

## Book Reviews

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**Pascal Blanchard, , Nicolas Bancel, Gilles Boëtsch, Éric Deroo and Sandrine Lemaire (eds), Teresa Bridgeman (trans.), *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008, paperback £19.95, pp. X+445**

The study of 'freak shows' encompasses several fields of interest, from museum history to disability studies, and has developed an extensive English-language canon, centered on the works of individuals like Robert Bogdan and Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, both of whom contributed to this collection. Based on the French volume, *Zoos Humains*, this edition brings together a range of divergent methodologies from history, sociology, and anthropology to examine 'human zoos', which represent an important combination of exhibition, performance, education, and colonial domination. While examining these displays' prehistory and legacy, the volume's authors focus on the heyday of anthropo-zoological exhibitions during the 19th and early-20th centuries in America and Western Europe to attempt to show the lasting impacts of these inherently ephemeral events. Across the volume's thirty chapters, a detailed examination of the variety of 'human zoos' - loosely defined as placing a human on display because of what they are (any real or imagined difference) and not because of what they do (an artisan or musician, for example) - reveals the interrelationship between epistemology, ideology, and cultural form these displays embodied. Understanding these relationships highlights the impact this phenomenon had on the discourse of science, the collective image of the self versus the Other, and the motivations of the full range of actors. Furthermore, the focus on particular sites and events throughout the volume permits one to comprehend the means of popularization and how these views could be perpetuated through secondary cultural forms. Overall, this volume, and the larger project that underpins it, seeks to expose the colonial history of the postcolonial present.

The book is divided into three sections. Part 1 presents the historical and definitional positions that underlie the study of human zoos. Garland-Thomson's *From Wonder to Error: Monsters from Antiquity to Modernity* (Ch. 1) provides a compelling introduction to the history of the 'freak show' and sets the tone for the chapters that follow it. These include pieces on displays like the Hottentot Venus (Ch. 2), organizers like P.T. Barnum (Ch. 3), and locales like the Jardin d'Acclimatation (Ch. 8). Part 2 investigates the people involved, their motives, and their reception. From American Indians (Ch. 10 & 17) to Niam-Niams - the 'tailed people' (Ch. 19), most of the section focuses on those being displayed and the circumstances concerning their display, including questions concerning their freedom and the truth of their presentation. However, the wider populations involved with 'human zoos' are not neglected: Peacock's *Africa Meets the Great Farini* (Ch. 15) is an impressive examination of the motivations and life of an exhibitor, and Edwards's *Photography and the Making of the Other* (Ch. 20) tries to show how the reproduction and dissemination of images affected the perception of the Other within the larger visual economy. Part 3 focuses on context. The twelve authors in this section examine the effect that the differing social or political national contexts had on the focus, style, and content of human zoos in their country of choice. Including studies of Japan (Ch. 21), Belgium (Ch. 23), Italy (Ch. 29), and Spain (Ch. 30), this section expands the context for human zoos beyond the main four countries - the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany - discussed most frequently throughout the volume. Additionally, this section contains the one chapter that is the biggest stretch of the volume's coverage but is the most noteworthy for modern museum historians, Arnoldi's *From the Diorama to the Dialogic: A Century of Exhibiting*

*Africa at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History* (Ch. 27). It covers the historical, political, and social processes behind exhibition creation, both for the current display and for its predecessors.

Bookending these three sections are an Introduction and a Postface - two of the longest pieces in the book. With much of the material presented in these repeated throughout the book and with many chapters being relatively short, the space given these two pieces is rather excessive. The repetition of material and brevity of the chapters makes reading the volume difficult and the arrangement of the material creates an inconsistent experience. Stories are fragmented; various chapters provide portions of the same story but in none of the chapters can complete or easily completed stories be found. For example, both Chapters 13 and 14 open with descriptions of the Hamburg suburb of St. Pauli and the Hagenbeck family but neither chapter addresses the background issues surrounding the prevalence of this family in the European tradition. Instead, they quickly move to their main arguments. Throughout the volume, similar echoes occurred concerning a number of topics, including Zulus, Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows, and the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. A heavier editorial hand could have been used to organize material better and to remove obvious repetitions.

Beyond those content issues, the volume has a couple of structural issues. Considering the outstanding quality of the bibliography, this volume has one glaring omission - an index. Especially in a volume which revolves around a handful of major examples and contains significant cross-referencing, the absence of an index makes using this volume onerous. While this volume contains excellent scholarship, it is not easy to navigate. So, instead of being integrated, the individual contributions stand as useful introductions for many of the topics presented and can act as a gateway into more advanced works.

In 2002, when the original French volume was published, it was met with a mixed reception. Some historians welcomed it because of the efforts taken to uncover an overlooked element of French colonial history, but others, like Claude Liauzu (Liauzu 2005:99-109), decried it as 'Barnum history' - the exaggeration of 'human zoos' to a metonymic status - and linked it to the difficult debates surrounding colonialism and its post-colonial memorials in early twenty-first century French society and colonial historiography. The impact of this volume in France highlighted the fault lines on which much of French society and academia were structured and divided. Compared to this impact, this translation will no doubt be warmly welcomed, despite its shortcomings, onto the shelves of a variety of academics because of its interdisciplinary appeal and its relation to the existing English-language canon on this subject.

## Reference

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**John M. Mackenzie, *Museums and Empire: Natural history, human cultures and colonial identities*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009 cloth, pp. ix+286.**

*Museums and Empire* is an ambitious project that surveys the development of museums in the context of British Empire, focusing on institutional growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Canada, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Asia. The book is part of the venerable Manchester University Press series, *Studies in Imperialism*, for which author John M. Mackenzie is also a general editor. MacKenzie's approach is that of a "sceptical historian" (p.8) who focuses on amassing data in order to build a comparative history, as opposed to engaging with museological theory. As such, *Museums and Empire* is descriptive and comparative, a strategy that implicitly warns readers of the problems with abstract, grand theory.

A central paradox that Mackenzie identifies is the fact that while the global proliferation of museums in the nineteenth century was fueled by confidence in science and the rational, these institutions were fragile in their early years and their collections were often arbitrary and jumbled, dependent upon the particular interests of local elites, as well as extensive global trading relationships.

As such, museums reflected the white bourgeois public sphere of the period, with its various commitments to respectable leisure (such as scientific collecting), travel, the building of colonies and proto-nationalism, duty to empire, as well as the everyday world of status acquisition, self-commemoration, competition and rivalry. Given Mackenzie's attention to details of the everyday, *Museums and Imperialism* is in part a social history of Empire, as seen through the lens of museums. MacKenzie's sources include annual reports and budgets, recorded impressions of museums, correspondence, donation records, museum publications and bulletins. Chapters are filled with much detail about individual biographies and the ups and downs of museum fortunes.

However, the details also provide the reader with comparative insights, so that both general patterns and divergent cases emerge. A concluding chapter outlines a general pattern of museum development, which includes five overlapping stages. Proto-foundational institutions were formed by private religious and educational societies in the pre- and early 1800s. Surviving museums usually entered a pioneering phase, which focused on collecting and documenting resources of the colony. Fueled by the economic growth of colonies, museums in the mid-nineteenth century entered a transitional phase in which they gained official support. From the 1860s until the inter-war period, museums enter what MacKenzie calls a pre-modern phase, in which they are increasingly linked to local educational institutions. There is a nearly universal, "seamless" (p.22) shift toward ethnography, including the deeply problematic trade in human remains. Finally, in the modern period, museums are increasingly professionalized and democratized. A sense of self-interrogation and public exposure is matched by the growth of a service economy, which links museums to tourism. MacKenzie's research and insights are strongest with regard to the earlier periods, when imperialism was at its height. It is useful to read this concluding chapter first, as it helps one see the larger picture amongst the accumulation of details, which convey imperialism as a rambling and chaotic force, despite its rhetoric of control and command.

Comparisons between museums within the same colony are compelling. For instance, we see starkly divergent forces shaping the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto and the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria. While the former was connected to Europe and a business culture, the latter developed as a frontier museum, guided by provincial patriotism and enamored of the striking visual culture of the Northwest coast. It is easy to trace the resonances of these beginnings in each museum today. While the comments on each museum's history are too brief for specialists (in the BC case the outdated term Kwakiutl is used rather than Kwakwaka'wakw), MacKenzie's work suggests the rich potential for area specific comparative work.

While MacKenzie addresses the difficult subjects of looting and human remains, he does so largely from the point of view of museums, as opposed to victims and their descendents. Scrambles for artifacts and human remains are situated in the context of the authority of evolutionary theory and the salvage paradigm, as well as pressures of competition between institutions and their agents. Museums are understood to be implicated in imperialism, but also imperial in their own right (p.71). Implicitly, however, MacKenzie celebrates the perseverance of museums as they struggle with "heroic efforts" (p.108) to establish order, despite the perpetual dilemma of having too much stuff and neither the money nor space to care for it.

For museologists who specialize in institutional histories in one geographic area, this book provides a larger picture, and suggests broad comparisons that could lead to interesting debates. The early development of Asian museums is oriented toward local aesthetics, as opposed to natural history, and perhaps as a result of this, these museums played an important role in the early formation of Asian elite identities, as opposed to white imperial ones. MacKenzie also suggests that the colonial encounter in New Zealand, as reflected by museum practices, may have been more respectful and reciprocal than in other places such as Canada and South Africa. These claims are compelling in historical terms, but also with regard to

thinking comparatively about contemporary museums. As such, *Museums and Empire* is a useful addition to a literature on museums, colonialism, post-colonialism and globalization. I am thinking especially of *Making Representations: Museums In the Post-Colonial Era* by Moira Simpson (1996) and *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures: Global Transformations*, edited by Ivan Karp *et al.* (2006). In the latter book, Tony Bennett's theoretical essay, 'Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture' is particularly relevant, as he provocatively suggests that contemporary museums may be less global than their precedents. All of these works offer different angles for making sense of museums and globalization and the changing public sphere.

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**Joachim Baur, *Die Musealisierung der Migration: Einwanderungsmuseen und die Inszenierung der multikulturellen Nation*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009, paperback, pp. 404.**

As the first comparative ethnography of immigration museums in three countries on two continents, Joachim Baur's book moves beyond the individual case study to explore the immigration museum as a *genre*, a subcategory of the history museum. The author examines in detail the 'politics and poetics,' the forms and functions of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York, Pier 21 in Halifax (Canada) and the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (Australia). He analyzes their similarities and differences, and the transfer of ideas among them, and addresses larger questions around the proliferation, the successes and the limitations of immigration museums, especially in an era of increasing calls to limit the admission of foreigners in most Western countries.

Baur begins by tracing immigration museums to the new museology movement, with its emphasis on maximal inclusiveness and self-reflectiveness, on the shift from collecting to exhibiting, and from objects to concepts. He identifies his major research methods as archival analysis, interviews with museum staff members and deconstruction of the permanent exhibit of each museum. Baur positions himself as an outsider: as a non-native English speaker, a German citizen and a non-immigrant. He then introduces his argument that immigration museums serve as a strategy for managing a crisis in representing the nation. In these museums, the story of immigration goes beyond filling in episodes within a longer national history. It provides an overarching image of a nation of immigrants, in the process, recoding social inequalities and conflicts.

Detailed case studies of the three museums form the core of the work. The longest chapter is devoted to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, by far, the largest and the most complex of the three. Baur points to the multiple agendas and actors that shaped its production, especially the neo-liberal ideologies of the Reagan government and sponsoring corporate interests, partly offset by the more left-leaning views of social historians involved in developing the narrative. Baur's reading foregrounds this museum's display of a universal immigration experience, the presentation of this experience from the point of view of the immigrants who are portrayed as heroes, and the broadening of the exhibit to reach beyond the stories of those who actually entered the US through Ellis Island, to include the widest possible range of immigration experiences and immigrant groups. Baur emphasizes that, at Ellis Island, immigrant groups, displayed as equal and interchangeable, share the history of becoming American. The reviewer would add that the section Peak Immigration Years: 1880-1924 shows how they became American, by literally building New York City, and by participating in the struggle of organized labor to transform the US into a more just society.

The section on Pier 21, the smallest of the museums considered, points to its location in a harbor area that is in the process of being restored as a tourist attraction. Baur emphasizes the small group of Canadians involved in building this museum, the low level of controversy around it, and he criticizes Pier 21's sanitized and nostalgic approach to immigration.

Baur locates the opening of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne (in 1998) within the framework of the backlash against multiculturalism in Australia in the 1990s, in favor of a new national agenda which foregrounded national unity and harmony. In this climate, he argues, the museum's focus shifted from the cultural and material rights of immigrants (a major theme in the Migration Museum which opened in Adelaide in 1986) to fostering harmonious cohabitation. But the most important role of this museum, Baur argues, was to replace Australia's pre 1960s identity as a homogeneous British-based country with an account of how it became a cosmopolitan, multicultural society. Baur sees this museum too as maximally inclusive, stretching the concept of immigrant to include even groups like the Scots (at their own request) who are usually thought of as settlers. And he showcases the outreach and mediating activities of the museum staff, especially in the Immigration Museum's access gallery in which immigrant communities are invited to display their own cultures and lives in Australia. Baur locates a major strength of this museum in its sharply critical section on the history of Australia's immigration policies.

Baur emphasizes that all three museums are elite projects, in contrast with some smaller, community-based museums, such as the Lower East Side Tenement Museum and the Museum of the Chinese in America, in New York. Nevertheless, these larger museums celebrate the masses of modest people, rather than a few prominent individuals. He contrasts the avoidance of controversy in Pier 21 in favor of 'discourses of gratefulness' with the Immigration Museum's more critical approach. This reviewer was struck by the messaging incorporated in the buildings housing the three museums. The Ellis Island Immigration Museum, Pier 21 and the Immigration Museum are all located in structures in which their respective states once inspected and controlled the intake of people and goods. Additionally, Ellis Island and Pier 21 were sites from which troops were sent overseas to defend their country and liberate Europe during World War II. Displaying immigration in these buildings defuses the dangers around the admission of foreigners by conflating it with national defense and with state control. All three museums refrain from addressing illegal immigration which represents a threat to the nation, an attack on its sovereignty.

Baur's insightful and detailed book goes beyond outlining the characteristics of immigration museums to lay the groundwork for a larger critique of the inclusive museum movement. It maintains that, in aiming for maximal inclusiveness and representation of the nation as a harmonious cohabitation of diverse groups of immigrants, these museums fail to address frictions and inequalities among the different groups and within them, dynamics which have been important driving forces in the histories of the US, Canada and Australia. Baur's book is a must read for anyone interested in immigration museums and in history museums, more generally.

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**Gwyneira Isaac, *Mediating Knowledges: Origins of a Zuni Tribal Museum*, Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2007, cloth, \$50.00 pp. +272**

Museums are being interrogated more and more about the way in which they collect, document, interpret and display the collections of specific communities, particularly indigenous communities. But what happens when such a community creates and keeps their own museum? In *Mediating Knowledges*, Gwyneira Isaac explores how the Pueblo of Zuni in New Mexico set about creating the A:shwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center. With much of their material culture collected and stored in the Smithsonian Institution, Isaac's book contrasts how the Pueblo of Zuni presents much of this same material differently from the national museum, chronicles the Pueblo's work, and presents her thoughts about the museum's progress. Intended for an



audience of cultural anthropologists and museum professionals, this book is very good at giving a thorough examination of the history of the Pueblo and a detailed account about the growth of the museum. However it is much weaker when reflecting on what the museum means to the Pueblo of Zuni (there is a lack of interviews, for instance), and where it is headed in the future; issues that are important to address when looking at the complexities of cultural ownership.

During the course of the book, Isaac touches on a number of themes: group knowledge, bureaucracy, national identity, and colonization. It is divided into seven sections: an introduction to the layout of the museum and Isaac's work; an exploration of Zuni approaches to knowledge; a history of anthropological and archaeological research done at Zuni; a history of the beginning of the museum; a discussion of the museum 'as mediator', examples of problem-solving by museum staff; and conclusions about Isaac's work and the politics of the museum. The author, who is Anglo-American, was until recently an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Museum of Anthropology at the School of Human Evolution and Social Change at Arizona State University. In 2010, Isaac became the Curator of North American Ethnology at the Department of Anthropology of the Smithsonian Institution. Since Isaac's book looks critically at how the Smithsonian Institution stores and displays material from the Pueblo of Zuni, her change in jobs suggests that she may act as an agent of change for the Smithsonian, promoting interaction and cooperative exhibitions with indigenous communities.

One of the book's biggest strengths is detailing how the Pueblo of Zuni overcame funding and organizational obstacles to create their own museum. As museums increasingly work more intensively with the groups whose histories they put on display, the subject of so-called 'tribal museums' or alternatives to mainstream approaches has become a hot topic. Isaac's work follows on the heels of more than two decades of texts which discuss ethnicity and museums, including contributions by Susan Sleeper-Smith (2009) and edited volumes by Richard Sandell (2003) and Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (1991, 1992). The subject has found favour among archaeologists, among them Carol McDavid, who is working to reveal the African-American history on plantation sites in east Texas and involve local communities in interpretations of the resulting artefacts. This book reflects some of the conflicts that can occur between the collecting and display techniques of museums and the desires of communities to be represented on their own terms. In the case of the Pueblo of Zuni, Europeans and Americans have long viewed their customs as particularly valuable areas of study. A large number of prominent early ethnographers, including Frank Hamilton Cushing, Ruth Benedict, and Edward Burnett Tylor, conducted research on different aspects of Zuni traditions. The build-up of professional anthropologists' knowledge led the Smithsonian Institution to store a huge amount of information and artefacts related to the Zuni people. This information sat, and still sits, largely untouched and unused. For the Pueblo of Zuni, who objected vigorously to the way in which their customs and people were being portrayed by others, the A:shiwi Museum gave them a chance to present their culture and traditions from their perspective. They incorporated the living community of the Pueblo of Zuni, as well as the non-Zuni visitors to the museum, into *their* exhibits; they made the museum 'live'.

One of the more intriguing aspects about the A:shiwi A:wana Museum and Heritage Center is that it bills itself as an 'ecomuseum'; however the understanding of this term is very different from a Western understanding of an 'ecomuseum', which would likely emphasize the ecology of the natural environment, the importance of native species, and past degradations and rehabilitative efforts. Rather, A:shiwi A:wana showcases the connection of the Pueblo of Zuni to the surrounding natural environment; the group's past that can be seen in the local area, such as drawings on the rock faces around the reservation; and rituals centred on natural resources, such as rain, which are important for the group to continue having a shared identity. The different approach that the Pueblo of Zuni take towards the interpretation and presentation of their material culture compared to a national museum like the Smithsonian Institution is exemplified by the book's description of a mural project, which seeks to depict the origins of the Zuni clans and their journey to the Middle Place. As the museum was being built, museum staff and mural artists gave members of the Pueblo of Zuni an explanation of the place-names, creation stories, and landmarks of clan symbols and places in the mural. Non-Zuni visitors presumably were not, and will not, have the same artwork explained to them. The act of using traditional stories as a guide to a permanent exhibit allows the Pueblo of Zuni and museum staff

to keep the meanings of the places and symbols hidden to non-Zuni people. This type of tour could not effectively be given at the Smithsonian because it depends on local people being available to educate members of their own group. Another added benefit of having the museum with the mural and community members near the Pueblo of Zuni is that people of the community can return to the reservation and see around them what they have just learned about.

In her conclusion, Isaac explains that after conducting her research between 1996 and 1997, she returned to A:shiwí A:wán in 2005. At that point, she had just accepted a teaching position at ASU. Isaac writes that the act of becoming a professor made her understand that she had a responsibility to present the account of the museum “within the context of the politics of the control of knowledge” (2007: 156). For Isaac, this meant that her book had to explain how the Pueblo of Zuni used a museum to definitely pronounce their identity, taking this power away from the United States federal government and the Smithsonian. A question that Isaac may come to answer in her future research, especially as an agent of the Smithsonian, is, what power can national agencies ethically find for themselves in this new era of museum creation?

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