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Title: Museological Criticism and Museum
Practice. How far can museum practice be
informed by museological criticism? (with
reference to the National Galleries of
Scotland and The Royal Museum of
Scotland)

Name: Chidi Okeke

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I will be looking at a selective range of museological criticism that has been applied to the educative purpose and functions of museums and more specifically to galleries from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. I will give an outline of these criticisms, their development, the basis of their arguments and the implications they have had for museum and gallery educational practice. This will, it is hoped, illustrate some of the social, cultural and economic developments which have affected both museological criticism and museum practice. In conclusion I will evaluate the extent to which museum and gallery practice can be informed by museological criticism by looking at the current educational practices of two institutions whose collections incorporate the subject areas of the museological criticisms that I have selected.

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. . . The Museum and Education

Introduction

Many of the pejorative clichés that are often used to describe museums can be seen as having their origins in museum criticism of the mid-twentieth century when, as now, people were seriously questioning not only the purposes and functions of the various state and local authority museums and galleries, but also whether they indeed had a future and, if so, what this was. It was from this period onwards we can also identify the growing influence of museology - the branch of knowledge concerned with the study of the purposes and organisation of museums (Sofka 1980) - upon ensuing museum debates.

Museological theories have looked at the history and background of museums, their role in society, their relationship with the physical environment, and the classification of different types of museum. The theories can generally be identified under three basic headings: the museum's role in society; the type of experience that the museum visitor should have within the various museum institutions; the ways in which a museum may present the objects in its care to the variety of its visitors.

Current museological criticisms reflect the enormous changes that have been taking place within

the past thirty years especially in relation to the changes in attitude on the part of the museum visitor towards the sort of material for which museums have always cared. I think it can rightly be said that the wide range of museum visitors now have an increased attitude of cultural awareness, and of sensitivity towards the environment and place which have not previously existed, and a substantial amount of the new criticisms can be seen as a direct result of a new sense of cultural and visitor awareness on behalf of museum and galleries.

However, for all that has been written about museums and which incorporates and accepts the societal and institutional changes that have taken place during this time, there does not appear to have been produced, as yet, a critical and extensive answer to the question of 'How far can museum practice be informed by museological criticisms?'

It is this central question which will form the basis of my dissertation but because of the practical constraints which have been imposed by the length that this dissertation has to be and the time in which I have to write it, I have chosen to focus attention on those museological criticisms which relate to the educative purpose and function of museums and galleries. I will place special emphasis upon how the museums and galleries of art, in particular, have responded to these criticisms.

It is hoped that the various museological discourses on this topic will bring into focus and touch upon, however briefly, other areas that have been incorporated within museological theory and museum debate.

To make my answers and proposals more focused and cohesive I have chosen to look at a selective, though I hope an indicative, range of museological criticism dealing with the changing nature of museum education and their implications, from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. I shall be looking at this theme with special reference to how the changes in education were influenced and affected by wider societal developments, and how these helped or hindered the museum's response to educative reform and practice with regard to implementing the proposals put forward by the main bodies of museological criticism.

I have chosen to look at the museum and gallery from the mid-nineteenth century to the present because I think it is important not only to show how recent museological ideas have come about, but indeed how they can either be seen as a reflection of or as a direct consequence of what has been called the golden age of museums; how the philosophies behind this era have directly affected the educative purpose of the museum and the nature, over a hundred years later, of museological discussion.

I shall be looking at this with regard to two institutions, the National Galleries of Scotland and the Royal Museum of Scotland, previously the Royal Scottish Museum, during this period so that I may examine the relationship between museological criticism and museum practice more closely and comprehensively.

Chapter One

Museum Education 1840-1945

The origin of the museum is often traced back to the Ptolemaic mouseion at Alexandria, which was (whatever else it may have been) first and foremost a study collection with library attached, a repository of knowledge, a place of scholars and philosophers and historians.¹ Thus from its earliest beginnings the museum was associated with learning and knowledge, therefore fulfilling some preconceived educative function.

Martin Kemp in reviewing David Wilson's book on the British Museum highlights the ideals of this museum and many others when he says, "they are those of the eighteenth century encyclopedists, dedicated to the benevolent views of universal knowledge, progressive education and the state as guardian and purveyor of cultural verities."² 'Museums in Scotland' a report commissioned by the Museums and Galleries Commission in 1986 states that, "it is significant that museums grew from endeavours in what are now called higher and adult education from universities (notably Glasgow) and philosophical societies (Dumfries, Elgin and Thurso). The desire

¹ Vergo 1989. p1.

² Kemp 1989. see *Times Literary Supplement*, 29/12/1989-4/1/1990, article entitled 'A Guilty Success'.

to respond to the fundamental gift of curiosity - to educate - has not only brought museums into being, it informs each of the continuing functions of a museum; acquisition, research, conservation, display and interpretation. The last of these, interpretation, is the primary concern of museum education."²⁵ These same sentiments can be applied to museums throughout Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It would seem then that the Museum and education seem to have always been inextricably linked. From those sixteenth century Classical shrines dedicated to the Muses, to the present, it has been thought that the museum bestowed some form of knowledge upon us. The museum profession and others have written numerous articles, papers and books which readily acknowledge this and which define the nature of education within the various museum contexts.

I will now try to analyze some of the most prevalent interpretations of the museum's edifying role - its purpose and function - and examine how and why it has developed from the mid-nineteenth century to World War Two.

**The Early Public Museum and Education:
A Reflection of Victorian Ideals.**

²⁵ Report by Working Party 1986. 'Museums in Scotland'. p28.

Between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth centuries elementary education became in Western Europe first an opportunity for a select body of students and then a right through law for a greater majority of people. With this came an awareness of the museum as a means of general education to assist in the improvement of existing educational standards. Some of the great museums in the European capitals were formed in the second half of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries. Though in theory 'public', these early museums for a considerable time were but a limited aid in the enlightenment of the masses. When public museums, such as the British Museum, were established, they carried on the traditions of the private collections. They might belong to the state, or to a body of trustees, but they were exclusive, elitist and, not infrequently, as precious as their predecessors. They met the needs of a very small section of the public. They were run by autocrats, who asked for nobody's advice or suggestions as to how the collections should be presented or organised. Visitors were admitted as a privilege, not as a right, and consequently gratitude and admiration, not criticism, was required of them.⁴

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Britain witnessed a number of agencies making collections

⁴ Hudson 1975. pp6-7.

for a variety of reasons; the Government, universities, schools and other educational establishments, learned societies, scholars, scientists, the entrepreneur and certain trading companies. Most museums can trace their origins in the collecting instincts and tastes of those involved within these various groups. These collectors were, by and large, those who had wealth and power to indulge them, from royalty and nobility to merchant venturers and successful exploiters of the Industrial Revolution. Their collections were in some instances undoubtedly formed with altruistic intent but they were also in part an investment and in part an advertisement. Other times provided other means for the first and other fashions for the second.

The material they accumulated reflected the current interest in scientific discovery, and ranged from instruments to demonstrative principles and advances, largely in the field of physics, to collections illustrating the systematics of the natural sciences, which enjoyed a wide popularity from the publications of Charles Darwin and his contemporaries. These types of museum were genre pieces which made no claim to be comprehensive. On the art side certain types of specimens were excluded from the category of museum pieces. Once again following the tradition of the early museums of previous centuries, public access to these founding collections

was still extremely limited.

This was to change during the mid-nineteenth century with the growing recognition and acceptance of public instruction which would benefit a widening sphere of society. Subsequently these collections passed from private possession to public ownership, under ministries, trustees, and municipal authorities. A somewhat later source of ready-made collections of the natural and applied sciences lay in the natural and antiquarian societies, philosophical institutions, and mechanics institutes which flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century. These early museums garnered valuable material which was to serve as a nucleus or establish a bent for the museums of the future.⁵

As Sir Frederic Kenyon(1927) said "It was not in the eighteenth, nor in the earlier part of the nineteenth century that museums can said to have taken any noteworthy part in the national life of any country. They began to be of service to scholars...Artists as well as scholars then began to profit. But for the general public museums were just collections of curiosities...with little guidance for the inexpert and no help to enable them to assimilate this mass of strange and unrelated

⁵ Royal Society of the Arts 1949. 'Museums in Modern Life'. pp87-8.

objects."⁶

By the mid-nineteenth century the museum movement would begin to respond to this, and similar criticisms, and if we look at the museum and its educative function from the mid-nineteenth century to the post-first World War Period, we can see just how significantly its response was influenced by Victorian ideals. We can see how these ideals not only shaped its function and implicitly prescribed and explicitly directed museum practices well into the twentieth century.

In his first report for the Department of Practical Art in 1852 Henry Cole stated that, "The museum is intended to be used, and for the utmost consistent with the preservation of the articles; these are not only to be used physically, but to be taken about and lectured upon. For my own part, I venture to think that unless museums and galleries are made subservient to the purposes of education, they dwindle into very sleepy and useless institutions."⁷

This came to be the dominant view of the purpose and function of the museum from the mid-victorian era onwards. The Victorians had very specific and prescriptive ideas about the nature of education, and thus about its interpretation and incor-

⁶ Kenyon 1927. p10.

⁷ reprinted in Alexander 1983. p159.

poration within the museum. These were the result of the socio-economic consequences of the Industrial Revolution, and a reflection of Victorian morality and materialism.

The Industrial Revolution in Britain took millions from their rural lives and transported them into new industrialised towns and cities. Urbanization completely restructured society and radically changed the lives of all people. Among these changes came a new concept of leisure. Industrial areas grew at such an alarming rate that population increases posed immediate questions of what was known, almost at once, as the 'problem of leisure.'⁸

During the 1830s-1840s there were a number of people who wished to see this 'new leisure' time as a potential and means for self-improvement. These factions in national and local government were led by Prince Albert. They saw the need as being one of civic museums, reading rooms, and instructional galleries, which were all the means of self-education. There was a growing belief that people could and should be trusted to educate themselves and that the business of public bodies was to provide the opportunities for this to take place. There was also a conviction that public amusement i.e. 'leisure' should be combined with education.

⁸ This phrase is used by Pick 1988. see p32 for a detailed explanation.

This marked a distinct break with the past because the idea that the working classes should be encouraged to visit galleries and museums was not universally accepted until the 1840s. Dorothy George, in her book on English political caricature, noted that the decade of the 1820s was the great age of self-education and that the "march of the mind" was ridiculed increasingly from 1825. Many treated the movement of wider education with scepticism, ridicule or contempt, and higher education for the working people particularly was singled out for criticism, with the imputation that they would neglect their work or the people of position and culture would be disposed to the general detriment of society.⁹

The type of education many people saw the museum of fine arts as providing can in part be found by looking at the British Parliamentary papers devoted to the Fine Arts and Design in the nineteenth-century. These reflect a deep and specific conviction about the moral benefits bestowed through their cultivation. George Godwin's (1841) comments are a clear example of the opinion of many influential Victorians who supported this view. "The influence of the fine arts in humanising and refining, in purifying the thoughts and raising the sources of gratification in man, is so universally felt and

⁹ Saunders King 1982. p16.

admitted that it is hardly necessary now to urge it...By assisting the works of fine art...all may rest assured that they are forwarding the best interests of humanity and entitling themselves eminently to the applause of the high minded."¹⁰

The primary purpose of many of the first public museums that were then created, or opened up to a greater majority of the people, can therefore be seen in light of cultivating these moral benefits among the masses. This theory was scarcely new. The new factor was the scale and importance it assumed when it was applied not just to a single institution, but also to an entire nation as an adjunct to their general education and suitable recreation. Moreover, in common with other aspects of Victorian educational theory, the moral can rarely be separated from the more practical, materialistic side.¹¹

The Great Exhibition in London was the first of a long succession of world fairs which significantly changed the attitude of museum curators to the public. From this period until the outbreak of the 1914-18 war, these international exhibitions, gave museums a social power that they never had before.

¹⁰ King 1964. p107.

¹¹ Sutherland(Ed) 1977. p69. Also see Chapter Four, Celina Fox 'Education, Art and Design'. Fox provides a good account of Victorian views about art and art education. Also see Denvir 1986. pp157-203.

They attracted very large numbers of visitors and they compelled both governments and the leaders of fashion and taste to recognise that the sciences and the useful arts were the proper concern of the community as a whole. Formal learning and social needs were brought together. They opened the way for the renaissance of the modern museum in terms of how dramatic displays widely accessible to the public could attract visitors to museums.¹²

This was however not as altruistic a gesture as it at first seems. During the early years of the Industrial Revolution Britain had depended upon its considerable technical lead to monopolise world markets in manufactured goods. However with the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815 the economic welfare of the country was increasingly threatened by foreign competition, and the relaxation of tariff barriers in the mid-1820s further aggravated the problem. Britain's biggest mechanised industry, textiles, was thrown into fierce competition with that of France, and the French were seen to excel with products which paid more attention to quality of design than to quantity and economy, the predominant British criteria.

Mounting concerns were temporarily stemmed by the Great Exhibition of 1851, where Britain was

¹² Hudson *op.cit.* pp40-42. Also see Mainardi 1987. pp22-30.

still seen as having the advantage over the rest of Europe. Not only was she displaying on home ground her best manufactures but, having escaped the ravages of 1848 which had upturned much of Europe, she was enjoying a political stability which had put British industry in a formidably competitive position. Yet success was tempered by the recognition of the rapid technical and scientific advance that Britain's European competitors were making and it became accepted that unless immediate steps were taken, her pre-eminent position amongst them would be in serious jeopardy.

The Royal Society of Arts, at the request of Prince Albert, took action and organised a series of lectures on the results of the Exhibition.¹³ In retrospect, they concluded, Britain's achievements would be measured, not only by its lion's share of the prizes but also by its ability to seize the commercial opportunities displayed by the Exhibition. For this to be achieved Britain's industries had to improve the quality of their products. France and especially Germany had developed a strong manufacturing industry by recognising the close interrelation between an expansive and extended educational system and manufacture.

Eighteenth-century mercantilist theory had

¹³ Second Report of the Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851. House of Commons 1852. pp72-74.

underlined the intimate connection between commerce, industry and the arts. In the nineteenth-century museums came to be seen as having practical utility in applying science and art to productive industry. Various Government reports can be used in testimony to prove this fact. The Select Committee on Arts and Manufacture of 1836 had been appointed to inquire into 'the best means of extending a knowledge of Arts and the principles of design among the people (especially the manufacturing population) in this country.' The report stated for the first time themes which were to be endlessly explored in other government reports. The committee exposed a lack of faith in the products and design of British manufactures compared with other European countries. What was required was an art education for the whole country, 'from the prince to the mechanic'. The rot began at the highest level with undiscerning patronage and the exclusion of art from the minds of the aristocracy in their public schools and universities. This was seen to be matched by an equal want of study and education in the arts amongst manufacturers who produced fabrics and goods requiring applied design. Finally, there existed a total lack of discrimination throughout the general public. The Committee in conclusion thus recommended the establishment of schools of design, the formation of open Public Galleries and Museums of Art, and that the

principles of design should be part of a permanent system of elementary education, all of which had already being carried out by Britain's competitors who had a greater extension of art instruction throughout the mass of society.¹⁴

The fulfilment of these objectives were ignored when they were published, however just over a decade later the suggestions put forward by the committee were largely accepted and steps for their implementation began to be taken. The Committee had expressed the view that "the more exalted branches of design tends to advance the humblest pursuits of industry, while the connection of art with manufacture has often developed the genius of the greatest masters of design."¹⁵

What this report and those succeeding it called for was the elevation of public taste. This became nearly an obsession during the 1840s. The optimistic side of the Early-Victorian character believed that such a thing was possible; the materialistic side saw commercial advantage in it; and the nostalgic 'Olden-Time' side of it saw a chance of getting back on to a footing with the past, and of producing a style of architecture, painting and craftsmanship comparable with the best of earlier ages. A large

¹⁴ see Ashwin 1975. pp8-25.

¹⁵ Report of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures 1836. p3.

body of influential opinion now believed that the principles of good taste in the applied arts could be taught through schools and institutions, and that such teaching should be State-supported. Such advocates were careful not to urge taste for taste's sake, but stressed, very sensibly, the commercial advantages of the improvements in design which, they hoped, would result.¹⁶

The setting up of the Department of Practical Art in 1852 can be seen as a consequence of these feelings. It was instigated to establish, among other things, museums to study the common principles of taste, and five years later came the complex of institutions for investigating the arts and sciences known as the South Kensington Museum, which grew into the Victoria and Albert and Science Museums. It was an imaginative concept of the Prince Consort, reflected also in the Museum of Science and Art, later to become the Royal Scottish Museum, in Edinburgh.¹⁷

We can now see the connection between the Great Exhibition in London and the socio-economic benefits accrued from it and subsequent grand exhibitions of commerce and industry in Britain (and Europe), throughout the following decade as providing the catalysts that led to the creation not only some of the

¹⁶ Steegman 1970. pp137-138.

¹⁷ Finlay 1977. p15.

great English museums of arts and crafts but of similar museums in other countries. The mechanised era had produced a desire for the advancement of the industrial crafts and now every industrialised country wished to score by trading with such products. This was a modernised version of the eighteenth-century mercantilist idea of economising by encouraging home-made art, which at an earlier date had caused the opening of many private collections to artists. In the first public museums of arts and crafts, the commercial motive mingled with these idealistic tendencies towards an improvement of standards of taste which many thought had deteriorated under the influence of mechanised production.

It was not just the museums of arts and crafts which could be incorporated into this adapted mercantilist ethos. George Wilson (1857), who was one of those responsible for the opening of the Science and Art Museum in Edinburgh, stressed the commercial and mercantilist considerations of an industrial museum. "One great service, then, which an Industrial Museum may render to commercial enterprise, is the teaching of those about to be scattered over the world, how to recognise the important, working and modifying materials of Industrial Art." And "it is not intended by this to come in between the importer and his profits, but only to supplement his ignorance or neglect of the value of what he has

imported...none will probably deny that it would be of signal service to the mercantile Public, to be assured that whatever raw materials the correspondents or agents sent home, would be examined, if deserved, by skilled experts, and their commercial value proximately determined."¹⁸

The 1840s had regarded the exhibition of works of art and science as a means of moral self improvement; the 1850s regarded them also, as a means through which one could obtain commercial advancement.

The Expansion and Nature of Museum Education up to 1914.

Until the post First World War period the Museum would relate its educational purpose to mercantilist and instructional objectives. Looking critically over this period, it may be said that with regards to fulfilling the educational ideals of the Victorians, the first foundations of the purpose of the Public Museum and its educative role was in reality little more than a vague tendency towards instruction to increasing numbers of people.

The 1870 Education Act (England) and that of 1872 (Scotland) ushered in the foundations of mass

¹⁸ Wilson 1858. see 'The Industrial Museum of Scotland in its relation to Commercial Enterprise. A lecture delivered at the request of the Company of Merchants.' 4/12/1857.

education. The difficulties implied in the extension of education to ever increasing numbers of people offers problems which up to the present have not been resolved, within, or without, the particular institution called 'museum'. Wittlin (1949) said that in the early stages of mass education in museums, methods that were used for an elite of scholars were, as a matter of course, applied to the education of children and non-scholars, with alterations concerning the scope and the quantity of subjects of study rather than the approach to them. She viewed the creation of the Public Museum as an expression of the eighteenth-century spirit of enlightenment which generated enthusiasm for equality of opportunity in learning. Collections which before had been sources of instruction and enjoyment for the few who owned the treasures and their personal friends were made accessible to everybody.¹⁹

This was the theory from which the practice, however, came to differ widely. Museums towards the end of the nineteenth century were the butt of much criticism and if we look at the address given to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society by Professor W.B.Dawkins (1876), who was the Curator of the Manchester Museum at Owen's College we can see some of the reasons for this. In Britain, he said, "a museum is a sort of advertising bazaar, or a

¹⁹ Wittlin 1949. pp133-134.

receptacle for miscellaneous curiosities unfitted for the private house, or it is composed of an accumulation of objects, valuable in themselves but valueless for all practical purposes, because they are crowded together or stowed away for want of room." Museums were visited as places of amusement, rather than instruction. F.W.Rudler another museologist of this period said that in order to fulfil their potential so that they should become the educational institutions that many wanted them to be, museums had to restrict, not expand upon their aims. They taught too little by attempting to teach too much.²⁰

In many cases, the early Public Museums became a magnified and distorted version of a private collection. Features of different types of collections - that of the scholar and that of the art lover etc - became mixed in a single museum, and all organic character was annihilated instead of an integration towards a new wholeness taking place. Other survival features were a legacy of the scientist, or pseudo-scientist of a pre-scientific era who, in his avidity for knowledge would amass in his studio specimens of all kinds. He may have benefited from his collection, whatever its arrangement, monotonous or kaleidoscopic, yet similar arrangements adopted in many museums confused the inexpert, who

²⁰ Reprinted in Lewis 1989. pp1-2.

were the vast majority of museum visitors. The men and women who to a great extent were the visitors of these museums were people who had hardly benefited from elementary education. Their standard of knowledge was very limited and their approach to information differed fundamentally from the avid inquisitiveness of the pioneer scholar. The result of this, was that for many people a museum may have appealed as a novelty promising entertainment or information, but when confronted with overwhelming numbers of specimens and with objects presented in a monotonous and confusing manner, and without obvious bearing on their lives, their interest palled and their first visit to a museum was often their last.²¹

David Murray was one of a small body of museologists who was aware that the arrangement of exhibits was a crucial factor in assisting the museum in its educative function in relation to all its visitors. He believed that "the usefulness of a town or general museum should not, however, be dependent upon the services of a guide. As far as possible it should be self-interpreting; it should explain itself...The majority of the visitors to museums are not classes or societies, but units. Some are students who come for a definite purpose, and to obtain certain information. Others are beginners groping their way, and seeking to grasp more

²¹ Wittlin *op.cit.*, pp136-146.

clearly what they have been learning from textbooks. The larger number of all visitors have probably no distinct aim before them, but all wish to know what the object is they are looking at, and to have some general information about it. For all visitors, methodical and scientific arrangement, easy and unobstructed means of observing, and proper labelling are essential." He also lamented the fact that museums were regarded too much as mere exhibitions, and were too little employed for practical teaching. He contrasted this with the situation in Germany where, in his view, museums were made the basis of instruction, and every subject which could be made intelligible by means of a museum was provided with a teacher.²²

Thus it could be said that although "Legislative and administrative reforms, in the nineteenth century transformed museums from semi-private institutions restricted largely to the ruling and professional classes into organs of the state dedicated to the instruction and edification of the general public," and "as a consequence of these changes, museums were regarded by the end of the century as major vehicles for the fulfilment of the States' new educative and moral role in relation to the popula-

²² Murray 1904. pp260-262.

tion as a whole."²³

In reality museums in this period were primarily perceived by the general public as centres of scholarship and connoisseurship, limited in their general appeal. Their educative incentives were still weighted in favour of the educated and knowledgable sectors of society. The Public Museum had been called into service as a means of contributing to the adjustment of man to a changing world, but as yet the thing and its shape and service were hardly delineated.²⁴

One of the reasons I believe that may have contributed to this was the way in which museums were allowed to form under the municipal museum movement. Most municipal museums were formed as a consequence of the Museums Act 1845 and, from 1850, mainly by public library legislation. Most of these municipal museums had been built around existing collections, many of them from the learned societies whose museums became the subject of severe criticism. They rapidly increased in number because for many local authorities they were a tangible example of civic pride and in many cases these objects ensured the continuity of previously owned private collections. The result, however, was often a het-

²³ Lumley(Ed) 1988. p64. see essay by Bennet, 'Museums and the people'.

²⁴ see Flower 1898. pp35-38.

erogeneous collection of great curiosity but little educational value.²⁵

A report on museums published in 1888 in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland contained statements with respect to Scotland, which to some degree would seem to illustrate the contemporary state of British museums in general and reiterates some of the comments made earlier. "...If all the contents of all the local museums were brought together, they would fail to furnish the materials for a systematic archaeology of Scotland...They (the museums) have not made it their business to tell any particular story...and the fragmentary stories they do tell are so incompletely and unsystematically set forth that they are unintelligible to the public."²⁶

Similar sentiments were echoed in the report of the Committee on Provincial Museums by the British Association for the Advancement of Science which was published in the same year 1888. "The practical value of museums as important factors in all adequate systems of education is not yet recognised by the general public. Too many of these institutions have hitherto been but toys and hobbies, and require complete re-organisation. We are not aware

²⁵ Lewis *op.cit.*, p6. Similar sentiments are echoed by Flower *op.cit.* pp40-42, and Murray *op.cit.* pp259-284.

²⁶ reprinted in Wittlin *op.cit.* p142.

of a single free rate-supported provincial museum in the kingdom which has attained the ideal recommended in this report."²⁷

The ideal that this report talked about was that beyond the preservation and display of specimens, the special aims of such museums were seen firstly as contributing to the scientific knowledge of the country by collecting from its locality and receiving and preserving local collections and specimens of scientific value which it was to offer for public use. The displays used should be those that provided the greatest amount of popular instruction which was consistent with the preservation of the specimens and their accessibility for study, to which other specimens, to demonstrate scientific principles or relationships between the locality and the rest of the world might be added. Even though many critics would increasingly demand comprehensive changes by the museum of its educational objectives and aims the museum profession had during the period under discussion been responsible in implementing many educational initiatives which do indicate that they were aware of the importance of their educative role, especially in relation to schools, and were doing something about it.

Many of these initiatives came about because of

²⁷ Report of the British Association for the Advancement of Science 1888. p124.

the development of the municipal museum movement which gathered moment as a consequence of the introduction of the 1870 (England) and 1872 (Scotland), Education Acts. The municipal era saw many of Britain's great national and provincial collections housed for the first time in new purpose-built homes. Free access was a central concept of the museum as a place of popular learning, a place where the ordinary person child and adult alike would benefit from the educational aspects of the museum and could gain some insight into the history and natural history of places he would never have the opportunity to visit.

In 1883 the Rev. Henry Higgins wrote to the Liverpool School Board on behalf of the museum sub-committee offering to distribute useful duplicate specimens among the various elementary schools to help them establish school museums, and this was the beginning of formal museum education in Britain. If one looks at various articles which appeared in the *Museums Journal* an established publication by the Museum Association, which was formed towards the end of the 1880s, there is a very strong sense of the educational purpose of the museum which pervades them, sometimes to the exclusion of any consideration that museums might also be enjoyable. The recognition of instruction in a museum as school attendance in the Day School Code of 1894 meant that

there was a closer association between educationalists and curators. In 1902 the Director of the Manchester Museum, W.E.Hoyle, in a paper read at the North of England Educational Conference spoke of the use of museums in teaching. He argued that curatorial staff should teach the teachers how to use the museum rather than endeavouring to teach the children direct, he also spoke about the lack of support from the public elementary school teachers in his attempts to organize classes for teachers. He and many others called for closer union between museums and schools. There was also the campaign of Lord Sudeley for the greater recognition of the public utility of museums which commenced in 1910. He was particularly concerned with promoting the appointment of guide lectures in museums, a subject on which he wrote to The Times. His campaign met with some success in the national museums and he was responsible for introducing a debate in the House of Lords on this topic. Eventually some provincial museums would also introduce guide lecturers. In 1913 the British Association for the Advancement of Science, having heard papers from Dr. Joseph Clubb and Mr. A.R. Horwood on the educational use of museums, set up a committee in relation to education. Apart from recommendations for the development of schools work in the museum and through special loan collections to schools, it was also felt that

museums should be developed into research centres, interpretative work should be improved by better labels, the provision of temporary exhibitions, published guides, conducted tours and public lectures should be made and better facilities should be provided for the advanced student, and that the national museums and universities had particular responsibilities for curatorial training. Partly as a result of the committees recommendations, the Education Act of 1918 would permit the local education authorities to grant-aid a museum and school visits for instructional purposes.²⁸

Despite these and various other educational acts and some impressive programmes for reform during this time, the resulting progress, if viewed in the perspective of the time, hardly equalled the influence of tradition that remained decisive in the majority of museums. Throughout the period up to 1914, the museum on the whole remained an accumulation of objects acquired to a great extent in a haphazard manner, very often through donations. Only exceptionally did the manner of presentation merit the term systematic.

There are many reasons that lie behind this but generally speaking it would seem as if the men who recommended museum reforms were not equipped with power to take action commensurate with their pro-

²⁸ Thompson(Ed) 1984. pp30-37.

pounded theories. While schools were gaining in character as public institutions and their efficacy was permanently tested by the achievements of their pupils, in examinations and in relation to professional tasks, so that inadequate results would sooner or later lead to serious scrutiny on the part of the authorities and the public, the Museum, another public institution did not enter within the bounds of immediate reality and on the whole, existed, thrived or degenerated, without being truly subjected to investigation and even without standards of measure for its services being established.²⁹

There was also the legacy left by those who founded the first private collections where as I have mentioned previously those who ran and formed many of these museums asked nobody's advice, where visitors were admitted as a privilege and where gratitude and admiration was the sole requirement of them. This attitude persisted long after the widespread establishment of public museums in the modern sense. These new museums although financed from public funds were very much the creations of their directors, who were the ones who took all the decisions, from what system of display was to be adopted to what material was to be shown and what excluded. Research based upon the requirements of the museum

²⁹ Wittlin *op.cit.* pp176-177.

visitor were altogether foreign to the way in which those in charge of museums thought about and carried out their tasks. These people by and large measured their success by the number of people who visited the museum. Whether their visitors were coming for the first or last time was of no particular consequence to them, to invite public comment of their museums was unthinkable.³⁰

Sir Fredric Kenyon had called for the museum to be planned and arranged so that "the casual visitor may realise their interest; that he may no longer wander wearily through long galleries among objects which he does not understand, but feel at every turn a challenge to his curiosity, accompanied by a means of gratifying it. He should go home with an awakened mind and an enlarged experience - not merely with a headache."³¹ Unfortunately these symptoms of acute malady were to prove extremely persistent.

The Museum and Education: Between the Two Wars.

There was now the realisation among a widening sphere of museum professionals that the museum and its function, its shape and service were hardly delineated and this deficiency had to be rectified

³⁰ Hudson *op.cit.* pp5-8. For a more expansive account of museums and galleries in the late nineteenth century look at Greenwood, T. *Museums and art galleries.* London.1888.

³¹ Kenyon *op.cit.* p12

if the museum was to fulfil its educative role within society.

The situation of the museum after the First World War may be summed up in the following words by J. Rothenstein (1937), who said, "Up until the end of the period brought to a close by the War, the prime energies of those responsible for their direction were devoted to acquisitions. Collecting mania was prevalent ... It is, however, no longer the principal function of a director. A new orientation makes the intelligent use of the art galleries' and the museums' resources even more important than their increase... The problem of distribution is the first problem which we have to face - the distribution, not of course, of the objects themselves, but the diffusion of the influence they wield... Our principal task, in short, is to make the man in the street conscious of his possessions, and to help him to use them."³²

These opinions were supported by the Reports on the Museums and Art Galleries of the British Isles (other than the National Museums) which started from 1928. One report said that "it may be accepted as a fact that the uses and functions of museums and art galleries are not generally appreciated." Among these various reports was that of Sir Henry Miers' (1928). It considered the purpose of these museums

³² The Museums Journal October 1937.

and came to the conclusion that "their chief function is by means of exhibited objects to instruct, and to inspire a desire of knowledge...to stimulate not only a keener appreciation of past history and present activities but also a clearer vision of the potentialities of the future." Furthermore, it was not just provincial museums which were being discussed. From this period forth national museums and galleries would also receive particular attention from museologists and other museum critics. Much of the museum criticism of the preceding period had been directed at municipal museums and they would still be under attack from reformers the national museums and galleries would henceforth begin to play a more significant part in education related museological debate. The Royal Commissioners issued three reports on the National Museums and Galleries during 1928-1930 and these reports found that, compared with the development of other social services and the expenditure on them, the growth of the national museums had been had been severely checked and even with the most prudent of administrations the money that they received by the government was not enough.³³

The key reason behind this was the passive attitude of the State to museums. However as far as

³³ see Thompson (Ed) *op.cit.* pp 38-41 which includes a review of the 1928 Miers Report and reprinted quotations. Also Lewis *op.cit.* pp43-49.

the national museums were concerned, they needed to show a far greater awareness of their visitors. Within the educational objectives they needed to differentiate between the general public and students in their displays and generally extend contact with schools. The Commissioners expressed particular concern at the lack of close formal links between the national and provincial institutions and between the national museums themselves. (Ironically these observations and recommendations would be continuously expressed throughout the remaining century.) The co-operation at national level that these and succeeding reports called for received public recognition in 1930 primarily as a result of discussion between the then new Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, the Board of Education and the Scottish Education Department. In 1931 the Board of Education issued a memorandum on the possibility of increased co-operation between public museums and public educational bodies. This was the first official study that the Board had ever taken in relation to the educational role of the provincial museums.³⁴

In terms of actual practical reform within museums little progress seems to have been made. In practice, reforms which were undertaken, as a rule, concerned details and mostly details of display, yet

³⁴ Lewis *op.cit.* p50.

it has to be noted that there were a few pioneering efforts being undertaken which for all their differing features held out promise for the future. The two main features which marked these pioneer - museums were the educational bent and the functional manner of their displays. Features which were especially prominent in science museums and although these were all rooted in the pre - 1914 era, they only became fully developed after the First World War.

Wittlin said that the contents of these museums suggested an increasing awareness of the role of the Public Museum as an instrument of instruction for the rank and file of the people on problems essential to their epoch. They used their museums as a means of keeping the general public in touch with the bearing of science and industry on their lives. Materials and articles of everyday use were shown to the public in new perspectives, against the background of historical development which had yielded progress amidst adversity. They were aware of the urgent need of their contemporaries to acquaint themselves with human problems, in the collective sense of sociology, and the psychology of the individual. These tendencies marked a new departure, distinct from the majority of museums in the preceding periods, or of the same period but of more traditional character, where the subject matter con-

sisted of either minerals or machinery, or paintings, or pottery and where the role of the objects in human life was shown incidentally, if at all. Their educational value was based not only on their contents which were closely connected with current problems, but also on methods of display which they had adapted to the requirements of the non-scholar. In the Science Museum in London for example, efforts were made to abolish the case alienating the exhibit from the spectator and to create opportunities for visitors to handle and to operate pieces of machinery - to acquaint themselves with what was offered to them by way of experiment and first hand experience. In this museum the selection and presentation of specimens was based on a method of synthesis; objects were integrated into meaningful sequences where the coherence of the sequence of objects could be appreciated.³⁵

Another example of a deliberate message in the format of a museum display was the arrangement of 'natural objects' from the collections of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. These were laid out according to a framework drawn from Paley's 'Natural Theology' so as 'to induce a mental habit of associating the view of natural phenomena with the conviction that they are the media of Divine manifestation and by such association to give proper dignity to every

³⁵ Wittlin *op.cit.* pp177-181.

branch of natural science.³⁶

In critically evaluating this period, it could be said that museum work manifested itself in two ways widely differing from each other: a substantial body of progressive thought and some outstanding pioneering efforts stood out against a mass of half-hearted measures lacking in preciseness of purpose and, a still larger background of stagnancy. The ensuing result was that in its sum-total the museum up to 1939 just as it was in the preceding period did not develop into an institution vital to the community.

Mr G. Brown Goode said in 1888 that "an efficient educational Museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels each illustrated by a well selected specimen." Hudson (1975) said that this view about the museum and how it was to fulfil its educational potential was still, some fifty years later, accepted. The Museum, he said, would be according to this interpretation of its educational function and presentation used as a reference library for specialists. However it proved increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to organise a museum that satisfied both the specialist and the lay visitor. Although numerous reports recognised

³⁶ Lumley *op.cit.* p131. see Morton, Chapter Six, 'Tomorrow's Yesterdays: Science Museums and the Future.' In this chapter Morton briefly reflects upon the development of the science museum.

this and called for reform it did not occur on the comprehensive scale that was required throughout the museum movement. The exclusive categories that many museologists had compartmentalised their exhibits into, and also the way in which it presumed to know and understand the requirements of its audience were no longer applicable, if indeed they ever were. Most people did not, and do not, divide their interests into subject-compartments, however much an educational system encouraged them to do so.³⁷

The lack of any far reaching progressive reform up to this period highlighted one of the inherent dilemmas surrounding 'education'. The prescriptive nature of much museum education did not at this time allow for the fact that 'education' could mean different things to different people, consequently it would mean different things and thus require different objectives to scholars and to the general public. Thus before the museum could decide how well or how badly it was carrying out its educational function it had to ask precisely whose education they were talking about.³⁸ Museums during this period completely failed to do this. This was to be one of the primary concerns of museums after the Second World War.

³⁷ Hudson *op.cit.* pp70-73.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p69.

CHAPTER TWO

The Museum and Education from 1945

Great social, cultural and economic changes have taken place since the mid-twentieth century. These changes can initially be seen as a consequence of the Second World War and the effects that this had on ensuing societal change. In this chapter I will highlight how these changes affected the Museum and how they were reflected in many museological criticisms in relation to the Museum's educational role and purpose. I will also look at the ways in which the cumulative effects of these various changes were, in many instances, completely different from previous era's. How investigations into museum practices and potentials within the last thirty years have been undertaken from new quarters which were never before associated with museums.

The Post-Second World War Era :**Re-evaluation and Re-assessment.**

The second half of the twentieth century was undoubtedly the period when museums established themselves more fully in the general public's consciousness. This was a state of affairs which occurred throughout Europe and America and a greater sense of internationalisation would henceforth

characterise much museum activity. For example, as the War drew to a close, reconstruction of the international museum community commenced and as a result the International Council of Museums (ICOM) was formed.

The world museum scene was changing significantly. New and specialised museums had emerged and there was a conscious attempt by museums to preserve and display a nation's more recent past, or aspects of it, and this increasingly came to characterise a greater proportion of museum activity. Following the War rapid technological change brought a concern not only to preserve and interpret industrial artifacts but also to recreate industrial environments, their impact on communities and the rapidly disappearing processes involved. Thus the day of the museum as a general storehouse of objects was no longer acceptable and indeed could no longer be justified on any level. Consequently, changes were called for at all levels and a new concept of professionalism and with this institutional diversification took place. Museum officials were no longer expected to be expert in a score of sciences. Museum professionals could have an authoritative knowledge of a small group of objects which would enable individuals to interpret their collections more fully and thus convey the underlying principles of their studies to the public

more clearly and comprehensively.³⁹

The cumulative effects of both World Wars upon society forced all public institutions to rebuild, to re-evaluate and re-assess their functions, policies and aims in relation to societal change. Institutions throughout Britain, with a certain sense of urgency, set about re-establishing themselves in the public arena. The educational movement was perhaps more deeply affected by the War than most. There was an eagerness after the War to rebuild the educational system and to use new methods and ideas in doing so and the Museum like many other educational institutions responded to this.

From the late 1940s onwards the museum profession would lay increasing emphasis on the participatory nature of all aspects of the museums' various functions, especially with regard to its educative role. Directly after the War, Glasgow established a museum education service which was to provide a pattern for many which followed. In 1948 the Group For Educational Activities in Museums was formed following a meeting of the Children's Subject Section of the International Council of Museums in London. The formation of such groups can be seen as being part of a new era in the museum movement.⁴⁰

³⁹ Royal Society of Arts *op.cit.* pp100-102.

⁴⁰ Thompson(Ed) *op.cit.* p45.

By 1949, in Glasgow some museums provided a lecture room, film projector, demonstration material, and expert staff; Manchester had classrooms and used teachers who had been seconded from the Educational Authority; Edinburgh Education Authority appointed a Schools Museum Officer who organised visits, film shows, and lectures, and set aside accommodation in a school building adjacent to the Royal Scottish Museum; the Victoria and Albert Museum had expanded its museum services and was staging exhibitions which could be sent on tour around the country. This was adopted by many of the larger provincial museums, like those in Liverpool, which prepared exhibitions for touring to the smaller institutions in the surrounding regions; Leicester and Derby prepared individual exhibits which were readily transportable and covered a wide range of subjects for use in the School Loan Service and which took their place beside films, film strips, and graphic illustrations as Visual Aids. These and similar services provided by the museum demanded adequate and properly trained staffs, and called for substantial financial backing in terms of cost for construction, maintenance, storage, and transport, they also deflected man-power and funds from the more direct and traditional museum responsibilities. Even so for many museologists these new museum activities in relation to education provided the way

forward for the future. The museum movement entered the last half of the twentieth century with new found enthusiasm and a greater sense of purpose. They gradually undertook a review of their policies in light of their responsibilities and potentialities so that they could play a more valuable and conspicuous part in the life of the communities in which they were set.⁴¹

The three decades 1950-1980 have been called the 'didactic period' in the history of museum development not merely in Europe but all over the world. "A movement of evangelical fervour for the recognition of the educational purpose of museums burst forth in the early 1950s and one after another, museums small and large vied with each other in setting up school services."⁴²

The protagonists had a passionate belief in the value of museums and galleries for educational experience. Whether as a structured part of formal education or as an adjunct to an informal process of individual self-improvement. They believed that museum instruction could supplement, even at times replace, the verbal and theoretical approach which dominated most education.

⁴¹ Royal Society of Arts *op.cit.* pp89-100.

⁴² International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship 1982 (1). p213. For a more detailed explanation of this opinion see article by Moore 'Thirty Years of Museum education: some reflections'. pp213-230.

In 1963 the Rosse Report was published. This survey of provincial museums and galleries gave unequivocal support to museum education. The Report thought that it was impossible to over estimate the importance to future generations of teaching children the use and significance of museum objects. They urged those authorities which had not yet developed or assisted museums in this area to develop a schools museum service, and to do so without delay, and especially to provide a loan service in all rural areas.⁴³

However the setting up of these educational services was seen by many outside and within the museum profession as an admission by museums that they had up until then largely failed in their supposed educational role. As Donald Moore states, "If museums and galleries were so full of educational purpose and in their own view so successful in fulfilling it why the clamour for educational services?"⁴⁴

Many critics cited the fact that even with the wide scale introduction of these museum services the capacity of the museum as an aid in education, whether in more formal terms in relation to schools or in its general utilization by the public for

⁴³ Report by Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, 'Survey of Provincial Museums and Galleries' 1963.

⁴⁴ International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship. *op.cit.* p214.

instructive purposes still remained under developed. Comments like those expressed earlier by Rothenstein proved to be overly optimistic. Very little seemed to have changed and more and more museologists began to question why the museum was still being perceived of as having failed in its educational capacity. They looked back towards the Victorian era and claimed many of the museums' deficiencies were a legacy of this period.

The Victorians had placed much emphasis on their museums being useful but as the museum developed after the Victorian era and until the Second World War, there was considerable disagreement as to how this quality of usefulness was to be measured. For some it meant helping people to do their work more effectively and therefore the educative aim of the museum was to condition and direct visitors' thoughts and attitudes to this end. For other educationalists it was providing a more worthy sense of national purpose which would bind the social classes together. Then there were those who were content to simply let the collections speak for themselves, reckoning that the general effect would be beneficial and that people would leave the museum with a greater sense of self-worth than they had when they went in.

Museologists would now begin to cast serious doubt upon these aims. A growing body of opinion

would state that no matter which of these educational directions a museum adopted it would still be defeated in its ultimate aim and declared objective of being seen as a universal educational institution, and a public service used by all the people. The reason being that as long as educational aims continued to be developed and applied as a response to Victorian ideals which, had pedantically, prescribed the very nature, function and purpose of education, the museum would remain under-developed and under-used by the public. Thus in accepting, then adopting and implementing the Victorian concept of education into its practices, museums had until this time refused to recognise that the world had profoundly changed within the last fifty or so years, and the ethos of the Victorian era could no longer be applied to a post-industrialised and post-war modern generation.

Many developments were taking place, for example new approaches had been adopted within schools and other educational institutions in response to rapid social, cultural, economic, political and environmental change, and technological developments. In addition, notions not only of education but of what the public should expect from its educational services were very different from what they once were. Changing patterns of employment and leisure, the expansion and restructuring of the

schools curriculum, the increasing influence of television, films and the media, were rapidly redefining the concept of education.⁴⁵

In order to fulfil its educational duty the museum of the future, it was recognised, had to discharge its functions properly. It had to decide upon the type of user that it wanted to attract, and frame its programme and performance accordingly. One of the notable defects of museums in Britain and throughout Europe had been the indifference they had shown to catering for the needs of its visitors. With few exceptions, they were content to be passive providers of educational instruction, although following the First World War the more advanced of them had adopted a policy of active education, which they accepted meant attractive education. This meant the selection of suitable themes and planned presentation to the public and acknowledging the greater responsibility they had in relation to the presentation of their artifacts, merely arranging them in a series of good typical specimens and allowing onlookers to apply them to their own pet theories was not enough. In fact many thought that if the museum continued to do this, it would be failing in its educative role towards society as a whole.

The museums' response to these changes and the implications that these have brought about continue

⁴⁵ Ambrose 1988. p39.

to be as diverse as the problems that they had posed, and continue to pose. Solutions are still being sought within the museum and education debate. This debate, because of the increasingly visible profile of museums, has expanded and diversified.

J.C.Robinson said in 1857, "in almost every country museums are too much surrounded by a sort of exclusive repellent atmosphere. People visit them with the feeling of being admitted on sufferance; the very want of sympathy with ignorance of the general public, shown in the absence of any provision for their special instruction, being construed as a direct intimation that such establishments are not intended for them, and that they are, on the contrary to be regarded as costly, foundations for the abstract encouragement of knowledge, meant only for the use and benefit of a favoured few."⁴⁶ And it would seem, if we looked at the majority of current museological criticism, that nothing has really changed. That museums are still "places to which to pay holiday visits, when relaxation and the pleasurable influence of curious novelties will be more thought about than any definite instruction the objects may be capable of conveying."⁴⁷

Within a large body of criticism we can identify the pervasive influence of many of the social

⁴⁶ Robinson 1857. p7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p8.

sciences, especially sociology, and see what a marked effect they have had upon the educational debate. There are various reasons I would suggest that these types of criticism have obtained such increasing visibility within museological discourses. They have come about partly because even with the acceptance by the museum movement of the need to change its educative role in relation to the wants and requirements of all sections of the community negative perceptions about them continue. Especially with regard to the national museums and galleries. Also, even though free access does not inevitably mean that museums are not valued, it is nevertheless the case that Britain invested the capital and inspiration in creating the new museums of the nineteenth century, yet, perhaps partly because they were free their qualities were never widely enough valued and by the 1960s many national museums and galleries ran down.

We can see this if we look at the comments made by Sir Frank Francis the then president of the Museums Association. In 1966, he said, "...How dead is a museum? 'Musty', 'old-fashioned', 'moth-eaten' are all adjectives with which we are familiar and which we expect to find in almost any journalistic passage in which the word 'museum' occurs."⁴⁸

From this period onwards we have witnessed a

⁴⁸ reprinted in Cossons 1984. p1.

growing questioning of established norms and standards brought about once more by rapid social change. The museum has not been slow in responding to these changes and the period between 1965-1974 represents the first important period in the development of museums in Britain in the post war era. Not only did the number of new museums increase rapidly but new types of museum appeared and existing museums became increasingly aware of their need to reflect and incorporate some aspects of these new social and cultural conditions in their educational objectives.

This expressed itself in a number of ways, including the increase in the number of appointments to posts concerned with the public face of museums, particularly educationalists and designers; a wish to know more about museum visitors and their attitudes through visitor surveys; an increasing involvement with the natural and human heritage outside the museum; greater activity at community level, particularly under the Government's Urban Aid Programme for the declining industrial cities and to a lesser extent with minority groups.⁴⁹

Expansion and diversification brought with it the need for new skills and the development of old ones, for improved standards among museum staff and

⁴⁹ see articles written by Thompson, *The Museums Journal*. 71(4), pp 161-163. Also, 79(4), pp188-190.

for a better understanding of the purpose of museums and their role in society. The development of university-based curatorial training, foreshadowed in more than one report of the 1920s, came to fruition in the courses started at Leicester University (1966) and Manchester (1971).

These developments would play a significant part in shaping the nature of modern museological criticism. Many modern museological discourses have been constructed around certain criteria which question the neutrality of society and the objects that it produces. Institutions which purport to aid the process of knowledge have been analyzed, and the knowledge that they offer for public consumption vigorously questioned. By introducing and interpreting the concepts put forward by the social sciences, various critiques examine the assumptions that lie behind the museums' valorization of certain material objects which it has ranked above all others that constitute the physical world. The museum is no longer seen as the bias-free institution that it was until the Second World War, concerned with objectivity and the production of a single authoritative narrative for public enlightenment and instruction. Museums are now being seen as the centres of production and manufacture of social and cultural meaning.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Pearce (Ed) 1989. pp1-10.

UNESCO in the 1982 Final Report of its World Conference on Cultural Policies said that "culture springs from the community as a whole and should return to it: neither the production of culture nor the enjoyment of its benefits should be the privilege of elites. Cultural democracy is based on the broadest possible participation by the individual and society in the creation of cultural goods, in decision-making concerning cultural life and in the dissemination and enjoyment of culture."⁵¹

As a consequence, for certain museologists the disinterested nature of many museums, which was assumed during the pre-war era, is now being more vigorously challenged. This, and similar perspectives declare that the material object cannot be separated from its social and cultural influences. Therefore, in relation to the museum, neither can museum education be regarded as 'value free' and disinterested.⁵²

These critiques still see the museum as a didactic institution, presuming that it can still prescribe and impart the principles of taste, and know-

⁵¹ Reprinted in Thompson(Ed) *op.cit.* p20. To get a clearer understanding of UNESCO's modern cultural policies in the early 1980s, see UNESCO 1982. World Conference on Cultural Policies, Final Report '*Cultural industries: A challenge for the Future of Culture*'.

⁵² Pearce(Ed) *op.cit.* p 119-24. see Chapter 11. Jenkins, 'The collection of material objects and their interpretation'. Also see essay by Jerzy Swiecimski 'Truths and Untruths in Museum Exhibitions', in Uzzel 1989. Volume 1. pp203-212.

ledge through particular exemplars to its visitors, without questioning the very basis upon which its choices and decisions were, and are still being made. In order that it may rectify this many museologists have stated that the museum must accept the vast social and cultural implications that the material object in its care represents and convey this to all its' audiences. It must encourage, through the various means at its disposal, the visitor to comprehend what lies beyond the formal qualities of the object. They want the museum to be more accountable to its public, to incorporate their various life experiences into the museums educational services and displays.⁵³

In 1949 Sir John Forsdyke, the Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum talked of the "material document as the proper or primary responsibility of museums," and that "the first duty of a museum is to preserve realities, that is to say, to demonstrate the truth of things, so far as the truth depends upon the material evidence."⁵⁴

I doubt whether anyone today would question the basic premise of this statement, but there will be those who would question the concept of truth as applied in Sir James' observation - whose truth? For example in many of discourses questions are

⁵³ Vergo *op.cit.* pp1-5.

⁵⁴ Royal Society of Arts *op.cit.* p2.

being asked by the so called minorities, women, ethnic and handicapped groups who challenge the educational assumptions implicit in the museum. Gabby Porter's comments reflect many others when she says, "less advantaged, affluent and articulate groups - such as unskilled and casual workers, unemployed people, migrants and travellers are under represented or omitted from social and industrial museums." The reason for this according to the museologist Tony Bennet, who expresses quite popular sentiments, is that the purpose of the museum's educative function is to convey a central message which materialises the power of the ruling class in the interests of promoting a general acceptance of ruling-class cultural authority.⁵⁵

Modern Museological Criticism: Perennial Problems - New Solutions.

To briefly summarise the present situation surrounding the Museum and education, we can say that from the post-second world war era onwards we witnessed the rapid development of museum educational services in Britain. Educational departments

⁵⁵ Lumley *op.cit.* p102. see essay by Porter 'Putting your house in order: representations of women and domestic life'. Also p64. see essay by Bennet 'Museums and the People'. With regard to the inclusion of ethnic minority interests in museums and galleries see *Museums Journal* September 1990. pp23-25, and October 1990. pp20-21.

were set up in many more museums. These departments have, increasingly, been established separately from the other services that the museum provides, such as curation and conservation. Although some form of educational service had always been provided by the majority of museums, the post-war period has seen the growing specialisation of tasks within the provision of these educational services. Consequently museums now provide a greater variety of educational interpretational material for their visitors. These educational services aim to reflect the differing requirements of museum visitors, requirements which have significantly changed from the pre-war era.

However, even though educational departments are now a major feature of most museums, there are museum critics who still challenge certain concepts which they consider to be implicit within the provision of museum education. In short, they believe that whilst the museum claims to be an institution for the people, certain elitist assumptions still exist which alienate sectors of the public. Thus, the museums educational services, by-in-large, still do not adequately meet and reflect current visitor needs. A growing proportion of museological thinking stresses the importance of looking at the social, cultural and economic histories that lie behind the material object and deciphering the pedagogy that is implied in their re-presentation in the museum.

This is at present the most dominant type of criticism that is applied to the museums' educational practices. Criticisms which challenge not only the notions of education implicit within the museum but the foundations upon which this is based, more specifically the concept of connoisseurship. As the museologist Neil Cossons has said, "It all began with those cabinets of curiosities assembled by the people whose wealth, learning, taste and leisure allowed them to indulge in such pursuits. These early and now sometimes great collections bore a number of fruits of which connoisseurship, a less than arcane but more than academic form of scholarship, was the most important. It is still the lifeblood of every true museum. Paradoxically it is the connoisseurship of the curator, dependent as it is upon a carefully cultivated form of self-indulgence, that is most under threat in the museums of the 1980s."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Cossons *op.cit.* p2.

Chapter Three

Art Related Museological Criticisms

In this chapter I will try to evaluate certain museological criticisms and the implications that they have for the educational functions and practices of the museums and galleries of art.

Notions of Art, The Nature Of Art Education And Their Effect And Association With The Art Museum
c1840s - 1960s

The traditional concept of education is represented by the word Humanism, an ideal which is embodied in the history of Western Education. Education was thus designed for wholeness: for the uniform development of the mind and the body, of manners and accomplishments, of all those faculties that together would make the student a good and useful member of a peaceful and progressive society. The Humanist approach towards art and education stressed that any form of education began and ended with people, not with products or performances. In this respect art was seen not so much as a product but as a process, a vital instrument in the education of feelings. The moral function of art itself was to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that kept the eye from seeing, tear away the veils

due to want and custom, and to perfect the power to perceive.

Under the impact of the Industrial Revolution such beliefs would decline in importance and lose their pre-eminent position in shaping the educational ideal, specifically in relation to the instigation of the formal education system. Industrialisation resulted in the establishment of a more pronounced and institutionalised concept of the division of labour which affected every facet of society.

The 'innate' virtues of a Humanist education were replaced by a more pragmatic sense of the purposes of education. Utilitarian objectives would now redefine the very nature and social purpose of education especially in relation to the arts. The art debate would be shaped by the new middle class. It is hardly ever possible to assign definite dates to changes of taste. All that can be said here is that the standards that prevailed among collectors during the eighteenth century were still applicable in the 1820s; and that during the 1830s a very marked change took place this had much to do with the Reform Bill of 1832 which was seen as a charter which recognised the newly-powerful middle class, and heralded a new set of social conditions, quite different from those which had prevailed during most of the eighteenth century. Money and patronage had

for some time already been passing out of the exclusive control of the old oligarchy, and the Reform Bill could be seen as the official recognition of that trend. It was, among many other things the signal for the arts to enter into servitude under a new set of masters. Throughout the eighteenth century they had been in the service of the aristocracy, now their masters were men without the familiar background of European and classical traditions and with quite different requirements.⁵⁷

As has been previously mentioned the Victorians placed double emphasis on artistic and moral improvement - the second being expected to follow as a matter of course from the first. These sentiments were indicative of mid-nineteenth century liberal thought which believed that by raising the aesthetic standard of the people, preferably by State or public enterprise, you would automatically raise the ethical standard. This was an article of faith held by philanthropists, reformers, educationalists and social workers with varying degrees of conviction. Yet coinciding with this belief there was also the widely held conviction that an improved aesthetic standard would earn improved commercial dividends.

This can be seen if we look at what John Ruskin said in 1858 in a speech delivered at the Cambridge School of Art. "I suppose the persons interested in

⁵⁷ Steegman 1970. pp10-11.

establishing a School of Art for workmen may in the main be divided into two classes, namely, first, those who chiefly desire to make the men themselves happier, wiser, and better; and secondly, those who desire to enable them to produce better and more valuable work. These two objects may, of course, be kept both in view at the same time; nevertheless, there is a wide difference in the spirit with which we shall approach our task, according to the motive of these two which weighs most with us - a difference great enough to divide, as I have said, the promoters of any such scheme into two distinct classes; one philanthropic in the gist of its aim, and the other commercial...one desiring the workman to be better informed chiefly for his own sake, and the other chiefly that he may be enabled to produce for us commodities precious in themselves, and which shall successfully compete with those of other countries."⁵⁰

These two groups of opinion would dominate the art education debate, their different objectives would directly influence the nature of art instruction in Britain for the next century and a half. They would be the main protagonists involved in the controversy surrounding the utility or otherwise of the arts namely whether the Fine Arts should be considered as possessing utility in addition to aes-

⁵⁰ Ruskin 1858. pp405-406.

thetic beauty and spiritual value. Common to both schools of thought was how to elevate the aesthetic standards of the people. The way in which this was to be done was vastly different according to which school of thought you belonged. The differing opinions of both schools would bring into question the very nature of art and what it meant to be an artist. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards it was to be those who supported improved aesthetic standards based on utilitarian principles because they would earn commercial dividends who would most influence the course of art instruction in education. We can see this more clearly if we look at the formation of the Government Schools of Design.⁵⁹

Up until 1837 the only government funds allocated to art education went to the Royal Military Academy at Woolich and the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, a curious circumstance which can be explained by the high strategic value attached to the drawing of military installations and topography in the pre-photographic era. This state of affairs was to be brought to an end by the foundation of the first Government School of Design. In July 1836 Parliament agreed to give a grant of £1600 toward the setting up of a National School of Design. William Bell Scott ascribed the Government's action in founding the School of Design to its fear "that

⁵⁹ Ashwin *op.cit* pp26-35.

our want of taste would countervail the advantages of our machinery and the excellence of our materials."⁶⁰

However, the council formed to decide the actual purpose of the School of Design in 1836-37 was unable to decide upon what exactly this purpose was. The only unanimous conclusion it came to was that while the School's function was to educate in art, it was absolutely necessary that the School should avoid rearing artists. This decision caused a storm, a contributing factor being confusion between a school of design and a school of art. Those who had hoped that the Government School was going to teach such things as drawing, perspective, colour and modelling to promising art students were disappointed. The Board of Trade even provided a table of rules for the School, one of which said that no one intending to follow any of the Fine arts professionally was admissible as a student; and another that the drawing of the human figure was forbidden.⁶¹

The Report of the Select Committee on Arts and Manufactures published in the same year as the School of Design was being set up. This Report which assessed the opinions of many influential artists and people concerned with manufacture from 1835-36 was overwhelmingly concerned with the issue of

⁶⁰ reprinted in Steegman op.cit. p144.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p45

taste. Just who was lacking in taste was not always agreed upon. Most witnesses believed that the lack of taste was in the working classes who made the goods but others believed that it was a lack of taste on the part of the manufactures themselves. Others argued that it was the buyers, and that the middle classes had no taste, but all agreed that taste was the cause of the problem.⁶²

Though it is difficult to define precisely what was meant by the word or what was considered good taste and what bad, taste was at the crux of the primary problem under discussion, namely what had gone wrong with English manufactures. C. R. Cockrell, the architect, summed up the attitude of the witnesses and indeed the examining committee when he testified: "Having resided a good deal abroad I have piqued as an Englishman at seeing the great superiority of foreigners in that respect (the arts). I have visited the manufactories of the country with a view to this question (the relationship of the arts and manufactures) and I have exceedingly lamented the want of instruction I found in those manufactories but I have much more deplored the indifference shown by Government on the subject which materially concerns the honour and character of England as respects arts, which is of paramount commercial and national importance in a manufacturing country,

⁶² Saunders King *op.cit.* p27.

where the cultivation of taste only is wanting to give us the superiority over the world."⁶³

In order to amend these deficiencies the Committee made many recommendations. What is important about this report and the recommendations made by the School of Design, is that they inadvertently prescribe the very nature and function of art. The Report of the Select Committee says, "it appears to the Committee most desirable, with a view to extend a love, a knowledge of art among the people, that the principles of design should form a portion of any permanent system of national education. Such elementary instruction should be based on an extension of the knowledge of form, by the adoption of a bold style of geometrical and outline drawing."⁶⁴

Thus the principles of good design - as the Victorians and later periods would see it - with its ready application to manufacture and industry would become synonymous with art within the educational curriculum. The principles of art as taught within the schools curriculum were by and large those which had direct application to the production of manufactured goods based on established design principles. Thus what was in good taste for the majority of pupils and which became the principle upon which art

⁶³ Report of the Select Committee of Arts and Manufacture 1835-36. ppvi,vii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

education was based, was identified by what was, or was not acceptable in relation to the production of approved manufacturers.

The effects the Report had cannot be underestimated, as Quentin Bell, in his history of the British schools of design, said, "it provided the first rude shock that persuaded the public to set about the business of creating art schools. It led to serious efforts in provincial towns to do something to improve current standards of design."⁶⁵

We can see just how influential mercantilist and utilitarian considerations were in dominating the art education debate if we now look at the criticisms applied to the School of Design a few years after its opening. It was principally called into being to provide an example to others of the high quality of British design which for the most part was used in manufacture and industry.

However there were many who argued that despite the School enterprising manufacturers still, five years after their establishment, had to call in foreign designers out of sheer necessity. The Quarterly Review published a long article on the subject of Design in Industry in 1844. This article emphasised the point that it was in design rather than in productivity that the average workman was at fault when compared with, for example, the French.

⁶⁵ Bell 1963. p37.

This, said the Quarterly, was because Britain had neglected the cultivation of taste in the artisan, whereas the French designed upon long-settled principles. It heavily criticised the Government Schools of Design because if one was to compare the productions of France and Germany with Britain, it could be found that they concentrated on producing staples of taste, while Britain was merely concerned with the quantity of its production irrespective of the levels of their craftsmanship. Punch magazine in the following year made similar criticisms. They quoted Pugin who said, "I do not use too strong language when I say that the School on its present system is worse than useless, for it diffuses bad and paltry taste."⁶⁶

The argument exemplified by the articles in the Quarterly and Punch was based on the premise that good taste could be taught to people in whom it was neither a natural gift, nor a racial characteristic, nor an inherited and still active tradition. This belief was not widely held before the emergence of nineteenth century Liberal democracy. These ideas and beliefs would have a direct influence on the formation in 1849 of the Department of Practical Art. It was ruled by one official, Henry Cole. He was responsible for setting up a national system of art education during the periods 1853-73. A period

⁶⁶ reprinted in Steegman *op.cit.*, see pp147-149.

which saw the rapid increase of art institutions in Britain including the establishment of the first training school of art masters, the first government art examinations and teacher certificates and the first art master's association. The proposed objectives of the Department were general elementary education in art as a branch of national education, among all classes of the community, with a view to laying the foundation for correct judgement in both consumer and producer of manufactures.⁶⁷

The First Report of the Department of Practical Art in 1853 was classed under three divisions: General Elementary Instruction in Art, which they saw as a branch of national education among all classes of the community, with the view of laying the foundation for the correct judgement, both in the consumer and the producer of manufactures; Advanced Instruction in Art, with a view to its special cultivation; and finally, The Application to the Principles of Technical Art to the Improvement of Manufactures, by which, primarily through the establishment of museums, all classes might be encouraged to investigate those common principles of taste, which may be traced in the works of excellence of all ages.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* pp150-155.

⁶⁸ First Report of the Department of Practical Art. H.C. 1852-53(1615) LIV, p30. IUP series Design 4 p286.

In the 1864 Report of the Select Committee on the Schools of Art, the opinions of a wide variety of those connected with the arts was taken. When a Mr Bruce was asked whether he considered the union of elementary and advanced instruction essential in influencing the taste and knowledge of the manufactures of Britain he replied, "I think to begin by taking a hard-fisted artisan and teaching him is a costly operation. It has been proved to be a very costly operation, and bearing little results; and that, unless you begin with the child and teach him the A B C of drawing, you have little chance of establishing any permanent system of art instruction in this country."⁶⁹

Bruce was just one of many who called for elementary instruction in drawing and designing for the young, in order to elevate the standard of textiles and manufactured objects, and the instruction, amusement and general education of the working classes in order to improve their minds and thus, as what seemed a natural consequence, to improve their morals.

The Department of Practical Art was to merge with the Science and Art Department and until its' dissolution in 1889, the Science and Art Department effectively controlled the curriculum of the art

⁶⁹ Report of the Select Committee on the Schools of Art 1864. Minutes of evidence qq4313-4316.

colleges and, until 1898 the teaching of art in the public elementary education had in fact been to provide a foundation upon which more advanced studies could be based.

Justified on utilitarian and pragmatic grounds rather than as a means of self-expression, art education for most children consisted of little more than stereotyped exercises in copying from rather uninspiring models. The study of art, like all the other subjects within the school curriculum was taught and studied in a very desultory fashion. Even though mass education had come about because of dramatic social, cultural and economic developments, it was implemented in a manner that left it largely isolated from the whole complexity of issues brought about by these developments, which included the realms of artistic and scientific creation and their implications.

By the end of the nineteenth century educational reformers were speaking out against the deadly mechanical nature of the elementary art curriculum. Ebenezer Cooke put the problem succinctly when he wrote about an elementary art course in South Kensington: "originally intended to teach adults design (not quite successfully), when children are to be taught drawing, it shows no sign of adaptation, but gives the course and copies used for other ages and purposes. It was made for the man, and did not

suit - it will do for the child unaltered."⁷⁰

During the nineteenth century art education was dominated by practices originally devised for post-school education, and thus, for successive generations of students this type of art education would be the most direct contact that they would have with art within the state system. If we look at the 1926 Report of the Consultative Committee of the Board of Education entitled, 'The Education of the Adolescent' (The Hadow Report), Cooke's criticisms seem to have passed by unnoticed. The main section devoted to art education is indexed and subtitled 'Drawing and Applied Art' and it says, "some practical skill in drawing forms a valuable and indeed an indispensable adjunct to the study of various branches of the curriculum, such as woodwork and metalwork, elementary geometry, elementary science, particularly nature study, biology and mechanics, geography and history. In such subjects, drawing is of great value, not only as a means of recording what is seen and in so doing strengthening the pupils powers of accurate observation of detail but also as a means of training the pupil to appreciate the significance of diagrams, pictures, maps and plans in the text-books and works of reference which he uses for the

⁷⁰ Journal of Education 1885. p464. see Cooke 'Our art teaching and child nature'.

various branches of the curriculum."⁷¹

These recommendations by the Committee also show that art education was now not only made subservient to the demands of industry and commerce, but it was also being defined in relation to the constraints now being imposed upon it by the other subjects of the curriculum which were recognised as having the greater academic priority. The Spens Report of 1938 observed the pernicious effect of examinations on the secondary curriculum, and the tendency to neglect art, craft and music because of their low factual content. It repeated the sentiments of earlier reports when it stated that the curriculum should be thought of in terms of activity and experience rather than knowledge to be acquired and facts stored.⁷²

Even with the development of child-centred education in the 1940s which led to fundamental reforms in the teaching of more subjects, the position of art education within the curriculum continued to be undervalued and neglected. In 1959 the Central Advisory Councils' Report, '15 - 18' was published (see The Crowther Report). It described the congestion which took place in the curriculum of older secondary school children, and the unfortunate

⁷¹ The Education of the Adolescent (The Hadow Report) 1926. p227.

⁷² Secondary Education (The Spens Report) 1938. p152.

consequence that practical and aesthetic subjects were dropped in favour of more traditional academic subjects. Subjects such as the arts it claimed "are not flowers, but the roots of education."⁷³ Prophetically, the Report warned against the tendency for intellectual studies to monopolise the secondary curriculum and recommended practical activities as a valuable antidote. "It is the task of some importance to make this other tradition of artistic or creative education (historically a matter of professional technical training) as much a respectable part of the general education system as the largely analytical traditions of the school."⁷⁴

Although there were changes within the art syllabus during the periods under discussion, art remained segregated from the rest of the curriculum and subsequently for the majority of students under the ages of 15 - 16 years, it played no significant part in their formal education. For the most part, advanced studies in art could only be obtained by a student going on to study at either an art school, a further education college, polytechnic or university once they had finished their secondary education and had passed the appropriate number of examinations. In Scotland, a survey of school leavers taken in

⁷³ The Central Advisory Council's Report 15 to 18 (The Crowther Report) 1959. para 325.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* para 570.

1951 showed that 87% of the employed population aged twenty to twenty-four had left school at fifteen or younger. A mere 5% had left aged seventeen to nineteen.⁷⁵ Similar statistics apply to the rest of Great Britain, and the figures would remain relatively constant during the next decade.

If we look at the various institutions which provided an advanced art education, we see that they received many of the same criticisms which were made about the nature of art education in the elementary and secondary school curriculum. The Summerson Report of 1964 was commissioned by the Minister of Education and its purpose was to review Britain's art schools and colleges and also the instituted Diploma in Art and Design. Two of the most important criticisms that the report expressed were the lack of emphasis that schools and colleges gave to the study of original works - it was disappointed to find how few of them made use of local resources, such as museums and galleries - and perhaps most importantly how the majority of art courses showed a lack of serious interest in the social relations of the arts, either in the historical or contemporary sense.⁷⁶

These and similar other developments in art

⁷⁵ Smout 1986. p228.

⁷⁶ First Report of the National Council for Diplomas in Art and Design (The Summerson Report) 1964. para 50-51.

education would have far reaching ramifications upon the museums and galleries of art in relation to their educative practices, and they would also directly influence many arts related museological criticisms. Such criticisms, I will argue, can be seen as criticisms of the British educational system as a whole.

The museum had primarily come into being to serve as an adjunct of formal educational requirements. Thus many museological criticisms are in effect criticisms of, and reflections about the nature of education itself. Legislative and administrative reform in the nineteenth century had transformed museums from semi-private institutions restricted largely to the ruling and professional classes, into major organs of the state, dedicated to the instruction and edification of the general public. As a consequence of these changes museums were regarded by the end of the century as major vehicles for the fulfilment of the State's new educative and moral role in relation to the population as a whole. However, for the first century of formal education, through successive legislation and government policy, the arts were perceived as being wholly separate from the needs of citizenship. They became a separate construct, and a separate industry. The arts were something which belonged to one's elders and betters, something for the well-educated

and the well-to-do. Their appreciation was encircled by educational, social and financial walls, each of which became progressively harder to scale.⁷⁷

There is a bitter irony in this because there were those who truly wished to expand knowledge of the arts to everybody. The Manchester Exhibition of 1857 sprang from the same root as the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851; that is to say educational usefulness. Prince Albert was largely responsible for overseeing both these exhibitions and unlike most educationalists of the time he made a clear distinction between education and instruction. The Prince's line of thought concerning the purpose of the Exhibition is expressed very clearly in a letter from him to Lord Ellesmere where he wrote, "In my opinion, the solution will be found in the usefulness of the undertaking...in the educational direction which may be given to the whole scheme."⁷⁸

It was not enough simply to gratify public curiosity, nor even to provide intellectual entertainment for the connoisseurs. The Exhibition had to serve the instruction of the uneducated in art-history. Prince Albert believed that art education should involve both instruction in art-history and also the opportunity of experiencing works of art

⁷⁷ Pick *op.cit.* p37. Also see Macdonald 1970. pp23-29.

⁷⁸ Reprinted in Steegman *op.cit.* p236. Also see Ames, T. *Prince Albert and Victorian Taste*. London 1967. This gives a good account of Prince Albert's and Victorian ideas about art.

and that these were important factors in general education. It was this kind of instruction combined with first hand experience of the art object that would ultimately produce a more critical taste in the general public, and raise the design in manufacture. Unfortunately the Prince's beliefs were not shared by many other people either in his lifetime or for many decades afterwards. We can see this by remembering once again the discussions about the Government Schools of Design.

As the educational system developed, it did little to acquaint its charges with this section of cultural history and contemporary culture, which became indicative of the very nature of the educative process. If we look at the development of education in Scotland from the introduction of the 1872 Education Act, and see it as being representative of the rest of Britain, we can see how this state of affairs came about.

In 1872 publicly-managed board schools were created. The aim of the board schools was famously summed up by Robert Lowe when he said that it would be absolutely necessary that schools should prevail on their future 'masters' that they learnt their letters.⁷⁹ Secondary schools were then introduced. The typical Scottish secondary school - the burgh

⁷⁹ Humes and Patterson (Ed) 1983. see Chapter Six, Wilson 'A reinterpretation of 'payment by results' in Scotland, 1861-1872'.

school - was, however, tending already to become the preserve of the middle classes with, "tradesmen and shopkeepers at the one end, and professional men and the less wealthy landed proprietors at the other, but having few or no representatives of the lowest or highest classes on their benches."⁸⁰ This had come about because following English thinking, the 1872 Act had not regarded secondary schools as a matter of any priority in the State system.

In Scotland the management of the old burgh schools was transferred to new boards of education, but by the 1870s, the majority of them taught most of their pupils little other than the three R's and were easily converted into new, essentially elementary board schools. There were thirteen burgh schools which did have an extensive interest in an advanced curriculum and these were subsequently designated as 'Higher Class Schools' and were allowed to continue advanced teaching. However, these schools became dependent on expensive school fees, and in practice were scarcely different to the numerous private secondary schools. Sir James Grant said that these schools were no longer national schools open to all classes but select schools for the upper middle classes.⁸¹

In 1903, post-elementary school education was

⁸⁰ Anderson 1983. pp8-9.

⁸¹ Grant 1876. pp507-510.

divided into three streams, effectively narrowed to two by the changes of 1920. In terms of content, the education system believed that anything but the basic curriculum taught in the most traditional way was to be regarded as superfluous in most schools. Education for the vast majority of pupils up to the latter half of the twentieth century, and arguably to the present, centred upon the drilling of the Three R's. These developments within the non-elementary sectors reveal most clearly the true orientation of the late nineteenth and twentieth century education.

The basic philosophy of the early leaders of the Scottish Education Department, and it must be said of those throughout Britain, between 1885 and 1921 was to make available public secondary education to those whom they felt could benefit by it, and to make it appropriate for the further career needs of the pupils, but this admirable aim came to involve two less admirable assumptions. Firstly, in the school system that emerged after 1900, it was taken as axiomatic that pupils could, at the age of eleven or twelve, instantly be classified as academic or non-academic. Secondly, it was assumed that the former would be mainly, but not entirely, middle class, and that the latter would be, and would remain, working class. For those pupils who were classified as being non academic their contact with

art would centre around materials and methods, a process that divorced art from its wider social and cultural contexts.⁸²

From the 1950s onwards many museum critics questioned why it was that the museums of science and technology were educationally so much more progressive than the museums of art and archaeology. Why was it that in the sphere of the phenomena of nature and technology there was little hesitation in presenting matters in clear relation to cause and effect, but where human affairs were concerned, especially in the social aspects of human aspects of human life, the ruling code that was adopted seems to have been moulded by a reluctance to allow problems in the forefront of contemporary life to enter the halls of the Muses? A substantial body of museological criticisms would cite the reasons as being connoisseurally based.

In the nineteenth century the educational duty and the primary function of the museums and galleries of art was to instruct the public in matters of taste, yet they failed to give the public an opportunity to make up its own mind about Taste. But was it their duty to do so ?

Haskell(1976) said that many people felt that it was the function of a museum to instruct rather than to inform, to impose Taste rather than to ques-

⁸² Smout op.cit. pp226-30.

tion its foundations. A museum was not, it was often explained, a library: that on the contrary some people were of the opinion that the establishment of a National Gallery was a formal recognition on the part of the government of the powerful influence which the fine arts were intended by Providence to exercise on mankind. The only way by which a Legislature could render this influence effective was by exempting, as far as possible, the principles of sound taste and genuine art from the caprices and fluctuations of fashion. The selection, therefore of works of art was a question of national importance. Haskell found a vivid indication of this attitude when he highlighted the comments made by John Ruskin in the 1857 committee meeting about the conduct of the National Gallery in London. " 'You have much to do with the education of the working classes in Art. As far as you are able to tell us, what is your experience with regard to their liking and disliking in Art - do comparatively uneducated persons prefer the Art up to the time of Raphael, or down from the time of Raphael - we will take the Bolognese School, or the early Florentine School - which do you think a working man would feel the greatest interest in looking at ?' Ruskin replied: 'I cannot tell you because my working men would not be allowed to look at a Bolognese picture.'"⁸³

⁸³ Haskell 1976 p156.

The prescriptive nature of Ruskin's comments are undoubtedly influenced by the essence of connoisseurship, specifically those of a humanist-connoisseur. Ruskin was just one of many who would shape the nature of art-historical discourses in the nineteenth century and directly influence what was considered to be good or bad art at a specific period in history. Eastlake was another, from the 1830s he became concerned with making connoisseurship a more exacting study than it had hitherto been. The function of the connoisseur as he saw it was to direct his knowledge so that he could not only recognise excellence when he saw it but also discover the nature and principles of that excellence. Descending from the eighteenth-century *cognoscenti* and *dilettanti*, the connoisseurs/art historians of the nineteenth century and thereafter were concerned with establishing for their generation a standard of serious criticism in a field where none existed. These theories were, by in large, developed and perpetuated by the Academies of Art, who in turn had unparalleled influence in dictating the course of art.⁸⁴

As I have mentioned before it is the notion of connoisseurship, the traditional regard of the art historian and curator, which has, especially, in

⁸⁴ Steegman *op.cit.* pp63-69. For a comprehensive history and evaluation of the academies of art during this period see Pevsner, N. *Academies of Art*, Cambridge. 1940.

recent years, come under fierce criticism. Although it has, quite rightly, been stated by many museologists that connoisseurship has played a significant part in shaping many of the Museums ideals and functions. I question the emphasis laid upon this in relation to the museums and galleries of art by many of the newer art historians and museologists. Criticisms accuse the curator of upholding art historical beliefs which are, among other things, elitist, patriarchal and racist. In short, that the museums and galleries of art compound the belief that art is unconnected to the social, cultural, spiritual and intellectual concerns of life. Thus, because of this many people feel excluded from visiting these museums.

Yet if we look at the museums and galleries of art we can see just how closely they were allied to and affected by other factors outside of the museum. For example, during the periods up to the Second World War there was a general reluctance in many art museums in allowing the problems in the forefront of contemporary life to enter into them. However, I would argue that the influence of connoisseurial interests in shaping this situation run secondary to those of the formal educational system. It was, and continues to be, the education system which directly and indirectly perpetuated this state of affairs.

As formal educational progressed the arts

became more and more marginalised within it. There was, and continues to be a popular disregard for the arts which has arisen from a sense of their irrelevance in the educational ideal.⁸⁵ There have even been those who view art as socially disruptive and morally ambivalent, a view enhanced by the damaging features of the art teacher stereotype, where eccentricity of dress and manner and assumed low academic status are commonly prevalent in many peoples minds. Thus connoisseurship and art historical discourses have played little part in the vast majority's perception of art.

The art debate has been further complicated by developments which took place between the 1960s-70s when the greater specialisation of art within the school curriculum led to internal struggles taking place within the art movement between the different schools of art, each of which were vying for supremacy within education. The different schools of Conceptual Art which concentrates on impulse, feeling and ideals, Visual Art which involves the perception of visual form, Graphicacy and Design education, the school of Art and Craft which concentrates on media, materials and technique and finally the school of

⁸⁵ For a comparatively recent evaluation of the role of the arts in education see Report by The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. *The Arts in Schools*. London. 1982. pp 217-237. Also Robinson, K.(Ed). *The Arts and Higher Education*. London. 1982. see Chapter Two, Griffiths entitled 'Pyramids of Excellence'. pp51-68.

Fine Art, factionalised the art debate. People were forced to choose which type of art they wanted to see within the curriculum and this contributed to the lack of cohesion. This prevented any type of unified policy being adopted within the art discipline itself. Art became a battle from within for the struggle between those who favoured the pre-eminence of disciplinary values of craftsmanship against those who stressed the expressive values of art.

Moreover, the debates concerning art and its place and importance within education are more than just discussions about methods and materials. They go much further than this. Utilitarian assumptions about the role of the arts in society and in education have now put the work of artists and the work of art teachers well down the list of social and educational priorities. Art is now committed to fulfilling educational plans rather than ideals. The demands of external examinations and constraints determine the structure of the educational curriculum forcing teachers to make distasteful compromises that often mean relinquishing the very ideals that nourish creative work and lead to the greater understanding of it. Art is now seen as a self-conscious humanistic study, far removed from the humbler if more remunerative vocations of modern society.

This has all had a direct effect on the Museums

and Galleries of Art, not only in the formal educational sense but also in affecting peoples wider perceptions of art and its contribution and place in society. For example, if we examine museum practice in relation to the teaching of science and art taking place up to the 1960s in schools and in higher-education institutions, we can see just how similar their instructional approaches were.

It had become the standard practice for works of art to be shown in isolation, reft apart from their background and in a manner of display which at best emphasised the formal qualities of single exhibits, or either their technical or informative aspects which would appeal to the advanced student but which would not be understood by the less initiated person whose interests were steeped in the everyday reality of life which existed outside the museum.⁸⁸ This practice can be seen in light of the museum interpreting the dictates of education, and how education perceived society's view of art.

We can also see the development of the two basic groups of museological opinion concerning the display and presentation of exhibits in these wider terms. The proponents of the aesthetic exhibition, (who Julian Spalding(1989) now calls the Modern Antiquarians after the revival of traditional Antiquarian methods of display in the 1960s) believed

⁸⁸ Royal Society of the Arts *op.cit.* p88.

that the art object itself was of paramount importance, and understanding was essentially a process of private communion between the audience and the work of art.⁸⁷ Such ideas are firmly rooted within the nineteenth century view of the fine arts, where just being in close proximity of the art object imbued within the audience some kind of educative and humanist knowledge.

The advocates of contextual exhibitions thought that the art object that was to be displayed was of relatively little intrinsic significance and was to be regarded purely as an object of contemplation, where its presence within the exhibition was justified by its importance as a token of a particular age, or culture or as being representative of certain ideas or beliefs. This school of thought directly reflected one tendency in how the history of art was then taught throughout the advanced art curriculum.

The New Art Historical Criticism

From the 1970s onwards there would be calls for the complete re-evaluation of the educational sys-

⁸⁷ Royal Society of The Arts Journal (August) 1989. pp579-580. This is taken from the speech Julian Spalding delivered to the RSA. Though he was talking about the role of art galleries in society, many of his comments are relevant to all museums. Though brief, the article highlights the development of some of the major theories that have effected the gallery and by implication the museum. see pp577-587.

tem. A significant number of people wanted to construct a very different view of the nature and purposes of education. They believed that the traditional system of education had failed to fulfil many of its basic aims, and that its objectives needed to be changed in order that the whole system could become more effective. Some museologists would henceforth express the opinion that in order to be more effective in its educational pursuits the museum had "to connect more directly with the people whose lives and experience they are charged to represent. Connection through the 'fetishised' medium of objects is unsatisfactory and, (as we have seen) leaves enormous gaps and gaping silences... The cultural practice of museums has to become more closely enmeshed in the society which museums are unavoidably situated."^{ee}

A large body of work has been produced which questions and challenges the cultural assumptions of art museums and galleries especially in relation to the national collections, challenging the established ideas of a national gallery of paintings, which as Michael Compton points out in the *Manual of Curatorship* (1984), depends upon the view that there is something distinctive about paintings which separates them from other man-made objects, however

^{ee} Pearce (Ed) *op.cit.* pp 145-146. see Chapter Thirteen, Jenkinson 'Material Culture, Peoples History and Populism'.

fine. It is a view that is implicit in writings upon art from early times although not always by any means absolute.⁸⁹

Svetlana Alpers and Stephan Greenblatt in putting forward new socially orientated art historical discourse sought to "encourage a new community of scholarship among all who explore the way artifacts, institutions and modes of thought give a heightened account of the social cultural and historical situations in which they arise."⁹⁰

Criticisms such as these see the art museum as being wedded to the traditional old master exhibitions which celebrate and document the work of a recognised great artist and which inevitably support traditional canons of taste, support in short the value of tradition itself. This body of literature exemplifies one of the main themes that has emerged from the discourse around post-modernism. In the post-modernist era we have seen a crisis of values and beliefs in which major legitimating narratives that informed and underpinned development in the modernist period have disappeared. Consequently many academic theories have searched for a new political and cultural agenda to replace theories and practices of the past.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Thompson(Ed) *op.cit* p59.

⁹⁰ Rees and Bordello(Ed) 1986. p27.

⁹¹ As an example see Burgin 1986.

Svetlana Alpers says that "the new look in the study of art does not place its emphasis on art and society, but rather the terms in which it is proposed. While previously it was the history of art conceived in terms of the development and achievement of period styles, which was studied in the historical content, to-day it is individual works or groups of works, individual phenomena located at a particular time and place. It is the work of art itself, not a history or sequence of works which she and other art historians see as a piece of history."⁹²

The 'New Art Historians'⁹³ challenge the aesthetic theories and established art historical criticisms which have developed primarily since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which have played a significant role in determining the direction of public taste at the sight of any original work or reproduction. Kenneth Hudson said "if I see wonders which I do not understand, they are no wonders to me...The history must go together; if one is wanting, the other is of little value. It grieved me to think how much I lost for want of a little infor-

⁹² Journal of the American Academy of the Arts and Sciences, Volume 1 1977. p9. see ppi-13 for a more comprehensive account of Alper's views.

⁹³ Title taken from Rees and Bordello 1986. Used here to indicate those Art historians who take account of the social, economic and political role of art in 'contemporary' society. These theories are heavily influenced by the social sciences, feminism, marxism and structuralism.

mation."⁹⁴

'The New Art Historians' want the histories that are represented in the museum to be more clearly expressed and to incorporate the influences upon art made by critics, historians, connoisseurs, and dealers so that the audience is made aware of how they affected the notions of taste. More specifically they want the museum to show the ideological determinants which lie behind the creation of every artefact, and which can be located even in the complex surfaces, the figures, the very colours and brush strokes of the finished work.

Many of the 'New Art Historians' use Historical Materialism as the basis of their approach in putting forward their art historical criticisms. Historical Materialism is itself the basis of Marxist philosophy which its proponents see as a way of understanding and comprehending the world. This philosophy is anxious that we understand the world as manufactured and not as natural. It 'supposedly' makes no assumptions concerning the 'human essence'. Its only interest lies in the practical considerations as they relate to man.

The methodology behind Historical Materialism is, so it claims, governed by empiricism and it understands the phenomenal notion of reality to be worthless and deceptive because it hides the real

⁹⁴ Hudson *op.cit.* p8.

conditions of life under ideological forms. Ideologies themselves have a history which is interdependent upon social forms and production. Historical Materialism must question this and does so by dissecting and unmasking phenomena by subjecting it to empiricism.

Ideology, the form of myth-making which disguises a real process is the key concept in understanding the Marxist concept of art and culture. Marxism states that it is of paramount importance that we relate social and cultural life and work with the economic environment. They believe no man has an autonomous existence and lives in the realm of pure thought. Thus they see man's actions and thoughts as being mediated by the material terms of production.

This 'consciousness by life' is preshaped and conditioned by the external world which recreates already existing patterns of thought and consciousness. These patterns are the product of class ideologies which highlight man's role within the means of production. Thus the system of production, capitalism, has control not just over the means of production but also the means of mental production through ideology. Such a system provides no room for human agency, for creative action upon the world and consciousness. Men make their own history but not in conditions of their choosing because it has already

been shaped by the external environment which permeates all thought and action.

Marxist historians of art have used these various parts of Marx's philosophy to challenge the idea of artistic autonomy by questioning the relationship of art to other deterministic structures of society. They are opposed to the nineteenth century philosophy which claimed that art and society were logically distinct, and that art was in some way the apotheosis of human being. For a long time art history expounded art's autonomy. The constructive and ethical sense of freedom dating back to Antiquity and the Renaissance, the influence of Kantian and Hegelian philosophies are some of the bases of various historical and modern theories which stated and endorsed art and artistic freedom.

These theories, whether they were expressed explicitly or by implication, meant that the artistic process and the process of interpretation and appreciation at various points in art history assumed great importance. Even when critics argued against or proceeded from these basic theories, the introspective and separate nature of art, its meaning, interpretation and appreciation, was left predominantly intact by various formalist and aesthetic allusions to the notion of art and artistic sensibilities.

Such ideas are at variance with those Marxist

art historians, who insist on there being an intimate relationship between art and society. They try to resist the construction of an autonomous art history as they feel any rarification of art is indicative of the bourgeois. They are concerned with the social history of art which is an attempt to show how art functions as both social and ideological imperatives, the belief being that art work imitates or works in social opposition to the milieu from where it came.

In challenging the 'old' art history the Marxist art historians believe that the traditional i.e. the aesthetically and connoisseurally based art history in its persistent celebration of great art and artists plays an important role in the production of cultural values within society. Society has taken for granted that certain objects and individuals are more implicitly worth studying than others and both are the expressions of the special significance and values of high culture. The generation of Antal, Hauser and Klingender used historical materials as their conceptual tool when writing about art history and their work had a significant influence on later art historians.

What I have presented thus far is an unquestioning and straightforward account of how Marxism and Historical Materialism have been viewed and incorporated into art history by Marxist art histor-

ians. However, Historical Materialism for all its value does present problems in the study of art. Klingender said that art responds to economics and it is therefore a determined phenomena and that it was a class ideology in that each class will judge the content of art by which its ideals are embodied.

This statement applies to Marxist art historians as well as anybody. They view art, rightly or wrongly, as the visual personification of class values, or should I say a tableaux from which class values become apparent. They look at the meanings ascribed to all works of art through analyzing their historical conditions of existence in terms of class and ideology.

In a Marxist analysis of art, art is no longer seen as part of the solution but as part of the problem, burdened with all the ideological baggage of a history that is bourgeois, racist and patriarchal. They want to deconstruct the myth that is art. Yet Marxism is an ideology too, an ideology which is as capable of perpetuating myth as any other.

Marxism, the political ideology, seeks egalitarianism in society. Marxist art history seeks to do the same in art. However, no matter how much one is told about what went into the production of a work of art, no matter how much further one's knowledge is expanded with regards to the social, econ-

omic and historical implications governing art and interpretation, one aspect which is central to any discourse about art is left strangely abandoned in a Marxist analysis of art, and this is aesthetics. In locating and deciphering the various meanings in the works of art, these art historians leave the affective aspects of a work untouched. Feelings, moods and aesthetic experience are left stranded or denied altogether. They are ideologically suspect or subjectivist.

The implication in many Marxist writings on art is that the production and appreciation of art is at the mercy of history, but the sensitivity to the object, by both artist and spectator, is not something to take for granted as given. Art history and aesthetics, no matter how constructed, are inextricably intertwined. Pleasure obtained from looking at art is distinguishable and distinct but there cannot always be a rational solution to our appreciation.

However, there are flaws within all criticisms, but irrespective of this, how possible is it for the museum or gallery of art to incorporate and reflect this type of art historical criticism within its functions and practices? In the following chapter I will be trying to address this question.

Chapter Four

Museological Criticisms and Museum Practice with regards to the Museums and Galleries of Art.

If we look at art museums in relation to the developments of the past, not much seems to have changed. The nature of art education taught within the elementary, secondary and advanced curriculum is relatively unchanged from that which came about in the 1950s and 1960s. Negative and elitist views about certain types of art and their cultural connotations still exist. These are supported by an educational system which continues to expound a very distinct and limited view of art, where the art syllabus and examination papers remain undisturbed by the new art history or any other new approaches towards art.

We also have an educational system which has to accept government cuts in the higher education sector and particularly the demand of the University Grants Committee, the University Funding Council and the National Advisory Board, which now require institutions to prioritise disciplines, modes of study and educational establishments and to forecast educational needs within assumed economic patterns of resources and demand.

Therefore, even if art museums were to accept these and other socially and culturally related

criticism, which are at the present time the most dominant type of arts related museological writings, how possible is it for museum education to put the ideas expressed in these criticisms into practice? For example, is it possible for the Museum or the Gallery to rectify social and cultural inequalities whilst they continue to function amidst a growing number of obstacles? I put these and other questions to two of the educational officers working for the National Galleries of Scotland.

On April 8 1991 I was fortunate enough to be able to talk with Lindsey Shaw and Susan Lamb. Lindsey Shaw is the Chief educational officer of the three galleries - which are the National Gallery of Scotland, the National Portrait Gallery and the Gallery of Modern Art. Susan Lamb has special responsibility to work with the particular collections at the National Portrait Gallery and the National Museum Collection.

The following section of the thesis is based upon the discussion that I had with them and it will include:

(1) Their opinions about certain modern museological and art historical criticisms pertaining to the Art Gallery and the Museum in general, and whether or not they as educationalists believe that these criticisms are justified and practicable. The areas of discussion will be;

- The notion of connoisseurship in the museum.
- The museum and exclusivity.
- The influence of language upon the art historical debate, and its effect on the art gallery and art appreciation.
- The presentation of information in the Gallery.
- Concepts of aestheticism and criticism in the art gallery and their implications for gallery education.
- Curatorially based museological criticism.

(2) The ways in which the educationalists' task has changed, and how these educationalists now perceive the museum educators role and carry out their educational tasks within the resources and demands of the institutions that they serve. The areas of discussion in this section will be;

- The changing nature of education and its effect upon the museum and gallery.
- The present day task of being an educationalist in a museum or gallery.
- The growing specialisation of the educators' role.
- The determinants upon educational provision in the museum with regard to community concerns and curatorial constraints.
- An example of what type of exhibition programme this educational department provides in relation to the community that it serves.

(3) Brief comments.

(1)

One of the initial points I put forward, in this part of the discussion, was that certain museological criticisms had expressed great reservations about the traditional concept of connoisseurship, which they saw as being characteristic of the curatorial role. These criticisms felt that connoisseurship had perpetuated the concept of exclusivity on various levels, especially in relation to the collecting of certain established objects which had traditionally been accepted as having greater value than others. Therefore, by implication, the curator and his individual institution had ignored and devalued whole areas of cultural history, expression and knowledge. This situation, for these museum critics, runs contrary to the notion of a democratic system of instruction. I asked them about this and what effects it had, if any, with regard to the educationalists role.

Susan Lamb did not deny that there was exclusivity within the character of collections, because of the nature inherent in the formation of them, but stated that a growing number of education departments were taking on board the fact that they should provide informational services for a wider section of the public, not only for those with a specialist knowledge. They were doing this through their attempts at communicating to people ways in

which they could themselves get the most out of those particular material objects which had traditionally been the preserve of the specialist or connoisseur. Increasingly, educationalists were providing people with a structure for the studying of collections, so that irrespective of who wished to know more about them, they would have a certain criteria that they could easily follow in relation to the understanding of collections. She did feel however that there would always be a specialist nature to museums and galleries.

Lindsey Shaw maintained that curators who had specialist knowledge were becoming increasingly conscious of the nature of their collections and the way in which they had historical and geographical gaps. They were increasingly having to be conscientious about filling those gaps, a problem which had become an evermore difficult thing to resolve now that many countries were becoming concerned with all aspects of their own cultural heritage and were therefore reluctant to give any of it away. Also it had to be recognised that collectors had and will continue to collect what they want, historically in most cases there had been no reason to do otherwise. This was how National and Municipal collections were formed. Collections came about through donations and therefore a patchwork of pockets and specialist preference were inevitable. It was perhaps un-con-

structive therefore to look at individual collections as representing tangible evidence of exclusivity within the museum, which was what these criticisms had implied.

Lindsey Shaw did not necessarily think that the collecting policies of a curator and a museum were indicative of their desire to promote exclusivity. She felt that in relation to galleries exclusivity came through language - that certain words had been attached to objects particularly pictures - where there was the instance that art was universal but was at the same time surrounded by exclusive language.

Although connoisseurship had played a significant part in people's appreciation and understanding of art, both educationalists felt, that it was art history which had a lot of difficult language accrued to it which had increasingly shaped and influenced people's appreciation of art. The appreciation of art now depended upon the use of a particular language.

Lindsey Shaw considered it to be the case that there had been a definite point in Britain's cultural history where language and the visual arts spilt apart in Britain. Language and literature became the dominant cultural expression within art, which was one of the reasons why people felt they had to be able to talk about a picture in order to

feel comfortable that they understood it. She said that if we looked at other countries, in Europe for example, like Italy or France, we would see that people there by and large did not feel like this, they went up to a picture and knew it was wonderful. They reacted to a work of art visually and sensually. In Britain this was just not the case. Such a reaction was regarded as 'airy - fairy'; it was a reaction that was frowned upon.

This was an ironic situation because if we were to go back to the medieval period, Britain was flourishing in images, shapes and design. There were huge cathedrals being built and sculpture and decorative art being created. This changed with the onset of the Reformation. After the Reformation images were destroyed and Britain never truly recovered as an art-producing country that really respected visual arts and visual design. Instead it concentrated on language. From the sixteenth century, language began to take on the role that images had of an extremely flourishing and extremely diverse content of artistic expression. Though there were important artists who made images, for example Holbein, they were part of the Royal Court, and they mostly produced portraits which were icons of the great historical figures. It became very rare for an indigenous artist to be considered great. One had to wait until Turner before Britain considered that it had

produced a great artist. This meant that for almost five centuries there had been, for the vast majority, a form of visual illiteracy taking place and which had ultimately channelled itself into a very dense and sophisticated literacy around language.

Furthermore, she added, the Gallery now not only had to deal with the effects that language had placed upon the appreciation of art, but also with the opinion that people now entertained that art had nothing to do with their lives. A growing number of people had the perception that, generally speaking, art fetched millions of pounds at auction and was therefore too exclusive for them, and so they could not and should not go and see it even if it was to be in an institution that was supposed to belong to them. This was one of the most important things that museums had to address. Educational departments had to therefore think of ways in which they could overcome the reservations of sectors of the public from visiting certain museum collections.

I could not deny that this might be true, but stated, that I did feel that the reluctance of certain sectors of the public to visit museums and galleries could also be attributed to the uncompromising attitudes of some museums and galleries themselves towards the visiting public. Even those people who visited these museums and galleries were often left with only the minimal amount of guidance

which could help them understand the objects better.

With regard to the presentation of information in galleries I felt that in presenting paintings to the viewer in some form of chronological or geographical order demanded that the viewer accepted some form of commonality between the works. Yet within these groupings there were often irregularities which did not relate to the historical values which were implicit within these grouping of these objects. For example, the paintings of the artist El Greco, are often hung among Spanish paintings because he painted in Spain for a long time. However, the fact is he was Greek and his paintings look like Greek paintings of that time. Similarly the same can be said of Gauguin. Even though he was a French painter, his most potent work comes from the time that he spent in the Pacific. His work, I believed, is therefore more relevant to pacific art than it is to continental or French art. Thus, to articulate an artist in terms of a school or artistic period does not really tell the audience enough about an artist or a work of art. Where artistic anomalies do occur the audience, through lack of information, often has to assume for themselves why these occur.

Furthermore, in relation to the concept of language, I drew attention to the fact that, generally speaking, new art criticism had highlighted that

there was an analogy to be made between art and language. That art was a language within itself. Incorporated in a whole body of work from different periods there was a language being communicated and what this criticism had asked was how did we dissect this language and how did we provide a way of doing so that it was intelligible to a wider section of the public.

Thus, many curators and galleries, who had accepted the assumptions of traditional art historical discourses, were by and large only telling people a fragment of the truth. Indeed they had missed the basic point which was that works of art told you more than just about aestheticism and emotion. They actually communicated a whole body of ideas, and, just as criticism could be said to be indicative of its time, so too could a painting. In art galleries, these criticisms had said, this acknowledgement was totally missing. Audiences were completely left unaware that this discourse might have been taking place.

Lindsey Shaw, a trained art historian, did not think that the gallery visitor could truly be able to understand the inconsistencies within art and what these meant without some form of formal back up. Even if galleries were to provide more contextual information of the kind required by some of the newer art historian, what was really needed was for

public to have had, even before they came into the gallery, was an awareness of the whole body of ideas which would lead them to a better understanding of the cultural context of art and the museum. This could only be obtained effectively through extensive reading.

Moreover, she thought that every work of art worked on two levels. There was the level which needed contextual information in order to place that image and understand the complexity of ideas that lay within it, either overtly or covertly. Then there was the second level where art, if it was a good piece, was an object that somebody considered beautiful. On this level it conveyed its main impact or power without all of this contextual analysis. This level, seemed to be something that many art related criticisms had either overlooked or devalued in their arguments.

The most distinctive feature of art was that it has these two existences, and what she judged to be one of the most pressing problems that gallery educators had to address, in relation to the appreciation of art, was that generally speaking people did not have the confidence to take the visual impact or beauty of a painting or sculpture and absorb it and feel comfortable about doing so. Their lack of confidence caused them to worry about whether they were thinking the right thing about it; whether their

initial impression really had been the right one. It made them suspicious of enjoying a work of art, even though it might be considered a very superficial piece.

I agreed that museums and galleries could not be expected to provide contextual information which reflected all the factors which had influenced a work of art, and which reflected all of the interests of their visitors. Nonetheless, I asked, couldn't contextual information influence aesthetic appreciation. If we were to take Modern Art as one example, some artistic styles did, perhaps, contain completely different imagery from anything that an audience might have ever seen before. Yet these styles, within the context of art, mark a distinct break from earlier artistic periods and there have been specific reasons for this. Thus, a visitor might say that they dislike a certain work, but knowing why an artist created the work in the manner that he or she did, they might be able to appreciate that work better.

Susan Lamb agreed, and said that educationalists were trying to address this situation by making available more information to the general public. Thus, if people were drawn to a particular painting because of their reaction to it, adverse or otherwise, they would have some idea about the work so that they could follow up and develop their knowl-

edge.

Lindsey Shaw added, that it was not only the educationalists duty to provide some form of information for their audience, but it was also important that they be very selective in the types of contextual information that they presented in their institutions. In many arts related criticism, which she expressed certain reservations about, many cases art historians - especially ten years ago at least - spoke a lot about the 'what' of a work of art and 'why' it was the way it was, in relation to a particular image or composition. They talked about the way in which an artist had decided upon a composition and allied it to a particular set of ideas so that a figure in a composition had a particular gesture because of the potency of the idea that the gesture might convey.

Even though this may be true in certain instances, it must also be recognised, she maintained, that in most cases all artists worked very physically on a scale that suited them, with a medium and support that suited them, and they were often limited economically by the pigment and the materials that were available. Most importantly artists were limited by what they could do. They often made the decision to change something because they knew that they could do one gesture better than another. They made decisions upon this basis because

an artist, just like anyone else, wants his work to be as good as possible. Thus the educationalist in a gallery not only had to make his or her audience aware of the social and cultural implications of a work of art but also the physical and economic restraints implicit in the making a work of art. These things had also been overlooked in many museological criticisms.

Finally, I asked them their opinions of those - modern museological criticisms - which were directed towards the museums and galleries of art and which were curatorially based - that had criticised the curatorial and educational role in relation to the temporary 'block buster' exhibition, where the exhibition focused upon a readily identifiable artist.

Many critics, not only those working within the museum field, have increasingly questioned the foundations behind the presentation of facts in these exhibitions. They believe that these exhibitions just reinforced commonly held stereotypes and assumptions about an artist or an artistic period. They questioned why curators and educational departments were more and more frequently allowing this to happen. In many instances they condemned both of them for not challenging established ideas, some of which they believed were in themselves manufactured and distortions of the truth.

Lindsey Shaw and Susan Lamb did not deny that

these criticism could be applied to certain temporary exhibitions, but maintained that even within this framework it was possible for art to be challenging in a way that did not compromise either the curatorial or the educational role.

Lindsey Shaw cited the 1990, National Gallery of Scotland exhibition on Cezanne and Poussin, which had brought together two major artists. Their work was brought together in away that showed that there were connections to be made between them. In terms of content, these connections were presented with a degree of density that illustrated this idea in an intelligent way. Moreover neither did the exhibition say that one style evolved from another, or led to another, or that one was a natural progression form the other. Instead it concentrated on the fact that these groups of works had in common certain aspirations to Classicism which manifested themselves very differently, but they nevertheless had certain common threads which were instructive in terms of both artists. Thus, this exhibition of two big name artists challenged all kinds of categories into which they had previously been fitted. So, she concluded, the curator and the educationalist of a gallery could still issue challenges by using well known artists or ideas, about which the public had a certain amount of knowledge, making them feel secure but also forcing them to ask new questions.

(2)

Lindsey Shaw and Susan Lamb were asked what changes they felt had taken place within museum education in the last thirty or so years.

Susan Lamb felt that the fundamental difference between thirty years ago and the present time was that the concept of education had dramatically changed. Education was no longer seen as a passive act where people were told what to believe and were given certain facts to learn and regurgitate when the need arose. Gradually the whole education system has recognised the need for students to learn through questioning and through personal investigation, and that it is important that through the various educational systems that they are given the confidence to do this. It has also become important for students to feel that what they are learning has some personal relevance. Education departments in museums and galleries were increasingly trying to reflect and incorporate this into the educational programmes on both informal and formal levels.

Lindsey Shaw thus felt that the task of every educationalist, irrespective of the type of institution that they worked for and the individual history that their institution had inherited, was now basically the same. Essentially, the primary role of the educational officer had become that of a communicator, so that instead of actually researching and

doing original research in objects, like the curator, the educationalist was actually concerned with actually communicating the ideas of that research to the public. The separation of the curatorial and educational role had become more pronounced, and subsequently the educationalist's task had become more specialised and it has become accepted that it requires two different aims.

First of all, he or she had to suitably reflect the values of a curator. An educationalist, in a museum or gallery, had to be appreciative of any reservations that could be expressed between those who were concerned about the object being taken care of in curatorial terms and how this might conflict with those who wanted to use it as a tool of education. The best way for this to be overcome, both educationlists felt, was through liaison, so that both the educationalist and the curator were working towards making the collection as available as possible in relation to their own specific tasks.

There was no point, Susan Lamb said, in having an educational programme which was going to be of detriment to the object in some way: for example, putting an object in a handling collection that was just too fragile or which was not really going to have enough of a tactile or physical interest to somebody who was handling it. Similarly there was no point in a curator being so exclusive about his

objects that the educationalist was never going to have access to them. If one did not have this type of liaison the separation could be very inhibiting.

Secondly, the educationalist had to respond to the community independently of the curator. Lindsey Shaw said that the task of being an educator within a museum and a gallery should be one where educationalists look at the nature of their collections and the nature of the activities that surround them and that are perpetuated by their institutions and then to try and think about all the potential that these might have. They should not just look at what was out on display, but at what was held in the reserves, and most importantly they must find out about the community that they serve and see how best the museum or gallery can productively be of use to them and interact with them.

Susan Lamb explained that this was not as simple an undertaking for an educational department as it may sound, especially with National Institutions where educational programmes had to be reflective of the people within the large geographical areas that they covered, and where the department may never come into contact with the vast majority of the public that it served. In England, in her considered opinion, catering for an assorted and expansive public with regards to the provision of educational programmes, exhibitions and activities

was perhaps easier than in other parts of Britain. England was so culturally diverse that museums could afford to be both metropolitan and international in the references that they used. A situation which was helped by the fact that the National institutions also had a big network of provincial galleries and museums, which had been created who have proven to be conscientious in serving their local communities thus taking much of the pressure away from the National Institutions.

The situation in Scotland and Ireland was different. The National Museums and Galleries serviced a much bigger geographical area and community and similar collections could not be found within other institutions. There was also the fact that many people did not visit the National Collections because they were just too distant for them to visit. Many collections therefore seemed to them to be irrelevant to their daily lives. Nonetheless these institutions had in their possession, these peoples' national collection and the education department should try to make provision for them.

Both educationalists recognised that educational departments had to produce materials which reflected the wide ranging nature of education in museums and galleries. Consequently, they felt that people should not prescribe one definitive concept of education upon the whole museum field, because it

was so varied. Neither should there be one definitive notion of education within an individual museum because the nature of the audience was becoming increasingly more varied.

In the closing stages of this section of the discussion questions were asked about the type of information that the educational department provided and what exactly it was looking to achieve in relation to the audiences that it served. With the qualifier that it varied enormously from exhibition to exhibition, as each exhibition had different potential, they talked about the four year exhibition on 'The Stuarts' which was currently being presented at the National Portrait Gallery and the types of educational programmes that they had devised for this.

One of the primary concerns that the department had when the exhibition was set up was that even with the presentation of portraits and possessions that were being exhibited, there was no real sense of who the Stuarts actually were and why they were so important, and so the educational departments felt that their primary task was to make the people who went to the exhibition aware of the range of history that this dynasty covered. The exhibition deals with portraits of the Stuarts and their personal possessions. This was something that the department wanted to stress because they believed that this would be a very accessible way in which to look

at the whole history of the Stuarts, which ordinarily may have appeared, certainly in history books they felt, quite academic and quite difficult.

As a solution to this, they have produced an interactive video where people were able, by use of a touch screen video, to ask questions of and investigate into a variety of very simple themes. These are very popular themes - 'Love and Marriage', 'Death and the Stuarts', 'Fact and Fiction', focusing on the real truth behind them all - which it is hoped will prove to be a very accessible way into the whole exhibition. They concern things which would not ordinarily be found out about the Stuarts and they contain information which would not necessarily be put on to a label. The themes point to certain people whose portraits are in the exhibition or certain objects, and they give the public the background to them whilst placing them in some kind of context. The interactive video was specifically set up with the main aim of providing the gallery audience with a taster to the main exhibition itself.

The department also undertook quite an intensive period of study activity with primary schools who came into the exhibition. As a result, the department has produced a teaching pack which teachers could use with primary school children which resources the exhibition and which provides them

with various ways in which the exhibition could be used so as to make it both fun and productive for the children. The education officers also organised a series of lunch time lectures when the exhibition first opened were all the lectures on the particular site of the National Gallery were about the exhibition. The department has also been looking at the possibility of resourcing the exhibition for senior schools, but at the moment it was proving difficult to make the exhibition relevant to the current syllabus.

Nonetheless the department was striving to include other sectors of the collection in the new schools curriculum which emphasises the use of resources as an integral part of study. They were at present working with teachers and other educational advisors on trying to establish a new basis and resources which were directly relevant to the curriculum. They hope to open out new subject areas of study for the collections and produce resources for English, history and the sciences which had ordinarily been sidelined and get away from the tradition that the gallery could only be of use in the study of art and design.

Lindsey Shaw concluded by saying that she felt that it was good for the educationalist to have certain criteria to meet which were set outside the institution, like those set by the curriculum. She

held the view that it was healthy to have to reconcile what the gallery or museum had in its collections with outside needs that were set up by other social institutions of various sorts. Presently she said she was planning a pack on Art and Design of the syllabus in Scotland which was to be made available to schools so that they could develop vocational courses which were technologically based. This had made her look at the pictures and the collections of the National Galleries in terms of how they functioned as evidence of design concerns rather than on purely aesthetic criteria and at the ways in which technological change had effected the change of materials that artists use and the kind of imagery that they refer to.

For both Lindsey Shaw and Susan Lamb it was vital that in their jobs they remained positively aware of the needs of all sectors of the community, informal or formal. For the educationalist this could only be of benefit to their awareness, and the awareness of educational department, of the resource that they had got in their collections. For them, this meant that a collection was never static and it was not something that had a fixed relevance and meaning. It was instead something that was alive and changing.

(3)

The discussion I had with Lindsey Shaw and

Susan Lamb highlighted and emphasised the difficulties which were implicit in the provision of educational material. How provision of museum education is affected by many things which are often outside of a museum educationalist's control.

For example, the educational department of the National Galleries of Scotland is surprisingly small. There are actually only two full-time and one part-time members of staff in the department. Yet, within the limited human resources that the galleries have, the department must set programmes which not only fully reflect the collections, and the aims of the individual galleries, but also the audiences that these serve. In addition, because these were National institutions, educational materials had to reflect the fact that they had to serve a very distant audience. This means that the department not only makes provision of resources which were relevant to the collection and could be used at a distance, but also caters to the diverse groups that visit the museum, who have in many cases specific requirements with regards to their own instructional objectives on both a formal and informal level.

It has also proved difficult for the department to get successfully represented on all the planning committees of exhibitions because of the internal dynamics of each of the individual institutions.

Subsequently a lot of the work that they produce comes as a result of the fact that not enough consideration had been given to particular levels of information within an exhibition.

Thus this discussion made me realise and re-evaluate my attitudes towards certain museological criticisms; re-address the fact that there were things that intruded upon the Museum and the Gallery, and which directly and indirectly effected what they could and could not do in terms of education. Individual histories, collections, institutional infra-structure and the professionals who work in institutions, all shape the running of museums and galleries and the ethos behind them.

This seems to be a crucial point that has been overlooked in many modern museological criticisms. In relation to these criticisms, another problem that this discussion illustrated was the way that they generalised the features of a museum. Although it has been recognised that there were different types of museum and gallery, criticisms have still not incorporated into their arguments and given due consideration to the other corresponding fact that within these general categories themselves there were major differences, and that to generalise about the nature of museum and galleries also implies that various types of education in relation to the different types of museums and galleries can also be

generalised. By talking to Lindsey Shaw and Susan Lamb I realised that such whole scale generalisation ultimately devalued many modern museological criticisms.

Chapter Five

Modern Museological Criticisms with regard to Museums of History, Archaeology, Science and Industry.

In this Chapter I will briefly look at the contemporary educational museological criticism in relation to the museums of history, archaeology, science and industry. They are similar to the new art historical criticism in that they question the cultural and educational assumptions made by the museum in relation to the material document that it possesses.

Unlike the previous section however, where I presented a somewhat detailed analysis of art, art education, the perception of art and its history within the formal educational system and the museum, this section deals exclusively with modern criticisms of the museum which directly and indirectly focus attention on the museums of history, archaeology, science and industry.

As a consequence I recognise that this chapter might be considered to be quite insubstantial in comparison to the previous one, but I do not believe that adopting the same approach as I did with the museums and galleries of art would necessarily be more beneficial. I have already looked quite comprehensively at the nature of education in relation to

art and by implication and reference touched upon how other subjects were themselves treated. I have also up to this point discussed other general historical and museological points which could be applied to the various museums to which I will shortly refer.

Moreover implications of the histories that could be accrued to the galleries of art and these other museums are fundamentally different. It is the developments which have taken place within the last twenty or so years with regard to the creation of new types of museum, and the introduction of new ways of introducing established material that have affected these museums.⁹⁵ These are the critical factors that have effected them, and to a far greater extent than they have been at any other time in their history.

Modern Museological Criticism - The Re-presentation Of History, Archaeology, Science And Industry Within The Museum.

In the last few decades many new types of

⁹⁵ It is to be noted that I will be concentrating on the ideas taken from Heritage Interpretation Volume 1 (The Natural and Built Environment) and Volume 2 (The Visitor Experience). They are both edited by David Uzzell(1989). These two volumes consist of papers delivered at the Second Congress on Heritage Presentation and Interpretation, and the various papers review current interpretative philosophy, theory, practice and research.

museum have been created as a consequence of a renaissance of interest in and a demand for more museums. They look after new types of material, or present museum objects in a completely untraditional way. An important new strain of museums can be seen as being a direct product of the rapid changes that have taken place in the industrial landscape.

'Industrial Archaeology' as a term was first used in Britain in the 1950s. It came about with the recognition that the replacement of old technologies with new was sweeping away the 'supposedly' unattractive remains of past industrial activity and eliminating the evidence of an important cultural phenomenon of world significance. By the 1960s, numerous public and private bodies had been formed to preserve the remnants of this section of Britain's industrial past and this directly led to the formation of many of these museums.

Some museums, such as Ironbridge, have set out to preserve whole areas of industrial activity; others have developed along the lines of more traditional open-air museums in which industrial buildings and artifacts have been constructed on special sites laid aside for them. These museums have played a significant part in shaping public perception of the traditional coal, steam and iron-based industries of the old industrial heartlands of Britain which declined because of the onset of de-

industrialisation within society.

Common to these various museums is activity, the desire not only to preserve the artifacts of the past but to keep alive industrial or craft processes, to present them to the public, and even on occasion to manufacture products within the museum environment. Outdoor museums especially have helped to bring visitors nearer to a concept of the past with the use of interpretative techniques of display and presentation which emphasise activity, participation and process. The increasing popularity of these museums with the public pose many questions for the museums of history, archaeology, science and industry.⁹⁶

These independent museums have become the most immediate competitor of the National and Local Authority museums and account for the paradoxical growth in the number of museums at a time of relative funding restraint. Myerscough has said that the true independence of these museums of recent foundations is their independence from the traditional educational and social-welfare motivations which launched the original museum movement in the nineteenth century.⁹⁷ They are concerned with entertainment and this has become the over-riding factor in their

⁹⁶ Cossons *op.cit.* p2-4.

⁹⁷ Myerscough 1988. see Chapters Two, Seven, Ten and Fourteen.

presentation. And within the Independent Museum sector it is the Heritage Movement that has become its most visible success.

The influence of the Heritage Industry has produced the most criticism because it is the notion of the past and what constitutes a people's natural heritage as represented within the museum that is currently one of the most contentious issues surrounding the museum of today.

Heritage interpretation has become a major part of the museum movement and as Marc Laenen notes, the past and the cultural heritage have become a lucrative business which have been made possible by the 'retro' climate that has occurred during the last decades. However there is, perhaps, an inherent problem in the representation of the past and cultural heritage, which is the assumption by the museum that it has obtained a conclusive understanding, and subsequently presented, an accurate interpretation of them.⁹⁸

Robert Hewison states that the preservation, in whatever context, of the world's heritage, has called for the exercise of certain disciplines which are regarded as valuable to one's culture. Firstly, there has been the value placed on stewardship, which is concerned with the preservation of objects to the best of our ability; secondly, there is the

⁹⁸ Uzzell(Ed) 1989. Vol 1.pp88-95.

value of scholarship, which seeks not simply to preserve these objects, but to enlarge the public's understanding of them, in terms of both their original significance and the interpretation of that significance within a contemporary context.⁹⁹

If we accept this, then the Heritage Industry Hewison maintains has got it wrong, because we cannot summon up the past to revive the present. He says, "this obsession with heritage is ultimately entopic and has led, and will continue to lead, to a state of inertia within society where people are distracted from the present by ever-improving images of the past, and paralysed by the thought of a future which can only, by comparison with the familiar, be worse than the way we never were."¹⁰⁰

Heritage as seen in this and similar museological criticisms is a source and vehicle for myth, which does not necessarily mean that it is untrue but simply, that it is true in a special sense; that it has truth for a great many people and the general belief gives it contemporary validity, it may indeed contain a great deal of historically accurate and factually testable material, but this is transformed into a touch stone of national, local and even individual identity. With this, history has gradually

⁹⁹ Uzzell op.cit. p21. Also see Hewison 1987 'The Heritage Industry'.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p22.

been bent into something called Heritage which is largely focused on an idealised past whose social values are those of an earlier age of privilege and exploitation which it serves to preserve and bring forward into the present. Heritage, these museologists believe, is gradually effacing History, by substituting an image of the past for its reality.¹⁰¹

It is not just those museums which incorporate the heritage concept however that are being criticised. Museums that are publicly funded are also being questioned in much the same way as the independent museums. To those museologists of a Marxist persuasion the museum is seen as a centre of production, which perpetuates this by manufacturing social and cultural meaning.

They consider that museums central task is to "reinforce the cultural logic of late capitalism and post-modernism by restructuring and commodifying private memory itself which has been erased by the collectively reconstructed image of a period or a way of life."¹⁰² As a consequence museums have inevitably failed to face and interrogate ideas of truth, reality and ideology and this they conclude situates them in a position of conformity with domi-

¹⁰¹ see Uzzel 1989. Volume 2. pp212-215. In this section David Lowenthal assesses the representation of truth and history within heritage presentation and interpretation.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

nant, conservative political forces and the values of a British imperialist culture.

As well as this type of criticism, there are those which use interpretational methods to construct their arguments and the interpretation of material culture has become a major academic preoccupation. Susan Pearce says, because "museum collections represent the stored material culture of the past, while museum exhibitions are the principal medium through which the past is publicly presented; museums move more steadily into the forefront of the picture as the past, and its tangible memorials, become increasingly a political issue in the broadest sense."¹⁰³ Another reason for this she says "is the style of much post-war thinking which shows interest in the idea of universally applicable concepts in ways in which the earlier generation of students did not, and which tends to see objects, with language as the principal medium through which human relationships are created, expressed and validated."¹⁰⁴

In previous chapters I have talked about the growing importance placed on the study of material culture in its museum aspect, which embraces not only the formal interpretation of artifacts, but also the analysis of collection and their history

¹⁰³ Pearce *op.cit.* p1.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* p3.

and which sees the museum as a cultural phenomenon. This has I have said led to a new methodology of study and theory being applied to the Museum, or, I should say, methodology and theory being applied to the Museum in a new way. Thus in the last ten years we have seen within museological criticism calls for the increase in the use of interpretational techniques, along with the parallel acceptance of certain research findings that 'books on the walls' are not only boring, but ineffective in getting a message across to the public.¹⁰⁵

These critiques want the Museum to adopt interpretative planning, which requires that it knows who the visitors are, their interests and knowledge and encouraging interpretive techniques appropriate to the audience, situation and interpretive subject matter. An effective educational programme within a museum they believe cannot be presented unless the museum has some understanding of its visitors and details of the visitor profile and the pattern of visitation to the museum which are essential background information in the successful application of interpretational techniques.

Nonetheless those who support interpretational techniques say it should not be assumed that just by involving people in the museum and employing their

¹⁰⁵ See Curator 33/3/1990. Essay by Dobbs and Eisner. pp213-235. This essay talks about the silent pedagogy that takes place within many museums and art galleries.

experience especially in relation to social history, that the problem of what they call 'object fetishism' has been resolved. In order to do this the museum must endeavour to stimulate within its public a process called the 'recovery of experience' which is a strategy - i.e. unlocking the human experience of living - that articulates the silences represented in museum collections, and one which radically alters the relationship between the producers of knowledge - the curators - and the consumers of that knowledge - the public at large.

Another feature of these criticisms which can be noted in the above reference is the way in which they not only challenge the role of the museum and gallery in relation to the presentation of knowledge, but they also question the role of the curator. To do this within these criticisms is seen as being critically important because "the relationship of the professional curator to the public and the balance of power within such a relationship raises questions about 'whose history?', and produced 'for whom', which are of particular significance to ethnographers and social historians."¹⁰⁶

In summarising the ethos behind Interpretationalism I will use a quote by David Uzzell, who says, "we are deceiving ourselves if we think that when we stand in front of a case of medals, or guns

¹⁰⁶ Pearce *op.cit.* p9.

or photographs of mutilated bodies we are looking at the past. We are looking also at the present and the future. If interpretation is to be a source of social good then it must recognise the continuity of history and lead us to the future through the past. Interpretation should be interestingg, engaging, enjoyable, informative and entertaining. But now and again it has to be shocking, moving and provide a cathartic experience."¹⁰⁷

The selections of criticism that I have just highlighted are indicative of the nature of some of the most popular current museological discourses, and as I have done in Chapter Four I will now look at how those who work within a museum which incorporates the subject areas of museological criticism. The areas of discussion will be:

(1) How Mary Bryden, the Chief Educational Officer at the Royal Museum of Scotland, and by implication the whole educational staff of this museum, actually perceive their educational task and attempt to fulfil their educative role. I will be focusing upon the educational activities that the museum undertakes, and the factors which have influenced the way in which Mary Bryden and the Educational Department of the Royal Museum of Scotland carry out their educational tasks. The areas of discussion in this section will be:

¹⁰⁷ Uzzel op.cit. p5.

- The current aims and activities of the Royal Museum of Scotland.
- The primary concerns of the education department when establishing programmes for their museum visitors.
- How the Education Section uses the collections in its programmes.

(2) Briefly evaluating how these developments contrast with attitudes in the pre-Second War Era.

(1)

Mary Bryden briefly described the current educational aims and activities of the Royal Museum of Scotland. She explained that the Royal Museum of Scotland, previously known as the Royal Scottish Museum, displays and produces resources relevant to many subjects, including Natural History, Geology, Ethnography, Science, Social History, and Art and Design.

The museum also offers a wide range of displays and resources relevant to many areas, and it offers the opportunity for a wide range of educators to participate in 'In-service' and 'Familiarisation' courses which cover all the areas on display. The museum has always been of particular interest to schools and has developed special links with them. To this end, it works closely with the Regional Council's Education Department. The museum is also a member of 'Interlink', which is a programme of edu-

cational activities put together by many different organisations in the Edinburgh area. This organisation has developed a programme of activities to encourage an integrated approach to a variety of themes for primary and secondary schools. It has also produced material based on its collections for Standard Grade, and publishes a wide range of material for young people to use in an informal and formal situation.

Although the museum places special emphasis on younger people, it does recognise the diversity of its audience and provides activities in which all of its public can participate. In 1987 the education section of the museum, impressed by the Discovery Room in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto decided to create one of their own. In this room all ages could go into the museum and explore objects, handle specimens, use microscopes and experiment. This proved popular and the 'Discovery Room' has now become a regular feature within the museum.

Many of the activities which take place within the museum are heavily influenced by the fact that the educational department have recognised that education has undergone major change within the last decade especially. Schoolchildren were no longer required to absorb facts and opinions from the teacher and the blackboard. Instead schools were encouraging them to find things out for themselves,

not just from books and audio-visual sources, but also through their own investigations of the world about them. This department therefore emphasises the interactive elements of museum education in their programmes. They argue that in order to learn anything from an object the audience must feel as though they are actively participating in the educative process.

Mary Bryden therefore felt that it was absolutely crucial that the education section thought about the variety of publics that the museum had to serve. They not only had to think about those who came into the museum but also those that didn't. She saw the role of museum education as being concerned with a whole range of publics and in particular trying to find out why certain members of the public did not think about going to visit museums. It was important that The Royal Museum of Scotland addressed this problem and found out where people had learnt these habits so that they could be a more effective public service. The department was also concerned with how people who had gone to the museum had viewed their experience. As a result they had worked with the Open university in producing a qualitative survey using the Discovery Room. The aim of the survey was to find out what visitors thought were the most rewarding aspects of their visit throughout the whole museum. This survey, it is hoped,

will enable the department to lay the foundations of future educational activities.

The key to establishing a successful object centred educational programmes and activities was, she felt, finding people's frames of reference and orientating them in the museum. To do this effectively the Education Section had decided that they had to start off by looking at the visitor as opposed to the collections and asking how the visitor related to the collections? She recognised that this was a difficult task because it presumed that visitors knew how to read objects. With this in mind the department placed strong emphasis upon visitor orientation within the museum. One of the main reasons for setting up the Discovery Room was to try to build up the confidence of the visitor in his or her ability to read objects. The discovery room was planned with the very specific aim of helping people think how to read objects and taking these skills with them to the conventional galleries.

It was put to her at the end of the discussion that some critics would say that just enabling the audience to read objects was not in itself enough. They said that it was not only the Museums' duty to challenge people to question collections, but it was also its basic task to make them challenge the familiar conceptions about objects, and in some places replace them.

Mary Bryden did not think that this was possible, but, she did think that it was important to look at an object in its context. Consequently, an essential part of the departments work was helping people to unlock and understand an object by using the familiar and contemporary experience and relaying it back in time. This enabled the visitor to make analogies and comparisons of an object within the context of past and present.

She stressed that this was her own personal opinion and said that it was important that critics should not take what she had said as being the only way of establishing educational programmes for the public. She made the point that collections varied so much and even the types of publics that a museum was going to attract into them. Therefore one structure might not suit them all. It was important that every museum thought about the different members of the public that they wanted to reach. That museums asked themselves 'what it was that it wanted visitors to go away from it thinking?', and, 'did it want to change their visitors way of thinking and if so what did they want visitors to think about a collection?' Subsequently each institution may well have a different aim or intention towards its collections and the public.

Concluding the discussion she said that one of the most serious problems that, she felt, museums

and galleries faced was that many people who produced exhibitions did not think through carefully enough what messages they wanted to get across or what questions they perhaps wanted the public to think about. Sometimes museums had to be explicit in the presentation of their educational aims, although she recognised that it was important that people should be able to relax and enjoy themselves and not have to exhaust themselves by following a message through various points. Thus the department was in favour of having some kind of contextual information present within the museum which illustrated the social, cultural and historical implications, however briefly, of a collection.

(2)

One of the accusations of the Museum and of the Gallery has been that they do not truly reflect the needs of the visitor; an attitude which many believe has been inherited from their Victorian founders. Yet, what is significant about the variety of museums' educational programmes is that they are increasingly being based upon qualitative surveys of the visitors reactions to the collections. These are now influencing not only the focus of educational programmes, but also the presentation of the permanent collections and temporary exhibitions; from exhibition design to exhibition content.

The Royal Museum of Scotland's use of qualit-

ive research in order to find out about the reactions that the visitor has had within a museum marks a distinct change from previous museum attitudes which were often perceived as being prescriptive and didactic. This museum stresses the participatory nature of education at all levels within it, and recognises that orientation, in all its guises - whether it is used in the most direct sense with regard to telling the visitor where the collections are, or, in the sense of getting the visitor more closely acquainted with the nature of museum objects through its handling collections - is of the utmost importance. The introduction of the Discovery Room, where a diverse range of museum objects which are representative of the whole of the museums collection are investigated by visitors, can be seen as a direct result of this.

In the latter half of the twentieth century museological critics have called for the museum to be seen as a means of communication. The educational programmes of the Royal Museum of Scotland and the attitude of its Chief Educational Officer are a reflection that this is happening.

Conclusion

Wittlin (1949) said "it is beyond argument that a book designed to serve both as a means of information on a variety of subjects only loosely connected with each other and to appeal to people with varied cultural backgrounds and interests, to scholars and to laymen, to adults and to children, is an insoluble proposition. So is an exhibition which aims at answering a similarly multiple and vaguely defined purpose."¹⁰⁸

Some forty years later, museums are still thinking of ways to address this 'insoluble proposition'. They are still trying to find ways to fulfil their educational aims and objectives. Historically this has not been an easy task.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century museums and galleries did not fully recognise that in order to function successfully as educational institutions - where a variety of publics could visit and both learn something and enjoy themselves whilst doing so - they needed a clarity of definition with regard to their potential educational aims and purposes. Museums and galleries during this period did not reflect within their educational programmes and interpretational materials, or the arrangement of their collections

¹⁰⁸ Wittlin *op.cit.* p185.

and exhibitions, the diverse nature of education provision. Generally and in museums educational provision was characterised by the reactionary nature of the methods that museums and galleries used to impart information - on various objects and the subject areas that these incorporated - to the non-specialist. Even though other educational institutions were adopting methods of study which addressed the changing needs and demands of the public (because of the various social and cultural changes that had taken place), and recognised that there were various levels and types of education that they needed to address within their practices, museums and galleries on the whole were slow to respond to this basic fact, as and when it emerged. Thus the wealth of knowledge that museums and galleries held within their collections became increasingly perceived as only being accessible to a fractional minority of experts.

The absence of any concrete philosophy within the greater proportion of public museums and galleries with regard to formal and informal educational aims, and how these would affect the public they served, thus became one of the overriding preoccupations which dominated the post-Second World War period. As the second half of the twentieth century has progressed the educational capacities of museums and galleries have increasingly been the focus of

public attention. We have seen systematic inquiries being undertaken into the potentialities of the museum as a means of communication. We have witnessed the expansion and diversification of the museum movement both institutionally and professionally, and with this has come an increase in the production of museological criticisms on education which incorporate a diverse range of socially and culturally related theories; criticisms which re-articulate the communicative aspects of museum education, and have strong implications for museum educational practice.

In order to access the effects and implications of modern museological criticisms on museum practice I talked with museum educationalists, not only to see how practicable and justified some of these contemporary criticisms were, but also to try and evaluate how the nature of museum education has changed. I specifically chose to talk with those who work in National Institutions because a large amount of museological literature currently focuses on them.

I realised through these discussions that not only are there a surprisingly large amount of restraints placed upon the museum educationalist which limit what they can and cannot do with regard to their carrying out of educational tasks, but that museum practice as a whole is subject to many

restraints. Therefore even though a whole host of influences both internal and external have directly and indirectly shaped the nature of museum education, including museological criticism, and these factors can be generalised, their affects on and implications for specific institutions and the subsequent implementation of museum practices cannot. Thus the question that I posed in the introduction of this dissertation when I asked 'How far can museological criticism inform museum practice?' has proved decidedly difficult to answer, irrespective of the fact that I chose to focus upon certain museological criticisms with regard to just two institutions. Thus the conclusion that I have reached is one which I am sure could be challenged but I believe that, in short, these restraints limit the extent to which museological theory can inform museum practice.

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