Hot Topics, Public Culture, Museums

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Edited by

Fiona Cameron and Lynda Kelly

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FOREWORD

CELEBRATING THOSE WHO CREATE CHANGE[1]

ELAINE HEUMANN GURIAN

In a profession generally resistant to change and where alterations in practice can be measured in what seems like geologic time, it is books like the one the reader is now holding that helps move the process along.

Books are substantial and seen as trustworthy. The reader can hold them (or now read them on a screen). The authors create footnotes, which help confer a respectable authenticity. The writing is put into a framework that allows one idea to sit next to another as if both had always been related to each other like siblings. The very processes of book production, which take time and have many steps, might possibly help move the subject of controversy from its fringe position into established acceptance. This important book, about museums incorporating difficult and contested subjects into their work, the consequences of doing so and reviews of the theory and practice that surround such decisions, helps merge isolated examples into a more coherent and acceptable practice.

Each illustration coheres to the next and an almost viral, seemingly intentional, plan seems to evolve. The creators of the activities written about are made more highly regarded and they, by association, are able to join the company of others, some of whom they may never have known before. In real life the same museum directors cited probably met resistance by staff and their public when inaugurating these very activities.

We must likewise be grateful to the editors, Cameron and Kelly, for persisting in researching and writing about controversy and its value, for gathering authors who now know each other, and most of all for helping to move formerly marginal parts of the museum world onto centre stage for emulation by others.

Why is it that many museums are resistant to change? And when museum directors insist on change, why are museum personnel so expert at thwarting and avoiding it? Does this resistance have to do with the

specificity of museum work, or is it ubiquitous wherever organisational change is proposed?

In museum work we find people who have chosen their careers based on their individual philosophy, life style and interest. Their choice of profession is often very specific and may have been committed to from a very early age. Choosing to work in museums is certainly not based on remuneration, since salary levels are low when compared to the pay similarly educated people tend to get elsewhere. I conclude that most museum staff are self-selected based on a mix of personal reasons, which include the role museums have played in their lives, a commitment to the nobility of the work itself, and pleasure with the position they hold in society because of it. This is especially true of those who choose employment in the specialised museum functions (curation, museum education, exhibition development and collections care, for example). Museum workers can appear messianic in defence of their notion of what museums are all about. Their definition of appropriate museum activity is often tied, I believe, to their view of themselves as vigilant guardians of patrimony (physical objects) for future generations and benign enlighteners of present day visitors. These staff members envision themselves standing at the barricades fighting against those who, like the authors of these chapters, wish to propose change because they believe in a different definition of museums. These museum workers, as self-appointed custodians, fear that these individuals might be misguided, advocating the transformation of the institutions they love into something they will no longer recognise.

I now sometimes thank such resisters—a funny position for one who has advocated inclusionary change for nearly 40 years. Let me confess that I find the object-based temple of the contemplative—the places I have so long sought to change, such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre—divine.

Equally surprising to me is that my young grandchildren are similarly entranced, no matter their age or their prior subject-matter knowledge. For all of us, going to the Met is indeed like entering the rarefied magical world of the imagination. The journey is closer than I care to admit to the mystical literature favoured by these same grandchildren. Entering satisfies aspirations of being powerful, rich and endowed with super-human powers because, in some sense, we know those places diverge exotically from our daily environment and reflect more of the values of the people who formerly owned these objects than those who made them.

Allow me to name these museums as the “classicists”. These are the object-drenched gorgeous spaces whose installations have intentionally

omitted explanatory labels that might help most mere mortals. These are the places that are indeed overwhelming and memorable—at the same time as they exasperate by reducing the uninitiated to feelings of insignificance. The indelibleness of the Metropolitan may be based in part on its indecipherability. And there are some smug few who fear that the exclusive ambience would be compromised if more people understood it.

Let me be clear: there are few such classic places so perfect as to be worthy of my total forgiveness. I would still contend that most classic museums do not reach the Met's level of delightful astonishment. Instead they often evoke mystification, and ultimately boredom and frustration in their visitors.

In contra-distinction, there are "inclusionists' museums" with whom I proudly associate myself, that are committed to wide accessibility, that associate with daily experience and the important issues of the world around them. I would contend that the examples cited in this volume belong predominantly to this category. These institutions have intentionally modified and even wilfully destroyed the impenetrable atmosphere so treasured by the classicists. But they often intentionally give away their other worldly magic by doing so. These institutions take as their stance a more egalitarian political position asserting that the material evidence we call collections belongs to everyone and that any systemic change that welcomes the less initiated is for the good.

The tension between the "classicists" and the "includers" has existed from almost the beginning of museums themselves and there have been side-by-side contemporaneous developments of excellence by each "team" in every age. The inclusionist museums tend to be numerically fewer and are often considered generally less powerful than their more traditional siblings. They are often children's museums, science centres, community and culturally specific museums—institutions that the classicists might not always consider "real" museums. The influence of these inclusionary institutions is huge because they experiment with multiple strategies of interactivity, interesting administrative techniques and controversial subject matters that push the boundaries of the field as a whole. The subject matter, points of view, and techniques employed by these museums are the ones that slowly make their way into the mainstream, first by imitation at other inclusionary museums and then via acceptance by the more flexible classicists, where any change is often heralded as revolutionary.

Thereafter there is an acceptance of this self-same technique by even the most reticent, using a process that could be called "wanting to be the third on your block". The approval comes after many others have tried it,

most especially after the supplest of the classic museums have incorporated it into their own programs. Peter Linett writes: “It is unrealistic to expect any major museum to venture out on the limb alone” (Linett 2009).

I now understand that so many museums resist change because they aspire to remain in the “classic” camp, most especially aligned with the social elite and reinforced by the stereotype of museums found in movies and literature. The lack of basic change among the majority of the world’s museums has, I now believe, been intentional and the resistance to change has been successful overall. It also is the case that neither the majority nor the powerful have demanded it. Quite the contrary, the controlling stakeholders, whether the social elite, political officials, or the newly rich, have more often funded “classic” institutions over others in their locale. And these stakeholders have sometimes required those who stray to return to the fold, instructing others of the dangers of experimentation.

The advocacy of museum inclusion has remained the province of the political left, the mostly disenfranchised cultural minorities, academics and free-choice educational philosophers. These advocates usually have insufficient political clout to effect major transformation. But publications like this one can encourage and legitimate further experimentation.

When classicists’ museums begin direct work with under-served audiences, institute a social web blog, or publish an exhibition calendar that includes seemingly controversial subjects, such activities might be seen as gestures in response to external pressures so that the museum core can remain inviolate. Such actions often remain episodic or ancillary, without permanent adoption within the museum’s programming, and sometimes exude a patronising feeling that I am sure the staff did not intend. By contrast, inclusionist museums tend to experiment with systems that enhance their dialogue with visitors and in doing so care less about old definitions of patrimony than do their classic siblings.

I now believe that museums transform only when their directors *will* it. It is more personality based than I would like. Such directors are the indefatigable visionaries who know how to advance from idea to operation. And eventually those who join him or her share the vision and form a band of believers—a passionate coterie.

Visionary directors appear in both museum categories—inclusive and classic. Those who foster experimentation in classic museums tend to expand on examples already seen elsewhere (but do not violate the boundaries of their sector) while visionary directors of inclusionary museums often defy traditional boundaries. These far-sighted inclusionary directors are the “first on their block”, often vulnerable to firing, or oversee

museums small (or deemed insignificant) enough to fly below the radar. It is such directors who are most often cited in this book.

Classicist directors attempting change move their institutions and their field in small successive steps that can be emulated by others. They recognise that their museums are incrementalists. They borrow ideas from the more experimental branches of the museum community and choose those most ripe for acceptance.

These directors are brave, but not foolhardy. They pay with their personal social capital to make change happen. It is because of their clout that such departures from established practice can be embraced by other classic museums and come to be seen as acceptable, traditional and even timeless. The classic sector, when cautiously emulating the more avant garde change-agent museums, forgets (or intentionally does not acknowledge) the source material they've adopted. As a political move, expanding the acceptable methodology of one's own cohort is smart. It makes the director into an acknowledged pioneer. I admire such directors. Those who succeed in changing the procedures of their class are, of necessity, persistent and valiant. But their aim is to be the second, not the first, on their block. That makes those who emulate these expanders the "third" on their block.

I do not know who will tackle new museum issues in the immediate future but I remain impressed by and grateful to those who dare to be the first on their block, as well as those are brave enough to be the second. I admire this book, which allows the ideas of the "firsts" to be highlighted, and encourages the "seconds" to follow their lead. Both of them will give heart to all of us "thirds" as we eventually try new things.

References

Linett, P. 2009. Reinstallation Rorschach: What do you see in the renovated Detroit Institute of Arts? *Curator,* 52 (1): 5–12.

Notes

[1] Parts of this foreword incorporates elements of a key note address "Being the Third on Your Block" written for the Michigan Museum Association, and delivered in October 2009.

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INTRODUCTION

FIONA CAMERON

This collection engages the highly problematic and increasingly important issue of museums, their engagement with "hot" topics (taboo subjects, revisionist histories and political issues), and their roles as part of wider conversations in a networked contemporary public culture.

Hot topics such as homosexuality, sexual, racial and political violence, mental illness, massacres, lynching, drugs, terrorism and climate change are now all part of museological culture. A long-established practice of exhibiting "the facts", "truth", "national history" or unproblematic conceptions of "other" places and peoples is no longer sustainable in an environment where the self-evidence of all these things is under question. Unproblematic conceptions of national history and the "other" are now giving way to complex narratives and the portrayal of their unsavoury aspects. Previously considered off-limits, the induction of these subjects and their representation in museums has been problematic. While some museums have successfully and meaningfully engaged hot topics[1], in reality few are willing to do so because they are seen as high risk due to a fear of political and social repercussions, such as funding withdrawal or the alienation of audiences.

Over the last 20 years, Western democracies have witnessed a rise in museum controversies and political debates around disputed interpretations of history, current affairs and topics considered morally and politically transgressive.[2] Clearly controversies suggest that many institutions in the second decade of the 21st century are theatres of struggle over moral values, beliefs and political agendas. Institutions are seen as powerful places for shaping cultural memory and important gatekeepers for directing, opening up or closing down cultural conversations on topics of societal significance.

The new museology has often expressed the need for museums to deal with complex political and social issues, arguing that museums must develop a function of critique and see themselves as a forum for debate. Engaging such topics is an extension of the museum's role in representing diversity and pluralism, however, a reluctance to converse deeply with

these subjects is based on a limited understanding of the roles and civic purposes of museums in contemporary society; the social and political contexts in which institutions operate; and how these topics might be purposefully interpreted and engaged in a changing and increasingly politicised world.

Contentious topics such as difficult histories, taboo topics and hot contemporary issues of local and global relevance and significance are difficult to represent because they are unpredictable, involve conflict, are mobile and are inseparable from a range of broader social and political contexts and flows, many of whom cannot be calculated and anticipated (Cameron 2003). Most importantly they embody a divisive dimension, raising alternative answers while challenging an individual's or group's values, beliefs, ideologies or moral position (Cameron 2003). It is for these reasons that the entry of such topics into museums in recent years has been problematic, deemed to challenge the institutional foundations and the philosophical integrity of the museum. Museum metaphors as they currently stand are predominantly orientated towards the production of stable, certain meanings, ordered categories, unified heritage values and socially symbolic meanings such as local or national identity (Cameron 2008).

As Ferguson, Cameron and Koster argue in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 respectively, these blockages are partly due to a schism between the modern museum, based on the notion of certainty; consensual values; the use of expert knowledge systems as factual objects; a lack of focus on impact and relevance; as places to discipline populations by setting moral standards and reforming behavior; and as places to control conversations. Essentially museums have strived to create a world of factual "objects" almost completely separate from human concerns, desires and conflicts (Cameron 2003).

Political theorist John Rawls argues that societies and the culture of public institutions are inherently political, characterised by irreconcilable opinions and values.

> The political culture of a democratic society is marked by a diversity of opposing and irreconcilable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines … within a background of enduring free institutions … What are the grounds of toleration so understood …? how is to possible for there to exist over time a just and stable society … who remain profoundly divided … we must find a way of organizing ideas and principles … in a different way than before. (Rawls 1999, 123)

Re-reading Rawl's argument in the context of museums, controversy is a naturally occurring state in wider public culture, and therefore the ability to express and embrace ideological diversity in terms of the subject and those of audiences is a requirement of many 21st century museums. On the other hand representing contentious topics also engages the political culture of museums—the diverse and opposing doctrines of a range of stakeholders, many of whom have political clout and control public funding.

From these vantage points we might ask the following questions. Although doctrines remain irreconcilable, how can museums effectively engage contentious topics in new ways considering that in a contemporary complex society, pluralism and discursive conflict is an emergent contemporary condition?

Moreover, morality in a postmodern world, according to cultural theorist Zygmunt Bauman (2007), has become re-personalised and individual rather than based on a consensual, collective morality, all traits characteristic of modernist institutions. Therefore it can be argued that engaging divisiveness challenges the epistemological foundations of museums as "objective" knowledge sources and as authorities. For museums, contentious subjects raise more questions than they answer rather than offering consensual positions or knowable "facts". As a result a difficult dilemma arises between the perceived objective basis of knowledge in museums and the subjective interpretations that contentious topics necessarily entail. Museums must navigate the sensitive terrain between facts / opinion, authority / expertise, advocacy / neutrality, censorship / exposure.

New forms of content production and sociality enabled by digital technologies and Web 2.0 through social networking sites such as Facebook, ning, YouTube and Flickr dramatically alter relationships between cultural institutions and public culture in terms of knowledge production and power relations. Accordingly, the borders between the museum as a discrete entity operating above society are eroding as the boundaries between the museum and public culture become increasingly blurred. Museum information now operates within networks that transcend their immediate location, placing institutions in wider flows of interconnected cultural, political, economic and technological ideas, agendas and resources (Cameron 2008). Through these public spaces, museum information and collections, for example, are able to garner greater interest and cultivate meanings within wider cultural and social contexts. Social actors in various locations and contexts are acting on and modifying information according to their interests. For example, museum

information and objects are taking an active role in social networks and political agendas. Via Google, collections of Persian objects, used as signifiers of Iranian cultural identity were mobilised to counter negative representations of ancient Persia following the *300* movie controversy about the battle of Thermapylae between the Persians and Spartans in 480BC (Jones 2007). Searches for the film *300* were diverted away from the film to a website Project 300 that displayed contemporary Iranian art, documentaries and links to the British Museum's *Forgotten Empire* exhibition of Persian artefacts (Jones 2007, 6)[3]. Art works were used as a tool to project positive representations of Persian civilisation and bolster contemporary national narratives.

Collections information from the Powerhouse Museum collection on Australian swimmer, Annette Kellerman, the "Diving Venus", who was arrested in 1907 for indecent exposure by appearing in her bathing suit, appeared on the porn blog, Silent-Porn-Star.[4]

Interactions with museum information and heritage collections, some planned, others serendipitous are now being conducted through these multiple and extended connections of people, ideas and objects, across long distances and national boundaries. Museum information is fluid, boundaries no longer exist, enabling all these things to be used and reconfigured within flows (Cameron 2008).

Although museums tend to be locality-bound and represent specific communities, they now simultaneously operate in global networks as nodes in information flows, and within broader heritage regimes. The global offers a different set of competing dynamics, no longer territorially defined and community based. In considering museums as at once local, national and global, this aspect works with the potential to integrate a multiplicity of political, economic, social and cultural economies, linked to various communities, histories and geographical regions of the globe. All these actions and connections have the potential to create and (re) create meanings around museum information in complex ways.

Because the space of information flows is now so flexible and interactive, protocols of communication according to theorist Manuel Castells (2004) between cultures in networks are not necessarily based on shared values but sharing the value of communication. Therefore museum information now operates in an open-ended network of meanings and within many-to-many communication regimes that co-exist but also interact and modify each other on the basis of exchanges. Here museum information and objects are simultaneously connected to locality and institution, but also increasingly play a role in mapping out a public space beyond the museum. Clearly, the more technology facilitates a networked

social structure and individual self expression as seen most recently with Web 2.0, the more difficult it becomes for institutions to produce universal or consensual meanings around identity and history. On the other hand, these developments offer new opportunities for museums to become more embedded into and relevant for contemporary societies, operating as part of assemblages and assembling entities around socially relevant issues. What particular contributions museums might make and how institutions might capitalise on these opportunities and confront the challenges posed by these new configurations between hot topics, public culture and museums is the theme of this collection.

These movements and interactions, as detailed between public culture and museum culture, are more closely aligned to what Bruno Latour (2005) calls "object-orientated democracies" (Cameron 2008). According to Latour (2005, 15), and in referring to contemporary issues such as the Islamic veil in France or the latest beheading of fanatics in Falluja, each of these "objects" generates a different pattern of emotions, passions, opinions, disagreements and agreements while drawing together an assembly of people each with their own agendas and ways to achieve a resolution.

In a networked environment, Latour (2005, 19) posits that there is a shift from matters of fact, to matters of concern or matters of interest as the various agendas and opinions are brought together through networks. The museum accordingly is an actor within an object-orientated democracy as competing assemblies of people and ideas coalesce generating changes in conceptions of what is objectivity and what are the "facts" (Cameron 2008). Persian objects from the British Museum exhibition, *Forgotten Empire*, for example, were drawn into the object-orientated democracy around Persian nationhood and identity that emerged around the *300* movie. Here collections and information were used as "objects" in international relations specifically to foreground and assert the matters of concern and interests of contemporary Iranian artists, activists and media about representations of the Persian past and how the Persian empire was portrayed (Cameron 2008).

By the gathering together of different assemblies of relevant and interested people around an object, Latour (2005) argues that the public space and the readings of the object that emerges is profoundly different from that usually recognised under the label of the political. Here the analogy for museum information lies in how this information is operating, read and used in networked public space by different individuals and groups, often in entirely different ways from those imagined under the guise of curatorial authority or heritage significance, value and certainty.

Increasingly, institutions seek to re-evaluate their roles and institutional forms in a diverse, mobile, networked and deeply politicised world to remain relevant, inclusive, viable and vital. But for many, the particular roles institutions might perform under these emerging conditions remains unclear. How might institutions position themselves meaningfully around topics that are divisive, that challenge established or conservative orthodoxies and the values, beliefs, moral positions and political agendas of their stakeholders? How are networked relationships between constituencies enabled by digital technologies reshaping museum-audience relations and wider conversations around socially significant topics, and as part of object-orientated democracies?

Museum scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000) suggests that it is timely to reconstruct the museum idea itself to think more deeply about the character and possibilities of museums in a more complex society. Hooper-Greenhill suggests this process involves reviewing, reinvigorating and adapting museum values, practices, authority and knowledge as shaped according to 19th century ideas, and embracing new ones reflecting 21st century conditions. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) concludes that reworking the idea of the museum has much to do with understanding the relationship between museums and their audiences, as well as the recognition and exploitation of the generative power of the cultural sphere.

At this intersection, the initiation of hot topics into museums offers an ideal starting point to interrogate what Hooper-Greenhill proposes. Clearly there is a variable gap between knowledge about and the practices of museums around hot topics in an increasingly complex and networked political world in a context where the idea of shared values, common meanings, disciplinary and institutional authority is now under question. The social, cultural impact and networking capabilities of media technologies and their uses in emergent cultural conversations between museums, audiences and across a variety of social spaces also requires investigation.

This collection fills these gaps by drawing on the findings from the Australian Research Council international research project *Exhibitions as Contested Sites, the Roles of Museums in Contemporary Societies* and *Contested Sites Canada* (Canadian Museums Association).[5] Sustained research in the Canadian, US, UK, Australian and New Zealand contexts is used to theorise and interrogate the contemporary social, civic and political agency of history museums and science museums in public culture. The work of international scholars in other cultural contexts (South America and Continental Europe), contribute to this volume by

expanding the discussion on museums, hot topics, and the nexus between institutions, public culture and audiences.

This collection advances the knowledge base of cultural / museum theory and practice by offering new ways of conceptualising and theorising contemporary museums as institutional forms and their place in public culture based on emergent social conditions; alternative notions of how culture is conceived; how the engagement with hot topics is enacted through new forms of sociality, and what this says about building social and cultural competencies (institutions and audiences as both agents / actors). It also contributes to making museums more responsive, integral, valuable and relevant to communities by the consideration of all these things. The various authors in this collection contribute to the formulation of new knowledge about the practice of contentious curatorship within institutional settings including institutional interpretative capacity, curatorial strategies for engaging hot topics from those based on didactic models to ones that also engage the emotions and affect, and the possibilities offered by digital media. And finally authors in Part 2 explore the potential for digital technologies to enable conversations around hot topics examining key themes of museum authority and expertise, the ways museums might be reframed as information sources and what this says about audience, institutional forms and relations in building vibrant participatory cultures.

In **Part 1: Hot Topics, Agency and Institutional Forms,** authors present multifarious musings on museums as institutions and forms in contemporary societies and the changing role of the curator within these assemblages through various philosophical theoretical lens and practice models.

Chapter 1, *The Transformation of the Museum Into a Zone of Hot Topicality and Taboo Representation: The Endorsement / Interrogation Response Syndrome* by Caleb Williams (Justice and Police Museum, Sydney, Australia) presents a new theoretical and conceptual account for the emergence of hot topics in museums (examples include: sexuality, prison riots, ecological protest, forensic work and the history of tattooing). Williams goes on to argue that the current condition of post-modernity at once changes the museum from a space dedicated to truth and fact to interpretation. Here the institution is situated in a new realm of possibilities in engaging two-way conversations around topics of societal relevance and concern. Williams goes on to discuss the practice of contentious curatorship and the limits of the interpretative capacity of the museum in a contemporary world.

In **Chapter 2**, *Strategy and Tactic: A Post-Modern Response to the Modernist Museum* Linda Ferguson (Australian War Memorial, Canberra, Australia) drawing on the *Contested Sites* findings examines a range of topics considered too contentious by stakeholders for museums to display. Ferguson considers what these topics say about the widely accepted roles of museums, and as places for representing identity, certainty and morality early in the 21st century. Here Ferguson situates and theorises museum controversies as evidence of the struggle between the conditions of modernity and post-modernity and notions of what the museum is. She considers museum controversies as an event beyond a simple opposition politics between institutions, audiences and citizens, rather as a legitimate, active and influential actor within an existing field of power relations. From this position Ferguson offers a new reading of how and why exhibitions become contentious within this wider field of relations beyond the museum.

Fiona Cameron (Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia) in **Chapter 3**, *Risk Society, Controversial Topics and Museum Interventions: (Re)Reading Controversy and the Museum Through a Risk Optic* offers a new reading of the museum and controversy using Ulrich Beck's (1999) notion of global risk society, the rise of global risks and hazards such as climate change and terrorism and the emergence of new social forms drawing on the findings of the *Contested Sites* research. Although it is clear that museums have a very important role to play in conversations, debates and decisions around topics of societal importance, Cameron argues that previous institutional forms are based on the notion of earlier risk management regimes based on discipline and risk control that inhibit such conversations and debates. In reading the museum in the context of what Beck calls second modernity, ways of engaging controversy emerge pointing to new strategies in which institutions must engage controversy as interfaces between museums and public culture become more intimately interconnected in a networked, globalising world.

In **Chapter 4** *Evolution of Purpose in Science Museums and Science Centres*, Emlyn Koster (Liberty Science Center, Jersey City, US) examines the evolution of science museums and science centres through the optic of purpose as opposed to simplistic binaries based on experience, static versus participatory. Koster argues that in engaging purpose, institutions must strive to attain optimum relevance to pressing science-driven opportunities and challenges in society. Koster tracks the movement of purpose from the establishment of science museums in the nineteenth century and their emphasis on research, education and collecting to the science centres of the 1960s as spaces for increasing

science literacy around physical phenomena to world expositions presenting a positive view of the world based on scientific and technological progress. All these rationales, in which Koster regards as examples of first and second generation institutions are mainly pedagogically driven, and accordingly this preoccupation has been at the expense of an equally important criterion of considering impact and relevance, and the place of institutions in science and society. Here Koster argues that both the internal barriers and the external opportunities for science centres and science museums must be tackled in a wholehearted, relevancy-driven state of mind, a defining characteristic of his third generation institution. He concludes by stating that institutions are not only to be safe places but also ideal places for conversations, places that consciously proceed boldly but carefully forward.

Chapter 5, *Curator: From Soloist to Impresario* by Elaine Heumann Gurian (Consultant and member of the Museum Group, US) explores museums as institutions in networked society, sites intentionally or unintentionally now operating in extreme sharing networks of information. More specifically she interrogates the structural change a museum will have to make in order to intentionally share information not created exclusively or edited by staff and how the integration of such information on the exhibition floor must allow the visitor to find answers to their own self generated queries in the presence of objects. Topic choice and the breadth, angle and depth of its exploration tends to remain in control of the institution. This chapter examines what happens when carefully edited museum information around a topic deemed controversial comes together with user-generated content. Heumann Gurian argues that the coming together through multiple avenues of input where different knowledge systems—opinions and values, lived experience and expertise are enabled to interact offers unique opportunities for deeper conversations to occur in museum spaces. Heumann Gurian also examines some of the blockages preventing such engagement around knowledge sharing, which she articulates as a philosophical problem around the notion of the curator.

In her second chapter, **Chapter 6,** *Liquid Governmentalities, Liquid Museums and the Climate Crisis*, Fiona Cameron (Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia) extends her thinking about museums as institutional forms in the context of the highly relevant, controversial and compelling topic of climate change. Foucauldian and post-Foucauldian governmentality theory and Beck's notion of world risk society are the predominant means by which the analysis of climate change governmentality structures is conducted. Moreover, the former is the principal paradigm in which museums are theorised, at once as places

for discipline (Bennett 1995) and accordingly in risk management. Cameron reads climate change and museums in governmentality flows through these two predominant optics. Cameron then goes onto critique these modes of thinking, proposing a new theoretical idea, "liquid governmentalities" and "liquid museums" drawing on complexity and assemblage theory as a means of moving away from normative views on climate governmentality and the museum. Here the aim is to look at governmentality and the place of museums in these formations as a process rather than as a reflexive exercise in which to tease out the meaning of a particular form, event program or exhibition, and the circulation of power within this ensemble. Here by looking at museums according to a different optic, rather than one that asks *why* to one that looks at the *how* we can look at institutions and interventions as processes, and consider ways that institutions might be shaped and connected to broader networks and flows.

Morgan Meyer (Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, UK) in **Chapter 7**, *From Cold Science to "Hot" Research* examines the shifting roles of science museums from places for cold research, where secure, closed and fixed knowledge is communicated, to ones that engage hot controversial research and open debates and where novel questions are asked. He demonstrates how contemporary science museums act increasingly as contact zones, that is, "places of hybrid possibility and political negotiation, and sites of exclusion and struggle". Here Meyer, drawing on his research in the UK and France, contemplates new roles for science museums as environments for negotiation between diverse actors and between multiple epistemologies and ontologies.

In **Chapter 8**, *Queering the Museum*, Richard Sandell (Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK) and Stuart Frost (British Museum) use case examples from the UK and US to explore issues surrounding museum attempts to represent lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual communities. The authors go on to interrogate the challenges and opportunities created by museums to combat homophobia and promote equality. Their discussion offers new insights into the museum's relationships with social norms of acceptability and tolerance and examines the social agency of representational practices, in particular the potential for museums to (re)frame, enable and inform the conversations society has about difference.

In **Part 2: Engagement**, a combination of theoretical positions, case studies and research findings are presented by authors that provide new ways to think about working with museum audiences, whether in the physical surrounds of the museum or, increasingly, in the social spaces of

the web. Taken together, these suggest that ideas around participation, "citizen curator" and museum authority are key challenges facing museums when engaging with their multiple audiences around hot topics in a rapidly changing and fluid global environment.

In **Chapter 9**, *Controversies in Context: Communication, Hot Topics and Museums in Canada*, Jenny Ellison (History, York University, Toronto, Canada) reports on Canadian research undertaken with museum staff, journalists and museum audiences that explores risks, causes and perceived consequences of presenting hot topics in museums. Ellison argues that these hot topics are shaped by the social and political context within which museums operate and proposes that museums need to provoke conversations in thoughtful and honest ways, while purposefully connecting audiences. Ellison acknowledges both the complexity of these issues, and at the same time identifies the creative possibilities available for institutions to engage their audiences.

Lynda Kelly (Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia) in **Chapter 10**, *Engaging Museum Visitors in Difficult Topics Through Socio-Cultural Learning and Narrative*, considers socio-cultural theory as a conduit for engaging visitors with difficult topics as well as assessing their physical museum experiences. A socio-cultural approach to identifying visitor learning is applied through analysing summative evaluation of visitors to an Australian Museum exhibition that tackled the difficult topic of death. The role of narrative is also considered through examining visitor responses to the more confronting aspects of the exhibition and considering how they felt about death within the context of their personal experience.

Chapter 11, *Making Choices, Weighing Consequences: Pedagogy and Politics of Transportation in America on the Move*, Margaret Lindauer (VCUarts Department of Art History, Virginia Commonwealth University, US) uses the exhibition, *America on the Move* at the National Museum of American History (Washington DC) as a case study for analysing the pedagogical underpinnings inherent in exhibition development. Lindauer argues that while free-choice learning accounts for the wide range of educational outcomes among visitors, it is an insufficient conceptual model for developing an exhibition that would prompt visitors to consider the relevance of the exhibition to their own lives. In her reflexive analysis of the exhibition Lindauer suggests that "critical pedagogy", an educational philosophy aimed at engaging learners in analysing social issues, would have been compatible with curatorial hopes for visitor reception.

Hailing the Cosmopolitan Conscience: Memorial Museums in a Global Age, **Chapter 12** by Paul Williams (Ralph Appelbaum Associates, US), describes how globalisation and physical memorials can be understood as complementary with a growing post-nationalist public that identifies with "cosmopolitan conscience". Williams identifies that as globalisation has affected the moral impetus of memorial museums, it has been only occasionally discussed and little theorised. Williams' chapter remedies this lack of critical attention by elaborating on two connected facts that have become patent over the past twenty years: the flow of instantaneous mediascapes and tourists crossing borders (Appadurai 1996), and a near-worldwide "memorialising moment" realised in the creation of and popular interest in inert memorial structures.

Andrea Witcomb (Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University, Australia) in **Chapter 13**, *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Exhibition Making: Towards an Ethical Engagement With the Past*, analyses two examples as a way to explore their potential to generate more complex understandings of the past and, in particular, for crossing the boundaries produced by cultural memories and identities. Witcomb begins by describing a visit to Dennis Severs' House in Spitalfields (UK). While acknowledging that this is an extreme example of the new turn to what might be called sensorial or affective forms of interpretation, Witcomb suggests that the kind of "palpable" history Severs created in his house has parallels in contemporary forms of interpretation practice that seek to avoid linear, rational and didactic means of communication to impart information and meaning to visitors. These ideas are further developed and applied to a number of other experiences, including those that engage hot topics.

In **Chapter 14**, *"Mymuseum": Social Media and the Engagement of the Environmental Citizen*, Juan Salazar (Centre for Cultural Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia), invites us to think about how museums and science centres can engage the technologies and practices of social media toward increased citizenship participation in relation to the current hot topic of climate change. Regarding the question of engaging publics in climate change action, it is argued that there is still uncertainty about how social media can play a more fundamental role beyond offering the illusion of participation, access and creative content production. Salazar identifies that although recent literature examines the emergence and impact of social media in opening spaces for participation and co-creation, very few analyses go beyond the new promises of networked socio-technical communities.