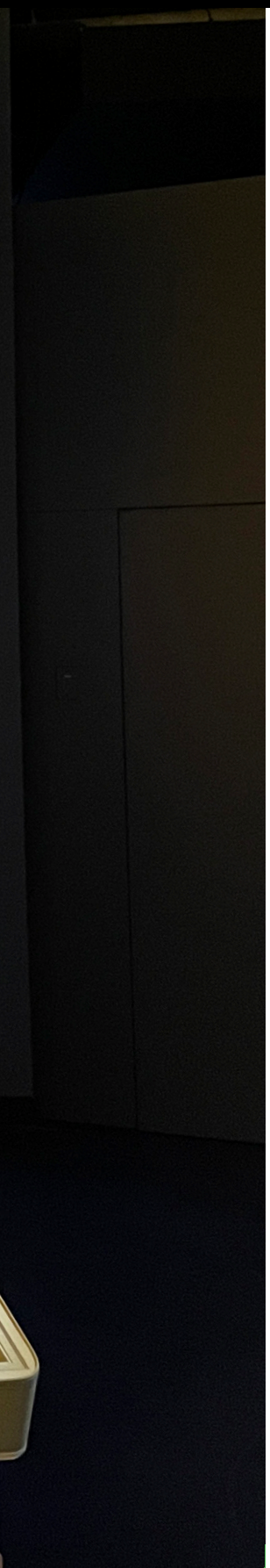

« Montréal était la ville où j'avais hâte d'aller. À 18 ans, [en '78,] je sortais les fins de semaine et j'allais voir des spectacles à Montréal. »
"I couldn't wait to go to Montréal. When I was 18, [in '78], I would leave home on the weekends to go see shows in Montréal."
"[In '92], Mom and Dad let me leave on my adventure. They trusted me and I trusted myself, even though I was only 15."
Tant d'histoires dans une valise !
So many stories in a suitcase!

At the museum: care for visitors, care for collections[1]

Dominique Poulot

Keywords:
Museums, Repair, Care, Inclusion, Diversity, Indigenousness, Museology, Therapy.



ABSTRACT:

The introduction to this issue provides a comprehensive overview of the various interpretations of the restorative museum in recent decades. This novel configuration is part of a broader context of reflections and projects for museums, which have emphasised the values of inclusion, diversity, and, ultimately, care. These diverse concerns manifest in various forms on different continents and across different generations of museums.

L'introduction du numéro fournit un panorama des différentes acceptions du musée réparateur au cours des dernières décennies. Cette nouvelle configuration s'inscrit dans un contexte plus général de réflexions et de projets pour les musées qui a mis en avant les valeurs de l'inclusion, de la diversité, et finalement du care. Ces différentes préoccupations connaissent des formes variables selon les continents et les générations successives d'établissements.

Opening Picture:

Figure 11. *Montréal, c'est quoi, c'est qui?* Permanent exhibition, Centre des mémoires montréalaises, Montreal, 2024.

All photos by Dominique Poulot.

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The museum is a cultural seismograph that records tremors and major shifts in interest, knowledge, admiration, values, and political commitments. In many traditions, the institution has been understood to participate in an educational process with civic or patriotic pride at its core. Over the last generation, however, the question of the purpose of the museum has been raised with renewed strength. The curatorial world has seen a series of debates about the expectations placed on museums and the responsibilities of those who manage them. The very definition of the museum concept has pitted the national sections of ICOM against each other in an international politics of models and commitments.[2]

In 1999, the North American museologist Stephen Weil wrote that the museum had gone from being an institution devoted to objects to one devoted to people.[3] The bold hyperbole of the claim was not fair to the history of the institution, and might well have overstated the current situation. It ignored pioneers around the world, such as John Cotton Dana, and many museums worldwide, including institutions like the V&A under Henry Cole, and French rural museums at the end of nineteenth century, that began with democratic impulses.[4] Also, many of those institutions that claim to be visitor-centric today might to various degrees be - as Pierre Bourdieu's sociology has argued -fundamentally elitist, able to make only symbolic efforts towards the communities they claim to serve.[5] Nevertheless, the procla-

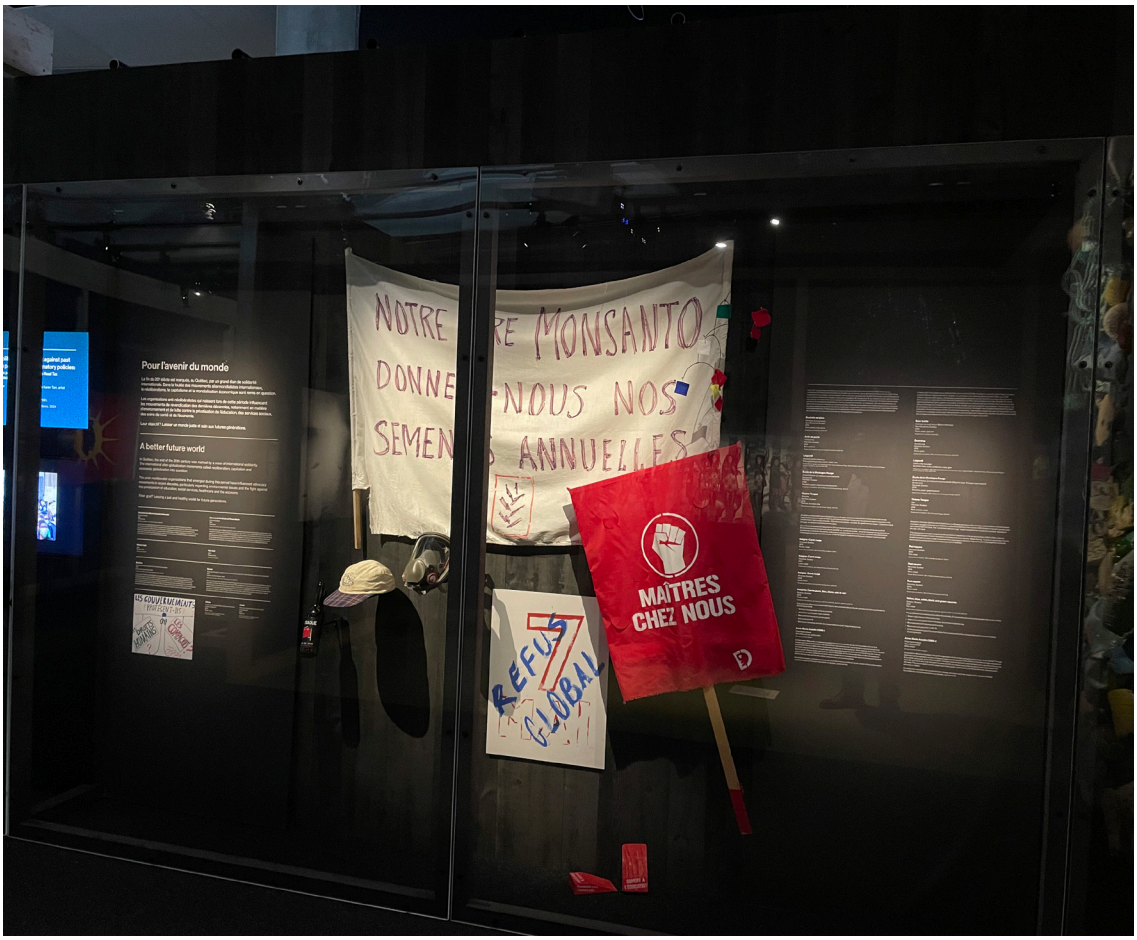

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Fig. 01:
Le Québec, autrement dit. Territoire de rencontres, Permanent exhibition, Musée de la civilisation, Quebec City, 2023.

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mation of such an inversion was a timely counterpoint to the critical position that held that museum-going was inevitably the privilege of the few. The insistence on the centrality of the public Weil identified, which was intended to represent a modernization as unprecedented as it was decisive, has been taken for granted by museum managers for a generation.[6] In France, it provided the impetus for the official forward-looking report of 2016-2017, which sought to compile "society's main expectations of museums".[7] The post-pandemic period, with a return to "real" attendance levels and a redoubling of funding requirements, has reinforced, if there were any need to do so, the imperative to clarify the social mission of the institution.[8]

Recent years have seen many museums attempt to fully engage with the implications of the centrality of the public, given new ideas about the various publics towards which the institution might be understood to have a responsibility. The issue of access to the common good as a cultural right[9] has been joined by the issue of repairing the harm done to individuals, communities and cultural groups - for example through the recovery of their objects. Compensating for material damage, repairing what has been ruined or broken, often leads to the challenge of healing a torn social fabric. This approach may be understood to reflect the replacement of pedagogical democracy with "performative" democracy. In the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, "while the pedagogical model of democracy emphasises the citizen's capacity for abstract reasoning and imagination, the performative model highlights the realm of the embodied and the sensual".[10]

This issue brings together heritage professionals and university curators and museologists from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, the United States, Canada and Brazil, with the aim of providing an account of this turning point in the history of Western museum, from both theoretical perspectives and practical experiences. The opening discussion between Mark O'Neill, Jonah Siegel and Nora Sternfeld outlines the issues and perspectives at stake. Although the authors come from different disciplines and are shaped by their participation in distinct professional, institutional and national contexts, they nonetheless share common convictions about the evolution of the global museum landscape and the present and future tasks of museums. Having inherited the obligation to preserve collections for future generations, and being subject to political and administrative constraints as much as to scholarly standards, museums today also find themselves needing to take into account newly urgent ethical considerations, including the legitimacy of ownership, the identification of provenance, the criteria for purchase, and the place of community voices. Determining the equity or inclusivity offered by the museum also comes to involve reflection on the relevance of visitor experiences, including the democratization of access, the relational values of *care* in the institution, and the violence that might be understood to be inherent in the history of objects and archives or in their acquisition. Georges Perec,

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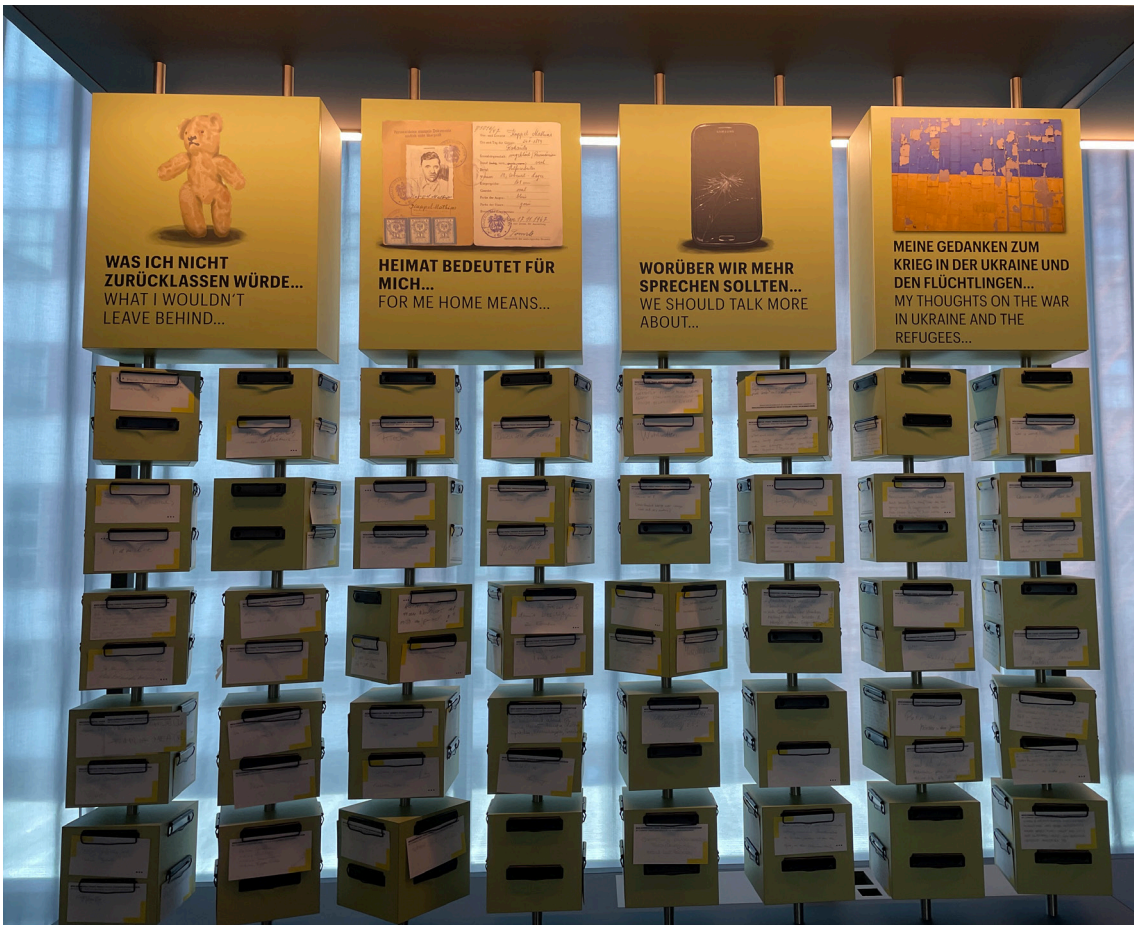

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Fig. 02: *Routes and Camps*, German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), Berlin, 2017.

Fig. 03: *Forum*, German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), Berlin, 2017.

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with his emphasis on the infra-ordinary and its political implications, should be evoked here: he seeks to capture "what is not noticed, what has no importance" - or what could be apprehended as a haunting.[11] For one of its commentators, "it is on the one hand a rehabilitation of the small scale in the age of the grandiose, and on the other a considerable space for contesting the field effects of government planning".[12] It is on these two scales that the sense of care unfolds, opposed as much to the architectural grandiose of the establishments and their panoramic views, as to a geopolitics of masterpieces and their worldwide circulation thanks to a multiplication of branches.

The place given by museums to the stories of objects, whatever they may be, is in any case a prerequisite for guaranteeing and consolidating the trust of specific audiences. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the horizon of care remains difficult to identify, distorted as it is by the contradictions inherent in a site, in which an economy of objects in exile generates emotions ranging from panic to the desire for limitless accumulation. The round table concluded with the need to preserve the achievements of previous generations of critics, while guarding against forms of critique that neither reform the institution nor improve its workings.

The remedial exhibition

When, in January 2025, the president-director of the Musée du Louvre made headlines in the French press with a memo to the Ministry of Culture calling for new resources she not only pointed out the danger posed to specific works of art by various conservation faults, she deplored "the inadequacy of the services offered to the public". "Visiting the Louvre," she declared, "is a physical ordeal; access to the works takes time and is not always easy; visitors have no space in which to take a break".[13] This recent intervention goes beyond the specific case of the Parisian palace, which was faced longstanding challenges that the Peï pyramid of 1993 was ultimately unable to resolve. The President-Director's words testify to the pursuit of a quality visit as an ongoing concern, after the museum reached a peak figure in 2018 of 10.2 million visitors. However, while the individual experience of the place has become the reference point for managers, such an emphasis no longer leaves out another pressing question, with which it is more and more connected in recent thought, concern for the objects in the collection themselves.

In the past, the drives for improvements in the treatment of objects and people have typically been kept separate in. This is no longer the case. The material turn in art history, the emergence of multidisciplinary provenance studies, justified where necessary by projects for restitution or at least for justice, and finally the triumph of an anthropological perspective that has become almost hegemonic in the field of museum studies, have certainly brought the concern for artefacts to the fore. Far from arguing for a return to the previous situation – the exclusive priority of collections to the detriment of

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public policies (for example, in the name of a higher respect for art) – the point is to emphasise the need to repair the previous failure to articulate, and to demand an obligation of cross-care.

Some museums are committed to repairing the world in line with their ethical and professional aspirations or specific missions[14] (Figure 1). Sometimes they have been given a specific mandate to do so, like the International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in Geneva,[15] or they integrate the approach into their treatment of contemporary history, focusing on humanitarian interventions, or reconciliation processes[16] (Figure 2). In France, a terrorism memorial museum devoted to the judicial, political and cultural invention of the status of victim is planned for 2027: it is part of the museology of human rights, or of sites of conscience[17] (Figure 3). Other types of museums, such as the Hygiene Museum in Dresden, which hosted the *Fake* exhibition in 2022, are fighting disinformation and conspiracy in the name of civic and scientific values, to restore truth to the public sphere.[18] Still others evoke the prospect of personal healing, or even sacrifice themselves to individual hedonism.[19] These may all be understood as incarnations of the idea of using the museum to heal difficult or even dangerous emotions by mobilising the trust that public museums have earned over the past two centuries (Figure 4).

A museum's confidence in its objects, like that of its visitors, varies over the course of its history according to the expectations it has raised, the disappointments it has experienced, and the aesthetic or scholarly controversies it has provoked by its exhibitions.[20] While, in most cases, a museum is built in relation to the heritage of an area, its owners and

Fig. 04:
City.history. afresh: Eight questions. In the past, today and tomorrow, Kölnisches Stadtmuseum, Cologne, 2024.

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its context, within any institution works and objects are given a new meaning beyond or distinct from their original purpose or location.

The invention of the revolutionary museum was a key moment in this respect. In the 1790s, what came to be seen as the unjust confiscation of masterpieces by tyranny - royal, aristocratic and religious - was to be rectified in order to return these prized objects to the whole of humanity and ensure the progress of the arts and sciences. Thanks to the regeneration undertaken, the new era would benefit from the works inherited from the past. But, in many cases, this new use called for a fundamental dissociation between the artist and his original sponsors. Even if they are masterpieces, monuments from the past are nonetheless evidence of bad government. Conversely, hitherto neglected works might reflect the contempt in which truth and beauty have been held: their very obscurity is likely to reveal a talent that has gone unrecognized, or has been stifled. Restoration work is then supposed to eliminate the ravages of this ancient malevolence.

Regarding the libraries of the Old Regime, Abbé Grégoire explains that "guides to the peerage, genealogical treatises, works in which despotism has recorded its extravagances and fury, have almost always been bound in Morocco, while immortal books [...] have only escaped the compass of censorship, the pursuits of the inquisition of the courts, by taking refuge in unknown corners, under a modest parchment cover".[21] The museum was understood to justify its glory by repairing the works both materially and morally, removing them beyond culpable ignorance and blameworthy alterations. At the Louvre, new values were asserted through the restoration of the paintings on display, which were as much evidence of revolutionary energy as they were of skill or ingenuity. The success of confidence in the museum was based on the exaltation of French patriotism.[22]

Museography as a remedy

Such a celebration inevitably provoked a reaction: as soon as the decade was over, a radical *museophobia* called for the closure of the revolutionary museums. The most vulnerable, the Museum of French Monuments, was dispersed under the Second Restoration because it was the legacy of vandalism, having brought together monuments taken from Parisian churches that had been suppressed. Later, Napoleon III's dynastic museum, the "museum of sovereigns" that Zola compared to a "royal thrift shop", was closed when the regime collapsed.[23] In the course of contemporary history, changes in regime or ideological or philosophical condemnations have led to proposals for the outright abolition of museums in the name of a *damnatio memoriae*, though these are rarely carried out. There is no lack of literary translations, in the form of allegories. In Siegfried Lenz's novel *Heimatmuseum*, the destruction of the institution seems to be the only way out when you can't get rid of objects that are thought to poison the present and even contaminate the future.[24] On the other hand, the opening of new museums on an *ad hoc* basis is a convenient

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solution: the historical museum of the citadel in Spandau[25] collects the condemned statues of Prussian militarism, Nazism and Stalinism, with a view to repairing German history (Figure 5).

However, consolidating or renewing trust in an institution more commonly involves repairing its exhibitions, with contrasting results. When what visitors see is precisely what needs to be repaired, the exhibition strategy must call on a variety of museographies - short of simply making the exhibits disappear. The effect of such processes of re-signification of images and artefacts can be uncertain, even counter-productive: the articulation between the visible and the legible is in any case crucial. At the beginning of the 1990s, interventions by curators at the Museum of Natural History in New York led to new arrangements of objects, display cases and texts. For the critic and artist Mieke Bal, who observed the repairs, "certain labels succeeded better than others in suggesting a different approach to the metamuseum, in other words an approach that integrates the transmission of knowledge about the object with an understanding of the construction of this object by subjects. There are parts of the exhibition where the text panels do not contradict the visual displays. There are also displays whose visual persuasiveness is such that no panel can counter their rhetoric. Finally, there are areas where the objects on display benefit fully from the critical light shed by the textual accompaniments".[26]

The 1989 exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto was no less exemplary of such discrepancies. The professional skills of those in charge were worthy of the best specialists on the subject, the quality and significance of the pieces presented in the coun-

Fig. 05:
Unveiled. Berlin and its monuments. 1849-1986, **Proviant Magazin, Spandau Zitadelle.**

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try's most famous institution were indisputable, and the institution's postcolonial and multicultural commitment was obvious. But the event was taken as an affront by many in the communities concerned; it prevented the Canadian museum from attempting the same exercise for decades, and its memory still weighs heavily on the institution. Caught off-guard by its audiences, the exhibition seemed to support and propagate precisely what it set out to denounce.[27] Everything seemed to indicate that, in this case, the cure could be worse than the disease - if those administering the cure don't work with the audiences and/or do formative evaluation to find out if their curatorial intentions will be effectively communicated.

The new "museography" that arose during the inter-war period sought to use museums to serve political projects as much as purely artistic or scientific ones. A generation of curators and architects were mobilizing museums for communication purposes, if not propaganda, while at the same time seeking to use them to promote individual development. Federico Maria Giorgi highlights the first studies carried out in the early 1940s to scientifically identify 'pleasant' light and visual comfort.[28] The pursuit of visual 'satisfaction' was taken up again and developed further at the beginning of the 21st century, when lighting in museums was regulated according to physiological and psychological constraints, but also considering visual memories specific to the cultivated *habitus* - what some call the eye of an era.[29] From this point of view, Paul Valéry's comments in 1923, when he deplored the fact that the cane had been banned from the museum - he was stripped of it at the entrance - testify to the malaise of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, for him, this initial gesture was the prelude to a growing unease about the accumulation of works and a didactic purpose that prevented him from exercising his aesthetic eye in the course of a comfortable stroll through the collection.[30] In contrast, the *Association populaire des amis des musées* [APAM], founded in 1936, sought a few years later to "revive the museum" for the benefit of popular education.[31] The uneasy articulation of these perspectives, within a widespread desire to repair the museum, demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between the feelings of an amateur - or the pure spirit of Valery's *Monsieur Teste* - and the pursuit of a democratisation project through schools or similar mechanisms.

The avenues opened by the meetings and publications of curators' associations springing up all over the world, as well as the international cooperation structures developed within the League of Nations lead to new foundations or restorative redevelopments. Susana Stüssi discusses the ways in which scholarly research was translated into exhibition practice, and how the enhancement of Amerindian and pre-Columbian collections played a key role in museum reform. The aim was to ensure the best possible publicity for the progress of Americanist studies in France, which was tantamount to a demonstration of the privileged status of French science *tout court*. The story continued

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with subsequent moves, starting with the founding of the *Musée de l'Homme* - which replaced the old Trocadéro in 1937. The episode illustrates some of the characteristics of the modernization of European museums in the first half of the twentieth century, which combined social adaptations and scientific improvements, minor repairs and maintenance, and sometimes even the relocation of collections.

Writing in 1930 in the avant-garde magazine *Documents*, Georges Bataille defined the museum as fundamentally a social space: "[...] the rooms and the works of art are only a container whose content is formed by the visitors: it is the content that

Fig. 06: Granville, Illustration of the chapter "Le Louvre des marionnettes", *Un autre monde*, Paris, Fournier, 1844. Source: Wikipedia Commons

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distinguishes a museum from a private collection. A museum is like the lungs of a great city: every Sunday the crowds rush into the museum like blood and come out purified and fresh. Paintings are nothing more than dead surfaces, and it's in the crowd that the interplay, the sparkle and the trickle of light take place, which are technically described by authorised critics".[32] It should be noted that Georges Bataille accompagned his article with an illustration by Granville entitled *Le Louvre des Marionnettes* (The Puppet Louvre) - dedicated to transforming visitors into real puppets in the encounter between objects and people, in a reversal that was provocative at the time, but can be heard differently today (Figure 6).

Fig. 07: Humboldt Forum, Berlin, 2021.

Writing for the artists and ethnographers who read *Documents*, Georges Bataille insists on the collective, socialised, urban character of this apparatus, a clear reflection of the new socio-economic conditions of the first twentieth century, in other words of an unprecedented urban civilisation. Visitors to the museum perform a ritual essential to the equilibrium of the social body, like the movement of bodily fluids, a process illustrated above all by the circulation of blood. Bataille suggested that the main benefit of visiting a museum is the regular purification of the body. Each visitor participates in a series of exchanges with the collections in which even the pedagogic mission of the museums is simple part of a more material social process. In 1939, Georges Salles, curator at the Louvre, in *Le Regard*, a work much celebrated by Walter Benjamin stated that "the museum has invaded the street".[33] Even if the idea that the museum contributes to urban prosperity, through its power to attract tourists, culture and politics, is a commonplace in specialist liter-

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ature, a phrase such as Salles' suggests the institution's entry into the realm of urbanism and the politics of the body, a development which itself may call for repairs in order to fully participate in a process of a broader social replenishment.

Social revitalisation

At the end of the twentieth century, museums were built into the urban fabric on a variety of scales, sometimes in the form of new constructions, sometimes as inventive restorations of existing buildings. In Berlin, the transfer of two of Dahlem's museums to the new Humboldt Forum was tantamount to an attempt to repair the recreated building, perhaps to attenuate its normative force, and at the very least to invent a convenient and indisputable utility for this empty form of an imaginary past.[34] The colonial history of their collections was a contributing factor in the initial debates about the legitimacy of rebuilding the palace, which, as far as its opponents were concerned, risked becoming a concentrate of historical criminalities[35] (Figure 7). In Nantes, after several decades of legal disputes with its neighbours, the Musée Dobrée is now fully integrated into the urban landscape, opening its garden and redesigning the sensitive landscape of the neighbourhood. The success of this latest project is characteristic of a more general trend, which sees programs to repair not just museums, but their entire neighborhoods, with a view to revitalizing the area, often from a political, economic and social perspective.[36]

On the theme of urban ornamentation, Jesus Pedro Lorente looks at the revitalisation of a neighbourhood in Bilbao thanks to carefully-labeled installations, which allow passers-by to become aware of the museum's role in the invention of a 'distinguished' cultural landscape. The relevance of this development, he argues, lies in a "fourth place", in reference to the typology of sociologist Ray Oldenburg.[37] Oldenburg distinguished three kinds of place: the first are homes, the second workplaces or schools, while the "third places" fulfil different roles that are essential to local democracy and, beyond that, to the vitality of any community. Today, an unprecedented hybridity of cultural establishments - such as libraries and museums - that have become, on occasion and for a time at least, medialabs or workshops, poses fresh questions about their role in carrying out other social functions.[38]

In fact, thinking about museums and collections, whether documentary or otherwise, has never ceased to take an interest in the most favorable arrangements to introduce into them - just as thinking about justice has never ceased to weigh on the architecture and furnishings of judicial courts or political assemblies.[39] An emblematic place in this respect is the famous laboratory imagined by Warburg in Hamburg: an "arena of science [Arena der Wissenschaft]" – at once a reading room, an exhibition space and a conference venue.[40] But contemporary critics take a different approach to work on museum collections: the aim is often to bring to light their suspect provenance, or even to

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identify the violence inherent in objects that have not been typically seen from that point of view - like Fred Wilson's work in 1992.[41] Such an approach treats museum collections as a virtually involuntary resource from which to extract items to redress the injustices of the past and the inequalities of the present, while ensuring future sustainability.[42] These endeavors, which might bring together artists and researchers, philosophers, architects and design specialists, and which often include structured engagement with potential users will require us to rethink the way the museum space is arranged and used.

Curator Clémentine Deliss, who ran the Frankfurt Museum of Cultures from 2010 to 2015, drew inspiration from the university and art school there. In 2013, she curated *Object Atlas*, a manifestation of artistic engagement with ethnographic artefacts housed in the collection.[43] Her 'metabolic museum' designs an institution engaged in research based on the collections to be explored, thanks to a specially designed arrangement of rooms and furniture. The arrangement of the metabolic museum in favor of productive uses is reminiscent of a domestic utopia of modernity, such as that of Apollinaire, who professed that "in order to work well, one would need a flat furnished in the futuristic manner of pneumatic furniture that one would inflate and deflate after use. In the moment of inspiration, all the furniture would be flat and perched on the ceiling by means of pulleys. The field would become free for intellectual work and the walking that is its necessary complement".[44] For Clémentine Deliss, furniture is not intended to fit in with the ar-

Fig. 08: *Voie libre*, permanent space, Musée de la civilisation, Québec.

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chitecture of an exhibition, or to accommodate the regulated paths of visitors, but to allow fruitful extractions.

As Manuel Borja-Villel points out, “reading, working, chatting and resting are performative acts that museums generally try to suppress”,[45] but Clémentine Deliss mobilises the logistics of her ideal museum for these very purposes, making collections and storerooms, tables and comfortable chairs available. She imagines visitors individually projecting images between the works, to “spam the display” - less as a form of piracy than as a way of repairing or complementing the official collection. Such proposals establish the museum as a space for precarious experiments, serving the object, the artist and often diasporic communities.

The “Resonant Museum” proposal launched in 2024 by the Musée du Quai Branly - Jacques Chirac provides a material instance of these kinds of conceptual aspirations, while nevertheless respecting the more conventional itinerary of the museum visit[46] . As Louis Petitjean points out, the parisian museum wants to give a voice back to its collections, particularly of musical instruments, while at the same time remedying colonial erasure, through collaborations with artists[47] . New installations will enable sounds (whether music, voices or environmental noises) to enrich the experience of dissonant heritages. An artist’s sound residency - in this case Youmna Saba’s project, with the emblematic title “La Réserve des non-dits” - illustrates the challenges of this remediation. The initiative is part of a context in which museums are asking questions, as the Geneva Museum has done in its temporary exhibition *Tuning in - Acoustics of Emotion*: “What voices are we preserving, and why? Who speaks, who has the right to be heard? (...) What kinds of emotional links can be conveyed by the voice? (...) How can we hear a voice that does not produce sound?”.[48]

Fig. 09:
To All the Unnamed Women, temporary exhibition, curated by Michaëlle Sergile, Montréal, McCord Stewart museum, september 2024 - january 2025.

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Post-colonial treatment

Within the reparative turn embodied in multiple practices around the world, Nada Guzic identifies, in North America, "a series of interrelated themes and issues, including restorative justice, healing and well-being, restitution and repatriation, decolonisation in its many forms, and the demand for more caring institutions" (Figure 8). The multiple meanings and challenges of reparation touch on issues as varied as inclusive purchasing policies, the treatment of collections and exhibitions, indigenous rights, and the challenge of *re-enacting* intangible cultural heritage - whether on the initiative of a guest artist curator or that of source communities (Figure 9). All these practices aim, in some measure, to "repair the living"[49] by establishing new relationships to objects on display.

In Canada, the museum has played a role in diversity policies from the adoption of multiculturalism in the 1970s to the latest Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policies. Initiatives have focused on both accessibility and the promotion of indigenous institutions, with the aim of redressing inequalities of an ideological, physical or cultural nature. Both the development of collections and their documentation have been marked by a triptych of resolutions: the modification of acquisition criteria to reflect the aspiration to model diversity within museums, the change of terminology to represent the plurality of identities of visitors, and a revision of the discourse on objects to make room for the expression of emotions and promote new narratives (Figure 10). Collection management, with a view to EDI, must therefore bridge the gaps in representation to compensate for the invisibility of certain communities. Identifying artists and works in indigenous languages, in exhibition titles and object descriptions, is one of the most notable requirements.

The museum is seen as a potentially restorative institution, in both

Fig. 10: *Sur paroles. Le son du rap queb*, Temporary exhibition, Québec, Musée de la civilisation, november 2023 - september 2024.

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material and symbolic terms, one which should aim to "encourage the emergence of a representative, just and equitable society".[50] As Thierry Ruddel has pointed out in relation to the various "civilising" museums in the country, this decision will have to face several challenges.[51] Nada Guzic stresses the "contradiction between policies aimed at establishing a national collection that is supposed to reflect the country's identity and the fragmentation of that identity, as manifested in political demands for the inclusion of under-represented groups identified by their country of origin" (Figure 11). The play of nomenclatures and classifications specific to the different types of museums weighs particularly heavily on this program. Compared with museums of society or ethnology, art museums are clearly out of step, even though some of them, which according to the available surveys are very much in the minority, "have begun to incorporate cultural categories, attempting to segment identities in the same way as databases of cultural objects". Inventories of collections, for example at the *Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, provide "a breakdown of artists by gender, cultural origin, year of birth and regional distribution".

Jean-Philippe Uzel shows that in recent years there has been a shift in the demands of the First Nations, from reconciliation to decolonisation, leading to new debates and new oppositions. The first period saw the introduction of a policy of including "indigenous voices" - to varying degrees of effectiveness, depending on the museum - thanks to the new care taken in the way objects are discussed, from their origin to their final treatment. A second era was characterized by an emphasis on the genocidal nature of the colonial project, leading to an emphasis "between post-trauma medicine and social justice", to collaborate in "healing" through "reconciliation". From 2017 onwards, the abandonment of this vocabulary, deemed unsuitable, has led to an increasing adoption of the postcolonial perspective, drawing on a tradition begun a generation earlier.

The Canadian Aboriginal movement's approach to "coloniality" aims to create a museum that is not so much reconciling as healing following the national trauma of the discovery, in May 2021, of the hidden remains of children who had died at residential schools. Some institutions, at the forefront of reconciliation processes in their early days, do acknowledge their colonial origins. But, when no concrete conclusions are drawn, the reference to decolonisation risks becoming merely metaphorical, and even tokenistic. Some museums have begun to call for real indigenous intervention in at least some of their spaces in the name of the principle, affirmed by David Garneau in 2022, that "museums are non-colonial, indigenous, when they place the needs of living people before the goods conserved".[52]

Such an alternative is found in many contemporary museums, which are confronted with the questionable provenance of their objects, from colonial looting to police raids. In Canada process of confiscation was

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set in motion after the potlatch was banned, leading to the seizure of property now being kept in museums in Western Canada, and then, depending on circumstances, to restitution or repair.[53] In Brazil, the five hundred or so pieces confiscated by the police at the end of the nineteenth century as part of social and religious repression were first placed in a museum of "black magic" but were later transferred to the *Museu da República* in Rio de Janeiro. Pedro Marco Gonçalves and Arantxa Ciafrino retrace the successive episodes in a demonstration of decolonial museology. Today, their conservation is part of a process of reparation for Afro-Brazilian religious traditions and their memory. In concrete terms, the custody of the collection, because of its specific characteristics, is in the hands of the Afro-Brazilian temples, commonly known as *terreiros*, with the museum providing them with its

Fig. 12: *Art sur ordonnance*, MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain.

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support. This partnership, theorised by a particularly inventive new Brazilian museology, aims to respond to the gesture of faith without depending/insisting on the scientificity inscribed in previous repressions. As museologist Bruno Brulon Soares writes, "uncertainty about collections is never an easy burden for museums to bear, but it is a fundamental part of any ritual in a *terreiro*. Understanding these objects in their process of objectification, rather than attached to fixed and stable classification systems, can free the museum from its own colonial methods and procedures".[54]

Caring for others

This is the beginning of new ways of treating objects, opposed to the longstanding views of conservation-restoration, and aimed at creating a framework in which fairness is newly valorized.[55] A new horizon of practices is taking shape, that of the *bientraitance* of objects, according to a recent neologism[56] which tolerates certain material deteriorations, if not losses.[57] From this perspective, Noémie Etienne defends the idea of an "active and polyphonic conservation" in museums devoted to the display of puppets. Rejecting the classic paradigm of heritage protection, these establishments illustrate the possibility of a social participation in the management of their collections, in forms of negotiation between museum professionals and puppeteers invested in their games. Like art libraries, or museums of religion or music, which allow some of their artefacts to be used in private practices or in collective ceremonies, these collections willingly sacrifice parts of their mission (protection or conservation) to the demands encouraged by the recognition of intangible cultural heritage. In this way, these museums fall into the category of popular spectacle, somewhere between community at-

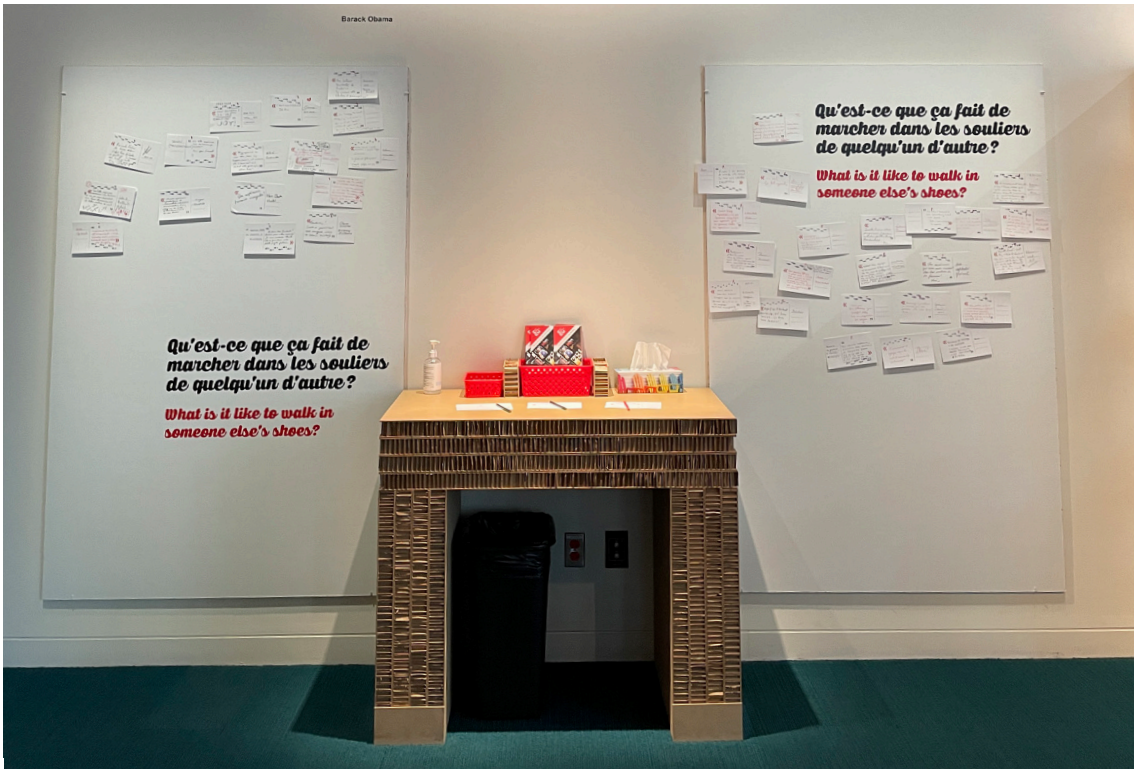

Fig. 13: *Un mile dans mes souliers*, Temporary exhibition, Centre des mémoires montréalaises, Montréal, february 2024 - august 2025.

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tachment and folk tourism.

To guarantee the documentary value of the material, the involvement of conservators is crucial at every stage of the process, as is the choice of the people who take temporary charge of the objects. The practices permitted are subject to very precise limits in terms of the original condition of the instruments, which must be guaranteed. They also depend on the legitimate players - and, in the case of ethnological collections, the source communities - respecting the practices. However, this last condition may prove impossible to achieve. Anthropologist Carole Delamour has defended the principle of returning to the Innu Indians of Mashteuiatsh the drums they can no longer play because they have lost their skills.[58] "This is perfectly understandable in a given situation," remarks Joelle le Marec, "but it is difficult for the organisations responsible for investigating claims for restitution to take into account: how can you justify the quality of a relationship with the objects claimed by claiming that they have not been used?".[59] To accept this weakness, on the part of the museum, would be to acknowledge that people can see their know-how disappear, without calling into question their properties: after all, owning musical instruments that you don't use but are attached to is a commonplace phenomenon. As a French historian once wrote about the social classes of the 19th century, the bourgeoisie is defined by the presence of a piano in its interior.[60]

Restorative museology is a necessary result of the politics of care when brought to the cultural field.[61] Almost a generation ago, in an article co-authored with Berenice Fisher, Joan Tronto suggested that "care should be seen as a generic activity that includes everything we do to maintain, perpetuate and repair our 'world', so that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, ourselves and our environment, all of which we seek to link into a complex network in support of life".[62] The response in museums, in the form of care for the public through the collections, has been remarkable. This trend is part of a wider context, illustrated since the 1960s by specific proposals such as "bibliotherapy".[63] This is the case at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, with the opening of a pavilion dedicated to art therapy,[64] and free tickets on prescription.[65] Since this pioneering initiative in 2018, the movement has quickly spread to Brussels, Switzerland and France, where in various places doctors can prescribe visits. In Montpellier, the "Art sur ordonnance" project has developed between the contemporary art center and the psychiatric emergency and post-emergency department, as well as in Rennes and the Yvelines department[66] (Figure 12). Art on Prescription distinguishes itself from art therapy by offering visits and activities at the museum (totally detached from the medical world) rather than hospital sessions.

Care also ties in with older concerns about diversifying museum offerings. The *Doppio Senso* programme at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which offers tactile experiences and educational activities

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for people with visual impairments, is one instance of the policies of inclusive access that have marked recent decades around the world. However, as Valeria Bottalico insists, this is not just another service added to the museum's organisational chart, but a provision designed in collaboration with users, to meet their real needs. Alessandro Paolo Lena points out that the initiatives to promote touch in the museum are part of a wider effort to take account of the body and the senses from a perspective of care that refers to classic philosophical debates from the sensualism of the Enlightenment to the current perspectives of neuroscience.

Here and there we are now seeing collaborations[67] between museum professionals and the medical world, particularly around mental health treatments.[68] The Museums of Liverpool have devised a digital collection of museum objects and everyday items combined with sounds, under the title *My House of Memories*. Irene Di Pietro describes how, along with other similar projects, the initiative is working to care for people with dementia, through the development of interpersonal skills within a community setting. A philosophy of *care* such as this has given rise to professional training courses: in France, through the *Institut national du patrimoine* (National Heritage Institute)[69] , and through the Association of Museum Curators.[70] The museum, thanks to its objects and their different histories or biographies, is defined as a place for therapeutic work on people - on a par with other practices, such as the storyteller's workshop (Figure 13).

Relying on the museum

Walter Benjamin defined the storyteller in terms of the art of recounting experience[71] and distinguished two types: the sedentary ploughman (guarantor of traditions) and the merchant navigator (involved in voyages and discoveries). Both share a set of traits that, for him, define "the nature of the true narrative": "It always has, overtly or tacitly, a utilitarian aspect. This is sometimes expressed as a moral, sometimes as a practical recommendation, and sometimes as a proverb or a rule of life - in all cases, the storyteller is a man of good advice for his audience".[72] In this case, a museum's good advice to its guests could be that of healing through objects, of which Western literature has left some remarkable examples.[73] In chapter CX of *Moby-Dick*, Melville recounts how during his grave illness Queequeg asks for a coffin to be made for him. The creation of the coffin seems on to strengthen him, however, so that he recover and he later makes himself a chest out of the object: "Many spare hours he spent, in carving the lid with all manner of grotesque figures and drawings; and it seemed that hereby he was striving, in his rude way, to copy parts of the twisted tattooing on his body. And this tattooing had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Queequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; a wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own live heart beat against them;

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and these mysteries were therefore destined in the end to moulder away with the living parchment whereon they were inscribed, and so be unsolved to the last".[74]

The episode of a vanished wisdom evokes the "paradigm of the last", dear to the French anthropological school.[75] For Jean Jamin, who has written an acute commentary on the topic, Queequeg's coffin - which survives the shipwreck of the Pequod, gutted by the white whale, serves as a lifeline for the hero, and therefore provides the basis for the possibility of Ishmael's story being told at all - is "an allegory of the collection and storage of objects from the farthest reaches of the civilised world, (...) seen as covers for cultures in mourning, obviously doomed to disappear if not already gone (...), but whose deeper meaning, whatever was done or said, would remain forever buried, unreachable, indecipherable".[76] From the perspective of the "last romantics", the *Musée du Trocadéro*, in the discussion of which Jean Jamin cites the tale of Queequeg's coffin, exhibits the relic of an elsewhere lost to all and ultimately useless. But today's restorative museology wants to imagine the positive force of Queequeg's coffin. The radical alteration of the original context of the tattoos – when the prophet spoke and was understood – renders his chest indecipherable, but does not prevent it from being faithfully preserved by those who still claim it, nor does it prevent the captain, a foreign viewer, from respecting it as an enigma or a myth. The combination of their care and respect is undoubtedly utopian, but isn't that always the case in museums?[77]

In studies of museum and library audiences, sociologists have long identified a gap between authorised commentary and ordinary practice. In fact, "sympathetic attention to places, people and practices that are subject to power or relegated to the margins," Joelle Le Marec has pointed out, is often lacking both in the studies carried out by institutions and in the critical viewpoints of intellectuals and specialists. In other words, in the vast body of contemporary museum evaluation, "it is hard to take seriously that the museum or the library can engender trust and even produce it on a daily basis, and we are even saddened by the naivety this implies".[78] In the end, writes Le Marec, this lack "exempts us from thinking about and considering the nature of an embarrassing form of trust". And yet the challenge facing museums today is precisely to inspire confidence, or to continue to do so, in the absence or confusion of identifications and belonging. For the museum, it is a question of what care its collection obliges it to take; for the visitor, it is a question of whether he or she can trust the museum and rely on its care.[79]

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Endnotes

1 I'd like to express my deep gratitude to Mark O'Neill and Jonah Siegel for their invaluable contribution to the proofreading and commentary of this text. Their expertise has significantly enriched the content and improved the quality of the translation.

2 Portin, Grinell 2021.

3 Weil 1999.

4 Poulot 1985.

5 Bourdieu, Darbel 1966.

6 About the French case: Galard 2000; Fourteau 2002; Donnat, Tolila 2003.

7 https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/36387-inventer-des-musees-pour-demain-rapport-de-la-mission-musees-du-.

8 As the pandemic episode showed, in an emergency, priority is given to the collections rather than the public, and the museum once again becomes an invisible treasure, except in very small ones: Poulot 2020.

9 https://www.icom-musees.fr/sites/default/files/2019-11/Publication%20Muse%CC%81es%20et%20droits%20culturels.pdf.

10 Chakrabarty 2002.

11 Perec 2010.

12 Smith 2019.

13 *Confidential note…* 2025.

14 Sterling, Larkin 2021.

15 The *A World to Heal* exhibition was presented at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum from November 2021 to April 2022.

16 Guzin Lukic 2004; for an example, see the exhibition *Enfants en guerre, guerre à l'enfance?* at *La Contemporaine*, Nanterre, http://www.lacontemporaine.fr/.

17 https://musee-memorial-terrorisme.fr/. On the phenomenon Barrett, Alba, Moses 2025.

18 https://www.dhmd.de/en/exhibitions/preview/fake.

19 Šveb, van Zomeren, Hansen 2024.

20 Lemieux 2007.

21 *Rapport sur la bibliographie 22 germinal an II* (1794), quoted by Poulot 1996, p. 279.

22 Etienne 2012.

23 Lethbridge 1992.

24 Lenz 1978.

25 Poulot 2025.

26 Bal 1992.

27 Riegel 1995; Forni 2020, pp. 59-71. For the general context Tator, Henry, Mattis, 1998, chapter 2, pp. 36-61.

28 The first one of this kind being Benjamin Ives Gilman's article on "Museum Fatigue" from 1916, https://archive.org/details/jstor-6127/page/n13/mode/2up

29 Baxandall 1972.

30 Valéry [1923] 1960.

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31 Buttier, Roullier, Sandras 2022.

32 Bataille 1930, p. 300; Debaene 2002.

33 Salles [1939] 2022, p. 133.

34 Flamm 2007, p. 692.

35 See the poems by Volker Braun, translated and edited by Jean-Paul Barbe: Braun 2023.

36 Gasnier et al. 2022.

37 Oldenburg 1999.

38 Besson 2017.

39 Among others, Fischer Taylor 2013.

40 Interview with Céline Trautmann-Waller: McEwan, Trautmann-Waller 2018.

41 *Mining the Museum* was an exhibition installed by Fred Wilson, invited by The Contemporary, Baltimore, using the archives and resources of the Maryland Historical Society in October 1992: Corrin et al. 1994.

42 *Report of the World Commission…* 1987

43 Deliss 2013.

44 Faure-Favier 2018.

45 Quoted in Dercon, Lecuyer 2023.

46 On the complexity of actual museum experiences, see Debary, Roustan 2012.

47 https://hemisphereson.com/youmna-saba-dans-la-tour-des-instruments-du-monde.

48 *Tuning In*, temporary exhibition 2024-2025, International Museum of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, https://redcrossmuseum.ch/exhibitions/tuning-in-acoustique-de-lemotion-exhibition-redcrossmuseum/.

49 *Réparer les vivants* is a novel by Maylis de Kerangal published in 2014 by Verticales.

50 *Report by the Canadian Museums Association*, cited here by Nada Guzic.

51 Ruddel 2005.

52 Garneau 2022, p. 245.

53 Assu et al. 2018; Loget 2021.

54 Brulon Soares 2024, p. 83; Russi 2024, p. 5.

55 Phillips 2011.

56 Garcia Gomez 2023.

57 Arndt, Etienne 2023.

58 Delamour 2019.

59 Le Marec 2021a, p. 21.

60 Chaline 1983.

61 Owens 2024,.

62 Tronto 2008; Brugère 2023a; 2023b.

63 Detambel 2017; 2023.

64 https://www.mbam.qc.ca/fr/seances-dart-therapie/.

65 https://www.mbam.qc.ca/en/news/museum-prescriptions/.

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66 https://www.moco.art/fr/art-sur-ordonnance; https://metropole.rennes.fr/prescriptions-museales-quand-lart-devient-un-remede.

67 Cowan, Laird, McKeown 2020.

68 Chatterjee, Vreeland, Noble 2009; Holzritter 2024.

69 https://mindful-art.eu/care-et-cure-au-musee. A bibliography has been compiled by Célia Corbet and Nathalie Bondil, as part of the continuing education course: "Museothérapie - Art et santé dans les musées", 2024 by the Institut national du patrimoine in Paris. See the collection of articles edited by Joëlle Le Marec: Le Marec 2021b.

70 *Le caring museum…* 2023.

71 Benjamin [1936] 2016.

72 Benjamin [1936] 2016, p. 119.

73 Orlando 1994.

74 Melville 1851, Chap. 110, "Queequeg in His Coffin".

75 Wendling 2021.

76 Jamin 2014.

77 See the chapters by Donald Preziosi and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in Rüsen, Fehr 2004; Michael Conforti 2018.

78 Le Marec 2021a, p. 16.

79 It's worth noting that the entire issue was composed before the recent political upheavals in North America, which are calling into question the previous orientations of many museums.

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