

Project 'Universal Histories and Universal Museums : a transnational comparison'
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1-Topic and relevance to the Care for the Future and Labex Programmes

Since the late eighteenth century, alongside Enlightenment's philosophy on human rights, Western scholars have conceptualised human universality in universal histories and universal museums. In its investigation of the evolution of museum collections, the 'Universal Histories and Universal Museums' project has a clear correlation with the third objective of the 'The Past in the Present' and the 'Care for the Future' programmes: the mediation, and of the cultural and social appropriation of the past. Looking at the history of museum collections is one of the ways in which we can examine how history is made, displayed and disseminated through the uses, legacies and representations of the past. Our research will highlight the constituent features of encyclopaedic knowledge about Western universalities from the nineteenth century to the present day. It will also examine the assumptions and limitations of such understanding. In particular, the project seeks to address questions regarding the representation of the diversity of cultures that define human universality, the articulation of historical and anthropological approaches to the description of humanity and the influence of social knowledge practices on the structuring of universal knowledge. The project also considers how ways thinking about the past may help us to prepare for a global future that incorporates more diverse universalities.

The first phase of the project will combine critical investigation through four workshops and two historical case studies, based in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro. These will focus on the subject divisions and taxonomies, (science/ arts, history/ethnography) which gradually evolved between 1857 and 1914, and which have directly contributed to current fields of knowledge about humanity and the past. The project's second phase will consolidate the first phase research in a small on-line exhibition based on the two case studies, and a conference timed to align with the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi - a contemporary universal museum. The conference and subsequent publications will bring together key themes of the project relating to alternative understandings of human universality. This will include investigation of the ways in which the social practices of knowledge creation in museums may enable us to think beyond today's established museum epistemologies, and the current narratives of universal histories. Publications will include a book, articles in peer-reviewed journals and digitisation of key archival resources.

2-Research Aims and Objectives

Our project 'Universal Histories and Universal Museums' aims to study the historical development and presentation of museum collections in order to understand the interactions between the various conceptions of world history, and the active shaping of historical narratives, taxonomies and epistemologies in museum collections. We would argue that, far from being an inevitable development of the contemporary Western mind, or a consequence of a rational, systematic institutional process, the development of knowledge about humanity is contingent, and often made fortuitously. By critical investigation of the policies for the assembly and display of museum collections, we will contribute to the growing body of research into the ways in which knowledge is created and presented in museums, and on the ways in which meanings and values are accumulated and transformed in object biographies. Contextual analysis of the relationships between the different narratives of human universality that constitute the writing and reading of universal histories, and the layout and visitor interpretation of universal museum collections, will therefore highlight the constituent features of encyclopaedic knowledge of Western universalities, spanning the 19th to the 21st centuries.

This notion of the universal museum relates to the great museums of art and anthropology that developed in the 19th century, facilitated by colonial expansion, and their global collections' policies and taxonomic classifications of the materials in their collections. Following the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations of 1851, Prince Albert's vision for a collection of institutions and museums across the whole range of knowledge and educational endeavour in South Kensington, led to the founding of the South Kensington Museum (predecessor of the Victoria and Albert Museum). The aim of such a 'universal museum' was the systematic collection and taxonomic classification of objects representative

of all eras (historically thematic) and regions (geographically thematic) of the world. The Museum's first Director, Henry Cole believed its encyclopaedic collections should be 'like a 3D book with its pages always open'.

Two other Parisian examples also illustrate this. The opening of the halls of Oriental Antiquities (Mesopotamian archeology) in the Louvre in 1847 was linked to a desire at that time to better understand biblical narrative. But a few years later, the deciphering of cuneiform facilitated study of the culture itself. In this instance, these constitute collections of objects that preceded and enabled the formation of an academic discipline, and the subsequent integration of this data into universal histories after 1870. Similarly, the recovery of the world exhibition building in 1878 led to the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (1880-1882). But the relocation of the American collections of the Louvre to the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro (and more recently to the Museum of Man in the Musée du quai Branly), as well as the fact that the distinction between archaeology and ethnology is less clearly delineated in American pedagogy, are essential elements in the consolidation of these collections, and their impact on universal histories through the interpretation of museum objects.

So our project will investigate a representative range of such 'universal' museums, both quantitatively (i.e. how they increased and developed their collections), and qualitatively (how they developed their themes and expanded their collections from new geographic regions). We will consider this material both as initially displayed and developmentally, as new museum displays replace previous museologies. We will compare and contrast the balance between how museums displayed their collections chronologically, geographically and thematically.

We will also speculate on a social history of the impact of universal museums on the later writers of universal histories. As part of this, we will consider how Hans F. Helmolt's (1899-1907) topography of the *Weltgeschichte* resembles the cultural museologies of the great museums of arts and archaeology, and ethnography of the time. In terms of 'The Past in the Present' and 'Care for the Future' our core theme of 'Universal Histories and Universal Museums' remains relevant: indeed, universal histories are still being written and there are currently plans for a 'universal museum' at the Louvre Abu Dhabi. In addition, there is the parallel development of the 'global history' approach, in which museums increasingly seek to present their collections in a globalized historical context (as in the case of the Louvre Lens, or the British Museum).

3-Research Methods and Approach

The project will last 30 months (January 2016 to June 2018) and will be divided into two phases, each concerning the writing of world history from the 19th to the 21st century.

Phase 1: reflection and investigation, articulated around archival research and four workshops. The archival research, carried out by a postdoctoral research assistant, will be based on the comparative study of historical collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Musée du quai Branly. This will allow for detailed investigation of applied arts and ethnographic collections in the context of universal histories and universal museums. The workshops will focus on contextual studies, including the constitution of Western museum universalities in major cultural capitals in the 19th and early 20th century; the development of universal museums in the 19th century, and comparative museologies (e.g. the examples of oriental arts or natural history collections).

Phase 2: project consolidation, articulated through a conference exhibition display and publications. The conference will focus on the subject of the current universality of contemporary museums. It will explore methodologies for understanding the relationships between museum approaches and universal histories outside Eurocentric frames of reference.

Our primary methodology will be through archival and collections' research: investigating large quantities of under-utilized source materials. Linking of data across French and English archive collections, papers and literary, journalistic and photographic evidence, will comprise part of the project research.

In the case of the South Kensington Museum, surprisingly, the only previous attempt at a comprehensive history of the collections was written in 1980: A. Summers Cocks, *The Victoria and Albert Museum: The Making of the Collections*. Archive material would include: the 'Universal Catalogue of Books in Art' in the South Kensington Museum, published in 1870; the manuscript records of the 1908 Museum 'Committee of Re-Arrangement', which was the first comprehensive attempt at a universal catalogue,

classification and display of every single work in the museum by material; William Maskells' *South Kensington Museum Handbooks*, Redgrave's *Manuals*, the Arts Catalogues from 1870-1890, and the record of the development of the museum by photographic documentation. These would be read alongside the Parliamentary enquiries into the Museums, the Department of Science and Art minutes and papers, the assorted publications of the first Museum Director, Henry Cole, and the guidebooks to the Museum published over this 40 year period, which detail display, organisation and interpretation as well.

In the case of the Musée du quai Branly, the project will focus on the American collections. There are some old and more recent publications on this material, but much remains to be done, and several specialist researchers would assist in access to archival collections research in Paris: Christiane Demeulenaere (honorary general curator of the National Archives); Christine Laurière, CNRS researcher at the Laboratory of Social Anthropology; Pascal Riviale, curator at the National Archives; André Delpuech and Paz Nunez Regueiro, curators at the Musée du quai Branly; Nélia Dias (Lisbon University); Lise Mész, conservator of the City of Paris.

In addition to archival research, our methodology will include consideration of the exhibited materials themselves, their method of selection and subsequent arrangement and survival. This will aid in the better understanding of the museum collections concerned and analysis of the composition, participation and impact on specialist and non-specialist audiences and wider publics. In the case of the South Kensington Museum, research on the Oriental Arts and Antiquities collections would build on PI's (Kemp's) current work on the South Asia Collections and their origins, including studies of George Birdwood, Casper Purdon Clarke and Aurel Stein. In the 1880s, Clarke (1846-1911) spent two years in India, where he purchased 3,421 items for the museum's collections. The V&A still holds the largest collection of South Asian arts of any museum outside Asia and the history of this collection is not yet widely researched. We will apply quantitative methods to these materials to analyse knowledge-oriented developments.

Phase 1: reflection and investigation: archival research and four workshops

Workshops

The organization of these four days will alternate between London and Paris. We propose to have two themes and a maximum of 12 participants per day. The premises will be provided by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Louvre. Stakeholders will prepare contributions of 5,000 words in advance of the workshops. This will result in either four thematic sets of essays for publication either as special issues of peer-reviewed journals or a single published collection, bringing together material from all four workshops. We plan to organize one workshop every 4 months in 2017. We will fit the precise timing of the workshops around the organization of the conference (in 2018) in connection with the inauguration of the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

Workshop A: 'The constitution of various Western museum universalities in major cultural capitals in the nineteenth and early twentieth century'

It is essential to understand that in 1900, every major Western city offered a particular definition of human universality, configured around the assembly of universal museum collections. This workshop will focus in particular on: institutional aspects – museums which were state-related in most of Europe, but under independent administration in France; heritage, for example, American museums are of more recent design and are not dependent on previous collections; social contexts, including the impact of universal exhibitions and related events, including museum-based 'soirées'; and pedagogical developments in 'universality', including distinctions between civilization and culture, and between history and ethnography. This workshop will also consider the different trajectories of museums, such as the disaggregation of the original British Museum or the division of collections in the Louvre, South Kensington Museum and other museums, into specific disciplines or periods: for example, in Paris, the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1882 and the Musée d'Orsay in 1986, and the addition of various museums, such as Berlin's 'Museum Island' project, or the overall design of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The relationship, or tension, between the West and the rest of the world in the definition of human universality will also be examined in the context of why, for example, 'universality' is different in Paris or in London in 1900 and 2000.

- European examples (London, Paris, Berlin, Rome)
- American examples (New York, Washington DC, Chicago, Los Angeles)

Workshop B: ‘The evolution of the museum’

The evolution of the museum can be traced through changes in collections, but also through the adoption of new pedagogical perspectives corresponding to new questions or new ideological trends. It is sometimes the case that maintaining old museologies allows a quasi-archaeological approach to the problem by referencing various time periods. For example, in the National Museum of Natural History in New York, the Northwestern gallery remains as it was curated a century ago by the leading anthropologist, Franz Boas. But for the most part, original displays have long since been replaced by others for pedagogical reasons. This workshop will focus on methodological issues relating to universal histories and universal museum collections arising from the case studies, which will provide examples of these changes over time. We will explore the extent to which museologies express the social concerns of their day, and/or the predilections of senior staff, rather than a supposedly systematic and strategic accumulation of knowledge. In particular, we will investigate the impact of temporary exhibitions, the circulation of knowledge in the public sphere, how social knowledge practices influence the structuring of institutional knowledge, and the emergence of new disciplines.

- The South Kensington Museum/Victoria and Albert Museum and Science Museum

The 1876 Loan Collection of Scientific Apparatus at the South Kensington Museum – a temporary exhibition that became the founding collection of the Science Museum – is an excellent, under-utilised study for the development of distinct disciplinary approaches towards curation and display. This exhibition offers an ideal case study for the ways in which temporary displays have a permanent legacy in national and international museum collections, and how far the interpretation and presentation of materials was transformed in this process. Using the soirées that accompanied temporary exhibitions at the South Kensington Museum and the Louvre, we will explore how the contents of such displays and demonstrations were determined, and by whom, and the profile and responses of participants and audiences.

- The Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro

The transformation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro into the Museum of Man (1937), and the creation of the Quay Branly Museum (Museum of arts and civilizations of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas in 2006) and MuCEM (Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilisations in 2013) are well documented and have been well studied. However, the creation of the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in 1880-1882 is less well known. The project's analysis of the place given to the arts, to the regions and areas covered in the universal exhibitions in the second half of the nineteenth century (Paris, 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889) will contribute to a better understanding of the ways in which the dynamics uniting collectors, public and politicians, have presided over the creation of this museum.

Workshop C: ‘Comparative Museologies: the example of the Oriental Arts’

Unlike collections of European paintings or Greco-Roman antiquities, which began as early as the Renaissance, it was not until the 19th and 20th centuries that the major European museums gained widespread access to the oriental arts. The collections of oriental arts in universal museums therefore provide a good example for comparison, since they were acquired almost contemporaneously. However, their incorporation into existing museum collections or their interpretation according to scholarly knowledge at the time differed depending on the range of objects available and the various national scholarly traditions.

- The oriental antiquities at the Louvre, the British Museum in Berlin and New York
- South Asia collections at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Guimet Museum (+ New York, San Francisco, Washington DC)

Workshop D: ‘Comparative Museology: the example of museums of art and archaeology, natural history and ethnography’

In the 19th century European museums mostly tended to separate fine and applied arts, or archaeology and ethnography, with the exception of the Louvre and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris, or the South Kensington Museum. The subsequent separation of the collections of the South Kensington Museum into the Victoria and Albert Museum (art and design) and Science Museum (science and technology) in the early 20th century represented to some extent the abandonment of its universalising founding principle. This is also the case in Chicago with the Institute of Arts, the Science and Industry Museum and the Field Museum, but this is not so in New York, where the American Museum of Natural

History still includes both natural sciences and ethnography, or even in Paris, in the range of collections in the Museum of Man of 1937.

Workshop A (above) focuses on the creation of universal knowledge through the founding of museums of art, science, archaeology and ethnography in major capital cities. By contrast, Workshop D will analyse both the various constellations of knowledge assembled in different museums, and the advantages this has for research both into the development of knowledge through the assembly of museum collections, and into the division of knowledge into specialist disciplines: for example, between 'hard' sciences and social sciences, or design and technology.

- The division and assembly of knowledge (London, Paris, Berlin, New York, Chicago, Washington DC)

- Universal Histories Compared: ethnographic museums and art and archaeology museums (London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, New York, Washington DC)

Archival Research

This will be carried out by a Postdoctoral Research Assistant (PDRA) for one year. He or she will be fluent in French and English, will divide their time between London and Paris, and will locate materials for the small on-line exhibition display based on the two case studies in the second phase of the project.

The PDRA will address the following research question: 'Was there a theory or policy underpinning the development of the collections of the South Kensington Museum and the Musée ethnographique du Trocadéro, from the 1857 to 1914?'

In particular, he or she will investigate how temporary exhibitions influenced the content and construction of more permanent public collections, and in turn contributed to the development of universal museum knowledge. How did museums become contested spaces for control of discrete disciplinary territory as knowledge and understanding of the collections developed? This research would also explore how the knowledge, understanding and use of these collections were shaped by their early public display and through engagement between audiences and collections at soirées and other exhibition events.

In the case of the South Kensington Museum, scholarly understanding of the history of the South Kensington Museum has so far paid little attention to the ways in which its developing collections contributed to the development of universal knowledge. The project would investigate the fragmentation of scholarship into different subjects according to material and or topography.

In the case of the Musée du quai Branly, the PDRA will work on some of the world exhibitions in Paris (1855, 1867, 1878), focusing on the American collections.

Phase 2: Consolidation, conference, exhibition and publications

Conference

Ideally, the conference will be linked to the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, planned for Autumn 2016. It will be structured around the subject of the current universality of contemporary museums. It build on the preliminary research on 'Universal Museums' from the workshop in Abu Dhabi in October 2011, which will be published in 2015.

Panel 1: The Universality of Universal Museums (in Paris)

This panel will explore methodologies for understanding the relationships between universal histories and universal museums, including those outside established Eurocentric frames of reference.

Panel 2: Different universalities

- the collections
- the public (tensions between locals/tourists/pedagogy)
- the human (natural history and cultural anthropology)

Panel 3: Non-Western universality?

- the world parks in China (Beijing World Park, Window of the World Shenzhen)
- the Beijing museums (National Museum of China) and Tokyo (National Museum)
- the Louvre Abu Dhabi

Panel 4: Universal museums and global museums

- historical exhibition design and universal museum collections (including LACMA, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Louvre-Lens and the Louvre Abu-Dhabi)
- What would constitute a 'global museum'?
 - i. a museum which represents the process of globalization or global connections
 - ii. the overall presentation of the collections as global (modelled on the Louvre-Lens?)
 - iii. an encyclopaedic museum, including the history of the universe and of humankind (sometimes known as 'Big History')
- the 'chronicle of the worlds' and the universal museum

Show

A small on-line exhibition on the comparative historiography of the constitution and evolution of collections of the South Kensington Museum in London and the Musée d'Ethnographie du Trocadéro, based on the two project case studies, will form part of the project outcome.

Outcomes and Outputs

We plan to publish:

- a co-edited collection of essays from the workshops as either a book or as a special issue of a peer-reviewed academic journal.
- The conference proceedings
- the results of the case study research both through the digitisation of key source material, and as an exhibition catalogue, or a peer-reviewed journal publication.

Project Management

The project will be led by the PIs (Inglebert/Paris Ouest and Kemp/V&A), who have extensive experience of research programme management and an international track record of successful delivery of major collaborative research projects. PI (Kemp) will be project co-ordinator, and take responsibility for communication and integration across all work areas. PIs (Kemp and Inglebert) will share the monitoring of progress and results, including a risks and issues log. They will ensure delivery on cross-project alignment of quality control, financial monitoring, work planning and procedures, as well as coordinating reporting processes.

The PIs will be supported by the PDRA and student helpers for the organization of the conference and symposium. There will be a monthly conference call between the PIs to explore opportunities to ensure progress against research aims, organisation of cross-study workshops, development of publications, and management of the PDRA.

The PI (Kemp) will oversee PDRA supervision, development, monitor training, and ensure that the PDRA research is built structurally into the project through reporting and project coordination mechanisms (with help from André Delpuech/Musée du Quai Branly in Paris). The PDRA will also be supported to develop leadership experience, engage fully in the writing process and be offered a range of training opportunities to ensure their longer-term career progression.