and Rome since 2003. He is member of the Scientific Committee for the National Conference of Interiors 2005, 2007 and 2010, member of the Scientific Board and co-organizer of the international conferences IFW-Interiors Forum World. He is member of the Scientific Board of Museography of Edifir Publisher and consultant for the architectural magazine Area since 1997. He

is Project Coordinator of the research “MeLa-European Museums in an age of migrations”, funded by the European Commission- Seventh Framework Programme under Socio-economic Sciences & Humanities (March 2011 - February 2015).

RICHARD BENJAMIN, *Head, International Slavery Museum*

PhD in Archaeology, since 2006 Richard Benjamin heads the International Slavery Museum team at National Museums Liverpool. He is responsible for the strategic development of the museum, partnership work and research, and supervises the running of the display galleries including the acquisition of objects and collections. He is also the Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of International Slavery, managed in partnership with the University of Liverpool. He is a Trustee of the Anthony Walker Foundation, a member of the International Scientific Committee of the UNESCO Slave Route project, and a Governor of Edge Hill University, who also awarded him an honorary doctorate in 2012.

PETER BJERREGAARD, *Senior Adviser of Exhibitions, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo*

Peter Bjerregaard has specialised in material culture and museums over the last 15 years. His work has focused on rethinking the museum institution and its role in the contemporary world, both theoretically and practically. Most recently he has been leading a national collaboration between the six Norwegian university museums with the aim of developing methods to turn exhibition making into an integral part of research. Over the years, he has been active in taking his ideas into public debate, both as speaker at museum seminars and panels, columnist and board member of the International Committee for Museums and Collections of Ethnography.

CHRISTOPH BONGERT, *Science Communication, Deutsches Auswandererhaus Bremerhaven*  
Christoph Bongert has been working in the field of science communication at the German Emigration Center in Bremerhaven since 2013. He studied philosophy, modern history, general linguistics and German philology at the Universities of Tübingen and Berlin (HU). After receiving his degree in 2010, he worked freelance as an editor of academic writings and as a research assistant at the Spandau Citadel, Berlin.

PIERANGELO CAMPODONICO, *Director, Galata Museo del Mare*

Pierangelo Campodonico is Director of the Institution Mu.MA - Maritime and Navigation Museums. Since 1988 he has been contributing to the renovation and promotion of several institutions managing and promoting the maritime heritage of Genoa. Over

the years, his research and passion for navigation and museums resulted in the publication of various catalogues and books. He is a member of the International Council of Maritime Museum, and member of the secretariat of the AMMM - Association Museums Maritime of Mediterranean.

BAMBI CEUPPENS, *Anthropologist, Department of History and Anthropology, Royal Museum for Central Africa*

Since 2007 Bambi Ceuppens has been working at the Royal Museum for Central Africa on western representations of Africa and Africans, Belgian and Congolese colonial history, colonial and post-colonial popular culture in Congo, as well as autochthony, interculturalism and multiculturalism in the Flemish Region. Ph.D. in Social Anthropology, she has been Senior Researcher at the African Research Centre in the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Catholic University of Leuven, and previously cooperated with the University of Gent.

DENIS CHEVALLIER, *Director of the Department of Research and Education, Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée*

General Curator and Doctor in Ethnology Denis Chevallier has been actively involved in the cultural sector, operating within the Ethnological Heritage of the Ministry of Culture and the Inventaire Général du Patrimoine Culturel. Since 2000, he has cooperated to the evolution of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires into the Musée des civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, leading the team in charge of the reconfiguration of the new museum in Marseilles and promoting several pilot research and collection programmes concerning the Mediterranean area. In 2009 he was appointed Deputy Scientific Director of the MuCEM, where he currently operates as Head of the Department of Research and Education.

ALEXANDRE DELARGE, *Director, Écomusée du Val de Bièvre*

Alexandre Delarge is the Director of the Écomusée du Val de Bièvre, and Deputy President of the Fédération des Écomusées et des Musées de Société (FEMS). Throughout the foundation and direction of several institutions - e.g. Écomusée Salazie à la Réunion and Musée Portuaire - and the constant engagement in the elaboration of cultural projects, exhibitions, publications and management practices, he has been fostering a reflection/action on heritage issues such as participation, the dissemination of knowledge in the contemporary context, and the relationship with the museum publics.

**HÉLÈNE DU MAZAUBRUN, Director, Clock Museum and freelance curator**

Hélène du Mazaubrun is the Director of the Clock Museum in Saint-Nicolas d’Aliermont. Curator of the ethnographical collections at the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in Paris, she was also the curator of the Galerie des Dons. From several years onwards, she is consultant for various museums (e.g. Musée du Louvre, Louvre Abu Dhabi, Fondation Louis Vuitton pour la Création). She studied museology in Quebec, and developed a special focus in the new technologies to “reveal” collections; she currently teaches museology in several universities. In side of the Compagny 14:20, which created the New Magic, she has been fostering a reflection on the “museography of the invisible”. Through her special attention to Sustainable Development, she created the network ‘Scéno&co’ between French museums, in order to recycle scenographic elements.

**ANGELA JANNELLI, Curator, Historisches Museum Frankfurt**

Angela Jannelli, Ph.D., works as curator at the Historical Museum Frankfurt since 2010. She is responsible for the ‘Bibliothek der Alten’ (Library of the Elder), an artistic reminiscence project. She is also the project coordinator of the exhibitions ‘Frankfurt Today!’ and ‘StadtLabor’, based on the principle of participation and focussing present day Frankfurt.

**VITO LATTANZI, Head Curator, Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico ‘Luigi Pigorini’**  
After studying Ethnology and History of Religion at the ‘Sapienza’ University in Rome, Vito Lattanzi has developed a special focus on the Mediterranean cultures and the anthropological aspects of cultural heritage. He has designed and organised several exhibitions and museums, and widely published historical and theoretical contributions. He is a board member of Simbdea (Società Italiana per la museografia e i beni demoetnoantropologici) and of the journal *Antropologia Museale*, both founded in 2001.

**MARIE POINSOT, Curator, Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration**

Marie Poinsot is Editor-in-Chief of the journal published by the Musée de l’Histoire de l’Immigration, Hommes et Migrations.

CATHY ROSS, *Director of Collections and Learning - Honorary Research Fellow Museum of London*

Cathy Ross has had a thirty-year career in museums. After working in curatorial roles in museums in South Yorkshire and Tyne & Wear Museums, in 1993 she joined the Museum of London, where she has worked as Head of Later London History, Chief Curator for the Galleries of Modern London and, latterly, as Director of Collections and Learning. Her interest on museums, cities and contemporary collecting, focused on the challenges of representing the complexity of cities within the walls of a city museum, has been the subject of several conference presentations and publications.

MICHEL ROUGER, *Director, Musée de la Grande Guerre du Pays de Meaux TBC*

Since 2006, Michel Rouger has participated to the conception and realisation of the Musée de la Grande Guerre du Pays de Meaux, where currently serves as Director. MA in Museology, he has previously operated in the field of culture, heritage and tourism engineering.

RAMZI TADROS, *Co-director, Approches Cultures et Territoires*

Ramzi Tadros is co-director of the association Approches Cultures et Territoires (ACT), a Marseille-based organisation fostering mediation on topics related to cultural diversity in the Region of Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur (PACA). Drawing on his training in Library and Information Sciences, he promotes education and dissemination events concerning the culture of immigration and intercultural practices, and is coordinator of the network Histoire et Mémoires des Immigrations et Territoires (RHMIT-PACA).

SONJA THIEL, *Curator, PhD Student, Project-coordinator of the Freiburg Museum-Academy (FRAMAS)*

Sonja Thiel is historian, philosopher and working as a free-lance curator. For the Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main, she has promoted several projects within the 'StadtLabor unterwegs' series, developing with a special focus on methodological aspects and on the potentials and problems of a curatorial model building upon field research, local practices, participation and cooperation.

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By reporting on a selection of innovative museological and museographical practices that are being experimented by some major European museums, the volume offers an overview on the revision of their mission, strategies and tools to enhance the approach towards the contemporary multi-cultural society.

*With contributions by*

Cécile Aufaure, Luca Basso Peressut, Richard Benjamin, Peter Bjerregaard, Christoph Bongert, Pierangelo Campodonico, Bambi Ceuppens, Denis Chevallier, Alexandre Delarge, Angela Jannelli, Vito Lattanzi, Hélène du Mazaubrun, Marie Poinsot, Cathy Ross, Michel Rouger, Ramzi Tadros, Sonja Thiel.

FRANCESCA LANZ and ELENA MONTANARI, PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design, are post-doc research fellows in the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, and adjunct professors of Interior Architecture at the School of Architecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano. Since 2011 they have been investigating the evolution of contemporary museums in the framework of the EU founded Project MeLa - *European Museums in an Age of Migrations*.

*On the cover*

Exhibition spaces under renovation. © Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Bordeaux.

