François Mairesse

COLLECTION STRATEGIES
NOW!

Most museums appear, for the public, merely as collections. The museum field has changed, museum collections have evolved drastically, especially the relation between collections, museum professionals and the public, but museum people are still mostly seen as collection keepers and collectors. The psychiatrist Henri Codet (1921) assesses collecting as an occupation that does not 'necessarily' represent a mental defect. Whilst good care has generally been taken to draw a clear distinction between the 'noble' activity of the collector or the museum and that of the mentally ill, it must nonetheless be recognised that 'healthy' collecting can get out of hand and come across as a symptom of mental deficiency. Compulsive hoarding is thus one of the symptoms associated with obsessive compulsive disorders (Neziroglu, Bubrick and Yariura 2004; Tolin, Frost and Steketee 2004; Mertenat and Girardin 2009). The house of a compulsive hoarder bears no resemblance to a home, most of it having been invaded by collections of papers, boxes, rubbish and the most incongruous of objects. The hoarder has been taken over by his or her collection, which he or she is no longer able to manage, but to which he or she cannot prevent him or herself from continuously adding. Some museums cannot escape this risk, as their galleries, and even more so their storerooms, sometimes bear a striking resemblance to pathological collections.

There is no denying that the development of the collecting practice, which was dealt with in the previous articles, is not devoid of a certain number of problems.

Along the same lines as the general situation of the 1950s, it has essentially been the 'unlimited growth' type of museum scenario (like Le Corbusier's architectural model) that has tended to prevail, leading to the major extension of most of the existing museums of the 1980s and, more generally speaking, to a two-fold increase within a quarter of a century in the number of museums worldwide. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, five specific issues would appear to be emerging as a result of this development, raising questions for the institution and its collecting practices.

The museum – an obsolete technology?

The major investment pumped into museums, as well as their relative current popularity, is no immediate guarantee of their continued development. As a technology inherited from an eighteenth century model based on the material study of collections, the way in which museums operate now finds itself challenged, particularly by new technologies and architecture.

For some, the emergence of new information and communication technologies marks a radical turning point in the way in which we read images, with many observers wondering whether museums can survive the shock of the advent of the Internet and the digital age (Deloche 2007). The creation of new *lieux de mémoire* (realms of memory), to use the expression coined by Pierre Nora and picked up on by Peter van Mensch (2005), swings in with this movement towards more or less immaterial, more or less authentic and more or less scientific collections. It is clear as to what sway television and the new media hold over the younger generations. Whilst museum visitor numbers are obviously related to their potential to adapt to these new modes of reading, we have to admit that their very 'raison d'être' as places for preserving collections and conducting research is also being challenged by the digital revolution. We could even go so far as to ask whether the physical presence of collections in museums does not perhaps hamper systematic scientific analysis: sometimes, digital databases seem more beneficial than the classical study of objects, as computer analysis produces stronger statistical results (Deloche 2001).

The great extent to which museum popularity now depends on their relationship with architecture should also be pointed out, as it has major consequences on the future of museums and their relations with collections. Tourist activity has established itself within post-industrial societies as a major branch of the economy, which is so brilliantly reflected by the spectacular new constructions intended to house museums that have emerged in the wake of the 'Bilbao effect' and the success of the beautiful building conceived by Frank Gehry for Guggenheim undertaking (Werner 2005). How-

ever, the success of these new venues has much less to do with their actual collections than with their superb architecture and their ability to offer the passing tourist a pleasant visit. The Jewish Museum of Berlin (conceived by Daniel Libeskind) was inaugurated empty. Visitors used to come to see beautiful objects and collections; except some landmark cultural relics such as Mona Lisa, Van Gogh's sunflowers or the Rosetta Stone, they almost do not see them anymore. If these new museums are supposed to represent the future of the museum field, aren't the collections themselves sometimes superfluous?

Too much stuff, too much technique

Compulsive hoarding stalks museums, as consumption society produces more and more objects, and encourages the feeling of an unlimited museum growth – as the global economy is mostly based on this axiom. The recent economic crisis and, even more so, the measures to be taken against global warming are also an invitation to revisit the collection issue from a different angle. Seeing as we have gotten as far as imagining a de-growth economy, should we not also be considering 'de-growth museums'?

The museum/sustainable development relationship does not simply boil down to saving energy or organising exhibitions on climate change (Brophy and Wylie 2008; Museums Association 2008). It raises questions about the very cornerstone of the museum, in other words the collection and the principle of accumulation. Generally speaking, museum collections tend to follow a continuous growth curve from the moment of their creation (around 1–2% per year (Lord, Lord and Nicks 1989)). This growth principle has long dominated the Western world, its economy in particular. Nonetheless, many scientists concerned about environmental issues are starting to wonder about the limits of such growth prospects, which require ever-increasing amounts of energy. Whilst sustainable development demands a rethink of our patterns of consumption, there can also be no denying the fact that current-day modes of operation in the museums (and their principle of accumulation) are also at issue. Isn't there just *too much stuff?* (National Museum Director's Conference 2003).

This general principle aside, there is also the fact that the techniques for preserving and conserving collections are also becoming increasingly expensive. The emergence of a new category of museum professionals, during the 1980s – museum registrars – and its regular development, linked with the development of museum preventive conservation methods, might explain the much better standards for collection care, but also the higher costs that such methods represent. Even if the size of the collection remains constant, the cost of managing collections is shooting up, whether in terms of storage equipment, maintaining the hygrometric climate, filtering the air, light, re-

Why should all the objects be preserved when they can perfectly well be documented?

cording and describing the collections or even curative conservation and restoration techniques. What is more, collection management funding is difficult to find, as public gratitude remains weak for such invisible investments. Whilst 'heritage is recognizable by the fact that its loss constitutes a sacrifice and its preservation demands sacrifice' (Babelon and Chastel 1980), the question of the sacrifices to be made in order to maintain it has reared its head again – sacrifices that not everyone is prepared to make.

Collections as assets

For some years now, the appointment of MBA-qualified managers in museums has to some extent boosted the possibility of collections being seen as 'assets' like any other (Miller 1997; Heal 2006). 'There have been several cases in the United States where museums have used their collection as a guarantee against a loan. Against this backdrop one wonders whether, with the current practice of disposal, there is not the risk of over-stepping a limit', sums up Peter van Mensch (2008). This is probably one of the most controversial issues as far as museum management is concerned. The sale of major works from the collections of the Jefferson University in Pennsylvania or the Abright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo has sparked criticism within the museum world, which has enjoyed wide press coverage (Morris 2007). The current financial crisis, which is hitting US museums full force, has rekindled tensions. 'Collections are not just any assets!' proclaim not only museum

directors but also a certain number of US political leaders. Some economists would claim, however, that they are (Grampp 1989). The thought that some political leader or another might pick up on such an idea, however ridiculous it may be, represents a more major concern for many museum directors.

Poorly managed collections

Therefore, with collections becoming ever more expensive, what is their pay-back if they cannot be sold without sparking controversy? This is a question that arises for museums as a whole: if they bring in no money (since they are non-profit making), what do they actually yield and how can it be measured? Generally speaking, the performance indicators (Ames 1990; Weil 1995) and economic assessments (Hendon 1979; Martin 1993), which attempt to provide an answer to this question, focus on the museum's activities. However, what of the collections? If there is a preference for not taking their market-estimated monetary value as the sole criterion, how can their 'activity' be estimated? Whilst their main purpose, at least for the public at large, is to be exhibited, the fact is that a mere 20% of their collections are on display, and for some science museums that figure drops to less than 1% (Lord, Lord and Nicks 1989). So what's the point of the rest? Not everyone is satisfied with the answers provided by the professionals (studies, research, subsequent reassessment, etc.), one of the major objections being that reserve collections are relatively useless since they are often badly managed (Heritage Health Index 2005; Richert 2003). The general trend on investments gives priority to visible aspects and events, two characteristics that are not easily applied to storeroom management. It is difficult to provide convincing answers on the use of collections if it is not possible to demonstrate familiarity with them and ensure their management.

To whom do the collections belong?

At first sight, museum collections belong to the public domain (national, regional, etc.) or the museum itself where it is set up as an association. The demands of the Native Americans in the United States or Canada, but also those of societies living in Australia, New Zealand or the Far North, have nonetheless given rise to a relatively important policy of returns, a major milestone being the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA), signed in 1990 (Mihesuah 2000; Robson, Treadwell and Gosden 2007).

Witness also the calls of several countries for the return of objects collected under questionable circumstances. The case of the Parthenon marbles or the bust of Nefertiti are just two highly publicised examples of what is a much wider controversy (Cuno 2008), and the response from the major museums, which hinges on 'the importance and value of universal museums' (ICOM 2004), is far from convincing all parties.

Sometimes the public also become involved, for example over the sale of an object from the collection (Dercon 2001). Museum staff long believed that once the collections were bought, the museum took full ownership of them. However, nowadays, this hypothesis is being increasingly challenged in the face of lobbying groups and social networks – ever more easily mobilised through the Internet.

THE EMERGENCE OF NEW STRATEGIES

Obviously, most of these issues are not of particularly recent date (Fahy 1995), but they are being expressed ever more forcefully. Various strategies have gradually emerged in the face of all the questioning.

The immaterial collection

Why should all the objects be preserved when they can perfectly well be documented? Can digital documentation solve the problems created by museum collections? New technology for developing museum databases and creating cyber-museums has allowed remarkable progress to be made (Hemsley, Cappellini and Stanke 2005; Kalay, Kvan and Affleck 2008; Parry 2010). The practice of documentation obviously goes back much further; it relates to substitutes and pure documentation. There is a whole continuum of possibilities between the original work and its indirect description by writing: moulding, copying, photo, etc.

Paul Otlet is one of the fathers of librarianship and documentation. At the turn of the twentieth century, this Belgian scholar launched the idea of a systematic compilation of all the library catalogues around the world before gradually turning to the entire range of information supports, including museum collections (Otlet 1934; Gillen 2010). Using all of the collections available worldwide (books, archives, photographs, museum objects), Otlet thus designed a fully organised form of documentation, a *sine qua non* condition for the development of the science. The launch on the Internet (of which Otlet is often quoted as one of the forerunners) of massive databases such as *Europeana* or *Google Books* is part and parcel of this desire to collect all manner of objects, more or less well digitised and described. It has been some thirty years since the possibility of shaking off the fetishist reasoning of the material collection in order to retain only the most essential information started to be discussed (Deloche 1985).

However, through its simple presence, a collection of material objects allows for a different perception, linked to the senses rather than to understanding. Through its very presence and its *aura* (Benjamin 1939), the 'real thing' still

differs in quite obvious fashion from the digital copy. However, the differences between these two worlds are getting smaller, as witnessed in 3D films and other holographic methods, for example. A few years down the line, will it not be possible to satisfactorily (or more satisfactorily) digitally capture an object to the extent that retaining it in material terms becomes superfluous?

Digital collections, in place of material ones, present some interesting features: space savings, easier management potential, digital analysis or modelling, etc. It should however be stressed that, far from providing a panacea, digital material is still also very fragile (much more so than an archaeological potsherd!), requiring highly sophisticated and expensive conservation protocols in order to ensure its preservation. In any case, digital collecting may well prove to be equally compulsive: as digital documentation appears sometimes as a bright solution for space and money saving, the temptation exists to develop a collection on unlimited perspectives, exactly in the same way as the unlimited growth scenario that used to be preeminent in the museum sector. However, within a couple of decades, some people might ask again if there is not 'too much stuff'.

The sustainable collection

Technology is definitely not a solution in itself. This means, therefore, that the answer is largely to be found in man's attitude towards the collection issue. Thus, many museums have already taken measures on an individual and responsible basis to ensure the long-term management of their heritage, avoiding any compulsive tendencies.

By way of tribute to a great British museologist, Tomislav Šola gives the name of 'Hudson's law' to the relationship between the size of a collection and its poor management – the bigger it is, the worse it becomes (Šola 2004: 252). It was in full awareness of the shortcomings of its reserves that some years back the Smithsonian Institution published a study on collection management in handbook form, which has become a reference in its field (Neves 2005). Two essential points are addressed at length therein: planning methods and the direct link between acquisition and disposal. More than any others, the questions relating to collection management require a strategic long-term vision, based on an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses relating to collections and on an analysis of the general context within which they evolve. There is not much difference between these principles and general strategic planning rules (context analysis, SWOT, vision, mission statement, defining strategic lines, operational plans, performance indicators, etc.). 'There is an emerging consensus in the United States that museums ought to have formal, written, board-approved collection plans that create a rationale for how they shape their collections' (Merrit 2008: 17). Whilst such procedures may sometimes not produce any results – simple rhetoric on the

part of the manager – there is no denying that they can also act as a backup for the implementation of a genuine collection management policy.

As a forerunner of this reasoning, the written collection policy on the acquisition, protection and use of collections, which every museum is required to draw up under the ICOM's code of ethics, could very well morph into a genuine 'collection management plan' as already exists in a large number of museums (Van de Werdt 2009). Somehow, such a management plan gives the occasion to all museum stakeholders to share and present a common view on the collection. The board and sometimes public authorities might be tempted to sell the 'useless stuff in storerooms', when curators and, mostly, conservators would sometimes protest to dispose even but one of them. However, conservators and registrars also know that (following the Hudson Law) the standards of collection care might also depend on the size of the collection. The task of the collection management plan appears thus useful for reaching a global balance between acquisition wishes, collection care technology development, collection costs mastering and sometimes disposal issues: different points of view that are not at first sight shared by all museum people.

The prospect of the global management of collections implies not only enriching them but also the possibility of 'refining', thus disposing of them. The principle of a responsible collection is based on the need to make choices, not being afraid to tackle the tricky issue of disposal. The principle of disposal, which has been accepted in some countries (generally of Protestant origin and maybe as such less influenced by the cult of relics) including Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and the United States, is banned and widely contested in many other countries that are fervent supporters of inalienability, such as France, Italy or Spain (Sénat de France 2008). The recent move to bring the principle of collection disposal into French law met with tough opposition; the bill was doomed to failure (Rigaud 2008; Clair 2007).

In *Concern at the Core*, a single chapter deals with both acquisition and disposal policy; thus the two are intrinsically linked. Besides for 'traditional' acquisition policies, several other alternative methods are also examined (shared acquisition, rental, acquisition by the community, documentation, etc.), and it is within this framework that disposal appears as the logical continuum of a consistent acquisition strategy. If it is to be accepted across the board, disposal policy somehow hinges on demonstrating that the collection is completely under control (showing that one knows what has to go and for what reason). The main objection put forward as a barrier to disposal is, therefore, a practical one – sometimes it proves too expensive, because it is less a case of selling or destroying than of documenting, assessing, removing from the inventory, transferring and, doubtless in the not-too-distant future, ensuring object 'traceability'. However, only thus is it possible to con-

As digital documentation appears sometimes as a bright solution for space and money saving, the temptation exists to develop a collection on unlimited perspectives, exactly in the same way as the unlimited growth scenario that used to be preeminent in the museum sector.

stantly maintain the trust the public places in the museum institution. There is no doubt that disposal matters are more easily dealt with when they affect multiples (manufactured objects, common natural specimens) rather than unique objects. Indeed, there are actually few radical opponents to the disposal of cheap objects, of which several copies are known to exist. As far as the actual physical removal is concerned, destruction or exchange, in particular prevail over public or private sales. Such methods are regularly used in libraries (the term *weeding* is used) and archives (for which rather specific sorting methods have been implemented).

In Europe, the Netherlands is one of the most advanced countries on the disposal front. Following a national conference organised on the subject in 1999, the Netherland Institute for Cultural Heritage was appointed to draft a new code of ethics intended to regulate any sort of deaccessioning procedure and setting out in detail how objects are to be selected, the method of transfer (priority being given to the object remaining in the public domain), documentation of the procedure, the possible use of sale income, etc. (Bergevoet 2003; Bergevoet, Kok and de Wit 2006; Kok 2007; Timmer and Kok 2007). The *LAMO* – the guide that emerged from this approach – has become a widely used tool over the years for the profession. Great Britain has also long been tackling this issue as it considers its long-term collection policy (Wilkinson 2005; Wilkinson and Cross 2007), and has adopted an active mobility strategy (loans, exchanges, etc.), and a disposal practice, as shown by the guide intended for this purpose (Museums Association 2007).

In any case, the idea of a lasting and responsible collection is based on the need to possess in-depth knowledge of the context and the will to make choices. Knowing the context involves recognising the aforementioned problems; and as for the choices to be made, disposal definitely does not always look like a panacea. However, there is no doubt that the museum, just as in the world, is not of unlimited growth.

The national collection

Whilst every museum strives in some way or another to responsibly manage its own collections, and some public initiatives have also been taken in order to jointly manage this type of issue.

The economies of scale to be achieved by sharing premises have incited several authorities to come up with joint collection management solutions. Obviously, it is often the national museums that come under the same organisation that have benefited first and foremost from such an infrastructure. The first shared operations initially focused on photographic documentation, analysis and restoration before the collections themselves were actually physically transferred. The idea of physically grouping reserves together

really took hold once the museums themselves, spatially challenged, had exhausted all other more or less temporary solutions. The first step in the case of a museum was to construct a building bringing the reserve store-rooms, inventory, restoration and loans teams, which are often scattered across various different locations, together in premises adapted for the purpose. This led to the emergence of several specific construction projects, such as in Paris (National Conservatory of Arts and Trades), Zurich (Swiss National Museum), Quebec (National Reserve), etc. The possibility of pooling and sharing between several museums can obviously only be considered in the second stage. Thus, the Louvre and the Ministry of Culture recently launched a project for a reserve and restoration centre in the Parisian suburbs that is intended to bring together the reserves of several of the capital's museums. Such initiatives are likely to develop in the future. From a practical point of view, the legal set-up (ownership of collections in particular) is of the essence as concerns the joint management of collections. It is obviously more difficult for museums to gather their reserves under one roof when they are supervised by different authorities.

Logically enough, this train of thought has gradually been furthered at the supranational level. It was with this prospect that the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (Iccrom) was set up at the ninth session of Unesco in 1956. European competence (jurisdiction) on cultural matters is known to be quite limited, so it is hardly surprising that European policy in this field is thin on the ground. It would appear that, at a national level, it is from thinking about documentation that the idea of a European collection might emerge. At the moment, documentation is also necessarily considered from the essentially digital perspective. Indeed, the *Digicult*, *Minerva* and *Michael* programmes, and then *Europeana*, the portal that brings together highly diverse digital documents (films, books, engravings, photos, etc.) from European heritage, currently only provide a rather timid response when compared with the major work being carried out by Google on its digital library or for *Google Earth*.

As such, public instigation looks to be the logical route for seeking solutions. The regional or national level will doubtlessly long remain the driving forces behind most policies for jointly settling issues such as the creation of joint reserves and common collection management teams. However, the regional and national levels in a global world are definitely not the ultimate decision authorities any more. Following national libraries' last developments, it appears that regional or national solutions will not prove sufficient, and that multinational, European or world solutions are being found via Internet and public (or private) initiatives. Acquisition policies are evolving in order to reduce redundancy among libraries, and exchange standards have been adopted for a long time. Although it will no doubt take longer and prove more difficult, it appears equally that it is at this supranational level that cer-

tain museum collection issues such as restitution demands, exchanges, the standardisation of loan conditions (the Network of European Museum Associations or NEMO has an important role in this respect), long-term loans, etc. in a nutshell, collections mobility, can be dealt with optimally.

Franchised collections

In some ways, the phenomenon of setting up franchised museum branches as an offshoot of some major museums is part and parcel of the same reasoning that is aimed at improving the management and use of collections. Playing a role that is comparable to that of multinationals in the face of small-scale producers in the private sector, some seriously big museums – the Guggenheim, the Louvre or the Hermitage – have embarked in a blaze of publicity upon an extension and brand-franchising policy in all four corners of the earth. The phenomenon goes back much further (as witness the branches of the Tate Gallery), but the arrival of Thomas Krens at the head of the Guggenheim Foundation in 1988 marked the start of a new era.

The implementation of these projects, as well as the resounding echoes that they receive in the press, is revolutionising former practices. 'If the Guggenheim Bilbao adventure appears as a success story, why not us?' seemed to think some museum directors but, moreover, public governments. As former branches were launched with educational and outreach goals, new ones were mostly initiated in a touristic, diplomatic and economic perspective. Thus, within the space of just a few years, whilst a branch of the Hermitage had been set up in Amsterdam, the mining town of Lens in Nord-Pas-de-Calais was chosen in 2004 as the site to host the Louvre 2. Two years later, a three-year partnership was established with the High Museum of Atlanta for the staging of temporary exhibitions of several of the Louvre's masterpieces. Discussions then got underway towards the setting up of a Louvre in Abu Dhabi, including making the 'Louvre brand' available for thirty years, assisted by collections from other French museums.

This special collection strategy, adopted by a restricted but very well-known group of major museums, is highly controversial. As certain economists and politicians see it as a wonderful opportunity to valorise underused collections (Levy and Jouyet 2006), many curators or scientists comment on it as a real threat, a 'something rotten in the kingdom of museums' that put the institution in total contradiction with its previous educational and preservation aims (Clair 2007; Rykner 2008). Even without any deontological consideration and from an objective point of view, would it really be possible to make better financial use of under-exploited collections? Actually, all museums are far from being equal in this game, which is essentially based on wagers concerning hypothetical economic income from tourism, and the game seems restricted to a couple of dozens of *superstar museums* (Frey and

Meier 2006). Not everyone has Tutankhamun's mask, the Elgin marbles or the bust of Nefertiti – which also makes it easier to understand why the latter are being demanded with such insistence.

The network collection

On their own initiative, many museums did not wait for the public authorities or the lure of the market before striking up numerous partnerships between themselves or with other establishments, even with the public itself.

The pioneering attempts at joining forces and mutual assistance through the creation of forums for discussion and exchange should be credited to the first museum associations, which date back to the late nineteenth century. The many reports (*Collections for the Future*, *Making collections effective*, *Guide to collections planning*, etc.) drafted at the initiative of the Museums Association, the American Association of Museums or the ICOM, to name but three, show the role that such associations can play at the national or international level. When associations and public authorities get their heads together, organisations specifically dedicated to collection management (*Collection links*) or inter-museum meetings are regularly set up in order to facilitate exchanges or long-term loans. The *Museums Journal* circulates proposals for disposal or for exhibition circuits. The *Museum loan network*, founded in 1993 in the United States and housed in the John Nicolas Brown Center, proposes a catalogue of almost 20,000 objects from 400 museums available for long-term loan. The method developed by *Samdok*, created in 1977 by the grouping together of cultural history museums with the aim of documenting Swedish society, also deserves particular attention (Samdok 2007; Fagebörg and Unge 2008).

The launch of the Internet gave collaboration a tremendous boost. The development of alternative worlds, like *Second Live*, has led to the creation of new sites on the Web, some of them started by institutional museums (Science Museum, Exploratorium, Newseum, etc.), others at the initiative of DIY surfers (Davies 2007). A large number of digital collections have also been assembled thanks to the joint contributions of institutions or amateur surfers. All of these hybrid networks ascribe to the principle of exchange, mainly based on a community initiative as expressed on the 'web 2.0'. It is common knowledge that the 2.0 operates largely on the basis of highly advanced participatory elements: it is no longer up to the webmaster to circulate the information on his or her own, but rather up to each individual surfer to react to or produce content as the writer of their own blog or as a more or less anonymous collaborator in a joint project. The nature of *Wikipedia*, from the name of the famous collaborative encyclopaedia, represents a remarkable challenge for the institutions hitherto seen as the guardians of 'knowledge', such as museums, universities or libraries. The changes in the relations of authority, the principle of a research community that no longer

The principle of

a responsible collection

is based on the need

to make choices,

not being afraid to tackle

the tricky issue of disposal.

extends exclusively to established scientists but instead includes everyone according to a more or less sophisticated corrective mechanism, represents an upheaval, the consequences of which will only gradually be revealed to us.

The 2.0 principle also produces repercussions in terms of collection management. The idea of sharing management between the entire community is nothing new and lies at the very heart of the new French museology. 'The museum as we see it gradually taking shape cannot have curators. It only has players – all those who live in the community. Individually or jointly, it is they who own the museum and its collections.' (Varine 1973: 246) This type of programme, utopian in part, has not always been followed and most ecomuseums have developed collections. Some museums, however, have drawn on a similar logic to propose programmes that include the people. The 'Heritage at Home' initiative developed by the Quebec Museum of Civilisation suggests that individuals who might wish to donate an object to the museum should document it and include it in a general database on the condition that the families retain it, following the advice of the museum professionals. In some ways, the idea of jointly managing heritage (professionals/ community) has something of the reasoning of any museum faced with the heritage of native peoples (American Indians, Aborigines, etc.) and for some years now this model, which is tending to assert itself (in Canada, the United States, Australia or New Zealand), has been drawing on the sharing of traditions and management. Are such procedures not going to be envisaged in most museums on an ever more regular basis?

Museums are undergoing considerable development. It is true that the world is also facing upheavals, the influence of which is being genuinely felt on their collections. 'It has been understood that museums are made for collections and that they should be built from the inside out, so to speak, shaping the container to fit the contents', wrote Louis Réau (1908:158) a century ago. That type of statement is no longer accepted. It is now the public, visitor or consumer, depending on the point of view one chooses to adopt, who stands at the heart of the museum. The visitor's knowledge or experience could also take that place, but the material collection sometimes seems to be conveyed here and there outside the museum. The classical museum, a legacy of the Enlightenment, sometimes has the air of an obsolescent technology in the face of the new experiences proffered by the new technologies, but also in the face of changing views on heritage.

Although many collection-related issues exist, some museums, organisations or public authorities are coming up with fresh solutions. There is no doubt that all of the attempts described here and linking-in public, market processes as well as donations, will give rise to future methods of collection management. These will probably take account of two essential elements: the audience for which they are intended, and the objects. In addition, both are becoming increasingly intelligent! Minority demands (native peoples, small states, pressure groups) in terms of managing a heritage that they believe belongs to them is no doubt just the visible tip of a similarly enormous whole, of which it would appear that the museums will have to take increasingly regular account, particularly through digital social networks, both as regards exhibition content (Dubin 1999) and for collection management. Some years hence, objects could also be deemed increasingly autonomous, even talkative (Sterling 2005). Admittedly, they will never be more than the outcome of human activity, but this human activity is constantly enriching them. Since most manufactured objects are currently linked to a barcode that provides information, particularly from the Internet, and the new RFID chips to be attached to them could connect them directly to portable terminals (computers or telephones, GPS systems, etc.), it would seem logical that a few years down the line storeroom reserves could also enjoy these technological advances and, therefore, through their own site archive their past, their condition and their journey around the world.

Technology opens up some amazing prospects, but it does not do away with choice. When all is said and done, humankind – people, the community, the planet – still has the upper hand; for better or for worse.

François Mairesse is the Director of the Musée royal de Mariemont (Morlanwelz) in Belgium and teaches museology at the Université Jean Moulin in Lyon as well as at the Université de Liège. After a Master in Management and a Master in Art History at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, he received his PhD in 1998 at the same university. He has published several articles and books on museology.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ames, P.J. (1990) 'Breaking new grounds. Measuring museums' merits', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 9: 137–147.

Babelon, J.-P. and Chastel, A. (1980) 'La notion de Patrimoine', *La Revue de l'Art* ; reprinted in *La notion de patrimoine* (1994), Paris: Liana Levi.

Benjamin, W. (1939) *L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproductibilité technique* [1939], Paris: Allia, 2006.

Bergevoet, F. (2003) 'Taking Stock: Deaccessioning in the Netherlands', *ICOM News*, 1, 2003: 4.

Bergevoet, F., Kok, A. and de Wit, M. (2006) *Netherlands guidelines for deaccessioning of museum objects*, Amsterdam, Instituut collection Nederland. Online. Available HTTP: < http//: www.icn. nl>(accessed February 2010).

Brophy, S. and Wylie E. (2008) *Green Museum: A Primer on Environmental Practice*, Walnut Creek: Alta Mira.

Clair, J. (2007) *Malaise dans les musées*, Paris: Flammarion.

Codet, H. (1921) *Essai sur le collectionnisme*, Paris: Jouve.

Cuno, J. (2008) *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over our Ancient Heritage*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Davies, A. (2007) 'Out of this world', *Museums Journal*, July: 34–35.

Deloche, B. (1985) *Museologica. Contradictions et logiques du musée*, Mâcon: Ed. W. et M.N.E.S.

Deloche, B. (2001) *Le musée virtuel*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France.

Deloche, B. (2007) *La nouvelle culture : la mutation des pratiques sociales ordinaires et l'avenir des institutions culturelles*, Paris: l'Harmattan.

Dercon, C. (2001) 'Le principe de l'inaliénabilité: une remise en question', in J. Galard (ed.) *L'avenir des musées*, colloque, musée du Louvre, 23–25 mars 2000, Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux-musée du Louvre: 263–285.

Dubin, S.C. (1999) *Display of Power. Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum*, New York: New York University Press.

Fagerbörg, E. and Unge, E. von (2008) *Connecting collecting*, Samdok, Nordiska Museet. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/upload/documents/349.pdf>(accessed February 2010).

Fahy, A. (ed.) (1995) *Collections management*, London: Routledge.

Frey, B. and Meier, S. (2006), 'The Economics of Museums', in V. Ginsburgh and D. Throsby (eds) *Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture*, Amsterdam, Elsevier, vol. 1, 1017–1050.

Gillen, J. (coord.) (2010) *Paul Otlet, fondateur du Mundaneum (1868–1944)*, s.l., Les impressions nouvelles.

Grampp, W.D. (1989) *Pricing the Priceless, Art, Artists and Economics*, New York: Basic books Inc.

Heal, S. (2006) 'The great giveaway', *Museums Journal*, October: 32–35.

Hemsley, J., Cappellini, V. and Stanke, G. (eds) (2005) *Digital Applications for Cultural and Heritage Institutions*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Hendon, W.S. (1979) *Analysing an Art Museum*, New York: Praeger.

Heritage Health Index (2005) *A Public Trust at Risk: the Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America's collections*, Washington, Heritage Preservation Inc. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.heritagepreservation.org/HHI/HHIfull.pdf>(accessed February 2010).

ICOM (2004) 'Les Musées universels', *ICOM News*, 1, 2004, special number.

Institute of Museum and Library Services, Museums, Libraries and 21st Century skills, Washington, Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009. Online. Available HTTP: <www.imls.gov/pdf/21stCenturySkills.pdf>(accessed February 2010).

Kalay, Y., Kvan, T. and Affleck, J. (eds) (2008), *New Heritage. New Media and Cultural Heritage*, London: Routledge.

Kok, A. (2007) 'Dutch Disposal', *Museums Journal*, March: 16–17.

Lévy, M. and Jouyet, J.P. (2006) *L'économie de l'immatériel : la croissance de demain. Rapport de la Commission sur l'économie de l'immatériel*. Online. Available HTTP: <http://immateriel.minefi.gouv.fr>(accessed February 2010).

Lord, B., Lord, G.D. and Nicks, J. (1989) *The Cost of Collecting*, London: HMSO.

Martin, F. (1993) *Une méthode d'évaluation économique des musées*. Montréal, HEC: Chaire de gestion des arts.

Mensch, P. van (2005) 'Annotating the environment. Heritage and new technologies', *Nordisk Museologi*, 2: 17–27.

Mensch, P. van (2008) 'Collectieontwikkeling of geld verdienen ?', *Kunstlicht*, 29, ½: 57–59.

Merrit, E.E. (2008) 'Beyond the Cabinet of Curiosities. Towards a modern rationale of collecting', in E. Fagerbörg and E. von Unge (eds) *Connecting collecting*, Samdok, Nordiska Museet, 2008. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/upload/documents/349.pdf>(accessed February 2010).

Mertenat, T. and Girardin, M. (2009) *La vie secrète du Diogène*, Genève: Labor et Fidès.

Mihesuah, D.A. (2000) *Repatriation Reader. Who owns American Indian remains?*, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

Miller, S. (1997) 'Selling items from museum collections', in S. Weil (ed.) *A Deaccession Reader*, Washington: American Association of Museums: 51–61.

Morris, J. (2007) 'A sellers' market', *Museums Journal*, July: 16–17.

Museums Association (2008), *Sustainability and Museums. Your Chance to make a Difference*, London, Museums Association. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=16398>(accessed February 2010).

Museums Association (sd), *Disposal toolkit. Guidelines for museums*, London, Museums Association. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/asset_arena/text/it/disposal_toolkit.pdf>(accessed September 2009).

National Museum Director's Conference (2003) *Too much Stuff?*, London: Museums Association, October. Online. Available HTTP: <www.nationalmuseums.org.uk/>(accessed February 2010).

Neves, C. (2005) *Concern at the Core. Managing Smithsonian Collections*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution, April. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.si.edu/opanda/2005.html>(accessed February 2010).

Neziroglu, F., Bubrick, J. and Yariura-Tobias J.A. (2004) *Overcoming Compulsive Hoarding*, Oackland: New Harbinger.

Otlet, P. (1934) *Traité de documentation. Le livre sur le livre*, Bruxelles: éditions du Mundaneum.

Parry, R. (ed.) (2010) *Museums in a digital age*, London: Routledge.

Réau, L. (1908) 'L'organisation des musées', *Revue de synthèse historique*, t. 17: 146–170 and 273–291.

Richert, P. (2003) *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires culturelles par la mission d'information chargée d'étudier la gestion des collections des musées*, Paris, Sénat de France, n°379, session extraordinaire de 2002–2003. Online. Available HTTP: <www.senat.fr>(accessed February 2010).

Rigaud, J. (2008) *Réflexion sur la possibilité pour les opérateurs publics d'aliéner des œuvres de leurs collections, Rapport remis à Christine Albanel, Ministre de la Culture et de la Communication*, Paris, January 20. Online. Available HTTP: <http://lesrapports.ladocumentationfrancaise.fr/BRP/084000071/0000.pdf>(accessed February 2010).

Robson, E., Treadwell, L. and Gosden, C. (2007) *Who owns Objects? The Ethics and Politics of Collecting Cultural Artefacts*, Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Rykner, D. (2008) *Le spleen d'Apollon. Musées, fric et mondialisation*, Paris: Nicolas Chaudun.

Samdok (2007) 'Connecting collecting, 30 years of Samdok [anniversary issue]', *Samtid & Museer*, 2, 31.

Sénat de France (2008) 'L'aliénation des collections publiques', *Etudes de législation comparée*, 191, décembre 2008. Online. Available HTTP: <www.senat.fr/>(accessed February 2010).

Šola, T. (2004) 'Redefining collecting', in S. Knell (ed.) *Museums and the Future of Collecting*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2nd ed.: 250–260.

Sterling, B. (2005) *Shaping Things*, Cambridge: MIT Press.

Timmer, P. and Kok, A. (2007) *Niets gaat verloren. Twintig jaar selectie en afstoting uit Nederlandse museale collecties*, Amsterdam: Boekman Stichting.

Tolin D.F., Frost R.O. and Steketee, G. (2004) *Buried in Treasures. Help for Compulsive Acquiring, Saving, and Hoarding*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van de Werdt, E. (2009) 'La politique des Pays-Bas en matière d'aliénation d'objets appartenant à ses musées', in F. Mairesse (dir.) *L'inaliénabilité des collections de musée en question*, Morlanwelz, Musée royal de Mariemont: 75–80.

Varine, H. de (1973) 'Un musée "éclaté": le Musée de l'homme et de l'industrie', *Museum*, XXV, 4: 242–249.

Weil, S. (1995) 'Progress report from the field: The Wintergreen conference on performance indicators for museums', in *A Cabinet of Curiosities. Inquiries into Museums and their Prospects*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution: 19–31.

Werner, P. (2005) *Museum, Inc.: Inside the global Art World*, Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

Wilkinson, H. (2005) *Collections for the Future*, London: Museums Association. Online. Available HTTP: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/9839>(accessed February 2010).

Wilkinson, H. and Cross, S. (2007) *Making Collections effective. Effective collections: an Introduction. Collections for the Future: two years on*, London, Museums Association. Online. HTTP: <http://www.museumsassociation.org/collections/9839>(accessed February 2010).