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# **MUSEUMS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: A THEORY OF PRACTICE**

**Part I**

**Mark O'Neill**

Submitted to City University, London, as part of the requirements for a PhD by Prior  
Publication, March 2011



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**Continued on next page**

## Continued from previous page

### **pp267-286:**

Part II: 7

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Part II: 8

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Part II: 9

O'Neill, M. (2007) Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland: telling stories in a treasured old/new museum. *Curator*. 50(4), pp.379-400.

### **pp333-355:**

Part II: 10

O'Neill, M. (2008) Museums, professionalism and democracy. *Cultural Trends*. (17(4), pp.289-307.



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## **Museums and Social Justice: A Theory of Practice**

### **Abstract**

This PhD by prior publication proposes a holistic approach to museums which integrates theory and practice. It is built on a positive theory of social justice and incorporates the founding social ambitions of public museums, the professional traditions of object-based research, conservation and interpretation, the analyses of critical theory, and the insights of empirical visitor studies and change management. The commentary also reviews the publications in which I developed this theory. I propose that the literature on museums falls into three broad paradigms:

- The social justice paradigm argues that the principle that the least well off in society must not be excluded from society's benefits is as much an intrinsic good of museums as preservation, research and display. The authority for the social justice paradigm is based on the public funding of museums and the public ownership of their collections, cultural rights and fairness in the distribution of public goods.
- What I term the 'conservative paradigm' claims to represent the essence of museum tradition, to which the social justice paradigm is inimical. Conservative museums argue that they meet their responsibilities to the public through services which are available on the same terms to everyone.
- A third paradigm, that of critical theory deconstructs this benign view of museums, exposing their complicity in historic and contemporary injustices based on class, gender, race and ethnicity. The theory of critical theory is that by enabling a deeper understanding of the causes of injustice it liberates people to bring about change.

As well as these broad understandings of the role of museums in society, I distinguish three models of museum practice, based on how museums view their audiences:

- An elitist model which serves only those who already possess the cultural capital required to appreciate museum objects.
- A welfare model which targets new audiences through public programmes. This approach is deployed by conservative museums to comply with demand for public services and to enable them to preserve their 'traditional' core unchanged. It can be deployed by reforming museums which are moving towards a social justice model.
- The social justice model, which integrates the principles of access, critical theory, analytical history, visitor studies, organizational learning and cultural representation. It is the practical expression of the social justice paradigm.

In order to explore how these models of practice map onto the three general paradigms, I review three museum literatures of particular relevance to how visitors and social justice are conceived: museum historiography, conservative museology, critical theory. The literature on change management casts interesting light on organizational psychology of the three museum paradigms and their ability to adapt to social transformations.

Museum historiography shows that the social justice model is a legitimate tradition traceable to the emergence of public museums in the nineteenth century, and that the conservative paradigm, based on connoisseurship and professionalization, is a later development. The uncertain historical basis for the claim of conservative museology to represent the traditional essence of museums undermines its intellectual foundations. Consequently, conservative museologists find it difficult to respond coherently to the demands of

contemporary society (including museum issues such as repatriation) and to the growing dissonance between their practice and stated principles.

Critical theory contributes an understanding of the role of museums within society. However, I argue that because critical theory lacks an empirical basis, a theory of practice and a positive theory of justice, it shares with the conservative paradigm a tendency to essentialize 'the visitor' and to generate elitist practice.

I conclude with suggestions of the research opportunities opened up by the social justice paradigm of museums and a summary of the social justice museum model as an object-based, visitor-centred learning organisation which contributes to the creation of a more just society through embedding access at its core in a continuous process of reform.

Mark O'Neill

## **Contents**

### **Section I**

<b>1.0 Introduction and hypothesis.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1.1 Thesis structure.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2 Definitions.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.2.1 Paradigms.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1.2.2 The conservative paradigm.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.2.3 The critical theory paradigm.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.2.4 The social justice paradigm.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.2.5 Three models of practice.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>1.2.6 Cross currents.....</b>	<b>16</b>

### **Section II: The publications and the evolution of my hypothesis**

<b>2.0 Museum literatures.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>2.1 Museology, from the inside.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.2 Museology, from the outside.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2.3 Cultural policy.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2.4 The museum history literature.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>2.5 Museums and epidemiology.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2.6 The literature of the reformist paradigm.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>2.7 Organizational learning and change management.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>2.8 Which theory?.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>2.9 The publications: context and commentary.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>2.9.1 List of publications submitted in Part II.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>2.9.2 Introduction.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>2.9.3 The Glasgow context.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2.9.4 Social justice.....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>2.9.4.1 Social justice – the intellectual basis.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.9.4.2 Visitor studies, social justice and reflexive practice.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>2.9.5 History in museums – in Glasgow.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>2.9.5.1 History versus nostalgia.....</b>	<b>49</b>

2.9.5.2 Human or museum categories?.....	50
2.9.5.3 Kelvingrove: an encyclopedia of human life.....	50
2.9.5.4 History and the conservative paradigm.....	51
2.9.6 Coherence.....	53
2.9.7 Repatriation.....	56
2.9.8 Conclusion.....	57

### **Section III *Museum historiography and social justice***

3.0 Museum historiography and social justice.....	58
3.1 Against 'the joining of companies'.....	59
3.2 Whig and Radical museums.....	60
3.3 Tory museums.....	61
3.3.1 Ruskin and Tory museum reform.....	51
3.4 The Risk to objects.....	63
3.5 Political 'interference' and the arm's length principle.....	64
3.6 The politics of interpretation.....	65
3.7 The museum as 'social institution'.....	65
3.8 From social to professional institution.....	66
3.9 Museums and the symptoms of injustice.....	68

### **Section IV – *Theories of theory, theories of practice*..... 71**

4.0 Introduction.....	71
4.1 Critical theory in practice.....	71
4.2 The conservative paradigm and museum visitors.....	74
4.3 Anthropology and the 'universal' museum.....	75
4.4 The conservative paradigm and issues of identity.....	77

### **Section V – *Conclusion***

5.0 Towards a theory of practice.....	78
5.1 Future research.....	79
5.2 Conclusion.....	80

<b>5.2.1 <i>The theory in practice</i>.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Notes.....</b>	<b>84</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Part II: The Publications.....</b>	<b>158</b>

## **Section 1**

### **1.0 *Introduction and hypothesis***

The publications submitted for this PhD by prior publication range from 1990 to 2009, and represent the evolution of a theory of the role of museums in society. The theory argues that meeting the requirements of social justice is as much an intrinsic good of museums as collecting, preserving, researching and displaying objects. The principles of social justice apply to museums because they are publicly funded (whether directly or through the tax benefits accorded to charities) and because the collections are owned by, or held in trust on behalf of, the public.

This theory evolved through a series of experiments in museums in Glasgow, where I held various positions from 1985 onwards.<sup>1</sup> It is supported by a particular reading of museum history, focusing on how visitors and the public were regarded by policy makers and museum staff, and, insofar as can be gauged, on how the public regarded museums. On this basis, I argue that modern museums which adapt their practice in response to the demands of social justice are being consistent with the original aims of public museums. This refutes the view that a concern for social justice merely complies with recent local or central government policies and is inconsistent with 'traditional' museum ideals which give priority to the intrinsic value of objects over access, interpretation and education. I present evidence that this 'tradition' is a later development which emerged in the late nineteenth century when the advent of professionalism and connoisseurship led many museums to see institutional goals and professional autonomy as at odds with public service. While traditions and origins do not determine contemporary practice, they are frequently appealed to as sources of legitimacy.

My thesis aims to integrate theory and practice, tradition and reform, social justice and professionalism<sup>2</sup> because, as I argue, museums which take this holistic approach are better able than those which emphasise detachment from society to:



- create sustainable access enabling museums to contribute to the creation of a more just society, because they incorporate lessons from visitor studies, outreach and education work into the core of the museum;
- achieve coherence between the academic rigour of museum disciplines and accounts of museums' role in society, because they do not have to rely on tendentious accounts of history to generate a legitimate 'tradition';
- describe their role in society because they can demonstrate fairness in the distribution of a public good, meet modern standards of accountability and transparency, and reconcile professional and societal ideals;
- address contemporary issues (such as repatriation or the revival in the religious significance of museum objects) coherently because they are committed to engagement with, rather than detachment from, modern society; and to
- ensure that the personal commitment and expertise of museum staff are deployed for the public benefit rather than the projection<sup>3</sup> of personal, group or bureaucratic interests, because they develop the necessary reflexivity.

### **1.1 Thesis structure**

This section provides an overview of the thesis structure, defines key terms, describes my methodology, and my original contribution to museology.

Section II gives an overview of the literatures of museology, puts the submitted publications in the context of these literatures and articulates how they contribute to the development of my hypothesis.

Section III explores the historical basis for my thesis, reviewing the historiography of museums in terms of what it reveals about attitudes to visitors and the claims of justice on museums.

Section IV situates my theory in the museological literatures and argues that, from a practitioner's perspective, the assumed opposition between critical theory and conservative museology, conceals shared assumptions and methodological flaws. Both fail to integrate empirical visitor research into their methods, which is part of a wider lack of reflexivity, and both result in displays which are elitist. While agreeing with much of critical theory's assessment of the 'political valence' of museums (Witcom, 2003:11) I argue that it lacks a positive theory of social justice which is required to integrate theory and practice.

Section V indicates directions for future research and provides a conclusion.

Part II comprises the publications submitted for the thesis.

I focus on the English language literature throughout, mainly relating to museums in the UK, but also making reference to America, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The museum cultures of Anglophone countries share many features but differ sufficiently to provide useful comparators (e.g. in the balance of private and public funding or variations in attitudes to repatriation arising partly from the presence or absence of an indigenous population which makes claims on museum objects). Apart from the historical discussion in Section III, I concentrate on the past 25 years. My work has involved natural history and science displays but has concentrated on interpreting human history, including social history, art history and anthropology, which are the focus of this thesis.

## **1.2 Definitions**

The literatures on museums use a variety of terms such as 'tradition', 'reform' and 'paradigm' whose meanings vary depending on the authors' discipline and on whether they approve of or condemn the developments under consideration. To secure consistency I use the following terms in the senses set out below:

### 1.2.1 'Paradigms'

The terms 'paradigm' and 'paradigm shifts', derived from Thomas Kuhn's account of scientific revolutions, are used in museum debates (Kuhn, 1962; Silverman, 1995; Anderson, 2004; Bann, 2003). I use these terms, but with the caveat that the analogy with Kuhn is a loose one. Kuhn argues that scientific change is not the result of incremental progress but of periodic radical changes in philosophy and practice or 'revolutions'. After a scientific revolution the new paradigm becomes generally accepted and then constitutes the basis for 'normal science'. The problems that the paradigm cannot solve accumulate gradually until a crisis is reached, triggering another revolution. In Gail Anderson's anthology *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (2004), the title implies that a Kuhnian revolution has taken place, even if not everyone accepts it. However, the earliest essay making the case for the 'paradigm shift' (by John Cotton Dana) dates from 1917, suggesting that the claim is overstated.<sup>4</sup>

Even if there has been no super-session of paradigms, the concept is nonetheless useful in communicating the fundamental disagreements between the competing versions of museums and the visions of society on which they are based. The publications submitted seek to identify these conflicting paradigms, assess the degree to which they are, in Kuhn's term, incommensurable, enabling me to identify barriers to the integration of theory and practice (1962:198–204). The review of museology literatures for this thesis has led me to question their assumptions about the oppositions and alignments amongst the different paradigms. For example, the literature assumes the complete opposition between critical theory and all practitioners, not distinguishing between conservative and reformist practitioners (e.g. Witcom, 2004). I present evidence that critical theory shares some aspects of the reformist analysis, but also some of the features of the conservative paradigm (see below 4.2).

### 1.2.2 *The conservative paradigm*

The museological literatures often refer to museums which resist reformist and/or modernizing change as 'traditional', as for example, in the literature review of the 'New Museology' by Deirdre Stam, a US information science academic (1993). These museums also often describe themselves as traditional, as in Travers and Glaister's 2004 report for the National Museums Directors' Conference. As this thesis argues that there is more than one legitimate museum tradition, I use the term 'conservative' for these museums. This is appropriate because of the reactive nature of conservatism. 'Not favoring a general plan for society, conservatives in different eras usually valued the world as they found it, then reacted to what they perceived as threats confronting it' (Allitt, 2009:3; Muller, 2002:3–9). This perspective sometimes takes an 'essentialist' view of social institutions like museums, holding that they have an inherent nature which transcends history, leading to what art historian Jeffrey Abt calls a 'Platonic image' of the museum (Abt, 2006:132).<sup>5</sup>

The reactive nature of conservatism may explain why statements of the conservative paradigm in museums are relatively rare, with few appearing in the 1990s and those mostly in reviews of the emerging New Museology.<sup>6</sup> A few, more substantial statements appeared in the 2000s, notably in Mark Wallinger and Mary Warnock's *Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture* (2000) and James Cuno's *Whose Muse? Art Museums and the Public Trust* (2004). The latter is a significant work as it consists of essays by the directors of the five most important art museums in America and of the National Gallery in London.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.2.3 *The critical theory paradigm*

The overlapping terms 'critical theory' and 'cultural theory' embrace a range of intellectual developments which emerged in the twentieth century, inspired by Marx's analysis of the ideological as well as the economic workings of capitalism, Nietzsche's rejection of the classical tradition in philosophy and his critique of

mass culture, and Freud's revelation of the unconscious motivations and desires which drive human behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

'Critical theory' specifically refers to the Frankfurt School which was founded in the 1920s to create an interdisciplinary analysis of capitalism, updating Marx and incorporating Freudianism in order 'to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them' (Horkheimer, 1982:244).<sup>9</sup> The term 'critical theory' embraces a wider range of approaches whose common feature is a challenge to the authority of established hierarchies and norms, and to liberal ideas of progress, as expressed in institutions such as museums. 'Cultural theory' shares many features of this paradigm, with a particular interest in how power is mediated through texts, symbols, objects and displays (Henning, 2006). 'Cultural studies' refers to the term coined by Richard Hoggart, and developed by British neo-Marxists, including Raymond Williams, and later, Stuart Hall and Terry Eagleton.<sup>10</sup> They were influenced by the ideas of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, in particular his concept of hegemony. This moved beyond Marx's interpretation of culture as an expression of the economic substructure and saw it as a field through which elites sought consent for their rule through persuasion and, to some extent, negotiation, rather than violent oppression. (Gramsci, 1926:194; Steel, 1997:38–9).

Since the early 1990s social analysis has been influenced by poststructuralist ideas, such as those of the historian Michel Foucault and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, though not without resistance and controversy (see 2.2). Conservative scholars see them as attempts to share the prestige of the sciences by aping their language, but without the rigour of providing hypotheses which are, in Karl Popper's terms, 'falsifiable' (Steiner, 1998:xv, xvi).<sup>11</sup> Left-leaning scholars like the physicist Alan Sokal have accused critical theory of the kind of mystification usually associated with powerful elites and of betraying the Left's historic commitment to the liberating force of objective truth in favour of relativism (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998). Pierre Bourdieu, from a sociological

perspective, has criticized the field's lack of a rigorous method or an empirical base: his theories were built on extensive and sophisticated empirical research (Bourdieu, 1972).<sup>12</sup> My thesis argues that the analyses of critical theorists of the role of museums in society contributes to an overall theory of museums, but needs to be supplemented by empirical visitor studies and a positive theory of social justice to create a holistic integration of museum theory and practice (5.0).

#### **1.2.4 *The social justice paradigm***

'Social justice' refers to the Rawlsian principle that the worst off in society should not be excluded from society's benefits (Rawls, 1971).<sup>13</sup> While it is argued here that the principles of social justice apply to museums, the need for this case to be made seems remarkable. As Stanford philosopher, Seamus Miller, argues, all social institutions, from the family to wage structures, have to meet the wider society's criteria of social justice to retain legitimacy (Miller, 2007). As applied to museums it assumes that they have a responsibility to contribute to 'the combating of *social* as well as *cultural* inequality (Sandell, 2002:xvii, original emphasis). 'Reform' is used to refer to changes in museums made in response to the principles of social justice.

#### **1.2.5 *Three models of practice***

The term 'elitist' is used to refer to museums which make no claims to provide for the general population and serve only those with the cultural capital required to appreciate the objects (Goldgar, 2000).

I use the term 'welfare' to refer to museums which maintain core displays which serve expert visitors, but supplement these with public programmes to target other audiences.

'Modernization' is used to refer to changes in practice which are not motivated by the principles of social justice, but are undertaken (willingly or otherwise) by

museums as they adapt to economic, social and political changes in the wider society.

#### 1.2.6 *Cross-currents*

The paradigms and models of practice identified above interact in a number of ways. Museum welfare programming can be part of a process of transition to a social justice paradigm, given the time required to gather the resources and support needed to change the core. The welfare approach can serve conservative museums, generating visitor numbers and appeasing funders while, in the words of leading historian of art museums, Andrew McClellan 'the permanent collections remain blissfully insulated from the shifting trends of the postmodern world' (McClellan, 2008:192).

Conservative and reformist practitioners coexist (with varying degrees of conflict) within many museums as 'professional sub-cultures' and both are forced to respond to modernizing pressures, which might include the adoption of marketing approaches from competitors in the entertainment sector (Lee, 2007; Lawley, 2003; Tlili, 2008:144), the application of information technology to collections management, or innovations in management, accountability and income generation.<sup>14</sup> Conservatives as well as reformists may claim a democratic mandate for their position. For example, Conservative governments in the UK (1979–97) favoured neoliberal market-led modernization, including charging for museum entry, which they saw as a form of democratic reform, part of their challenge to privileged institutions such as the professions (Perkin, 1990:472–519).

Stam implicitly recognizes the distinction between reformist and modernizing change. Reform, a recurrent phenomenon, is

a popular intellectual sport among museum players and spectators since the inception of museums ... [which] ... typically ... decries the old as



irrelevant to 'today's' world, and calls for adopting 'the new', or for 'change', or 'reform', or even for full fledged revolution in the name of better service to 'the populace'. This rhetorical form usually includes a few snide remarks about the self-serving, possessive or otherwise neurotic tendencies of curators, and the mendacious and wily natures of administrators and trustees. The call for reform typically ends with the recommendations that power to govern museums be granted henceforth to the disenfranchised constituency most passionately committed to the future of the institution, that is to say, the writers themselves. (Stam,1993:54)

She believes that attacks on the traditional museum world 'would evoke nothing more than a weary yawn ... were it not the case that museums are in fact experiencing radical and perplexing changes in their social environment ... "Crisis" is a word commonly used' (1993:54–5). Theory has nothing to contribute. It is simply the recasting of these 'time honored sentiments' in the 'language of Structuralism and Deconstruction, and include rather more code words drawn from disciplines outside the traditional museum world than has been the case in earlier polemics' (1993:55). The required response to the crisis is the adoption of modern information technology in order to manage the 'information base' (which includes objects) in an integrated way (1993:58–9). In other words, theory and reform are irrelevant, whereas modernization, which is portrayed as an apolitical process driven by technological change, is essential. In contrast, McClellan's brief overview of 'Museum Studies Now' (2008:92–6) argues that 'analysis and critique are vital to museums as to any social institution and should be viewed as the legitimate prerogative of all who care about their future' (McClellan, 2008:96).

Apart from Stam's, the only other published literature review of museology is by Randolph Starn, an American public historian (2005).<sup>15</sup> He portrays reform more positively as periodic renewal,<sup>16</sup> but sees conflicts between 'traditionalists' and 'reformists' as have 'by and large become ritual tilts ... Most museum



professionals have already either embraced or conceded the case for more "accessible" museums "responsive" to a broader and more diverse public.' (Starn, 2005:46).

### **1.3 Methodology: Theory, ideals, practice**

The publications submitted have a strong normative element, reflecting the position of a practitioner engaged in advocating a specific philosophy to the museum sector and engaged in its debates. Nevertheless, I have striven to make them as rigorous as possible. My method of developing a social justice museum paradigm has been

- to state the ideals and principles on which the work was based as clearly and explicitly as possible, in the interests of transparency and to make them as coherent as possible;
- to write up examples of the museum experiments I led to show how theory and practice interrelated and to demonstrate the practicability of implementing these ideals and principles;
- to demonstrate how these experiments were legitimate adaptations of museums' historic purposes in response to the needs of modern society and how they reinforced rather than threatened museum values in relation to aesthetics, research and conservation; and
- as part of the assessment of each experiment to refine the articulation both of the theory and its practical implications.

While trying to integrate ideals, theory, practice and context into a coherent view of the role of museums, I have also sought to avoid producing a dogmatic, reductionist approach or to implement an *a priori* theory.

My approach has also involved a critique of the conservative museum paradigm. This involves an analysis of its internal coherence, exposing contradictions between its claims to represent tradition and the historical record, and between

claims of impacts on society and the failure to take actions which would increase the chances of those impacts being achieved.

Being critical of these claims of impact has not entailed moderating my museum ideals. Instead, I have focused on exploring these ideals in depth, and taking them as practical guides to making choices about how objects are interpreted and how museums relate to visitors. The ideals of my work have been, in many ways 'traditional' – inspiring people to appreciate canonical art of the past and the wonders of the natural world and to think about history and culture – and are not instrumental in this sense prevalent in recent debates<sup>17</sup>. My aim has been to realize these ideals by modifying museum practice so that the core displays are accessible to people who lack what Bourdieu called the 'cultural capital' to feel at home in museums (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969).<sup>18</sup> Far from being reductionist or entailing a diminution in the role of the expert knowledge and judgment of staff, or a simplification of the complex functions of museums, the social justice paradigm creates added complexity in all these dimensions.

#### **1.4 Original contribution**

This thesis constitutes an independent and original contribution to knowledge in so far as it provides:

- a holistic museum theory which integrates theory and practice, incorporating the original social ambitions of public museums, the professional traditions of object-based research, conservation and interpretation, the analyses of critical theory, the insights of empirical visitor studies and a positive theory of social justice.
- A new synthesis of British museum historiography from the point of view of the attitudes to visitors and social justice of 18<sup>th</sup> and nineteenth century policy makers and staff.
- An analysis of museum studies which points the way forward for the better integration of theory and practice.

## **Section II: The publications and the evolution of my hypothesis**

### **2.0 Museum literatures**

The opportunity offered by a PhD by prior publication is to relate my publications systematically to those museological literatures which have grown exponentially since the time I took my postgraduate qualification in Museum Studies in 1985 and got my first museum job later that year. The advent of New Museology is usually dated to 1989 and credited to the publication of a work of that title edited by Peter Vergo. This convenient dating masks the fact that the wider questioning of museum orthodoxies had been emerging earlier, through Robert Lumley's *The Museum Time Machine* (1988) and Donald Horne's *The Great Museum* (1984). The latter provides a semiotic analysis of the ideological messages of the museums and monuments in both Western and Eastern Europe, their celebration of capitalist bourgeois culture and communist revolutionary achievements, of national and racial myths and of male authority. It is one of the few cultural studies which does not essentialize museums as inherent instruments of Western capitalism – simply by showing that they performed a different ideological function in Eastern Europe under Communism. Horne also explores how museum displays in Western Europe in general and in Britain in particular, minimized social conflict in the past, not only promoting a myth of progress, but a progress in which those in power did not actively oppose changes which had to be wrested from them through enormous effort and sacrifice. He describes the difficulties that museums in democracies face in creating meaningful, critically informed experiences for visitors, avoiding nostalgia, and unconscious reinforcement of stereotypes and power structures. He highlights the intellectual difficulty of creating analytical history when the focus on authentic objects creates an unrepresentative sample of the past, and makes it difficult to represent social processes and the realities of power (1984:248–9). He singles out art museums

as particularly problematic in terms of their failure to provide contextual information (1984:16).<sup>19</sup> These are all problems I set out to address in my work.

Horne's work is occasionally cited in the literature on heritage (e.g. Corsane, 2004) and frequently referred to in the literature on tourism (see e.g. Urry 2002), and rarely appears in that on museums after 1990. It is not mentioned, for example, in Stam's or Starn's literature reviews or in Sharon MacDonald's *Companion to Museum Studies* (2006). This is despite the fact that Horne deploys concepts from the 'culture and society' debate, drawing on Stuart Hall, Gramsci, Roland Barthes, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman, and addresses most of the issues of the New Museology. This may indicate a lack of merit in the text (and indeed it is dismissed as 'patronising depreciation' by Bann in 1989 (Bann 1989:104) but the lack of recognition even as a precursor is puzzling; it may be in part due to the fact that the book, unlike most museology, is addressed to the 'general reader' on the grounds that 'it is essential for our general intellectual culture, and for our belief in ourselves as humans' (Horne 1984:5). For Horne writing accessibly is a matter of obligation, of social justice, not just of personal taste. Later theory has been much criticized for its obscure and ugly writing, and not just by scholars who dislike its political stances (e.g. Cohen, 2007:199–200). However, the most important issue with 'difficult' theory is the contradiction between its avowed principles of politically radical analysis on behalf of the oppressed, and the barriers to understanding presented by its style.<sup>20</sup> While deconstructing the power relations inherent in museums or other texts, critical theorists establish a new set of power relations by the amount of cultural capital required of their putative readers. Part of my commitment in producing museum displays as well as in writing about the ideas behind them was to find a way of writing as clearly as possible, without using jargon.

Vergo defined the new discipline as 'focusing more on the purpose of museums rather than their methods' (Vergo, 1989:3) which were the preoccupation of most museum literature up to that point. The New Museology reflected wider

intellectual developments, including Cultural History, the New Art History and History from Below, a great deal of which was inspired by the French *histoire des mentalités*.<sup>21</sup> What was new about these disciplines was a rejection of traditional limits of history to high politics, high art, great men and narratives of progress. They were interested in power, not just as deployed by elites in geopolitical contexts, but as it was manifested in prisons, asylums, the family – and in museums and art galleries. They were more interested in structures and systems of domination and resistance than in narrating events, and saw the reality to which historical actors were responding as socially constructed (Burke, 2006a:1–24). The monumental *Manual of Curatorship*, published only five years earlier, attempted an encyclopedic summary of relevant ideas as well as practical knowledge about museums, contained no hint of these new approaches (Thompson, 1984).

### **2.1 Museology, from the inside<sup>22</sup>**

The largest source of new museological publications has been the University of Leicester, where the world's oldest museums studies department is based.<sup>23</sup> While it does not constitute a completely unified school, Leicester's scholars have sought to integrate museological theory into the mainstream of academic intellectual developments. After those of Leicester perhaps the most influential body of publications has been the trilogy, *Exhibiting Cultures* (Karp & Lavine, 1991); *Museums and Communities* (Karp, Kreamer & Lavine, 1992) and *Museum Frictions*, which 'reflected the concerns of the period, debating pluralism, the representation of minority and non-Western cultures and the role of museums in civil society and in according or denying identity' (Szwaja & Ybarra-Frausto, 2006:xi).<sup>24</sup> These volumes were based on international conferences hosted by the Smithsonian Institution which brought together leading practitioners and university scholars in museum disciplines.<sup>25</sup> These volumes communicated a sense of a global debate about the role and future of museums, a debate which was infused with the key issues of social justice in the societies in which they were located.

Amongst the most influential anthropological analyses of museums are those of James Clifford (1988, 1997),<sup>26</sup> whose account of their potential as 'contact zones' between cultures (represented by both objects and visitors) has been 'one of the most frequently referenced' accounts of the exploration of new inter-cultural relationships enabled by museums (Clifford, 1997; Brown & Peers, 2003:5–6). The contribution of anthropology to the understanding of 'the social life of things' is summarized by social anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1986). It sees the 'demand' for objects (in small scale or modern societies, in the art market or in museums) 'as a function of a variety of social practices and classifications, rather than as a mysterious emanation of human needs, a mechanical response to social manipulation (as in one model of the effects of advertising in our own society), or the narrowing down of a universal desire for objects to whatever happens to be available' (Appadurai, 1986:29). The idea of museums as reflecting 'a variety of social practices and classifications' may seem unarguable, but it is inimical to the 'platonic idea' of the museum and the conservative paradigm, which reject the implied contingency. I explore the opportunities enabled and missed by museum anthropology in Section 4.3.

History as a discipline has taken an increasing interest in museums, as 'public history'<sup>27</sup> has grown, and most historians' wariness of the simplifications of 'heritage', has been overcome, both as a result of historians becoming more involved in projects communicating with the general public, and general improvements in the quality of the presentation of history.<sup>28</sup> The Social History Curators Group (of which I was an active member from c1985 to 1996) has been one of the most active specialist groups, in terms of organizing training, conferences and publications. The expansion of the subject matter of social history museums resulted in exhibitions which generated controversy as they appeared to threaten cherished versions of the past or brought to the fore histories which some would have preferred to remain hidden. This has led to a



growing literature on museum controversy and on the nature of memory, individual and collective.<sup>29</sup>

The 'politics of identity' have also complicated the idealized picture of a single cohesive community with which the museum can relate, and socially engaged museums have learned to work with competing claims for representation and competing interpretations of the past (Karp & Lavine, 1991; Karp, Kreamer & Lavine, 1992; Watson, 2007). These are important issues for the social justice museum, particularly for its capacity to address 'negative heritage', which is a theme of the submitted publications and is discussed below (Barnard, 2007; MacDonald 2009).

The field of visitor studies has grown exponentially in the past twenty years.<sup>30</sup> In her 2006 review Hooper-Greenhill noted the shift from a positivist mode of counting and observing visitors and testing their learning to more interpretive methods of understanding their motivations and meaning making processes (2006:367). She criticized the field for the 'functionalist' approach of most studies, for being theoretically uninformed and lacking in academic sophistication (2006:373).<sup>31</sup> She concludes that the focus on improving displays, along with restricted resources, limited the development of visitor studies which seek a 'deeper understanding' of visitor experiences (2006:362, 374).

The related literature on museum learning, access and education has also grown apace, not least because of the focus on and investment in this area of practice by governments and foundations (Lang, Reeve & Woollard, 2006:5, 6).<sup>32</sup> Visitor studies and learning are related through the influence on both of constructivism, which rejects the idea of knowledge as something existing outside the visitor, to whom it is transferred by the experts in the museum. Instead, visitors are active agents, relating what they experience to prior knowledge (Hein, 1998). The accusation of under-theorization is due in large part to the different genealogies of museum education and critical theory. The latter is based on Continental (i.e.

European) philosophy, while the former is based on the American pragmatism,<sup>33</sup> schools which rarely intersect in the world of philosophy (Haack, 1996).

My interest in visitor studies and learning is not so much in their internal or technical debates, but in the principles and purposes of their deployment. I argue that a coherent museum philosophy requires the integration of critical theory and pragmatic, constructivist theories of visitors' experiences. It also requires a constructivist approach to assimilate some of critical theory's analysis of power in society. The resulting synthesis would involve the deployment of visitor studies as a means of ensuring that all aspects of museums were accessible to the widest possible audiences, thus enabling museums to meet their obligations as a public good to distribute their services fairly. The methods of visitor studies such as surveys and qualitative forms of exploration such focus groups, are important not just for what they reveal, but for enabling museums to become learning organisations (see below 2.7).

## ***2.2 Museology, from the outside***

The disciplines which are not themselves practised in museums, but have studied them from the outside, range from literature and sociology to urban studies, philosophy and economics. Many of these literatures have been influenced by different schools of critical theory. Structuralism, derived from Saussure and Levi-Strauss, is best represented in museology by the work of Susan Pearce, who has applied its concepts systematically to the activity of collecting (1999). Her influence on the field also involved reorienting Leicester's Museums Studies programmes to make them less vocational and more able to meet the requirements of Research Assessment Exercises introduced in 1986.<sup>34</sup> Post-structuralism, based on the ideas of Foucault, was introduced into museology by art historian and curator Douglas Crimp in an essay called 'On the Museum's Ruins' (1980) and represented in Leicester by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 1995, 2000).<sup>35</sup> Cultural sociologist Tony Bennett rejected Crimp's application to museums of Foucault's category of 'institutions of



confinement' (such as prisons and asylums) (Bennett, 1988). Retaining Foucault's analysis of the power dynamic, he interpreted museums as making public what had once been private, as part of the 'exhibitionary complex'. This included industrial exhibitions, panoramas and fairgrounds, and reflected a strategy of inculcating 'civic seeing' by persuasion rather than by force. These ideas were elaborated in his influential *The Birth of the Museum* (1995).

In general terms, works influenced by various schools of critical theory have sought to deconstruct the liberal account of museums as benign institutions of progress and expose their complicity with inequality, racism, sexism and empire. They are said to have influenced generations of museum studies students to see the 'evil political side of museums' (Rice, 2003:78).<sup>36</sup> The majority of the growing number of anthologies and readers share this critical perspective.<sup>37</sup> They also implicitly or explicitly tend to share Horkheimer's belief in the liberating power of rational analysis – what might be called its theory of theory. For example, Sherman and Rogoff argue that their questions, problems and strategies 'have a significance, and an urgency, that go far beyond the museum; they are, we believe, essential to an understanding of our culture that is itself a prerequisite to changing it' (1994:xix).<sup>38</sup> A key argument of this thesis is that revealing the inner workings of power is not in itself enough to generate change, as critical theory often seems to assume (see Section 4.1 below). This may be due in part to its failure 'to account for the material specificity of museums and exhibitions, for their experiential and affective appeal' (Henning, 2006:2, 17–8). The result of the influence of critical and cultural theory in universities is that many disciplines which have been practised in both museums and universities have diverged. Art history and anthropology are now practised so differently in universities and (especially in conservative) museums that scholars are barely able to communicate.<sup>39</sup>

The leading cultural studies practitioner Mieke Bal was chosen by MacDonald to represent 'difficult' theory in her *Companion to Museum Studies* (2006:9).

According to Bal, museum discourse is 'ruled by conventions, mostly flatly historical, vulgarly aesthetic, monographic, and monomaniac, and often, nationalist ... [and by] the illusory transparency of the discourse of realism' (Bal, 2006:529). I use Bal as a representative of the critical theory approach to museums, partly because of the exemplary status given her by MacDonald, but also because she is one of the few authors in this field who has attempted to put her ideas into practice.

Along with Foucault, the greatest external influence on museum studies is that of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>40</sup> He showed how the state's self-presentation as meritocratic masked how elites passed power and status on to their descendants through the possession of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969). This was a knowledge of the rules, rituals and traditions of particular sectors of society (the 'habitus') into which each new generation was socialized and enabled to achieve in the 'meritocratic' competition (Bourdieu, 1972). Bourdieu's significance is that he did not simply apply this theory to museums (and to art museums in particular) but developed it on the basis of a large-scale empirical study of museum visitors in several European countries (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969). His work is particularly important for understanding how apparently meritocratic societies create disadvantage and, more importantly, pass on disadvantage through the generations. Exponents of the conservative museum paradigm may claim intellectual, political or aesthetic grounds for their rejection of critical theory – though rarely with any evidence of deep engagement. Their response to the empirical basis of Bourdieu's analysis (e.g. in the work of Duncan), however, is little more than opinion.

Performance studies links museums to events and festivals, and captures the shifting semiotics of museums, often disguised by their monumentality and the illusion that museum 'tradition' is how things have always been (e.g. Kierschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Within cultural economics, museums have been included in attempts to apply econometric methods to demonstrate the impact of

culture (Myerscough, 1988a; Johnson & Thomas, 1991, 1998). Specific studies of museums and related issues (e.g. charging for entry, the value of museums, tourism) include Johnson & Thomas, 1991; Frey & Meier, 2006; and Harrison, 1997. Perhaps ironically, at a time when practitioners are reluctantly justifying themselves in financial impact terms, some economists have been increasingly forthright about the non-economic value of museums – what they call ‘positive externalities’ (e.g. Frey<sup>41</sup> & Meier, 402–3).

The interest of literature academics in museums is recent and includes Siegel’s useful anthology of nineteenth century museum documents (2005). Black’s monograph *On Exhibit, Victorians and their Museums* (2000) uses the term ‘museum’ in the literal and metaphorical senses, including not just private collecting, but Fitzgerald’s appropriation of Omar Kayan’s *Rubaiyat* (2000:48–66), and Dickens’s descriptions of overcrowded and cluttered London from *Our Mutual Friend* (2000:90–1). On the basis of this ‘expansive’ (p. 16) definition, Black goes beyond the analysis of museum as the ‘master pattern’ of the age and argues that the ‘civic museum’ is ‘the greatest constructive project of the nineteenth century’ (Black, 2000:1). No comparisons with other projects of the period (sewerage and clean water, universal free primary education, the Empire) are made to support this claim.

### **2.3 Cultural policy**

From 1997 New Labour changed the focus of government policy from the discipline of the market to targets focused on learning, social and economic outcomes. It made an historic investment in non-national museums, based on the *Renaissance in the Regions* report (Re:source, 2001). These initiatives generated a flow of official publications which sought to measure progress towards the targets and assess the impact of the new funding.<sup>42</sup> Its policies generated resistance from conservative museums because they infringed the autonomy of arm’s length bodies and imposed objectives which were not ‘traditionally’ part of museums’ purposes.<sup>43</sup> It also provoked a debate about the

role of museums framed in terms of 'intrinsic' versus 'instrumental' value,<sup>44</sup> and analyses of implicitly deterministic theories of causality and of the efficacy of the measures used to track progress in achieving targets (e.g. Selwood, 2002, 2003; West & Smith, 2005).<sup>45</sup> John Holden, then Head of Culture at Demos, sought to bridge the divide with a model which envisaged three types of value – public, professional and institutional (as discussed in O'Neill, 2009, in Part II).<sup>46</sup> The responses to his intervention reflected the greater influence of think tanks than cultural policy academics over cultural policy (Selwood, 2006a).<sup>47</sup>

## **2.4 The museum history literature**

The title of one of the earliest histories of museums, *The Museum, Its History and Its Task in Education* (Wittlin, 1949), shows how museum history can be deployed to shed light on their contemporary role.<sup>48</sup> Her view, that museums were in need of reform from the beginning, is very different from Stam's and conveys an impression that she saw museums as institutions which tended to stagnate without constant 'efforts at reform'. Despite the disputes about museums' place in society, the numbers of historical studies of museums has grown more slowly and recently than the more theoretical literature<sup>49</sup> – indeed, the history of the relationship between politics and culture has been described as 'one of the most fruitful if still under-researched' areas of British history from c1760 to c1850' (Hoock, 2003:254).

A more in-depth history was Germain Bazin's<sup>50</sup> *The Museum Age* (1967), which analyzed museums in terms of Europe's attitude to the past, from ancient times to the present. Industrial archaeologist and social historian Kenneth Hudson published both contemporary analysis, including *Museums in the 1980s* (1977), and histories, notably *Museums of Influence* (1987) and *A Social History of Museums* (1975). Though brief and selective, the latter was the first attempt to write a museum history from the perspective of visitors.<sup>51</sup> A decade before Bennett described the phenomena he labeled the 'exhibitionary complex', Altick's *The Shows of London* provided a 'panorama' of object-based spectacle at every

social level, from 'slum shows' to royal patronage of the 1851 Exhibition, designed to satisfy the 'unquenchable curiosity' of Londoners (Bennett 1988; Altick, 1978:433). Altick analyzed both commercial and publicly-funded institutions and provided vivid accounts of visitor experiences from a wide range of sources. The American historian Janet Minihan (1977) analyzed parliamentary debates on *The Nationalization of Culture* and remains unsurpassed on the subject, though there is more to be gleaned from Hansard about the relationships of museums to society, as there is from the numerous Parliamentary investigations of museums undertaken in the nineteenth century<sup>52</sup> (see Section III).

Biographical accounts of influential museum directors include a life of Henry Cole (Bonython & Burton, 2003), Edward Alexander's *Museum Masters* and Charles Samaurez Smith's *The National Gallery*,<sup>53</sup> while many curators have produced histories of their own museums (e.g. Wilson, 2002; Fortey, 2008). The past of museums has also been explored in exhibitions. Giles Waterfield, when Director of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, set out to recover, in relation to the South London gallery the 'political and social role of an artistic institution intended for the working man and woman' (Waterfield, 1994:31, 1991). Significant anniversaries of the British Museum (1753–2003), the V&A (1851–2001) and the National Portrait Gallery (1856–2006) all produced institutional histories (Baker & Richardson, 1997; Burton, 1999; Wilson, 2002; Cannadine, 2007). The last of these reflects a welcome interest in museums amongst university-based historians who are less prone to 'tunnel history' than traditional institutional accounts (Fischer, 1970:142–6). The works of Whitehead (2005) and Taylor (1999) in relation to museums in London take this contextual approach. So also do the works of social historians Kate Hill (2005, 2007) and Amy Woodson-Boulton (2007, 2008) whose work throws invaluable light on the neglected history of the museums of Britain's major cities.

Many of the growing number of museums studies anthologies include historical articles published in museum journals or new studies, notably Carbonell (2004) and Preziosi & Farago (2004). Anthologies by Siegal (2008) and Genoways & Andrei (2008) make many original sources more easily available than before.<sup>54</sup> Social historian and museum studies scholar, Gaynor Kavanagh, has written a history of museums and the First World War which is one of the few works which takes museum history beyond their eighteenth and nineteenth century origins. The pre-history of public museums in sixteenth and seventeenth century cabinets of curiosities has been the subject of a number of studies, as has the history of anthropological museums (Impey & MacGregor,<sup>55</sup> 2001; Ames, 1993; Shelton, 2006). The cultural historian Peter Burke's *Social History of Knowledge* interprets the 'inexorable rise' of museums as due in part to the 'crisis of knowledge' which arose from the influx of objects from newly discovered worlds which challenged both Christian and Aristotelian taxonomies (2000:106–9). Others have linked the development of museums to the emergence of nationalism (e.g. Anderson, [1983] (1991),<sup>56</sup> of civic and bourgeois identities (e.g. James, 2006) and of philanthropy (Checkland, 1980). From the lofty vantage point of 'global history', museums appear as repositories in Western capitals for the loot plundered from African and Asian capitals, such as Peking and Benin (Bayly, 2004:369,370).<sup>57</sup> Hooch takes a similar view of the links between cultural institutions, fine art, war and empire, but explores them in detail and includes a wider range of institutions than previous histories (2010). He argues that between c1760 and c1837 the 'military-fiscal state' also became a 'cultural state' which invested large sums in transforming St Paul's into a national pantheon and in collecting antiquities as 'a continuation of war by other means', in competition with France and, later, other European powers (Hooch, 2010:136).

No one since Bazin (1967) and Wittlin (1970) has attempted a synthetic history of all types of museum, though Andrew McClellan has done so for art museums (2008). Of all the literature reviewed here, his chapter on 'The Public' best integrates critical analysis of the role of museums in society with an appreciation



of the value of the canonical tradition and with a sense of the actual behaviour of visitors (2008:155–192).

### ***2.5 Museums and epidemiology***

One discipline which investigates museum visiting which is rarely if ever referred to in the museology literatures is the population level epidemiological research carried out since 1996 on the impact of cultural participation on health, assessed in terms of longevity.<sup>58</sup> There are over a dozen large scale, longitudinal studies, tested recently by a randomized controlled experiment (Bygren et al, 2009). These studies were controlled for income, education, chronic illness and other factors, and concluded that museum visiting (i.e. attending, not taking part in more intensive activities), along with other forms of cultural participation, such as going to the cinema, have a sufficient impact on people to constitute a separate variable in influencing longevity.<sup>59</sup> Given the political and financial pressures to find evidence of 'impact', as well as the professional and intellectual interest in the visitor experience, the neglect of this research is difficult to understand.

Perhaps for practitioners it is too large scale to have any obvious applicability, and for academics in any of the humanist disciplines it is too 'positivist'.<sup>60</sup> A holistic theory of museums has to be able to assimilate findings of this significance, not least because of their implications for social justice – if museums have an impact on health and wellbeing, then they may have a role in reducing health inequalities.

### ***2.6 The literature of the reformist paradigm***

This section sets out the contexts in which the submitted publications were produced and their contribution to my hypothesis.

In broad terms the publications sit within a subfield of museological writing by reformist practitioners who emerged in the 1980s. These represent a wide range of disciplines, though perhaps the most prominent were social history and

museum education.<sup>61</sup> The prominence of social history was due to the affinity of its methods (oral history, collecting representative everyday objects) and its focus ('history from below') with methods of reform (visitor consultation, audience representation in displays). These were also compatible with museum education's focus on the visitor experience. Other disciplines involved in reform included decorative arts e.g. Sally MacDonald (1995, 1998), archaeology e.g. Nick Merriman (1991), women's history e.g. Gaby Porter (1993, 1996), and (very exceptionally) fine art e.g. Julian Spalding<sup>62</sup> (1991, 1993, 1998a, 1998b), who appointed me as Keeper of Social History in Glasgow Museums in 1990. All of these share a paradigm which involves a commitment to improving access especially for excluded<sup>63</sup> groups, generally through the representation of hitherto neglected histories in displays, the interpretation of objects (including high culture objects<sup>64</sup>) in their historical and cultural contexts and taking the characteristics and interests of visitors into account.

In North American terms, my work is aligned with that of Elaine Gurian (2006) and many of the authors included in Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1992). Robert Janes, the Canadian museologist and editor of *Museum Management and Curatorship*, and US museum consultant Lois Silverman have both referred to the publications included in this thesis in their writing (Janes, 2009; Silverman, 2010). Like the British practitioners listed above, these reflect a commitment to museums being engaged with contemporary issues, in particular representing excluded groups and enabling them to participate in creating displays. Silverman is known for introducing the concept of meaning making into museum discourse, which fits with my understanding of visitors as active agents in museums, and my commitment both to celebrating visitors' meanings in response to or instead of the meanings offered by the museum (Silverman, 1995). In a joint article (not submitted here) Silverman and I argued that the standard dichotomies of current museum debates are false – 'our messages versus their meanings', 'theory versus practice'; 'keepers of culture versus makers of culture'; 'depicting cultures:



art versus anthropology'; 'the collections versus the public';<sup>65</sup> 'institutions'; 'best practices versus innovation' (Silverman & O'Neill, 2004).

My work is also close to that of both Richard Sandell and Jocelyn Dodd of Leicester University. They have explored the empirical basis for creating more inclusive museums, especially in relation to disability and human rights, including case studies of Glasgow Museums' practice.<sup>66</sup>

Reformist practitioners see museums as existing in a world in which social inequality has an impact on who visits, and argue that reform of museums can improve their ability to serve those excluded by these factors. Those who have reached senior positions within museums (e.g. Davies; Fleming) combined reformist with modernizing studies, partly to assert the professionalism and credibility of reformers<sup>67</sup> and partly arguing that reform can only be delivered by effective management (e.g. Davies, 1994a, 1994b, 1998 and Fleming, 1998).

## **2.7 Organizational learning and change management**

One of the literatures I have found most useful in reviewing my publications is that of organizational learning and change management. Its themes include the need to overcome the tendency of bureaucracies and professions to defensive behavior and resistance to change. Reforming museum practice encounters this resistance to a great degree because of the normative pressures on staff to conform which come 'from the continuing professionalization of the organization's managers and specialists ... having had a common training, professionals are in many ways much closer to their professional counterparts in other organizations than they are to their managerial colleagues in their own' (Pugh & Hickson, 1996:198–190). Perhaps the best known scholar in this field is Peter Senge, whose book *The Fifth Discipline*, identifies the key disciplines required to overcome defensiveness and become a 'learning organization' (Senge, 1990). These are: Self Mastery (rather than mastery of others) – the limits of the organization's capacity to learn are the limits of the self-knowledge of the staff; the capacity to make explicit and review the Mental Models which tacitly shape

behavior, ranging from stereotypes of customer behavior to the 'neglect of possibilities for discontinuous change' (Pugh & Hickson 1996:204); building a shared vision (not just a superficial vision statement); a commitment to Team Learning, beyond turf wars and stereotypes of staff; and Systems Thinking, which rejects short-term problem solving for an analysis of the complexity of the organization in its complex context and integrates the other disciplines (Senge, 1990:7–14; Pugh & Hickson 1996:203–208). While the management publications by reformist practitioners referred to in 2.6 above discuss change, most are case studies with a strong normative element and systematic applications of the change management literature to museums are few and relatively recent, while both Stam and Starn see change as mostly driven by external factors.<sup>68</sup> It is noteworthy that the large literature on learning in the museum, whether from a visitor studies or education perspective, rarely addresses learning by staff (e.g., Hooper-Greenhill, 1994a; Hein, 1998), despite the well-known difficulties of getting museum professionals to take educational expertise and the results of visitor research into account.<sup>69</sup> Learning is something museums might help sections of the public do, not something they do themselves. The work of Argyris and his collaborators is particularly illuminating in this respect (1985). In their analysis of the mental maps people use to direct their actions within organizations, they distinguish between 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use'. In carrying out their work people try to keep 'governing variables' within certain limits, managing trade-offs between these. When asked to explain their actions, people often deploy convenient theoretical ideas (espoused theory), which may not be the real drivers (theory-in-use). The latter are more likely to involve the tacit knowledge and values of organizations and individuals, of which they are usually unaware. Discrepancies between espoused theory and theory in use are the places where reflection and learning can take place as the organization responds to mistakes or demands from the external environment. They distinguish between two types of learning in response to these pressures. Single loop learning involves correcting mistakes or developing plans without questioning the governing variables. Double loop learning involves reflecting on

the governing variables and possibly changing the norms, values and objectives of the organization. On the basis of this analysis, they distinguish two types of organizations.

***Model I theory-in-use characteristics***<sup>70</sup>

The governing values of Model I are:

- achieve the purpose as the actor defines it;
- win, do not lose;
- suppress negative feelings;
- Emphasize rationality

Primary strategies are:

- control environment and task unilaterally;
- protect self and others unilaterally.

Usually operationalized by:

- unillustrated attributions and evaluations e.g. 'You seem unmotivated';
- advocating courses of action which discourage inquiry e.g. 'Let's not talk about the past, that's over';
- treating ones' own views as obviously correct;
- making covert attributions and evaluations;
- face-saving moves such as leaving potentially embarrassing facts unstated.

Consequences include:

- defensive relationships;
- low freedom of choice;
- reduced production of valid information;
- Little public testing of ideas

*Valuing Museums* (2004) and the *McMaster Report* (2008) are exemplars of this kind of thinking. The former, despite its only purpose being to justify museums to the government, fails to present any case for what it calls the 'traditional' functions of museums, assuming that these are obvious. The *McMaster Report's* proposed solution to the 'intrinsic' versus 'instrumental' debate and excessive government targets is peer review, a process which, in Argyris's terms, enables museums to 'design and manage the environment unilaterally...[and]... 'own and control the task' (Argyris 1999:180, O'Neill, 2009).

What they call Model II organizations are significantly less defensive and engage in dialogue as a core process. They are better able to use data and analysis to make and justify decisions. They seek to learn and take into account the views of participants rather than simply imposing the organizations' views. They articulate and test their theories and accept the challenge of justifying their positions. The significant features of Model II include the ability to call upon good quality data and to make inferences. They look to include the views and experiences of participants rather than seeking to impose a view upon the situation. Theories should be made explicit and tested; positions should be reasoned and open to exploration by others. Model II organizations try to develop shared leadership and authority, emphasize common goals and mutual influence, encourage open communication, publicly test assumptions and beliefs, and to combine advocacy with inquiry (Argyris & Schön 1996; Bulman & Deal 1997:147–8). Model II characteristics can be summarised as follows:

The governing values include:

- valid information;
- free and informed choice;
- internal commitment.

Strategies include:

- sharing control;
- participation in design and implementation of action.

These are 'operationalized' by:

- attribution and evaluation illustrated with relatively directly observable data;
- surfacing conflicting view;
- encouraging public testing of evaluations.

The consequences should include:

- minimally defensive relationships;
- high freedom of choice;
- increased likelihood of double-loop learning.

In terms of my thesis, my entire career has been devoted to developing the museums in which I have worked as Model II organizations dedicated to double loop learning. While this theoretical insight may seem simple, or even simplistic, and to create exaggerated polarities, there is a strong alignment between Model I thinking and the conservative museum paradigm and Model II thinking and the reformist approach. The commitment in Model II to becoming aware of and rethinking tacit assumptions and mental models reflects the transformations sought by reform rather than the more pragmatic approach of modernization. Implementing the lessons of reflexivity through testing services with the public is essential to moving beyond a welfare model to a social justice model of museum provision. I will explore this further in the analysis of my publications in Section II below.

## **2.8 Which theory?**

A detailed exploration of the reasons for the influence of Foucault on UK museum studies, rather than, say, Dewey<sup>71</sup> or Habermas<sup>72</sup> is beyond the scope of this thesis, but they seem likely to reflect wider social changes rather than being a phenomenon of museology alone. In an article on the development of

academic disciplines, leading sociologist Randall Collins<sup>73</sup> explains how academic fields develop around the small number of key ideas which succeed in dominating the 'attention space' (Collins, 2002). Careers are built by applying these ideas to new areas, or, for a minority, by challenging them. Thus for example, Starn traces the application of Foucault to museums, from Hooper-Greenhill (whose work he describes as 'near-parody'), through Bennett and many others (Starn, 2005:8). Most of the practitioners listed above started their reformist careers prior to 1989, the date when the New Museology is generally agreed to have taken off (MacDonald, 2006; Starn 2005). This suggests that interpretations of recent museum history, which see reformist practice as a response to critical theory, are too simplistic (e.g. Message, 2006:19–20). It also challenges the theory that reform was triggered by the election of New Labour in 1997 (e.g. Appleton, 2001). Equally, Stam's account of museum modernization as a response to a 'crisis' generated by external pressures may underestimate the power of ideas and of staff within museums to generate change (Stam, 1993). It seems likely that both critical theory and reformist practice (inspired by social history and education) were part of wider social trends, not least the widening of access to university education as a result of the 1944 legislation. Both critical theory and reformist practice emerged as neoliberal economic policies gave capitalism a newly confident and assertive tone, for the first time arguing not just for the importance of market values but for their primacy in all areas of society.<sup>74</sup> This may have motivated academics to expose the ideological workings of capitalist society, while simultaneously generating for some a withdrawal from practice, as it became difficult to imagine fundamental social change, especially after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which was widely interpreted as the final triumph of capitalism and the 'end of history' (e.g. Fukayama, 1992).<sup>75</sup> Newly-educated working class graduates explored social history and popular culture in museums, while the economic changes inspired some practitioners to work with communities who were suffering the consequences of de-industrialization.<sup>76</sup> I fit into many of these developments,

including being the first generation of my family to receive a university education, funded by grants from the state

MacDonald has identified as 'characteristic' of the recent past, 'a renewed commitment trying to bring together the insights from academic studies with the practical work of museums – to return to some of the "how to" concerns of the "old museology" from a new, more theoretical and empirically informed basis' (MacDonald, 2006:6). This generalization has some validity, but insofar as it implies an emerging consensus, it omits significant conflict within the museum world, not just about the relationship between theory and practice, but about the nature and purpose of museums. In my attempts to articulate a coherent view of museums I have always sought to bridge these gaps, not only through my own publications, but through commissioning social science based research on Glasgow Museums, encouraging researchers to study our practice<sup>77</sup> and through building collections research into Glasgow Museums' structure and major projects (Cultural and Leisure Services, 2001).<sup>78</sup> It is to these publications I now turn.

## ***2.9 The publications: context and commentary***

### ***2.9.1 List of publications submitted in Part II***

(Part II is a separate volume)

'Springburn: A community and its museum' (O'Neill, 1990), hereafter 'Springburn' (Part II:1)

'After the artefact: Internal and external relations in museums' (O'Neill, 1991), hereafter 'Internal and external relations' (Part II:2)

'Making histories of religion' (O'Neill, 1996), (Part II:3)



'Museums and identity in Glasgow' (O'Neill, 2006a), hereafter 'Identity in Glasgow'<sup>79</sup> (Part II:4)

'Enlightenment museums: Universal or merely global?' (O'Neill, 2004) hereafter 'Enlightenment Museums'<sup>80</sup> (Part II:5)

'Repatriation and its discontents: The Glasgow experience' (O'Neill, 2005), hereafter 'Repatriation' (Part II:6)

'The Good Enough Visitor' (O'Neill, 2002a) (Part II:7)

'Essentialism, adaptation and justice: Towards a new epistemology of museums' (O'Neill, 2006) hereafter 'Essentialism' (Part II:8)

'Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland: Telling stories in a treasured old/new museum' (O'Neill, 2007) hereafter 'Kelvingrove' (Part II:9)

'Museums, professionalism and democracy' (O'Neill, 2009) (Part II:10)

### **2.9.2 Introduction**

Most of the publications submitted as part of this thesis began as presentations which I was invited to give about my work and then refined through discussion and reading. The exceptions were 'Making histories of religion' which was commissioned for an edited volume of different aspects of history in museums (Kavanagh, 1996) and 'Enlightenment museums', which I submitted to Leicester University's *museum and society* journal. The lecture invitations reflected recognition of, at least, an interest in my approach and its applicability beyond the Glasgow context. Some are detailed accounts of projects aimed at demonstrating what a social justice museum could be and that such a museum could be possible. The main projects described in the publications – Springburn Museum, the Open Museum, St Mungo's, the People's Palace, and, most

comprehensively, Kelvingrove – were attempts to demonstrate that the museum reforms I espoused were achievable in practice. The core of my approach is the embedding of access into core displays, with outreach and programming supporting this process. The articles also engage with wider museum debates, based on what I was learning from experience, reading, discussion and travel. Looking over the publications as a whole, it is apparent that there were four key drivers of my rethinking of museums:

- the Glasgow context was critical for the challenges it posed and opportunities it created;
- the second was a commitment to social justice, based on empathy with and a commitment to audiences especially the least well off and excluded;
- the third preoccupation was the nature of history in museums and the difficulties of providing a public history based on objects that was adequate to the Glasgow context. This historiographical interest also included an exploration of the early history of museums, to attempt to understand their original social roles and the various traditions which emerged later;
- the fourth driver, underlying all my work – and writings – is a need for coherence, between personal and professional roles, between theory and practice, between 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use'.

Many of these issues come together in the case of repatriation, which, again because of the Glasgow context, became a particular focus of my work, and I review it as part of the conclusion of this overview of my writing.

### **2.9.3 *The Glasgow context***

Moving to Glasgow was a matter of chance – Springburn was the first place to offer me a job after I graduated from Leicester. Remaining in Glasgow, however, was due to the synergy between my approach and the direction the civic

authorities wished museums to take. 'Springburn' (Part II:1) sets out the context of my first five years in the city, while 'Identity in Glasgow' (Part II:4) puts my major projects in the wider context of the city's economic, social and cultural development from 1990 onwards. This context included significant and very public conflicts about the role of museums and of history in Glasgow as the city consciously deployed culture as an instrument of urban regeneration. The pressures from the City Council for museums to deliver more for its regeneration agenda led to the appointment of a new director in 1989. Being Glasgow, they chose radical reformist Julian Spalding, whose conservative populist agenda along with the city's political culture and the pressures of its social problems created an atmosphere conducive to experimentation in the name of social justice. Divergent approaches within Glasgow Museums had been apparent for some time, reflected, for example in the contrast between the Burrell Collection (1983), a classic example of the conservative paradigm, and the emergence of the People's Palace in the 1980s as a leader in the field of radical social history.

While the results of museum reformism have been criticized by conservative critics (Cuno, 2004; Burlington, 2007) much of the debate within the city and academe involved criticisms from a Marxist or neo-Marxist perspective. These argued that the city's deployment of culture to lead urban regeneration was a sham, a form of 'roll-with neo-liberalism' which covered up growing inequalities (Boyle & Hughes, 1991; Booth & Boyle, 1993; Tether, 2009).<sup>81</sup> 'Identity in Glasgow' (O'Neill, 2006a, Part II:4) accepts in a pragmatic way that Glasgow's museums consciously supported the Council's commodification of the city's identities for tourist consumption – as a strategy to use the city's assets in order to regenerate the economy (Comedia, 1991; Myerscough, 1998b). The non-essentialist definition of museums deployed in Glasgow did not see cultural, social, economic and other impacts as inherently in conflict and so did not entail a reductionist view of their role. Nor did museum staff see the interests and needs of tourists as radically different from those of local people. The issue was how the multiple agendas were managed in practice and whether the integrity of

the displays was compromised by the mobilization of museums for tourist development. All this made ensuring that the core of Glasgow Museums' displays met the requirements of social justice and of rigorous history of crucial importance.

#### **2.9.4 *Social justice***

The most basic position on which my work is founded is a commitment to improving access to museums for people who are excluded from society's opportunities, based on the principles of social justice. Reviewing my work, one element that is apparent in retrospect (but not explicitly stated or evaluated) is the emotional basis of this commitment in an empathy with the excluded. One academic study of successful leadership within established companies at middle management rather than at chief executive level included a study of my management of Kelvingrove project.<sup>82</sup> What the author identified as common characteristics amongst this group of managers (mostly in the private sector) was the combination of an empathetic attitude towards customers with an experimental approach to service/product development (Liedtka, 2009:37–43). While empathy has long been recognised as a basic foundation of ethics, for example in David Hume and Adam Smith,<sup>83</sup> its status has been diminished in both scientific and professional cultures as 'subjective'. It is however undergoing a revival, mainly due the discovery of a physical basis for it in the structure of the brain.<sup>84</sup> Empathy is a basic human quality which is an essential foundation for perception, inter-subjectivity and societal functioning.

Other recent research about empathy, however, shows that it is usually restricted to an in-group and the task of ethics – and here I am particularly concerned with professional ethics – is to extend the circle of empathy to those outside the prevailing culture (de Wall, 2006:163). This is not an argument for subjectivism in making strategic management decisions, but for a recognition that subjectivism is unavoidable, given the huge personal investment in professional knowledge and practice and the intimate relationship between work and identity in all professions

(including museums) and therefore needs to be managed (Worts, 1990; Witcom, 2003:74). My personal commitment to social justice raised important issues in terms of the authority with which I functioned, notably in arguing for change in how museums were run. Was there any basis for the changes I promoted other than personal feeling? How could I address the danger, articulated by Raymond Williams, that 'all human and positive beliefs and especially a belief in radical change' can be seen as 'either a projection of some personal or social maladjustment or as an inexperienced, naïve adolescent idealism' (Williams, [1971] 1984:83). Similar issues are raised by Stam's claim that reformers are not so much bidding to change museums to represent 'the populace', but for power for themselves (2005:54, Section 1.2.6).<sup>85</sup> If my notions of social justice suggested actions which were inimical to museum traditions, on what basis could I justify choosing change in a profession dedicated to preservation?

Working through these issues in Springburn contributed to the political rationale of my hypothesis. My belief (shared by the local people who founded Springburn Museum) that the museum could bring benefits was open to the most basic political question as to whether museums and other publicly-funded cultural institutions are a palliative which impeded necessary change and thus prolonged injustices. Writers from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to Oscar Wilde<sup>86</sup> have argued that reformist improvement mutes anger at injustice and puts off the radical, revolutionary change that was needed in the structure (Marx & Engels, 1848; Wilde, 1891:255). I concluded that if public funds are being spent on culture, those excluded from society's benefits (e.g. work) by structural inequalities are as entitled as anyone else to receive cultural services. To argue that it is pointless providing cultural services until wider, more important issues of economic exclusion are addressed is to take a simplistic view of human nature, in which culture is separate from other aspects of life. In Springburn it would also have meant, given the area's poor economic prospects, that many people (especially unemployed men over 50, whose average life expectancy was 60) would never receive any services. My view was that museums were indeed a

palliative (though they were also much more), but that this was a good thing – postponing addressing issues of history, belonging, tradition and the meaning of change until someday which might never arrive, rationalized further deprivation.

#### **2.9.4.1 Social justice – the intellectual basis**

My emotional commitment to social justice was accompanied by an intellectual exploration of the subject, testing its rationality and applicability through reading, lecturing and writing.

The intellectual basis of the social justice had three foundations. One, particular to the Glasgow context, was public ownership of the collections – as a real part of the public culture and not just a legal fact. On this basis, all citizens had an equal right of access, no matter what their background, level of education or cultural capital. This was supported by ideas of cultural rights, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>87</sup> (O'Neill, 2002). The work of John Rawls has also been important (O'Neill, 2002a, Part II:7). As a theory of distributive justice, it is particularly relevant to public services, which, by definition should be distributed fairly. It details, in effect, a theory of managed empathy.<sup>88</sup> Rawls recommends a thought experiment in which social arrangements are decided from behind a 'veil of ignorance' of the circumstances of the individuals making the decisions. He argues that this approach will lead people, in their own self-interest, to opt for a fairer distribution of society's benefits. This addresses precisely the difficulty that many museum staff and critics experience in imagining how people with different backgrounds, levels of education or cultural capital would experience museums.

#### **2.9.4.2 Visitor studies, social justice and reflexive practice**

The second major control on empathy and foundation for the social justice paradigm is the application of visitor studies to core museum displays. These are not simply a pragmatic tool to improve communication; they are an essential means of creating a reflexive museum practice and of connecting the museum



experience to real rather than imaginary visitors. A commitment to rational evidence-based practice does not mean abandoning the high ideals of museums. Even if it is difficult to ascertain the impact on people, it is at least possible to set out a strategy which plans explicitly to achieve those impacts and which uses empirical testing to gauge audience responses. While some of the more poetic and spiritual claims of museums may be the most difficult to track, those of justice are more amenable to research, and visitor studies can reveal how much cultural capital is required of visitors to understand and enjoy displays; they can ensure that people who do not currently visit will feel welcome and at home. This is the first step in achieving any museum impacts – no claims for museum impacts (increasing tolerance, civilizing the masses, fostering an appreciation of art and knowledge for their own sake) have any chance of being realized for those sections of the population who do not visit.

An empathic attitude to visitors is necessary for museum staff to create a welcoming museum and to motivate removing barriers to access, but it is not sufficient in itself. Visitor studies provide the essential corrective to the inevitable limits on how museum staff can imagine people from different backgrounds. They enable sharing authority with visitors in the creation of displays. My commitment to visitors is set out in 'The Good Enough Visitor' (O'Neill, 2002a, Part II:7) which argues that the real target of the animus of conservative critics is not so much reformist curators, as those sections of the public that the latter seek to welcome. (The history of this line of argument is explored in 3.1.) It contrasts the welfare model of museum provision with one based on social justice. The latter argues that meaningful, long-term accessibility can only be achieved through fundamental change in the core displays of museums. This brings out a critical element missing in some accounts of inclusive museum practice. For example, West and Smith distinguish between improving access and 'social inclusion' practices. They define the latter as working with target excluded groups, for example on exhibitions which tell their story, using learning evaluation techniques to assess progress (2005:275–288). This is a welfare approach and falls short as



a theory for creating museums which respond to the demands of social justice. The small group with whom the museum has worked intensively may acquire the confidence and motivation to revisit the museum once their display has ended. There is no reason to believe, however, that this confidence will transfer to other members of that group, even if they visit the museum for the particular exhibition, or even that it will transfer with the participants to future visits. As McClellan argues, 'Programming no doubt makes a short-term difference to who comes, but lasting change will surely require structural modification of permanent collections and staffing at the decision-making level in the museum hierarchy' (McClellan, 2008:94). It is only by embedding access and the lessons learned from community engagement projects that a museum moves beyond the welfare paradigm.<sup>89</sup>

Within the conservative paradigm, the only valued feedback is the professional test, as exemplified by the McMaster Report's recommendation that targets for museums and other cultural institutions be abandoned in favour of Peer Review (McMaster, 2008). For me, the testing does indeed include peer review, along with presentations at conferences and seminars, but it must also include careful study of audience responses. For this to be meaningful it must be carried out during the planning phase, so that displays can be shaped in response to how the public perceive them. Thus visitor studies are a critical element in a reflexive museum practice and in enabling museums to become, in Senge's terms, learning as well as an expert organization.

#### **2.9.5 *History in museums – in Glasgow***

The unique quality of museums – the representation of meaning through real objects – has inherent difficulties, in particular in relation to providing a basis for understanding and communicating history (Kavanagh, 1996). My publications return again and again to issues relating to history, from the lack of historical perspective in think tank interventions, to the facts that collections rarely represent good samples of the past partly because many objects survived by

chance while museum taxonomies limited collecting to particular 'tunnels', neglecting issues which were not discussed or apparent at the time (O'Neill, 2009, Part II:10; O'Neill, 1992). Added to this, the 'official' nature of museum history – celebrating civic, national or imperial achievements and acquisitions, meant that most displays represent a Whiggish, teleological interpretation of history in which the past appears as a series of achievements leading to the present, which is implicitly validated as the inevitable goal of past progress.

#### 2.9.5.1 History versus nostalgia

The first issue I had to face during my formative period in Springburn (1985–90) however was not a myth of progress but a sense of decline and the tendency of local history to be distorted by nostalgia. My views were influenced by the debates about the heritage industry in works by Lowenthal (1985), Wright (1985) and Hewison (1987). Though dismissed as metropolitan 'heritage baiters' by Raphael Samuel, a leading Marxist social historian and founder of the History Workshop movement and *Journal* (Samuel, 1994), these provided valuable insights into the ideological uses of the past as it was commodified or deployed to create an illusory sense of 'national' consensus as social conflict increased. No culture, including that of the Glasgow working classes, is wholly positive and exploring its negative aspects is an important function of a history museum<sup>90</sup>. There was a great deal of nostalgia and romanticization of the past in Springburn, which included a desire to ignore the oppressive aspects of community life. However, given the scale of loss the people had experienced as a result of deindustrialisation, I came to see nostalgia as a legitimate part of the process of reintegrating meaning after traumatic loss – but also as something which needed to be accompanied by analysis which challenged some of its illusions about the past.

My views on this were crystallized by *Loss and Change* by urban planner Peter Marris (1975) which I read soon after leaving Springburn Museum. Marris's was a psychoanalytically informed analysis of the impact of damaging upheavals on

communities, and made an analogy between individual grieving and communal responses to traumatic change (Marris, 1975). This confirmed my intuitions about the role the museum was playing in Springburn, which, like many post-industrial communities, was turning to social history (in museum, oral history and community arts projects) in an attempt to come to terms with rapid changes caused by deindustrialization which were damaging traditional patterns of family, work and social life. In Marris's terms, the museum was helping people come to terms with a traumatic loss.<sup>91</sup> In political terms, the museum may have been a palliative, but palliative care was a useful social function for the museum – and this was only part of what the museum did. In practical terms, the museum created displays which visitors could use either for nostalgic reminiscence or critical analysis or both.

#### **2.9.5.2 Human or museum categories?**

The museum of world religions which I developed in Glasgow was an experiment in moving beyond technical museum taxonomies (decorative art, metalwork, treen, ethnography) to categories more directly related to human life, relationships and meanings. An opportunity provided by chance (the Cathedral Visitor Centre running out of funds) and by Glasgow City Council's willingness to experiment, enabled the museum service to innovate in creating a museum based on a human, rather than a museum category. In contrast to the motives behind political commitment, the recurrence of religion as a theme in my publications is not a reflection of personal belief – quite the contrary. It is a logical conclusion of an interest in museum displays which focus on the primary human meaning of objects as opposed to their nineteenth century taxonomic category. Taking this approach involves treating culture less as a separate domain of life and more as the medium through which humans give meaning to existence. My hypothesis was that displays could be produced which took this focus, without losing aesthetic impact or scholarly rigour. Addressing the subject of religion also raises the issues of how the dark side of human history can or should be represented – the few museums with displays on religion take a celebratory

multi-culturalist approach.<sup>92</sup> The destructive aspects of religious belief do not need to be artificially imported: they are represented by many museum objects.

#### **2.9.5.3 Kelvingrove: an encyclopedia of human life**

*The Observer's* review of the refurbished Kelvingrove said that it was 'Not so much a museum of culture but of life itself', which was precisely the aim of the museum's approach to the displays and in particular to history, 'Kelvingrove' (O'Neill, 2007, Part II:9) sets out how this approach was implemented in response to the demands of its Glasgow context and the richness of its collections. Amongst many other characteristics, the displays show that even in the city's most prestigious museum, what John Urry called 'the tourist gaze',<sup>93</sup> is not protected from the fact that, as Walter Benjamin put it, 'There is no document of civilization that is not at the same time a document of barbarism' (1940:256). As well as galleries showing works by Rembrandt, van Gogh and Bellini, there are stories of the Holocaust and of Sectarian violence and violence against women in the west of Scotland (all based on objects in the collection). As well as providing an honest history, these displays represent the excluded and oppressed.

#### **2.9.5.4 History and the conservative paradigm**

A consistent argument from the earliest publication (1991, Part II:1) to the most recent (2009, Part II:10) is that the historical arguments used to support the conservative paradigm are not sustained by an examination of the record. For example in 'Universal Museums' (2004, Part II:5) I argue that it may be possible to construct coherent arguments against repatriation, but that building them on the basis that 'universal' museums espoused democratic and tolerant values from the time of the Enlightenment requires 'face-saving moves such as leaving potentially embarrassing facts unstated' to the point of significantly distorting the historical record (*ICOM News*, 2004; Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985:89). While the museological literature describes the conservative paradigm as anti-theoretical (Witcom, 2003:5, 12; Wood, 2004:123,125), it is, perhaps more

importantly, anti-historical. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile an essentialist Platonic image of museums as institutions which transcend history with the complexity and contingency of actual history. As history is not just the medium in which museums developed but the content of their collections and processes, this creates fundamental difficulties for their institutional coherence. This reflects a wider tension within British (and American) liberalism, which claims both rootedness in the unique paths taken by Anglo-American history and universal applicability of its principles irrespective of cultural and historical differences (Brown, 2007). Anomalies such as liberal imperialism reflected the fact that the universal principles of liberalism were always applied within a boundary. While the boundary widened throughout the nineteenth century, it always excluded significant numbers of people, so that, for example, women did not get the vote until 1918. While critical theorists (and social historians) emphasize the processes of exclusion, their consequences for the excluded and the struggle to widen the boundary, conservative practitioners and critics emphasize the incremental inclusion of more and more people. Cuno and MacGregor go further and invoke the progressive authority of Edward Said,<sup>94</sup> for their espoused universal values and their claims that their museums' displays foster tolerance and justice – without any evidence of this impact and without engaging with any of the issues of representation raised by Said (MacGregor, 2004c; Cuno, 2009). The evidence that nineteenth century museum displays provided intellectual rationales for imperialism, 'scientific' racism, social Darwinist hierarchies of peoples and cultures is incontrovertible (Coombs, 1997; Bennett, 1995, 2004). The most recent history of the 'cultural state' c1750–1820 by Hoock makes claims that institutions like the British Museum were apolitical in their origins seem, to say the least, naïve (Hoock, 2010). Modern displays in universal museums are more 'neutral' but there is no evidence that they promote tolerance (Higgins, 2003). At the time of their emergence in the first half of the nineteenth century, public museums reflected the prevailing social attitudes with regard to the Other. But they had more choices and more awareness of choices in relation to people within Britain, in relation to whom museums were relatively inclusive as

to who was counted as being within the liberal boundary of the nation (see below 3.9).

My work in Glasgow which aimed to develop museum history displays which emphasized the human and which did not have to avoid uncomfortable facts or negative heritage (of society or of museums themselves) was inextricably bound up with my commitment to extending the boundary of who was included.<sup>95</sup>

#### 2.9.6 Coherence

A key driver of my work, my writing and my critique of the conservative paradigm has been a need for coherence, for consistency between the emotional and intellectual, the personal and professional, between the pressures to modernize and the need to preserve, between the internal workings and external presentation of museums, and between their 'espoused theory' and their 'theory-in-use.' The aim of creating a coherent, holistic philosophy is not simply a rational imperative but an ethical one and I have tried to achieve what the philosopher Harry Gensler argues is an essential feature of moral logic – the 'need to harmonize our evaluations of ends and means' (Gensler, 1996:49, 29–52). While trying to integrate ideals, theory, practice and context into a coherent view of the role of museums, I have also sought to avoid producing a dogmatic, reductionist approach or to implement an *a priori* theory.

'Essentialism' (2006, Part II:8) is my most extended attempt to respond to my need for coherence (2.9.2) and to give an integrated account of museums. It seeks to bring together knowledge of objects, visitors, society with self-knowledge, on a foundation of social justice attempting also to break down the dichotomies of the museum debate – between Cuno's 'social institution' and 'scholarly research', Weil's 'about something' and 'for somebody',<sup>96</sup> between museum disciplines and museum rationales – and reconstructing them as a coherent whole (Cuno, 1997; Weil, 1999).



Being critical of claims of impact and being realistic about the amount of what Bourdieu called the 'cultural capital' possessed by many potential museum visitors has not entailed moderating my museum ideals (Bourdieu & Darbel, 1969).<sup>97</sup> Instead, I have focused on exploring these ideals in depth, and trying to find ways of realising them in practice, rather than simply continuing with traditional museum methods and assuming various impacts would follow – in Argyis's terms, reconciling espoused theory and theory-in-use. The ideals of my work have been, in many ways 'traditional' – inspiring people to appreciate canonical art of the past and the wonders of the natural world and to think about history and culture – and are not instrumental in this sense prevalent in recent debates.<sup>98</sup> My aim has been to realize these ideals by modifying museum practice so that the core displays are accessible to people who lack the cultural capital to interpret them without aid. Far from being reductionist or entailing a diminution in the role of the expert knowledge and judgment of staff, or a simplification of the complex functions of museums, the social justice paradigm creates added complexity in all these dimensions.

#### **2.9.6.1 Coherence and the conservative paradigm**

Many of my writings analyse the internal incoherence of the conservative paradigm, exposing contradictions between its claims to represent tradition and the historical record, and between claims of impacts on society and the failure to take actions which would increase the chances of those impacts being achieved. This analysis is present in 'internal and external relations' (1991), where I point out the un-self-critical quality of the conservative position and its elision of judgments of the quality of objects and displays with judgments about the quality of visitors; the conflation of intelligence and education (which enables privilege to appear meritocratic); the pressures on museums from both marketizing and democratizing forces; and the tendency of museums to lose a sense of a wider social purpose when the generation which set them up is replaced by professionals.



The case study of the V&A's Islamic gallery in 'Museums, Professionalism and Democracy' (2007, Part II:10) proposes that the museum lacked the authority to lay claim to social impacts when they had not taken the actions necessary to achieve those impacts – that they, in Argyris's terms 'speak with inferred categories with little or no observable behavior' (Argyris 1999:180). This argument does not imply that a museum can, or should try to, envisage and plan for all the possible outcomes of a museum display – visitors will have many valuable experiences unimagined by museum staff. The argument is that:

- the likely response of visitors with different characteristics to alternative approaches to displays can be discovered through empirical research;
- if this research makes clear what needs to be done to secure a particular response (e.g. to make contemporary Muslims feel at home in a display of Islamic art), choosing not to act on these findings limits the museums' right to claim that the particular audience response is likely.

This supports my hypothesis that conservative museums frequently encounter difficulties in providing logical accounts of their social role which create a coherent synthesis of theory, values and practice. Visitor studies cannot be deployed effectively because the museum's 'Platonic' core is non-negotiable.

The launch of the Universal Declaration of Museums<sup>99</sup> elicited one of the most striking examples of the Model I characteristics<sup>100</sup> of the conservative museum paradigm's view of history, from Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. He argued that 'If people stopped looking retrospectively at [sic] centuries ago, and moved forward, then everyone would be "on the same page"'. (Bailey, 2003:1). This illustrates the incoherence generated when the espoused theory of Universal Museums (whose absolute foundation is that the past, and evidence from the past, matter) is contradicted by a defensive 'theory-in-use', which maintains that, when it suits the museum, the past does not matter.

### 2.9.7 *Repatriation*

While major projects like Kelvingrove were extremely demanding in developing an approach that was coherent across 22 galleries and the whole range of museum subjects, the issue of repatriation posed particular challenges, for both social justice and coherence. In the mid-1990s Glasgow was confronted with four repatriation requests. What was owed to communities claiming objects which their ancestors had created? What was owed to the people of Glasgow who owned the objects? What place, if any, did empathy for claimant communities have in making a professional decision? Was there a conflict between Glasgow City Council's values and the values of the museum profession? 'Repatriation' (2005, Part II:6) describes the criteria and processes I devised which were designed to ensure that the decisions reached did more than simply provide a rationale for pre-existing attitudes and engage with the issues in a principled, rational way which took the relevant views and evidence into account.

The case for the Glasgow's repatriation is certainly debatable, but there was a striking lack of rigour amongst those who disagreed with it publicly in assessing the history of the object or of Glasgow's processes. Using a rhetoric which 'treats their own views as obviously correct' (Argyris, 1999:243), rather than making a case undermines their defense of museums as institutions dedicated to evidence-based rational discourse I attempted to generalize from this experience, and from my thinking about the kind of history museums should represent in 'Universal Museums' (2004, Part II:5). 'Repatriation', 'Universal Museums' and 'Museums, professionalism and democracy' support my hypothesis that conservative museums are less able than reformist museums to solve the intellectual difficulties raised by issues in contemporary society, especially the increased prominence of repatriation claims as a result of globalization. Far from their ideological position leading to 'the construction of internally coherent discourses' as Foucauldian analyses of museums asserts (Sherman & Rogoff, 1994:xi), it creates significant contradictions within their rationales.

### 2.9.8 Conclusion

In the critical theory literature museums are most often seen as part of the 'Enlightenment project' to provide a justification for European global domination and exploitation (Bennett, 1995; Coombes, 1997; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992; Preziosi, 2006). This is not an exclusively radical position. As the conservative critic George Steiner has argued, the record of the twentieth century means that Western civilization can no longer regard itself as the unalloyed centre of progress and Enlightenment virtue' (Steiner, 1998).<sup>101</sup> More recent evaluations represent the Enlightenment as less a monolithic set of ideas, but as complex debates, which included critiques of exploitation and domination (Todorov, 2007). My publications fit within this literature, in both their reading of the history of museums and the kind of history museums present – a history which sees synthesis of the positive and negative legacies of the past as essential to maintaining an intellectual and ethical coherence. They give an account of an attempt to reconstruct museums as institutions of 'Enlightenment' which met twenty-first century standards of social justice in their engagement with audiences, academic standards of rigour in the kind of history they showed, and professional and philosophical coherence and transparency in the public accounts of their rationale.

## Section III

### 3.0 *Museum historiography and social justice*

My hypothesis has a significant historical component, arguing that

- reformist museum practice is compatible with the founding ideals of nineteenth century public museums;
- the practices and values regarded by the conservative paradigm as essential to the 'traditional' museum are a development of the late nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup>

This section explores the historiography of attitudes to visitors in the period of the founding of paradigmatic museums in London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It presents evidence that

- there is no single tradition which favours a focus on the 'intrinsic' quality of objects over the social roles of museums;
- of the paradigmatic museums founded in London, the National Gallery and South Kensington Museum and a number of independent museums were explicitly intended to serve as 'social institutions', with only the British Museum taking an elitist stand, which was eroded as it gradually became a genuinely public museum in the course of the nineteenth century;
- museums which were criticized (by the public and politicians) for being elitist were not regarded as being immune from government intervention because of being managed 'at arm's length' through a system of trusteeship – they were held to account and were reformed by government action; and that
- what conservatives describe as the traditional museum paradigm developed late in the nineteenth century and involved a narrowing of the original social role and audience of museums.

New Labour's rhetoric of the socially inclusive museum has been subject to academic scrutiny which does recognise that it does have historical precedents (e.g. Masson, 2004; Kawashima, 2006).<sup>103</sup> However, many art critics, cultural policy analysts, conservative practitioners and think tanks maintain that reformist

museum practice is a recent, politically motivated phenomenon which poses a threat to the traditions, standards and apolitical status of museums.<sup>104</sup> This has also been explicit in critiques of museum projects which I led. One referred to 'Blairism on the walls of Kelvingrove' (Dawber, 2006). *The Burlington Magazine* also linked Kelvingrove's attempt to 'appeal to the lowest common denominator' to New Labour policies (The *Burlington Magazine*, 2006).<sup>105</sup> Similar analyses of the drive for the overall movement for improved museum access have been made by journalists from the right such as James Delingpole (2006a, 2006b) and from the left, such as Joan Bakewell (2007).

### **3.1 Against 'the joining of Companies'**

The analysis, put forward in 'Good Enough Visitor' (2.8.6) of the conservative critique of reformist museums as being directed as much at their visitors as at curatorial practice is revealed as a recurring theme in museum history. Minihan, Altick, Taylor and Wilson provide examples of MPs, staff and trustees of the British Museum and later of the National Gallery defending an elite view of museums on the basis of the shortcomings of the general public. These mostly take the form of complaints that the lower orders behaved in inappropriate ways (eating, talking loudly, breastfeeding), that they were not interested in the objects but only in socializing or escaping from the rain and that they would damage the objects.<sup>106</sup> Anne Goldgar in an article on the British Museum quotes an MP who proposed charging for entry in 1774 because 'the joining of Companies is often disagreeable, from Persons of different Ranks and inclinations being admitted at the same Time, and obstructing one another' (2000:196). She concludes that: 'The Act to buy Sloane's museum refers to the "general use and benefit of the public," but the trustees made it clear that their concept of the public was limited' (2000:210). They did not justify the restriction of access to people with the appropriate educational and social qualifications on the basis that they would appreciate the works for their 'intrinsic value' – the museum was meant to produce useful knowledge. The limits access were justified on the basis of the theory of 'virtual representation' of the public by the elite who were admitted – the

public would benefit from what they learned. Though this argument is no longer made, it is implicit in the claims of conservative museums to serve society as a whole by providing displays which are only accessible to the already educated.

### **3.2 *Whig and Radical museums***

Elitist views, however, were not the sole or even the dominant tradition. The idea of virtual representation was rejected not just in the cultural sphere but in the political, leading to the Reform Acts of 1867, 1884, 1911, 1918 and 1929.<sup>107</sup> Indeed the first art exhibitions in London, such as those in Coram's Foundling Hospital, and public exhibitions organized by its committee of artists, had been free and consciously and explicitly designed to achieve social purposes, including raising funds for the Hospital, educating the public and creating a non-exclusive artists' organization (Taylor, 1999:3–7; Wedd, 2009). As pressure for reform – of all of Britain's institutions – grew, the British Museum's 'studied policy of excluding as many members of the general public as possible' came under increasing pressure to change (Altick, 1978:434).<sup>108</sup>

The case for public access to museums put forward by the Whigs and Radicals, who gained power after the 1832 Reform Act, was influenced by utilitarian, dissenting and evangelical ideals. They believed in the 'joining of companies' or 'mixing of classes', so that the lower orders could learn by emulating their superiors (Minihan, 1977:32). They placed more emphasis, however, on museums as agents for educating the masses in general and improving the quality of British design and manufacture in particular (Minihan, 1977:29–56). They also believed that museums, as a form of 'rational recreation', would provide an alternative to the pub and support not only temperance, but moral improvement, family leisure, respectability, the reduction of crime and of political disaffection (Greenwood, 1888:vii; Croll, 2007; Minihan, 1977:87–95).<sup>109</sup>

The South Kensington Museum epitomized this philosophy. Managed not at arm's length but directly by the Department of Art and Science, every aspect of



its organization as it developed was designed to ensure that the working classes could visit and understand the displays, from evening and holiday opening hours and its approach to display, to the provision of toilets and the first ever museum café.<sup>110</sup> Its founding director, Henry Cole, quoted Adam Smith, Archbishop Cranmer and John Stuart Mill in justifying the public funding of museum education for the poor (Bonython & Burton, 2003:192). Though Cole castigated the National Gallery for its inaccessible opening hours, an 1857 survey showed a substantial proportion of workmen in local workshops visited (Taylor, 1999:75–6; MacGregor, 2004:42). After prolonged deliberation in Parliament, proposals to move the Gallery from the polluted atmosphere of Trafalgar Square were rejected because it would make it inaccessible to the working classes, despite the recognition that this could lead to the collections being damaged (Whitehead, 2005:60–6).

This perspective also led to the passage of the 1845 and 1850 legislation which enabled cities for the first time to support museums on the rates, as long as the capital required was donated by philanthropists (Greenwood 1888, Minihan, 1977:90–1). The implementation of the Act has only recently begun to be studied. Social historians Kate Hill and Amy Woodson-Boulton reveal mixed motives for municipal governments taking it up. These included the education of the local working classes in some cases, but the expression and consolidation of middle class identity was the main driver (Woodson-Boulton, 2008:146).<sup>111</sup> However, Hill concludes that, 'There is little doubt that, particularly in the first years after opening of a museum, members of the working classes were among its visitors in significant numbers' (2005:127).

### **3.3 *Tory museums***

Speaking in Parliament soon after the passage of the 1832 Reform Act, former Tory Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel, supporting the Whig government's proposal for a National Gallery, said that



In the present times of political excitement, the exacerbation of angry and unsocial feelings might be much softened by the effects which the fine arts had ever produced on the minds of men....[a National Gallery] was the most adequate to confer advantage on those classes which had but little leisure to enjoy the most refined species of pleasure. The rich might have their own pictures, but those who had to obtain their bread by their labour, could not hope for such enjoyment.

A new National Gallery would 'not only contribute to the cultivation of the arts, but to the cementing of the bonds of union between the richest and poorer orders of state ... joined in mutual intercourse and understanding' (*Hansard*, HC Deb 23 July 1832, Vol 14, cc 645). This frequently cited quotation<sup>112</sup> is recognisable as part of Bennett's 'set of cultural technologies concerned to organize a voluntary self-regulating citizenry' which can be interpreted through the 'Gramscian perspective of the ethical and educative function of the modern state' to account for the role of the 'exhibitionary complex' in the 'bourgeois democratic polity' (1995:63). In terms of Gramscian hegemony, Peel's vision of the National Gallery was both an attempt to secure consent to the existing social hierarchy and part of a negotiation between the elite and other sections of society. This is a Tory vision of museums, focusing on a public space where the social hierarchy was reinforced by the 'joining of companies' in an atmosphere of elevated leisure. While Peel does not use the word 'right' he implies some degree of entitlement to experience fine art.<sup>113</sup> This may be seen as an effort to re-create something of what Burke called 'natural society' which was being romanticised as it was being destroyed by urbanisation (Kirk, 1997:18,19).<sup>114</sup> For museums to carry out their hegemonic function they had to be inclusive 'social institutions', otherwise the benign influence of the social mixing could not take place.<sup>115</sup>

### 3.3.1 *Ruskin and Tory museum reform*

Though liberals were the leading champions of wide museum access, Peel's endorsement was not exceptional. Support also came from John Ruskin, who described himself as 'violent Tory of the old school' (Hewison, 2007:26). Though he disagreed with Cole's utilitarianism, he not only supported the provision of museums for the working classes, based on his belief in the redemptive power of art in the face of the degradation of work in industrialised society, but he also established a model institution – the Guild of St George Museum – in Sheffield. What both Peel's and Ruskin's views had in common was a belief that working class people had a dignified place in society and a right to cultural provision, a belief which was the seed of later democratisation.<sup>116</sup>

Ruskin's museum was one of a number founded by philanthropists which constitute important precedents for the museum as a social and educational institution.<sup>117</sup> These were motivated by 'Ruskinian visual education, Christian interpretation and national artistic tradition' (Taylor, 1999:99). They include the Whitechapel Picture Gallery, the People's Palace, the South London Art Gallery and the Ancoats Art Museum.<sup>118</sup> Though criticized later for their 'misuse' and 'vulgarization' of art and 'their application of' the fine arts to 'social problems', these museums made significant innovations (Borzello, 1987; Waterfield, 1994:62; Dowling, 1996). These included specialized displays and activities for children, lobbying for and securing from the Board of Education formal recognition of school visits as educational activities and a school loans scheme (Waterfield, 1994:62–3). Along with the access arrangements of the South Kensington Museum, the principles and practices of these museums are important precedents for reformist practice in general and in particular for Glasgow Museum's ideals and practical experiments in targeting displays and in the outreach work of the Open Museum (O'Neill, 2006, 2007).

### **3.4 *The risk to objects***

The charge that working class visitors were likely to damage collections was refuted by champions of the working classes like Charles Dickens<sup>119</sup> and Henry

Cole and his staff.<sup>120</sup> Pressed by MPs at the various Select Committees, museum staff conceded that their fears of damage by the working classes had been unfounded (Wilson, 2002:87). The charge was rejected not just by radical MPs like Joseph Hume, but by Peel, who maintained that it was more likely to be 'the vulgar rich' than the poor who vandalized historic monuments.<sup>121</sup>

### **3.5 Political 'interference' and the arm's length principle**

The British conservative museum paradigm maintains that their tradition includes autonomy from government and its social policies, and that New Labour's interference is an unprecedented intrusion, in both nature and degree.<sup>122</sup> This is not borne out by the record. The very fact that between c1760 and 1860 the state undertook to organize and fund cultural institutions meant, by definition, that 'the art world became intensely politicized' (Hooch, 2003:254). While there was indeed wariness of the government being able to control artistic expression,<sup>123</sup> this did not mean reticence in setting policy for publicly funded museums, particularly in relation to public access, both physical and intellectual. When Hume 'objected to the constitution of the trustees who had the control over the [British Museum], and who formed almost a self-elected body of thirty-eight persons ... that the public money should not be placed in the hands of persons over whom the Government had no control' and were therefore unlikely to implement the findings of the 1835 commission, Peel replied that 'So far, too, from their having no influence, the First Lord of the Treasury had always a very great influence, as it must be with his sanction that the vote was proposed; and ... any reasonable suggestion as to the management of the Museum made by the First Lord of the Treasury would be attended to by the trustees'.<sup>124</sup> The fact of public funding gave ministers and parliament effective influence over arm's length organizations, an influence to which they believed they were entitled because of that funding.

The 'long awakening' (Wilson, 2002:58–92) of the British Museum from its 'comatose' (Altick, 1978:439) state was the result of relentless pressure from the

House of Commons to provide a level of public access they believed to be commensurate with public funding (Altick, 1978:442–6; Wilson, 2002:98–102). It took until the 1870s for it to complete the transition from being a gentlemen's private research society to become a public museum, finally admitting young children in 1879.<sup>125</sup> Access was not a lesser issue than governance and funding; the lack of commitment to access on the part of the trustees of the British Museum was a major reason for the National Gallery being established as a separate institution (Saumarez Smith, 2009:24–5).<sup>126</sup>

### **3.6 *The politics of interpretation***

Contrary to the belief that interpretation is a recent fad, political intervention extended beyond the location of museums and their opening hours to the provision of information required by the uneducated public to understand objects on display.<sup>127</sup> Peel and Hume's 1836 dialogue quoted above continued on this subject. So frustrated had Hume become that the catalogue of the National Gallery cost a shilling that he had printed, at his own expense, one costing a penny, on the grounds that the

utmost facilities should be given to all classes, including the lowest, for viewing all those public treasures which were calculated to refine and enlarge the mind.<sup>128</sup>

Peel congratulated him on this initiative. The various Parliamentary investigations made detailed recommendations about the size and content of labels and the price and content of catalogues.<sup>129</sup> Indeed they became so involved in the detail, that Chris Whitehead, leading historian of the National Gallery, describes the 1853 Report as 'probably the most extensive disquisition into museological practice ever written' (Whitehead, 2005:81).

### **3.7 *The museum as 'social institution'***

This survey of museum historiography shows that there was not a single 'traditional' role for museums in society and that governments frequently sought

to hold museums accountable for creating effective public access for all, in the light of the responsibilities arising from public funding. Throughout the first three quarters of the nineteenth century museum curators and directors were regarded as public servants, accountable to the government which funded them, whether through trustees or government departments. Those who objected to wider public access were seen, not as defending a museum tradition or academic standards, but as representing an aristocratic political view on the need to preserve hierarchies (Wilson, 2002:88).

Many museums, including the archetypal South Kensington Museum embraced this philosophy of public service. Few would have agreed that there was a contradiction between 'utilitarian' (or 'instrumental') and 'intrinsic' value.<sup>130</sup> Museums would have the desired social and economic impact (whether ennobling, educating or socialising people) *because* of the intrinsic power of the objects. Enabling visitors to appreciate this power was a practical matter based on understanding their psychology very close to the deployment of theory, practice and principle in the social justice paradigm (O'Neill, 2009:299–301).<sup>131</sup>

### **3.8 From social to professional institutions**

The argument made by the submitted publications that the conservative museum paradigm is not the original but a later development is further borne out by the historical literature.<sup>132</sup> Bonython & Burton, in their biography of Cole, argue that the 'disengagement with the contemporary and the slide into antiquarianism' started with his retirement as director of the V&A (2003:279). In the 1890s, a new generation of scholars 'deepened as they reformed the scholarly role of the Museum' and 'in the process ... turned further away from contemporary art as well as from the institution's elaborate regional education programs (Conforti, 1997:46).<sup>133</sup> Rothenstein, director of the Tate Gallery from 1938 to 1964 described the period up to the end of World War I as being characterized by 'collecting mania', with the 'prime energies of those responsible for their [museums'] direction' being devoted to acquisition (quoted in Wittlin,

1970:158).<sup>134</sup> The history of municipal museums also shows that they were not an unchanging Platonic essence, but developed in ways that directly affected whether working class people visited or 'deserted museums when they became too coercive; leaving the middle class visitors in exclusive possession' (Hill, 2005:126). Even in the Whitechapel Art Gallery 'a paradigm shift is evident. There can be witnessed a battle of competing discourses, trustees (for whom the gallery was still a philanthropic venture) against curators (for whom art was a discrete practice...)' (Steyn, 1994:216).

Far from being 'traditional' and part of their original intent, the perception of conflict between the social and the aesthetic and scholarly roles of museums was not part of the nineteenth century public museum movement and emerged only towards the end of that period. It developed when 'the museum became the province of professional associations<sup>135</sup> replete with the organizational accoutrements of journals, annual conferences, and accreditation criteria, the "public museum" acquired a kind of Platonic image – an idealized standard against which individual institutions would be measured' (Abt, 2006:132).<sup>136</sup> This Platonic image which is at the heart of the conservative museum paradigm, is not the timeless essence of museums, but the contingent result of particular historical circumstances. It reflected not only the general development of professions, but changes in the politics of the period, as 'fears of revolution subsided' in the 1890s and the 'seductive power of the fine arts ... capable, as a supreme symbol of wealth and power, of excluding from the arena of the public space, or at least marginalising, activities that conveyed less potent codes (Waterfield, 1994:46; Perkin, 1990:116–140).<sup>137</sup> A 1946 report on *The Visual Arts* found that visitor numbers in the major London art museums had dropped by 13% between 1928 and 1937<sup>138</sup>.

The numbers might be very much greater if the directors and their staffs were as interested in attracting and educating the public at



large as they are in the specialist needs of students and connoisseurs' (Dartington Hall Trustees 1946:144, 145).<sup>139</sup>

While many historians criticized the basis for the Thatcherite claim to espouse 'Victorian values' (e.g. Walvin, 1987; Cannadine 2000), none pointed out that the introduction of admission charges for museums contradicted the sustained Victorian commitment to free entry to museums at civic and national level. Though New Labour retained many Tory neoliberal reforms, one exception was the removal of charging entry to national museums (Cowell, 2007).<sup>140</sup> New Labour had promoted reform in the cultural domain which was social-democratic and utilitarian in intent (Creigh-Tyte & Stiven, 2001). In the light of the historiography of museums, New Labour's instrumental investment in free museums was very 'traditional', certainly more so than Thatcherism's mythical Victorianism (MacDonagh, 1977).<sup>141</sup>

### ***3.9 Museums and the symptoms of injustice***

This brief history supports the hypothesis that modern museum reform can claim at least as 'traditional' a set of precedents as the conservative paradigm. However, it raises political and ethical questions similar to those discussed in relation to Springburn above. The modern public museum emerged at a time when unregulated industrialization and urbanization led to unprecedented numbers of people being condemned to live and work in horrific conditions (Gunn, 2007; Humphries, 2007).<sup>142</sup> What are the implications of such injustices for museums in receipt of public funding, with its implication of official endorsement? Are they inevitably, as critical theory argues, agents for endorsing society's injustices, limited at best to 'alleviating the symptoms of ... social problems' rather than 'attacking their causes'? (Waterfield, 1994:45).

Based on the historical account above, access to public museums was an issue for working class people. They chose to visit in large numbers, and objected when prevented from doing so.<sup>143</sup> Complaints by staff, trustees and members of



parliament about the numbers and calibre of people being admitted make it clear that there was a popular demand for access. One basis for their demand is revealed by a Prussian visitor, quoted by Goldgar, 'for, as it is property of the Nation, every one has the same "right" – I use the term of the country – to see it that another has' (Goldgar, 2000:212). Both members of the public and of Parliament had a concept of a general 'right' to access to publicly funded museums, which included a right to comprehensible information about the objects (see 3.6). This shows that the conservative paradigm's view that issues of access for the general public are a recent political fad is not borne out by the history.<sup>144</sup>

The surviving evidence does not reveal the proportions of working class who valued the educational and the recreational aspects of museums, or whether they saw this as a meaningful distinction.<sup>145</sup> Whatever the motivation, those museums which sought to cater for the working classes achieved far higher visitor numbers during the evening hours than at other times (Hudson, 1975:70; Waterfield, 1994:37). There was evidence of similar demand in the major regional cities (Hill, 2005:126; Leahy, 2008). However mixed and self-interested the motives of the elites who created museums,<sup>146</sup> they provided a facility which working class people used. Their claims of social impact have been mocked as 'wishful thinking', in particular their belief that museums would benefit society and reduce crime (Minihan, 1977:95). But this view was supported by someone who had experienced real poverty and spent more than seven years in prison. This was Michael Davitt, an Irish revolutionary and perhaps the most politically radical of all Victorian working class museum advocates. During his second prison term he wrote a vision of a reformed society which included museums, precisely because they could contribute to working class education (Davitt, 1885, Vol 2:46–51)<sup>147</sup>. Most reformers knew that 'the barriers of class were not so easily overcome' and understood the limits of what McClellan calls 'trickle down aesthetics' (2008:167,168). They also understood however that the poor were

the main victims of crime, disease and above all of ignorance, which was both a symptom and a cause of their immiseration.

None of the reformers saw museums as the primary solution to the problems facing Victorian Britain, but as institutions which should, because they were publicly funded, make a contribution. In her 400 page *Philanthropy in Victorian Scotland: Social Welfare and the Voluntary Principle* (1980) economic historian Olive Checkland devotes three pages to museums. They were a small but significant part of the social fabric which played their role alongside initiatives such as home missions, hospitals, refuges for prostitutes, temperance, schools, the care of lunatics, libraries and often established by charities and taken over by corporations as municipal socialism developed (Checkland, 1980:142–4; Briggs 1963:184–240; Jordan 1994). Checkland also concludes that, ultimately, philanthropy, municipal socialism and central government action were inadequate to the challenge of poverty, ignorance and disease created by nineteenth century capitalism, and it took the comprehensive application of central government resources, triggered by the sacrifices of two World Wars, to create something like an adequate response in the Welfare State.<sup>148</sup> While this means that society as a whole and its elites in particular may be judged a failure within that frame all institutions, and the individuals working in them, were presented with concrete choices which affected whether a more or less humane and just society was being created.<sup>149</sup>

It is impossible to prove whether or not museums reduced crime or had any impact outside the cultural sphere, but within that sphere, some museums chose to include the less well-off and less educated and others chose to exclude them. As many working class people wished to visit museums their inclusion or exclusion was a matter of real concern and a question of justice. At a minimum, even as a palliative, they may have provided relief from the harsh conditions of existence. They may also have contributed to addressing wider social injustices, through 'the joining of companies' and education. My thesis argues that the

definition of professionalism which emerged later in the nineteenth century and which involved a reduction in inclusiveness set up a conflict between the 'institutional', 'the professional' and the 'public' value of museums which was not 'intrinsic' to the role of museums (Holden, 2004).

## **Section IV: Theories of theory, theories of practice**

### **4.0 Introduction**

Having reviewed the historiography of the relationship between museums and their visitors, I now review how that relationship is represented in the critical theory and conservative museum paradigms. Critical theory must be incorporated into any holistic museum theory because of its analysis of museums' complicity with historic and contemporary injustice. The conservative paradigm is relevant because it either denies that complicity or argues that it belongs to the past and is therefore irrelevant (de Montebello, 2004:19). At the same time it argues that its 'traditional' approach to display is both politically 'neutral' and contributes to the creation of a more just and tolerant society (see 4.4).<sup>150</sup> Through this review I aim to refine the social justice paradigm which evolved through the submitted publications by locating it in relation to these literatures. I argue that conservative museums are destabilized by their denial of the historical realities of their complicity with injustice, but that the exposure of the ideological function of museums is not sufficient to enable museums to contribute to creating a more just society. A positive theory of social justice is essential to work through<sup>151</sup> the implications of critical analysis for museum practice.

### **4.1 Critical theory in practice**

Introducing Bal's 2006 essay as an example of the value of 'difficult' theory, MacDonald emphasizes that, 'It is important to note' that 'for the most part the aim of those producing such critical analyses is to contribute to rather than abandon, the original ambition to find better ways of helping museums to relate

to diverse audiences' (2006:8). This intent is difficult to detect in Bal's own account of an exhibition she created in response to criticisms that her theory does not take into account the real world constraints faced by museums (Bal, 2006:532). She focused on a single painting, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, and set out to draw attention to the 'syntax' of museum display. To achieve this she hung the work against a red background which clashed rather than matched a red in the painting, and showed other images of beheading by females, on less prestigious media such as ceramics and prints. She drew attention to the semiotics of labeling by providing texts for some images and not for others, and offering a specific interpretation based on Julia Kristeva's theory that there is a link between images of beheading and portraiture.<sup>152</sup> Her intention was to provide visitors with a certain kind of experience:

Within the framework of the social constraints that induce some people and not others to visit art exhibitions, we can only assume that people go to see things that are there. Some people are interested to learn something about those things – although it is impossible to know what – while others prefer to be left alone, to have an "aesthetic experience," or to see things "as they are" (2006:525).

Through the exhibition, Bal claims she learned to achieve 'a maximally effective expository politics with extremely limited means', overcoming 'the separation between empirical, historical and analytical studies' and to 'assess its affects', implying that the museum should be judged by its impacts on visitors as much as its theoretical interest. The fact that she did not carry out or commission a study of visitors' responses is puzzling in view of her aims. It is also curious in view of her politics. There is no dialogue or negotiation with visitors: hers is as powerful a claim to authority as that of any museum conservative.<sup>153</sup> MacDonald's emphasis on the practical aim of 'critical analyses' suggests that Bal's revelation of the formal structures of museum syntax falls short of Horkheimer's ideal of liberating

knowledge. In fact, it adopts the same elitist attitude to the public as the conservative paradigm which she associates with oppression and injustice. In a discipline which is avowedly political and is committed to empowering 'the other', this is a political flaw. Insofar as critical theory aims to analyze the dynamics of power relationships, failing to analyze one of the actors in the situation is a methodological and epistemological flaw.

Thus Bourdieu's criticism of critical theory for its lack of an empirical methodology seems to be borne out in Bal's case (Bourdieu, 1972). More surprisingly, it also seems to be true in Hooper-Greenhill's work. She concludes *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, with a number of open questions, including:

Does [the] individual and intensely personal interpretation of artefacts stand in opposition to the experiential and contextualizing efforts that many museums are making, as part of their destiny as totalizing institutions?<sup>154</sup> Is it the case that the more the museum contextualizes artefacts, places them in narrative displays ... the more difficult it becomes even to perceive the possibility of a personal interpretation? (1992:215).

This is the basic challenge of critical theory, some of whose practitioners maintain that no amount of access or educational work will enable museums to transcend their ideological function of sustaining the status quo (Duncan, 1995:4).

Over the decades after 1992 Hooper-Greenhill wrote further publications based on critical theory and others advocating reformist practice, based on empirical visitor studies.<sup>155</sup> However, in her 2006 survey of visitor studies, she concludes not only that visitor studies carried out in museums are excessively 'functionalist' compared to more 'academically sophisticated' work which seeks 'a deep understanding rather than the improvement of practice' but seems to imply that

these are incommensurable (2006:374). Both Bal's and Hooper Greenhill's suffer from critical theory's lack of an empirical method and of a positive theory of justice. Despite her work straddling both theory and practice, Hooper-Greenhill failed to integrate critical theory and reformist practice, leaving the latter without an adequate theoretical foundation.<sup>156</sup>

#### **4.2 The conservative paradigm and museum visitors**

Ironically, the critical theory paradigm reflects many of the characteristics of the conservative paradigm. Bal's view of the respective roles of expert and visitor are shared by *The Burlington Magazine*, the authors of *Whose Muse?*, the critics Delingpole and Linklater and the Institute of Ideas.<sup>157</sup> The only references to visitor studies in *Whose Muse?* is an unreferenced generalization to what 'a multitude' of visitor surveys say about what visitors to art museums want (de Montebello, 2004:161) and the 1857 Parliamentary report on local visitation to the National Gallery in London, mentioned above under 3.2 (MacGregor, 2004:42). Even though all the museums represented in the book practise visitor research, the authors rely exclusively on their intuitions about both art and visitors to organize their museums' displays – reflecting Model II characteristics such as 'achieving their purpose as the actor defines it' and 'controlling environment and task unilaterally' (Argyris 1999:181-182). In 'The Future of Museums', the concluding essay in MacDonald's *Companion to Museum Studies*, Saumarez Smith provides an example of a rarely expressed but very typical form of projection, not from professional but from personal experience – he justifies his approach to museums on the basis of his two sons' preferences for traditional military museums, arguing that they are not likely to be that different from anyone else's children (Saumarez Smith, 2006:548–9).<sup>158</sup> He does at least acknowledge the existence of visitors, unlike James Cuno. The latter justifies museums as repositories of public trust on the basis of valuable experiences which only they can enable. The examples he gives however are of handling ancient pottery and terracotta figures, experiences only staff (and a small minority of those) and visiting experts can share (Cuno, 2004:56–60).<sup>159</sup>



The visitor is just as much a cipher in the conservative as in the critical theory paradigm.

#### **4.3 Anthropology and the 'universal' museum**

But perhaps this attitude to visitors is limited to art museums and art theory, reflecting the traditional association of art with power, wealth and status (Geczy, 2008:131–144). Its presence amongst anthropologists in the 'universal' museums is more surprising, and is evidence for the power of the institutional culture of conservative museums. It is surprising because this view seems so much more at odds with the very reason for existence of the discipline,<sup>160</sup> which, having been complicit with colonialism, has become exceptionally reflexive (Shelton, 2000).<sup>161</sup> Anthropology has engaged with many of the issues of representation, contextualization and de-contextualization which need to be addressed by museums if they wish to embed social justice in their theory and practice (Shelton, 1992). Some of the resulting opportunities were taken up in innovative displays in Birmingham's Gallery 33 (1990, see Peirson Jones, 1992), the Africa galleries in the Horniman Museum (2000, see Shelton, 2006) and in numerous museums in America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Tramposch, 1998; Casey 2001; Janes 2009).<sup>162</sup>

In contrast, the insights of anthropology are not being carried through to museum displays or to relationships with visitors in the great 'universal' collections in Europe or America. There is an extensive literature on the complicity of art museums in creating a market for anthropological objects and on the display of anthropological objects as art, in particular as key influences on Western modern art (Clifford, 1988; Price, 1989; Errington, 1998). The universal museums ignore this, as demonstrated by the Sainsbury Africa Galleries of the British Museum and the Quai Branly museum in Paris (Phillips, 2002; O'Neill, 2004; Hennes, 2010). However, the problem with anthropology in these museums is even more fundamental than the domination of Western aesthetics and extends to areas unaffected by the art market boom since the 1980s.



The 'universal' museums' view of anthropology is represented by Brian Durrans of the British Museum who, like Saumarez Smith appears in one of the first anthologies of the New Museology (Lumley, 1988:144–169) Unlike Saumarez Smith's, however, Durrans's early essay advocates a number of innovations in museum practice which translate the insights of his discipline into the world of museum visitors.<sup>163</sup> A mere four years later, however, he dismisses critical theory not only on intellectual grounds, but because, as a form of self-awareness, it would lead to 'paralysis' for practitioners (Durrans, 1992:12). His response to the view that reality is socially constructed is that 'If everything else is fabricated by the enquirer, the bits of material, however classified or interpreted as ethnographic artefacts, are certainly not' (1992:11). He states that this 'materialism' would be 'unacceptable' to 'postmodern theory,' but presents it as incontrovertible (1992:12). However, 'materialism' is not the issue – it is the denial of the basic premise of anthropology i.e. that peoples of different cultures see the world in profoundly different ways – differences which are reflected in their material culture.<sup>164</sup> The conservative paradigm of institutions like the British Museum (which is shared by the other signatories of the Universal Declaration) generates a fundamental conflict between its rationale as an institution and the intellectual foundations of its disciplines. Durrans's explicit rejection of self-awareness makes it clear that the paradigm cannot combine institutional functioning with a culture of 'analysis and critique' which McClellan argues is 'as vital to museums as to any social institution' or, one might add, to any academic discipline, no matter what theory it is based on (McClellan, 2008:96).

This discrepancy between the standards and insights of his discipline and Durrans's museum paradigm is echoed in his attitude to visitors. In the same article he argues that the value of museums is that, by showing how cultures differ across space and time, they convey the message that society's arrangements are contingent, and can therefore change. Apart from being self-contradictory (he is arguing that museums communicate a progressive message

about knowledge inspiring change by not changing themselves) this claim is highly questionable. As a statement about a social phenomenon (visitors will interpret displays in a particular way) it is a testable hypothesis, amenable to study by the methods of psychology, sociology or, indeed, anthropology. Stating it as a truth without supporting research suggests that different intellectual standards apply to practitioners' writing about museums as to their disciplinary practice. Durrans's arguments reflect characteristic Model II positions, including 'unillustrated attributions and evaluations', 'reduced production of valid information' and 'little public testing of ideas' (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith (1985, p. 89). Though possibly exaggerated for polemical effect, Durrans's rejection of theory and reflexivity in favour of unmediated contact with the object is so complete that it leaves the conservative museum paradigm with such a diminished intellectual foundation that it must be at odds with its Enlightenment ideals.<sup>165</sup>

#### ***4.4 The conservative paradigm and issues of identity***

The conservative paradigm, due to the prestige and institutional strength of the world greatest museums, seems likely to continue, despite the anomalies it generates. Their public programmes (many of them large and well funded), designed to meet the demands of justice, public service and accountability, maintain what could be seen as an extreme version of the welfare model in order to protect an unchanging 'Platonic' core. This incoherence (analyzed in 'Professionalism') is reflected, for example, in the multiplicity of documents issued by the NMDC seeking to articulate the social role of its members.<sup>166</sup> Even when they find a contemporary social justice issue on which they feel they have a contribution to make, they find it impossible to follow through. For example, in 2007 the NMDC announced a partnership with the Institute of Public Policy Research to address issues of identity. Amongst other goals, the project aimed to

- Lay out principles for adjudicating between rival claims made on behalf of national identities, minority cultures and individual rights

- Identify the policies that are most effective in challenging divisive identities and building shared identities, with a particular emphasis on the contribution that heritage and arts policy might play in fostering common identities.

The notes of a related roundtable discussion stated that:

'Museums and archives are viewed as neutral, non-religious public spaces which people trust and where they feel 'safe'. They offer expert, non-partisan interpretation of their collections and provide an impartial space for open engagement and debate' (National Museums Directors' Conference 2007).

On the face of it 'neutral' displays seem an unlikely method of 'challenging divisive identities' and 'adjudicating' rival identity claims, creating a contradiction that is typical of the conservative paradigm.<sup>167</sup> The intellectual bases of an ideal of unchanging Platonic museum which is outside time and of constructivist, socially engaged, public programmes are difficult to reconcile. While the IPPR has produced a number of reports from the project, none refers to the issues of museums and 'divisive' identities (see [www.ippr.org](http://www.ippr.org)).

## **Section V: Conclusion**

### ***5.0 Towards a theory of practice***

Witcom's (2003) prescription of the integration of museological theory and practice requires critical theorists to be less 'aggressive' (pp. 3, 90) and less apt 'take the moral high ground' (p. 168) and museum practitioners to be less 'defensive' (pp. 3, 168, 169) and 'paranoid' (p. 12). This would seem to support Starn's view that the disagreements between theory and practice are not substantive but merely 'ritual tilts' (Starn, 2005:46). MacDonald maintains that the integration of 'how to' and critical museology is already beginning to happen (2006:8). Section III of this thesis has added to the discussions about integrating

theory and practice by analyzing the alignments of the critical theory, reform and conservative paradigms. There is no binary opposition of theorists and practitioners. The conservative and critical theory paradigms share significant characteristics, notably a lack of empathy for visitors, an avoidance of reflexivity, and a rejection of empirical visitor research. Critical theory's lack of a positive theory of justice is not just what Witcom calls a 'pragmatic' flaw, but a political, methodological and epistemological flaw. All these features of the conservative and critical theory paradigms result in elitist practice, in contradiction to their avowed purposes of, respectively, expressing universal values and changing the world by liberating truths.

### **5.1 Future research**

This suggests many potential avenues for research.

1. While many publications analyse specific museum policies and displays, there is no rigorous case-study method comparable to that devised by the Harvard Business School (Hammond 2002). Devising such a method would help clarify the discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use and generally make museums more coherent institutions which are at the same time more flexible.
2. If the epidemiological research referred to in 2.5 is taken to prove that museum visiting has a wellbeing impact and is added into the synthesis of theory, practice, history and social justice, the research potential is immense. The question of whether the population level impacts can be linked to visitors' characteristics and to their experiences of different museum presentations is of both theoretical and pragmatic interest. Promising approaches on these lines of enquiry are opened up by Susan Galloway's suggestion of theory-based evaluation, and by Jan Packer's exploration of the museum as a 'restorative environment' (Galloway, 2009; Packer, 2008).
3. In terms of the historical precedents for the integrated practice of the social justice museum, many of the 'social evils' of the nineteenth century

persist and there may be lessons to be learned from history about 'what works' and about the capacity of museums to do more than alleviate symptoms and tackle the causes of injustice. Better knowledge of museum history would at least have the benefit of preventing consistent reinvention of basic processes (such as outreach, handling kits).<sup>168</sup>

4. One of the most significant claims made by both reformist and conservative staff is that museums can inspire inter-cultural tolerance. This is a hypothesis which could be and should be subject to empirical testing to ascertain which, if any, approaches to display could be effective.

A research programme including the above would enable the development of a holistic theory of practice with both an empirical and coherent intellectual and principled basis. It would test the arguments that I have put forward of the need to integrate the collections preservation and research functions of museums with purposes derived from a theory of social justice, and translated into tangible benefits for society through insights into museums and structures of power derived from critical theory and a 'deep understanding' of visitor experiences derived visitor studies. Only through such a synthesis is it possible to define the terms – ethical, social, cultural, professional - in which the 'improvement of practice' which Hooper-Greenhill calls for, can be framed. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2006).

## **5.2 Conclusion**

While many of the experiments described in the publications came to fruition because of the particular circumstances in Glasgow (see O'Neill 2006a), the underlying principles of the social justice museum can be extrapolated and, *mutatis mutandi*, applied in other places and circumstances.

Museums achieve institutional legitimacy through their traditions and expert, professional practices which are important to preserve even as they are transformed to meet contemporary needs. These include

- The focus on objects as the unique feature of museums and on which their special role in society depends
- Scholarly research on the collections as the basis for the stories told about them for the public.
- Preservation of collections for posterity

Expertise alone however is not sufficient to confer legitimacy for museums. Like all social institutions they must also meet the standards of social justice. This involves:

- Recovering the founding values of public museums, the vast majority of which were committed to ambitious programmes of public education and, in the context of Victorian urban squalor, what we would now call social renewal, in particular for the excluded.
- Acknowledging the obligations incurred by, and the rights conferred on citizens, by the public ownership of collections
- Recognizing that as a public good, museum access has to be distributed fairly, not according to current levels of unequal distribution of cultural capital.
- Acknowledging that museums are, and have always been, inherently part of the power structure of society, complicit in its injustices as well as its achievements and that most objects reflect a complex mixture of 'barbarism and 'civilization'. This means that museums cannot be 'neutral' – they are either promoting a more just society or supporting the current level of injustice.
- Working to enhance the value of the contribution of culture to the other domains of society, including education, the economy, health and politics.

### **5.2.1 *The theory in practice***

A commitment to contributing to the creation of a more just society raises many questions about the impacts of museums. Whether the answers describe wide and deep or minimal impacts on society, museums can make a contribution to justice within their own, cultural, sphere. They achieve this by making becoming



accessible and welcoming to the widest possible range of visitors. In order to achieve this, access needs to be built into the core displays of the museum, not simply relying on targeted events, outreach, temporary exhibitions and other short term programming to attract new audiences. With this core change these activities support the transition from the welfare to the social justice paradigm; without it, these activities remain as a form of cultural welfare.

The reform of museums requires them to move beyond being expert and become learning organizations, reconciling their actual practice (theory in use) with their avowed objectives (espoused theory). The need to modify their 'mental models' rather than amelioration within the existing framework means that reform, rather than modernization is required. It is particularly important to make explicit and rethink mental models of visitors, to move beyond the essentializing tendencies of the conservative and theoretical paradigms. This involves

- Museums embracing experiential as well as cognitive learning about visitors, which can only be acquired by meeting and working with diverse, especially excluded, groups.
- Accepting that the authority which comes with professional expertise must be accompanied by public engagement and continuously renegotiated
- Accepting visitors (and potential visitors) as they really are, based on sociological research, as the starting point for exploring the world of objects with them
- Focusing on the predominant human meanings of objects rather than displaying them according to their taxonomic or technical aspects,
- Accepting that they can play a particular role in terms of mediating major social change, in articulating the relationship between universal values (such as human rights) and local and global cultures
- Surfacing hidden and neglected histories, especially of excluded groups and broadening the range of human experience represented in museums



- Reaching out to the least well off and most excluded in society, and representing their experience in the museum, even in the most prestigious sites of civic and national pride
- Based on society's highest values (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) providing civic leadership by introducing new and difficult subjects and challenging prejudice and negative heritage.

Museums need to change in response to wider societal change; because the standards of justice change and the groups to which they are applied expand, reform is a continuous process.

In summary, social justice museums are object-based, visitor-centred, expert institutions which tell, as honestly as possible, the most meaningful stories about objects to the widest possible audiences, contributing to the creation of a more just society. They have an empathic attitude towards visitors and potential visitors, especially the least well off and excluded, tempered and tested by rigorous research into how visitors and potential visitors experience the museum. They provide authoritative information on their collections and share authority with the public in the production of displays. They learn from their experiences with visitors and through experimental exhibitions and programmes. They challenge prejudice and negative cultural heritages, celebrate human creativity, resilience and diversity and promote understanding and appreciation of the natural and human world.

In historical terms museums are relatively young institutions; they have only begun to realise their potential for benefiting society.

Mark O'Neill

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> I was Curator of Springburn Museum Trust from 1985 to 1990, when I joined Glasgow City Council museums. My posts from that time were: 1990 Keeper of Social History; 1996 Senior Curator of History; 1998 Head of Curatorial Services; 1999 Head of Museums; 2007 Head of Arts and Museums. In December 2009 I was appointed Director of Policy, Research and Development, in order to apply the lessons learned in museums to the other sections of Culture and Sport Glasgow (including libraries, archives, sport, and the arts).

<sup>2</sup> I use the word 'professional' here in the sense it is most frequently used within the sector, as referring to issues 'broadly ... relating to collections and their care, rather than wide philosophical, political or managerial issues' (Davies, 2000:135). The *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* has a section for 'Professional Notes' in precisely this sense. It often implicitly rejects as irrelevant issues of relationship to the wider society and to justify positions about which there is not in fact a general consensus. In my publications I have tried to broaden the definition of 'professionalism' precisely because its narrow, technical use in museum debates. See Kavanagh, 1991:1–12, 37–56; Cossons, 1991; Kavanagh, 1994; Davies, 2000; and Boylan, 2006. For an account of the recent history of the museum profession with a particular focus on education experts see Woollard, 2006. The standards relating to collections' care are set in the UK by codes of ethics and systems of professional standards such as Accreditation. For the UK Museums Association Code of Ethics, see <http://www.museumsassociation.org/publications/code-of-ethics>, accessed 11/5/2010. For the UK Accreditation standards see the Museums, Libraries and Archives website at [http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising\\_standards/accreditation](http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/raising_standards/accreditation), accessed 11/5/2010.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term 'projection' to refer to the process of attributing one's own feelings or traits to another person and imagining, or believing, that the other person has those same feelings or traits. This more widely used sense modifies the strict Freudian definition, in which projection functions as a defense against unacceptable feelings or insights (*Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1999:690). See comment by Raymond Williams in 2.8.1).

<sup>4</sup> Within the philosophy of the social sciences there are debates about whether it is possible to devise a paradigm in Kuhn's sense, or whether the model of positivist rationality applied in the physical sciences is inappropriate for the studying social phenomena. The implication is that there will always be conflicting paradigms in the social sciences and the humanities (Okasha, 2002:122–125).

<sup>5</sup> This terminology revises some of that set out in 'Essentialism' (O'Neill, 2006) notably its use of 'adaptive' for non-essentialist, reforming museums. All museums adapt, and the distinction between reformist and modernizing change provides a more precise analysis.

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<sup>6</sup> See for example, Robert Baron's review of Bennett (1995) and that of Vergo (1989) by *The Burlington Magazine's* (1989). Baron sees *The Birth of the Museum* as a 'political' analysis of the 'struggle for power among the classes' which is only 'outwardly' scholarly and is driven by 'nihilism' and 'biases against high culture, against dominant culture and against their values'. His case that 'any art is potentially available to any member of any class, be there will, initiative and ability' is undermined by statements like 'or so says the myth by which we live'. He shows no awareness of research, for example by di Maggio (1982), which provides in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, an example of intentional cultural exclusion. He recognizes that the value created within the museum somehow depends on the values of the wider society, but wants to be able to take the latter for granted.

*The Burlington Magazine's* review of Vergo (1989) condemns the 'unholy alliance' between the Tory emphasis on markets and commercial culture and 'leftist' attempts to popularize art by providing contextual information (*The Burlington Magazine*, 1989:683). The idea of 'simply looking at great art' is founded on a complex and not very coherent mixture of Platonic idealism, Kantian aesthetics, romantic subjectivism and positivism (in relation, for example, to national schools of painting) and hundreds of years of the development of practices of categorizing and looking at objects deemed to be art (For further discussion of this aesthetic see Elkins, 2002; Bennett & Belfiore, 2008:178–80.) For an incisive review of the new museology from what might be called a reflexive conservative position see Gaskell, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Cuno's 2008 book on repatriation is the most extended statement of the conservative position not only against repatriation, but in favour of 'universal' museums continuing to acquire objects which have been removed illegally from temples and archaeological sites (Cuno, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> See for example, Marx & Engels [1848] 1967; Nietzsche [1889] 1967; Freud [1932] 1973. For an overview of critical theory see Benton & Crabb, 2001:107–118.

<sup>9</sup> The other leading thinkers of Critical Theory were Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno (see for example, Benjamin [1955] 1999; Adorno [1967] (1982). Jurgen Habermas is Critical Theory's most influential contemporary exponent (see Benton & Craib, 2001:113–117; Habermas, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Hoggart, 1957; Williams, 1961; Steel, 1997; Eagleton, 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Recent evidence for Steiner's view that the emulation of science's 'difficulty' influences the humanities may be seen in the claim by the historian Richard Overly that: 'At the cutting edge of modern research, [history] has no less reason to be inaccessible than physics or biochemistry' (Overly 2010). For Overly's views on public history and heritage see footnote 11.

<sup>12</sup> The conflict between what might be called analytical and applied critical theory became overt in 1999 when Martha Nussbaum, a leading philosopher of human and especially female rights, published a lengthy attack in *The New Republic* on Judith Butler, a leading light of feminist critical theory. Entitled 'The Professor of Parody' it accuses Butler of promoting quietism by attributing

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overwhelming power to the structures of oppression and arguing that the only resistance possible was ironic parody of its modes of oppression (Nussbaum, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> According to the late Brian Barry, Professor of Political Science at the London School of Economics, Rawls is 'the most original and interesting political philosopher of this century', 1989:147).

<sup>14</sup> See for example Moore, 1998; Todd & Lawson, 2001; Caldwell, 2002; Rentschler, 2007. These changes are sometimes referred to as managerialism – the transfer of management practices from business to other domains, especially the public and voluntary sector (Paton, 2003:8,168). The impact of the New Public Management on the cultural sector is assessed in Belfiore (2003). Alexander (1996) explores the 'the impact of funding exhibitions, scholarship and management' in large American art museums. Possibly the first proponent of the deployment of professional marketing for museums to make them accessible to 'the housewife in a Bronx apartment' was Edward Bernays, nephew of Freud, and inventor of the focus group and its application to public relations (Bernays, 1928:157). His offer was not taken up.

<sup>15</sup> The anthologies, readers and companions which have proliferated have introductions which give an overview of the field, though none constitutes a literature review (e.g. Carbonell, 2004; Farago & Preziosi, 2004; Corsane, 2005; MacDonald, 2006; Marstine, 2008). Most detailed than Stam's and not focused on a particular set of essays like the anthologies, Starn's is the most thorough of these overviews.

<sup>16</sup> In this he follows Wittlin. See 2.4.

<sup>17</sup> However, a key point, made by David Anderson of the V&A (personal communication, 12 November 2007), is that museums are by definition 'instrumental' in that, by their very existence they are meant to have an impact on society. Even if a museum's purpose is stated in terms of 'intrinsic' values (e.g. 'celebrating the world's great art for its own sake') this represents an instrument to shape society so that it is one where those values are cherished to the extent that they are embodied in publicly funded institutions. The use of 'instrumental' in recent debates does not acknowledge this sense of the word.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the application of other concepts of 'capital' to museums, including 'human', 'social' and 'identity' as well as 'cultural' capital see Newman (2005).

<sup>19</sup> Horne also anticipated the recent debate about cultural omnivores, and the argument that because not all middle class people feel at home in high culture domains, it is not complicit in reproducing social inequalities (Goldthorpe & Chan, 2007; Ward, Wright & Gayo-Cal, 2007). Where Bourdieu is 'plain wrong' is in believing that all educated people are necessarily at home with high culture' ... 'High culture plays a part in putting ordinary people in their place, but the specialisations of "expertness" have become so great they can drive out belief in a general

intellectual culture' (Horne, 1984:151–2). While exposing its power structures and its desire to hide evidence of its destructiveness and human costs, he sees liberalism as having a progressive dimension, what he calls 'Enlightened Capitalism', an element of which is museums. 'These South Kensington buildings represent the voice of nineteenth-century capitalism at its most enlightened, buoyant with optimism and reason and a belief in improvement. Education, science, art and technology would bring light. Free enterprise would bring abundance to the world and the abundance facilitates eternal progress' (Horne, 1984:121–2).

<sup>20</sup> This criticism could also be made of the *History Workshop Journal*, which defended working class culture in terms which would have been inaccessible to the vast majority of people

<sup>21</sup> See Darnton, 1984; Preziosi, 1998; Trodd, 2003; Burke, 2006a, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> The following are the main journals of museology and the most closely related fields (with dates of foundation): *Museums Journal* (1901); *Museum* (later *Museum International*) (1948); *Curator* (1957); *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* (1982); *Journal of the History of Collections* (1989); *Journal of Museum Ethnography* (1989); *International Journal of Heritage Studies* (1994); *Museum Practice* (1996); *Open Museum Journal* 2000, *museum and society* (2003); *Museum History Journal* (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Works by Leicester staff include: Hooper-Greenhill (1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1995, 2005, 2006); Kavanagh (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1999, 2002); Knell (2007); Pearce (1994, 1999); Dodd & Sandel (2002); Sandel (2002, 2003, 2006); Moore (1994, 1998); Watson (2007).

<sup>24</sup> Google Scholar registers a total of 739 citations for the three works, with 473 for the first, higher than any individual work by a Leicester staff member, though surpassing Hooper-Greenhill's *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992) by only two. The only museological work referred to in this thesis, which has been more frequently cited, is Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum* (1995), with 573 citations.

<sup>25</sup> Anthropology dominates, followed by art history.

<sup>26</sup> The Google Scholar citation scores are 3008 for Clifford 1988, and 2027 for Clifford 1997.

<sup>27</sup> The term 'public history' was introduced in the mid-1970s in America, but has only recently come into common use in Britain (Jordonova, 2000:126–149). See also History and Policy website, [www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org), accessed 29/7/2010.

<sup>28</sup> In a 2002 edition of BBC Radio 4's *In Our Time*, David Cannadine, then Director of the University of London's Institute of Historical Research; Miri Rubin, Professor of European History at Queen Mary, University of London; and Peter Mandler, Fellow in History, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge agreed that this rapprochement had taken place.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00548j4>, accessed 24/5/2010. In 2010 Professor Richard Overy defended academic history against the demand for 'impact' from the new university research assessment criteria in terms replete with unexamined assumptions about the public.



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Quoting Hewison from 1984 as if nothing had changed he argued that democratizing history (though 'not entirely negative') was merely providing entertainment. Following a statement that, 'It is important to be able to think of more positive ways in which history can make its case for survival and meet some of the demand for engagement with the wider world of policy and popular history' his main suggestion was that local authorities fund historical research institutes, free of the accountability constraints of universities. As a defence of a discipline which failed to meet the evidentiary and intellectual standards of that discipline, it bore a distinct resemblance to much museum rhetoric (Overy, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> On controversy in museums see Cameron (2003); Casey (2003); and Bonnell & Roger (2007). On memory and museums see Crane (1997) and Kavanagh (2000).

<sup>30</sup> For overviews of visitor studies see Bicknell & Farmelo (1993); Falk & Dierking (1992, 2000); Hooper-Greenhill (2006).

<sup>31</sup> She makes similar criticisms in Hooper-Greenhill (2000, 2006). These views are shared by MacDonald (2006:8).

<sup>32</sup> Significant works include: Falk & Dierking (1992, 2000); Hein (1998); Hirst & Silverman (2000); Paris (2002); Lang, Reeve & Woollard (2006). Several organizations were established to promote improved educational practice in museums, from the Group for Education in Museums (1948) to the Campaign for Learning in Museums and Galleries (1998) (Lang, Reeve & Woollard, 2006:11,12). I have contributed to this literature, as for example in O'Neill 2002b.

<sup>33</sup> The American pragmatist most influential in constructivism's philosophical foundation is John Dewey. Like Nietzsche, Dewey rejected the Western classical tradition. Unlike Nietzsche, he did so from a democratic rather than an aristocratic point of view (Dewey, 1929, 1938). There are no references to Dewey, Falk, Dierking or Hein in Elsner & Cardinal, 1994; Sherman & Rogoff, 1994; Carbonell, 2004; Preziosi & Farrago, 2004; or Marstine, 2008. The indifference is reciprocated – Falk, Dierking and Hein do not refer to Foucault or his European forebears. The constructivists argue for an inclusive politics but are generally optimistic and uncritical about American democracy, except in the matter of racism. They tend to use an apolitical language of modernization rather than reform. Thus for example, Falk, Dierking and Adams argue that 'free choice learning' is the only viable 'business model' in response to the major trends in their 'industry' (2006:336).

<sup>34</sup> See <http://www.rae.ac.uk>. The long-term success of this strategy was demonstrated in the 2007 Research Assessment Exercise, when Leicester University's Museum Studies department was the highest rated in the UK in the Communication, Cultural and Media Studies section.

<sup>35</sup> Crimp re-used the title *On the Museum's Ruins* for a collection of essays (1993). For a review of this and of other Foucault-influenced anthologies (Elsner & Cardinal, 1994, and Sherman & Rogoff, 1994) from a broadly conservative perspective see Gaskell, 1995.

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<sup>36</sup> Despite this radical approach in museum postgraduate training, there is little evidence of this creating a dramatic change in museum practice. This may be due to the recruiting practices of the largest and most prestigious museums, which place more value on disciplinary expertise than on museology; the power of the institutional culture of museums which make change very difficult; and the lack of a positive theory of justice within critical theory which helps translate it into practice, and overcome critical theory's own elitist tendencies.

<sup>37</sup> See for example, Elsner & Cardinal, 1994; Sherman & Rogoff, 1994; Carbonell, 2004; Preziosi & Farrago, 2004; Marstine 2008.

<sup>38</sup> It is also explicit in Oliver Bennett and Eleonora Belfiore's history of the idea of 'the social impact of the arts', despite showing that there is little evidence for this impact and their wariness of applied research, because of the dangers of advocacy influencing the outcomes. They conclude their book with the hope, 'if a little advocacy of our own might be permitted, that an intellectual history of the kind presented here might, even in a climate of evidence-based policy making, be seen to have some relevance to the formulation of policies that govern the place of the arts in our public institutions' (2009:195).

<sup>39</sup> See Haxthausen (2002) on *The Two Art Histories*. For the divergence in anthropology see 4.3.

<sup>40</sup> Bourdieu's influence has been extensive, for example on Duncan, 1995; di Maggio, 1982; Wallach, 1998; Prior, 2003; and Bennett, 1995, 2007. For overviews of the work of other sociologists on museums see Marontate (2005) and Fyffe (2006). Because of the empirical basis of his work, he objected to being classed as a structuralist or poststructuralist (Bourdieu, 1972).

<sup>41</sup> This may be influenced by Frey's origin in Europe (he is Swiss) where public funding of high culture at a higher level than in Britain is an established tradition, or by his interest in the emerging field of happiness economics, which seeks to measure the impact on human wellbeing of more than GDP (Frey, 2008).

<sup>42</sup> These publications were issued both by the relevant government department, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and by the non-departmental public body funded by the government to provide policy advice and disburse funding. The latter underwent a number of changes of function and title in the period under consideration. In 2000 the Museums and Galleries Commission was amalgamated with the Library Information Council to form Re:source. This was later renamed MLA, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. For the DCMS's changing views on the value of museums see for example, DCMS, 2000 and 2005, and Evans & Shaw, 2004. For DCMS publications in general see <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/default.aspx>. For MLA publications see <http://www.mla.gov.uk/what/publications/2005>, accessed 18/7/2010. For local government policy and museums see for example, Lawley, 2003.

<sup>43</sup> See for example, Somers Cocks (2001), and Travers & Glaister (2004).



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<sup>44</sup> Demos organized a debate on the subject in which a former Minister of Culture, Media and Sport (Chris Smith, 2004) took part, along with Saumarez Smith (2004), then Director of the National Gallery. The serving Minister was so concerned about the issue that she issued her own paper on the subject (Jowell, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> It is, perhaps, worth noting that all the major publicly-funded institutions and the traditional professions – education, health, social welfare, the law and medicine, were subject to more government intervention, far greater pressures to modernize, and more radical reorganization than the museum sector, something which is rarely alluded to in the museology literature (Perkin, 1989:448–454,477–8). Amongst the few accounts which view museums in this wider context are the introductory essay by Glover & Hughes to their *Professions at Bay* (2000:3–41), and the essay by Davies on the need for both values and strategy to be 'given the proper weighting ... in a post-Thatcher goal-oriented society' (Davies, 2000:147).

<sup>46</sup> *Cultural Trends* devoted an issue to this debate (17/4, 2008) as well as reviewing Holden (Pinnock, 2004) and commissioning a series of commentaries on it (*Cultural Trends* (2005) 14/1:113–128), to which I contributed (O'Neill, 2005 – not in submission).

<sup>47</sup> These responses included the dedication of a substantial part of volume 14/1 of *Cultural Trends* to commentaries on his work. Other 'interventions' by think tanks include position papers by the Institute of Ideas (Appleton, 2001); the Institute for Public Policy Research (Cowling, 2004); and Policy Exchange (Mirza, 2006). Cultural Policy academics whose work addressed the issues of the value of museums include Clive Gray (2001, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008); Eleonora Belfiore & Oliver Bennett (Belfiore, 2003; Bennett & Belfiore, 2007; Belfiore & Bennett, 2007a, 2007b); Susan Galloway, 2009.

<sup>48</sup> Wittlin's book was commissioned by one of the founders of the Sociology of Knowledge, Karl Mannheim, in a series called the 'International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction'. It was updated as *Museums: In Search of a Usable Future* in 1970 (Wittlin, 1970), which adds a 'Third Period of Reform: From 1945 to the Present' to the first two ('First Period: Up to 1914' and 'Second Period of Reform: Between the Two World Wars').

<sup>49</sup> This distinction is not always clear-cut because all history has an implicit theory of some kind (e.g. that narrative can be constructed, that the past is intelligible) while theoretically informed history deploys evidence to support its interpretations (Jordonova, 2000:60–62). Hill argues 'even the most theoretical of studies marshal a respectable amount of empirical evidence: and equally all but the most antiquarian history of museums utilizes a few concepts and theories' (2005:3). An example of the contrast would be Prior's history of the National Gallery of Scotland, which uses Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' to analyze the historical record, while Taylor's history of the art museums in London is a detailed documentary account which eschews theory (Prior, 2002; Taylor, 1994, 1999). Cannadine, in his history of the National Portrait Gallery, explicitly rejects the

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'excessive theorizing' of museum studies, in favour of an approach influenced by Geertz's concept of 'thick description' of how symbolic and ritual institutions are seamlessly embedded in particular historical situations (Cannadine, 2007:8). For the wider debate within historiography between postmodern history and its opponents see Jenkins (1991) and Evans (1997).

<sup>50</sup> Bazin was Chief Curator of Paintings in the Louvre from 1951–1965. *Dictionary of Art Historians*, <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org/bazing.htm>, accessed 4/6/2010.

<sup>51</sup> Hudson promoted his strongly reformist perspective through his work on committees for British and European museum awards. He was chair of the committee which gave the Best Social or Industrial History Museum Award to Springburn in 1989.

<sup>52</sup> Whitehead lists 17 reports (2005:261). The most important of these for this thesis were those of 1836, 1853, 1857a and 1857b (Parliamentary Papers, 1836, 1853, 1857a, 1857b).

<sup>53</sup> A less respectful biographical/institutional history is Michael Gross's account of the Presidents and Directors of the Metropolitan Museum in New York and their connections with the city's wealthy elite, called *Rogues' Gallery* (2009).

<sup>54</sup> As do web resources like Project Gutenberg, which digitize historic publications which are out of copyright and make them available on-line. See [www.projectgutenberg.org](http://www.projectgutenberg.org).

<sup>55</sup> Impey & MacGregor also founded the *Journal of the History of Collections* in 1989.

<sup>56</sup> For empirical investigations of the role of museums in national identity see McLean & Cooke (2003) and Masson (2007).

<sup>57</sup> For the emergence of 'global history' and how it differs from earlier 'world history' see Burrow, 2009:507.

<sup>58</sup> See Bygren, L.O., Konlaan, B.B., Johansson, E., (1996); Bygren, L.O., Weissglas, G., Wikstrom, B.-M., Konlaan, B.B., Grijbovski, A., Karlsson, A.-B; Andersson, S.-O; Sjoström, M. (2009); Bygren, L.O.; Johansson S.-E.; Konlaan B.B.; Grijbovski, A.M.; Wilkinson, A.M.; Sjöström, M. (2009); Clow, A. and Fredhoi, C. (2006), Cohen, G.D.; Perlstein, S, Chapline, J.; Kelly, J.; Firth, K.M.; Simmens, S. (2006); Glass, T.A.; de Leon, C.M.; Marottoli, R.A.; Berkman, L.F. (1999); Khawaja, M.; Barazi, R. and Linos, N. (2007), Konlaan, B.B.; Bygren, L.O.; Johansson S.-E. (2000); Konlaan, B.B., Bjorby, N., Weissglas, G., Karlsson, L.G., Widmark, M. (2000; Hyypä, M.T.; Mäki, J.; Impivaara, O.; Aromaa, A. (2006); and Wilkinson, A.V.; Waters, A.J.; Bygren, L.O.; Taro, A.R. (2007).

<sup>59</sup> This research seems to bear out Victorian intuitions about the beneficial impact of cultural attendance, though the issue was confused by their assumption that the improvement would be a moral one – except for those who believed that, in the case of nudes and nihilistic modern art, the impact would be immoral. See Bennett & Belfiore (2008); Borzello (1987) and (Smiles 1878).

<sup>60</sup> The only references to this research I could locate are in Staricoff (2004), which draws no conclusion from it, and Belfiore & Bennett (2008). Both refer only to the 1996 study by Konlaan et

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al, making no reference to the follow up work by this team or other research in other countries. Belfiore & Bennett conclude that, 'Despite the impossibility of making a straightforward connection between arts participation and these physical processes [various hormonal and other biochemical changes], the Swedish research team concluded optimistically that '[t]he prognostic importance of changes in cultural stimulation should be investigated and experiments initiated for verification' (2009:102). Nowhere do Konlaan et al suggest that the link is 'straightforward' and are careful to separate their speculation on why cultural stimulation might affect people profoundly and on how this might manifest itself biochemically, with the phenomena they are describing. See O'Neill (2010) for a discussion.

<sup>61</sup> For social history see for example, David Fleming (1996, 2002) and Stuart Davies (1981, 1984, 1985, 2005, 2008). Social history was the specialist module in my Leicester qualification, the content of my first permanent museum posts (as founding curator of Springburn Museum in 1986, and my appointment as Glasgow Museums' Keeper of Social History in 1990) and the focus my most active professional membership (of the Social History Curators Group) for the first five years of my career. For museum education see for example, David Anderson (1997) and Jem Fraser (2007).

<sup>62</sup> Spalding studied both art history and fine art practice, and much of his approach to both museum management and display could be seen as the approach of an artist *manqué* – 'Museums are best seen as artistic places, standing between education and entertainment. The curator's job, like an artist's, is to bring his inert materials – his collection – to life' (Spalding, 1991:165). Despite the emergence of a very significant school of conceptual art in Glasgow in the 1980s, whose members have gone on to be shortlisted seven times for the Turner Prize (and included two winners), Spalding remained unremitting in his commitment to traditional painting and narrative art. For an account of the contemporary art scene in Glasgow during this period see Lowndes, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> While the terms 'exclusion' and 'social exclusion' have been criticized for their vagueness (e.g. West & Smith, 2005; Tili, 2008), I have found them useful as shorthand for the compound deleterious effects of poverty, poor education and ill-health, interacting with characteristics for which people can be discriminated against – race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability. See O'Neill, 2002a.

<sup>64</sup> For an analysis of one of the first displays to apply social history methods to the display of art see Whitehead's account of 'Art on Tyneside' (2009).

<sup>65</sup> This particular dichotomy has been much reinforced by the description of the 'paradigm shift' by Stephen Weil, the late veteran American museum commentator, as meaning that museums had changed from 'being about something to being for someone. We argued that museums had always been about something *and* for someone' (Weil, 1999).

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<sup>66</sup> See Sandell (2002, 2003, 2006); Dodd & Sandell (2002).

<sup>67</sup> For example, the subtitle to the 1993 *Social History in Museums* is *A Handbook for Professionals*, emphasizing the claim of reformists to equal status with conservative practitioners (Fleming, Paine & Rhodes, 1993).

<sup>68</sup> One survey concluded that 'surprisingly few reflections on the process of organizational change in museums have been published' (Sandell & Janes, 2007:19). Exceptions include Suchy, 2004 and Woollard, 2006. Early examples with which I was familiar were *Institutional Trauma: Major Change in Museums and Its Effect on Staff*, edited by Elaine Gurian (1995), a leader in this as in many other aspects of progressive museum thinking, and Janes (1995).

<sup>69</sup> See 4.2 for the response of conservative museum directors to visitor studies. O'Neill, 2007, gives a more detailed analysis of an exhibition which carried out extensive visitor research and then ignored its results. According to Sherene Suchy, the research she carried out for *Leading with Passion* (2004) shows that 'the new millennium museum director needs to be a leader who balances a belief in the institution and the reality of marketing'. This means 'that most curatorial staff, the pool from which museum directors usually emerge, are not necessarily suited for this role' (Suchy, 2000).

<sup>70</sup> Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith (1985:89).

<sup>71</sup> For the influence of Dewey on American and educational museology see footnote 31.

<sup>72</sup> For example, there are no references to Habermas in MacDonald in 2006, and only two in Carbonell, 2004, and both of these relate to his interpretation of the eighteenth century bourgeoisie (2004:49,149). Bennett argues that because museums generally represent official history, they cannot really participate in the public sphere in the Habermasian sense of generating debate through supporting dissenting opinion (Bennett, 2007). Kylie Message's *New Museums and the Making of Culture* uses Habermas's ideas of modernity in her analysis of 'the new' in relation to modernity and postmodernity (2006:15,63,64,113–114). For a summary of Habermas's influential concept of 'the public sphere' see Habermas, 1991. For a rare application of Habermas's concept of 'communicative action' to museum practice see French, 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Burke also argues that 'intellectual innovation, rather than the transmission of tradition, is considered one of the major functions of institutions of higher education ... and there is pressure on academics ... to colonize new intellectual territories rather than to continue to cultivate old ones' (Burke, 2007:114).

<sup>74</sup> This argument for the comprehensive domination of market values claims descent from the classical liberalism of Adam Smith, but this is a distorted and simplification of his ideas, failing to take into account not just the holistic concept of human nature in *A Theory of Moral Sentiments*, but also the other values at play in *Wealth of Nations*. For example Smith, after his classic description of the economic benefits of the division of labour, argues that the repetitive nature of

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the work can have a deleterious effect on the character of working men and that therefore universal public education is essential – paid for by the state if necessary.

<sup>75</sup> For a vigorous polemic on how the left has lost its way since 1989 see Cohen. For a more reflective account of what left/liberal thinking has to offer, see Judt, 2010.

<sup>76</sup> One of the consequences of the high levels of unemployment and the training schemes designed to cater for the unemployed was the extensive use of Manpower Services Commission programmes by museums and by community history projects. The impact of these schemes in widening the social basis of staff entering the museum profession has not been studied, but it seems likely to have been significant. Museum consultant Crispin Paine is, according to his website, working on an oral history of museums and the Manpower Services Commission. See [homepage.ntlworld.com/crispinp](http://homepage.ntlworld.com/crispinp), accessed 13/7/2010.

<sup>77</sup> See Dodd & Sandell (2001); (Economou, 2004); Sandell (2009); Newman et al (2005); Hooper-Greenhill (2000:153–163); Waters (2009).

<sup>78</sup> Glasgow Museums is the only non-national museum in the UK which has a collections research department (with five staff). It is modeled on the V&A's approach to managing research, seeking to engage academics in studying the collection and to create partnerships to raise funding for collections research from the AHRC and similar bodies.

<sup>79</sup> Based on paper at an AHRC funded seminar organized by Fiona McLean, then of Sterling University, and Andrew Newman of University of Newcastle.

<sup>80</sup> This article is to be included in the 2011 edition of Carbonell's *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Blackwell, forthcoming).

<sup>81</sup> For a recent critique of Glasgow's cultural policies from this perspective see Tretter, 2009.

<sup>82</sup> In an assessment of my management for a case study by for the Getty Foundation's Museum Leadership Institute Jeanne Liedtka (of the University of Pennsylvania Business School).

<sup>83</sup> Both, perhaps not coincidentally, Scottish philosophers.

<sup>84</sup> See for example Gallese (2001) on the discovery of mirror neurons.

<sup>85</sup> George Walden in his *New Elites: A Career in the Masses* (2006), makes a similar accusation that careerism was behind a great deal of New Labour's proclaimed populism, which involved no real interest in or respect for working class culture.

<sup>86</sup> 'The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim ... They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor' (Wilde, 1891:255).

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<sup>88</sup> In Rawlsian terms empathy is used to describe the act of imagining oneself in a different situation. Though often represented as asking for an unrealistic altruism, this is a



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misunderstanding. Rawls is asking people to think only of their *self*-interest behind the veil of ignorance, i.e. what arrangement they would think fair, if they were able to imagine themselves without the advantages of their current situation.

<sup>89</sup> Another critical ingredient, outside the scope of this thesis, is ensuring that front of house staff make non-traditional visitors welcome and can gauge when they need support. Again, during inclusion projects (as defined by West & Smith, 2005), where novice visitors are accompanied by an education or outreach officer, this may not be an issue. If the participants return on their own and, due to their lack of familiarity with the rituals of museum behaviour, are not made welcome or supported, their sense of exclusion may be increased rather than diminished – we were invited in, but it wasn't really meant.

<sup>90</sup> For an assessment of the 'classless society' announced by successive UK governments and the continuing relevance of class as an analytical concept for past and present see Cannadine (1998).

<sup>91</sup> One of the implications of this is that Springburn Museum could be seen as a transitional institution, for which the societal need would decline with the passing of the generation which founded it. Springburn Museum's Urban Aid funding ran out in 1993 and the City Council provided a grant (at a reduced level) until 2006, when it was absorbed into the Open Museum (see O'Neill, 2006:40). This trajectory raises questions about the need for temporary collecting/history institutions which have a particularly intense role to play during periods of rapid and difficult social change. Once that period has passed the museum needs to reinvent its role, or be closed, with its collection transferred to other museums which can serve the area in a less intense way.

<sup>92</sup> For example, Suina (1994). Despite a number of multicultural displays and temporary exhibitions in Leicester, Bradford, Birmingham and Hull, there is also remarkably little reference to cultural diversity or multiculturalism in Fleming, Paine & Rhodes's 1993 *Social History in Museums Handbook*, even in the chapter on outreach (Janes, 1993). This may be because the methods of social history (community engagement, contemporary collecting, oral history) enabled curators to be responsive to their communities, but the theory lagged behind.

<sup>93</sup> Urry argues that the tourist gaze is a 'paradigm case' of the imaginative pleasure-seeking characteristic of modern 'post-Fordist' consumption (2007:14). It involves seeing a unique object (e.g. the Eiffel Tower, the Grand Canyon); seeing a typical sign, representative of a place or culture (an English village, a skyscraper); seeing the familiar aspects of what had previously been seen as familiar (e.g. museums which show everyday life of other cultures); seeing people carrying out everyday tasks in an unfamiliar context (e.g. daily life in communist China); carrying out everyday activities in an unfamiliar environment (e.g. shopping or playing sports in visually

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different places) and seeing an apparently ordinary object as extraordinary (e.g. moon rock) (2007:12–13).

<sup>94</sup> Said's most famous work, *Orientalism* criticized Western scholarship for stereotyping and reifying the other (Said, 1973). For a critical re-assessment of *Orientalism*, see Irwin (2007).

<sup>95</sup> See de Waal (2006) for an account of the evolution of empathy and of its philosophical and ethical implications

<sup>96</sup> See footnote 64 above.

<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of the application of other concepts of 'capital' to museums, including 'human', 'social' and 'identity' as well as 'cultural' capital see Newman (2005).

<sup>98</sup> However, a key point, made by David Anderson of the V&A (personal communication, 12 November 2007), is that museums are by definition 'instrumental' in that, by their very existence they are meant to have an impact on society. Even if a museum's purpose is stated in terms of 'intrinsic' values (e.g. 'celebrating the world's great art for its own sake') this represents an instrument to shape society so that it is one where those values are cherished to the extent that they are embodied in publicly funded institutions. The use of 'instrumental' in recent debates does not acknowledge this sense of the word.

<sup>99</sup> Though prompted by the British museum the 'Universal Declaration' is now no longer available on its website, though the idea of the universal museum is still being promoted ([www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org), accessed 29/1/2010). For a review of the concept by a university museum anthropologist, see Curtis, 2006. The June 2008 *Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship* hosted a debate about the principles of the universal museum, with particular reference to the Parthenon Marbles. None of the six authors defended the concept, even the President of the American Association of Museums, whose role 'in advancing discussions like this ... is to help museums explore the general principles underlying the ethics of the situation' (Bell, 2008). The British Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Canadian Museums Association and the Museum of Modern Art in New York had declined the invitation to take part. (2008: Editorial note).

<sup>100</sup> 'Advocating courses of action which discourage enquiry e.g. 'Let's not talk about the past, that's over' (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985: 89)

<sup>101</sup> Recent historical works have tried to create evidence-based analyses of the period combined with moral evaluations, for example, Niall Ferguson's *Empire* (1999) argued that the British Empire did a lot more good than the postcolonial critique would allow, and was less destructive than other empires. Jonathan Glover's *Humanity: A Moral History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (1999) sought to explain mass participation in depravity and genocide. Tvetzan Todorov has explored the decisions of those trapped in moral dilemmas arising out of the Holocaust, as well as to defend the principles of the Enlightenment (Todorov, 1999, 2007).



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<sup>102</sup> For an account of a similar trajectory in public libraries see Muddiman (n.d.).

<sup>103</sup> See 2.2.6 for academics who criticize New Labour's cultural policies on similar groups but don't acknowledge the historical precedents.

<sup>104</sup> See for example, Appleton, 2001; Holden, 2004; Cuno, 1997, 2004; Saumarez Smith, 2006; Jenkins, 2008.

<sup>105</sup> For the origins of *The Burlington Magazine* see Leahy, 2002.

<sup>106</sup> For example: Ellis, a British Museum Keeper, argued against opening on public holidays because 'People of a higher grade would hardly wish to come to the Museum at the same time with sailors from the dockyards and girls whom the might bring with them' (Altick, 1978:445; Wilson, 2002:86). See also Minihan, 1977:94.

<sup>107</sup> Throughout the period under discussion the management by the ruling elite of the transition from oligarchy to parliamentary democracy while maintaining a great deal of their power is one of the most studied phenomena in British history (see Harvie, 2010 for an overview). Liberal narratives of peaceful progress to increasing democracy (which appear frequently in MacGregor's account of the role of the British Museum e.g. 2004a,b,c) have been challenged by accounts of repression within Britain (especially during and immediately after the Napoleonic Wars), and the export of violence overseas (Hooch, 2010). State legitimacy was also compromised by venality, jobbery and nepotism – Cobbett referred to the system as 'Old Corruption.' Daunton has emphasized how the ruling elite responded to these radical accusations by eradicating corruption so that they could present government as working neutrally on behalf of the public interest (Daunton 2001:46–47, 58–59). Similarly, reform of public schools, universities and the civil service created a system which could be portrayed as meritocratic, but competition existed within a framework, largely created by Robert Lowe, which restricted competition to the sons of that elite (Maloney 2001:38–51).

<sup>108</sup> In relation to this period of the British Museum's history, Wilson argues that, despite criticism in press and Parliament, which 'concentrated on opening hours and closed months (particularly August and September)', 'there was some realization that limited access was largely due to lack of funding and only to some extent because of what would nowadays be called elitism' (2002:85).

<sup>109</sup> The most significant opposition to these ideas came, not from those who believed in the intrinsic value of culture and their autonomy from the state which funded them, but from those who didn't believe in either the value of culture or in public funding or both. The opponents of culture amongst the Whigs and Radicals were labeled Philistine by Matthew Arnold, and amongst the Tories (especially from the 'country party'), Barbarian (1869). They greatly added to the pressure to keep funding for museums to a minimum. For example, William Cox, Conservative MP for Taunton, in the 1865 budget debate, proposed to reduce the allocation to the V&A on the grounds that 'the attendance of the working classes at South Kensington to which the right hon.

Gentleman alluded was somewhat like those theatrical representations in which twenty or thirty men were made to pass in and out so as to wear the appearance of a considerable body' and that the 'warming-pans and hurdy-gurdies' which constituted the collection were of no real value or interest (*Hansard*, HC Deb 01 June 1865, Vol 179, cc1173). The most ardent and explicit champion of the Philistine cause was the Scottish businessman Samuel Laing who claimed that British economic success was due there being 'no feeling for the fine arts, no foundation for them, no esteem for them' (Porter, 1991:265; Schmiechen, 1991).

<sup>110</sup> Under Cole's management, the South Kensington galleries were open six days of the week, on three of them for sixpence from 10a.m until dusk, but on Mondays, Tuesdays and Saturdays they were free, from 10 a.m. until 10 at night, lit in the later hours by gaslight (Minihan, 1977:72–3). For a critique of teleological histories of the V&A 'as a steady progress toward a museum of decorative art and design' but as an institution which combined the roles of public education with 'bazaar or emporium' see Robertson 2004).

<sup>111</sup> The take up of the act was slow, but gathered pace as the century progressed. The following table is based on dates given in Meirs's 1928 report on museums in Britain.

Dates	No of museums	Total
1845–1850	4	
1850–1859	9	13
1860–1869	6	19
1870–1879	19	38
1880–1889	21	59
1890–1899	47	106
1900–1909	57	163

Though Meirs lists 65 towns with a population of over 20,000 which did not have museums in 1928 all the larger cities had museums. This was considerably fewer than the number of libraries (authorised by the 1851 legislation), as seen in this table from Moore, 2003).

#### **Adoption of library powers by local authorities in England 1855–1920**

1855	11	1890	162
1860	22	1900	298
1870	33	1910	427
1880	74	1920	469

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The greater number of libraries is not surprising given the general consensus on the importance of literacy and reading, though progress with libraries (which also relied on philanthropy for capital) had been slow until the intervention of Andrew Carnegie and Passmore Edwards: 'When Andrew Carnegie died in 1919 it was said that more than half the public library authorities in Great Britain had received grants and over 380 public library buildings in the UK as a whole were associated with his name. The grants made by Passmore Edwards had a similar, although smaller, impact'. (Moore, 2003). Passmore Edwards was more interested in libraries than museums, but he funded the building of South London Art Gallery, the Whitechapel Public Library and Museum and much of the cost of the West Ham Museum, now the Passmore Edwards Museum (Waterfield, 1994:60).

<sup>112</sup> For example, Minihan, 1977:56–57; Trodd, 1994:33; Taylor, 1999:40; McGuigan, 1996:56; Saumarez Smith, 2009:48; Whitehead, 2005:5. It was also quoted in a 1992 House of Commons debate about museums and the issue of charging, by Labour MP Martin Flannery: 'Sir Robert Peel said that the purpose of the National Gallery was to allow people who could not afford to put pictures on their walls to look at them free of charge—and he was a noble Tory, to say the least. When, for instance, the National Museum of Wales introduced charges, admissions fell by 80 per cent. When charges are introduced, the people who have no art in their houses are the ones who stop visiting galleries. That is what the Government have done'. *Hansard*, 1992 HC, 992/993.

<sup>113</sup> The British concept of 'rights' was very different from the abstract ideas of the American or French revolutions, which the founder of British utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham described as 'nonsense, nonsense on stilts' (Kumar, 2003:217). Both Whigs and Tories referred to 'traditional English liberties'. Utilitarians argued for the reform of traditional institutions on the basis of reason and even the most radical movements such as Chartism demanded inclusion in the political system through reform in the name of these liberties (Mandler, 2006:55–6, 80–83).

Conservatives, following Edmund Burke, argued that rights were better secured through historic institutions which had stood the test of time and which were put at risk by reform (Kirk 1997).

<sup>114</sup> This romanticized view of rural life was reflected in Peel's personal tastes: he was a notable fine art collector, concentrating on Dutch landscapes. Later museums set up specifically to cater for the urban working classes, like the South London Art Gallery, linked landscape paintings in its collection with a 'practical pastoralism in the form of escape from the city to the countryside, for the day in the case of adults or longer for children' (Waterfield, 1994:57).

<sup>115</sup> In these terms museums are examples of the 'countermarket institutions' which Jerry Muller identifies in his *The Mind and The Market, Capitalism in Western Thought* as essential to the survival of market systems (Muller, 2003:392–395). He emphasizes however that no countermarket institution – even the family or the church – is immune from the social

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transformations wrought by the market (301,393,399). These are the changes I have called 'modernization'.

<sup>116</sup> Ruskin's critique of capitalism and in particular of its degradation of labour was very influential on British socialism, so that a majority of the first group of Labour MPs in 1906 nominated his *Unto This Last* as their most important influence (Rose, 2001:405).

<sup>117</sup> The influence the Guild of St George Museum was not in its specifics, which Catherine Morley, in the most detailed study of its structure argues would be impossible to duplicate (1984:75). In addition to his wider influence, Ruskin directly encouraged T.C. Horsfall in setting up the Manchester Art Museum at Ancoats in 1886 and inspired other 'didactic' museums, such as the Harris Art Gallery in Preston in the 1890s (Waterfield, 1991:23,39). It was only reading Morley that made me aware of my place in the genealogy of Ruskin's influence. I had known that Julian Spalding for whom I worked for nine years in Glasgow had been director of Sheffield Museums when the Ruskin Museum was refurbished. He later became Master of the Guild of St George, which continues as a registered charity, whose purpose is to 'promote the advancement of education and training in the field of rural economy, industrial design and craftsmanship, and appreciation of the arts in accordance with the principles set out in the letters to working men by Ruskin published under the title *Fors Clavigera*.' Website of the Charity Commissioners, accessed 6/6/2010,

<http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/SHOWCHARITY/RegisterOfCharities/CharityWithoutPartB.aspx?RegisteredCharityNumber=231758&SubsidiaryNumber=0>.

Morley's descriptions of the loan collections for schools and the design of museum furniture to transport them have strong echoes of Glasgow's Open Museum (Morley, 1984:58/59, 67).

Spalding never mentioned these precedents and we reinvented this particular wheel entirely from scratch – another consequence of the lack of knowledge of museum history.

<sup>118</sup> The Whitechapel Picture Gallery became the Whitechapel Art Gallery when it got a new building in 1901, and its mission changed from serving the local community to showing contemporary art (Steyn, 1994:216)

<sup>119</sup> In 1836 Dickens wrote a pamphlet, dedicated to the Bishop of London, arguing for the relaxation of restrictions on Sunday leisure, including the opening of museums (Dickens 1836). In 1844, speaking at a *Conversazione*, in aid of the funds of the Birmingham Polytechnic Institution on 28 February, Dickens said that

whenever the working classes have enjoyed an opportunity of effectually rebutting accusations which falsehood or thoughtlessness have brought against them, they always avail themselves of it, and show themselves in their true characters; and it was this which made the damage done to a single picture in the National Gallery of London, by some poor lunatic or cripple, a mere matter of newspaper notoriety and

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wonder for some few days. This, then, establishes a fact evident to the meanest comprehension – that any given number of thousands of individuals, in the humblest walks of life in this country, can pass through the national galleries or museums in seasons of holiday-making, without damaging, in the slightest degree, those choice and valuable collections. I do not myself believe that the working classes ever were the wanton or mischievous persons they were so often and so long represented to be; but I rather incline to the opinion that some men take it into their heads to lay it down as a matter of fact, without being particular about the premises; and that the idle and the prejudiced, not wishing to have the trouble of forming opinions for themselves, take it for granted - until the people have an opportunity of disproving the stigma and vindicating themselves before the world (1844).

<sup>120</sup> For example, Richard Redgrave, the Inspector General of Art at the South Kensington Museum reported that, in a period with 110,000 evening visitors, there was not a single case of 'misconduct' (Taylor 1999:71)

<sup>121</sup> *HC Deb, 14 July 1842, Vol 65 cc139*. Like Peel, Hume preferred honest working class people to *parvenus* and added a nationalist twist to his defense of their behaviour:

'As to the damage which it had been the fashion with a certain class of people to predict would be done by the admission of the masses to the treasures in the Museum it was now proved that no damage whatever need be apprehended. It could no longer be justly charged against the English commonalty that they could not safely be admitted to places where foreigners might in all security be trusted. In one day, 30,000 persons of all classes, principally of the humbler ranks, had passed through the various public room of the Museum, and not one sixpenny worth of damage had been done to any of the multitudinous objects which were exhibited. The conduct of the humbler classes, on all these occasions, was stated by the officers in attendance to be most exemplary; the persons who had behaved themselves with the least propriety being precisely what the witnesses before the committee termed the "half-and-half, or would-be gentry;" and this improvement in the character and conduct of the lower classes was attributed, by Mr. Mayne and Col. Rowan, precisely to the greater confidence which was placed in them. (*Hansard, HC Deb 07 April 1843, Vol 68, cc733-734*).

This charge re-emerged in *The Burlington Magazine's* editorial on Kelvingrove: "Here major (unglazed) paintings by Ribera, Constable and Turner are hung perilously low; indeed, a recent

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visitor observed there was no guard to stop a child from putting both hands on Constable's *Hampstead Heath*'. A few weeks after the Burlington editorial was published, Glasgow Museums received a Freedom of Information enquiry about damage to the collection caused by the public in Kelvingrove. Despite over 200 incidents of public touching objects being investigated, only two incidents of minor damage were revealed. In its first year after reopening the museum had 3.2 million visits, with more than 20-25,000 people a day for the first six weeks.

<sup>122</sup> See for example, Travers & Glaister, 2004, *passim*.

<sup>123</sup> With the exception of drama, which was censored by the Lord Chamberlain until 1968.

<sup>124</sup> *Hansard*, HC Deb, 07 April 1843, Vol 68 cc728.

<sup>125</sup> The entry in the Dictionary of London published by Charles Dickens Jnr in 1879 begins:  
'Museum, British, Great Russell-street, Bloomsbury. Free. With the year 1879 this institution commenced a new era. For a century it was scarcely anything else than a storehouse of the treasures of the ancient world, and the curiosities of science, literature and art; but today its invaluable accumulations are being brought out and adapted to the uses of the age, and the public are invited to profit by the many beautiful lessons they can silently but surely teach. The British Museum is now open every day (except during the first week in February, May and October, when the rooms are cleaned) and the baby in arms is no longer excluded.  
[www.victorianlondon.org](http://www.victorianlondon.org), accessed 12/7/2010.

<sup>126</sup> Agar Ellis said

'To have a gallery of paintings generally and frequently seen, there must be no sending for tickets...its doors much always be open, without fee or reward, to every decently dressed person; it must not be placed in an unfrequented street, nor in a distant quarter of town. To be of use, it must be situated in the very gangway of London, where it is alike accessible and conveniently accessible to all ranks and degrees of men'

(quoted in Saumarez Smith, 2009:26)

<sup>127</sup> For example, see Appleton's argument that one of the 'valuable' elements of early nineteenth century cultural policy was that 'the public was free to interpret these exhibits as it pleased' (Appleton, 2004). The interest of Members of Parliament in educating the nation was consistent with the view the parliament itself was an educational institution, a 'great engine of popular instruction' (Bagehot, 1873:53).



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<sup>128</sup> *Hansard*, HC Deb 07 April 1843, Vol 68, cc733.

<sup>129</sup> This degree of parliamentary interest is best captured in the title of the 1857 *Return to the House of Commons Showing how far [in all publicly funded museums and national monuments] the Rule has been observed of attaching to the Objects of Art a Brief Account thereof, including their Date, their Subject, the Name, with the Date of Birth and Death of the Artists, and the School to which he belonged; and in the case of Objects of Science or of Historical Interest, a brief Description therefore, with the view of conveying useful information to the public, and Sparing him the Expense of a Catalogue* (Parliamentary Papers, 1857).

<sup>130</sup> Conforti argues that it was this very eclecticism which made the V&A such an inspiring model: 'It was South Kensington's very lack of aloofness, its amalgamation of audience excitement, educational purpose, aesthetic ambition, and, indeed commerce-enhancing ends, that energized the nascent American museum movement in the second half of the nineteenth century (Conforti, 1997:23).

<sup>131</sup> Not everyone was convinced of the improving nature of art. Samuel Smiles, in his sequel to *Self Help* called *Character* points out that a lot of art represents immoral behaviour, that it 'usually flourished most during the decadence of nations' (1878:261). Like a much later critic John Carey, another skeptic about the improving power of art, Smiles did believe in the transformative power of reading (Carey, 2005:213-260; Smiles, 1878:264-298).

<sup>132</sup> The submitted publications quote the most striking evidence – the response by a Museums Association delegation to a 1919 government proposals that museums be transferred to the Board of Education. The delegation stated that 'museums are not fundamentally educational institutions' – an unimaginable statement from any of the founders of the Victorian public museum (quoted in O'Neill, 2002a:26).

<sup>133</sup> The 'disengagement with the contemporary and the slide into antiquarianism' in the V&A was aided by the return as specialist art adviser of John Charles Robinson after Cole's retiral (Bonython & Burton, 2003:279). He had been let go in 1868 after taking his dispute with Cole over allocating funds to modern as opposed to medieval purchases to a Select Committee of the House of Commons in 1867 (Bonython & Burton, 2003:235/6, 279). Robinson's views on collecting did not prevent him supporting the South London Art Gallery's educational mission (Waterfield, 1994:53).

<sup>134</sup> See O'Neill 'Internal and External Relations' and 'Professionalism and Democracy' for my account of this history (O'Neill 1991, 2008).

<sup>135</sup> The Museums Association was formed in 1889 (Lewis, 1989:8).

<sup>136</sup> Bennett argues that the retreat was also a consequence of the rising prestige of the sciences, dominating the intellectual field (especially as a result of the explanatory power of Darwinism) and the field of reform (1997).



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<sup>137</sup> This may seem to contradict the widespread expression of fears of social breakdown as social conflict escalated in the before World War I, with the advent of the New Unionism, violent suffrage attacks on property, including that of museums, notably the vandalism of Millais's portrait of Carlisle in the National Portrait Gallery) and intensification of violence in Ireland (Baikin, 2004). However, these organized campaigns were different from the fear of mass uprising by the unorganized poor which had threatened earlier elites. The discovery and enfranchisement of conservative lower middle class and respectable working class vote by Disraeli and its mobilization through the 1867 Reform Act and jingoistic imperialism made these threats seem specific rather than general. The 'mixing of classes' became less of a political imperative than shoring up middle class identity and confidence (Hill, 2005:143–9).

<sup>138</sup> McClellan gives the decline as 28%, based on a drop from 3,845,103 to 3,342,117 i.e. 502,986, or 13.08% (McClellan, 2008:306; Dartington Hall Trustees, 1946:144). The museums included are the British Museum, the V&A, Bethnal Green, the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery and the Wallace Collection.

<sup>139</sup> There may be explanations other than that posited by the Dartington Hall Trustees for this decline, as large scale patterns in museum visiting may not be entirely a response to what museums do, but at least in part to wider social developments (see Cannadine, 2007:28). The Trustees' point – that staff weren't enabling museums to do what they could – remains. When Pope-Hennessy was looking back at this period, he recalled being called up from his post in the V&A to fight in World War II: 'I had never met ordinary people before (people whose interests did not in some way conform to my own, I mean), and to my surprise I found the congenial and interesting (Pope-Hennessy, 1991:69). Clearly the 'joining of companies' had declined since the middle of the previous century.

<sup>140</sup> The statistical data on which the success of the free entry policy was assessed have been questioned by in Selwood, 2004b and 2006b. In a review of New Labour's record in office, *Better or Worse? Has Labour Delivered?*, *Guardian* journalists (and, in general, Labour-supporting) Polly Toynbee and David Walker, stated that the results of this policy were that 'Visits by children to museums and galleries in England increased 80% in the four years to 2002' and visits to the national collections were 'up 40% on 1998 as a result of the abolition of entry charges (Toynbee & Walker, 2005:107). For an assessment of the claims that these additional visits widened access rather than simply increased access for existing visitors see Cowell, 2007. For an analysis of free entry to national museums as a policy which disproportionately benefits the middle classes see journalist George Walden's 'Come to our free museums: see an exhibition of hypocrisy' (Walden, 2007).

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<sup>141</sup> Mrs Thatcher seems to have generalized her values from those of her Methodist lay preacher shopkeeper alderman father, Alfred Roberts, who was born in 1892 and who would have been classified by Arnold as a Philistine (Cannadine, 2000:129–130, 140–2).

<sup>142</sup> *Punch Magazine* made the charge of hypocrisy explicit in a cartoon of 1843 (at the height of the 'hungry forties' showing starving families confronted by paintings: 'The poor ask for bread, and the philanthropy of the state accords them – an exhibition' (quoted in Taylor, 1999:57).

<sup>143</sup> As an MP John Stuart Mill supported a number of petitions by working men's groups 'In favour of opening the British Museum and other national institutions on Sunday afternoons' including one 'from the *employés* of Charles Aldin, builder, South Kensington' which had 65 signatures, while another 'from working men resident in London' had 203 signatures. (Mill 1873: paragraphs 1555 and 1569).

<sup>144</sup> For American precedents, ignored by the authors of *Whose Muse?*, see de Forest (1920), Bach (1939) and Silverman (2010:8–12). De Forest stated that the Metropolitan Museum (of which he was director) was 'a public gallery for the use of all people, high and low, and even more for the low than for the high, for the high can find artistic inspiration in their own homes' (1920:125).

<sup>145</sup> Jonathan Rose, attempting to quantify how many working class people (mostly men) were affected by autodidacticism, uses surveys carried out by Sheffield People's College in 1918 to suggest that as many as a quarter of working class men read books and newspapers. The survey included questions about museums and the Mappin Art Gallery and the Ruskin Museum were well recognized (Rose, 2002:190–2).

<sup>146</sup> Thorsten Veblen had no doubt about the self-interest of cultural philanthropy. In his *Theory of the Leisure Class* he argued that, 'To such an extent is this true, that many ostensible works of disinterested public spirit are no doubt initiated and carried on with a view primarily to the enhanced reputation, or even to the pecuniary gain, of their promoters. In the case of some considerable groups of organizations or establishments of this kind the invidious motive is apparently the dominant motive both with the initiators of the work and with their supporters. This last remark would hold true especially with respect to such works as lend distinction to their doer through large and conspicuous expenditure; as, for example, the foundation of a university or of a public library or museum; but it is also, and perhaps equally, true of the more commonplace work of participation in such organisations and movements as are distinctively upper-class organisations. These serve to authenticate the pecuniary reputability of their members, as well as gratefully to keep them in mind of their superior status by pointing the contrast between themselves and the lower-lying humanity in whom the work of amelioration is to be wrought; as, for example, the university settlement, which now has some vogue' (Veblen, 1899:63).

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<sup>147</sup> Davitt's second period in prison was a result of his agitation for land reform in Ireland, and it was only because his political status was recognized that he was allowed the unusual privilege of being able to write while in prison. His first sentence resulted from a conviction for procuring guns for the Fenians. Davitt, who had lost an arm while working in a Lancashire cotton mill aged ten, spent time in a number of prisons including Millbank, later the site of Tate Britain, which casts interesting light on the Foucauldian idea of the 'carceral archipelago' which links reformed Victorian prisons, of which the model was Bentham's panopticon, to other instruments designed to internalise discipline in individuals. Taylor, despite disavowing theory in favour of documentary research, nonetheless picks up this idea in relation to Millbank, and makes a strange analogy between the prison for people, and the imprisonment of paintings in the Tate Gallery.

<sup>149</sup> This excludes the revolutionary option which the great majority of British people eschewed (Harvie, 2010:191–4).

<sup>150</sup> See MacGregor 2004c and 4.4.

<sup>151</sup> I use the term 'working through' in a loose analogy with the Freudian psychoanalytic process. Contrary to Freud's early expectations, simply revealing the causes of neurosis (or 'hysteria') did not relieve the symptoms, and instead, a long and painful period of working through follows, of the patient facing up to how their responses to the original causes of their disturbance are transferred to many other aspects of their life (Freud, [1915] (2003).

<sup>152</sup> Bal refers to Kristeva (1998).

<sup>153</sup> The subjectivism of Bal's method is also reflected in how she locates her exhibition in relation to museum practice. She does refer to exhibitions which she regards as precedents, but only ones she happens to have seen. She makes no reference to precedents in the literature, whether by curators like Gaby Porter (1996) or Lesley Prosterman (2000) or artists such as Fred Wilson (see Corrin, 1994) and Andrea Fraser (2005). Referring to the latter Christoph Grunenburg, then Curator at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, concluded that 'however disruptive the artists' interventions and however radical their attempts during the period to escape the confines of institutions and the pressures of the art market, eventually most of them returned to the white cube (this includes Haacke, who continues to show in major institutions of Europe and the United States)' (1999:41). In other words there is a literature on interventions like Bal's and at least one evaluation which had concluded that the museum 'synthax' had proved impervious to their challenge.

<sup>154</sup> This final phrase, especially the use of the word 'destiny' is strange as it implies a contradiction of the book's analysis of the museum as an historically contingent institution with shifting meanings and purposes. This reflects a tension within the critical theory paradigm, which,

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in exposing the complicity of the museum in power, can easily overestimate that power and be seduced by it.

<sup>155</sup> See for example, Hooper-Greenhill, 1995, 2000.

<sup>156</sup> Other early practitioners of the New Museology were interested in visitor research and in its application in the pursuit of social justice, including American sociologist Vera Zolberg (1994) and British art consultant and writer Philip Wright, who had an essay on 'The Quality of Visitors' Experiences in Art Museums' in Vergo's eponymous anthology (1989). Both articles analyze the exclusive practices of art museums and end with exhortations in favour of 'democratizing art' (Zolberg, 1994:49). Though described as 'the classic text on the potential discrepancy between museum practice and public interest' by one leading practitioner (Stephen Deuchar, later Director of Tate Britain), Wright's article did not form a foundation for building a theory of practice – there are no references to it in Witcom (2003), Henning (2006) MacDonald (2006), or Marstine (2008).

<sup>157</sup> Witcom points out another area of alignment; 'ironically, polemical criticism and conservative defence agree on the issue of commercialism' (2003:168).

<sup>158</sup> In an interview in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine* Saumarez Smith revealed that his own childhood ambition was to be Archbishop of Canterbury (Patalay, 2009).

<sup>159</sup> 'The terracottas ... are not heavy objects. The can be held easily in our (sic) hands. The size, scale, immediacy of effect, and familiar material invite our touch: we want to hold them, to press our fingers into their hollows, to match our fingerprints with those of their maker' (Cuno, 2004: 56). McClellan remarks dryly, 'It is safe to say that anyone fortunate enough to accompany Cuno on a tour of his collection, seeing as he sees, knowing what he knows, and holding things in their own hands, would become a museum lover for life' (McClellan, 2008:188).

<sup>160</sup> Many other disciplines avow how much they have learned from anthropology, all in the direction of engagement with cultural and social contexts of people and objects. These include art history (e.g. Baxandall, 1988), cultural history (e.g. Darnton, 2009: xii, 6; Burke, 2006:6), social history (e.g. Briggs, 1955; Sharpe, 2006:32, 34–6) and museum studies (MacDonald, 1996:6–7).

<sup>161</sup> This has led to some influential museum experiments, some of which have backfired, in ways which led to important lessons being learned. For example, *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition in the Royal Ontario Museum (1989) tried to tackle legacies of colonial racism through displays which included historic quotes in a manner which was intended ironically. However, the academic mode of irony did not translate into the medium of the museum display, leading activists to accuse the museum of endorsing the quotations and to extensive protest and controversy (Canizzo, 1989). I was aware of this controversy, but not of the probably more significant debate surrounding the Glenbow's Museum's *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples* (1998), which led to a significant shift in the relationship between Canadian museums and first nations (Conaty, 2006).

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<sup>162</sup> For an account of how Kelvingrove approached displaying objects in the anthropological collection see Brown (2006).

<sup>163</sup> Durrans argues that the 'appropriate curatorial reaction' to the public's 'idiosyncratic and mysteriously enriching reactions to displays' is 'not despair but a determination to cater sensitively to the public's imagination by means of a variety of display styles and themes that between them will help prevent visitors become complacent about what they expect to find in an ethnographic museum' (1988:163).

<sup>164</sup> For a history of anthropology see Eriksen & Nielsen (2001). For recent debates see Ingold (1996). On materiality see Miller (2005) and Knell (2007). For studies of how objects even in modern consumerist societies express people's most important meanings and relationships see for example, Czikszenmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton (1981) and Miller (2008).

<sup>165</sup> Nor is he unusual. Similar views are expressed by other British Museum anthropologists, e.g. Kingston & Mack (2003). MacGregor's case for the universal value of the British Museum is a version of this argument, with a similar lack of evidence for its claim that it will make visitors 'see the world as one' and become more tolerant as a result. As *Guardian Arts Correspondent*, Charlotte Higgins, pointed out in her review of the seminar at the launch of the Universal Declaration in London, the British Museum's displays were as likely to confirm as to challenge intolerant attitudes to non-British cultures (MacGregor, 2004c, 2007, Higgins 2003).

<sup>166</sup> In 2004, as well as a *Manifesto for Museums*, the NMDC produced three reports advocating the value of national museums (*National Dimensions*, *Museums and Galleries: Creative Engagement and Valuing Museums*), and a summary of these (*The Impacts and the Needs*). In 2006 came another two reports (*Values and Vision: The Contribution of Culture and Museums and Galleries in Britain: Economic, Creative and Social Impacts*). See [www.nmdc.org](http://www.nmdc.org).

<sup>167</sup> 'Adjudicating rival identity claims' would seem to be inherently 'divisive', which is not defined anywhere. Recent debates about 'multiculturalism' and 'British values' reflect the same confusion between issues of values which promote social cohesion and issues of justice – historically the claims of identities of groups excluded from citizenship (the poor, Catholics, Jews, women) and assertions of the rights of minorities (e.g. by John Stuart Mill, 1854) have been dismissed as 'divisive'. Museums would seem to be well-placed to explore the relationship between particular heritages and cultures and aspirations to universal principles such as social justice – but not if they try to exclude themselves from the 'adjudication'. See O'Neill 2004 for a discussion. For recent debates re multiculturalism and British values see for example, 'Ten Core Values of British Identity' in *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/telegraph-view/3618632/Ten-core-values-of-the-British-identity.html>, accessed 15/10/2020 and Phillips (2009).

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<sup>168</sup> For the persistence of social evils see Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2009) and Dorling (2010). For research showing the population level health impact of inequality see Wilkinson & Pickwell (2010).





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