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STUDIES IN GENDER AND REPRESENTATION IN BRITISH HISTORY MUSEUMS

ABSTRACT

In this study, I develop a critical practice relevant to museums, drawing from feminist practice and poststructuralist theory. I examine the process through which museums construct, order, represent and interpret history to make meaning: how history comes to be true in the museum text. My focus is this process of production, not history itself.

If the text is recognised as a construction, then it is available for deconstruction, to reveal the process of production of the text, the relations of production, the materials used, and their arrangement. In the activity of deconstructing the museum text, I take a feminist perspective. From this perspective, I argue that the process and relations of production are themselves gendered: the identities 'man' and 'woman' are formed and articulated through a range of relationships. The categories of 'man' and 'woman' are set against each other but, at the same time, are bound together and interdependent. 'Woman' becomes the background against which 'man' acts: 'his' existence and ascendance depend on 'her' presence and subordination. Together, they provide a thread for museums in the histories and narratives which they make.

I examine the development of museums in England, and especially the development of history collections and museums in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here, I draw attention to those elements which have contributed most strongly to the articulation of a gendered history in museums.

Moving from a general overview to specific case studies, I examine the articulation of history in three museums, whose identities and themes are related to production and consumption, work and leisure. These are chosen to represent the dominant forms through which museums articulate history, and at the same time as important sites for the construction and articulation of gendered narratives and histories.

Finally, I look beyond the materials gathered in the case studies, and the conclusions drawn from them, focus on practices and projects which are broadly relevant to the thesis and which, implicitly or explicitly, challenge the conventions of museum work. In these examples, I have looked beyond Britain and beyond history museums, to open up wider possibilities for change.

STUDIES IN GENDER AND REPRESENTATION

IN BRITISH HISTORY MUSEUMS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Project

A number of recent writings on museums have hinted at the failure of museums to represent women adequately in their displays (e.g. Bennett 1988a; Horne 1984; West 1985), but have not developed these arguments. Conversely, critiques of the representation of women have tended to overlook museums and to focus on visual representation - photography, fine arts, film, advertising and magazines (e.g. Kuhn 1985; Parker and Pollock 1981; Rose 1986; Williamson 1978; Winship 1987). In this study, I take up the work developed in other media, to extend and apply it to museums. I look beyond the content of museum displays to their production and meaning. I examine the process through which museums construct, order, represent and interpret history. My focus is this process of production, not history itself.

The underlying premise of many museum workers - enshrined in professional codes of conduct and reiterated through day-to-day practice - is that of objectivity and neutrality (Museums Association 1993: 400). Museum workers believe that the 'real thing' they are dealing with carries intrinsic, essential and universal truths - material facts. On the whole, museums appear to be closed to the debates around representations of class, race and gender which have informed and enlivened other areas of cultural production. Equally, they appear indifferent or even hostile to more analytical debates around representation, identity and subjectivity. In this thesis, I demonstrate that these debates, and the theories which have informed them, are relevant to museums; further, that they assist in developing a more focussed, thoughtful practice. By engaging with these critiques, museum staff may develop a

fuller understanding of the complex system of representation and communication which constitutes museum practice, as well as an appreciation of the need for rigorous attention to method.

Historically, museums and museum staff have rejected theory and have worked empirically, outside academic institutions and outside the arena of public debate. This is particularly true in history museums (see below, Chapter Three). In the last decade, museums have been drawn into more theoretical and analytical debates on representations through anthropology and archaeology, on the one hand, and through popular culture and media studies, on the other. Debates in anthropology and archaeology are characteristically initiated in, or with, museums, and involve both professionals and academics. They are driven by the new cultural theories, most notably structuralism and semiotics; equally, by a recognition of the culturally sensitive issues of ownership of collections and representation of non-Western cultures. Abroad, particularly in North America and Australasia, exhibitions such as 'Into the heart of Africa' and 'Te Maori', and the issues of the return of human remains and other items from museum collections, have been at the centre of vigorous public discussion and dialogue between indigenous communities, curators and scholars (described in a special feature of Museums Journal, March 1993: 24-36; see also Carter 1994; Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992; McManus 1992). In Britain, the debates have been less heated. Examples include the seminar, 'Making exhibitions of ourselves: the limits of objectivity in representations of other cultures' at the British Museum in 1986, and the triennial conferences at the Department of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, from 1988. These debates are

publicised and disseminated in professional journals and related publications (e.g. Kavanagh 1991a; Pearce 1994).

The debates linked to popular culture and media studies, however, have taken place more often outside museums, with museums as their subject; museum professionals may be involved only incidentally, if at all. This has been a period of vigorous debate and transformation in other areas of cultural practice, through the development and application of the same cultural theories of structuralism and semiotics. Equally, over a longer period, social history has been transformed by populist and radical movements in people's history and community history which have re-written history 'from below'. These transformations have been debated and developed in particular at seminars organised by the former Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, and at conferences in the History Workshop series. They have given rise to powerful critiques of museums (e.g. West 1985). Without the involvement of museum staff in these debates, critiques which are immediately relevant to museums are not meshed into everyday practice and into a detailed understanding of museums. Further, the vitality of ideas in cultural criticism and history movements outside the museum is dissipated or lost (Jenkinson 1989: 141; Kavanagh 1989: 139-40).

The two areas of debate have been brought together and invigorated most recently with discussion of the issues of cultural diversity within British society: particularly at the international conference 'The Politics of Collecting' at Walsall Museum and Art Gallery in 1992 (Butler 1992). An Editorial in the Museums Journal described the conference as 'ground-breaking':

> People from a diverse group of institutions came together to discuss the power relationships affecting, and created by, museums and galleries. The conference readily agreed that cultural rights are a central part of human rights. (Editorial, <u>Museums Journal</u> 92 (8): 7).

The conference was well attended, but the absence of directors and the lack of commitment to democratisation and equality in the wider museum community were noted (ibid; Butler 1992: 15-16).

The wider social and commercial context in which museums currently operate does not encourage the development of a vigorous critical culture. A shift has taken place in society generally, from a production-and-work ethos to a consumption-and-fun ethos (Mitchell 1975: 147). Museums occupy a critical position within this shift, in offering a glimpse of the past (production and work) while achieving success as a medium of the present (consumption and fun). While few museums would be bold enough to relinquish their claim to educate, they place increasing emphasis on their value as a medium of entertainment and leisure, both internally - in policy decisions and priorities - and externally, in their appeals to the public and to sponsors, on whom they increasingly depend for visitors and for income.

In this climate, museums are anxious to create ever more authentic and exciting milieux. On the one hand, authenticity sets museums apart from other media, because museums can offer the <u>real</u> thing, the authentic historical object. On the other hand, these other media generate specific expectations among the audiences who also visit museums, such as the desire for spectacle and for the creation or reconstruction of whole settings and experiences (Lumley 1987). Museums do not, therefore, disturb or disrupt the prevailing, commonsense view of

the past. Rather, they are increasingly the point at which the prevailing views are concretised

- the ultimate and material confirmation of realities which have already been learned and are

known from elsewhere (Bennett 1988a: 74). In this shift, museums employ more superficial

techniques of research and fieldwork, while their techniques of presentation become more

sophisticated.

The power of the dominant, commonsense view to define history is also the power to

marginalise and negate the histories of other, less powerful, groups and to continue to place

them 'outside' the dominant representations and definitions (Agyeman 1993: 23). Those

critics who challenge existing museum representations, and groups or individuals who offer

alternatives, may be unwelcome. The debate around museum representations is developing at

a time of increasingly harsh financial and competitive pressures on museums. Across the

whole museum sector, in independent museums and publicly subsidised museums, success

and even survival is being determined by visitor numbers, frequency of visits, and the costs

and spend per head (Jenkinson 1993: 22; Murdin 1993). Museums are increasingly reliant on

admission charges, income generation and sponsorship. This climate is unfavourable to risk-

taking and experimentation with new methods, approaches and audiences (Kirby 1988).

Requests for change may meet the response that resources are simply not available; criticism

may be dismissed as naive or damaging to the public image of museums, and thus to their

economic survival.

1.2 The Hypothesis

In this thesis, I develop a critical practice relevant to museums, drawing from feminist

practice and poststructuralist theory. I test this practice in three case studies of museums. I

then evaluate the usefulness of this critical practice, and suggest alternative and productive

ways in which museums may work in the future.

The broad approach and theoretical underpinning of this thesis has been developed most fully

in literary criticism and in studies of popular culture. I therefore use terms familiar in those

fields of <u>text</u>, <u>writing</u> and <u>reading</u>. Museums employ a wide range of working methods, and

of materials on which those methods are applied - arguably, visitors and employees as well as

collections, buildings, spaces and resources. In general, I use the terms in the following ways:

<u>text</u> to refer to the permanent public exhibition or display, as the most enduring and widely-

seen part of a museum's activities; <u>writing</u> to refer to the work of curators or interpreters who,

singly or as members of a group or team, lead the production process of the display

(writers/authors); and the activity of <u>reading</u> as that of the museum viewers or visitors and

critics.

In this thesis, I also use a feminist approach to examine the relations between men and

women, masculine and feminine, as they are constituted in the museum. I use the term

<u>gender</u> to refer to the social meanings attached to the biological differences between men and

women. Feminism asserts that women are not destined by their biology to certain roles and

behaviours; that gender differences and inequalities are a matter not of nature but of culture.

Following this premise, I use quotation marks around the terms 'man' and 'woman' in this

study to denote that they are representations of the social and cultural meanings attached to

the different sexes and not particular individuals of flesh and blood. These gender differences

- material, technical, economic, intellectual, emotional, symbolic - are, at the same time,

interdependent and relational. Further, values are attached to these differences in a gender

hierarchy in which 'man' has the superior position. Finally, masculinity and femininity are

plural and flexible phenomena; the forms of gendered relations change over time and across

cultures.

Museums claim to show the past as it really was - to re-present history. In this simple claim,

the medium of the museum and the process of making collections and displays are rendered

transparent or invisible in a relationship of authenticity and truth. Many of those who work in

museums have rejected theory in favour of empiricism - the approach that states that our

concepts and our knowledge are the product of experience. Empiricism posits itself as

obvious and natural, and rejects theory as distorting or, at best, unnecessary.

From the poststructuralist perspective, this position is no longer tenable. The poststructuralist

critique demonstrates that truths are not universal and absolute, and that knowledge itself is

positional. The critique shifts attention from the concern of conventional criticism with

essences and integrity - whether something is true. Instead, poststructuralist criticism is

concerned with forms - how, in a text, something comes to be true. In such a critique, the

realist text - whether in literature, in documentary film, or in museums - depends as much as

any other text on an underpinning theory or ideology, despite its apparent invisibility or

transparency. It is intelligible as 'realistic' precisely because it is familiar, recognisable and

taken for granted: it reproduces what we already seem to know. Thus, empiricism is not a

sufficient response to or defence against critical analysis in museums. Further, a critique of empiricism shows that its unquestioning 'faith' in its own position as 'natural' and without ideology leads to a lack of rigour and method in thought and in practice.

In this thesis, I examine how meaning is made, or constructed, in museums: how history comes to be true in the museum text. If the text is recognised as a construction, then it is available for deconstruction. Through deconstruction, the process of production of the text can be analysed: the mode of production, the materials used, and their arrangement in the work. In deconstructing the museum text, I examine the practices of research, acquisition and interpretation through which history is constituted and the museum display is produced. I ask whether these practices are appropriate to the stated aims and objectives of the museum; are they accurate; and are they relevant to the expectations of its audiences? I argue that, beneath the guise of popular history, and history for everyone, museums lack clear objectives and methods, and fail to pay attention to the detail and outcome of their work. Compared with other forms of cultural production, they are slack and imprecise. For example, when compared with academic writing, museum exhibitions do not have authors, footnotes, references and appendices; they do not go through a referencing process before they are accepted for publication. As this study shows, the paucity of museum practices is revealed in their inability to develop strategies and methods for collecting and representing the recent past, present and future, and for responding to current social concerns and issues. Without an adequate body of practice, they are unable to select from and represent an increasingly diverse and multicultural society; without a critical understanding, they are unable to respond to the

intellectual project of the holistic interdependence and integration of peoples, cultures and materials in the environment.

Further, in this process of deconstruction, I take a feminist perspective. From this perspective, the process and relations of production are themselves gendered. Applying this to studies in museums, I am less concerned with the elements - artefacts, images and representations - which themselves pertain to women. Any programme to raise the profile of women in museum displays and collections by simply 'bolting on' or 'slotting in' women to the existing framework is based on the empirical assumptions which I have already refuted. Such a programme assumes that museums represent and reflect reality - albeit a partial reality (less than the whole) since women are seen to be under-represented. Rather, I turn to studying the articulation of gender in all aspects of the production process. Feminist studies, drawing on psychoanalysis, have demonstrated that there is no fixed point of reference in sexual difference: that 'sexual difference is itself an imperfect and hesitant construction' (Rose 1986: 215). I argue that museums draw upon sexual difference as a firm and persistent referent. The interrelated notions of masculinity and femininity are central to the ways in which museums organise their identity, collections, space and exhibitions to make meaning.

Museums are not merely reflections of the world around them - they are instruments, and instrumental, in forming and consolidating identities: of empire and state; of the 'civitas', or city; of region and locality or community; of self. I argue that these identities are articulated through a range of relationships in which gender is constantly invoked and enrolled. Within and beyond these relationships, museums are instrumental in forming and consolidating

gendered identities, of 'man' and 'woman', masculinity and femininity. Such relationships

include: subject/object; progressive/static; public/private; modern/folk; self/other;

culture/nature. Underlying all these relationships are the associations of active/passive and

man/woman. In museums, and in this discourse, 'woman' becomes the background against

which 'man' acts. These representations are formed around idealised and stereotypical notions

of masculinity and femininity, which are rendered as 'real'. As produced and presented in

museums, the roles of women are relatively shallow, undeveloped and muted; the roles of

men are, in contrast, relatively deep, highly developed and fully pronounced. The categories

of 'man' and 'woman' are set against each other as polarities but, at the same time, are bound

together and interdependent. 'His' existence and ascendance depend on 'her' presence and

subordination. Together, they provide a thread for museums in the histories and narratives

which they make. The critical project is thus to deconstruct the whole process in which these

notions are both given and giving meaning, and to build new ways which are more

productive, diverse and open to re-reading.

Finally, I argue that, while museums present an increasingly open and accessible face, they

maintain a closure of space, authority and authorship. This will not change until the rhetoric

of expressive realism, and the underlying empiricism, are displaced or unsettled.

Repeatedly, museum developments today are described in a way which assumes that a natural

and simple transformation is taking place to make them more friendly, open and accessible.

In these accounts, it is as if the apparatus of museums is automatically transformed by their

increasing use of familiar, more informal materials and methods, and their increased access to

greater numbers of people. A collapsing occurs in which problems of history, fiction and

identification are dissolved into those of technology and communication. In this collapsing,

the apparatus of the museum - the process, techniques and materials used in the production of

the museum text - becomes invisible.

In this thesis, I acknowledge that the materials and methods which museums use are bringing

people into a closer relationship with museums, and identification with the histories on

display. But I argue that the ways in which museums communicate and connect with their

visitors are constrained by the underlying premise of empiricism. This positions the

reader/viewer as consumer, whose role is to gaze at the finished product as commodity, and

appreciate the creativity of the maker or the authenticity and truth of the setting. The mode of

address is declarative. The process of production of this work is suppressed: the labour

involved in production is not acknowledged, and the process of production itself is either

mystified or ignored.

In contrast to this, the poststructuralist approach turns the reader/viewer from passive

consumer to active producer of meaning, and sees meaning constantly in the making. Its

form of address is interrogative, inviting response and dialogue. Through drawing attention

to the processes of production, and making it visible, the critical approach suggests that things

can be made again and made differently: that meaning is plural and negotiable. Applying this

critical approach to museums, they can uncover the processes of selection, acquisition,

ordering and arrangement of collections, which underlie the public expressions of identity and

exhibition. Through presenting themselves as workshops rather than shrines, and supporting

others to use their tools and methods with different outcomes, museums can become a site for active and creative production, the presentation and exchange of diverse viewpoints, and the dynamic (re)interpretation of collections and histories.

1.3 Methods of Study

If the text is recognised as a construction, it is available also for deconstruction. The aim of deconstruction is to locate the point of contradiction within the text, where it oversteps the limits within which it is constructed, and breaks through the constraints imposed by its own realist form. At this point, the text is no longer limited to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. In deconstruction, the critic seeks the multiple and diverse meanings which are possible in a work; its incompleteness; the aspects which it omits but cannot describe; its contradictions. Thus, deconstruction is both a strategic practice, to produce new constructions, and an act of resistance: the critic challenges or refuses the unity, authority/authorship and conventional readings of that text.

In deconstructing the museum text, and reading 'against the grain', I take the position of a woman reader. In doing so, I do not presume or rely on my experience as a woman as a given, that can justify or ground the reading: my position is not essentialist. Nor are the conclusions which I reach from these readings limited to women in the sense that one can sympathise, understand and agree only if one has had certain experiences as a woman. Rather, I use the hypothesis of a woman reader, to provide leverage for displacing the dominant, male vision.

This position, standing 'outside' the dominant categories, facilitates the process of deconstruction and opens the text to new readings and meanings. Usually, the perspective of a male reader, or critic, is assumed to be sexually neutral, full with meaning; a feminist reading is seen as a special case and cause, an attempt to force the text into a narrow, artificial and predetermined mould. The hypothesis of a woman reader reverses this situation by placing feminist criticism in the position that male criticism usually occupies. From this changed position, the reader is awakened to the significance of the text's sexual codes, identifies and situates male readings, and confronts them with those parts of the text that they neglect. Here, 'woman' is an abstract and shifting concept, of otherness: 'she' is always at the margins, what is not represented and not said. By putting 'woman' at the centre, such a reading reverses the usual hierarchy of dominant/ masculine and subordinate/feminine, and demonstrates that conventional, male interpretations are limited.

In reading the museum text as a woman, I unsettle the stability of museum representations as objective and inclusive. These readings raise questions of history and fiction, identity and subjectivity. They call on different registers and expand the repertoire and range of themes and techniques. These readings are productive: they open the text to re-reading, offering wider possibilities and interpretations.

In Chapter Two, I introduce current theory and criticism which has been used to analyse other forms of cultural production. I examine those which are relevant to this study: literary criticism; Foucault and the power/knowledge relation; poststructuralism; psychoanalysis. I

describe the contribution which feminism has made to analysis and criticism - not as a theory

in itself, but as a perspective and concern throughout the work. From these, I develop the

tools for the analysis of museums as texts in succeeding chapters.

In Chapter Three, I examine the development of museums in England, and especially the

development of history collections and museums in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and

twentieth centuries. Here, I draw attention to those elements which contributed most strongly

to the articulation of a gendered history in museums. These include: conceptions of

knowledge and power; of civic pride and citizenry; of nation and empire; of progress and

redundancy. They also include conceptions of public and private; production and

consumption; and propriety. I describe how these are embodied materially and symbolically

in museums: in their identities and positioning; in the selection and organisation of space and

collections; and in the practices of museum staff. I map out significant developments in

museums in the late twentieth century, and underlying trends.

Moving from a general overview to specific case studies, I examine the articulation of history

in three museums. These case studies are selective, and are used to provide a detailed and

precise account of the processes at work in the construction of meaning (Hakim 1987). I use

these case studies to illustrate and develop my hypothesis. I examine the public presence,

chosen identity and themes, displays and exhibited collections of these museums, because

these are the public, most accessible and prevalent forms of the museum. I illuminate

particular aspects of the theory developed in Chapter Two in each case study.

I have chosen museums whose identities and themes are related to production and consumption, work and leisure. These are chosen to represent the dominant forms through which museums articulate history, and at the same time as important sites for the construction and articulation of gendered narratives and histories. The projects have all been acclaimed and influential on developments in other museums. In these ways, they are both typical and outstanding.

The first case study is a large gallery in a museum of everyday life and the home - about the domestic production of services and small crafts, comfort and consumption - the York Castle Museum (Chapter Four). This is a museum which is full of things made and used by women. The second case study is a relatively new museum about work - about industrial production, performance and achievement - the Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield (Chapter Five). This museum was created with a firm intention to move from machines and technological explanation to people and social contextualisation. The industry on which it focuses is the steel industry, with a predominantly male workforce. The third is a new wing at a museum of leisure - taking as its theme, visual communication and the contemporary mass media, which address and involve both women and men - the National Museum of Photography Film and Television in Bradford (NMPFT)(Chapter Six). The NMPFT is also a relatively new museum, a regional offshoot of the Science Museum in London, with innovatory displays and programmes to represent these visual media. In this case, I examine whether the practices of the museum in relation to this exhibition are, indeed, innovatory and new. In this case study, I also examine my own position as a former employee, and therefore as both reader and writer of the text.

In these case studies, I use multiple sources to read the text. The first source is the physical evidence of the museum itself: the location and buildings, the public displays, the spatial and thematic arrangements, and what the museum chooses to say about itself through design, promotional and informative literature, staff reception and interpretation. The second source for this research is the quantitative and qualitative data collected by the museums studied on their visitors and market, where these exist: who visits, where they come from, what motivation they have for visiting, and whether they are satisfied; who doesn't visit. The third source is published reports, papers and accounts relating to the museum: these include 'internal' documents, such as reports produced for governing bodies and committees, and 'external' documents generated by museum staff, such as accounts of projects published in professional journals, interviews with senior staff about their views and vision for the museum, and publications sold in the museum shop. The fourth source is the working notes, records of meetings, research files and plans relating to specific display projects within the museum, again where these exist and are available. The fifth source is depth interviews which I have conducted with staff in the museums studied, particularly those staff who have played a key role in the displays, as authors/ curators (see Appendix). The sixth and final source for this research is other 'readings' - the critical reviews of displays and of museums from relevant journals and, occasionally, seminar papers.

In Chapter Seven, I draw conclusions from the case studies, to substantiate the hypothesis proposed in this introductory chapter. I evaluate the methods used throughout the work, and their strengths and weaknesses in substantiating the hypothesis. I describe the difficulties of

using theory. Here, I include both my own difficulty, in struggling to develop an appropriate

theory and to apply it in specific case studies; and the more general difficulty of using theory

in a context which resolutely rejects it. Against and despite these difficulties, I argue for the

value and necessity of theory for those who work in museums, to reach an understanding of

what is happening at a level beyond the day-to-day, routine practices and immediate demands

of museum work. I claim that, through this more analytical understanding, those who

participate in museums - whatever their role - may recognise and draw on other, relevant and

useful, ways of working; and may exercise greater courage, confidence and choice in their

future work.

In Chapter Seven, I also outline what I have not done. This study is partial in both senses of

the word: part only, and taking a particular perspective. The study is not comprehensive: it is

geographically and thematically restricted in the choice of museums; it is based on specific

forms within the museums studied. Many other examples and aspects of museum work may

be studied fruitfully, and perhaps with different outcomes, from a similar poststructuralist and

feminist position. Equally, this position is itself partial: I have favoured it in preference to

other available positions and perspectives. Those who also 'speak' from the margins, for

example to challenge the Euro-centrism of the classical museum tradition, might enhance and

strengthen, or shift, the arguments put forward in this thesis.

Finally, in Chapter Eight of the thesis, I look beyond the materials gathered in the case studies

and the conclusions drawn from them to indicate examples of working practices and projects

which are broadly relevant to the hypothesis. These are projects which, implicitly or

explicitly, challenge the conventions of museum work. By showing the techniques which museums use, they demystify and expose the process of production of meaning; by calling on different registers and interests, and engaging them as producers, they change the process of production and the product. In these examples, I have been eclectic, drawing from beyond England and beyond history museums to open up wider possibilities for change.

In this research, I have shared the knowledge and analysis as part of my research method. In seminars and conferences with museum professionals and academics, I have engaged in discussions with others who have often challenged and criticised aspects of this work; at the same time, they have insisted on the importance and relevance of the analysis, and offered suggestions to develop it further (Porter 1987, 1998, 1991a and 1991b). Through sharing the research in this way, I have reached a stronger and more thorough analysis and a clearer sense of new directions for museums.

1.4 Literature Review

In preparing this thesis, I have surveyed the literature relevant to the study, both in the museum sector and in other sectors.

Of the museum literature, very little has contributed directly to this study for two reasons. First, the museum literature is, on the whole, descriptive and empirical rather than critical and analytical. It assumes that museums can, and do, reflect the past and tell truths about the real world. It is concerned with refining the skills and knowledge of museum practice to produce

a brighter and clearer reflection. Second, the available museum literature is largely gender-blind and inattentive to perspectives of gender; it assumes that the male perspective is a sexually neutral and general perspective. Thus, most museum literature is relevant to this study only as further evidence of the prevalent and stubborn empiricism - because of what it does not say or express.

Museum professionals in Britain have worked in isolation from other cultural and educational/research institutions. Most have not heard about, taken part in, nor become the objects of, rigorous research and analysis. Thus, there is a paucity of literature at this level. An important exception, where academic research moved into the museum, is the detailed sociological and anthropological study of the Science Museum's gallery 'Food for Thought': here, Sharon Macdonald studied museum staff as they made the gallery, and museum audiences as they visited it (Macdonald 1993; Macdonald and Silverstone 1992). At the same museum, Robert Bud made a close, though less analytical, study of the process of making an exhibition in which he was directly involved (Bud 1989). The situation in Britain contrasts with that in Scandinavia, for example, or in some parts of the United States of America and Canada, where museums work formally and informally with higher educational and/or research bodies.

Equally, museum professionals have been isolated, on the whole, from the debates that have informed and transformed other areas of cultural practice (see above, 1.1). Museum professionals have participated in wider debates on representations, and have contributed to the resulting literature, in archaeology, anthropology and ethnography (for example, Jones

and Pay 1990; Shelton 1992a and 1992b). Museums, and museum professionals, have also

been implicated in the literature of popular culture, cultural studies and media studies but

have not participated in the debates giving rise to them (for example, Johnson et al 1982;

Wright 1985; Hewison 1987). A very small number of published works have drawn together

contributions from both museum professionals and academics in this area: these include the

collections edited by Lumley (1988), Vergo (1989), Kavanagh (1991a), Pearce (1994) and

Fitzgerald and Porter (1994).

When I first started to work on this thesis, there was virtually no museum literature which

was helpful to me. In the last decade, a small but powerful body of museum literature has

developed which is critical and analytical, raising questions beyond the everyday and

extending debates from other areas of cultural production to the whole spectrum of museum

activity. Among this literature, I include titles in the Museum Studies series published by

Leicester University Press (notably, for this study, Kavanagh 1990, 1991a, 1991b; Merriman

1991; Pearce 1989 and 1992). I also include the series published by Routledge on museums

(including Lumley 1988; Hooper-Greenhill 1992 and 1994); and the new series New

Research in Museum Studies by Athlone (Pearce 1994).

I also include in this category the professional journal for museum workers in Britain, the

Museums Journal, published by the Museums Association. This has taken a new and

challenging editorial direction since the late 1980s, to publish articles which go beyond

descriptive accounts of museum projects to critical analyses of their activities and attitudes, to

make comparisons with other sectors and to propose alternative ways of working. The

editorial staff of the journal commission articles and reviews from museum workers and

commentators, and from journalists; equally, and importantly, they commission work from

those whose voices may otherwise not be heard in museum debates and museum literature:

for example, the critique by Julian Agyeman, a member of the Black Environmental Network,

which immediately and poignantly expresses his sense of exclusion through the title, 'Alien

Species' (Agyeman 1993). In addition, they have drawn together clusters of articles for

special features such as those on women, equal opportunities, and cultural exclusion

(Museums Journal September 1988; November 1990; February 1991; August 1992). They

have also commissioned authors to contribute a feminist perspective in other features: for

example, the feature on science and public understanding in museums (Porter 1993). Finally,

they have introduced authors and accounts of projects abroad, particularly from Europe and

north America, to break down introspection and insularity among museum professionals, as

well as to acknowledge their international readership.

I have also surveyed the publications of the specialist group for curators working in the field

of social history, the journals and newsletters of the Social History Curators Group, which

have yielded relevant and useful material (for example, Davies and Whittaker 1992; Griffiths

1987; Mansfield and Jones 1987; Butler 1992; Porter 1992).

In addition to these British publications, I have included material from abroad, particularly

from the United States of America. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington has published

thought-provoking and relevant collections (for example Blatti 1987; Karp and Lavine 1991;

Karp, Kreamer and Lavine 1992). The American Association for State and Local History has

published collections such as the essays collected by Thomas Schlereth, as well as more practical manuals (Schlereth 1982). The journal <u>Technology and Culture</u> has continued to encourage debate, particularly in relation to science and technology museums, through reviews of exhibitions and museum developments (for example, Batzli 1990; Cooper 1987; McMahon 1981).

In surveying the literature relevant to this study, the strongest material lies outside the museum sector and without explicit links to museums: in literary criticism, cultural studies and feminism. These works have been both practically useful and inspirational: they have provided me with the building blocks for developing and strengthening a theoretical position and methodology; they have provided a platform from which I can draw examples for ways of reading the museum text and for ways of describing and writing about it; they have given me the courage to think, talk and write about museums in a way which is new to me and to the museum sector. Among the works of literary and linguistic criticism, I cite three works in particular. Catherine Belsey's <u>Critical Practice</u> has provided me with a clear understanding of the limitations and inherent contradictions of the common sense, or empirical position and with a productive critical practice building on poststructuralist theory and psychoanalysis (Belsey 1980). Toril Moi, in <u>Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory</u>, surveys the two main strands of feminist literary theory - the Anglo-American and the French - and 'discuss(es) the methods, principles and politics at work within feminist critical practice' (Moi 1985: xiii). Chris Weedon, in <u>Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory</u>, is explicitly political in her project: she focuses on poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity and power 'in order to develop strategies for change on behalf of feminist interests' (Weedon

1987: 11). These works are, however, concerned with culture as it is constituted in writing

and language, on the page and in speech. They may discount the material world, with which

this study is doubly concerned: both in museums themselves as material forms, and in the

collections on which museums work and through which they express meanings about the

world.

An important counterbalance to literary criticism and inspiration to this study has been a

group of works which, in broad terms, are feminist technology studies. These examine the

mutual shaping of technology and gender relations. They acknowledge that representations

shape material practices; but, at the same time, recognise that the material is itself a source of

meaning; asking 'how does technology bear on gender relations?' and also 'how are

technological outcomes shaped by gender?' (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993: 3, 7). This

literature includes the studies by Cynthia Cockburn, in which she is concerned with the

persistence and endurance of a fundamental asymmetry and inequality in the relation between

women and men, despite far-reaching technological changes. She uses the term 'the

materiality of male power' to suggest its associations with technology and muscle (Cockburn

1981). Cockburn has published both historical and contemporary studies (Cockburn 1983,

1985; Cockburn and Ormrod 1993). A similar concern runs through the collected papers on

the social shaping of technology edited by Donald Mackenzie and Judy Wajcman; and the

collection of essays on women and technology edited by Erik Arnold and Wendy Faulkner

(Mackenzie and Wajcman 1985; Arnold and Faulkner 1985). In Feminism confronts

technology, Wajcman gives an overview and assessment of feminist research on technology;

while the undervaluing of women's particular expertise and rationality is discussed in the

collection of papers edited and introduced by Maureen McNeil, <u>Gender and Expertise</u>,

looking at the masculine construction of expertise and knowledge across a range of fields

including medical science, reproductive technologies, education and the environment

(Wajcman 1991; McNeil 1987).

Among the literature of popular culture and cultural studies, in addition to those works which

are directly related to museums cited above, I have found the works of Judith Williamson on

advertising and popular culture, Janice Winship on women's magazines, and Ros Coward on

female sexuality, desire and (dis)satisfaction, particularly helpful (Williamson 1978, 1986;

Winship 1987; Coward 1984). These works challenge the dominant media representation of

women as a partial and constraining view which emphasises women's dependence on men,

dismisses their work as marginal and unproductive, and limits their expectations of

themselves. The authors analyse the complex construction of sexual identity and femininity,

and the creation or promise of lack, desire and pleasure, within the various forms of popular

culture.

I have referred to a small group of works close to these, which examine the power relations

behind the construction of the still and cinematic image from a feminist and psychoanalytic

perspective (Betterton 1987; Cowie 1978; Kuhn 1985; Mulvey 1975 and 1987; Rose 1986). I

have also referred to work in other areas of visual representation - specifically, photography

(Sekula 1983; Slater 1983; Tagg 1988; Taylor 1986 and 1990).

In surveying the literature of women's history, I have found that many works are essentialist and empirical: they appeal to a common grounding in women's experience, and seek to extend the existing historical canon to include the histories, experiences and writings of women. More recent, and explicitly feminist, work has sought to unsettle that historical canon and to expose its narrow concern with the public realm of male power and knowledge. The early slogan of the Women's Liberation Movement, 'the personal is political', has been translated by feminist historians into studies of personal life and work which question the boundaries of public and private, paid and unpaid, skilled and unskilled labour, production and reproduction, and which offer new themes, sources, methods and knowledges for historical research. Examples of such work include the group study by Manchester Women's History Group; the study of factory life by Sallie Westwood; the oral histories collected by Elizabeth Roberts in the north west; the detailed comparative study by Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall; and the essay on the domestic interior by Ravetz (Manchester Women's History Group 1987; Westwood 1984; Roberts 1984; Davidoff and Hall 1987; Ravetz 1989). Such research is of particular relevance to history curatorship because it is concerned with the everyday experience and personal histories of men and women, and with the detailed interplay of home, leisure and work. But, at the same time, this work calls into question the boundaries and definitions of 'masculine' and 'feminine', and shows that gender and meaning are constantly in the making.

<u>CHAPTER TWO</u>

<u>THE THEORETICAL AND CRITICAL FRAMEWORK</u>

In the introductory chapter, I outlined my project to develop a critical practice in museums; to look beyond the content of museum displays to their production and meaning. I emphasised the centrality of theory to this project: particularly, the theories of structuralism and poststructuralism, which have been applied to language, literature and other cultural fields; and the feminist critique which draws on, and extends, these theories.

The theory which I use is drawn from different fields and brought together to form a theory of the relation of power and meaning. Jonathan Culler has described such a heterogeneous approach as a 'new genre': 'the works we allude to as "theory" are those that have had the power to make strange the familiar and to make readers conceive of their own thinking, behaviour and institutions in new ways' (Culler 1983: 9). I use theory not as an end in itself; rather, as Culler suggests, I mobilise theory to develop a critical understanding of the processes and relations through which the dominant representations in museums are constructed and maintained. In turn, from that critical understanding, I seek to identify strategies for change to produce new and different relations and representations.

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the structuralist and poststructuralist theories, and the challenge which they present to traditional, humanist and empirical, ways of thinking and working. I outline the application of these theories in language and literature, and in the field of representation. In the second part, I describe the development of a feminist critique, which is informed by poststructuralism and psychoanalysis. It is concerned not only with women, but

with relations of sexual difference, subjectivity and power. In the third part of the chapter, I draw

from these to develop a critical practice for museums.

2.1 The Construction of Meaning

Conventional critical practice looks at a 'text' for its truth and expressiveness. It gazes in awe at

the finished product. New critical practice, particularly in the fields of language and literature,

has drawn attention to the <u>production</u> of a text, and has questioned the notion of a single, true

meaning. Rather, truth is constructed by position and relationship - truth itself is a constitution of

meaning.

Fundamental to this new practice is a critique of humanism, as the basis of Western thinking.

Humanism presumes the existence of the conscious, rational individual, the unified subject.

> At its centre is the seamlessly unified self - either individual or collective - which
> is commonly called 'Man'... Gloriously autonomous, it banishes from itself all
> conflict, contradiction and ambiguity. In this humanist ideology the self is the
> <u>sole author</u> of history and of the literary text: the humanist creator is potent,
> phallic, and male - God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text.
> (Moi 1985: 8)

Humanist thought embodies the idea of the 'founding subject', who 'is given the task of directly

animating the empty forms of language with his (sic) aims' (Foucault 1981: 65). The founding

subject is the creator of meaning, which thereafter is fixed and absolute. The subject 'founds

horizons of meaning beyond which history will henceforth only have to elucidate and where

propositions, sciences and deductive ensembles will find their ultimate grounding' (ibid). From

the idea of the founding subject, humanist philosophy has been called 'foundationalist' thought.

The humanist desire for a unity of thought and vision in the rational being has its equivalent

desire for a universal, objective reality in the material world. The concept of the founding

subject, and the author function, has its opposite in the concept of originating experience. This

supposes

> that at the very basis of experience ... there were prior significations - in a sense,
> already said - wandering around in the world, arranging it all around us and
> opening it up from the outset to a sort of primitive recognition. Thus a primordial
> complicity with the world is supposed to be the foundation of our possibility of
> speaking of it, in it, of indicating it and naming it, of judging it and ultimately of
> knowing it in the form of truth... Things are already murmuring meanings which
> our language has only to pick up; and this language, right from its most
> rudimentary project, was already speaking to us of a being of which it is like the
> skeleton. (Foucault 1981: 65)

Originating experience offers the empirical view of an external reality 'out there', waiting to be

'discovered'. Objects, as observable, measurable and quantifiable evidence, provide an inventory

through which to order and know the world: they come to stand for the world. Humanism's

ultimate goal is a comprehensive, encyclopedic archive and repository, which will yield a total

knowledge. The empirical view which is prevalent in museums also offers the prospect of a

scientific, objective method of collecting and measuring material evidence. That the processes of

collection - selection, ordering and arrangement - might themselves constitute meaning is not in

question.

Museums were among those institutions - along with libraries, encyclopedias, zoological and

botanical gardens, police files and banks - built on the principle of global archives and

repositories. Their philosophical basis, as Allan Sekula has pointed out, lies in an 'aggressive

empiricism'. He uses the term 'archival projects' to encompass this range of institutions; he states

that they 'typically manifest a compulsive desire for completeness, a faith in an ultimate

coherence imposed by the sheer quantity of acquisitions' (Sekula 1983: 197). Thus the challenge

to humanism and empiricism presented by the new theories is also a challenge to the whole

philosophical basis of museums and their collecting.

Through the unity of the subject and through originating experience, humanism proposes a

certainty in its view of the world. Operating on the simple model of a concept and its referent,

the text disappears, or becomes the transparent medium through which 'experience' can be seized.

Thus literature and other texts are seen to 'reflect the reality of experience as it is perceived by

one individual, who expresses it in a discourse which enables other individuals to recognise it as

true.' (Belsey 1980: 7) Catherine Belsey uses the term 'expressive realism' to describe this

mechanism within orthodox literary criticism.

It is precisely through this mechanism of transparency that humanist thinking effaces itself as

obvious, natural and real. The function of the realist convention is to naturalise itself, to deny the

conditions of its own production and offer itself as identical with reality. John Tagg describes

this process:

> Realism offers a fixity in which the signifier is treated as if it were identical with
> a pre-existent signified and in which the reader's role is purely that of consumer...
> In realism, the process of production of a signified through the action of a
> signifying chain is not seen. It is the product that is stressed, and production that
> is repressed. (Tagg 1988: 99)

Tagg refers to what he calls a 'limited movement' in realist texts, from description to rhetoric,

from observation to expression:

> In this limited movement, it is the business of the language-medium only to
> 'express' or 'communicate' a pre-established concept. Such is the constriction that

> signifier and signified appear not only to unite, but the signifier seems to become transparent so that the concept appears to present itself, and the arbitrary sign is naturalised by a spurious identity between reference and referents, between the text and the world. (Tagg 1988: 99)

He notes that realism works by the controlled and limited recall of a reservoir of similar texts, by

a constant repetition, cross-echoing, by 'silent quotation':

> a subtle web of discourse through which realism is enmeshed in a complex fabric of notions, representations, images, attitudes, gestures and modes of action which function as everyday know-how, 'practical ideology', norms within and through which people live their relation to the world. (Tagg 1988: 100)

This everyday know-how is often referred to as common sense. Belsey described the concept of

common sense as 'the collective and timeless wisdom whose unquestioned presence seems to be

the source and guarantee of everything we take for granted' (Belsey 1980: 3). In relation to

literature, common sense assumes that valuable texts tell truths - about the period which

produced them, about the world in general, or about human nature. It proposes a practice of

reading in search of these truths; it offers itself as the 'obvious' way of reading, the 'natural' way

of approaching works in literature. It makes any attempt to theorise a diversion or a distortion:

> Critical theory accordingly appears as a perfectly respectable but to some degree peripheral area, almost a distinct discipline, ... having no necessary connection with the practice of reading itself. At best it is seen as a way of explaining in theoretical terms what we already - and on the whole without encountering any difficulties - do when we read; at worst it is held to be misleading, interfering with the natural way of reading, perplexing the minds of readers with nice speculations of philosophy and so leading to over-ingenuity, jargon and a loss of direct and spontaneous contact with the immediately perceptible reality of the text. (Belsey 1980: 2)

On the contrary, critics since structuralism have insisted on critical theory, on a practice of

reading which questions expressive realism and the underlying philosophy of humanism. They

have put into question the commonsense view by proposing that common sense itself is

ideologically and discursively constructed. The 'obvious' and the 'natural' are not givers of

meaning, but are produced within a specific society by the ways in which that society talks and

thinks about itself and its experience.

Criticism developed in relation to linguistics and to literary texts has been applied equally to

other texts. Poststructuralist criticism has taken the term 'text' in its broader sense, as any

representation. Visual representations have been drawn into the field of enquiry, most notably

through the work of John Berger (1972) and Judith Williamson (1978); also by Ros Coward

(1984), Annette Kuhn (1985), Jacqueline Rose (1986) and John Tagg (1988), among others.

Those texts which claim most fervently to be beyond authorship, to 'tell the truth', are no less

deserving of critical attention.

A fundamental shift in emphasis, from objects and essences to relations, was brought about by

structuralism. The structuralist approach states that relations create and define objects, not the

other way round. One of the distinguishing marks of structuralism is the break with the humanist

conception of 'totality':

> Structuralism constituted a fundamental <u>decentring</u> of cultural processes from
> their authorial centre in 'man's project'. Culture was as much constituted by its
> conditions of existence as it constituted them. (Hall 1980: 30)

The term 'structuralism' derives from Ferdinand Saussure's linguistic studies in the early part of

this century (Saussure 1974). His work demonstrated that the meaning of signs is not intrinsic

but relational: each sign derives its meaning from its difference from all the other signs in the

language chain. Thus structuralism insists on the primacy of relations and systems of relations.

Saussure's work in linguistics was not taken up and applied in other areas until the middle of the

twentieth century. Since then, structural analysis has been applied not only to language and

textuality, but also in scientific, social, anthropological and cultural studies. Nineteenth century

empiricism, which granted ontological primacy to objects, has given way to a 'theory of relativity'

in the broadest sense - a theory based on the primacy of relations. Whereas empiricism stresses

the endurance of objects and materials, in the new theory the only endurances are structures of

activity (Culler 1981: 141).

In the disciplines of anthropology and the newly-emergent cultural studies, structuralism shifted

emphasis from the substantive contents of different cultures to their forms of arrangement - from

the <u>what</u> to the <u>how</u> of cultural systems. Structuralists assert that meaning is produced in the

ordering - arrangement, regulation - of cultures; therefore the processes and effects of this

ordering, rather than the objects and phenomena it designates, become the focus of study.

Objects and texts continued to be studied, but not for any intrinsic, essential meaning. With the

shift of emphasis, studies after structuralism have 'treated them as archives, decentring their

assumed privileged status - one kind of evidence, among others.' (Hall 1980: 27)

Saussure located meaning in the language system, but then saw it as single, 'fixed', prior to its

realisation in speech or writing. His theory did not account for plurality and contradictions in

meaning, nor for changes in meaning over time. Critics since Saussure have taken his underlying

concern with relations further; their interest has focussed on the way in which texts construct

meanings and subject positions for the reader. This is called poststructuralism.

Poststructuralism modifies and transforms structuralism by insisting that meaning is constantly changing. The meaning of a signifier at any given moment depends on the discursive relations within which it is located. Its meaning is open to constant rereading and reinterpretation.

> In simplest terms, structuralists take linguistics as a model and attempt to develop 'grammars' - systematic inventories of elements and their possibilities of combination - that would account for the form and meaning of literary works; post-structuralists investigate the way in which the project is subverted by the workings of the texts themselves. Structuralists are convinced that systematic knowledge is possible; post-structuralists claim to know only the impossibility of this knowledge. (Culler 1983: 22)

Poststructuralist criticism disregards the conventional respect for the authority and intentions of the author, the hierarchy of text and reader. It destroys the prevailing image of the reader/critic as the passive recipient of <u>authori</u>tarian discourse. It looks instead at how meanings circulate between the reader or spectator, the wider social formation, and the text or representation. The poststructuralist critic insists on the autonomy of the text, and shows how conflict between the reader and the author, or text, can work productively to expose the underlying premises of a work.

The move from structuralism to poststructuralism has been associated with the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Moving from a focus on speech to a concern with writing and textuality, Derrida sees all meaning as produced by a dual process of difference and deferral. This process is, respectively, spatial and temporal. For Derrida, meaning is never truly present, but is constructed through the potentially endless process of referring to other, absent, signifiers; through the interplay of presence and absence (Derrida 1976).

> The play of differences involves syntheses and referrals that prevent there from being at any moment or in any way a simple element that is present in and of itself and refers only to itself. (Derrida, quoted in Culler 1983: 99)

Thus meaning is never essential, absolutely stable, nor fixed once and for all. The effect of representation, in which meaning is apparently fixed, is only temporary and retrospective in its fixing.

If meaning is constructed in the text through the interplay of presence and absence, then it may also be deconstructed. Deconstruction locates meaning in texts and their relation with other texts, insisting that meaning is not only plural but also constantly deferred. Derrida argues that all criticism is predicated on specific philosophical precepts. These are hierarchical oppositions, in which one side of the opposition is the key concept in relation to which the other is defined negatively. Deconstruction reverses these oppositions and, in doing so, is able both to show how discourses achieve their effects and to displace their systems. Deconstruction works upon the incomplete and contradictory nature of meaning. It is thus both subversive and productive: it works 'against the grain' of dominant representations to release meaning. 'The activity of deconstruction sets loose an array of "unintended" meanings, by their nature subversive of the apparently transparent meanings which texts offer us.' (Kuhn 1985: 8) Precisely because meaning is incomplete and contradictory, it is open to challenge and redefinition.

However, Derrida's deconstruction has been criticised because, while acknowledging forces outside and beyond the immediate text (non-discursive forces), he ignores the play of power: he 'does not spell out the social power relations within which texts are located' (Weedon 1987: 25). For Derrida, meaning is achieved through the endless play of the signifier. 'Systems of difference' and 'endless play' are phrases which imply an open availability of texts between which meaning is constituted. Feminist critics have drawn attention to this implication: Michele Barrett

has pointed to the descriptive, neutral, agnostic qualities inherent in the very idea of 'difference'

(Barrett 1987: 35).

Feminism denies such a neutrality: it insists on the power dimensions of difference. For Weedon,

meaning is achieved by struggle and control, through legitimation and exclusion:

> The discursive battle for the meaning of texts ... is a   battle in which the
> legitimation of particular readings and the exclusion of others represent quite
> specific patriarchal, class and race interests, helping to constitute our common-
> sense assumptions as reading and speaking subjects. (Weedon 1987: 168)

Weedon seeks 'a politically useful understanding of the production and reproduction of

patriarchal power, both institutionally and for individual women and men' (Weedon 1987: 107).

She finds the work of Michel Foucault the most useful for a feminist and poststructuralist

analysis, because he is concerned with historically specific discursive relations and social

practices.

Foucault's analysis broke with any model of a hierarchy of determining forces in his study of

'discourse'. For him, discourses are the social processes of making and reproducing sense. They

are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and

power relations which are inherent in such knowledge. Foucault refused any dichotomy between

'knowledge' and a prior or external 'reality'; between signifying or discursive, and external, non-

or extra-discursive, aspects of any practice. Rather, discourses are 'practices that systematically

form the objects of which they speak' (Wickham 1986: 161).

> Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the
> nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects
> which they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning
> outside their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourse constitutes the

> minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases. (Weedon 1987: 108)

Foucault argued that the rules, systems and procedures which constitute, and are constituted by, our 'will to knowledge' comprise a discrete realm of discursive practices - 'a conceptual terrain in which knowledge is formed and produced' (Young 1981: 48). These discursive practices are characterised by 'a delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories' (Foucault 1977a: 199).

For Foucault, discourses are power relations. The production of discourse is an act of power and control, of mastery. (Here, and elsewhere, Foucault ignores the sexual dimension of language in his writing.) In his work, he shifted from the language of structuralism to a new language of combat and struggle; from consciousness and reason to tactics and strategies of power and domination (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 9). Thus, Foucault stated that 'we must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them' (Foucault 1981: 67). He stressed that 'discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle'. Therefore 'discourse is the power which is to be seized' (ibid: 53).

Foucault argued that knowledge is bound in a circular relation to systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to the effects of power which it induces and which, in turn, redirect it. 'The exercise of power is perpetually creating knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power.' It is this dialectical relation which he calls 'a regime of truth'. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth:

that is, the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements; the way in which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1977b, 13)

Foucault broke from any general theory of power, with its attendant notion of a search for origins, to insist on historical specificity. 'Power is not an institution, a structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed: it is the name given to a complex strategic situation in a given society.' (Foucault 1980: 236) He aimed to identify actual, material discursive practices. 'For him the question is always the identity of particular discursive formations.' (Brown and Cousins 1986: 36)

Gane identifies three phases of Foucault's work: first, analyses of knowledge as structured in discursive practices linked to fundamental epistemes (archaeology); second, a study of knowledge disciplines as articulated regimes which operated systematic techniques of exclusion and censorship, and whose internal structures were produced as power structures (genealogy); finally, a massive project into the history of sexual morality (ethics) (Gane 1986: 5). My analysis draws on the second phase, of genealogy.

In his inaugural address at the College de France in 1970, Foucault laid out his genealogical project. This was concerned with those procedures which operate in every society to control, select and organise the production of discourse, 'to ward off its powers and dangers' (Foucault 1981: 52). He identified three groups of procedures in the formation of discourse: the exterior procedures of exclusion; the interior procedures of limitation or rarefaction; the procedures of restriction.

The exterior procedures of exclusion 'have to do with the part of discourse which puts power and desire at stake.' They include the procedure of prohibition: the ritual of the circumstances of speech, the privileged or exclusive right of the subject to speak, and a taboo on the object of speech. The division of madness is another procedure of exclusion: opposing reason and madness. The will to truth - opposing true and false is the procedure which tends to assimilate the others: 'the first two are constantly becoming more and more uncertain, to the extent that they are now invaded by the will to truth, which for its part constantly grows stronger, deeper and more implacable.' (Foucault 1981: 56) Through these procedures, discourse defines the norms of truth and of its unthinkable other.

The interior or internal procedures of limitation or rarefaction operate '.. as if this time another dimension of discourse had to be mastered: that of events and chance' (ibid: 56). These function as procedures of classification, ordering and distribution. The unpredictable elements of any discourse are limited by repetition and sameness in commentary: 'the new thing here lies not in what is said but in the event of its return' (ibid: 58). Certain authors, and texts, take on special significance: meanings are reduced to, or deductible from, their works or lives. The role of the author limits the unpredictable by giving the 'disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion into the real'. The operation of disciplines, more than the other interior procedures, limits the chance-elements of discourse; it both constructs and restricts discourse. 'The discipline is a principle of control over the production of discourse. The discipline fixes limits for discourse by the action of an identity which takes the form of a permanent re-actuation of the rules' (Foucault1981: 61).

The discipline operates by setting limits, reducing possibilities, applying quasi-scientific rules, methods and techniques. 'Within its own limits, each discipline recognises true and false propositions; but it pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins' (ibid: 60). The third group of procedures for the production of discourse are procedures of restriction; rather than mastering the powers of discourses (exclusion) or averting their unpredictability (limitation), these determine the conditions in which discourses are applied. They control, select and refine the discourses. Those who enter the order of discourse have to be qualified or meet certain requirements.

> Not all the regions of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some of them are
> largely forbidden (they are differentiated and differentiating), while others seem
> to be almost open to all winds and put at the disposal of every speaking subject,
> without prior restrictions. (Foucault 1981: 62)

Foucault identifies here the operation of ritual, which determines both the particular properties and the stipulated roles of the speaking subjects. Societies of discourse function to preserve or produce discourses; but to circulate them within a closed space, and to distribute them only according to strict rules. Doctrine binds individuals to certain types of enunciation; it 'brings about a double subjection: of the speaking subjects to discourses, and of discourses to the (at least virtual) group of speaking individuals' (Foucault 1981: 64). On a much broader scale, the system of education works as a procedure of restriction, in its distribution and in what it allows and prevents.

Foucault identified certain methodological principles for any analysis of discourse - principles opposed to those which have dominated the traditional history of ideas. The first is the principle of reversal. Where tradition sees the source of discourses, their abundance and their continuity in

the roles of the author, the discipline and the will to truth, we see instead the negative actions of cutting up, splitting and dissecting.

The second principle is that of discontinuity. This opposes the notion that beneath the dissected and discrete discourses, there is a vast unlimited discourse, which we have the task of raising up and restoring. On the contrary, discourses should be treated as discontinuous practices: they may be independent, oppositional, or even simply unaware of each other.

The third is the principle of specificity: this places discourse in specific, concrete and historical circumstances. Thus, when regularity occurs, it occurs because we impose it on the events of discourse; it does not occur in the events of discourse themselves.

The fourth principle is that of exteriority, which emphasises the external, material conditions of possibility. According to this principle, analysis should move not inwards, towards the interior, hidden nucleus of discourse, but outwards, towards its external conditions of possibility: towards what gives rise to the events of discourse, and fixes its limits.

Foucault offered two approaches to discourse analysis (Foucault 1981: 70). The first is critical analysis by reversal. This analysis tries to grasp the forms of exclusion, limitation and restriction - how they are formed; how they have been modified and displaced; what constraint they have exerted; to what extent they have been evaded. The second is genealogical analysis, analysing the historical process in which a particular discourse operates. How did a series of discourses come to be formed, and how did the procedures of exclusion, limitation and restriction operate?

What was the specific norm of each one? What were their conditions of appearance, growth and variation?

> The critical task will be to analyse the processes of rarefaction, but also of regrouping and unification of discourses; genealogy will study their formation, at once dispersed, discontinuous, and regular. In truth these two tasks are never competely separable. (Foucault 1981: 71)

Foucault is concerned with the power relations of discourse, which are relations of advantage and disadvantage. The discursive play of power constitutes 'subjects' and 'objects' of knowledge, which are, respectively, superior and inferior. Thus, his work offers an analysis which is relevant to feminist criticism and practice.

Foucault's conception of discourse encompasses not only ways of speaking and writing, but also physical layout and material forms; social practices; and individual subjects. To be effective, discourses must be activated through the willing agency of the individuals whom they simultaneously constitute and govern, as embodied subjects. Foucault's writing and expression suggest compulsion and conscription. But he emphasises that discourses operate most effectively with consensus, when individuals recognise and identify themselves fully with particular subject positions offered. Moreover, he sees discourses as changing and productive: where there is a space between the subject position offered by a discourse and individual interest, a resistance to that subject position is produced. Such resistances produce new discourses which may displace or modify the dominant discourse.

These principles and methods of analysis are useful for a feminist and deconstructionist analysis because they reveal the ways in which power relations are produced and reproduced in

discourses; the institutional mechanisms and procedures through which they operate; and the enrolment of individuals as subjects and agents. They also suggest that new discourses can be constructed from the margins, to challenge and subvert the dominant discourses.

2.2 The Contribution of Feminism

Feminism is concerned with power - more precisely, with patriarchy - the relations of advantage and disadvantage, in which women's interests are subordinated to those of men. Patriarchy means, literally, the rule of the father. As this implies, patriarchy exercises power not through biology, but through the meanings attached to biological sexual difference in society and in the self. The term used to describe these social and psychological meanings is gender; the focus of study is not women, but 'woman' and 'man' and the relations between them. The reciprocal relation of power and meaning are again at issue.

Patriarchy has been applied by feminists in a broad range of practical and theoretical programmes (Beechey 1979). Feminist readings of anthropology showed that the meanings of 'man' and 'woman' are constructed through kinship rules. Woman is both object of exchange and sign in exchange: the sign 'woman' is produced in the exchange of actual women (Cowie 1978: 61-2). Marxist-feminists examined the ideological, economic and physical relations of domination and subordination in the institutions and social practices of capitalism (e.g. Cockburn 1981). The historian Sheila Rowbotham rejected the concept of patriarchy because, to her, it implied 'a universal and historical form of oppression which returns us to biology', a single determining cause of women's subordination (Rowbotham 1981). In response, Sally Alexander and Barabara

Taylor drew on psychoanalysis to develop the concept of patriarchy to encompass internal, individual practices as well as external, material conditions.

> It allows us to confront not only the day-to-day social practices through which men exercise power over women, but also mechanisms through which patterns of authority and submission become part of the sexed personality itself - 'the father in our heads', so to speak. (Alexander and Taylor 1981: 372)

Initially, feminists drew on history and social conditioning to 'explain' the representations and images attached to women. They worked empirically to demonstrate the gender-blindness of existing work, in which women were invisible or were the passive subjects of male study. They worked to expose other realities, in which women were both visible and active.

> The muted and invisible categories of women, and in labour history the working class, required to be given a voice and a visible presence in history; the 'mirror' of historical representation needs (sic) to be angled to reflect the lives and the social world of women, hidden in the shadows by his-story, the dominant discourse of the historical tradition. (Fleming 1986: 5)

The feminist project extended beyond the conventional boundaries of public and political life, to the private and the personal. It insisted on the right to 'speak as women', and to speak of women's experience, subjectivity and sexuality. Thus the early feminist project was essentialist in its approach: 'speaking as a woman' appealed to a sexual identity defined as essential and privileged experience associated with that identity. In this aspect feminism was anti-theoretical.

Feminist work in this 'first moment' (Culler 1983: 46), then, remained within the convention of expressive realism described above (section 2.1). It offered a critique of the supposed unity and universality of traditional history, demonstrating that experience was not single and unified, but plural and gendered. However, the underlying assumptions of truth and authentic experience remained. Indeed, these conventions were reinvigorated through, for example, the use of oral

testimony and autobiography, the shift from narrative to first person. 'Women's history is seen as expressing things as they were, perhaps more authentically than mainstream historical studies' (Fleming 1986: 5). Equally, in advertising and popular culture, groups campaigned for women to be portrayed in more positive roles than the usual dichotomy of mother or whore, and with more variation to reflect women's changing position in modern society. These campaigns assumed that women should be represented in the media against a measure of their lived experience, of true life (Betterton 1987: 20). The goals were to obtain equal access to the process of representation, and equal treatment in the representations themselves.

Similarly, feminist criticism appealed to experience as a given which could ground or justify a reading. Critics asserted a continuity between women's experience of social and familial structures and their experience as readers. 'Such criticism is resolutely thematic - focused on woman as a theme in literary works - and resolute too in its appeal to the literary and nonliterary experience of readers.' (Culler 1983: 46)

Writing and other acts of representation were seen as a more or less faithful reproduction of an external reality - the authentic expression of real experience. Criticism was strongly normative, downgrading works which critics found lacking in 'authenticity' and 'real experience' (Moi 1985: 47-8).

Through 'speaking as a woman', feminism cut across dominant categories and divisions, introducing its own categories and concerns. Most of all, feminism cut across the traditional separation of the spheres of personal and political, private and public life, to emphasise their

interconnection. For example, feminist historians criticised labour history for its narrow focus on work and trade unions, and for taking the sexual division of labour for granted, rather than recognising it as the systematic exclusion of women and less skilled men (Alexander and Davin 1976: 4). In historical and cultural studies, feminism placed reproduction alongside production, and raised production for use from its subordination to production for exchange. Thus feminism rendered a critique of production itself (Beechey 1979: 77-9; Westwood 1984). Again, studies of the subordinate genres in art practice in which women were effectively 'ghettoised' produced a critique of the constitution of 'fine' art, and of the separation of art and craft (Cherry 1986; Parker and Pollock 1981). Feminists also explored cultural practices beyond the conventional frontiers of 'high culture', in popular forms such as the cinema, advertising and magazines (Coward 1984; Kuhn 1985; Williamson 1978 and 1986; Winship 1981 and 1987).

Radical feminists have continued to work within an essentialist and anti-theoretical framework. They reject knowledge and theory as part of male rationality and reason - a masculine discourse which devalues and suppresses women. Radical feminists envisage a new social order, in which women will not be subordinated to men and 'true' and 'natural' femininity will be valued; in the short term, they can only separate from men and patriarchal structures. They have been criticised for 'writ[ing] women's subjectivity and active agency out of history as effectively as any marxism' (Alexander 1984: 128). This is because they ignore the metaphysical nature of gender identities: they 'uncritically tak[e] over the very metaphysical categories set up by patriarchy in order to keep women in their places, despite attempts to attach new feminist value to these old categories' (Moi 1985: 13). Their position creates its own unified and totalising concept 'woman' as a biologistic 'given', always outside and separate from the male/main symbolic order. Therefore

'woman' has no position within the symbolic order from which to address it; 'she' remains silent, accepting 'her' separation and, by implication, subordination. Radical feminist writers may celebrate their position outside, by identifying with mysticism, magic and madness or insanity (Weedon 1987: 9).

Other feminists have moved towards an analysis of the whole system of knowledge and thought which underpins expressive realism. Their analysis exposes the inadequacies of the masculine cognitive model, demonstrating that knowledge is positional (Barrett 1987: 33-4). Avoiding any general theory of femininity - because this would essentialize woman - feminists have instead produced a critique which disturbs the logic of the masculine system, its concepts and procedures.

The relation of power and meaning is central to this critique. In patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male. To quote Moi again, 'the humanist creator is potent, phallic, and male - God in relation to his world, the author in relation to his text' (1985: 8). Feminism has exposed the male values disguised as neutral and universal terms:

> one of the major achievements ... has been to criticise and deconstruct the 'unified subject', whose appearance of universality disguises a constitution structured specifically around the subjectivity characteristic of the white, bourgeois man. (Barrett 1987: 35)

Feminist criticism provides a different position or point of departure, that of a female reader, to analyse and situate the dominant male critical vision. In doing so, feminist criticism demonstrates that this vision, rather than being potent and full with meaning, is limited and partial. It thereby draws attention to the sexual codes of the text. However, in order to avoid

essentialising the experience of women as readers, feminist criticism uses the <u>hypothesis</u> of a woman reader (section 1.3). The hypothesis of a woman reader puts feminist criticism in the place usually occupied by male criticism. The position is twice removed from the usual inferred or explicit subject position of the text: as reader, rather than author; and as woman/feminine, rather than man/masculine. From this position outside the text, as it were, the reader is awakened to its sexual codes and innuendoes, its gaps and silences, its awkwardness and constraints.

Foucault analysed discourse from a different position (section 2.1), but equally demonstrated the restrictions and constraints within a seemingly generous and open discourse:

> All that appears to our eyes is a truth conceived as a richness, a fecundity, a gentle and insidiously universal force, and in contrast we are unaware of the will to truth, that prodigious machinery designed to exclude. (Foucault 1981: 56)

In western, humanist thought, subjective identity is constructed as masculine and feminine. The feminine, woman, is necessary to the whole structure of patriarchal thought. The 'unified' subject - knowing, acting, rational - is constituted upon an opposite, against which to define <u>him</u>self. According to Michele le Doeuff, philosophers in the late eighteenth century reactivated older themes and myths in order to re-establish the certainty of philosophy. '"Woman" was to be invoked here in a strictly fantasy-oriented sense, as a purely negative otherness, as an atrophy which, by contrast, guarantees a philosophical completeness' (Le Doeuff 1987: 192).

Le Doeuff sees philosophy as a discipline produced through the fact that it represses, excludes and dissolves. Philosophy makes use of an available signifier to pinpoint difference. 'The man/woman difference is involved or conscripted to signify the general opposition between definite and indefinite, that is to say validated/excluded'. The feminine is constructed in an

inferior, but necessary, relationship: philosophy 'creates itself in what it represses, and, this object

of repression being essential to it, is endlessly engaged in separating, enclosing and insularizing

itself.' Thus the philosophical creates its opposite: the feminine, 'a support and signifier of

something that operates within it as an indispensable deadweight which cannot be dialectically

absorbed' (Le Doeuff 1987: 196).

Many feminist critics have drawn attention to the construction of femininity and masculinity

through a series of hierarchical binary oppositions in which the female is always the devalued,

subordinated part.

> Science, philosophy, rationality - call it what you like - constantly re-enacts the
> Cartesian mind/body divide in its most basic methodological moves... Always
> and everywhere the rational, active, masculine intellect operates on the passive,
> objectified, feminized body. (Moi 1989: 189)

Drawing on the deconstructive work of Jacques Derrida, Helen Cixous has traced an endless

series of hierarchical binary oppositions that always in the end come back to the fundamental

'couple' of male/female: activity/passivity; sun/moon; culture/nature; day/night; father/mother;

head/heart; intelligible/palpable; logos/pathos. In these couples, the underlying paradigm is

always the hidden male/female opposition with its inevitable positive/negative evaluation. In the

positive/negative pairing, the weaker (female) partner is always repressed, silenced, or, for

Cixous, put to death. She describes a battle for signifying supremacy in which the male, active

term must destroy the female, passive term in order to acquire meaning (Cixous 1980).

This dualism acts by making itself inevitable, inescapable. There is no space between or outside

such a pairing. Jane Gallop calls it the 'taming and binding' of difference in order to allay the

'great anxiety' which difference produces.

Polarisation, which is the theatrical representation of difference, tames and binds that anxiety. The classic example is sexual difference, which is represented as polar oppositions. (Gallop, cited in Mulvey 1987: 5).

The problem for feminism is then how to escape the dualism in which woman, the feminine, is tamed and bound; how to transgress the boundaries of either/or and move beyond them. Feminism has turned to psychoanalysis, which recognises the conflicts and complexity of subjectivity and sexuality. In psychoanalysis, the identity of woman is not unproblematically given, nor the effect of contingent social oppression; it is itself a site of conflict and contradictions. Its focus is the unconscious - 'that area between silence and speech' - which unsettles the unity of the subject and the polarity of sexual difference (Mulvey 1987: 18). The unconscious undermines the subject from any position of certainty, and at the same time reveals the fictional nature of the sexual category to which everyone is none the less assigned (Rose 1986: 51-3).

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud worked with female hysterics in Paris in the late nineteenth century. In his work, he questioned the prevailing, empirical belief that the symptoms of hysteria could be 'read' from visible evidence, by looking at, or examining, and describing the body of the patient. Instead, he allowed the patients to speak; he went behind the visible symptoms, to ask what these were 'trying to say'. He went further, to expose the unconscious desires and motives of 'normal' people which appear in slips of the tongue, jokes and dreams. Thus, he challenged the privilege attached to the visible, to the empirically self-evident, and the forms of reasoning attached to these; he presented 'the force of the unconscious as a concept against a fully social classification relying on empirical evidence as its rationale' (Rose 1986: 97).

Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst working from the 1930s, developed Freud's analysis to interpret the unconscious as a language, to link the seeming disorder of the symptom or dream and the normal language through which we recognise each other and speak. The unconscious becomes a form of indirect representation: 'the body speaking because there is something which cannot be said' (Rose 1986: 99).

Lacan emphasised the fictional, constructed nature of masculinity and femininity as the result of social and symbolic, rather than biological, difference. The symbolic order is achieved in the passage from the imaginary, the relationship between mother and child, into the symbolic, the recognition of the father and his law. Lacan's theory of entry into the symbolic order was mapped onto Freud's Oedipus complex. The child passes from a maternal, natural or experiential, bond into a symbolic order of resolution and closure, rational and cultural order, with its own laws and taboos. In this symbolic order, sexual difference is constructed through subjection to a law which exceeds any natural or biological division. For boys, the journey is one of transition, separation and rejection: male identity is formed through a split, and maintained through suppression and discontinuity. In this journey, rationality is established through the exclusion of the feminine: the knower (subject/masculine) splits himself from the known (object/feminine), and establishes dominance over it/her. For girls, the journey is one of inversion and loss: recognition of and subjection to an order in which she has no position in her own right, but only in relation to men. For Lacan, the negativity of the feminine is a symbolic and psychical necessity.

However, for both men and women, this journey is never perfected but always remains partial and precarious. Subjectivity is always in the making. As in Derrida's critique of textuality,

Lacan states that meaning can only occur in specific locations and in a relation of difference from other locations. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the mechanism of desire, rather than the principle of difference, prevents any final fixing of meaning (Weedon 1987: 53). The individual subject is driven by a desire for control, satisfaction and completeness which can never be achieved. Differences exist <u>within</u> each subject: the human self is a complex entity, of which the conscious mind is only a small part. The subject is never fully in command of her/his identity: rather, a complex network of conflicting structures <u>produces</u> the subject and its experiences.

Psychoanalysis, then, offers a specific account of sexual difference; it describes the psychic law to which we are subject, but only in terms of its failing. Its value to feminism lies in the place assigned to woman in that differentiation. If the image serves to maintain a particular and oppressive mode of sexual recognition, it does so only partially and at a cost. Feminist studies in literature and the cinema have drawn on psychoanalysis to open the text, analysing its disturbance in and of narrative codes. The concept of sexual difference is posed as an inherent part of this analysis: the placing and displacing of sexual difference is taken as crucial to the process of writing itself. Historians have been more reluctant toexplore the implications of psychoanalysis, because of its apparent distance from the specific material and concrete institutions which frame and determine our lives. Sally Alexander is among the few historians who have approached the relationship of history and the unconscious. For Alexander, the reservations of historians cannot staunch the flow of ideas:

> Historians of pre-industrial society have fewer inhibitions about speaking of myth, ritual, magic and their significance in human organisation. Perhaps the fear that by introducing the unconscious and phantasy into social history is to open a pandora's box, to deny the rationale of political and social life, is stalled by the distance of pre-industrial societies from our own. Against these reservations, I only suggest that the persistent problem of femininity and the presence of

feminism indicate that the pandora's box is already wide open. (Alexander 1984: 134)

Jacqueline Rose, too, urges this critical activity: 'our previous history is not the petrified block of a singular visual space since, looked at obliquely, it can always be seen to contain its moments of unease.' (Rose 1986: 233)

Using these feminist critiques which draw on psychoanalysis, I return to the museum and to the representation of history. I examine the solid and concrete forms and texts of the museum obliquely: in Rose's words, to reveal their 'moments of unease', conflicts and inconsistencies. In the next section, I draw together the poststructuralist and feminist critiques to lay out the framework for analysing museums in subsequent chapters.

Illustration 1

'Your fictions become history': the work of the American billboard artist Barbara Kruger suggests

the fictional and fractured nature of identity and history (Kruger 1983: 27).

2.3 Towards a Critical Practice

Museums claim to be open and accessible, in their forms and in the medium which they use to convey messages. They claim to be inclusive, to offer meaning for everyone; they offer a prospect of unlimited (and unlimiting) experience. But the theories and criticism which I have described in the first two sections of this chapter provide a critical standpoint from which the museum discourse can be analysed to expose the constraints exercised on it. From this standpoint, the museum discourse closes off possibilities, excludes and limits. Further, these theories demonstrate that the feminine occupies a critical position in a system of knowledge and rationality which operates through limitation: 'woman' and the feminine are structural, marginal, necessary to uphold (male) knowledge and rationality. Thus, the constraints of the museum discourse - and its underlying contradictions - can be traced most clearly where discourse maps its boundaries through sexual difference, in the discursive construction of masculine and feminine. This discourse rests on a particular mode of sexual recognition which it maintains only partially: 'it is in the normal image of the man that our certainties are invested and, by implication, in that of the woman that they constantly threaten collapse' (Rose 1986: 232).

Applying the theories described in the first two parts of this chapter, the focus of study becomes not whether something is true, but how it comes to be true: in the creation of meaning. Feminism and poststructuralism insist that meaning is political, located in the social networks of relations of power and knowledge. A feminist and poststructuralist criticism puts into question existing institutions and practices and seeks to create new practices. The activity of criticism is itself

productive, since every act of reading produces new, alternative and unintended meanings which can be released and explored. The process of criticism is also, in principle, infinite since meaning can never finally be fixed. However, at any particular historical moment, a finite number of discourses is in circulation and in competition for meaning. In the conflict between these, the possibility of new ways of thinking and new forms of subjectivity are created.

In this section, I map out a critical practice for examining the construction of meaning in the museum discourse. The difficulty, and importance, of criticism is that it seeks to untie those things which are taken for granted and naturalised in discourse, so that they become invisible: 'the effect of discourses is to make it virtually impossible to think outside them' (Young 1981: 48). Foucault's critical and genealogical analyses of the production of discourse are useful for a feminist and deconstructionist reading of museums because they facilitate this process of 'thinking outside' the discourse. Critical analysis grasps the particular mechanisms, or procedures, through which discourse is produced: procedures of exclusion, limitation and restriction. Genealogical analysis focuses on the forms of discourse - dispersed, discontinuous and regular (Foucault 1981: 71).

Foucault describes the circular relation of knowledge and power through which particular discourses are constructed and maintained in a regime of truth (Foucault 1977b: 13; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 9). In a feminist reading, this relation of knowledge and power is a relation of advantage and disadvantage, in which male forms always have the upper hand. By taking the perspective of a woman reader, I examine how meaning is made through sexual difference; how gender is constituted in the museum discourse; how 'man' and 'woman' are enrolled, through

presence and absence, activity and passivity; and how meaning itself is thereby contradictory, imperfect and open to re-negotiation.

In taking the position of woman reader, I do not appeal to any essential qualities in individual women, or common experience among women. Instead, I use the hypothesis of a woman reader to provide leverage for displacing the dominant male vision. I take the position of 'woman' as 'she' is constructed in discourse, at the margins of meaning. `Woman' is invited to identify against herself - 'she' is co-opted into participation in an experience from which 'she' is implicitly or explicitly excluded. At the same time, reading obliquely, from this marginal position, the text itself becomes a tangle of contradictions and inconsistencies.

'Reading as a woman' reveals the play of power in sexual codes at the heart of museums and museum practices, in constituting 'subjects' and 'objects'. Against the holistic, unifying view of organic entities and interdependence, museums are based on a mechanistic view of separation and splitting into parts. This view incorporates a rigid dualism of subject and object, of active culture working upon the passive body of nature. From the seventeenth century, this dualism of subject and object have been formed and expressed through a gendered dualism, of male/female.

Foucault's exterior procedures of exclusion are concerned with the will to truth, opposing true and false. The discourse of truth is formed upon certainty; upon material, visible presence; and upon the conscious mind as the source and guarantee of meaning. Museums collect things which they can observe, examine and describe; the present materiality of artefacts is privileged over

absent, immaterial or unconscious forms such as ephemeral, perishable and expended goods or thought, speech, emotion, dreams.

Museums collect, preserve and interpret the material culture; they place emphasis on truth, which they define as authenticity of the material, the artefacts which they collect. The professional method for defining authenticity is provenance: the source of the artefact is recorded to demonstrate its direct relationship to a recognised prior historical event, person, context or sequence. Where unprovenanced artefacts are collected, these are deemed to be legitimate in a general way, as representative of a type which is significant in relation to a recognised historical context, development or sequence. For the last two centuries, museums have increasingly rejected copies and imitations of the real thing for their collections, except where these are themselves authentic, such as counterfeit coins (see Chapter Three; Bann 1984: 15).

These genuine, original or authentic historical artefacts are taken from their context and placed within the museum, in new arrangements and narratives which themselves, by inference, purport to be true. Artefacts are divorced from their original context of ownership and use, and regrouped or redisplayed in a different context of meaning, which is regarded as having a superior authority. Museums offer the promise of a safe place in which meaning is fixed, above and apart from the fluidity and traffic of meanings in everyday life (Saumarez Smith 1989: 9). Within museums, objects are ordered in classifications. These are based on the premise that objects can be separated into categories, and labelled with names and meanings, which are fixed and final, transcending context and relationship.

Until recently, museums have occupied a monopoly position in using and making meanings from the material culture. The rise of theme parks and the heritage industry has challenged this monopoly, placing historical artefacts and events within a new discourse which emphasises visitor experience and interweaves techniques which belong to fact and fiction: drama, construction, impersonation, replication, multimedia. This has provoked museums into defending their position as guardians of authenticity and truth; while at the same time adjusting their own services to deliver a more exciting and engaging experience for visitors.

Some of those who challenge the monopoly position of museums have also earned their disapproval for adopting a tone and presentation which are consciously humorous, playful and ironic (Davies 1988: 137; Lewis 1991). In the reverential discourse of truth, museums do not condone humour unless it is of their own making. Although 'fun' and 'pleasure' are now encouraged in museums, through, for example, demonstrations, interactive exhibits or re-enactments, these are often available to limited audiences, mainly children. Moreover, fun and pleasure are offered through games played on the surface of history: they do not disturb the serious substance of history, presented in that version which through practice and replication has become conventional. Those who make fun of, or with, history are rebuked for trivialisation.

Foucault's second procedure of discourse is the interior procedure of limitation which operates particularly through the creation of disciplines. These operate by setting limits, reducing possibilities and reaffirming their own rules. 'Within its own limits, each discipline recognises true and false propositions; but it pushes back a whole teratology of knowledge beyond its margins' (Foucault 1981: 60). The divisions of discipline in museums carve the material world

up into separate institutions, identities and collections with rigid boundaries. These are internally driven, rather than externally imposed; they are created and reinforced by distinct methods and practices of acquisition, ordering and interpretation. Each discipline has its own internal dynamic and progressive historical sequence. It creates within itself a totality, unity and coherence. It functions without reference to those other disciplines, collections and systems which juxtapose, overlap or contradict it.

The third group of procedures for the production of discourse are those of restriction: these control the application of discourse by rituals of behaviour, distribute discourses only within closed spaces and according to certain rules, and bind individuals to certain types of enunciation.

In Great Britain, the museums profession is not a closed society of discourse in the way that Foucault defines it. Entry does not depend on a specific programme of training and qualification; the current definition of museum professional encompasses a broad range of vocations, and levels of activity. However, all professionals are bound to a code and expected to uphold a certain set of values, which are expected to take precedence over other, public or personal, loyalties and values.

> Museum professionals must be aware of the implications of becoming involved, in their professional capacity, with any public pressure group or lobbying faction, since this might call into question their professional objectivity... Museum professionals must clearly understand the point where professional judgement ends and personal bias begins. (Museums Association 1993: 400)

In this code, the will to truth is reasserted by opposing truth and falsehood - here interpreted as distortion: 'professional objectivity' and 'professional judgement' are opposed to 'lobbying faction' and 'personal bias'.

Again, the code prescribes the terms of the discourse (objects on display, with information); assumes a transgressive, or transparent, mode of representation (exposition); and binds individuals to certain types of enunciation (clear, accurate and objective):

> Museum professionals must ensure that objects on public display, with all forms of accompanying information, should present a clear, accurate and objective exposition, and should never deliberately mislead. (Ibid)

These terms tacitly endorse the hierarchy which exists within the broad category of professionals: those closest to the objects - curators - control ('ensure') the interpretation ('exposition') which supposedly emanates from them. The code presumes that the enunciation will be declarative; it closes off the possibility of different, interrogative, modes of address, which elicit other points of view, encourage dialogue and acknowledge opposing discourses. Instead, opposing discourses are labelled as 'personal bias' or 'a particular point of view', from which the professional should distance him/herself[1]. The fact that these opposing discourses exist within the profession, between disciplines or different occupational groups (for example, between curatorial and education staff), is denied. Finally, the code implies that the discourse is controlled by museum professionals: visitors are situated as spectators of that exposition, looking on and in.

The rituals of discourse are contained in a whole range of formal and informal structures and practices, from the tight regulation of the ethical code to debate and criticism, for example. The dominant forms of criticism tend to reinforce the will to truth through descriptive accounts and through measuring the accuracy, or lack of it, of exhibitions. Criticism is then directed at those

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[1]   The code does not reflect an earlier debate which took place in 1986 on 'Bias in Museums'. There, the President of the Museums Association acknowledged that bias is unavoidable and, if declared and stated, acceptable; he described objectivity as the corrective to, rather than the opposite of, bias (Robertson 1987: 5).

projects which are deemed to be distorted and unbalanced through commercial or political influence: for example, a permanent gallery on nuclear power gallery at the Science Museum in London, or an exhibition on the miners' strike at Edinburgh City Museums (Levidow and Young 1984; Kirby 1988: 96-98).

In his genealogical analysis, Foucault describes the forms which discourses take as dispersed, discontinuous and regular (Foucault 1981: 71). Applying this analysis to history, he describes the tendency in the historical tradition to resist external forces, failing to represent their impact on the past or to recognise their importance in the present. It assumes a suprahistorical perspective,

> a history whose function is to compose the finally reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself; a history that always encourages subjective recognitions and attributes a form of reconciliation to all the displacements of the past; a history whose perspective on all that precedes it implies the end of time, a completed development. (Foucault 1977a: 152)

The effect of this is to put history just out of reach, so that it cannot be moulded or changed. Foucault calls for a genealogical project to dismantle the traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history, which trace the past as a patient and continuous development, encourage a consoling play of recognitions and depend on 'rediscovery'. Against this, he defines an 'effective' history which refuses the certainty of absolutes, and is without constants.

> History becomes 'effective' to the degree that it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature ... It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting. (Ibid: 154)

Traditional history dissolves the singular event into an ideal continuity. Effective history seeks discontinuity; rather than looking for origins, it deals with events in terms of their unique

characteristics. It recognises the events of history, its jolts, surprises, unsteady victories and unpalatable defeats.

Effective history also examines the emergence of events as accidents, errors and reversals. These dispersed, exterior events, rather than truth and being, lie at the root of what we know. Thus, effective history fragments what in traditional history was unified (Foucault 1977a: 147).

Finally, in the genealogical project, effective history notes the regularity of events - not as the slow exposure of the meaning hidden in an origin, but as 'the endlessly repeated play of dominations' which displace and reverse other dominations (1977a: 150). Effective history traces the emergence of these different dominations as events on the stage of historical process.

Effective history inverts relationships of proximity and distance; it shifts the focus of study from the contemplation of heights to what is closest. It opposes the veneration of monumental history with 'base curiosity' and detail. It seeks events in those places which we tend to think of as without history - sentiments, love, instincts.

Effective history affirms knowledge as a particular perspective; the historian is explicit in his/her preferences and acknowledges the injustice of his/her position. Thus, effective history is directed against truth because it opposes the notion of history as objective knowledge (Foucault 1977a: 160). Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has used Foucault's concept of effective history as a tool to write a 'history of the museum' in which, through 'focusing on when and how "museums" in the past

changed, and in which way and why long-standing practices were ruptured and abandoned', she reveals new relationships and articulations (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 11).

In this chapter, I have traced theories of the construction of meaning and gendered subjectivity; from these, I have developed a critical practice for examining the construction of meaning in the museum discourse. In the following chapters, I apply it to analyse the discursive construction of gender: in Chapter Three, in the formation of history museums and, in Chapters Four, Five and Six, in specific case studies. In Chapter Seven, I draw general conclusions from this critical approach; in the final chapter, I describe some projects which unsettle the conventional discourses and practices of museums, and the certainties and identities on which these rest.

CHAPTER THREE

THE DISCOURSE OF THE HISTORY MUSEUM

In the last chapter, I summarised the practice of feminist criticism and the theory of poststructuralism. These show that texts cannot be innocently 'read' to reveal 'truths', but rather that each text is charged with meaning through position, inclusion and exclusion, and through the reading and reader.

In this chapter, I outline the background and context to situate the case studies which follow (Chapters Four to Six). I examine history museums in their institutional forms - buildings, collections, knowledges and personnel - as powerful embodiments of particular world views, both shaping and reflecting those views. I describe the shift in attention of museums as ideas of history, of museums, and of personal identity have shifted; with these, the shift in practices of acquisition, classification and exhibition; and the shift in the identities and representations which museums produce.

As I stated at the outset, my focus is not history, but representation. I analyse museums as institutions which both reflect and are active agents in forming notions of self, history and identity. These notions are given meaning through forms of self and other, subject and object, progress and stasis, public and private, in which gender is strongly articulated. Thus, gender is both charged with the task of making meaning and is itself charged with meaning.

Here, I do not cover the background history and the development of history museums. This has been fully covered by Marsh and Kavanagh; while the study of museums and galleries in Yorkshire and Humberside by Brears and Davies has documented the long and diverse history of

museum provision in one region (Marsh 1987; Kavanagh 1990; Brears and Davies 1989). Rather, I outline those aspects of the history and development of museums - and history museums in particular - which are important in forming and reflecting gender identities.

3.1 The Formation of Museums

Early museum collections were royal, princely collections or private collections. The former collections were majestic, testifying to political influence, material possession and far-reaching trade links. During the fifteenth century, patronage and collecting began to combine: 'the display of wealth became one of the technologies of power, and ostentatious luxury one of the measures of social and economic success' (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 53). Private collections were for study, the accumulation of knowledge, and personal enjoyment; they were primarily collections of natural specimens. To their collectors, these demonstrated the profusion of the natural world and, through displaying its diversity and anomalies, testified to the creativity and playfulness of nature. Both princely and private collections were the products of boundless inquisitiveness and curiosity about the world, and concern for the rarity and singularity of each thing, and the relationships of resemblance and similitude between things, without imposing value or hierarchical order (Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 12).

In the seventeenth century, museums were influenced by a new scientific discourse of rationality, which rejected preceding practices. The Renaissance forms of knowing, based on resemblance, were replaced with the classical form of knowing, based on ordering and the classificatory table. 'The great circular forms of sixteenth-century similitude collapsed into the flat tables of identity

and difference, (ibid: 16). The phenomena which formerly had been seen as playful nature were now firmly accounted for within an ordered world in which things were measured and organised according to their place in a group and within the whole system. 'Beneath the stern gaze of modern science, nature had stopped playing' (Nielsen et al 1993: 13). Natural specimens were collected, organised and dissected into their component parts; isolated from the context in which they were found; ordered and interpreted in new arrangements; given new, and fixed, identities.

This discourse firmly established the dualism of subject and object: the active, seeing subject was split from, and given primacy over, the dumb, unseeing object. This dualism was given gendered forms of male and female: the discourse was couched in terms of active domination of the male intellect over the passive, subordinate female body of nature. In The Death of Nature, Caroline Merchant traces the extension of this discourse and the Cartesian mind/body split into many fields of representation, beyond science. She shows how it was developed and clearly articulated in contemporary texts, paintings, illustrations and collections, as men's mastery over and extraction from women and nature; ultimately, as their/her exhaustion and extinction (Merchant 1980).

In the new discourse, sight was emphasised as the primary seat of cognition. The world came to be known through what could be observed; what was observed was then given a name. Language provided the link between seeing and knowing; through naming, language conferred the status of universally valid knowledge on what was seen. Knowledge followed the gaze, focussing on material, solid forms and neglecting invisible, immaterial, fluid or changing forms. The discourse was formed through exclusion: knowledge was formed through sight, to the exclusion

of other senses, such as sound and smell. In describing the development of European museums, and the underlying general principles on which they were ordered, Nielsen suggests the narrowness which this emphasis produced. He calls it 'a special form of near-sightedness: a dry, stolid way of satisfying oneself by giving objects names that, as Linnaeus did, combines them by genus and species' (Nielsen et al 1993: 21).

Museums were centrally implicated in the new scientific discourse, with its emphasis on solid forms of knowledge, labelled and arranged; on the active subject ordering and placing the passive object. In museums, specimens were collected and brought together; they were divided and grouped in different rooms; in each room, they were placed side by side in systematic arrangements. This systematic and (seemingly) universal classification separated the new, rational collectors from the earlier, Renaissance collectors. In this system, also, continents, countries and states positioned themselves within the world through a horizontal demarcation relative to other continents, countries and peoples.

The earliest forms of history museums exhibited portraits of men of consequence; and portraits of women as beauties. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, interest in history, the monuments and relics of antiquity and, particularly, of the Classical period revived. These were seen to provide guidance and models for contemporary society: the study of the past would provide benefits in the present. Further, in this new history, a distinctive and developmental process was traced through origins and prehistory; periods of progress, change and decay; distinctive styles. Those with an interest in the new kind of history positioned themselves within the world through a vertical demarcation, relative to their times, against the horizontal

demarcation of earlier collectors and scholars. The vertical depth of this demarcation increased

as historical time was pushed further back into the past, and brought closer to the present.

History was used to structure that past and to demonstrate progress. Collections were periodised

in a series of vertical relationships. Nielsen traces the first museum to be organised on this

chronological principle to the Rosenborg Castle collection, in Denmark, in 1812 (Nielsen et al

1993: 27).

A historical framework for collecting, organising and displaying material in museums emerged at

the same time as other practices which sought to represent the past as a progressive series of

developmental stages leading to the present: history writing and the historical novel, for example.

 Moreover, these new forms were strongly tied to the concept of nationhood. Historians and

collectors extended their search for origins further back into historical time in order to

demonstrate their place in a universal history of civilisation. Equally, the recent past was

historicised and collections of national materials were preserved and displayed as the culmination

of the developmental series. In this way, museums, along with other cultural producers -

painters, poets, novelists - contributed to a more specific notion of the nation state as a political

unity; to a national identity and sentiments; and to the study of the past.

Contemporaneously, and linked to this, there was a new emphasis on rigorous, rational and

cognitive standards for the study of the material world and of the past. Stephen Bann has used

the term 'historical poetics' to refer to this distinctive new form of historical study, with its

stringent concern for cognitive values:

> ... historians, painters, poets, novelists, collectors (and their publics) are
> experiencing the elation of a new and concrete vision of the past, which is linked

with but not (as it were) uniquely guaranteed by the new cognitive standards.
(Bann 1984: 6)

Bann describes the eighteenth century mode of representation as mediated: it was achieved through imitation (mimesis) - passing from real to simulated, from one set of conventions to another, without discontinuity or disturbance. The nineteenth century mode of representation was, by contrast, transgressive: claiming to be 'faithful' and 'life-like'; denying the intermediate techniques by which it had been produced. Taxidermy, dioramas, and the new photographic technologies of the daguerreotype and calotype, were 'explicitly devoted to securing an overpowering illusion of presence' (Bann 1984: 30).

Historians, collectors, scholars and writers sought to disseminate the new visions and lessons of history for the improvement and common good of society. They sought to release the material held in private collections from the narrow restrictions of aristocratic ownership and to open the collections for the benefit of a wider public. They also formed new collections in philosophical societies and mechanics' institutes. These were transitional steps towards the modern museum: an instrument of public education, a public place where many people came to see, on a voluntary basis, and to learn by example from the material and the arrangements of display. The philosophical societies established in the early nineteenth century in one county, Yorkshire, are said to have firmly laid 'the foundations of this country's modern museum movement' (Brears and Davies 1989: 16). Public museums proliferated in Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century: it has been suggested that, before 1850, Britain possessed 59 museums; between 1850 and 1914 a further 295 were added (Wittlin 1949: 136).

The early nineteenth century was thus a crucial period for the development of the public museum. It was also a time which has been defined by the historians Leonora Davidoff and Catherine Hall as a crucial period in the formation of masculinity and femininity (Davidoff and Hall 1987). New definitions of masculinity and femininity were being formed, around the notion of separate spheres, public and private. These were, respectively, masculine and feminine. The public sphere increased enormously in this period; political incorporation, legislative changes and civic reforms opened the way for wider social participation for many of the middle class. But these opportunities were for men, not for women. Significantly, the 1832 Reform Act - which extended the franchise to the adult male heads of middle class households - was the first piece of legislation to explicitly exclude women (ibid: 19).

In this period of burgeoning civic pride, towns and cities were remodelled to become cleaner, more spacious and dignified, more open to scrutiny. The streets were cleared, widened and paved, and lit by gas; markets for animals and produce were moved to new, separate buildings and sites; town halls, reading rooms and subscription libraries were erected, often in the classical style. Museums were included in these developments as a marker of civic pride and identity, embodying the material and symbolic presence of history and civilisation at the heart of the civic entity. In location and appearance, organisation, the scientific theories which they enunciated and their methods, museums were part of the public and masculine sphere.

Davidoff and Hall develop their analysis of men and women of the middle class through detailed local studies of families in the city and the country - Birmingham and Norfolk. The authors describe how the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century changed the terms of what

both women <u>and</u> men were doing. The culture of domesticity became the ideal for women in the early nineteenth century. During this time, middle class women - who had no formal role in business - continued to contribute informally to economic and commercial life: the notions of separate spheres were still forming and their boundaries were fluid. Increasingly, however, private and public spheres were separated - physically, wives and daughters moved from premises in the city, where commercial activities and living quarters were combined, to distant and separate residential suburbs. Here, they developed a culture of domesticity in the different, pure and healthy, atmosphere of the suburbs. Their daily lives, social connections and spiritual lives changed. At the same time, the world of middle class men was changing too. The commercial and public world in which they worked became more organised and formal. Occupations and professions were re-defined and differentiated in relation to each other. Anxious to create a life at home which protected them from the difficult and ever-changing public world, men encouraged the separation of spheres: they sought the comfort and support of a non-competitive, private, spiritual place. As the century progressed, these trends became less flexible and more firmly embedded. Over time, women were reduced from an unequal partnership with men to a dependence on them.

In what came to constitute the public sphere, women were not present from the beginning. Middle class men were making new forms of power, entering public and political life through commerce. They sought to define themselves by distinction from the aristocracy, on the one hand (where political and public influence had traditionally resided), and from the mass of the population, on the other. They closely regulated the organisations and associations through which they entered and conducted public life. Strict conditions of respectability - income,

personal conduct and perhaps appearance - were imposed as a condition of entry. Membership

was normally by subscription. These rules, imposed in order to emphasise public accountability

and to exclude the 'wrong' kinds of men, had the effect of excluding women too. Under less

formal arrangements, women had occasionally been admitted; with the new formality of written

constitutions, which often referred to 'gentlemen', rules had to be broken or changed in order to

admit women. These associations maintained the existing divisions between men and women

and, for Davidoff and Hall, actively contributed to their making:

> ... the associations of the rapidly growing public sphere not only reflected and
> confirmed the pattern of relation between the sexes on other sites, such as
> churches and chapels, they directly assisted in the construction and dissemination
> of particular practices in relation to men and women of the middle class.
> (Davidoff and Hall 1987: 421)

Education and self-improvement were the means whereby personal advancement could be

achieved and translated into legitimate and disinterested public involvement. Many of the

educational societies formed for self-advancement operated according to these rules and thus

were exclusive to men. Such societies often started by meeting in public houses, but moved to

building their own premises where possible. The architecture of the new public buildings

maintained the sexual divisions already fixed in pub culture. In the Birmingham Philosophical

Institution, for example, lady visitors were allowed in the lecture room, museum and library but

not in the newsroom, where men could smoke and talk freely.

The new forms of knowledge acquired and discussed by members of these societies also tended

towards ideas and areas of achievements which were masculine in their forms and concerns.

Museums were among the ways of expressing, sharing and disseminating this new knowledge, in

classification, collecting and display. Attention was focussed on natural knowledge, which

provided a base from which to build a separate philosophy and cultural system. Here, theories of evolution and progress could be demonstrated in the physical world, through the collection and labelling of specimens and through their visible comparison in display.

For women, the activity of collecting was limited to collecting for their own homes and gardens: linen, furniture, clothes, hats and caps, together with flowers and shells (Davidoff and Hall 1987: 443). While these constituted collections to their makers, they were not valued in the same way, and did not enter museums. Susan Pearce attributes the absence of women's collections in museums to their relatively lower value:

> Formal and systematic knowledge of the natural world, or similar knowledge of human history in archaeological or classical collections, is valued above material which carried an emotional and personal complex of meanings.

Further, she comments that their style was different:

> Men's collections are typically buttressed by an apparatus of special equipment, cabinets, and ultimately museum buildings. Women's collections, on the other hand, often (though not always) tend to look more like ... a sitting room furnished with ornaments and pictures. (Pearce 1993: 26)

3.2 The Development of the Public Museum

Interpretative methods of study and display, developed and elaborated most fully in the natural sciences, had an important influence on the subsequent collecting and arrangement of the material culture. In the natural sciences, an emphasis on seriality and systematic collecting expressed the underlying theory of the order of nature. In the eighteenth century, collections had been organised according to the similarities and dissimilarities of external appearance. In the nineteenth century, they were re-ordered into relationships of succession over time.

Developments in biology and geology, particularly linked to the stratigraphical study of fossil remains, led to this new, vertical and progressive conception of organic life. This, in turn, allowed the cultural series being established through developments in history and archaeology to be placed in the longer developmental series of geological and natural time (Bennett 1988b: 90).

Classification provided the method for ordering specimens, by observing things, comparing them and naming them. The name of things would locate them in an overall table of similarities and differences corresponding to the order of nature (Peponis and Hedin 1982: 23). This table of similarities and differences was then put on display through the arrangement of specimens in shallow glass showcases, placed within the exhibition space to form classification groupings. There was little distinction between the methods for storing artefacts and the methods of display. A notable example was the Rotunda Museum at Scarborough, of 1828-9. The Scarborough Philosophical Society chose a circular plan for their new museum in order that the society's fossil collections could be exhibited in correct stratigraphical order. The museum contained a schematic section of the strata of the Yorkshire coast and, round the walls, glass display cases for specimens (Brears and Davies 1989: 25). The museum formed a kind of panopticon, where every element could be seen and its place understood from a single viewing point.

The museum collections of the voluntary associations and philosophical societies included the natural sciences, archaeology, art and possibly manufacture, and the souvenirs of travel. These conservative collections, focussed on classical disciplines, were extended or copied in the public museum collections of the second half of the nineteenth century:

> ... natural science collections with imperial rather than regional boundaries, art collections selected for scale and grandeur, and an odd corner filled with "curiosities" and even freaks of nature' (Kavanagh 1990: 14).

These museum collections and displays were often contained in classical buildings, with elevated and colonnaded entrances to physically raise them, and to spiritually uplift those who entered them, above the everyday world outside. Some, like the Weston Park Museum at Sheffield and the Stockport Museum in Vernon Park, were placed in parks away from bustling town and city centres.

The application of systematic collecting and display to human cultures is attributed to General Augustus Henry Lane Fox, later called Pitt Rivers:

> Pitt Rivers offered, for the first time, a theory of material culture interpretation, an intellectual concept which ... could be applied to <u>all</u> artefacts and render them intelligible within the wider scheme. (Pearce 1989: 4)

His collection was exhibited in London in 1874, then presented to Oxford University in 1883 to form the Pitt Rivers Museum. He placed more emphasis on the things that people used in everyday life than on curiosities and freaks. The collection was arranged by type, with objects of the same type from many places grouped in sequences. Through typological arrangement, Pitt Rivers demonstrated an essential and unfolding development of the material culture, according to Darwinian principles of evolution and of the diffusion and survival of useful types. The intellectual concept was expressed in a spatial arrangement: Pitt Rivers saw the museum as a rotunda, with stone age cultures at the centre and more complex cultures arranged around it as stages of evolution, in concentric rings. The rotunda was divided into segments for different cultures and continents. 'Primitive' cultures were equated with civilisation's infancy; 'advanced'

cultures with civilisation's maturity and adulthood. Race was deeply implicated in this arrangement, which placed Western civilisation at its centre. Women were also culturally marginalised within a definition of culture which selected as its examples public forms, such as weapons, head hunting and ceremonial robes, which were more usually used by men.

Although Pitt Rivers' ideas of the evolution of human cultures have been discredited, the underlying premise of systematic collecting and thought has not. The premise is empiricist. It proposes that general principles of classification and ordering can be derived from the material world and invested with a reality beyond the immediate area of collecting. These principles can then be extended to impose a complete and universal intellectual pattern, a rational set. Objects are removed from their context and re-ordered by seriality; the series is then offered as the significant relationship. Whether by type, materials, or use and context, collections and spaces are arranged by systematic and serial ordering (Pearce 1990). The ordering is inherently hierarchical and progressive, from simple to complex, from the earliest to the present.

Placing material and technical sophistication at its apex, this hierarchical ordering tends to privilege men's activity, production and achievement over those of women. Capital investment, through patronage and profit, has been more concentrated in areas of men's activity. Women's activity, by contrast, has been characterised by low levels of capital investment through patronage and profit, and a more enduring, less differentiated and specialised material culture (Porter 1987: 11-12).

Women, and women's achievements, were not only subordinated within the progressive sequence relative to men's achievements; they were explicitly associated with the period before, or outside, history and development. The systematic collecting and celebration of a new, progressive culture and identity was supported and accompanied in museums by the preservation and protection of obsolescence: the artefacts (bygones), traditional customs and ways of life which had gone before. Modernity and change were assured through reference to a static 'folk' - 'the people' - who had existed outside history, as it were, and before progress. They also became the subject of antiquarian studies and private collections outside museums. The antiquarian tradition became more and more marginalised: by the professionalisation of history, the growth of scientific techniques in archaeology, and the development of economic history. It became restricted in area, period, and perspective: to 'Little England'; to the periods from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries; to objects and topographical material (Marsh 1987: 193). Women were strongly associated with these 'old' traditions, through oral traditions and through the home; customs and folklore; women's knowledge and medicine; preparing food and cooking.

Geoff Marsh states that social history museums today are heirs to this tradition. Its traces can be seen in the disparate collections of 'bygones' which John Kirk gathered in York, for example (see Chapter Four), and in 'folk life' collections in smaller, pre-industrial, museums. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, folk museums grew out of this tradition but with a strong sense of purpose and rigorous methods of study (Kavanagh 1990: 23-27). In England, the most enduring legacy of folk studies is that of site museums.

The inspiration for these site, or open air, museums came from Scandinavia and America. The Skansen open-air museum, near Stockholm, Sweden, was founded by Artur Hazelius and opened in 1891. Houses and craft workshops from different parts of Sweden were re-erected in a parkland setting, with furnishings, tools, equipment and costume, assembled to give an accurate representation of the lives and milieu of the original inhabitants. Dr John Kirk visited the site in 1910; Kirk's own collection became the core of the York Castle Museum (Brears and Davies 1989: 72; see Chapter Four). In America, John D Rockefeller began the re-creation of Colonial Williamsburg in 1928 (Foster 1983: 17). From the 1930s, the idea of folk museums was disseminated in Great Britain through folk studies journals. The Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagan's, Cardiff, opened in 1948; Frank Atkinson laid out plans for an open-air museum at Shibden Hall, Halifax in 1953 (Brears and Davies 1989: 77-8). Folk museums were established with vigorous, methodical curatorship and a strong sense of purpose and prospered in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; but in England the genre never flourished on this scale. The successful site museums were those established more recently, the industrial site museums.

The techniques for the display of historic artefacts to the public were, equally, aimed at the representation of a type and its arrangement in a developmental sequence leading to the present. For Tony Bennett, the nineteenth century exhibition was shaped by an array of new disciplines: history, art history, archaeology, geology, biology and anthropology. Displays of these disciplines were oriented towards 'show and tell'. They tended to be generalising in their focus, and sequential: 'each discipline, in its museological deployment, aimed at the representation of a type and its insertion into a developmental sequence for display to a public' (Bennett 1988b: 87-8). Stephen Bann describes how these representations were achieved in history museums through

the alternation of two strategies: the 'galleria progressiva' and the period room. The 'galleria progressiva' consisted of a route leading through a sequence of rooms or displays from earlier to later periods, demonstrating the conventions particular to each period, and linking them in an overall historical development. The period room consisted of a fixed tableau of material from one period, brought together in an integrating milieu which pretends to offer the viewer the authentic experience of 'lived' history. Further, Bann argues that these two principles of display - used sometimes singly and sometimes together, alternating with each other - constitute the distinctive poetics of the modern historical museum (Bann 1984: 91).

3.3 Historical Museums in the Twentieth Century

Museums in the late twentieth century continue to 'speak' and make history through objects, but the histories which they create have shifted towards more local and personal forms. From the classical buildings and grand narratives of civilisations and empires of the nineteenth century, museums have split and separated history through the splitting and proliferation of museums and disciplines to develop regional and local identities. History museums are characterised by the following trends: the shift from a focus on production to consumption; subject fragmentation and specialisation; a lack of overall strategy; and high levels of artefact collecting.

In the nineteenth century, museums contributed to the glorification of production. They created order through systematising the natural world and the history of civilisation. Through this order, they exercised intellectual control over nature and 'primitive' peoples; they contributed to the flow of value from colonial territories to the west, by extracting material from them, and

exhibiting and textualising it in Britain. This flow of knowledge and value complemented, and assisted in legitimating, the economic control exercised over nature and over the colonial territories, their exploitation and the extraction of value from them through manufacture (Haraway 1991: 19).

In the late twentieth century, a large part of that approach no longer holds good. The 'logic' of capitalism has shifted production to other places in the world where labour is cheaper. The 'effects' of capitalist production are acknowledged as problematic, at least in part: for example, creating appalling housing and living conditions, and contributing to poor health in the nineteenth century; exporting its effects, such as industrial pollution and hazards (as at Bhopal) in the late twentieth century. Whereas in the nineteenth century, production was glorified, in the late twentieth century, consumption is glorified. Museums continue to glorify manufacture, but their pride in manufacture is a past pride, and pride of the past. New industrial museums have been created which link the (museum) traditions of collecting redundant materials with the (national) idea of the centrality of those traditions to the nation and sense of 'Britain' - pride, strength, nostalgia for the workshop of the world. Industrial heritage can be celebrated only at the point where it is no longer real.

With the structural decline of manufacturing industries, more and more people in Britain and Europe earn their living in providing consumer services for others. History and the heritage industries are just one of this range of consumer services. They perform a dual role: to glorify past production and present consumption. In the story of past production, the dignity and endurance of labour, of working men and (sometimes) women, is emphasised. The story cannot

be sustained into the late twentieth century within the same terms, so it is not told: the story

terminates abruptly at some unspecified point before the flight of capital and production, and the

indignity of unemployment, as I show in Chapter Five. Thus, the very process of

deindustrialisation to which these museums owe their existence are omitted from the displays;

yet, as Michael Wallace points out,

> the very creation of an industrial museum is often a response by a community to
> the collapse of its manufacturing base, part of an attempt to transform defunct
> plants into marketable commodities and thus generate jobs. (Wallace 1987: 10)

In the story of present consumption, the details of production might undermine the ideology and

pleasures of consumption; thus, again, the story is told in terms which relegate production to an

insignificant position, as I describe in Chapters Four and Six.

There is now a very large number of different museums, and different types of museums. This

proliferation is caused by historical, social and economic factors. Historically, the divisions in

museums can be traced back to the division of material and activity into disciplines. In the

nineteenth century, each museum contained, or attempted to contain, a wide range of collections,

separated into disciplines or departments. In the twentieth century, and especially in the last four

decades, the tendency has been towards division and specialisation on different sites and with

different organisational arrangements. The larger museums have tended to divide off some

disciplines or departments to form branches of the parent body; while new museum projects have

been established on more limited and specialised briefs - within one discipline, as it were. Each

distinct discipline applies its own methodology in acquiring, storing, recording and displaying

artefacts.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century museum foundations were based on collections of fine art, archaeology, pure and natural sciences. Museums founded from the middle of the twentieth century were more likely to be museums of social history (particularly rural history), industrial archaeology, technology and transport, and everyday life. That subject shift was accompanied by a vast expansion in the number of museums and a shift in the ownership and location of the new museums. The most recent comprehensive survey of museums, in 1985, counted 2131 museums. Over half of these museums had been founded since 1950. Of the new museums, the majority (56%) were non-public institutions; others were new branches of existing museums and museum services (Prince and Higgins-McLoughlin 1987: 26). Whereas the nineteenth century museums were grouped with other public monuments in the town centres, the new museums, and new branches of established museums, were located in former agricultural, industrial or transport buildings, often related to their chosen theme. The survey found that three-quarters of all site museums had been established since 1971. Those site museums devoted to the industrial heritage have been described as a particular British contribution to museum developments (Foster 1983: 17; Trinder 1976: 173). Some lay within whole areas of industrial activity: for example, the complex of sites which make up the Ironbridge Gorge Museum in Shropshire; the Gladstone Pottery Museum in Staffordshire.

The earliest museum developments after the second world war were science museums, and science departments within larger museums. These assisted the public in gaining an understanding of new developments and also the new scale of disasters. They sought to explain the complexities of the modern world - particularly, the recent events of the war and the atom bomb; new production technologies and the proliferation of consumer goods. Museums in

Birmingham (1950), Derby (1951), Belfast (1955) and Cardiff (1957) established technology departments, combining historical and contemporary perspectives, following the broad model set by the Science Museum in London (Marsh 1987: 137-8).

These developments were quickly followed by new museums of technology, transport and industry. The impetus for these came from a combination of social and economic forces. In the 1950s and 1960s, amateur groups and adult education classes started to form around 'people's history', local history and industrial archaeology. Some of these sought to record, collect and conserve the physical environment of eighteenth and nineteenth century British industrial and technical achievement (Samuel 1981). This new flurry of activity was more democratic, more from the 'bottom up' and outside the academic traditions and institutions (Jenkinson 1989; Kavanagh 1990: 7). Nevertheless it was conservative, looking for historical evidence in the landscape and past lives; denying the present except as a destructive force on that heritage. It was also gendered: its effect was to celebrate the histories and past achievements of men more than women, as I describe below.

The first concerns of these societies were with the transport infrastructure - canals and railways - associated with that achievement; and with vanishing hand and craft skills. The amateur organisations pressed for public recognition and conservation of the industrial heritage, through extending existing museums or creating new ones. The interest of enthusiasts and visitors demonstrated the importance of industrial sites as leisure activities and tourist attractions, and strengthened the case of the amateur societies for preservation. The decline of staple manufacturing industries became more acute as a result of the energy crises and subsequent

economic recession in 1973 and 1979, and more buildings and sites were preserved in this way and converted to museum use.

Many of these new museums were dependent, at least in part, on visitor and other commercial sources of income: as cited above, a large number, and increasing proportion, of the museums founded after 1950 were non-public, or independent, museums. From the late 1970s, successive governments sought to reduce public expenditure and required publicly-funded museums, at both national and local level, to rely on income generation for capital schemes and operating costs. This, in turn, affected the 'product': history became a marketable commodity. With attention to the market, museums developed new public profiles and identities, displays and visitor services. In the same period, studies by Myerscough and others highlighted the potential of tourism, leisure and the arts as instruments of economic regeneration in areas of industrial decline and unemployment (Myerscough 1987). Thus a museum might become central to the tourist development of a whole area, as the place where a special 'founding' history could be forged and legitimised. Such projects were stimulated by funding from the English Tourist Board, until 1989 and, particularly in cities, by development corporations and metropolitan authorities. Such projects include the Maritime Museum and other museums at the Albert Docks in Liverpool, funded by Merseyside County Council and, after abolition, the Mersey Development Corporation and the Department of National Heritage; Ironbridge, in the Telford Development Corporation area; and the Calderdale Industrial Museum, in Halifax, within the former metropolitan county of West Yorkshire.

With these trends, museums have become places for leisure and informal family visiting. Popular interest in museums is stimulated by popular historical fiction, television drama and other forms which contribute to the idea of history as personal, local and accessible (Kavanagh 1990: 7-8). Museums are compared with other providers and competitors in the leisure markets, the media and theme parks. The most recent trend in museum developments is the formation of museums which take as their subject leisure, the media and contemporary, consumer culture. In Britain, they include the National Museum of Photography Film and Television at Bradford (1983); the Museum of the Moving Image (1988) and the Design Museum (1989) in London. These museums are 'high-tech', futuristic and forward-looking; they are strongly market- and user-oriented; they dissociate themselves from traditional museums and would prefer not to be called 'museums' at all (Lumley 1988: 16; see Chapter Six). They may be said to complete the shift from production to consumption in the museum.

So, museums have fragmented and become more specialised; at the same time, they have become more commercial. These trends combine as each museum seeks to develop a unique identity: to distinguish it from other museums and tourist attractions; and to reach a wider catchment area of visitors and funders. I use the example of one museum in Macclesfield, which has shifted its identity from local history to the history of silk, to illustrate this. Formed in 1987, the Macclesfield Silk Museum is an independent museum and a registered charity, receiving limited public funding from the district and the county, and relying heavily on earned income from visitor admission charges, shop sales and catering. The museum's Director, Moira Stevenson, described the strategy for change:

> We have recently commissioned a study from Manchester Business School and
> following their advice have decided to concentrate our marketing on the unique

theme of Silk, which has national appeal, and we are planning to produce a new leaflet which focuses the attention away from Macclesfield Museum and onto Silk. Next year we aim to capitalise on the Council of Europe initiative which has adopted Silk as one of three themes aimed at promotion and encouraging cultural links between member countries and tourism. (Stevenson 1989)

Fragmentation and specialisation may be a successful commercial strategy for museums in the short to medium term. Victor Middleton, a consultant commissioned to undertake a study of independent museums, points out that their rapid growth depended on a range of factors which were primarily supply- or resource-led, rather than market- or customer-led.

Noting the structural weakness of a sector with many small and very small organisations, he recommends functional networks or consortia for sharing management, marketing and information technologies. However, he insists that these 'do not, and for museums they should not, require any standardisation of the "product" offered to the public' (Middleton 1990: 51-68). Middleton uncritically celebrates the diversity and abundance of the product in the museum sector; yet their effect on history, collecting and interpretation is profound. In the process, lived experience is segmented according to the size of collections, the history of institutions, or the commercial viability of one theme or part, rather than by context. For example, the complex which makes up Leeds City Museums includes small trades, retailing and domestic life at the Abbey House Museum, in Kirkstall and the textile and clothing industries, motive power and electricity at the Armley Mills Industrial Museum. The finished clothing from these industries is in the costume collections of the related complex, Leeds City Art Galleries, displayed at Lotherton Hall. The outworkers in the clothing industries, who are represented at the Industrial Museum, might have worked, lived close to, and bought from the traders whose shops and workshops are exhibited in the street at the Abbey House Museum; the traders might have worn

clothes made by these workers, and now displayed at Lotherton Hall. But there is no overlap, repetition or reference in each of the museums; social history, design and production technology are kept apart and each is celebrated in a different, and incomplete, way (Mansfield and Jones 1987; Fitzgerald 1987). Further, each museum is using different methods for collecting, classifying and recording the material which it houses, thus limiting the integration or reorganisation of the collections in different ways.

The collapse of Britain's industrial infrastructure which gave rise to many of the new museums I have described, and the quest of museums for a separate, unique and marketable identity, have also had their effects on the (hi)stories told - particularly in terms of gender. History, and collections, are periodised in structures and contexts which are charged with (gendered) meaning. The new museums are often linked to the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century and industrialisation in the nineteenth century. They are formed around the staple histories and industries: motive power; transport by canal, road and rail; coal, iron and steel; textiles. In concentrating on the primary (extractive) and secondary industrial sectors, these museums tend to neglect the areas where women have worked in larger numbers: in the tertiary, service and distribution sectors. Museums focus on the mines, foundries and factories and, within these, on the obvious and central technologies of production. They pay less attention to the outputs of those production processes: for example, the different types of coals produced; or the qualities and weaves of cloth. Similarly, museums have neglected the other, connected and ancillary, tasks: preparation of the raw materials for production; checking, finishing and packing; making up goods; distributing, promoting and selling; feeding and cleaning the workplace; clothing and reproducing the labour force. In searching for a unique and distinctive theme, museums eschew

those industries common to many large towns and cities - such as laundries, sweet-making, or clothing. Thus, the history told in industrial museums emphasises the specialised, production-oriented and capital-intensive areas of activity; it effectively marginalises the contributions which women and less skilled men made. Excluded from the central production processes which they represent, women are found at the margins of these museums, and in the home.

While much has been written about industrial heritage, 'the past' and the role of museums in reflecting or distorting that 'past', there is little acknowledgement of another past, with its own 'Industrial Revolutions', in the home. As represented in museums, the home still remains either outside history or transformed by technology. The rhetoric is entirely different from that of industry. There is nostalgia for the 'old ways' - baking, laundry, sewing - given form and shape in museums like Shugborough Museum in Staffordshire, or Clarke Hall near Wakefield. A small number of museums acknowledge the new technologies of the home. But, as I show in the case studies, this is told in different terms: museums speak of new technologies in the home as positive, liberating and progressive; they maintain silence about the same process in the workplace (see Chapter Seven).

3.4 Collecting and Classification

The growth of the new disciplines of technology and social history, and the diversity and plurality of museum provision, have been accompanied by a huge increase in artefact collecting. In 1989-91, the Yorkshire and Humberside Museums Council undertook a survey of industrial and social history collections in the region's museums: the first comprehensive survey of collections for

these subject areas (Kenyon 1992). The findings demonstrate the huge growth in collecting in the period since 1960; the extent of overlap and duplication, on the one hand, and omission or neglect on the other; and the absence of any clear strategy or method of collecting in most museums.

The survey found that most material in museum collections was of a narrow date range, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century; recent history, in particular, was poorly represented. Kenyon attributed this to passive collecting, full stores, and an absence of any clear strategy to select from the available material. Passive collecting is often associated with the impending destruction of a site or material: scrapping industrial plant, clearing out offices, demolishing houses. In these cases, the artefacts are collected hurriedly, without collecting supporting material or fully recording use, context, and relationships between objects. Thorough selection and documentation comes later, if at all, and so relies on the immediate, visible, intrinsic features of the objects collected. By passive collecting, Kenyon points out that museums are responding to, and reinforcing, public conceptions of what museums are interested in - old, valuable, special or rare. 'Hence the mound of cobblers' sewing machines, lasts and handtools in the region as against examples from a modern heel bar' (ibid: 28).

Where a system of collecting exists, curatorial practices are attached to the older concepts of chronological, developmental sequences and the representation of types. Curators continue to refer to the need to fill gaps in the collections; to complete the sequence; to 'represent the continuity and development of material culture' (Nicholson 1985b: 2). Items are selected for the

museum collections to demonstrate their technological (and temporal) development within a sequence. These practices carry a further gender dimension.

In typological collecting, objects are brought together with others of the same type to mark the development of the species and each variant. Its markers are quantitative specifications: capacity; operating performance, materials and methods of construction. The objects chosen are separated from their application and context. In sequential collecting, those items which have endured with few observable changes, or which are very simple, are omitted. Detached from context and use, they may become insignificant within the type. It is with these simple, undifferentiated tools that women, children and less skilled men have characteristically worked, in repetitive and low-paid tasks; in service industries and support services within industries. Kenyon cites this as a reason for their relative neglect: 'the objects available may be of such a general nature that they give no indication of the specific work involved' (Kenyon 1992: 52). If such objects are collected, without documentation and contextual recording they are often 'lost' in any retrospective documentation programme. Thus, for example, tools and materials used in the Stockport hatting industry by women, usually in their homes as outworkers, to bind the felt hats with silk braids, were grouped and classified with items of domestic and personal use in the museum collections. The silk thread and needles were placed with embroidery items; the leather sheaths with which women protected their fingers when they drove the sharp needles through the hard felt, were placed with medical items.

The neglect of these items, and their associated contextual evidence, impinges on the histories of women far more than of men. Kylie Winkworth, writing about women's craft work in Australia, describes this clearly:

> the needle is a tool that stands both for the exploitation of women in the sweated trades and also for the conspicuous occupation of leisure time by wealthy ladies. It is hard to think of an equivalent activity or link in the world of men that so effectively crosses all boundaries of wealth and class. (Winkworth 1988: 46)

In the Yorkshire and Humberside survey, the museums surveyed stressed the importance of research and provenance to social history and industrial collections. The sources and framework for contextual research in social history is laid out in the professional manual (Brears 1984b; Brigden 1984). However, the evidence for this - the existence of supporting field records, notebooks, photographs and oral history materials which record provenance and context - is absent both in the survey and in the case studies of this thesis. Museums continue to collect passively, relying on the pre-selection of material through other processes, rather than to collect actively, and to undertake the concomitant activity of in situ recording. Thus, such material is lost, to the greater detriment of the histories of women, as well as those of less skilled men (Porter 1987).

The absence of any clear strategy and methodology for collecting suggests an underlying conservatism and malaise in history curatorship in Britain (Paine 1983; Jenkinson 1989). The discipline lacks organisation of its theories and practices, from which an informed selection can be made across the huge scope of human activity. This is particularly highlighted in the absence of a strategy for contemporary collecting: where history has not already made its own - gendered - selection, curators are reluctant to act (Green 1985; Griffiths 1986; Kenyon 1992). Other

countries have taken different, and more progressive, approaches to history curatorship,

particularly Sweden. There, curators identified the rapid rate of growth of museums and museum

collections, which they believed was not indefinitely sustainable. They embarked on co-

operative projects to rationalise their collections and to develop new ways of collecting from the

contemporary culture. They identified duplication and omission in the collections, compared the

scope and extent of collections with economic and demographic profiles and trends, and critically

examined collecting practices. They adopted criteria of selection which are:

> person-centred objects and information, data about individuals and their destinies,
> rather than the statistics and mass data otherwise to be found; context rather than
> random acquisition; representative, typical, common and significant objects and
> knowledge; things which are loaded in different ways (emotionally, symbolically
> etc). (Silven-Garnert 1993)

The museums in the SAMDOK network have shared out the huge task of recording and

collecting contemporary culture and history to different functional groups and across different

recording media (ibid; Cedrenius 1983; Rosander 1980; Stavenow-Hidemark nd).

Linked to collecting is classification. As described above (section 3.2), this is the method for

observing, comparing and naming things, and placing them in an overall system of similarities

and differences. Classification also comes to determine what, and how, curators observe the

world and therefore how they select from it to form collections. Until 1983, industrial and social

history museums in Great Britain used many different ways of classifying material. From the late

1970s, professional groups sought to produce a standard classification which could be shared and

used across urban and rural collections, and across the wide range of materials held by these

museums. A scheme was developed which brought together the system used by the Museum of

English Rural Life, and adopted and adapted by many other museums, with the Standard

Industrial Classification used by the Central Statistical Office; the resultant scheme was called the Social History and Industrial Classification, SHIC (MERL 1978; SHIC 1983). This is a hierarchical system, based on spheres of activity, and organised into four primary headings, 'covering all aspects of man's activity as a social animal': community life, domestic and family life; personal life and working life. Thus, the system upholds the traditional divide between home and life outside the home: between the home and work. Within each grouping, the classification headings cut vertically into activity. The headings and terms for working life are highly differentiated, with many levels; those for domestic life are relatively shallow, with few levels. The classification works from broad (high level) groupings of manufacturing sector or type to detailed skill areas. Those activities of more general character, which arise in many workplaces, become dislocated fragments within the hierarchical scheme: for example, industrial, office and domestic cleaning.

Moreover, in domestic life, the classification creates headings at the same level which are conceptually very different. For example, 'lighting' is a category mainly concerned with lightfittings and lighting appliances; it is not an activity and area of skill. On the other hand, 'cooking' or 'cleaning' are. By setting them beside each other, as it were, the classification oversimplifies relationships within the material culture, and of people to that culture; and neglects issues of craft and skill. Thus, the classification obscures, rather than draws attention to, areas of informally organised work and activity.

By its structure of divisions, SHIC works against the interrelationships between different spheres; in its detailed guidance, it operates differentially to make the links between some spheres and

activities more difficult than others to 'reclaim'. Stereotypically, it acts to confine women in the home. SHIC contains an index to suggest to users where objects might be located; it acknowledges that objects have more than one meaning, and offers linkages and multiple references. However, where articles or activities associated with men are listed in the domestic sphere, they are cross-referenced to working life; those associated with women in the domestic sphere are usually cross referenced only to other activities within that sphere, and not to areas of working life. There is no reference to paid, productive work in the home; unpaid work is conflated with hobbies, crafts and pastimes. SHIC recommends, and many users insist, that each object should be given only one classification: in such a situation, the clothes, furnishings and decorations made by women are classified as articles of utility, rather than of production (Porter 1987: 14-15; 1988: 110-4). The care of people - such as childcare and personal hygiene - are included under Personal Life whereas, for most people maintaining a home with children, the two are inseparable.

Classification offers a way of making sense of the world by splitting it up; SHIC does so in a way which is unhelpful to reconstituting everyday experience, and especially the experience of women. Classification is imposed on the collections, as a way of making sense of them, and on new collecting; it may actually - as in Chapter Four - determine the themes and layout of displays. The museums in the SAMDOK network in Sweden use a different classification system - one which has looser, and less hierarchical, groupings by association and context: this assists in their contemporary collecting programmes (Murdock 1980; p.112).

3.4 Exhibition and Interpretation

The techniques of present day museum exhibitions are different from those of the nineteenth century, with its emphasis on shallow arrays of typologies and objects, where the world was laid out through artefacts. Today, a wide range of interpretative materials and techniques are brought to bear on a much smaller, selected group of objects, organised in a deeper and more complex plan. The arrangements offer more depth, detail and context; but beneath these features the exhibition is equally determined.

The public face and focus of the museum may have changed, but these changes are assumed to work on an essential, unchanging truth of history. Certain representations achieve centrality, as the 'dominant memory', and become compulsory because of the uniformity of approach and the marginalisation, silencing, or absence of alternative approaches. Moreover, the processes whereby some representations are privileged and others excluded, or re-worked, are themselves inaccessible. Visitors see only the end product, the oblique form of the display - 'that curious curatorial shorthand called exhibition, a language of signs and symbols, of subtext and occasional subplot' (Kavanagh 1986: 176). As Bob West pointed out in his study of Ironbridge Gorge Museum, 'the museum is organised for public access and public pleasure, but privatised in terms of the control of access and the lack of public participation in [its] modelling of history' (West 1985: 34). The act of making history is removed from view, so that what is offered to the public becomes anonymous and consequently authoritative.

The principles of galleria progressiva and period room continue, in new guises. These principles of display broadly correspond with the diachronic and synchronic approaches to the material

culture, with the diachronic explaining change over time and the synchronic conducting in-depth studies of local or regional cultures. The latter places a greater emphasis on the object as evidence (Kavanagh 1989: 134).

The 'galleria progressiva' can be seen most obviously in those 'tunnel of love' local history museums which present the story of a locality in a chronological form (Paine 1983: 22). Others have as their theme the development of an industry or activity. Such displays are progressive, representing the past as a series of stages leading to the present.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many local authority museums - county services and district museums - opened new branch museums, or more often re-furbished existing galleries, to create narrative 'textbook' displays telling 'the story of' the locality. These employed documentary and sometimes oral evidence, models, pictures, graphic and three-dimensional reconstructions, as well as objects. In these displays, the object was de-centred. Individual events and items were selected to illustrate and expand a larger story, usually developed from other sources. Oxfordshire Museums Service adopted this approach at the Museum of Oxford (1976). It opened further branch museums in Banbury and Wantage and refurbished displays at the main museum in Woodstock[1]. The Museum of London employed a similar approach on a much larger scale, opening in 1975. Some displays placed emphasis on the topography, physical appearance and development of the locality as an index of historical change: for example, the local history gallery at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery of 1981 (Davies 1981). Others also dealt with the

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[1]   The author was employed as Research Assistant at the Museum of Oxford from 1973 until its opening.

history and development of the locality, but took as their starting point the community of people,

activities and occupations: a notable recent example is 'The People's Story' at the Canongate

Tollbooth, Edinburgh (1989) (Clark and Coutts 1989; King 1989).

The sequential approach has also been used in industrial museums, such as the displays showing

the development of the woollen and worsted industries at Bradford Industrial Museum (1974). In

industrial museums, the historical sequence may be combined with a production sequence, from

raw materials to finished goods. Thus, at Armley Mills, Leeds (1982),

> the museum could now show the entire process from the colonial sheep station
> through to the finished cloth baled for export as practised around 1900... Since
> Leeds has been the major world centre of mass-produced clothing, further
> displays followed the cloth through to the finished suit. (Brears and Davies 1989:
> 86)

These sequential narratives are still highly favoured in many museums: used, for example, in the

National Gas Gallery at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester (1991).

The 'period room' has been used widely and in a number of ways. Period settings may be used to

create pauses for more detailed, object-rich displays within narrative exhibitions like those

described above. Restoration to a certain period may be used to emphasise the associations of a

site or dwelling with a former, celebrated inhabitant, such as at the Timothy Hackworth Museum

at Shildon, County Durham (1975). Period settings may be used to preface or suffix a display

devoted to a more complex theme: reassuring visitors and offering a connection between

familiar, everyday things and more complex themes in the gallery. The television galleries at the

National Museum of Photography Film and Television (1986), for example, are prefaced by a

1930s setting in which four mannequins, portraying a family group, huddle round the flickering

screen of a new television set; the electricity galleries at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester (1987) terminate in a series of 'rooms' of the 1930s, 1950s and 1980s, with appropriate furnishings and electric appliances. In these cases, the sphere with which women are associated becomes, again, both preface and afterword of the main narrative and sequential development of history and progress, invention and production.

In the site museum, the concept of the period room is extended to become a much larger tableau, covering a whole landscape. Here, whole aspects of a local or regional culture are displayed. For example, at Gladstone Pottery Museum, kilns and workshops around the pottery yard are conserved; at Ironbridge, there are blast furnaces, tile and china factories, canal, housing, pubs and shops, as well as the bridge itself.

In period rooms and site museums, the individual room or dwelling is used to illustrate a more general lifestyle. Thus the guidebook to Beamish Museum, in its descriptions of individual features of the site, pronounced that they were 'typical' of the region or locality from which they were drawn, and of the period to which they were restored. The contents of one particular pit cottage were collected and, with assistance from relatives of the deceased occupant, the dwelling was entirely recreated in the museum (Allan 1984: 182). Yet museum visitors have no such detailed information; the cottage stands for a more general experience. Again at Beamish, prices and stock displayed in departments of the Co-operative stores are for the years 1925 and 1927, because 1926 - the year of the General Strike and widespread unemployment in the north-east - was deemed by staff to be untypical.

The emphasis in period rooms and dwellings is on human interest and the recreation of a 'life-like' environment. In decorative art museums, the authenticity of artefacts is paramount (Saumarez Smith 1989: 16-7). In social history museums, the general atmosphere may be more important than individual artefacts, integrity of a historical space or availability of documents to support the choice and arrangement of materials. Although the words 'period room', 'reconstruction' and 'restoration' are frequently used, the terms 'period setting', 'representation' or 'dramatisation' may be more appropriate (McClung Fleming 1972: 40). Thus, a social history museum might construct replica objects, costume and foodstuffs from sources and accounts of the relevant period, to contribute to the atmosphere of the whole. For example, Oakwell Hall, Birstall, West Yorkshire was virtually empty when it was acquired; Kirklees Museums Service undertook a programme of research and refurbishment to place the hall and its contents in the late seventeenth century, the height of prosperity for its occupants, the Batt family. 'The overall result of blending original artefacts with reproduction items is to give the visitor a good overall impression of what Oakwell would have been like at the end of the seventeenth century' (Davies and Glaister 1988: 6). At Beamish, the Co-operative stores were reconstructed on site and furnished to convey the atmosphere of the 1920s. The shelves of the grocery department were lined with tins wrapped with replica food labels: replicas because, even if bulk stocks of food had been found, their wrappers would have looked old and faded.

To assist in a more 'life-like' environment, the period room, or site, is increasingly animated. In Kirk's period rooms of 1938 at the York Castle Museum, the settings themselves heightened the realism, removing the display case and offering the public more intimate and life-like arrangements that those of most museums. No interpretation or animation was offered to

supplement the displays. In more recent period rooms, mannequins, smell units and sound systems have been employed to bring displays to life. Some museums have literally brought their displays to life with actors, or docents, who enact and demonstrate events and activities. The initiative came particularly from open-air museums - often also independent museums - where volunteers were involved in the museum's activities (Greene 1983: 26; Trinder 1976: 171-2). This animation is linked to the desire of many museums to preserve not only the physical environment but also older crafts and skills, oral culture and music. It has now spread to domestic, as well as other, areas of history. Current examples include 'The Way We Were' at Wigan Pier and aspects of the Apprentice House at Quarry Bank Mill. Many more museums offer historical re-enactment to educational groups, such as Oakwell Hall, Kirklees and Clarke Hall, near Wakefield.

The emphasis on 'doing' and on 'working' machinery in industrial and agricultural museums has highlighted those areas of central production and motive power which were most closely and jealously guarded by men (Cockburn 1983: 138-9), and those technologies which are huge and impressive: for example, the working water wheel and planned steam engines at Quarry Bank Mill Museum; the Power Hall at the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. White suggests this sexual dimension: 'there's a preoccupation, in social history museums, with boilers. Heavy plant and heavy labour has more sex appeal than adding-machines and office work' (White 1983: 97; my emphasis)[2].

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[2]   Gareth Griffiths coined the term 'laddism' to describe the culture of the volunteers and temporary employment scheme workers who often provide the working demonstrations in these museums.

3.5 Curatorship

The role of the history curator as writer and author of the museum 'text' is anomalous. On the one hand, authors/ curators almost always remain anonymous, an arrangement which confers a silent authority on the texts which they create: collections, exhibitions and programmes. On the other hand, individual curators have a large degree of latitude in their work. Institutions are now encouraged to have a written collecting policy - a practice advocated in the professional association's Code of Practice for Employing Authorities, and required for museums registration (Museums Yearbook 1993; Museums and Galleries Commission Guidelines for Museum Registration). Yet these are broad documents which do not restrict individual interpretation and application.

History curatorship as a distinct body of knowledge and practice, with a strong theoretical grounding and a common academic base, does not exist in Great Britain. Rather, the term is used loosely to describe a number of different approaches. Its professional specialist group, the Social History Curators Group, has been described as an 'umbrella organisation', encompassing 'local historians, antiquarians, British ethnographers, industrial archaeologists, post-medieval archaeologists and all shades in between' (Davies 1985: 155). The professional handbook for social history curators accedes to this disparity, dividing the study of objects into eleven different sections or 'approaches' (Fleming, Paine and Rhodes 1993).

The training and background of history curators is very varied.   The pre-entry training opportunities were, for many years, limited to an option within a single postgraduate course (Hale

1987: 30). These opportunities have very recently diversified. Many curators have entered with no formal museum-oriented training. They may have gained experience through working in museums as volunteers or on the numerous, government-subsidised employment training schemes of the late 1970s and 1980s.

> Curators working in this field have learnt their craft almost informally, through a number of available avenues, regrettably not equally available to all. One of the results has been that many have learnt to curate and exhibit through personal and political convenience. (Kavanagh 1986: 176)

Just as history collections developed as subordinate sections within departments of archaeology and antiquities, so curators were - and may continue to be - subordinate to archaeology. At Glasgow Museums (established 1854), until very recently the Department of Archaeology, Ethnography and History had two local historians among fifteen staff (Kirby 1988: 99-100). At Sheffield (established 1875), local, labour and social history are located within the Department of Antiquities, headed by an archaeologist. History curators continue to be recruited from archaeology - a discipline grounded strongly in the material culture, but more concerned with features below ground than above.

While archaeology is established as an academic discipline, that of folk life or regional ethnology is not recognised in this country. The rise of folk life museums in the immediate pre- and post-war period failed to gain the academic status achieved in the Scandinavian countries and the United States. Folk life studies in Britain have been mainly concerned with peasant, pre-industrial societies. The Society of Folk Life Studies was founded in 1961. Its founding members included scholars and curators 'who were all well-versed in the European tradition of folk-life studies, and recognised members of the European academic community' (Brears 1988).

When the Group for Regional Studies in Museums was founded in 1974, its impetus was to disseminate and develop these ideas in the museum context; many of its members were also members of the Society. The shift in direction of the Group, and of the field of history curatorship from whom members were drawn, was signalled by the change of name to the Social History Curators Group in 1982[3]. Subsequently, the pursuit of folk life studies within museums has been restricted to a smaller number of individuals and institutions than social history (Kavanagh 1987: 3).

Local and landscape history, concerned with documentary sources and the physical effects of patterns of human activity in the landscape and in buildings, has been another recruiting ground for curators. Local history and historical geography have a small but influential academic base, concentrated at postgraduate level, and are widely taught in adult education. But these disciplines did not provide a framework for the study of objects other than buildings and landscape features. The former links between the Departments of Museum Studies and English Local History at Leicester provided 'a whole generation of local historians [who had] developed a new understanding of their subject from which objects had been left out' (Paine 1983: 23). Similarly, graduates of social and economic history have been trained in a discipline which does not value objects as a primary source.

From this last training ground, some curators have emerged whose approach to history and to their communities is less remote, more immediate and populist, than former curatorial practices (Jenkinson 1989: 141-7). In addition, more people are entering the profession from other

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[3]   The change of name earned the joke that it was a change from GRueSoMe to SHoCkinG.

occupations, with a strong commitment to people, advocacy and equality. They have engaged

with the shifts towards people's history, oral history and community history (for example, O'Neill

1987; Clark and Coutts 1989). However, many working in museums are sceptical of the

usefulness of social, local and people's history, which they consider to be excessively concerned

with political issues and social relations, and to overlook the material culture[4]. Discussion of

alternative approaches in social history has, on occasions, become a hostile exchange between

those who consider that objects are their primary concern, and those who are concerned to trace

the patterns of broader social trends and movements.

As history curatorship has no overriding commitment to a single academic discipline or

philosophy, the exchange between history museums and centres of academic excellence is

minimal. History scholarship does not address itself to the museum as a resource; conversely,

there is a hostility to theory among museum professionals. By comparison with developments

such as the SAMDOK project in Sweden, British curators are conservative and their discipline

lacks organisation of its theories and practices (Paine 1983; Jenkinson 1989). Curators have not

developed strategies to deal with the selection of areas of collecting from within the huge scope

of human activity. They rely on the selection of other processes for collecting from the past, and

avoid collecting from the present (Porter 1987; p.111). They place a strong emphasis on internal

practices, of organisation and retrospective ordering of materials according to inherited categories

and intrinsic qualities, rather than an external focus on people, fieldwork, context and

association.

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[4]   For example, Peter Brears expressed impatience with 'those who state that you don't <u>have</u>
        to be a Marxist to be a social historian ... while remaining incapable of dealing with the
        average public identification or enquiry' (Brears 1986: 33).

In the public arena of the exhibition, too, history curators are conservative and lacking in creativity. They are often preoccupied with binding objects into received histories from secondary sources. They are concerned to place the solid and literal forms of objects and texts on display, as furniture. They do not see the display as itself a form, permitting other kinds of expression and articulation. The fluidity, reversals and contradictions of history are lost in the solidity and fixity of meanings and structures.

History curators have not, on the whole, responded to the upsurge of historical interest in issues such as women's and black history, and its attendant expectations of greater involvement in history-making through collecting and exhibition. Yet, through engaging with these discourses and voices from the margins, which challenge commonsense and everyday practices, history curators might re-examine and evaluate their core practices: it is these practices which ultimately determine the history which the museum produces.

CHAPTER FOUR

CASE STUDY: 'EVERY HOME SHOULD HAVE ONE'

THE DOMESTIC APPLIANCES GALLERY AT YORK CASTLE MUSEUM

In Chapter Three, I studied the development of history museums in Britain. I surveyed the practices of collecting and classification, exhibition and interpretation employed in these museums. I also described the various routes by which people have become history curators, and the profusion of approaches, skills and knowledges which make up history curatorship. In this and the following two chapters, I move from a general overview of history museums to three specific case studies. In these, I study these practices and people, their workings and the effects of these in the representations made.

In Chapter Three, I traced the articulation of gender in history museums. In every aspect of their workings, from the overall identity of the museum to detailed day-to-day tasks such classifying and cataloguing material in the collections, a gendered relation can be traced. In all of these, I suggested, the relation is an unequal one: 'woman' is placed in a subordinate relation to 'man' within the history which museums make. 'She' is implicated and enrolled in a range of relationships with 'man' in which 'he' is always the superior partner.

In the museums which form the first two case studies, the spheres of activity which each describes are, respectively, masculine and feminine (Chapters Four and Five). In the third case study, the museum describes a sphere of activity which is less obviously gendered (Chapter Six). I shall show that gender is at work here too, in subtle levels of arrangement of themes, spaces and collections, working relationships within the museum and relationships of the museum with its audiences. In Chapter Seven, I bring together different elements from the case studies and draw conclusions from these about gender in the representations which history museums make.

I have chosen the York Castle Museum as the first case study because the museum is the largest social history collection and museum in Britain. The museum has a high public profile. It also has had a strong influence on other museums in the style and themes of exhibitions. It is mainly concerned with those things which, in the foundations and development of history museums, have been defined as both before, and outside, history (Marsh 1987; see Chapter Three). The museum is concerned with small crafts; with agricultural and rural, rather than urban, life; with the private sphere of home life, rather than with industry and life outside the home.

Museums such as the York Castle Museum contain many, many items which are associated with women. The question I ask in this case study is: how is the material which these museums collect mobilised in exhibitions? How do the practices of research and collecting shape and influence the exhibitions? What representations of women do these produce?

I chose this particular gallery as a case study because it seeks to achieve something which few other history museums have attempted: to bring the displays up to the present; to move the museum forward into the modern period. Other folk and social history museums have continued to collect and display material which is firmly in the past. Those museums which deal most obviously with the present - such as museums of the media and science museums - have tended to ignore women and the domestic sphere, except as a background setting, or to depict that sphere as a low branch of science. For example, the Science Museum, London, had a domestic appliances gallery in the basement next to the children's gallery - literally a low branch of science.

This was removed in 1994; the more recent gallery, 'Food for Thought', is largely concerned with food technology and industrial production.

Representations of women and housework are of particular interest in feminism: feminist critiques - whether liberal, radical, socialist or poststructuralist - have identified this as an area in which patriarchal interests are clearly traced, operating to bind women and limit their expectations of themselves to patterns of behaviour and relationships which serve men's interests (for example, Arnold and Faulkner 1985; Cockburn 1985; Coward 1984; Williamson 1978; see also 2.2). In this case study, I use a feminist critique to ask what representations of women this exhibition produces, and to look beneath and behind them to ask whose interests are served.

The sources for this case study are: the physical evidence of the museum itself, its appearance and layout, the arrangement of space and themes. The background history of the museum and recent developments have been described in numerous articles and books, and in the Museum Guidebook sold to visitors (Brears 1980; Brears and Davies 1989; Higgs 1963; Kavanagh 1990; Nicholson 1985a; Suggitt 1985; York Castle Museum 1988). In this case study, unlike the others, there are published catalogues of specific collections (Brears 1979; Brears and Harrison 1979). I also consulted a small number of papers in the museum archives, including a copy of the first collecting policy, of 1985-8 (Nicholson 1985b). I requested recent market data, but was refused access to it by the Director; he did, however, supply me with short excerpts[1]. I interviewed the Keeper of Folk Life who undertook the gallery 'Every Home Should Have One';

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[1]   His refusal of my request for access to audience data stated: 'It is part of our ongoing performance review, thus I am unable to circulate the data. My feeling is that the surveys (sic) relevance to your research is limited...' (Letter 6 December 1989, see Appendix).

and his successor in the post (Suggitt 9 April 1987; Greaves 30 November 1989). His description of the project, and a review by another social history curator, were published in professional journals (Suggitt 1987; Stockdale 1986). I have written an earlier, and shorter, critique of this exhibition (Porter 1988).

4.1 Background History

The York Castle Museum, 'England's most popular museum of everyday life', is the largest museum of its kind in England. It is controlled by the local authority, York City Council, but is a national and international tourist attraction. In his survey of history museums, Higgs commented that 'in 1958 there were nearly 500,000 visitors and it can justly pride itself on being the only folk museum in the country that pays its way.' (Higgs 1963: 29) In 1962, visitor numbers reached the half a million anticipated by Higgs, and have continued above that level. In its first fifty years, between 1938 and 1988, over 25 million visits were made. In 1988, 98% of visitors came from outside York, and 20% from outside the United Kingdom.

Visitors to the Castle Museum pay for admission; the museum has never been supported by the local rates and has continued to 'pay its way': to raise revenue through admission charges, the cafe, and bookshop sales, and to apply these to finance improvements and additional staffing. In addition, museum revenues are returned to York City Council to offset the rates burden. Increasingly, the Castle Museum is competing with other tourist attractions and heritage sites in the city for visitors and income.

The Castle Museum is founded on the private collections built up by John Kirk. Kirk was a doctor who began to collect 'bygones' when he lived in London in the early 1890s. He acquired material from dealers and in antique shops, and by advertising his interest in the columns of Exchange and Mart, for example. He collected material throughout England and Scotland. In 1898, Kirk moved to the North Riding of Yorkshire; his work as a doctor took him into the farms and cottages of local people, where 'he realised that the old ways of life were changing'. He began to collect such artefacts - 'a wide range of bygones as they fell out of use' - but without any records or documentation to support the acquisitions (Brears and Davies 1989: 72; Brears 1980; Kavanagh 1990: 28).

In 1922, Kirk persuaded Pickering Urban District Council to house his collection and to provide some funds for him to open it as a museum. In due course, it became clear to Kirk that the council was not prepared to maintain the building or the collection. He therefore advertised the collection and his intention in the professional newsletter, the Museums Bulletin, and received offers from several town and cities in Yorkshire.

At the same time, York City Council had purchased the former York Castle Female Prison, a late eighteenth century building, for conversion to a civic centre. The council was persuaded to set aside part of the building as a museum to house the Kirk collection. In 1935, the transfer was agreed and building works began. The museum opened in 1938 (Brears and Davies 1989: 73; Higgs 1963: 24). Thus, a building designed for the compulsory confinement of its occupants was converted into a building to attract voluntary entrants, and to display to them the (confined) object and collections of the museum.

Kirk worked for several years to establish the new museum, expanding his ideas and collections. The resulting displays, some of which have been retained, opened in 1938. These included large, shallow glazed showcases of limed oak with large numbers of specimens grouped according to type and arranged in pleasing patterns (such as treen[2], truncheons and knitting sheaths). Others are arranged in series, such as the dairy and the Hearth Gallery. The displays also included a 'street', Kirkgate and Alderman's Walk, constructed within a vast room created by roofing over one of the former prison exercise yards. Here, original shopfronts which spanned five centuries, and which had been collected by Kirk in preceding years from all over the country, were brought together and assembled to make a composite, full-sized street. Some shopfronts were constructed with shallow cases behind the window in which items were displayed on shelves. Others were constructed in deeper bays, with windows, entrances and interiors dressed as they might have been at a chosen earlier period, drawing on other parts of the collections. Kirk may have taken the idea of the street from Thomas Sheppard, Curator of Hull Museum: a street was erected in that museum in 1935, but destroyed during the war (Kavanagh 1990: 29). The convention was copied by many other museums, including the Newarke Houses in Leicester, the Abbey House Museum in Leeds, and Salford Museum. Finally, the museum displays of 1938 included a sequence of period rooms from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Of these, the Victorian parlour has had a particularly strong influence on displays in other museums (Brears and Davies 1989: 81; Nicholson 1985: 25).

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[2]   Small articles of wood, particularly drinking and eating vessels.

The museum expanded into the former Debtor's Prison in 1952. This was an older building than the Female Prison, with smaller rooms and, in the basement, small cells. Some relics of the old prison were returned from the Yorkshire Museum and displayed; craft workshops were constructed in the former cells; a weapons and regimental gallery was created to display the recently-acquired Timperley collection of arms and armour, and local regimental collections. A further 'street' gallery was added in 1963, following the earlier conventions which Kirk has set out, but bringing the dateline forward to 1914. This was an Edwardian street, Half Moon Court, created 'by the re-building of a variety of shops from the City of York' (Castle Museum Guidebook 1988). Raindale Mill was dismantled and transferred from its site in North Yorkshire to the museum in 1966. Raindale Mill was a part of a much larger scheme for a folk park, first suggesting the whole castle area and later, on a more ambitious scale, a much larger site. After over twenty years, in 1975, the scheme was abandoned because of its cost (Brears and Davies 1989: 77).

The Kirk displays remained virtually unchanged, with the late nineteenth century as their dateline. Under the Kirk Trust Deed of 1942, the City of York agreed to publish sectional catalogues of the collection, but the first of these were not published until 1979 (Brears 1979; Brears and Harrison 1979).

Kirk died in 1940, shortly after the museum opened. From 1940 to the 1970s, the Castle Museum continued to function with only one Honorary Curator and one Assistant, who looked after the armaments collections. The museum employed volunteers to work on collections and to operate the turnstiles. Kirk's absence of method, and the consequent effects on the Castle

Museum, were sharply criticised by Higgs, curator of the Museum of English Rural Life at

Reading University, for its lack of method:

> Kirk despite his energy and enthusiasms did not take more pains to relate his material to
> the sources from which it was obtained. As a result the staff of the Castle Museum have
> been continually troubled by their inability to catalogue the Kirk collection effectively
> and to use it for anything more than public display. (Higgs 1963: 24)

Even if the staff were, as Higgs described, 'troubled' they compounded the problem by continuing

to collect in the same catholic manner, with little rigour or regard to fieldwork, research and

documentation. Most material was acquired passively, with duplication in some areas and many

omissions (Nicholson 1985a: 26). Some acquisitions were close to the character of Kirk's local

collections, such as the Bedford Collection of dairy equipment acquired in 1962 (Brears and

Harrison 1979). In addition, because of the high profile and reputation of the museum, material

was acquired from all over the country - again, continuing Kirk's own practices.

From the mid-1970s, new curatorial and administrative posts were created. In the curatorial area,

the posts of Keepers of Folk Life, Military History and Costume, and a further post of Assistant

Keeper, were created; conservators for textiles and for objects, and a technical assistant, were

appointed. In the late 1970s and 80s, the new staff worked on collections management,

introducing documentation, improving storage and publishing catalogues on the early

acquisitions of pre-industrial material (Brears and Harrison 1979; Brears 1979). These staff also

undertook active fieldwork, such as oral history and background research; but this was

concentrated on outdoor, agricultural work. They refurbished and extended, or replaced, displays

to introduce material from the reserve collections (Nicholson 1985a: 26). There were

considerable financial as well as curatorial pressures in this programme: any extra staff posts, and

any development in the service, had to be funded from visitor income. From informal feedback,

museum staff knew that their visitors wanted more galleries on recent history: thus, it was here

that they decided to concentrate new gallery developments. But, by precedent and by default,

when they came to make these galleries of recent history and of domestic life, they did so without

fieldwork or serious research.

In March 1985, the Director of the Castle Museum issued the first written collecting policy, as a

statement of intent for the period 1985-8. In this, he re-stated Kirk's original objective of 'a

regional museum to be used for educational purposes', and the direction of collecting 'towards the

ordinary possessions of ordinary people'. He also recognised the national importance of the

collection. The policy acknowledged the predominance, and in some cases duplication, of

material from the period 1830 - 1920 which was attributed, in part, to passive collecting:

> The Museum should and can adopt a rather different style of collecting in future. The
> public mainly offers things already well represented in the collections, particularly from
> the Victorian period. There is an evident need to husband storage and display space
> carefully. The Museum now has a basic structure of curatorial staff. Accordingly, there
> should be more emphasis on active and selective collecting of well documented material,
> which complements and extends existing holdings. (Nicholson 1985b: 1)

In the policy, the Museum Director set out broad principles, which he developed further under

section headings, These were that:

> The Museum's collections should, as far as possible, represent the continuity and
> development of material culture. To this end it should acquire relevant material
> of the period before 1830 and after 1920. There should be a presumption against
> the acquisition of material of the period 1830 to 1920. (Ibid: 2)

The policy mapped out the areas covered by the collections: folk life (social history); military

history; textiles; decorative and practical arts; other collecting (oral history, photographic and

local history recording and archives). The first category, of folk life (social history), included:

craft tools, agricultural equipment; trade materials, including retail; domestic; vehicles; local

history items; personalia. In the domestic category, the policy stated that:

> the Museum has probably the finest provincial collections of domestic equipment... it
> should be collecting domestic equipment and fittings, particularly of the period 1920 to
> the present day. Particular attention will be given to lighting and to kitchen equipment.
> (Nicholson 1985b: 3)

In the category of 'other collecting: oral history', the Director expressed the hope 'that staff time

will be available to undertake a ... specific project on domestic life'. In 'photographic and local

history recording' he suggested that 'the assistance of the local community may be enlisted

(possibly by means of an adult education class) to record such things as domestic interiors, local

industry, shops, streetscapes and fashions' (ibid: 5).

Despite these efforts towards professionalism, the York Castle Museum, struggling with huge

collections and a huge volume of visitors, continues to lack focus and direction. It claims in

promotional literature to be a museum of everyday life, and in professional statements to be

collecting 'the ordinary possessions of ordinary people'. However, the evidence to substantiate

these claims, such as clear research methodology, or a commitment to record and collect

provenance and personal testimony, is weak. Moreover, in its interpretations of collections, the

museum falls back on mechanisms which work against people and life: internal classifications,

progressive sequences, traditional arrangements and an emphasis on intrinsic, physical and

stylistic features. I shall describe these, and their effects, in detail in the rest of this chapter. In

her book on history curatorship, Gaynor Kavanagh is highly critical of the museum: she states

that 'in the years to date [it] has failed to find a central philosophy or direction other than entertaining the public with a mixture of myth and theme park' (Kavanagh 1990: 30).

In its jubilee year of 1988, the museum undertook market research in order to explore ways of generating further income, and to inform forward planning. The City Council sought to move visitor numbers from around 630,000 recorded in that year to 800,000. The research recorded a general level of satisfaction with the pricing and with the museum. Visitors questioned preferred the displays of streets, period rooms, and the exhibition 'Every Home Should Have One'. The visitors were asked 'This Museum claims to be about everyday life and experiences. How well do you think it succeeds?', and to mark this out of ten. 53% gave nine to ten; 44% gave seven to eight; 3% gave five to six (Letter 6 December 1989). In the rest of this chapter, I show how 'everyday life' is construed within one particular exhibition and area, that of domestic life.

4.2 The Development of the Domestic Appliances Gallery

In 1983, the museum prepared plans for its first major new gallery for over twenty years. £45,000 was committed from the museum's capital programme towards the gallery, in the centre of the museum.

Staff chose domestic appliances as the theme for the new gallery for two reasons. First, the museum had a rich collection of this material, but few examples were on public display and none in an interpretative display (as opposed to a flat array or contextual, period room) arrangement. Secondly, the theme was chosen because the staff wanted to create another gallery which, with

the rooms of the 1940s, 1953 and 1981, brought the collections displayed closer to the present day. Although informal feedback from visitors seemed to confirm an interest in the recent past, this desire was not informed by visitor or public opinion through, say, visitor survey or public consultation. Thus the decision was internally driven, by forces within the institution, not from outside; it was driven by the collections rather than by their use, by objects rather than people. Also, incidentally, the gallery presented an opportunity to undertake further, particularly contemporary, collecting. In these ways, the discourse of the gallery was already shaped by internal forces.

The displays had been anticipated and relevant collections built up at the time when staff were collecting for the Coronation Room. Work on the gallery began in 1983 and was undertaken by museum staff: Mark Suggitt, newly appointed as Keeper of Folk Life, and Steve Moore, the museum designer. The displays opened in April 1985. The information in this section is drawn from an interview with the Keeper in April 1986, and from his published account (Suggitt 9 April 1987; Suggitt 1987).

The Keeper and Designer made a number of decisions which crucially shaped the gallery: in the overall 'look', in the selection of material, and in its interpretation. First, they specifically excluded any domestic context or settings in which the chosen collections might have been used: they felt that these were unnecessary, given that the new gallery was located between the period rooms and the hearths gallery with the two kitchens of the 1940s and 1981.

Second, they decided to lay out the space like a modern department store. The objects are displayed with selling prices and advertisements. The lighting section deliberately copies a famous chain store; other areas are in the spirit of shop design. This look, they felt, would produce a gallery which was polished and stylish, and which encouraged 'just looking' (Suggitt 1987).

Third, they chose simple headings for each section: heating, cleaning, lighting, bathrooms, laundry, toilets, hobbies, entertainments. These are 'like a simple classification': indeed, they correspond closely to the categories for domestic and family life in the standard classification: heating, lighting, water and sanitation; cleaning and maintenance; hobbies, crafts and pastimes (Suggitt 1987: 9; SHIC 1983 (I): vi; 15-20). Thus, the gallery is not only created because of the existence of large reserve collections; it is also organised according to the same principles as the reserve collections: it is <u>literally</u> bringing material out from the stores, in the groups and categories in which it is organised, and then dressing these collections and categories in new clothes.

Fourth, the Keeper and Designer worked to make individual texts and the overall approach deliberately short, light-hearted, even trivial. Visitors at York are funnelled through a rigid circulation pattern, and high visitor numbers at peak times discourage people from lingering or turning back. The staff therefore felt that lengthy texts or complex ideas were impractical. The Keeper chose what he described as 'the factual approach' to keep ideas simple and straightforward. Among the alternative interpretations which he listed, he referred to a feminist

approach.   Thus, by implication, he sees feminism as differing from fact, and as complicating/complicated.

Finally, the Keeper and Designer decided to draw on contemporary advertisements to illustrate the gallery. They did so in order to provide a period atmosphere and reinforce the design idiom of the shop. They also believed that these would produce an additional advantage, providing images of women in a museum relatively short on images in general, and images of women in particular. They sought to offset the happy figures in the advertisements with texts which tempered their tone of address and the unqualified success of the products they advertised.

In his research for the displays, the Keeper drew heavily on a small number of secondary sources: the domestic appliances gallery at the Science Museum, London, constructed in the early 1970s[3], and the book written by its curator (De Haan 1977). Both the gallery and the book are strongly progressive and technological: the development of technology is drawn as a straight line over time, and an uninterrupted flow outwards from invention and production to consumption and use. The Keeper also used other secondary sources: the descriptive work by Caroline Davidson and the more critical essay with a feminist perspective - published in a well-known collection of studies of the material culture - by Ruth Schwartz Cowan (Davidson 1982; Cowan 1982). He used these secondary sources for the interpretation by extracting information from them and attaching the information to objects through introductory texts and labelling. The collections were poorly documented and carried little of their own histories of context and use. The Keeper and other staff did not undertake any research or fieldwork studies of housework and usage to

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[3]   These were dismantled in 1994.

develop and inform the display, and to complement and supplement the collections. As noted in the collecting policy (section 4.1), a later, and rather weak, commitment was made to field recording.

Thus, the methodology for the gallery was both inward-looking and superficial. It was inward-looking because it drew from the collections and the classification by which they were organised. The methodology was superficial because it did not seek to ground, contextualise or illustrate the collections and gallery themes through thorough fieldwork and research. Instead, the Keeper relied on secondary sources for illustrations and supporting information. It was both superficial and inward-looking because these were sources familiar to museum curators: the Keeper referred to the collection in which Cowan's article is published as 'the Leicester Bible', referring to the Museum Studies training courses at that University. He might have broadened his search and easily found numerous relevant historical, sociological and cultural studies with different perspectives which might have produced a different approach and structure in the gallery (for example, Coward 1984; Gershuny 1982; Oakley 1985).

In part, this paucity of methodology arose from a confusion and debate at the time among social history curators about the identity and coherence of their discipline: was it a discipline at all, or merely an 'umbrella' of other specialisms? In Scotland and Wales, the traditions of regional ethnology and sound, research-based collecting were stronger than in England; but they were associated with a backward-looking, pre-industrial era and with rural pursuits. Those working in urban areas and in recent history tended to reject the practice as outmoded. The debate about contemporary collecting, in particular, was dominated by curators who argued that any local

culture or identity had vanished (Davies 1985; see Chapter Three). In part, the paucity - or confusion - of methodology can be traced within the York Castle Museum itself: is it about aesthetics and style, or about social history and people?

4.3 'Every Home Should Have One': Description of the Displays

The new displays opened in 1985. They were announced to the public and to other museums by a small advertising flyer with cartoons on both sides and a single short text (Illustration 2). On the front of the leaflet, a sooty and dirty-aproned housemaid clutching a handbrush flees from an onslaught of new appliances; on the reverse, a servant sits, tools cast aside, her feet up on a chair, holding a leaflet entitled 'Solution of the Servant Problem'. The images on the leaflet are re-drawn from originals by John Hassall. The former was commissioned by the British Vacuum Cleaner Company, 1906[4], the latter was for electric heaters. Neither was attributed to its source.

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[4]   The original for this, 'Help', with its counterpart, 'Friends' (1909), is in the collections of the Science Museum, London.

<u>Illustration 2</u>

Flyer advertising the new gallery at York Castle Museum.

'Every Home Should Have One' is sited in the centre of the museum, between the Kirk period rooms and the 'hearth' gallery and twentieth century kitchens. Visitors enter the Museum through a pay desk and they are directed in a one-way circulation system towards the Kirk Collection[5]. From the concourse, a flight of stairs leads over a street display (Princess Mary Court) into a gallery containing the period rooms constructed as part of Kirk's original displays. Visitors are separated from each room by a wooden screen. The Victorian Parlour faces the Moorland Cottage; in the same area, a large ornate polished wood and glass wall cabinet contains decorative pieces in glass, china and metal of the Victorian period. As visitors move from this area, they pass similar cabinets with seventeenth century silver, salt glaze and Staffordshire wares; and with nineteenth century fairings and Staffordshire figures. Two further period rooms follow in the same area: the Stuart Room (formerly called the Yeoman's Hall) and the Georgian Dining Room.

Visitors pass from the period room gallery up a staircase into a small gallery containing the Coronation Room, a setting of 1953. This was added in the early 1980s, along with two other rooms - the 1940s kitchen and the 1981 kitchen - which are in the hearth area. The Coronation Room appears to follow Kirk's period rooms in its presentation and labelling. The room faces a juke box and two large cases, displaying twentieth century artefacts. These are selected, grouped, titled and described as decorative arts. The titles are 'New Shapes'; 'Crown and Empire'; 'A Present from ...'; 'The Plastic Age'; 'Jazz to Pop'; 'Art and Life'. These themes are developed further in the labels, which refer to materials and stylistic developments. They then pass through

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[5]   In 1989, the museum changed the visitor flow through the museum; this had the effect of reversing the journey through the gallery. I describe it as it was originally designed.

a small gallery, Thornley Park, 'an evocation of a small corner of an Edwardian town'. This includes an ice cream cart; a portrait photographer's stand camera; a park bench; a bath chair; a fairground carousel; and costumed figures of a nanny, mistress, boy and girl (York Castle Museum Guidebook 1988).

Thus, by the time that visitors arrive at the gallery 'Every Home Should Have One', they have already become familiar with certain conventions in the displays: in particular, conventions to do with the home, activity and work. The period rooms use physical form and the arrangement of material things to connote human occupation and activity. The selection of early rooms, their arrangement and interpretation suggest the point of view of the employer, and the master, rather than of servants and women; they suggest repose and rest, rather than work in the household. These are the rooms of the middle and upper classes; the reception, rather than work, rooms[6]. They are clean and tidy; the table is laid; slippers are warming at the fire. The labels are mainly item descriptions of fittings and contents in stylistic and decorative terms; if they refer to use and work at all, they refer to work which has already been done by someone else - the servants. In the Moorland Kitchen (a small household where there would have been no servants), any reference to activity is indirect, and passive (for example, 'dough was mixed in the wooden trough'; 'the fire gave heat for boiling kettles...'). The Coronation Room makes no reference to work or activity at all. The dimensions of human interest or activity, and subtle comparisons over time, class and gender, are not communicated to visitors by these or other means. Such means might include

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[6] This was the accepted viewpoint for writers and speakers in the nineteenth century. Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby note that in literature, 'even when the writer was a woman, the underlying imagery is the unacknowledged master of the household looking in, so to speak, at the household he has "created". The domestic interior awaits his coming, his return.' (Davidoff, L'Esperance and Newby 1976: 154)

illustrations of similar rooms and their occupants; clothed figures (as in Thornley Park); demonstrations (as at the North of England Open Air Museum in Beamish); direct comparisons between social classes at the same time (as at the Museum of Oxford, for example).

Visitors enter 'Every Home Should Have One' down a flight of steps, at the end a long, high-ceilinged gallery (Illustration 3). The gallery is thus very different in space and atmosphere from those on the route by which they have come. It gives an immediate impression of being light, open and modern; visitors can instantly encompass its whole layout as they enter (Figure 1). The gallery is high and large; it is lit mainly by daylight coming from large sash windows along one side of the gallery; the walls are painted light grey and are thinly clad with illustrations and display panels. In all these ways, the gallery differs from the modern department store which it seeks to emulate: the latter is characteristically crowded and difficult to comprehend at one glance; ceilings are low; it relies on artificial light; the walls are obscured by storage and display units.

The displays are arranged in sections; double-sided graphic boards hanging over each section carry the title and a simple illustration of an appliance, repeated four times in alternating squares of yellow and blue, as a visual key. These are: 'Heating' (a paraffin stove); 'Cleaning' (a vacuum cleaner); 'Lighting' (a table lamp); 'Bathrooms' (a washbasin); 'Toilets' (a lavatory bowl); 'Laundry' (a washing machine); 'Hobbies' (chess pieces); 'Radio and T.V.'(a television); 'Music' (a gramophone). The majority of objects in the exhibition are on open display, without the protection of glass showcases. There are a small number of freestanding, hexagonal and wall-

mounted display cases, containing smaller items of equipment, and a large wall case at the far end of the gallery with musical instruments, gramophones etc.

Figure 1

Layout of the gallery 'Every Home Should Have One' at the York Castle Museum.

Illustration 3

Entering the gallery 'Every Home Should Have One' at the York Castle Museum.

The first half of the gallery is sparse in its arrangement. This area contains the introductory feature and sections on 'Heating' and 'Cleaning'. The introductory feature consists of a low, sloping panel on a hexagonal wooden plinth; above it are suspended graphic boards using the same illustrations, colours and conventions as those which hang above each section, but without the titles and without the 'Hobbies' board. On the same low stand as the introductory panel, but turned away and to the side, is a hexagonal case with objects and texts on domestic service: this has no external sign or title.

The display stands consist of low, carpeted plinths, with sloping panelling in light, stained and varnished wood along the front edges of the plinths, bearing illustrations and texts. In some places, this sloping panelling is cut away for cases and flat stands for exhibits. Enlargements of advertisements are mounted onto the walls behind the objects, adding colour and visual interest. The length of the gallery is intersected at its centre by an L-shaped central, upstanding structure. From the long, flat side of the structure to the outer wall of the gallery, a slatted 'ceiling' and bay are created for the 'Lighting' section. Here, pendant fittings are suspended from the ceiling; others are bracketed to the walls and table lamps and lights are displayed in shallow, wall-mounted showcases. Enclosed in the right angle of the L-shaped structure, and on a plinth, an Edwardian bath, shower and bidet are displayed. The plinth also supports a low display case of cosmetics and toiletries, and a panel which follows the line of the panels and plinths of previous displays. Facing the bathroom, against the outer wall, is another panel on sanitation: these, together, form the sections on 'Bathrooms' and 'Toilets'. The 'Laundry' section is arranged along the outer, short, edge of the L-shaped structure. Here, the structure is used to carry further mounted enlargements of advertisements, this time for washing products; a low plinth in front of

the screen supports some of the older items of washing equipment, machines and bowls. Beyond,

on a low, freestanding, Y-shaped plinth, more recent washing machines are arranged; at one end

of the 'Y', a low case contains irons.

The latter half of the gallery - 'Hobbies', 'Music' and 'Radio and T.V.' - is more crowded with

objects, wall-mounted and freestanding fittings, and showcases. In the Radio and Television

section, it has the additional attraction of having movement, sound and entertainment: recorded

extracts from television programmes are played back through old receivers. Visitors are quickly

attracted to this, as the only part of the gallery which offers sound and movement; they are drawn

towards it. On one side of this area, slatted screens are arranged against the walls which carry

shelving and plinths for open exhibits - radios and televisions. On the other side, the area is

enclosed by a large showcase, to the same height as the wall panels, containing musical

instruments and gramophones. In the centre of this area, hexagonal showcases, graphic panels

and plinths are arranged in a cluster. They cover the themes of games, hobbies, dressmaking,

embroidery, knitting, crafts and pastimes, and gardening.

The introductory panel to 'Every Home Should Have One' introduces visitors unambiguously to

the gallery:

> Running a home can be hard, even with the help of labour-saving machines. The
> ancestors of modern machines first appeared as eccentric luxuries. Today they
> are taken for granted. They give us time to relax and enjoy home entertainments.

This key text sets the tone for the whole of the rest of the gallery. It places machines as the actors

in household management, leading and liberating the houseworker. The text tells the reader that

machines release time; it also defines how that time will be spent, tying it back into other

activities within the household. The text assumes an equality of input into domestic chores: 'we take the help of labour-saving machines ... for granted'. In this way, the subject position of the writer and reader are submerged into a universal 'we', undifferentiated by gender, class or race.

Throughout the displays, the visual and textual referents for objects are associated with promotion and sales: the advertising images mounted on the walls behind them; the small story-board labels, which carry prices, illustrations and information from product leaflets and brochures.

In all the sections, the texts assume that domestic work used to be unrewarding toil (done by someone else); and that today it is obsolete because machines do the work themselves: for example, 'washing day now consists of "putting a wash in"'.

Each section is introduced by a short historical paragraph, generally written from the point of view of the wealthy, servant-employing householder. The text about domestic service takes this position: 'Servants were supposed to ease the lives of their employers. They did the housework and other chores, leaving the family free to pursue their roles in society.' The text also discusses the relationship between service and new technologies: first, as if the servants themselves were responsible, rather than the purchasing decisions of their masters and mistresses: 'Servants did little to advance or retard the development of labour-saving devices, most of which first appeared in America.' Then, the text continues to investigate attitudes - only those of the employers, not the servants' attitudes - as if decisions were based on the servants' behaviour rather than other factors such as cost:

> British attitudes were divided. Some employers believed any easing of the servants' lot would encourage laziness; others hoped better conditions would entice good servants to stay.

In other sections, the same inflexion is used. For example, the text 'Home Fires Burning' in the heating section is introduced thus: 'Domestic grates burnt (sic) 18 million tons [of coal] in 1869, compared to 38 million tons in 1922. Fortunately, there were enough servants to carry it, light it, and clean up afterwards.' Again, 'Hard Labour' (laundry) starts: 'Washing machines appeared in the 1850s. They were too expensive for most people - housemaids were cheaper.' These texts conclude with references to the present; as described above, the different roles and positions are submerged into a universal 'we', ironing out different class positions and closing off the continuing existence of paid domestic labour within the home.

In these texts, sexual difference is excised wherever possible. The text 'In Service' carries no direct reference to women in its four paragraphs: yet domestic service was an overwhelmingly female occupation, and the largest single source of employment for women, for most of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the text, sexual difference is stated only where it is inevitable: for example, in the occupational name of 'house<u>maid</u>'. The gendered nature of domestic work is conveyed most strongly, and without interpretation, in the illustrations and advertisements used on text panels and on the walls. But even the selection of advertisements reinforces the message, of 'the past'/female/hard work and 'the present'/ undifferentiated/not-work. This is achieved <u>within</u> the advertising and promotional images chosen - whose message is that machines take away the work that women used to do - and also by the <u>omission</u> of other images: most notably, any recent or present-day advertisements or images.

The visual and verbal messages are confirmed and materialised in the selection, grouping and condition of the objects on display. By the selection of material, 'appliances' in the first part of the gallery are defined mainly as things which have moving (working?) parts within them: vacuum pumps, rotary blades, taps, flushing cisterns. The lightfittings are different but, equally, function by themselves, as it were. Those things which are simple and relatively enduring, such as a duster or a wooden spoon, are defined out of the category of appliance by their omission from the display. This material is grouped according to the way in which museums organise their material. Conversely, the task of housework is a jumble of all these things, and more besides: changing the bedclothes; tidying up, cleaning, washing, cooking. The objects are displayed in silent and gleaming condition on their stands; someone has neatly coiled and tucked away the flexes and water pipes of the washing machines; someone has cleaned the stains from the bath; someone has cleaned the lamp chimneys and changed the light bulbs.

The selection and placing of material in the 'Hobbies' section is different. Activities such as knitting, gardening, dressmaking and embroidery are brought together under this grouping, i.e. as not-work. Time released by appliances ('Labour-saving machines ... give us time to relax and enjoy home entertainments'), is assumed to be spent elsewhere in the home and that time is assumed to constitute relaxing and entertaining leisure pursuits, rather than further household tasks. Thus, tasks essential for many households - such as mending, turning sheets, making and cutting down clothes - are defined as inessential, relaxing tasks. Decoration and furnishing are also, implicitly, defined as luxuries. The materials selected include these items omitted from the earlier displays: simple needles, fragments of cloth, patterns, work in progress. The condition of these materials is variable, too: they look as if they are old and used.

Visitors leaving this gallery go into the Hearths Gallery. In passing into this gallery, they/we realise - retrospectively - the omission in 'Every Home Should Have One' of cooking, eating, and all the tasks (and tools) that accompany them, such as washing up. This gallery contains a series, or sequence, of hearths, including both hearths and ranges for cooking, and the more decorative hearths for heating only. The gallery also contains two period rooms: kitchens, of the 1940s and 1981, recently assembled. This gallery is intended to complement and to be 'read' in conjunction with 'Every Home Should Have One' but its style, selection and interpretation are entirely different.

These period kitchens are more open and more easily viewed than the earlier period rooms because the barriers are low. Different light levels, and illumination through period fittings, add to the effect. The 1940s kitchen is arranged with work in progress - the ironing board is erected in the centre of the kitchen, the iron plugged into the light socket. The pantry is viewed through a window. The 1981 kitchen is different: it looks and reads like a catalogue or magazine advertisement. It is clean and tidy; stocked with new foodstuffs; there are no signs of habitation or of active work.

The texts for these kitchens carry the inflexions already made in 'Every Home Should Have One': that developments are improvements, increasing comfort and reducing work. The text for the 1940s kitchen points to the convenience of packaged foods, washing machine and wringer, electric iron and cooker, gas wall heater. The text for the 1981 kitchen lists microwave ovens, cushioned floor covering, moulded chipboard work surfaces.

In the texts, there is no attempt to relate the kitchens to imagined occupants, by naming individuals or, as attempted in earlier texts, by stating locality or class position. The texts restrict themselves to physical changes with almost no reference to use, activity or agency. Change and development are described as autonomous, uninterrupted; furnishings and artefacts are the subjects and actors in the story. For example: 'By the late 1940s the kitchen was beginning to be adapted or designed as a separate working area'; 'the electric iron ... quickly replaced heavy flat irons'. Again, in the 1981 kitchen, 'pantries had vanished from kitchen design with cupboard space increasing accordingly', 'the cold quarry tile floor has been replaced'. Change and development may even be determining forces: the only direct reference to people in both texts presents them as subject to forces beyond their control: 'Rising standards and consumerism have made us elevate kitchen decor to new levels... A "total look" is now expected' (1981 kitchen). The reference does not state who expects 'the total look'; nor the cost of the expectation.

The 1940s kitchen and pantry are often understood as the back kitchen of a terrace house, although the pantry is in the wrong position for this house plan (Suggitt 1985: 15). However, the reconstruction was based on the kitchen of a flat in Quarry Hill, Leeds - an experimental and controversial public housing development of the late 1930s which had an exceptional level of conveniences for the period (Ravetz 1974).

The 1981 kitchen looks and reads like a catalogue or magazine advertisement. The room was commissioned by the Keeper of Folk Life and assembled by a local kitchen supplier/ contractor,

working to his own plans and using new components. It was stocked with new foodstuffs, mainly given by manufacturers.

These sections within the Castle Museum are the museum's formation and definition of 'everyday life' in the recent past, in the home; and for 'the ordinary possessions of ordinary people' who lived and worked in it. In the next section, I examine and analyse this formation.

4.4 All Play and No Work: a Critical Analysis of the Exhibition

In this section, I analyse the discourse and the forces which shape the exhibition 'Every Home Should Have One'. I look beyond and beneath the immediate themes to examine how masculinity and femininity are constructed in, and become the structure of, the exhibition. I ask whether, and how, we can move through and beyond these constructions to reach different representations and a new discourse.

Using the analysis of discourse described in Chapter Two, I define the exhibition as a discourse shaped by internal forces within the museum: the collections and their classification; the research materials available; the commercial and public imperatives of the museum; its lack of philosophy and methodology. These internal forces are thinly glossed over with a veneer of references to the world outside the museum: the 'shop' design; the advertising images; the joking tones.

Taking the position of a woman reader, I find that this exhibition has the effect of binding women to certain roles and definitions of themselves; of containing them as different from men, and simultaneously denying that such differences exist. This is achieved through a series of oppositions: past/present, archaic/modern, work/hobbies, active/passive, manual/ mechanical, nature/culture. I look beyond and beneath these themes and oppositions to ask <u>why</u> women are defined in this way, and <u>how</u> the ties that bind them in the exhibition can be loosened to release new, and different, meanings and representations.

Roland Barthes has discussed the abundance of narrational devices which are employed to naturalise the subsequent narrative, thus 'disinaugurating' it. 'The reluctance to declare its codes characterizes bourgeois society and the mass culture issuing from it: both demand signs which do not look like signs.' (Barthes 1981: 183)

The 'shop' metaphor chosen for 'Every Home Should Have One' at the York Castle Museum is an attempt to cover the museum's authorship beneath codes borrowed from the more familiar, and less formal, shopping environment; to disown or disavow the interior forces shaping the discourse (Foucault 1981: 67). With a subtle irony, the 'shop' metaphor returns authorship to its source, inviting comparison with the commercial framework within which the museum itself operates - as a highly profitable retail outlet, ploughing visitor income back into further displays and to York City Council to reduce overhead costs. The choice of an exhibition about recent history, and an exhibition which drew on material from the museum's stored collections, was in part a commercial decision (see above, 4.1).

The 'shop' metaphor has a strong influence on the display, as I describe later in this section. However, it is a thin veneer, through which the underlying structure and concerns of the museum constantly erupt: in the language and categories used, in the objects selected and ignored, in their grouping and interpretation.

The subtitle of the gallery, 'Domestic Appliances', is at once anachronistic and revealing: it exposes the museum's preoccupation with the artefacts in its collections, and with the terms of the internal classification which it uses, rather than with the external world and with these same artefacts in context and in use. To sustain the shop metaphor, another term should have been chosen: an equivalent section in the modern department store might be called 'housewares', 'household goods', or 'electrical goods'.

Again, the gallery reveals the interior forces shaping the museum discourse through what it includes and excludes. These inclusions and exclusions reflect the system by which the museum organises its collections, the Social History and Industrial Classification. This divides all human activity into four sectors: Community Life, Domestic and Family Life, Personal Life and Working Life. DIY, games and home crafts are <u>included</u> in the classification and in the gallery grouping of Domestic and Family Life (SHIC 1983 (I): 18). In a department store, these would be displayed in different departments, or even in different shops. In the gallery, tasks such as sewing are assumed to be for internal consumption, by the family, only: this arises from the classification, in which they lie within the category of Domestic and Family Life rather than in Working Life. The exclusions from this gallery are also determined by other internal forces: the prior existence of other galleries which the museum did not wish to duplicate, or remove. Thus,

cooking and kitchen appliances are <u>excluded</u> from this gallery because they are included elsewhere in the museum; they would certainly form a major part of any shop department concerned with housewares.

In choosing and using a light-hearted approach, the gallery <u>literally</u> makes light of women's work in the home, and of the detailed studies and heated debates over the status - past, present and future - of housework which have taken place in the last two decades (for example, Arnold 1985; Bereano, Bose and Arnold 1985; Gershuny 1982; Oakley 1985). Throughout the gallery, images, slogans and puns are used which draw on the visual and verbal language of advertising and promotional materials. These are source materials which can be easily located: in collections of printed materials held in museums such as the Science Museum (from which two key images were drawn for the leaflet); in the object files for items in the collections, which may contain technical manuals and other promotional materials; and in popular books on housework and the home. By using these materials, the humorous tone of the gallery is maintained at the expense of women. There is no reverent acknowledgement of craft skills or seriousness here; the redundancy of workers - whether real or imagined - is celebrated.

The Keeper stated that the gallery is constructed on a 'consumerist theme' (Suggitt 1987: 8). Yet it neglects the <u>new</u> work of consumption created by an increasing proliferation of 'convenience' household items and by increasing pressure to consume and conform (Coward 1984: 68-9; Winship 1981: 3). The huge range of 'software' available, particularly since the middle of the twentieth century, is missing from the gallery: the cleaning fluids, fabric care products, disposable tissues and packaging, sanitary and cosmetic products, for example. The battle

between manufacturers and brands for the domestic worker's buying power is nowhere suggested.

These omissions again reveal the interior forces shaping the discourse - the reliance on the collection. Items in the museum's collections are items which are not transient and impermanent; have not been totally exhausted and consumed in the process of use; are hard to dispose of; are deemed to be appropriate for a museum. Much of the museum's collection has been acquired by passive collecting, accepting material offered rather than initiating and undertaking research and acquisition (section 4.1). In these ways, domestic 'hardware' is represented in the collections and domestic 'software', which is ephemeral, is not (Porter 1987). This collection was the starting point, and limitation, of the material selected for display. The shop and advertising motif further limited the possibility of such a mixture of products: because the Keeper and Designer wanted to limit the number of showcases in the gallery, in order to maintain the 'shop' atmosphere, considerations of security and conservation may have guided the selection of more durable items from the collections, for open display without showcase protection. The absence of these products might also be attributed to the shop motif chosen, because a modern department store would normally separate hardware and software in different sections, or even different shops. However, as I described earlier, this separation is ignored in the inclusion of hobbies and games: I therefore attribute the omission of consumer products to the internal forces and limitations of the collections.

A selection based on active collecting, fieldwork and research in people's homes, and methodical literature searches for sociological studies of usage, might arrive at different interpretations. For

example, the modern AEG Lavamat automatic washing machine and its label suggest ease and convenience: 'washday has been replaced by "putting a wash in"'. A display based on usage might include the host of pre-wash, washing and conditioning agents available; it might make reference to the range of fabrics, and fabric care instructions which may require separate, small loads. It might note that people (mostly women) collect, wash, dry, iron and put away clothes, bedclothes and furnishings more frequently. It might suggest that the choice of an AEG model itself represents a particular class and gender position and a techno-fetishistic preference for functional and expensive German consumer durables.   A broader fieldwork study might acknowledge those households with cheaper and older appliances, or those with none[7].

Few museums have undertaken fieldwork studies of household work. Those which have - such as The People's Story in Edinburgh, the Old Schoolhouse in Hull, and the Geffrye Museum in East London - have found that it has profoundly changed the way that they view the material in their collections, and the way that they interpret it (Clark 1994; Griffiths 1987; MacDonald and Porter 1990). The staff at the York Castle Museum might usefully have undertaken such studies rather than depending so heavily on the limited, and limiting, sources used.

I have shown that the choice of 'shop' for the design motif was both convenient and deceptive. The exhibition's reviewer, David Stockdale, saw it as a commercial exhibition: he suggested that the gallery suffered from 'slip[ping] at times into an Ideal Homes approach to history' (Stockdale 1986: 4). The form of presentation chosen by the Keeper and Designer contributed to the 'Ideal

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[7]   In 1982 80% of all UK households owned a washing machine; 38% owned a clothes
       dryer (Audits of Great Britain, quoted in Bereano, Bose and Arnold, 1985, 165).

Home' style, both literally - in its resemblance to the promotional stands of an Ideal Home

exhibition - and implicitly, by obliterating differences of time, class, gender. The 'shop' display,

advertisements and slogans have the effect of offering everything at the same level, of free choice

for the visitor/ consumer among a range of 'goods'. This covers over differences <u>between</u> the

items: their different periods of purchase and use; different market conditions; factors of income,

available labour, regional distribution and household structure which would have affected their

use. Some texts acknowledge these converse, and complicating, factors: for example, in the

introduction: 'the ancestors of our modern machines first appeared as expensive luxuries'. Few

households could afford them; these households anyway had little incentive to acquire expensive

capital equipment while female labour was cheap. The Keeper stated that he sought to qualify

and contrast the visual messages on the wall-mounted advertisements with the written texts

beneath. But, in this, he failed to take account of the different position, and power, of these

messages: the written texts are contradicted and overwhelmed by the more powerful visual and

material message of the presentation.

Reviewing projects in the United States of America, Carolyn Cooper and Barbara Melosh point

to the difficulty of introducing and sustaining any critical messages in an exhibition of housework

which is, at the same time, using the images and language of advertising (Cooper 1987; Melosh

1989). In a display of household technology at the Brattleboro Museum, Vermont, the producers

sought to unsettle the assumptions about progress in household technology. Cooper commented

that the visual message of arrangements and objects undercut the exhibitors' intended message.

> In the story on the wall, the kitchen and its lonely occupant, the captive housewife, are
> the passive objects of activity by businessmen and manufacturers ... Are we the viewers
> also the victims of the same commercial persuaders, so we see progress where it is not
> intended to be seen? If so, exhibitors with a different message should beware of using the

same visual language as the advertisers. They should not rely on the viewer to supply the intended irony. (Cooper 1987: 331)

Above, I have shown that the exhibition discourse is shaped through internal forces, its authorship thinly covered with the veneer of 'shop' design. Here, I read this discourse as one which has the effect of binding women to certain roles, containing them as different from men and, at the same time, denying that such differences exist, through a series of oppositions. These are oppositions of past versus present; archaic versus modern; manual versus mechanical. This opposition is linked to others: of work/hobbies or work/relaxation; them/us; nature/culture.

Throughout the historical parts of the displays, housework is put at arm's length, as someone else's work ('them'). This is clearest in the 'voice' with which the written texts speak. They silently assume the middle class position of employer. In addition to writing texts from this position, the Keeper also selected original materials with the same position: thus in the section 'In Service', the duties of a housemaid are reproduced from The Book of the Home (1904). She is addressed in the superior and prescriptive tones of employer, or expert in household management expert; she has no voice of her own[8]. In the contemporary part of the displays, housework is assumed to have ceased: the displays represent it as obsolete; 'we' are liberated from housework.

Another device, both here and in the texts for the period rooms, is the use of passive, rather than active, verbs. For example, in the section on 'Hobbies', and under the title 'Put Your Foot Down' the text states: 'A sewing machine allowed the family to make durable repairs... Fashionable

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[8]   Accounts of housemaids and general servants are available in published form, e.g. in the diaries of Hannah Cullwick in the 1860s and 70s (Hudson 1974; Stanley 1984), or the autobiographies of Lilian Westall and Winifred Foley in the early twentieth century (Burnett 1974).

clothes could be made up from patterns.' This text panel is mounted on a screen covered with an

enlargement of a magazine illustration of two women, one seated at the sewing machine and

making a decorative border. In each of these examples, as elsewhere in the gallery, it is the

activity of <u>women</u> which is excised from the written text. The text mutes the identification of

women with housework which is apparent everywhere, in product names and illustrations.

In introductory paragraphs and labelling for the contemporary period, household tasks are

embraced as close, familiar and shared. The use of 'we' in these texts irons out all difference.

The writer (Keeper) places himself among 'us', in a consistent and unified whole. This deprives

'us', the readers, of any position 'outside' the text, from which to reject or qualify it. The device

closes off any consideration of different participation in housework according to gender, class

and age; the continuance of housework as women's work; the persistence of paid work within the

home, by domestic workers in the homes of others, and increasingly by women undertaking

waged work at home; the roles of children and older people (Gershuny 1982; Bedell 1993;

Hutton 1992). This reference to a - 'our' - universal human experience suppresses the weight of

history and the acknowledgement of difference. Barthes calls it a myth:

> This myth of the human 'condition' rests on a very old mystification, which always
> consists in placing Nature at the bottom of History. Any classic humanism postulates that
> in scratching the history of men (sic) a little, the relativity of their institutions or the
> superificial diversity of their skins, one very quickly reaches the solid rock of a human
> nature. Progressive humanism, on the contrary, must always remember to reverse the
> laws of this very old imposture, constantly to scour nature, its 'laws' and its 'limits' in
> order to discover History there, and at last to discover Nature itself as historical. (Barthes
> 1973: 101)

Barthes was blind to those other differences, of gender, around which classic humanism

organises itself in the same ways: centrally, in the use of the term 'man' to refer to everyone. His

essay is a critical review of the photographic exhibition 'The Family of Man': he notes that the exhibition places work with birth and death, as 'great universal facts ... as if it was quite evident that it belongs to the same order of fate' (Ibid: 102). Against this, he points to the <u>historical</u> fact of work: historical because of its modes, motivations, ends and benefits; and because it is not inevitable in the same way that birth and death are inevitable. Work is 'natural' just for so long as it is 'profitable'. 'It is this entirely historified work which we should be told about, instead of an eternal aesthetics of laborious gestures.' (Barthes 1973: 102) In these terms, the exhibition at York Castle Museum defines housework as not-work because it is not, or no longer, profitable in the narrow sense of the term (extraction of surplus, financial value); and because, unlike birth and death, it has been superceded. The use of the term 'we' is used to declare the universal fact that 'we' are in a post-housework era. Against this, a critical and progressive view stresses that housework continues to be profitable in the sense that it profits (benefits) those who are relieved of the work done - mainly, in this society and at this time, men, children and more wealthy women. Such a view describes the modes, motivations, ends and benefits of housework as historical, but not as inevitable.

A further effect of the opposition of past and present, manual and mechanical, is to imply a negative relation between women and/or working class people and new technologies: labouring women are the antithesis of technological progress and success: nature/culture. Historically, through the use of illustrations from the relevant period, women are associated as waged or unwaged labourers with 'low' technologies and menial tasks - carrying coal and preparing fires, or washing by hand. The writer has already distanced himself, and invited us as readers to distance ourselves, from these demeaning tasks. The thrust of his narrative is that such tasks have been

removed by new technologies, available to 'us', a group undifferentiated by gender, class, race or age. Significantly, there is no visual imagery to contradict or qualify the written narrative. The continuing portrayal of the domestic worker as wife and mother in contemporary illustrations or advertisements is absent. (With the exception of those for Radio and Television, all advertisements date from before World War Two.)

The gallery celebrates the transformation of housework, and the implied liberation of women, through technological progress. Elsewhere in the museum, in displays of male and paid craft work, the relationship between work and technology is explored very differently. The craft galleries (in the former Debtor's Prison) arrange the objects to suggest the place of work; name the workers and their place, and period, of working; venerate their skills; lament the decline or obsolescence of such practices.

The treatment is similar in other craft and industrial galleries in history museums: for example, at the Abbey House Museum in Leeds, or at the Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield (see Chapter Five). In these, the worker is noble, dignified, active, controlling his (sic) tools and processes. The tools and other equipment which he works with are described in great detail, visually and materially, through their arrangement in context; the tools are well-worn, providing evidence of his work. The workshop is littered with references to the materials he is working on - the off-cuts or waste of his trade - to indicate his activity. The worker may not be represented by a dummy or figure, but he is present and named in titles and texts. In some displays, further animation and interpretation are provided with photographs, illustrations of tools and materials

from trade catalogues, samples to show the quality of work, sound and smell, even film. The history of the craft or industry is treated as a serious, substantial narrative, or monograph.

An industrial gallery might detail the organisation of the industry and the workplace, the tools and skills of particular tasks or workers, their frustrations and rewards. It might embrace technological change up to the early twentieth century, after which the story may be suspended, to avoid the stories of deskilling and redundancy which undermine the dignity of labour as described. Thus Kelham Island Industrial Museum makes little reference to production after the second world war; Armley Mills Industrial Museum in Leeds arrests its story in the 1930s.

Again, the gallery differentiates the technologies and skills used by men and women through naming. The terms utensil, implement, appliance, gadget, device are used here. They are broad terms, each with multiple meanings[9]; they lack the precise reference to work which is carried in the term 'tool'. Cynthia Cockburn has remarked on this difference:

> Normally, women use utensils and implements - the dishwasher, vacuum cleaner, car. They don't use tools. The utensils and implements, are, in their way, tools, of course, and they are used by women with skills (making food, sewing clothes) certainly equal to the male skills of their husbands. (Cockburn 1985: 220)

In these terms, housework is entirely neglected in the gallery at York. None of the museum conventions of a display of work is used here. The complexity and detail of housework are flattened out into a simplistic pastiche. The whole message, visual and verbal, is of supply. The

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[9]   Chambers English Dictionary (1988) gives the following definitions: utensil: a useful or ceremonial tool or vessel; implement: a piece of equipment, a requisite, a tool or instrument of labour; appliance: apparatus; gadget: any small ingenious device; device: that which is devised or designed, contrivance.

objects are displayed as new, clean and pristine, with no signs of work in progress, or work needing to be done. Only certain objects and processes are chosen; others, which might convey a different message, of the endurance of manual and menial work, are not. Thus the various tools and materials which the domestic worker might use in her work are left out: the handtools, fluids, dusters, polish, soaps. Equally, the materials she works <u>on</u> are omitted: the dirt, grease, stains, smells, mess and dirt which housework removes; the piles of clean clothes, dishes, and cutlery, the meals and clean rooms which it creates (Porter 1994). Thus, the hard and unrewarding ephemeral labour usually done by a woman - the 'relentless struggle against things and mess' (Coward 1984: 66) - disappears.

Where the gallery recognises the domestic worker, she is anonymous. She is represented not as a proud, skilled worker, operating her craft but as a stooping, labouring drudge, in the control of employers and weighed down by her work. When relieved of this drudgery, she is transformed magically into the upright, smiling woman, grateful for the 'gift' bestowed upon her: portrayed not in control of her work, but in the control of technologies. The advertisements and promotional leaflets which provide the sole source of illustrations and depictions of women in the gallery have this effect: they remove the traces of women's work; laborious work is relieved by the use of the commodity, or the commodity appears to do the work by itself (Winship 1981: 17). Equally, supporting labels in the gallery reproduce advertising slogans without qualification. The Hoover model 375, for example, is presented as 'the cleaner that has brought new leisure to millions of housewives'.

Again, the whole work of producing the appliances which women use in their homes - work which is undertaken by a largely female workforce - is excluded from the gallery. Recent studies in technology have focussed on artefacts in their 'journey' from design to use, and the interplay of gender in this journey (for example, Cockburn and Ormrod 1993). By closing off the relations of the production of household appliances, the exhibition maintains the myth of technology as a gift to women.

The gallery offers a narrative closure, an era of hard labour brought to an end by new technology. The narrow research base, and the advertising materials used to support and interpret the displays, have resulted in a truncated story of the promotion and marketing of domestic appliances, within an uncritically progressive framework. The effect of this is to close off the story of women's or class oppression. The 'end of an era' is expressed through binary oppositions or polarisations: manual to mechanical, archaic to modern, nature to culture. The underlying polarisation, with its negative/positive evaluation, is that of feminine/masculine. It is men who 'deliver' women from nature by offering them culture, in the form of the machine, and therefore offer them leisure in the home; it is at the point of entry of the machine that men join in to share the chores.

Laura Mulvey has pointed out that the polarisation of difference tames and binds the anxiety which such difference produces (Mulvey 1987: 4-6). The effect of polarisation in this exhibition is to place women's oppression firmly in the past, and to abolish the possibility of conflict in the present.

The absence/absenting of women's work, and of conflict, in the home are maintained through a visual ideal and rhetoric to which women (and men) are encouraged to aspire. For Rosalind Coward, this 'ideal home' device is characteristic of representations in a whole range of popular magazines: it is one of many ways in which women's dissatisfaction is recast as desire - most often as desires which commodities promise to fulfil. She describes the 'ideal home' taste or style, created in magazines, as a style which women are invited to identify with; at the same time, this style sets an unachievable goal for them - 'a goal which is the obliteration of any trace of labour or the need for labour' (Coward 1984: 70). It emphasises the display of the home, its visual impact, the absence of clutter and mess. The 'ideal home' style effaces women's domestic labour; it also effaces class differences, and differences between men and women, within a uniform style: 'a visual ideal whose main statement is the absence of the work they do, and absence of conflict about that work.' (Coward 1984: 70) This is the style used in the displays, and in the 1981 kitchen, at the York Castle Museum.

The question which has to be asked is, <u>why</u> are these distorting metaphors and devices - taken from shops, commercial exhibitions and advertisements - used in a museum which claims to be concerned with the 'everyday life' of 'ordinary people'; and in an exhibition which claims to be 'factual'? Yes, shops and advertisements, at least, <u>are</u> a fact of everyday life; but their relationship to the everyday, lived experience of people in their homes is far more complex and indirect than that suggested in this exhibition. Advertisements have their own history: a history of seduction, recasting dissatisfaction as expectation and desire, as Coward points out; and a history of the construction of sexual identity and subjectivity (Williamson 1978; Winship 1987). The answer to that question is that the devices used in this exhibition are <u>useful</u> as instruments in silencing

women: they deny women any position from which to speak about their dissatisfaction or to make demands for change. The joking tone of the whole exhibition invites us, as women readers, to laugh at, and against, ourselves. It discourages any efforts to resist it: simultaneously, the tone seems to suggest that the exhibition is not worth challenging <u>because</u> it is light-hearted; and that those who resist it must themselves lack a sense of humour. After all, it's <u>only</u> housework.

The gallery expresses a reluctance to acknowledge the existence of domestic work, and to accord it status. Janice Winship has identified this reluctance as stemming from a male viewpoint:

> In male terms, these tasks do not constitute work because they are unpaid and done 'for love', and moreover are often done while men are at work. They are not work because they are about being a woman... Women and their homes just <u>are</u> for men: women know 'naturally' how to make a home, how to look attractive and so on. (Winship 1987: 54)

An exhibition produced with a different viewpoint might accord work within the home higher status; giving attention to skills, training and apprenticeship; showing concern for the layout, internal organisation and services of the home; examining the interrelationships between paid and unpaid work in the home and paid and unpaid work outside it (Ravetz 1989). It might take a more sceptical view of new technologies. I describe one such project in Chapter Eight.

An exhibition produced with a different viewpoint might also oppose different, and competing, views of the home. This was undertaken in an exhibition 'Springburn Mothers' at the Springburn Museum, Glasgow, in 1987. In this project, women worked with their own experiences and with advertising materials to construct montages and scenarios which contrasted 'Dream Women' and 'Real Women'.

The aim of the York Castle Museum constantly shifts between design and typological collecting - showing technical and material developments and changes - and contextual collecting - showing how things were used, who used them, where, when, and what objects they were used with. This display claims both meanings without applying their concomitant methodologies. In the slippage between the two, fundamental points about the role of technology and the organisation of work in the home are avoided. The constant tension between 'style' on the one hand and 'real life' on the other are captured in two remarks made by the Keeper of Folk Life. In the Coronation Room, 'the result is a room without aesthetic pretensions, but one that is accurate' (Suggitt 1985: 15); and, in the 1981 kitchen, 'as with the Coronation Room, this kitchen does not represent the ultimate in good design but compares well with real kitchens' (ibid: 6). Isn't this also the voice of a particular class, apologising for something which might not conform to 'our' expectations but which nonetheless has a historical validity? The 'aesthetic pretensions', the 'good design', disguise the class basis of any aesthetics or taste (Coward 1984: 68-9).

The curator intended to undertake a survey of usage after the opening of the gallery, and in response to its critics, but chose instead to co-operate with York Oral History Project on a similar survey which was already under way (Suggitt 1987: 9). The museum has published a booklet with a selection of interviews from this survey; the curator expressed the hope that 'the exhibition and the book should complement each other' in 'a happy marriage, bringing back together the artefacts and the memories of the people who actually used them, the workers of the Industrial Revolution in the Home' (York Oral History Project 1986; Suggitt 1987: 9, 7). However, it appears that this is a marriage of convenience only, and that, as in many marriages, one partner is stronger: such a claim fails to take account of the disparity between exhibition and publication.

The latter may be purchased, when available[10], from the bookshop at the <u>end</u> of the visitor's tour of the museum; the material is not offered within the body of the exhibition, to refer directly to exhibits, with soundtracks of extracts from interviews.

In suggesting that the booklet might complement the exhibition, the Keeper suggests that the terrain of the exhibition - the arrangement of space, the visual language, the selection of exhibits, illustrations and texts - are neutral, so that several readings are available, depending on the interests of visitors and on the information available to them. Conversely, as I have shown, the gallery is constructed on a specific reading which makes any other reading position difficult to achieve.

In this case study, I have shown that the exhibition form is a thin veneer, covering the underlying practices and constraints of the museum, but constantly breaking open to reveal them. The research and design for this gallery were superficial. The effect is to create a gallery with the premise that housework is no longer real work, and that what remains is shared equally by 'us'. I have suggested that this denies the work which women do, and silences them.

This case study emphasises that museum staff must develop a deeper critical understanding of the sources, materials and methods which they employ and the representations which these produce. The discourse of the museum cannot be read innocently, apart from the wider society in which it exists and in which other complementary, competing and conflicting discourses circulate.

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[10]   Is there a temporary separation in this marriage? When I visited the Castle Museum in October 1989 the book was out of stock, and had been for several months.

Museums are not a safe haven of 'fact', a retreat from society: they are in, and of, it. Through

fully acknowledging this position and understanding their own practices within it, museum staff

will be better placed to embrace the complexity and productivity of the museum discourse.

<u>CHAPTER FIVE</u>

<u>CASE STUDY: KELHAM ISLAND INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM, SHEFFIELD</u>

As described in Chapter Three, the growth of industrial and site museums has been an important aspect of museum development in the last thirty years. Most of the industrial museums are concentrated on the heavy, staple industries - those which have undergone rapid structural change and decline over the same period.

In the disciplinary framework of the museum discourse, museums are created around identities which are internally driven, by historical developments and by ways of dividing the material culture, rather than identities which are externally driven and related to human activity. In the museum discourse, industry and technology come to stand for work: these museums claim to be about and for working people (though, in making these claims, they do not exclude other themes and concerns; nor are they the only museums to make such claims). Such museums, it is claimed, constitute an important element of identity, memory and pride for local people; at the same time, they represent the quality and achievements of local industry, and celebrate the special, unique features of the locality to those outside.

If these museums represent work, what kinds of work are represented, and how? Are these kinds of work, and their representations, different for men and women? Does the industrial museum make meaning through the construction of masculinity and femininity, as I have suggested? If so, how are these meanings formed? These are the questions that I ask in this case study.

I have chosen the Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield for the case study because it is both typical and exceptional. It is based in a large city with a heavy industrial base - in the steel

and cutlery industries - as well as in other, lighter industries; it is situated in an industrial landscape and in an historic building; it is linked to earlier projects developed and supported by amateur enthusiasts; it opened in the early 1980s: in these ways it is typical. It set out to be exceptional - to differ from other industrial museums - by emphasising the lives and achievements of the working men and women of Sheffield; and by tracing the impact and interrelationship of technology and society.

In the case study, I analyse the production of the museum text: the mode of production, the materials used, and their arrangement in the work. The sources for this analysis are various. I analyse the museum itself, its location and buildings, the public displays, design and layout. I use background histories of the locality, and the history of museum developments within the locality (Brears 1984a; Brears and Davies 1989; Smith 1865). I use reports and accounts by museum staff which have been produced and published for 'external' consumption, in professional seminars and journals, and in the published guidebooks (Ara et al 1989; Craggs 1987; Howarth 1899; Peatman 1981; Robinson and Toobey 1989; Silvester 1981; Smithurst 1983). I use material from interviews conducted with museum staff (Smithurst 8 May 1987; Bostwick and Snowden 20 May 1987). Finally, I have collected materials and information from other local projects and interest groups in Sheffield, some of which, obliquely rather than directly, provide a critique of the museum (Beattie 1986; Steerwood and Machan 1986; Sheffield Film Co-op 1987). I have not used any internal papers, working notes or research files: I requested access to these but they were not forthcoming.

5.1 Background History

Sheffield's museums grew out of the activities and collections of the local literary and philosophical society, inaugurated in 1822 (Brears 1984a: 10-11). The society first met in the Cutler's Hall, but by 1826 was based at new premises which combined a Music Hall and Museum, and also contained a library, reading and billiard rooms, a gallery and refreshment rooms. In this way, the museum was part of a range of improvements to clean the city centre and civilise its occupants (see section 3.1). The museum collections rapidly grew beyond the accommodation provided for them: in 1865, Theophilus Smith commented that 'the obscurity and inconvenience of the premises thus occupied have long been complained of both by members and visitors; and more especially the dark and crowded state of the museum...' (Smith 1865: 61). Eventually, the society presented its collections to the City Council, to form the basis of the City Museum in Weston Park, opened in 1875.

The idea of an industrial museum recurs in the history of Sheffield's museums. But this idea contained within it the competing claims of art and taste, technology and trade. The purpose of industrial museums was, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, considered to lie with the products rather than the processes of manufacture: to educate visitors in craftsmanship, taste and excellence. Bennett notes a shift of focus in museums, from processes to products, which was introduced in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and decisively influenced future developments of museums and other exhibitions (Bennett 1988b: 104). In 1853, the Department of Science and Arts, in its prospectus for the new South Kensington Museum, stated that 'all classes might be induced to investigate the common principles of taste which may be traced in the works of excellence of all ages'. The same emphasis was made in Sheffield: in 1850, William Smith

suggested in a newspaper article that a museum of local industry should be set up to show some of the magnificent examples of locally-made metalwork then being gathered together for the Great Exhibition (Smithurst 1983).

In 1887, a meeting of Sheffield townspeople was held to consider proposals for celebrating Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The idea of an industrial museum was the most popular of several proposals (Silvester 1981: 161). However, the proposed museum did not materialise. Sheffield's public service continued at the City Museum in Weston Park, with the adjacent Mappin Art Gallery (the latter opened in 1887). The museum's collections grew, but space was restricted. In 1899, the curator, Elijah Howarth acknowledged in an article in the Museums Journal that the City Museum had

> failed to carry out its purpose, in a department of peculiar local interest, that is, in the illustration of the processes of manufacture of local and allied industries. And this is not through any lack of material, but solely for the want of space to exhibit. The original intention was to show such objects as would give an idea of the technical processes through which an article passed before reaching its final stage, together with similar finished objects manufactured in other countries, civilised and uncivilised, so far as they related to local trades... (Howarth, quoted in Brears and Harrison 1989: 84)

Howarth's account extended the emphasis to include processes as well as products, but he intended to tell a story of technology and trade, not of working people: 'with industries of such a technical character and world-wide distribution as Sheffield, much space is required to show them, technologically and commercially.' He stated that 'the importance of a technical museum is fully realised and the question of establishing a separate museum, chiefly for this purpose, is under consideration.'

In 1901, a branch museum was opened at Darnall, to ease the most urgent accommodation problems of the City Museum. The prospectus for the branch museum places a different emphasis from Howarth's, again stressing products, art and taste. The museum was intended not only to illustrate history, but to improve taste with industrial collections:

> the people at the East End of the City have now a museum that will illustrate the past history of Sheffield, as well as provide examples in artistic metalwork to stimulate the Art industries of the City... The museum is intended specially to illustrate local history, local industries and the application of art to them, with illustrations of art generally, both pictorial and industrial. (Annual Report of the Free Libraries and Museums Committee 1901/2)

Sheffield was seriously affected by bombing during the second world war, and in 1940 the Darnall branch museum was closed. The contents were returned to the City Museum at Weston Park.

The emphasis on the style and taste of the products of industry, rather than on the processes and the people who worked there, was further evident in the acquisition of the Camille Page cutlery collection in 1922. This collection represented the finished products of industry, framed within a national or international and stylistic context, rather than a local and industrial context. The collection established Sheffield City Museum as a major centre for the study of metalwork (Brears and Davies 1989: 108). At that time, the museum had the conventional departments of applied art, archaeology, natural sciences and, at the Mappin Gallery, fine art. The Page collection was placed in the applied arts department at Weston Park; similar collections of cutlery and other pieces of finished metalwork have remained the responsibility of that department.

In the 1920s and 1930s, interest in industrial history took a new and different direction. The appreciation of industrial archaeology among amateurs and enthusiasts was promoted by the Society for the Preservation of Old Sheffield Tools, later called the Sheffield Trades Historical Society (Brears and Davies 1989: 88). The society acquired and restored Wortley Top Forge, a water-powered forge in the Upper Don valley, and initiated the preservation of two further sites, Shepherd Wheel and Abbeydale Hamlet.

Shepherd Wheel, a grinding mill on the River Porter, was restored by enthusiasts in the 1930s; further works were carried out by the Council for the Conservation of Sheffield Antiquities in 1957. The site opened to the public intermittently from 1962, and regularly from 1975 when it was taken over by the City Council.

Abbeydale Hamlet was one of the largest water-powered sites on the River Sheaf, with a record of over two centuries of continuous industrial activity. The Abbeydale Works concentrated on making crucible steel, and producing scythes, hay-knives and other agricultural edge tools from the steel. A local trust acting for the city acquired the Works after it closed, in 1935 and mounted a campaign to raise funds to create an industrial museum. The project was interrupted by the war and did not resume until 1964. The Council for the Conservation of Sheffield Antiquities - a consortium of local societies - took a peppercorn lease on the site, which by now belonged to the local authority. They mounted a public appeal to raise money for restoration and, supported by the local authority, began work on the machinery and buildings (Peatman 1981; Silvester 1981: 161-2). The museum prepared displays to place the site in its local and industrial context. Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet opened to the public as a museum in 1970, as part of Sheffield City

Museums. It thus predates its more famous counterpart, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust in Shropshire, which formed in 1968 and opened its museum in 1973. Restoration work continued at Abbeydale for many years to expand the museum.

The Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet is a large site of six acres, including the dam area, which provided power for four water-wheels. A five-gallery display sets the site in the context of Sheffield's early industrial development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The site includes the crucible steel furnace, the scythe works, a tilt forge and grinding shop, together with the counting house and housing for the manager and workers. The buildings 'are furnished with appropriate tools and equipment, making this an exemplary preserved site museum' (Brears and Davies 1989: 88). On Working Days, the indigenous trades are demonstrated while, at the annual Craftsman's Fair trades, crafts and techniques not connected with the site, and other entertainments, are provided.

At the same time that Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet was being developed, museum staff felt that a complementary museum was essential, to represent the later industrial history of Sheffield, of the late nineteenth and twentieth century steel and engineering industries at the centre of a major industrial complex. This project was also urgent, because of rapid industrial change in the city. The local steel and cutlery industries came under increasing economic pressure during the late 1960s and thereafter. Huge rolling mills, equipment and plant were scrapped; whole areas of the city - particularly the East End - became derelict; people were laid off and their skills were redundant. After the second world war, 20,000 people were employed in the Sheffield cutlery industry; by 1986, the industry employed 3,000 people (Beattie 1986).

Abbeydale, as an early industrial site with a strong integrity, was felt to be inappropriate as a site to present the later history. A site adjoining the hamlet was purchased in 1969 for a new, purpose-built museum but the City Council then abandoned this plan. In 1976, the Council purchased a site and building in the heart of the city's former industrial district, in the lower Don valley, where many industries established themselves when they converted from water power to steam power to drive machinery. Kelham Island is an artificial island; it was the site for a wide range of industries in the nineteenth century (Smithurst 1983). The chosen building was originally constructed in the 1890s, as an electricity generating station for the city's tramways; it was taken over by the Yorkshire Electricity Board in the 1920s and used as a depot.

Between 1976 and 1982, plans for the new museum were drawn up and executed by Sheffield City Museums, with financial and material assistance from local companies. Museum staff examined the feasibility of an independent trust, to create a partnership between the city and local industry and commerce as the basis for the museum's development and management. However, some staff felt that such a trust might compromise the museum's portrayal of industrial history[1]. Also, the viability of such a partnership was doubtful at a time when the local economy was depressed and funds were scarce. A trust was set up with more limited goals of acquisition and restoration, but collected little money. The Keeper subsequently recommended that the trust should be terminated because it no longer served a useful purpose.

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[1] This information was given in discussion at a seminar at Armley Mills Industrial Museum, Leeds, in 1986 entitled 'Social History in Industrial Museums'.

The development of museums at Abbeydale Hamlet and Kelham Island followed a similar pattern. Both projects were achieved with a combination of local authority and private initiative and funding. Both are restored historic sites; both tell histories associated with the steel and cutlery industries. They do so through restored, working machines and reconstructed workshops, to show motive power, machine tools and hand tools; with interpretative displays which place the development of the site or area within the wider context of Sheffield's staple industry and its associated social history; and by demonstrations and continuance of skilled craft traditions, which are important aspects of the interpretation.

5.2 Curatorship at the Kelham Island Industrial Museum

For the first two years, 1976-78, the Kelham Island project was led by Bill Silvester, the Deputy Director of Sheffield City Museums. His brief for the new museum was radical: he wanted to remove the boundaries between technology and history.

> Too often visitors to museums are likely to find scientific displays bearing little connection with culture or everyday life, and with scarcely any reference to the wider implications of technology in modern society. Equally, curators in the social history field build only cursory links with technology into their displays for the public. (Silvester 1981: 160)

Thus, he planned an introductory gallery ' to reflect the diversity of the area and the social, artistic and ecological connections which put flesh on the technical body' (ibid: 164). The new museum was intended to carry on from Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet, to bring industrial history closer in time to local working people, and closer to their experience. The brief was triumphal in its celebration of the heritage of working people:

> a museum for the city's working people and their heritage since 1800... a museum
> for workers and their children, to restore that pride in heritage - so often denied or
> stolen by others - a museum where yesterday's efforts are recorded with the same

> dignity as were those of a pyramid sun king from ancient time; a museum where
> technology acknowledges its debt to working men and women - and not just the
> 'big names' but the unknown people in workshops, in factories and in backrooms.
> (Silvester 1981: 164)

His manifesto for the new museum echoed earlier proposals, too. The new museum would display many of the objects

> which go to make up Sheffield's contribution to the local, national and
> international scene. Today's products will be shown in special displays where
> local craftsmen and firms will demonstrate their contribution to technology and
> culture. (Ibid: 165)

The Deputy Director left the department in 1978, and the Keeper at Abbeydale, Peter Smithurst, was given the additional responsibility of the Kelham Island project. He retained responsibility for Abbeydale, with an Assistant Keeper working at the site, and an Assistant Keeper, Sarah Craggs, was appointed for Kelham Island. The Keeper converted the broad, impressionistic strands of the Deputy Director's outline for the new museum into a detailed brief. He undertook research and collecting for the main body of the displays; the Assistant Keeper undertook research and collecting for the sections on working conditions and social history, with support from social history staff in Sheffield City Museums. A museum design consultancy, Robin Wade Design Associates, was commissioned to design the new museum. This company had relevant experience of industrial museums through commissions at Ironbridge Gorge Museum.

Museum staff[2] assumed that Kelham Island, as a new museum, would create a new visiting public. The museum addressed itself to an unspecified 'everyone'. Staff did not attempt to

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[2]   Quotations are from the interview with Peter Smithurst, unless otherwise stated

substantiate this assumption through, for example, conducting surveys to assess potential visitors from among those visiting other sites, or from a wider public. In particular, the brief for the museum was constructed with reference to, and as the complement of, the Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet; but museum staff did not know whether visitors would go to both sites or, if they did, which they would visit first. Nor were surveys conducted to evaluate existing displays at these other museum sites in order to establish whether they were appealing to, and effective in communicating with, visitors in general and specific visitor groups. The Keeper stated that schoolchildren were expected to form a large proportion of the visitors to Kelham Island, as at Abbeydale; and that he had accommodated this expected audience in the exhibitions by adopting a simple approach, with short words and sentences in the written texts.

The theme chosen for the museum was 'a very general simple background to how Sheffield developed'. A narrative form was chosen to follow the city's industrial development. The staff wanted to avoid the 'museum of technology' approach which they observed in other museums, such as Bradford and Leeds, and identified as ranks and sequences of tools and machines.

The central theme, which informed the original displays and has guided subsequent museum strategy, was that of the steel industry and related trades. The Keeper - and Deputy Director before him - saw the steel industries as the core of industrial development in the city, with a longer and stronger historical tradition than other industries. Thus the museum consciously chose to represent a single industry, and its subsidiary and ancillary trades, in depth rather than to present a broad range of Sheffield's industries and economic activities.

(Smithurst 8 May 1987).

The Keeper attributed his research and interpretative strategy to cumulative experience rather than to methodology: the storyline came about 'as a result of experience of what Sheffield's industries are and have been - it's impossible to isolate one aspect or source'.

The narrative theme was built around substantial installations of large working objects to which the Deputy Director had already committed the museum: the River Don engine and the Crossley gas engine. Both are stationary steam engines which formerly drove rolling mills. The River Don engine, built by the local firm of Davy Brothers in 1905, powered an armour-plate mill at Cammell Laird's Grimesthorpe Works where steel plate was rolled for battleships and military vehicles prior to the first world war. The engine was used in the works until 1978. The Deputy Director described it as 'a dinosaur of the local capital goods industry and an example of local engineering, in the grand manner' (Silvester 1981: 165). It was installed in the museum's rotary converter house adjoining the main gallery. The Crossley gas engine was built in Manchester in 1915 and used to power a much smaller rolling mill. It was installed near to the planned entrance of the new museum (Smithurst 1983). Neither of the rolling mills driven by these engines was recovered for display.

Apart from these working objects, the narrative of industrial development determined the material collected. Objects were acquired according to the function allotted to them: to punctuate the sequential narrative and to illustrate specific points within it. Thus, the logic and method of acquiring material was determined by the immediate requirement of the displays, rather than by any broader considerations for the historical background or for the original context and activities

with which objects were associated. 'Finding suitable material to illustrate the points we wanted

to make was difficult'. Staff concentrated their activity on tracing and acquiring individual

objects for specific tableaux: for example, they spent several months tracking down three items -

a large lathe, a big ladle and a Grand Slam Bomb - 'the largest ever' bomb[3].

Large and distinctive objects were selected for the displays to provide dramatic visual impact,

mass and structure in a largely two-dimensional graphic narrative, and to fill the exhibition space.

 These large and distinctive objects were also selected to create an impression of the enormous

scale of the iron and steel industries. This scale, the fiery furnaces and the open crucibles of

molten metal, were commented on and marvelled at by visitors in the nineteenth century: they

conferring on machines and workers heroic, mythical qualities (Smith 1865)[4]. Finally, the

selection was pragmatic: museum staff acquired these objects because they were available in

abundance. The museum was being developed at the same time as widespread closures in the

local steel industries; in these closures, the largest plant was the first to be scrapped. In the

museum, the selection of these large and distinctive objects has the effect of exaggerating the

heavy trades of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries in the museum's narrative, and

diminishing the more enduring, but less massive and materially distinctive, edged tool industry[5].

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[3]   Designed by Sir Barnes Wallis in the early years of World War Two. Its name is a pun:
        in the card game of bridge, 'grand slam' means the winning of every trick. Only a small
        number of these were made; about thirty or forty were used in 1945, in specially adapted
        Lancaster bombers.

[4]   Echoed in the choice of factory names such as Cyclops Works and Atlas Works.

[5]   This point was made by Karen Snowden in interview (Bostwick and Snowden 20 May
        1987).

The selection of illustrations was also guided by the theme of the displays, and by availability. Illustrations were treated as secondary elements, to support and illustrate the main story; they were not explored or interpreted as artefacts in their own right. Where original material was unavailable, new works were created - such as the paintings of the hand-raiser, engraver and burnisher in the silver trades. These were commissioned by the designers, to add colour and to humanise the displays.

The musem opened to the public in 1982. The opening ceremony was conducted by Dame Margaret Weston, the Director of the Science Museum. The ground floor of the main building houses the shop, reception area and the interpretive displays: including the working exhibits, a small audio-visual theatre, and workshop space rented out to 'Little Mesters' - local craftspeople in the cutlery trades. An adjacent building houses a cafe, temporary exhibition gallery and teaching rooms. The museum has remained substantially unchanged since it opened. A second phase of the museum has been planned for several years, on the upper floor of the main building, with displays on social and labour history. In 1993, opening hours at Kelham Island were cut, the Keeper was asked to take early retirement, and the museum was transferred from direct control by the local authority to independent trust status (Murdin 1993).

5.3 'Lifted from obscurity?' Description of the Exhibition

The museum is situated in Neepsend, a depressed industrial area about a mile from the city centre. It is poorly served by public transport, and poorly signposted. However, once visitors are

in sight of the museum, their attention is arrested by the massive Bessemer converter[6] which stands at the entrance as a huge piece of industrial sculpture. It stands as 'a huge piece of industrial sculpture and a symbol of the Steel City' (Broomhead, addendum to Silvester 1981: 165).

The Bessemer process was a mechanised process, introduced in the mid-nineteenth century for the bulk production of mild steel. The quality of Bessemer steel was inferior to the high grade steel produced by crucible and open-hearth methods. This high-grade steel was what the local manufacturers and steel trades sought. The local steelmakers abandoned the Bessemer process, which continued to be used in the ironmaking centres of North West England until 1975. The converter outside the museum is from Workington - 'one of the last surviving Bessemer converters in the country' (Broomhead, addendum to Silvester 1981: 165; Smithurst 1983: no page numbers).

The converter is installed and isolated as an abstract, disembodied monument to Sheffield industry. It is not presented as a concrete piece of evidence of industrial activity. Such a presentation would be complex, taking into account the successive technologies of steelmaking in Sheffield, and the national and international context within which the steel industries operated. Adding context to the converter would weaken its symbolic strength. Elaborating the history and industrial associations of the converter - in the ironmaking industries of Workington - would reduce its strength as a monument to local industry. The gigantic size of industrial plant from Sheffield's steelworks lends itself to precisely such monumental treatment.

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[6]   An iron vessel, lined with firebricks, used for producing mild steel cheaply and in bulk.

Beyond the converter, visitors enter a narrow yard with tall buildings on both sides and the river beyond. On the left is the museum; on the right, cafe, exhibition galleries and offices. The buildings and yard are bare, cleaned and restored; they are stripped of any obvious associations with their former use, as an electricity generating station for the local tramways and an electricity depot. The 'restoration' creates a new entity: a building constructed to produce and distribute power, and linked to transport, is re-produced as an industrial building linked (by inference) to the local steel industries and opened up to a visiting public.

On entering the museum, the inside of the building has also been stripped of associations. The walls are cleaned bare brickwork; ceilings are high; light levels are low. Visitors enter a vestibule with lavatories, a small changing display area and a shop. In this area, the walls are hung with panels on which steel products and patterns - cogs, tools - are arranged as abstract forms.

The Kelham Island Industrial Museum charges visitors for admission, unlike the City Museum and Mappin Art Gallery in Weston Park, or the Mappin and Graves Art Galleries. The ticket counter prefaces the first display, 'Made in Sheffield' (Figure 2).

'Made in Sheffield' is presented in the form of small trade showcases and stands, with products which are mainly contemporary. The title makes an obvious reference to the cutlery trades, through using the legend which is etched or stamped on knife blades, other cutlery, scissors and

Figure 2

Layout of the exhibition at the Kelham Island Industrial Museum.

tools. This display shows the range of products made in Sheffield's steel and cutlery trades, and also indicates the diversity of other local industries, from liquorice sweets, beer, snuff and food to bricks and heavy metal goods.

The 'Made in Sheffield' display has no text, graphs or diagrams providing information on the relative distribution of employment and wealth among the city's industries, trades and people, over time and in the present. Without this information, visitors must accept that manufactured products stand in for the full range of industrial activity, and that the steel industries are the dominant industrial activity: this is demonstrated through the size and proliferation of artefacts in the display. Yet the emphasis given to the steel industries is precisely <u>because</u> of their material presence and abundance, enabling the museum to 'tell the story' through objects[7].

After the 'Made in Sheffield' display, the gallery narrows; the displays are arranged along a main concourse, with the Crossley gas engine and audio-visual theatre contained in enclosed spaces on the right of the concourse (the former in an 'engine house'), and a series of bays on the left. These bays are used to elaborate the main narrative, and to provide subsidiary stories.

The first bay contains the display 'What is Steel?'. This is a stark display of graphic panels, illustrations and gleaming, isolated objects. Beneath the title - mounted onto steel panels - a huge, exposed engine is mounted on a stand in the centre of the section, directly facing

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[7]   Research on Birmingham showed that, in the early 1980s, catering employed as many people as the 'traditional' metal industries for which the city was once famous. Yet this industry has been neglected by the collecting bodies - museum and library - because its development cannot be dealt with through objects (Jenkinson 1989: 149).

approaching visitors. The introductory text reinforces this connection with the text: 'Perhaps the most dramatic technological achievements of the twentieth century are the jet and rocket engines'; and with a photograph of an aircraft, and an illustration of a jet engine, showing its position in the aircraft. This is juxtaposed with, on one side, a classificatory table of the different types and qualities of steel and, on the other side, pieces of disembodied pipework and tubes.

In the next bay, 'The Beginnings of Sheffield's Industries', graphic panels carry visitors swiftly through the origins, history and organisation of the local metal industries before 1800. As visitors enter this bay, a single graphic panel is arranged on a central pillar, at an oblique angle which catches their eye and leads them into the bay. This panel carries the section title, the introductory text, and a large illustration which shows a woman working at a forge. The caption above it states: 'Equal Opportunities in Medieval times - a female smith at work. (From the Holkham Bible, 1325, reproduced by permission of the British Museum).' Below the illustration is a subtitle, in very large letters: 'What lifted Sheffield from such obscurity?' Presumably, this is intended to follow on from the last paragraph of the introductory text:

> Even so, trade was very limited. Cutlery manufacture centred around London, York, Thaxted and Salisbury. The important ironmaking areas were the Forest of Dean and the Weald of Sussex. Sheffield was a backwater with very little future.

But the text and subtitle are disproportionate, and they are separated by the illustration and caption.

In the remaining eight or nine panels in this bay, Sheffield industry is told through the histories of men. The infrastructure for industrial development is marked out as one which was built by men,

as landowners, inventors and businesspeople. A second reference to women is made on the panel 'Rise of the cutlery trade', in a quotation from Cobbler of Canterbury, 1590. The quotation is used uncritically and without comment to illustrate the prevalence and prominence of locally-made products: 'Women's wittes are like Sheffield Knives for they are sometimes so keen as they will cutte a hair, and sometimes so blunt that they must goe to the grindstone'. Women also appear incidentally within this brief pre-history, in a facsimile manuscript list of 1794, among the owners of works on the River Don. The emerging sexual organisation and division of labour within the Sheffield trades as they became increasingly organised and restrictive is not explained.

After these open introductory bays, the bays on the left are closed off from the main concourse, with graphic panels and display cases, to make an enclosed space behind. This is entered at a point beyond the panels and cases. In this way, the design of the concourse increases the pace of the story and imposes a stronger sequence - it removes the possibility of any glances or diversions into subsidiary narratives. Visitors have the sense that the pace of history itself is accelerating. Along the concourse, progress is marked through the significant technical developments in the metal industries in the eighteenth century: Benjamin Huntsman's refinement of steel, to produce high quality crucible steel; and Thomas Boulsover's discovery of 'fused plate' as a cheap substitute for silver. These led, respectively, to Sheffield becoming the main manufacturing centre in Britain, and major exporter, of steel; and to the rise of the silver holloware trades in Sheffield, making articles such as teapots, candlesticks and ornaments. The displays represent these developments by showing ceremonial pieces in the respective metals, and the decorated awards presented to the inventors. These cased specimens are picked out by spotlighting in a

generally dark area. Each 'cameo' is juxtaposed with an interpretive panel, describing the technique, qualities and applications of the new material.

The enclosed bay adjoining the main concourse is entered through an opening at the end of this Hall of Fame sequence. This bay, entitled 'Craftsmanship, Skill and Quality', represents the different skills within the steel and silver trades. These were hand skills, difficult to represent through objects; instead, the displays use a combination of illustration and finished article. The trades of hand-raising, engraving and burnishing silver are represented instead by large paintings, commissioned by the museum staff and designers, which portray the workers - two men and a woman respectively.   The men are standing at their benches, with their hands raised to their work; the woman is sitting working at a tray on her lap. The trades of hand-raising and burnishing are described in impersonal terms, that of engraving in male terms. In the same bay is the 'File Cutter' exhibit. Here, tools, files and the cutter's 'stiddy' are mounted beside and below a graphic panel. On the panel, an interpretive text is placed between photographs of a man and a woman at work, cutting files. The illustration of the man shows him cutting files at a bench; the caption explains that 'the heavier work upon larger and coarser files generally fell to men'. It explains the consequently greater risk of deformity of hand and wrist. The illustration of the woman shows her cutting files in a domestic setting. The caption reads: 'When it came to cutting small fine files, the nimble fingers of the women were hardly ever excelled'. The finished goods associated with plating - Britannia metal and electro-plating - are also included in this section.

This 'chapter' of history in the first part of the museum is brought to a close with a panel at right angles to the main concourse, facing visitors as they approach and directing them to the right,

towards the audio-visual theatre and then into the next part of the main concourse. The panel is entitled: 'The Nineteenth Century; the Age of Change'.

Like the main industrial display, the audio-visual programme, in a small theatre adjacent to the main concourse displays, illustrates and speaks of industrial progress as belonging entirely to men and technology: 'the Industrial Revolution just begun ... the age of engineers ... the age of men like ...' The programme includes one slide of a woman working, in the section of the programme on the 'Little Mesters', but no further reference.

In the next section of the displays, the main concourse divides into two workshop displays. These are reconstructed from local workshops: a die sinker's shop, from James Dixon and Sons' Cornish Works, and the workshop of an independent cutler, Tom Parkin. These workshops are intended as a <u>contrast</u>: the die-sinking workshop follows from the silver trades: it replaced some of those hand skills, and created others; the cutler's workshop shows the simplicity and continuity of hand skills. But what we see most clearly is the <u>similarity</u> between the two workshops, and their difference from anything we have previously seen. Here, the object collected and displayed is the whole assemblage of room, tools, materials. The workshops appear to have been carefully put together in the museum, with records and plans, photographs, and perhaps the assistance of those who worked in the workshops in their former premises. Great attention has been paid to detail - of makeshift lighting and overhead racks, dusty benches with a spread of tools and waste, patched windows and noticeboards. The atmosphere is created in the depth, density, detail and lighting of the displays. The technique of display reduces supplementary or extraneous features to a minimum. Small text panels make brief attributions to the sources and the processes of the

workshops. There are few photographs on these text panels; no dummies or figures in the workshops; no noise or smell. In the detail and precision of the reconstructions, the museum pays reverence and silent testimony to former workers. This quiet reverence serves instead of any dramatic and less dignified devices to animate them. The workshops are given an uncertain (or transcendent) historical and industrial status by taking what are clearly[8] recent assemblages and setting them in the nineteenth century section of the display; then by juxtaposing the two workshops, and enclosing them from the narrative structure of the preceding and succeeding parts of the gallery.

Beyond the workshops, visitors enter a wide space which occupies the full width of the gallery. This contains displays on the growth of the heavy trades; the products and processes of steelmaking; and 'Men of Steel'. To the right is a dramatised construction with two men, one working at a large steam hammer and the other sitting on a bench near the forge with a drink. The atmosphere and interpretation here is very different from the workshops. The construction is impressionistic, and the impression is scarcely maintained: for example, there is no ceiling or roof, and the top of the 'walls' is visible; the depiction of the glowing metal bars is crude; the display is interrupted on one side by a large, illustrated graphic panel on 'The Steam Hammer'; the hearth is lit but the surrounding lighting is dim, making the details of people and objects subdued and featureless; the workers are unnamed, shadowy figures.

'Men of Steel' is, again, a display of inventors and manufacturers who have been prominent in the steel industry: painted portraits of the figures are cut out and displayed in chronological sequence,

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[8]   For example, with electric lighting.

with biographical and relevant details. The 'men of steel' were those who established and transformed local companies into huge engineering steelworks; they bought shipyards and engineering works in the North East and North West as a form of forward integration, converting the Sheffield steel into ships and armaments.

Two areas branch off the main hall here: to the right, the giant River Don engine; to the left, 'A Walk to Work'. The River Don engine is installed in a large, light room; interpretation is provided through a film showing the engine and the rolling mills which it powered in operation, at Cammell's Grimesthorpe Works, and through regular demonstrations at set times each day, announced to visitors in the museum.

'A Walk to Work' is a passage lined with photographic montages of housing, and texts on housing conditions. It leads into displays on 'A Working Life', 'Working Conditions', 'Adult Education', 'The Buffer Girls'; and to the workshops of 'The Little Mesters'.

The first panel of 'A Working Life' describes the brevity of childhood where, 'by the age of eight, many were at work with their fathers'. By defining work as a job to which one travels (rather than taking place in, or near, the home) and collapsing the general term childhood into the masculine, boyhood, work is firmly identified as men's work and girls are written out at a young age. The display begs the question: what did girl children do? Subsequent panels cover education; apprenticeship; the working day; recreation; and old age. This last is illustrated by a reconstruction of the home of an elderly - retired or redundant - (male) worker.

The penultimate section of the narrative concentrates on working conditions, using the construction of a grinding shop, with grinding wheels and a dummy of a male grinder. The graphic panels around the display show dark and murky interiors, and emphasise the hazards of this and other occupations in the industry.

The interpretative displays end with a section on the 'Buffer Girls', curiously sited and isolated, and removed from the industrial gallery and story to which it belongs (Illustration 4). The displays do not make any obvious connection with the nearby grinding shop, nor with the adjacent panels on 'A Working Life'. Behind glass (unlike the earlier worker displays, which are open), a model of a middle-aged woman holds a silver-plated teapot to the rotating buffing wheel. Buffing was a dirty trade where the women buffed the plated wares against the 'dolly', a mop of soft felt, revolving at high speed. Emery cake, a polishing compound, was used to polish the silver plate to its final brilliance. The dolly threw out the polish in a fine black spray. Like grinders, buffers were working and breathing in an atmosphere of fine metal dust, without extraction systems or protective masks. But the display is described in completely different terms, visually and verbally, from the adjacent display on working conditions, or from the men's trades in the main gallery. The display is well-lit; the dummy and her tools are relatively clean; she works alone, without any suggestion of overcrowding, the proximity of other workers and wheels, or detailed attention to the workplace itself.

<u>Illustration 4</u>

The buffer 'girl' at Kelham Island Industrial Museum, curiously sited and isolated, removed from the industrial gallery and story to which she belongs.

On the adjacent graphic panel, a nineteenth century oil painting of a group of buffer girls is mounted above an interpretive text. The text describes these women not in relation to the work process, nor the products of their work; instead, it draws attention to their appearance and their behaviour towards men:

> ... the buffer girls of Sheffield became almost legendary with a reputation as hard working, fun loving characters with hearts of gold. But woe betide any man who stepped out of line in the buffing shop. The buffing girls had a reputation for giving as good as they got, regardless of whom the offender might be.

> It can be imagined that <u>buffing</u> was a very dirty trade. To protect themselves and their clothing the buffer girls covered themselves from head to foot with brown paper tied on with string but their hands and faces quickly became blackened.

Beyond the interpretative displays at this end of the gallery is a covered yard where 'Little Mesters' rent workshops to conduct their businesses. These are self-employed tradesmen, making and finishing knives, scissors and small wares. Women are not among the 'Little Mesters' renting shops, although they are referred to in press-cuttings displayed here, and are pictured in the tape-slide show and in a catalogue on sale at the shop (Steerwood and Machan 1986).

5.4 Women at/as the Edge: a Critical Analysis of the Exhibition

Comparing the Sheffield displays with the intentions of the museum at the outset, they appear to have failed to communicate a history from the bottom up, for both men and women, in a different vein from other museums and forms of industrial history (Silvester 1981).

Further, using the critical practice developed in Chapter Two, it is possible to trace the discursive construction of gender, and to show the ways in which the identities of masculine and feminine

are used to develop and sustain the narrative in the museum: in the themes chosen, the selection of materials, and their arrangement.

When I first entered the museum, I felt surprise, pleasure and recognition at seeing women represented here. However, reading the museum more closely, and reading as a woman, reveals that representations of women are strategically placed in the discourse as the borders, and boundaries, of the main (male) story. The museum follows the traditional discourse, which defines 'technical' in terms of rationality and physicality, and simultaneously denies women these qualities (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993). At the same time, 'reading as a woman' was a confusing, fragmentary and contradictory experience: it opened up the gaps, silences and omissions in the text.

The emphasis given in introductory titles and displays is to products on the one hand - 'Made of Steel' - and to raw elements and refined materials on the other - 'What is Steel?' The first named people in the main narrative are the inventors of steelmaking processes and the capitalists of the industry: the makers themselves are tucked into side galleries and remain anonymous, named by the jobs they did: file cutter, burnisher, etc. Only the independent craftspeople are credited with personal names, in the die sinker's and cutler's workshops, and the Little Mesters' workshops. The human story which emerges is of a three-tiered workforce: a small group of masters (manufacturers and inventors), clearly named and portrayed; a cluster of skilled, respected and relatively independent craftsmen (sic) working in small shops on their own account, familiar to the visitor by use of first and second names, and a mass of labourers. These last are shadowy, anonymous, mainly male, working in miscellaneous trades and processes, exposed to

considerable hazards. Women exist only at the periphery of this story - in the early period; working at home, as file-makers; burnishing, buffing and polishing the finished goods.

The massive scale of the technologies - the Bessemer converter, the River Don engine - tends to dwarf the histories of the people who owned and operated them, and who worked in the associated trades. The balance is created only by paying reverence to traditional craft skills and craftsmen, operating at the other extreme of the technological scale, but with a close and interactive relationship with their specialised tools. Women and men working in labour-intensive, poorly-paid and arduous jobs such as grinding and file-making do not fit into this heritage (Porter 1987: 12).

Objects and activities may be explicitly assigned to men through naming, language and illustrations, such as those relating to early manufacturers, or by using model figures, like the two men working the steam hammer.

In other displays, objects and activities may be described in impersonal terms, as in the reconstructed die casting shop and the cutler's workshop. Visitors who have learned the messages of preceding panels and displays will ascribe these to men. When women and less skilled workers are represented in illustrations and objects, they must be spoken for but, when skilled men are represented, the objects and activities are put in such a way that they 'speak for themselves'.

In some cases, a general term is used when a narrower, specifically masculine application is intended and pursued: for example, 'A Working Life' uses the term 'children', then follows with a reference to 'fathers'. It properly should refer to boys rather than children.

We occasionally glimpse women - the file cutter working at home, the burnisher, the buffer girls - but their roles within this complex group of industries are obscured through their partial treatment. Women are represented in the displays not because their history is held to have intrinsic interest, but for another purpose: that of confirming the main/male story.

The Kelham Island Industrial Museum celebrates, in objects and words, the unfamiliar, exceptional and dramatic. For example, visitors are introduced to the displays by way of the Grand Slam Bomb - 'the largest ever' - and the introduction 'What is Steel?', with the examples of the rocket and jet engines. In choosing these examples, the museum places technological progress firmly in war, the skies and space. These are areas of traditionally male achievement and concern, beyond the reach of almost all women. Technological innovations which are familiar to women through mass production and consumption - washing machines, for example, or stainless steel knives - are discounted.

The museum has selected a narrow range of industries within the locality - those which are most specialised, distinctive, and with a highly developed and differentiated material culture. Within these industries, it has selected objects which are dramatic in scale, and themselves distinctive and differentiated. Many of the products it has chosen to display are intermediate goods - produced to supply other parts of industry - rather than finished goods for the consumer market.

Together, these have the effect of exaggerating the heavy metal trades of the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries in the museum's narrative, and diminishing the more enduring, but less massive and materially distinctive, edged tool industry. In the heavy metal trades, the labour force was predominantly male; in the edged tool industries, men and women worked together and the sexual division of labour was imprecise[9]. Thus, in both these ways, the stories chosen at Kelham Island operate to the disadvantage of women. Further, these large objects tend to dwarf any form of interpretation or contextualisation, as J J Corn has described:

> Inevitably, such large objects dominate their setting and imply an interpretive importance not necessarily equivalent to their size... Their sheer visceral impact tends to upstage smaller artifacts in the vicinity, while any interpretation - whether internal or contextual - tends to get lost in their shadow. (Corn 1989: 248)

Corn sees this as a disadvantage for women as visitors, too: because they are less familiar with technical details and histories, they are more likely to be overwhelmed or intimidated by technologies to which no explanation or context is attached. From this perspective, the Bessemer converter which announces the museum may be a sign to some visitors that the museum is not for them.

Feminism and poststructuralism offer a critique which is relevant to this case study (see above, 2.2). Women are defined in relation to the symbolic order, as the limit or borderline of that order. Thus, at Sheffield, the inclusion of women in the displays may be seen as necessary to the main ordering of both physical space and historical narrative. Their positioning is strategic: both space and story are bounded by women. Women are necessarily marginal because the main story

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[9]   For example, in the file cutting districts of Eccleshill and Chapeltown, men and women worked together in small workshops at the back of houses.

chosen, of technological development of Sheffield's heavy industries, was built upon the exclusion or marginalisation of women. Their marginalisation as workers anchors and secures male skill in the central functions of the workplace.

Representations of women are used to provide amusement, prefacing a serious and perhaps harrowing story, even if women and their work are marginalised and belittled in the process. Women are used as light entertainment in the introductory panel on 'The Beginnings of Sheffield's Industries' (hereafter referred to as 'The Beginnings'). The caption to the illustration of the female smith - 'Equal opportunities in Medieval times' - is ridiculous, a joke which nudges the reader briefly out of history to jibe at current women's rights campaigns. The equation with present-day humour also occurs in the nearby quotation from Cobbler of Canterbury, portraying women as sharp and nagging or blunt and stupid.

The displays on file making and on the buffer girls marginalise the role of women workers by situating them away from the central work process and the main sites of the display - the file cutter working alone at home, the buffer girls placed in a separate and isolated position in the displays. The role of women workers is further diminished by images and language which avoid describing them as active, skilled workers, exposed to risk - i.e. in the same terms as men. Within the section on 'Craftsmanship, Skill and Quality', the skills of the woman file cutter skills are attributed in the text to biological, natural advantages - 'nimble fingers' - rather than to training and experience. In the buffing display, the work which the buffer women do is not described on the main panel. The women's status as workers is diminished by the affectionate tone of the text and by emphasis on their personalities, appearance, clothing and sexual

availability, rather than on their skills. They 'became almost legendary with a reputation as hard

working, fun loving characters with hearts of gold'. The text draws attention to the women's

distinctive clothing and dirty faces in terms which make them into curiosities. The term

'blackened' is ambiguous, particularly as the reason for the 'blackening' - the burnishing

compound spraying out from the buffing wheel - is omitted. The text presents the ambiguity of

race - black face and hands - and of soiling. It also pays attention to the clothing of these workers

which is not matched in descriptions of working people elsewhere in the displays. In the steel

industries, many workers wore distinctive clothing to protect themselves from particular working

conditions and hazards: crucible workers, for example, wore floor-length sacking aprons,

leggings and scarves over their throats and chins to protect themselves from the intense heat.

These are not the subject of attention in other displays.

In the nineteenth century, the workers of Sheffield - as in many other places - attracted the

interest of middle class observers, who connected the workers' dirt, easy behaviour and loose

clothing with a lack of civilisation, a loose, animal morality and active sexuality. Thus, an

observer in the 1820s described men and boy grinders in the Rivelin valley as:

> a rough, half-civilised class... Removed ... from the restrictions of society, and
> the observations of all authority, they associate only with each other... Athletic
> figures, with brown paper turbans, the sleeves of their shirts rolled high up,
> exposing their bare and brawny arms to the shoulders; their short jackets
> unbuttoned, and their shirt collars open, displaying their broad, dark, hairy chests,
> and tinged with 'wheelswarf'... (Smith 1865: 88-9)

Observers noted these qualities in men as athletic, muscular, barbarian; when they observed the

same qualities in women, they were both titillated and disapproving. One such observer (less

disapproving than most) was Arthur Munby, a London barrister who kept extensive diaries, in

which he described and sketched working women, and commissioned and collected photographs of them (Hudson 1974; Hiley 1979). For Munby, the contrasts between working women and middle class women were 'suggestive contrasts'. Working women worked outdoors, or outside the home; they wore loose, masculine clothing; they were dirty; they drank and smoked and mixed freely with men. By contrast, the middle class woman stayed in the home; her clothing was tight, controlling, feminine; she was clean and sheltered. The most 'suggestive contrast' was that of sexual behaviour: the working woman was seen as active, animal, passionate in contrast to the middle class woman's control and desexualisation (Edge 1986: 13; Kitteringham 1975: 127-33). In the panel on buffer girls, the text makes similar suggestions. The colloquial tone, the references to the women's warm, friendly characters, their clothing and dirty appearance, are bound up with their appeal and availability to men:

> ... woe betide any man who stepped out of line in the buffing shop. The buffing girls had a reputation for giving as good as they got, regardless of whom the offender might be.

This ambiguous statement, full of sexual innuendo, invites readers to identify with the (male) 'offender', to 'step out of line'; as women readers, we are invited to identify against ourselves and to participate in an experience which we are simultaneously denied.

A feminist and poststructuralist analysis emphasises the representation of women as 'the necessary frontier' of the male order; it also stresses the anxieties which surround representations of women. I quote Toril Moi at length because of the relevance of her analysis to the depiction of women in these displays:

> From a phallocentric[10] point of view, women will ... come to represent the
> necessary frontier between man and chaos; but because of their very marginality
> they will always also seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside.
> Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the
> disconcerting properties of all frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside,
> neither known nor unknown. It is this position that has enabled male culture
> sometimes to vilify women as representing darkness and chaos, to view them as
> Lilith or the Whore of Babylon, and sometimes to elevate them, as the
> representatives of a higher and purer nature, to venerate them as Virgins and
> Mothers of God. In the first instance the borderline is seen as part of the chaotic
> wilderness outside, and in the second it is seen as an inherent part of the inside:
> the part that protects and shields the symbolic order from the imaginary chaos.
> (Moi 1985: 167)

The very language chosen in the introductory panel, 'The Beginnings', suggests precisely this

'disconcerting property': women occupied the deep, dark 'obscurity' from which Sheffield was

'lifted'. Sheffield's industry began when it was lifted from the chaos in which women laboured

into an organised, rational and highly technological industry operating with a clear division of

labour and processes. Equally, the buffer girls are placed as neither inside nor outside, and are

described as neither known nor unknown: they harbour those sweet qualities expected of women

- fun-loving, warm-hearted - but show the capacity to turn on, and against, men. These two

displays are the preface and afterword of the main story of industrial progress.

Finally, the positions of dominance and marginality are presented as essential, natural truths. The

achievement of male dominance, and the repression of the feminine and of women, are rendered

as natural and therefore beyond doubt or change. 'Lifted from obscurity?'; 'The heavier work fell

to men' (my italics); 'when it came to cutting small fine files, the nimble fingers of the women

were hardly ever excelled.' In these sentences, there is no subject or agent; the language used is

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[10]   Phallocentrism denotes a system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of
       power. Women, who lack the phallus, are therefore always in a state of negativity and
       lack in a phallocentric system.

the language of the creation. Conversely, feminism has rejected the appeal to essences, showing that femininity and masculinity are not essential but social: they are the social meanings attached to the biological differences between women and men. The 'natural' attributes of 'woman' do not correspond to essential truths of woman but are chosen, and have changed over time according to the changing positions for women and men. For Julia Kristeva, position becomes the very definition of femininity, as 'that which is marginalised by the patriarchal symbolic order' (quoted in Moi 1985: 163-4).

The narrative at Kelham Island Industrial Museum is partial, made up partly by what we see, and partly by what is left out. Critical practice has identified these omissions, gaps and silences as significant because they reveal the author's ideology and intentions: the critic must then 'speak' these silences (Belsey 1980).

These silences can be 'spoken' through tracing those elements which Foucault identifies as characteristics of traditional history, and opposing them with the elements of effective history. Instead of looking for origins, effective history seeks discontinuity, jolts, surprises and defeats; accidents, errors and reversals; the endless repeated play of dominations (Foucault 1977a; see Chapter Two).

In the discourse of the Kelham Island Industrial Museum, history is presented as an already-existing and immutable fact, or fate; it has an unproblematic, unified story; the role which museum staff perform is transparent, the accurate representation or reflection of that history. History is presented as a forward movement, its pace measured with graphic panels and

interpretative displays, without any abrupt change of direction or disruption. The narrative omits conflict, struggle or reversal. As I have described above, the allocation of different roles to men and women in the workforce is represented as a natural order.

Such events, or possibilities, are closed off or avoided. For example, the medieval illustration of the female smith, in 'The Beginnings' could be used as the focal point to examine the emerging sexual division of labour in the metal trades. The Keeper chose not to pursue this issue (he stated that he was unable to find an alternative illustration, and would have preferred an illustration of a male worker). Rather, through captioning and position, he tried to shrug off, and close off, the issue with humour. The process of trade restrictions, whereby women and some men were progressively excluded from certain trades, is ignored or is presented as inevitable and natural.

When I asked him whether the museum consciously attempted to look at women in industry, the Keeper responded that:

> ... women were put into the displays at certain points because this was a true reflection of industry at the time: they worked only as buffer girls or file cutters... The feminine aspect of industry is truthfully displayed.

According to this statement, women are placed where they 'belong' in history. Therefore, we deduce that they did not work in other areas of work and, conversely, that men did not work in buffing. However, buffing has been 'women's work' for a relatively short period; a local historian suggests that history has been rewritten by 'folk memory':

> This has not always been women's work, but in the many cutlery factories of the late nineteenth century armies of women were recruited into this lightest and most painstaking sector of the trades, and here they built for themselves a permanent place in the folk memories of Sheffield's past. (Steerwood and Machan 1986: 39)

Another relevant, and more recent, episode which the museum staff chose to omit is an exact instance of reversal: the work which men did in the heavy trades became women's work during the first and second world wars. This reversal undermines the notion of the 'natural' division of labour, to which the museum adheres. Although the museum ignores this history, it has been researched and made into a film, 'Women of Steel', by the Sheffield Film Co-op and the Women's History Group (Sheffield Film Co-op 1987). The film incorporates archive footage and interviews with local women. It shows that women did some of the heaviest war work in Britain, even operating the steam hammers. In the film, the jealousy and competition between male workers and the women who entered their traditional preserve are articulated; as is the way in which these were negotiated in working practices. 'Women of Steel' also moves outside the traditional boundaries of industrial life to discuss the concerns of women workers with childcare, rationing, home life and entertainment.

The wars provided specific opportunities and reversals of traditional working patterns; more broadly, the defence and armaments industries were the basis for the development of the Sheffield heavy trades from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The military and destructive uses to which Sheffield products were applied is played down in favour of a more harmonious story, as in many science and technology museums (Porter 1993; see also Chapter Seven).

Equally, the museum narrative omits any conflict between manufacturers and workers. Sheffield was notorious in the nineteenth century for violent struggles between manufacturers and workers, particularly over the employers' use of non-union labour. These struggles were known as the Sheffield Outrages. At Abbeydale, for example, the grinding shop was blown up with

gunpowder in 1842; twenty years later, one of Abbeydale's owners was shot several times. Yet

the Sheffield Outrages are omitted from the displays at Kelham Island. Underlying the museum's

intentions was a supposition that progress was the collective achievement of capital and labour.

The power of capital and of manufacturers was benign: people occupied a place within its

workings, as subjects and beneficiaries of that power. The Deputy Director's prospectus for the

museum stressed the centrality of labour, and its contributions to the processes of production.

Like the exhibitions of the early nineteenth century Mechanics' Institutes, he intended to create a

museum which raised the dignity of labour. A newspaper report of a Mechanics' Institute

exhibition in Sheffield in 1839 had exalted the working men (sic) whose labour lay behind the

exhibits: 'The machinery of wealth, here displayed, has been created by the men of hammers and

papercaps; more honourable than all the sceptres and coronets in the world.' (Leeds Times, 20

July 1839, quoted in Kusamitsu 1980: 79). In his prospectus for Kelham Island, the Deputy

Director made a similar, if more modest, comparison: '...a museum where yesterday's efforts are

recorded with the same dignity as were those of a pyramid sun king from ancient time' (Silvester

1981: 164). Within such a framework, the portrayal of conflicts between capital and labour

would undermine the central premise of capital as a benign and beneficent power, and would

unsettle the intention to convey the pride and dignity of a responsible and complicit labour force.

Again, to maintain a narrative of the even and progressive flow of industrial development, the

museum's narrative closes, without explanation, in the early twentieth century. The workshops of

the 'Little Mesters' lie outside the narrative, historical framework of the main displays. They are

a postscript to the main story. In this story, the disruption and decline of the steel and cutlery

industries in the later twentieth century is entirely unspoken. The museum's story is narrower and briefer than that envisaged by the Deputy Director, 'a museum for the city's working people and their heritage since 1800... a museum for workers and their children...'

In the museum, technology is the material form of capital - even its personification. In his outline, the Deputy Director humanised technology and conferred on it a voice of respect and deference: 'technology acknowledges its debt to working men and women'. Events in the steel industry in the twentieth century disturb the careful balance between technology and labour which he propounded. In his terms, technology has lost its humanity, and capital has ruptured its partnership with labour, without paying off its debts. Capital has turned on the workers; technology has destroyed their dignity. The chosen history of dignity and pride in working people is difficult to match with the recent and still raw experiences of redundancy and unemployment for many local people. The museum therefore maintains an awkward silence. Thus the very events which created the museum - providing its economic, political and material base - are unexplained, and scarcely acknowledged.

Michael Wallace has observed a similar awkward silence in industrial museums in the United States of America. They deal with the success stories, but hesitate to deal with the subsequent processes of industrial decline which are integral to that history - and to the creation of the museums themselves. These processes of industrial decline are, for Wallace, more than 'a matter of considerable public concern': they are processes which the public should be able to understand and to act upon. Museums could provide an accessible treatment of these issues and thereby exercise constructive social and political influence.

> An opportunity is being lost to inform visitors about great historical processes which have drastically affected their lives, and thus to empower them, by enhancing their capacity to understand, and perhaps to change, their world. (Wallace 1987: 11)

In place of the concept of re-industrialisation, which implies the inevitable end of industry and start of a new post-industrial era, Wallace proposes the concept of capital movement - the global reorganisation of capitalism: 'what has emerged - seen in a planetary perspective - is not a de-industrialised society, but a global assembly line' (Wallace 1987: 14).

At Kelham Island Industrial Museum, the story of capital movement cannot be told because of specific, material exclusions and limitations set by the museum. External forces are explicitly excluded from the museum's collections, through the commitment to collect only artefacts made and produced in Sheffield. These exclusions become clear at the beginning and end of the main museum display. At the beginning, the section 'What is Steel?' raises a series of unanswered questions. Where does the ore come from? Who mines it? Where is steel made now? By whom? Who makes the jet engines and kitchen knives? What are the working conditions in the mines, rolling mills and factories? At the end of the main gallery, the narrative thread of Sheffield's industry ends abruptly - and evocatively - at the blank wall facing visitors, after the section on the heavy trades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Here, visitors must turn towards the River Don engine or into the oblique passage of the 'Walk to Work'. The Little Mesters' workshops are given a special place in the museum, as the only contemporary workers to be represented there. But their position is marginal to the main story. They are hidden from the main gallery, at the end of this passage; they are not interpreted within the historical narrative by any explanation or overarching text. Snippets - presscuttings and small advertisements - are

pinned to boards outside the workshops about each worker as an individual craftsman and 'character'. Their presence does not, by itself, explain the contemporary state of the steel and cutlery industries: the flight of capital and jobs to other continents, particularly to Asia; amalgamation and concentration of remaining industries, with continuing capital investment, innovation and 'shedding' of workers to survive. By honouring the labour of only this tiny 'rump' of craft workers, the museum fails to deliver the promised exhibition to visitors of 'their own working heritage' (Silvester 1981: 164). By maintaining a restrictive collecting policy, these stories can never be told. Equally, the stories of adjustment to unemployment and/or emergence of other forms of economic activity cannot be told while the museum restricts itself to the narrow story of technical development within one group of industries.

Thus, visitors are left with a story which is substantially over, but through an abrupt cessation of the telling, not through full narrative closure. The interruption of the industrial story does not explain the visitors' experience: the hectares of derelict land and the Meadowbank shopping centre that we see as we travel towards the museum; the Japanese cooking knives in our kitchens and Korean blade tools in our sheds. In Wallace's view, this cessation separates the museum from the contemporary experience of people working in the new economy: by accepting it, 'we automatically relegate "industrial" museums to the dustbin of history ... The definition dooms the industrial museum to being, willy nilly, a purveyor of nostalgia' (Wallace 1987: 14).

The whole emphasis in the museum is on industrial history - and, within that emphasis, on a narrow group of industries. The Keeper staunchly defends the museum as a social history museum, and insists that social history and industrial history are inseparable. But curatorial

responsibilities, physical space and a phased programme at Kelham separated the two, to the disadvantage of social history. The physical and narrative arrangement of the galleries places the 'main' story of Sheffield's industrial development in the first gallery with a clear linear structure. Social conditions occupy a <u>side</u> gallery, and become, literally, <u>side</u> effects of the 'main' story. They are rendered oblique through the curving passage 'A Walk to Work': thus those aspects of industrial history which qualify and modify the 'main' story of progress are set apart, they do not impede the visual or narrative unity of the main gallery. Social history in the side, secondary gallery is represented in an assortment of disconnected, brief narratives: adult education, working conditions, housing. These do not mesh with each other, nor with the 'main' story. The complex interface and interdependence between home and work - shift patterns, premises which combined working and living quarters, local services, for example - is omitted.

Overspending on the first gallery led to cuts in the second, where displays comparing the homes of factory worker and factory owner, and on trade unionism, were lost. Because these were conceptually and spatially separated from the main gallery, and because the structure and spatial arrangement of this side gallery was loose, staff were able to sever them from the programme: 'this was the most easy area in which to cut'. In a more integrated scheme, staff might have chosen to reduce the whole programme rather than to sacrifice one section. Responsibility for social and labour history were subsequently detached from the Industry and Technology staff and attached to staff in a different department. These staff developed an outline for a second phase of displays in the upper storey of Kelham Island Industrial Museum.

5.5 The museum on an island, or the museum in context?

Above, I have analysed the displays at Kelham Island Industrial Museum. Here, I move outwards, and forwards in time, to compare the project with other texts, or discourses, within Sheffield City Museums which shape the discourse: they both limited the possibilities for the museum at the time when it was created, and throw up new and different possibilities for its development. The interior procedure of limitation - through the operation of disciplines - is particularly relevant in this discussion (Foucault 1981; see Chapter Two).

As I described, the structure of Sheffield's public museums service was traditional, with departments of natural sciences, archaeology, applied arts and, in a separate building, fine arts. The disciplines developed and diversified: local and social history were included in the Antiquities Department; technology and industry grew up, as the responsibility of the Deputy Director and, in the mid-1970s, with new posts and the new Industry and Technology Department.

From the mid 1980s, Sheffield City Council, along with other progressive local authorities, moved towards a new framework of service provision: providing services which are relevant and responsive to users, emphasising participation and two-way communication with service users (Local Government Management Board 1987 and 1988; Lloyd 1990). To create a relevant service, the authority followed the example of other Labour-controlled authorities, such as Edinburgh and Liverpool, and made a commitment to create new displays on social and labour history (Lazarowicz 1987). These were planned as the second phase of Kelham Island's development. To achieve this, Sheffield City Museums expanded the brief and staffing of the

established Antiquities Department, and changed its name to Human History. A new post, Keeper of Social and Labour History, was created in addition to the existing post of Assistant Keeper of Social History. The physical base and the main efforts of these two staff shifted from Bishop's House Museum to Kelham Island in 1987.

To create a participatory and responsive service, the City Museums also created the new post of Community Outreach Officer. Under the Deputy Director responsible for Extension Services, the Community Outreach Officer worked with other departments and developed exhibitions and outreach programmes (Ara et al 1989; Robinson and Toobey 1989). Finally, all council officers were expected to work with the 'user panels', such as the Women's Committee and Social and Labour History Panel.

These developments were not integrated across the whole service, in a consistent way which took account of their lateral implications and effects: thus, rather than creating a new discourse and discipline, several, competing and conflicting, discourses and disciplines were created. Here, we can see the negative action of the cutting-up of discourse which Foucault identified (Foucault 1981: 67).

The separation of history, and collections, among different departments had an immediate effect on the displays at Kelham Island. The Applied Art Department includes in its collections the products of the edged tool industry: knives, razors, skates, silverware; the Human History Department collects items where they are part of a contextual group, for example, as part of a midwife's tools, or domestic furnishings and fittings. Each department uses a different method of

classification and the collections are not cross-referenced, so it is difficult to retrieve material across the different disciplines. The Industry and Technology Department, as latecomer, collects what is obviously left out by the other, established, departments: the large items of plant; the intermediate products of the steel and cutlery industries, such as machine tools and plate, which served other parts of industry. The absence of small wares and domestic items in the displays at Kelham Island can be explained by this conceptual and physical separation.

Although social and labour history and industry and technology staff and collections were physically brought together in the late 1980s, the practices and priorities exercised within each discipline secured their divergence, rather than integration.

For example, they differed in their methods of research, fieldwork and acquisition. The Keeper and Assistant Keeper of Social and Labour History invested in collecting according to local provenance and use. They spent a relatively high proportion of time recording and collecting contextual material and related histories. They adopted the standard Social History and Industrial Classification for the collections, to replace an older, hybrid system. However, the Keeper of Industry and Technology collected according to local production and manufacture. Thus he collected any product of Sheffield industry not represented in the existing collections. He acquired the material mainly through passive collecting, by responding to offers of relevant material from firms and individuals, rather than through active collecting, by fieldwork and research. When he made these acquisitions, he collected information for immediate, practical purposes: if dismantled, in order that they could be put back together on site. He did not record and collect their provenance and use. He preferred to rely on the recording work done by other

bodies - Sheffield Libraries and the Trades Historical Society. The Keeper classified the collections in a customised, 'self-made' system, rather than according to available systems - SHIC or ROOT (SHIC 1983; British Standards Institution 1985).

The two departments also took different positions in relation to service users. The Social History staff worked at Bishop's House, a small and intimate local museum in Sheffield, and developed its community base through an active policy of exhibitions and museum activities. They worked with the Community Outreach Officer on travelling exhibitions and outreach activities (see Chapter Eight). They met with local special interest groups combining professional and lay interests, such as the Sheffield Women's History Group. They welcomed the opportunity which the 'user panels', such as the Women's Committee and Social and Labour History Panel, offered to discuss the character and future development of the service. The Industry and Technology staff took few steps to respond to visitors directly, and to involve the service user panels in (re)modelling the museum's profile and programme. The Keeper presented the user panels as uninformed - composed of lay people who lacked appropriate historical knowledge - and intrusive, exercising or threatening[11] unwonted controls on the museum's activities. He was also critical of the Department's anti-racist policy:

> The department ... wants us to collect the tools and trades of immigrants. But the people worked in the same industries. I can't see any point in collecting the same tools just because they've been in a different coloured hand .. the issue is skill, not race. (Smithurst 8 May 1987)

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[11] For example, the Keeper cited the censure of armaments by the panels and the Council as a possible threat to the display of the Grand Slam Bomb (interview, 1987). In fact, when the display was mounted, the Council did not prevent or interfere with its presentation.

The plans for the Social and Labour History Gallery on the upper floor at Kelham Island indicate that, if achieved, this gallery will further secure the divergence of social and labour history and industrial history. The staff identified lack of local interest and active participation as a significant failure of the industrial galleries. The plans for the new gallery incorporate a mezzanine floor with temporary exhibition space; possibly a resource centre/library for the local labour history society; and areas in the gallery for other groups to mount displays. In this way, the gallery plans provide elements of change, access and participation to foster local interest and return visits. The plans also incorporate changing elements within more permanent galleries (Bostwick 1987: 2).

This case study highlights the way in which the meaning of any text is always positional, both spatially and temporally. Meaning depends on both difference and deferral: new meanings are produced with each reading, and change over time as new texts are written and read (Derrida 1976; see Chapter Two). Thus, both the museum staff and the critic - both writer and reader - are presented with the impossibility of ever fixing meaning.

In this case study, the writer(s) assumes the reverse - the possibility of fixing meaning through a 'permanent' display and a text which is resistant to editing or re-writing. It is built upon a narrative structure which makes change within it virtually impossible; the initial costs were high; narrow, inward-looking disciplinary divisions and curatorial practices continue, which inhibit any changes; the Keeper seeks to resist 'outside' influence, and to restrict the production of discourse to the specialist staff. For all these reasons, any radical re-writing is unlikely.

The critic makes a temporary, provisional and partial, reading while resisting any finality or fixing of meaning. In this study, I have shown the need to extend the reading to include much more than the building we enter, the displays in front of us: to include other sites, disciplines, people, economic collapses, political events. At the same time, I recognise that, as I am writing this section, my reading is already superceded because the relationships and circumstances which 'ground' the reading are already shifting. The structure of Sheffield City Museums, and specifically of Kelham Island Industrial Museum, is changing again. Several posts, including those of the Community Outreach Officer, Assistant Keeper of Industry and Technology, and Assistant Keeper of Social History, are vacant. Kelham Island faces the loss of eight out of fourteen posts designated as surplus in Sheffield City Museums; opening hours have been cut; the Keeper of Industry and Technology has taken early retirement; the museum has been transferred to independent charitable status and will have a new Director (Murdin 1993). What new constraints, conditions of possibility, and readings will these produce?

CHAPTER SIX

CASE STUDY:

THE KODAK MUSEUM: THE STORY OF POPULAR PHOTOGRAPHY AT

THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF PHOTOGRAPHY FILM AND TELEVISION,

BRADFORD

In this chapter, I study a new museum of the media and a particular project within the museum: the Kodak Museum.

I have chosen this museum and exhibition as a case study for several reasons. Firstly, I have chosen the exhibition in this museum because it is about a leisure pursuit - the pursuit of popular photography: it thus complements the previous case studies of work in the home/housework (Chapter Four) and work in industry (Chapter Five). Secondly, popular photography is a pursuit in which both women and men take an active part: it differs from the predominantly female domain of housework in Chapter Four, and the predominantly male domain of industry in Chapter Five. Thirdly, it is one of a very small number of 'media museums': formed around the theme of communication - a theme which has a less obviously material and local base than, say, the home or industry - and around the photographed, projected or broadcast image. These museums are consciously breaking the mould - indeed, they would prefer not to call themselves museums (Harker 1983: 1188; Lumley 1988: 16). So, do they use new and different approaches and techniques? If so, do these produce new and more productive discourses of gender? Fourthly, this museum is contemporary and is part of, and interprets, the medium of visual representation, in which a strong critical culture exists. In analysing this museum, I have been able to draw on critical reviews and other analyses, more than in the previous case studies. Does this assist in understanding and developing the museum discourse? Finally, I worked at the museum from 1984 to 1990, and was involved with the Kodak Museum transfer and display from 1984 to 1989. In choosing this project as a case study, I am both 'writer' and 'reader'. Consequently, I am able to describe the process of developing the exhibition more fully in this

chapter than in previous case studies. In the next chapter, I discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this dual role.

In this chapter, I outline the development of the museum at Bradford, the development of the Kodak company's own museum, and how these were brought together to form the new gallery. In the next section, I describe the displays; and, finally, analyse them with particular attention to the construction of gendered identities, and to the organisation of space and knowledge.

The sources for this case study are far more extensive than in the previous case studies. I have used the museum itself: the location, building, displays and collections. I have drawn on the research undertaken by Julian Pellatt for the development of the museum (Pellatt 1983). For details of the photographic industry, I have drawn on trade reports (Aris 1988; Economist Intelligence Unit 1986a and 1986b; SNAP 1984; see also Porter 1990). I have extracted material from market and evaluation studies commissioned by the museum (Bedwell 1989; Carne Martin 1989; Cross and Scobol 1989; L & R Leisure 1989; Wilkinson 1989); and, where relevant and appropriate, from internal minutes and notes (Ford, Fowler and Taylor 1987, and papers cited in the text). I have conducted interviews with museum staff (Taylor i November 1989; Budge 17 November 1989; Hunter 1 December 1989). I have drawn on the extensive published interviews, statements, reports and accounts made by museum staff (Ford 1989; Gainsborough 1983; Harker 1982; Hunter 1993; Killip 1981; Osman 1982; Taylor 1989); and reports in newspapers and journals (Harker 1983; Martin 1990a and 1990b; Osman 1979; Vaizey 1984). I have also drawn on the numerous critical notices and reviews (Arnold 1984; Bell 1983; Bezencenet 1986; Marsh 1984; McGrath 1990; Porter and Wombell 1991; Stallabrass 1989; Tagg 1986; Walker 1983).

6.1 'A Museum for our Times'[1]: the Development of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television

The National Museum of Photography Film and Television (NMPFT) in Bradford opened to the public in 1983 as an outstation of the Science Museum (later, National Museum of Science and Industry), London.

The Science Museum had already successfully experimented with devolution in setting up the National Railway Museum at York in 1975. The Director, Dame Margaret Weston, wished to direct more resources and attention outside London (Osman 1982: 662). Her interests coincided with those of members of the photographic community who, for many years, had been campaigning for a National Museum of Photography, on a separate site from the photography collections and displays at the Science Museum in South Kensington (Ford 1989: 6).

At the same time, government policy imposed devolution at a higher level. Through the National Heritage Act of 1984, all the national museums were devolved from direct central government control to boards of trustees. These new governing bodies were encouraged to loosen central civil service conditions and pay for staff; to devolve from monolithic, metropolitan institutions into leaner, livelier and more dispersed centres. The new outstation of the Science Museum was exhorted to become substantially self-supporting (Burrett, cited in Pellatt 1983). The Government accompanied the devolution with a progressive reduction in the real value of grant

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[1]   Vaizey 1984.

funding[2], and exhortations to museums to increase their income from sponsorship, trading and other activities. Among these, but not explicitly specified by the Minister, was the introduction of admission charges[3]. In the words of Richard Luce, Arts Minister, the government's policy was 'to encourage subsidised bodies to become more self-reliant in their development and growth' (quoted in Robertson 1988: 182). In the words of Neil Cossons, Weston's successor as Director of the Science Museum, 'the boundaries of state funding are pushed back, to put spending power into the hands of the people' (Cossons 1988).

The Science Museum chose Bradford as the location for an outstation for two main reasons. The location offered a catchment population of over five million within one hour's travel, or 14 million within two hours' travel (L & R Leisure 1989: 29). This was comparable with the population living within one hour's commuting time of the Science Museum in South Kensington, although there were significant differences in the attitudes and willingness to travel of each population (Pellatt 1983: 13-4). The other main reason for the choice was the encouragement and incentives offered by the local authority. Bradford Metropolitan Borough Council had formed an economic development strategy to combat the recession in the city's staple woollen textile industry with new forms of job and wealth creation, based on partnership between the public sector and private businesses. Tourism was one of the most successful elements of this strategy, promoted by officers within the Council's Economic Development Unit

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[2]   Mark Fisher, Shadow Minister for the Arts, claimed that funding of the nine national museums was cut by 3.2% between 1979/80 and 1988, their purchase grants cut by 33% (Fisher 1988).

[3]   Voluntary admission charges were introduced at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1985, and compulsory charges at the Natural History Museum and National Railway Museum in 1987 and Science Museum in 1988 (Cultural Trends 1989 (4): 7).

through liaison with tour operators; setting up holiday tours and study packages; encouraging business and conference visitors. One aspect of the tourist strategy was to promote the industrial archaeology and history of the district, including with the Bradford Industrial Museum and Saltaire. Another aspect was to promote the beauty of the surrounding countryside and villages: specifically the Keighley, Ilkley and Haworth moors, and the village of Haworth. The third aspect was to bring new cultural attractions to the city: the NMPFT was an excellent opportunity and a major achievement for the city, as cited in the Bradford Metropolitan Council Annual Report, 1981-2. As with the Kelham Island Industrial Museum at Sheffield, the museum owes its existence to the collapse of the city's traditional industrial base.

The council offered the Science Museum capital funds, a suitable building at a peppercorn rent and the promise of extensive promotion for the new museum. The building was an unused theatre, a surplus from the 1960s building boom. It had been built as part of a mixed culture and leisure complex, with a skating rink, bingo hall, shops, pub and offices in the adjacent block, and the central library nearby. It was converted with £1.9 million from Bradford Council and £0.5 million from central funds (Bezencenet 1986: 107). The Science Museum met staff and running costs and Bradford Metropolitan Council funded the museum's Education Unit.

The Bradford project was described as 'the brainchild of Dame Margaret Weston' (Vaizey 1984). She made senior appointments crucial to the museum's future identity. Colin Ford was appointed Keeper; formerly curator at the National Film Archive and at the National Portrait Gallery in London, he had been instrumental in raising the profile of photography and film as art

forms in the 1970s[4]. The establishment of a separate national institution devoted to these media

marked their acknowledgement in the realms of art and high culture. The Deputy Keeper, Steve

Pizzey, formerly at the Science Museum, was a technologist with a strong commitment to

interactive, hands-on exhibits and with experience of leading project teams. Thus, the two most

senior staff had made significant achievements within, and had influence beyond, the prestigious

national institutions in which they formerly worked.

Between these two, art and science, old values and new ideas, were combined in a philosophy of

'a living, expanding museum', a museum which would be 'fundamentally different', as described

by the Keeper:

> We have tried to question old ideas of what constitutes a museum, encouraged by
> the nature of the theatre building in which we have made our home. Like a
> theatre this museum will use light, colour, sound, and movement. Our purpose
> will be to depict the beginning, growth and future of photography, film and
> television which play such an important part in our lives. (Harker 1983: 1188)

The two perspectives of art and science remained as linked, but distinct, strands in the museum's

development. The NMPFT announced itself, on entrance doors and in its information pack, as 'a

museum about the art and science of photography'. (Television had no presence in the museum

until 1986, and the galleries on film have not been started at the time of writing in 1994).

The new museum was originally intended as a showcase for the parent museum's Photography

and Cinematography collections. Differences of approach emerged between the Keeper at

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[4]   The first photographic 'work of art' to have an export licence withheld was the Herschel
       Album of photographs by Julia Margaret Cameron. Ford campaigned to prevent the
       album going to America and led a successful public appeal for purchase money in 1975.
       The album was held in trust until the NMPFT was established, then transferred to it.

Bradford, and the Keeper of Photography and Cinematography at the Science Museum. The Director resolved these by holding the new outstation at arm's length from the Science Museum and permitting it to develop its own collections, practices, identity and audiences.

Phase One of the NMPFT was completed by a small project team, many of whom were on temporary secondment from the Science Museum. The permanent display galleries, with an expected life of five to ten years, opened in two stages in June and October 1983. The first galleries represented photography's pre- and early history, and the applications of photography, in contemporary imaging techniques, in the press and in portrait studio work. The opening temporary exhibitions featured the contemporary Canadian photographer Yousuf Karsh, 'a portrait king', 'the most renowned portrait photographer of our time' (Bradford Telegraph and Argus supplement 16 June 1983), and 'Beyond Vision', a selection of photographs linked to scientific discoveries. The museum also housed an Imax cinema, at that time the only such cinema in Europe, using the technologies, films and expertise of the Canadian Imax Corporation. Visitors were charged for admission to this last attraction; the rest of the museum was free.

The NMPFT was welcomed by many critics and visitors. The art critic Marina Vaizey, writing in the Sunday Times, called it 'a museum for our times', 'the most dramatic and accessible new museum in Britain', in which 'practicalities and aesthetics are held together in fine balance' (Vaizey 1984). In its second summer the museum won the Creative Camera Award for Service to Photography, and the British Tourist Authority's Special Award for Public Enterprise. With over a million visitors in its first three years, of whom over a third used its Imax cinema, and with a succession of business-sponsored schemes, the museum fitted the new model of national

museums - lean, fit, attractive, casual and successful. In 1987, over 700,000 visits were made to the NMPFT: it was the third most popular tourist attraction opened since 1983, only narrowly beaten by the Jorvik Centre at York and the Sandcastle at Blackpool (Tourism in action 1987 (49): 13). In 1989, the museum won the Museum of the Year Award.

Some, however, were critical. From the outset, the NMPFT was criticised for diverting funds from national institutions and undermining other initiatives (Killip 1981). The established national institutions in London would not 'willingly give up a proportion of either their funds, their acquisitions, or their audiences' ((Bezencenet 1986: 107). The Royal Photographic Society in Bath had ambitions to set up a national museum (Osman 1979: 3).

Equally, the new displays met with antagonism. Ian Walker, a photographer and lecturer writing in Creative Camera magazine, found the Museum 'silly' and 'disgusting'; he described it as 'Habitat meets Disneyland meets Alphaville', with 'an excess of gimmickry', 'a plethora of buttons to press and some interesting displays swamped in an overkill of high-tech gadgets'. As a photographer, Walker was particularly concerned that the approach of the displays carried populist implications which disturbed the hierarchies of photographic practice:

> All this would probably be great if you were ten years old ... but it left me with a hollow feeling. Because ultimately what is so awful about such displays is that they pander to the 'Amateur Photographer' attitude to photography in which the technology takes over from the human response to the subject and the machinery is expected to do the work. The second-rate photographer is encouraged to think that if only he (sic) had a particular lens or filter, he could be taking first-rate pictures. (Walker 1983)

John Tagg, another lecturer, also found the displays 'dominated by a popularised technologism presented in a suitably dramatic form'. He noted the separation of art and science, in galleries

devoted to the 'software' of pictures, or the 'hardware' of cameras and equipment. Art was

differentiated, and elevated, from science through content, ambience, layout and use:

> Photography as an Art, of course, occupies a level of its own. It has its special
> sanctum; a sheltered place, away from the amusement arcades of technology, as
> quiet and restrained as they are theatrical and brash, and as empty as they are full.
> A Victorian distinction is kept alive: photography may be the marriage of art and
> science, but separate bedrooms are still the order of the day. (Tagg 1986: 111)

Some galleries, such as the press gallery, appear to counter Tagg's criticisms because they include

both equipment and images, making and using pictures. But, within the gallery, these aspects are

held apart. The images and their use are displayed on walls and interpreted with texts, quotations

and references. The objects are placed in cases for mere display, with labels which refer to their

intrinsic features and type. The objects are presented as a series of technological landmarks,

rather than as tools in people's hands. By implication, technology, rather than purpose or use,

determines the picture-making. On the contrary, although history, technology and design are pre-

conditions of picture-taking, a 'bad' picture of an important event is more significant to the press

than a 'good' picture of an unimportant event[5]. In other galleries, such as Window on the World,

interactive exhibits are organised for visitors to interact with technologies - of viewing, capturing

light, focusing - rather than with practices such as editing or aesthetic selection.

The NMPFT displays were criticised for being superficial and expensive but lacking the

substance of a traditional museum. The perceived lack of substance was intentional: objects

were carefully selected to strike a new identity and balance between objects and ideas. The

temporary exhibition programme was instrumental in this identity: the Keeper wished to develop

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[5]   I am grateful to Adrian Budge, Head of Education and Interpretation, for these remarks.

the relationship between art and technology through temporary exhibitions. But the small number of objects also reflected the changed relationship with the Science Museum, in which collections did not move freely from London to the new museum. The Keeper soon recognised that the lack of substantial collections for display and study weakened political and material autonomy. The NMPFT's opportunity to acquire a substantial collection of its own was eagerly grasped when, in 1983, the Kodak company sought a new home for its substantial museum of photography and cinematography.

6.2 Transfer of the Kodak Museum Collection

The Kodak company museum was founded in 1927, under the voluntary and part-time curatorship of John Pledge, an employee (Taylor 1989: 8-9). Accommodated at the company's factory and British headquarters at Harrow, the museum collections extended beyond company products and archives to encompass material from other manufacturers and from other periods and areas of photographic activity. Brian Coe, appointed in 1969 as the first full-time curator, attracted considerable public interest in the museum through his energetic publicity and publishing, so that it became 'a natural place to donate treasured cameras or photographs' (ibid: 9). In 1980, the Kodak Museum was refurbished and opened to the public for the first time. It was seen as an important part of the company's public relations operation. By then, the museum was estimated to contain up to ten thousand items of equipment and an unknown quantity of pictures, archives and books.

Soon after the museum re-opened, the Kodak company went into recession and made massive cuts in all its operations. The museum, its staff and collections were among the cuts made to Kodak's operations in Britain.

For almost a century, Kodak was the major supplier of film to amateur photographers and film-makers in North America and Europe. Its share of the British film market in 1978 was between 75 and 80%, and of the US film market ten years later remained 80% (Aris 1988: 93-4). Kodak had massive interests in developing and processing machinery and materials. Particularly with the introduction of colour film to amateurs - film-makers in the 1930s, photographers from the 1940s - the company secured a huge share of the processing and printing market. The company also made and sold cameras. Most of these were in the cheaper 'snapshot' ranges, and were less profitable than their film and processing activities.

After World War Two, Kodak competed with a number of British and Western European film manufacturers - Ilford, Agfa, Gevaert, Ferrania - but retained its supremacy in British and American markets. The company's position began to shift in the 1960s, when import controls on cameras and materials were lifted. Cheap cameras, particularly from the Far East and Japan, penetrated European and North American markets. Also in the 1960s, Kodak's monopolistic position in the colour processing industry was broken by statutes in the United States and in Great Britain.

From the late 1970s, Kodak's film interests in the amateur markets received a double blow. The Japanese film manufacturer Fuji launched its colour films in the amateur markets of Western

Europe, with rapid impact. Symbolically, in 1984 Fuji won the concession for the Olympic games which Kodak had expected. Meanwhile, all established film manufacturers faced competition for their branded products from cheap own-brand colour film, most supplied by 3M (formerly Ferrania). These were sold in supermarkets and mixed retail outlets and, by 1988, had captured 40% of the 35mm film market in the United Kingdom[6]. Meanwhile, in professional and industrial markets, conventional silver-based imaging technologies of film and photography were being superceded by new technologies of video and electronic imaging in which Kodak was not a leading manufacturer.

The company, with declining profit margins and high research costs in the new imaging technologies, was forced to diversify and to cut its operations worldwide, from shopfloor to public relations. For the British company, the museum was an obvious cut. But its transfer to the NMPFT promised public relations benefits - a high standard of display and interpretation and much greater visibility. In the words of the company press release, the donation would

> ensure that this unique collection - while still firmly retaining its identity - will enjoy the wider audience that it richly deserves in a location that can provide the additional space and facilities to display it to its full advantage. (Kodak 1984: 1)

Under the terms of the transfer deed, the company made no financial or other commitment beyond the transfer of the collection, but the NMPFT agreed to retain the name of Kodak Museum. Thus the company secured a high profile, delivered to a much larger audience: it was

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[6]   For a fuller discussion of the amateur photographic industry, and of Kodak's position, see Porter 1990.

estimated that the Kodak Museum collection would be seen by the same number of people in six weeks at the NMPFT as had visited it in Harrow in nearly sixty years.

Most of all, the transfer promised to elevate Kodak from a mere manufacturer to a place within the history of photography, as represented at the highest level in a national institution with an international reputation (McGrath 1990: 61). Through their place in the new context of the national museum, the artefacts and, by implication, Kodak itself would be vested with a superior authority. Through securing their place in the museum, the collections and the company were sheltered from the uncertainties of the marketplace - removed from the traffic and territory in which their meaning and use can be transformed (Saumarez Smith 1989: 9). Both these aspects were important to the Kodak company at a time when its products and its own position were being eroded.

The contrast between the Kodak Museum at Harrow and the NMPFT in Bradford was sharp, in both presentation and, in the view of critics, expertise. The editor of the <u>British Journal of Photography</u> saw the move as 'a serious retrograde step' for the photographic community, particularly 'those who are devoted to equipment history'; as detrimental to both presentation and scholarship (editorial, 10 February 1984: 142). A journalist, Janet Marsh, made the same suggestion. She described the Harrow Museum as 'homely and reassuring': 'at a time when more and more museums strive to appear like satellites that have failed to make orbit, this one actually looks like a museum'.

> [Kodak's] combination of academic scholarship, human interest and quirky humour is quite at odds with the no less admirable high-tech spectacle of Bradford. At Kodak you

can peer nosily through the window of a Victorian photographer's studio; at Bradford you

are thrust surrealistically into the belly of a giant model camera. (Marsh 1984)

The NMPFT was portrayed as a young upstart, lacking knowledge and experience, with little

respect for elders and scholars:

> The excellent reputation of the Kodak Museum ... owes an enormous amount to
> Brian Coe's skill... I understand that Mr Coe decided that he was not prepared to
> move to Bradford because - I assume - he would be required to work within a
> system where he would not be permitted to control the policy directions of the
> Museum in the manner that was possible at Kodak Limited and yet where
> knowledge of the history of photography was considerably inferior to his own ...
> My great fear is that the Kodak Museum at Bradford will lose its identity, and
> atrophy since the knowledge and sureness of touch which made it such a delight
> to visit Kodak Harrow will not be available. (Arnold 1984: 193)

Commentators also regretted the overlap between the Science Museum and Kodak Museum

collections which would now be owned by the same institution, although held at different sites.

The collections were ostensibly built on different principles: the principle of the science and

technology of photography, and its applications, at the Science Museum; that of popular

photography at the Kodak Museum. But the convergence of the two collections, in the categories

of material collected, and in individual items, was considerable. The full extent of duplication

and omission was discovered when the Kodak collection was transferred to NMPFT in the

summer of 1985 and unpacked and sorted by museum staff. The collection represented neither

the history of amateur photography and cinematography 'in all its aspects', nor the economic

profile of the company, but rather its preferred identity.

The company described its collection as 'one of the world's major collections of photography and

photographic apparatus'; it claimed that:

the Kodak Museum tells the comprehensive story of the history of popular

photography and cinematography in all its aspects, with particular reference to the

development of the camera and allied apparatus. (Kodak 1984: 2)

This 'comprehensive story' was not neutral but formed by a company with strong commercial

interests and a particular market profile. While relying for profits on the software of film,

materials and processing services, Kodak's marketing stressed the hardware of cameras. It

concentrated on selling cameras as vehicles for the film and processing from which the company

made its profits, and on prompting people to use more film by suggesting opportunities and

views for picture-taking. Film, processing and prints were sold to amateurs across the whole

range of interest and skills but bulk sales were greatest at the so-called 'bottom' of the market,

among the majority of amateur photographers, who used their cameras occasionally to

photograph holidays and family events (Economist Intelligence Unit 1986: 22). Using the

advertising devices of the Brownie (introduced in 1890) and the Kodak girl (1901), the company

targeted children and women as new camera-owners and users, offering simplicity of its

products: 'you press the button, we do the rest'. Thus, from the first, the company defined its

market as ignorant of photography and dependent on company expertise: in advertising, it

promised that 'Kodak takes care of you'.

Thus, Kodak relied for its economic base on the mass market, and on the generality of

photography. But the company was anxious to maintain a high profile among discerning and

improving 'serious' amateurs. They were a smaller part of Kodak's business than the

'snapshooters'; yet they were committed photographers, on whom the specialist press,

photographic clubs and competitions, and the 'culture' of amateur photography, rested. In

Kodak's marketing, the serious amateurs were assumed to be male, using more complex and precise instruments to make larger and more ambitious pictures, and circulating their pictures more widely than the 'snapshooters' (Illustration 5). Although Kodak's camera sales were mainly in the simple box and fixed focus models, its reputation as a 'serious' manufacturer was made with folding bellows models and 35mm miniature systems, such as the Retina. Thus the company's address - to more committed and competent photographers, and through the hardware of cameras - veiled its economic position among 'snapshooters' and in the software of film and processing. It was also a gendered address, to men.

This gendered and differentiated address was reflected in the collections of the company museum. The vast majority of artefacts and records related to cameras. There were approximately ten thousand items of equipment, all numbered and most catalogued; there were very small numbers of film canisters and papers, which were not catalogued. Among the items of equipment, there were many cameras but few accessories or viewing devices. The collection's acknowledged emphasis was on 'the development of the camera and allied apparatus'. Cameras at the 'top' of the range, made in the northern hemisphere and by hand or select production methods, predominated over mass-produced, cheap models. Thus the collection included Corfield, Gandolfi, Reid and Leica cameras, but few Hanimex, Halina or cheap compacts. The collection was strong in the period up to the 1960s, after which it fell off sharply: this accentuated the same trends[7]. Thus, popular photography was charted through the features and progression of a select, and unrepresentative, part of its technology. Although much of the collection had been

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[7]   In the 1960s, photographic goods from Japan and other parts of South East Asia penetrated British markets: many of these were mass-produced 'snapshot' models.

acquired from amateur photographers, their histories, interests and experience as users of the technologies had not been recorded.

More striking still was the paucity of images taken by amateurs, and the almost complete absence from the collection of photographs taken after 1939. This absence is extraordinary, since between one and two billion photographs are produced every year by amateurs (Economist Intelligence Unit 1986b: 24). Where images and albums had been collected, they had been neglected: they were not listed or catalogued. Sifting the material, NMPFT staff found that many images had been selected according to the importance of the photographer, or as samples of technical processes, and thus bore no direct relation to popular photography. Snapshots in the collection were often untypical, commissioned works: for example, those by the established photographers George Davison, Paul Martin and Frank Meadow Sutcliffe, who were given snapshot cameras by Kodak in the 1890s. Their photographs were widely published and circulated by the company; the original prints were placed in the collection. There were no amateur photographs or albums, no wedding or studio portraits, and few negatives for the period after World War Two.

Through the transfer of the collection from Harrow to NMPFT, and its reworking in new displays, the identity embodied in the company collection was interwoven with that of the Museum.

For the NMPFT, the transfer provided a major collection and also promised audience and economic benefits. Amateur photography is one of the largest leisure occupations (SNAP 1984:

19). A gallery devoted to amateur photography was therefore expected to appeal to a wide

audience, on a personal and familiar level, and to bring more visitors to the museum. This was

an immediate concern at a time when grants from central government were decreasing in real

terms, and the museum was forced to rely more heavily on earned income. The Science Museum

in London, and its other branch museum at York, had imposed compulsory charges in 1988 and

1987 respectively; the NMPFT was exempted from charges because of its revenue-generating

potential with the IMAX and other services. Committed to maintaining free admission, the

Museum would increase earnings by increasing attendances and thus income from shop sales,

food and cinema tickets. By maintaining, or increasing, visitor numbers and satisfaction the

museum also attracted corporate sponsors.

These concerns and assumptions are evident in, for example, proposals prepared by the Keeper,

Kodak Curator and Designer for circulation to Trustees, the Kodak company, and possible

sponsors:

> An underlying principle of the displays is the premise that every visitor
> potentially owns a museum object - whether camera or photograph - and might
> therefore have an intrinsic interest in understanding the wider historical and
> cultural context relating to that object. (Ford, Fowler and Taylor 1987: 2)

The appeal of popular photography was assumed, by inference from general market analysis for

amateur photography products. It was not tested as the new Kodak Museum was developed. The

NMPFT had conducted visitor surveys and reports but their major concern was with visitor

facilities, museum awareness, and income potential. Commissioned by the Marketing

Department, they included only brief questions on visitors' preferences and opinions in the

Illustration 5

Plus-X film advertisement, Amateur Photographer 8 June 1955: Kodak's gendered address to photographers is expressed in the different equipment, the suggested formats and uses for photographs, and in the poses of the models.

Students on placement with the Education Unit undertook summative evaluation on the galleries (for example, Bedwell 1989) but such surveys were not central to the planning process for new schemes[8].

6.3 Development of the Kodak Museum

The site for the new Kodak Museum was converted from an enclosed underground car park at the rear of the NMPFT. The transfer deed had insisted that the Kodak collections and display should remain together, in the same wing; thus the site included storage space and, within each of the galleries from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth century, a 'visible storage' component.

Roger Taylor was appointed as Senior Curator of Photography at NMPFT in the autumn of 1985, with immediate responsibility as project curator for the Kodak Museum (Kodak Curator). The museum's knowledge of the collection, its condition and limitations, increased as a group of curators worked together to unpack and store it. Adopting the byline of 'The Story of Popular Photography', the Kodak Curator worked with other curatorial staff to develop broad themes for the gallery. He intended to provide a social and historical context for the collections, moving away from the technological and scientific emphasis of the Science Museum and Kodak Museum's displays and collections. He chose a chronological narrative, divided into five

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[8]   For example, in the sixth visitor survey, conducted by Cross and Scobol (1989), the relevant questions were: 'Did you come here to see anything in particular?' and 'What did you most enjoy on your visit today?' For the first, visitors had the options of IMAX, TV displays, Kodak collection and other; for the second, the same options plus cafe, shop, and a particular gallery or item.

sections, each with a theme and a loose date span. More detailed concepts were developed in discussions in the winter of 1985/6, then postponed until 1987. In that year, #800,000 was allotted for the project from the central capital allocation for the Science Museum (Martin 1990a: 32-3).

A physical layout and visualisations of the Kodak Museum were developed by the Kodak Curator and Richard Fowler, the museum's designer. The single level was divided chronologically into seven galleries, like segments of a shutter. (The Kodak Curator's five chronological sections were extended to include a gallery on cine and video photography, and a 'future' gallery). Each was expected to have a 'distinctive visual identity' and at least one major display feature which in some way stood for the theme (Ford, Fowler and Taylor 1987: 5). These were, respectively: Gallery One, 'Photography for the Few', a scientific instrument maker's shop, and a 3-dimensional construction of an early daguerreotype of a portrait studio; Gallery Two, 'The Mass Market', a middle class hall and drawing-room, and a mission hall lantern slide show; Gallery Three, 'The Hand Camera and the Snapshot', a beach photographer and a shooting gallery; Gallery Four, 'The Inter-war Years', a salon exhibiting amateur photographs, and a makeshift home darkroom, in a bathroom; Gallery Five, 'The Story of Colour', a retail shop and a mini-lab'; Gallery Six, 'Home Movie to Home video', a home environment and an interactive editing desk. Finally, the sequence would be completed with a gallery on the future, 'Digits or Silver?', based on market predictions for conventional and electronic imaging. A 'social chronology' running through the galleries would provide a general context of political events and social developments of the period.

The chosen titles and visual identities privileged the technology and selling of cameras, photographs and services over their use. Thus in Gallery One, for example, the proposed settings were places where cameras were made and sold, and where most photographs were taken and sold: the portrait studio. In Gallery Three, the chosen title of 'The Hand Camera and the Snapshot' did not attach these technologies to their users. The chosen feature for this gallery was neither the hand camera and snapshot of the title, nor the amateur photographers who used these technologies; instead, it was a commercial photographer with photographic cart (a travelling darkroom), using a conventional stand camera and plates to produce ferrotypes and paper prints for sale. In Gallery Five, the theme was technology-led, 'The Story of Colour'; the chosen features were a retail store, as a setting for part of the displays, and a mini-lab. This gallery, for contemporary still photography, was allotted the largest space, recognising the extent of contemporary amateur photography, and of the industry which supported it. (With the later integration of Gallery Six, 'Home Movie to Home Video', this came to occupy almost one third of the gallery space.)

Having apportioned the floor area and budget to these themes, the Kodak Curator gave responsibility for interpreting each section to a different curatorial team. The teams were variously composed of 'guest curators', assisted by junior curators on the staff, and more senior curators. The guest curators were external researchers selected by the Keeper and Kodak Curator for their expertise in particular areas: David Allison and Terry Binns, with saleroom and curatorial expertise in nineteenth century photography (Gallery Two); John Taylor, a lecturer and writer with curatorial expertise in early twentieth century pictorialist photography (Gallery Four); Sue Todd, a freelance curator with expertise in documentary photography (social chronology).

The staff curators were John Ward, Science Museum (Gallery One) and Colin Harding, Research Assistant, formerly at the Science Museum (Gallery Three); Terry Morden, Exhibitions Officer, and myself, Research Assistant (Gallery Five); Michael Harvey, Film and Audio-Visual Curator (Gallery Six).

The range of interests and expertise suggested for Gallery Five indicates confusion about the purpose and direction of this, the largest gallery and the most commercially sensitive to the sponsors. Various people were proposed: an art exhibitions curator; a professional expert on film and processing technologies; a journalist writing for the specialist, technical photographic press. Eventually, the team was appointed internally; the boundaries between still and moving picture-making were collapsed, and the staff worked together, combining sociological, historical and technical perspectives.

The curators of each team met frequently with the Kodak Curator, to report progress and co-ordinate the briefs; they also met regularly with the Keeper to confirm the overall approach and outline script for each gallery.

In planning the displays around the story of popular photography, museum staff interpreted the term 'popular' in different ways (Minutes of the Kodak Curatorial meeting 11 August 1987, item 8). To some, it meant popular as a profitable selling line for manufacturers; to others, it meant popular in usage. The majority view was to emphasise the middle ground, the marketing and selling of photographic goods and services. For example, the script for Gallery Three was adjusted from an emphasis on the technology and operation of cameras to include more

information and materials on advertising, to soften and popularise its appeal[9]. The shift from

technology went no further to connect directly with the users, the amateur photographers. The

meaning of the term 'popular' was contested most strongly in discussions for the post-war gallery.

The team for this gallery saw that they had the opportunity of involving amateur photographers;

they wanted to use this opportunity as the basis for the gallery. The Kodak Curator and other

staff felt that the group 'amateur photographers' was so vast and heterogeneous that it could not

be adequately represented in its totality, and to select particular photographers and histories might

constitute 'bias'. To overcome these problems, it was proposed that the main sources should be

trade and promotional literature, market research and photographic magazines. The market was

seen to offer a kind of natural selection: a neutral, acceptable place in which people might easily

locate themselves. That the marketplace was itself contested - in both ideological and

commercial terms - was not considered.

The team for Gallery Five started work in March 1988, with three months to produce a final

script on the theme of 'The Story of Colour'. Instead, they put the theme aside and started from a

different premise. The script was completed nine months later, in December, with the title

'Photography for All?' The team developed a three-tiered story, linking the producers, promoters

and users of photographic goods and services. They used the framework of market research

analysis to divide amateur photographers and film-makers into groups: snapshooters, hobbyists

and dedicated amateurs. Within these groups, they represented profiles of individual amateurs.

The team mounted public appeals and organised workshops to collect these 'profiles' of users:

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[9]   Editorial discussions and script alterations took place in April and May 1988. They are
        referred to briefly in Minutes of Kodak Curatorial meeting 19 May 1988, item 4.

these linked personal histories with objects, images and ephemera, and balanced the weight of information from the industry and advertisers. Through the appeal, they drew in material which was absent from the collections: photographs, recent cameras and cheaper models, for example. Finally, the team sought to develop a coherent brief which linked concepts with gallery space: they sought to work with those directly involved in the project - the Kodak Curator, designers, other curators and staff - in the gallery; they tested paste-ups of texts and layouts, inviting comments and contributions from other museum staff.

'Photography for All?' lacked the expected 'storyline' and clear identity of other galleries; its intellectual and spatial structure was never fully defined and grasped. Thus, the technically-minded represented it as a straightforward march of progress; aesthetic interests represented it as an opportunity to show people how to take good pictures; the designer interpreted it as a shop environment, and this became the dominant visual identity. One month before the Kodak Museum opened, he proposed the revised title 'Photography in the High Street'. Finally, the Kodak Curator and public relations staff, unable to make a succinct description for the press release, described it as portraying 'the recent explosion of film and video into the lives of ordinary people' ('A new view of photography', Update 10, April/May 1989, National Museum of Science and Industry).

6.4 From Small and Stiff to Large and Natural: Description of the Kodak Museum

The Kodak Museum at the NMPFT is in a wing behind the main museum; it is approached through the main museum foyer and basement galleries (Figure 3). Visitors ascend a steep flight

of stairs to reach the gallery, which is not visible until they reach the top of the stairs. Access is extremely awkward for people with physical disabilities, or with pushchairs and buggies.

Visitors are invited from the foyer towards the Kodak Museum by a reproduction of the Kodak girl, beckoning them through a narrow gallery, an 'Introduction to photography'. In this gallery, a very small number of images and objects is displayed to give the core elements of silver-image and electronic-image photography. As visitors walk towards the Kodak Museum, they are filmed on a hidden electronic camera. Filmed images are frozen and shown on a viewing monitor; here, the pixillated images are transformed into squares and the images gradually dissolve.

The Kodak Museum is a low-ceilinged space, with artificial light throughout (Figure 4). Visitors enter a hexagonal introductory area, in which a giant lens slowly rotates. This lens - 'believed to be the largest ever made' - was manufactured specifically for this purpose by Pilkington's. The mosaic floor has an inlaid pattern which imitates a camera shutter, and indicates the surrounding galleries. These galleries are entered through archways from the introductory area. Beside and between the archways are graphic panels with photographs: Henry Fox Talbot, Queen Victoria, an anonymous woman and child on the beach; an album picture.

<u>Figure 3</u>

Plan of the National Museum of Photography Film and Television, Bradford.

<u>Figure 4</u>

Layout of the Kodak Museum at the National Museum of Photography Film and Television,

Bradford.

Each gallery is designed with a different, 'period' atmosphere and spatial arrangement. The format and use of texts is different in each gallery. The theme of 'popular photography' is interpreted differently. Broadly, the emphasis alternates between narrative and thematic treatment; between inventors and technologies (first and third) and applications and users (second and fourth); between the hardware of cameras and the software of images; between science and art. In the fifth gallery, these are placed together in the different tiers.

In the first, 'The Early Years 1839-50', the coincidence between the inventions of Daguerre and Fox Talbot in 1839 (direct positive and negative-positive photography) is represented as a race between the nations of France and Great Britain, with an exhibit which copies a fairground machine. This gallery contains the life-size representation in three dimensions of a daguerreotype - the first known photograph of a portrait studio. It also contains the Giroux camera of 1839 - the first model of camera to be produced for sale - signed by Daguerre.

'Photography in the Home 1850-80', the second gallery, is furnished and decorated with an abundance of authentic and imitation period features. The main gallery is arranged like a room, with a fireplace in its centre. Cabinets, bookcases, a desk and a table are adapted to be used as exhibition cases. These contain photographs in the many forms in which they were enjoyed: books, prints, cartes-de-visite, ceramics, jewellery, ornaments and stereoscopic viewers. Folding wall panels exhibit a fuller range of cartes-de-visite. Visitors can view stereo images through a viewer constructed to allow different viewing heights. This is set beside a conventional Victorian stereo viewer. The gallery also houses a (re)construction home daylight studio, and darkroom, as the converted conservatory of a wealthy amateur. Visitors pass abruptly from here into a church

hall, where they can watch lantern slides and listen to the spoken commentary delivered from a speaker inserted in the body of a dummy.

'The Snapshot Era 1880-1920' is built around the theme of the seaside, the main features are a beach scene, in the centre of the gallery, and a promenade running down one side. (It was the first gallery to be completed: it was opened for a press preview in October 1988, which also gave the project team a 'dry run'). After the close and crowded atmosphere of 'Photography in the Home', this gallery is relatively open and light - within the constraints of the building. In the beach scene, the dummy figure of a photographer with camera and photographic cart is set against a backdrop of bathing huts. Along the boardwalk beside the 'beach' are amusements: an original 'what-the-butler-saw' machine and an exhibit designed as a shooting gallery. Here, visitors can test the accuracy of viewfinders on a range of cameras, by 'shooting' at a target. The promenade (copied from Brighton pier) houses a series of display cases, dressed to illustrate amateur interests and themes of the period 1880 to 1920. At the end of the 'promenade' is a constructed 'shop', displaying photographic equipment in the window.

The appearance and visual motif of this gallery - the out-of-doors, seaside setting and the commercial portrait photographer - contradicts the emphasis of introductory panels and the content of cases. These concentrate heavily on cameras and technologies: in particular, the hand camera and rollfilm. Introductory texts and cases line the wall facing the shooting gallery: these lay out the foundations for the gallery, charting the 'milestone' technologies. Beyond them, an alcove contains the first of the 'visible storage' units, arranged at right angles to the main display. These are high density storage units, composed of glass-fronted sloping cases with cabinets

below; in the cases, cameras and other equipment are displayed by type and period, with simple information for each item on labels - denoting model number and date; in the (locked) cabinets below other materials are stored which can be consulted on request. The blank ends of these units, which abut onto the walkway, carry panels about George Eastman and the Kodak company. The main display continues to the back of the beach scene; the bathing huts are cut away on the reverse side to provide further display cases for cameras and photographs.

The solidly technical story of 'The Snapshot Era' contrasts with the conceptual approach and ethereal atmosphere of the following gallery, 'The Serious Amateur 1920-45'. Here, the photography of dedicated amateurs in clubs and societies is represented as 'dream-work'. The introductory section of the gallery shows how club photographers took photographs of stock subjects and reworked the negatives and prints to create idealised images, which they then mounted and framed for exhibitions. The cameras and tools which the photographers used are displayed, with examples of their work. The middle section of the gallery is hung with framed photographs to suggest an exhibition salon. The photographs are grouped as dreams of the country; the city; the family; pleasure; the Empire; war. At the end of the gallery, dramatic lighting draws visitors towards a small bronze statue of a woman holding a lens above her head. This is the prize trophy awarded for 'the world's best snapshot' in a competition of 1932, organised by Kodak. The 'snapshot' (actually a large, framed pictorial photograph) is displayed with a video copy of newsreel footage showing the presentation ceremony in Manchester. Historical sections in this part of the gallery include the clubs and societies for serious amateurs; factories and shops where photographic goods were made and sold. Finally, through a glass screen, visitors can look into a 'home darkroom' which dissolves and reverts into a bathroom

(using the technique called Pepper's Ghost, with lighting and mirrors, to produce alternating images). Visible storage units in this section are used to store books and journals; medals; light meters; darkroom and retouching equipment, as well as cameras.

Visitors pass through a visible storage area of cameras and cine equipment, or back along the gallery and through the main archway, into 'Photography for all?'. The design is flat, stark, modern and gimmicky. Against the monochrome grey and white background of walls, floors and ceiling, there splashes of bright, primary colours are provided on graphic panels and in streaks of coloured fluorescent lights. Visitors are guided along a central walkway, running across the width of the gallery, with squat round pillars of glass and graphics on either side of it. On one side, these pillars are cases with rotating displays of equipment, manuals and packaging. On the other side, the pillars are graphic panels carrying advertising materials and interpretative texts. On the walls of the gallery, bold graphics are interrupted or, in some places overmounted, with cases of material. In three places, projection screens are inserted into the wall panels for film and video. As in other galleries, almost everything on show is small: hand-held pieces of equipment; small, personal images and albums. More than in other galleries, though, the design overwhelms the material presented, so that objects, images and people seem incidental.

The display panels and cases are colour-coded into two broad groups on facing walls: blue (industry and advertising/selling) and red (usage). Within the red and blue, further sections are introduced with large splashes of colour, titles and introductory texts. The title is continued across the top of successive panels, which are numbered sequentially across the bottom, in a graphic style which imitates rollfilm exposure numbers. The section titles are: faithful image;

photographic advertising; snapshooters; hobbyists; dedicated amateurs; affluence and leisure. Some objects are used duplicated in industry and in use, but interpreted differently through context and juxtaposition. For example, 'Who's the Fool?', in the section on snapshooters, sets 'foolproof' cameras, and the claims made for them in promotional literature, against the 'mistakes' which the automatic features produce when unsuspecting photographers use them (Illustration 6). Some of these cameras are included elsewhere, as examples in industry and advertising of goods produced and promoted for mass markets. The images used in the gallery are selected to accord with the different sections: experimental, sample shots for the section on industry; advertising and promotional materials in the pillar cases and on pillar graphics dealing with selling and advertising; amateur photographs and movies, and pictures of the picture-makers, in the section on users. The same rhetoric guides the selection, arrangement and labelling of objects in cases: those in the 'selling' showcases, for example, are in mint condition with price labels; those in the 'using' showcases are in variable condition, and have associated materials with them - processing wallets; society programmes; makeshift gadgets and attachments.

In this section, as in 'The Serious Amateur', the approach is conceptual; titles, texts and juxtapositions are questioning and ironic. For example, the section called 'The Faithful Image' begins: 'Photographs appear to show us an accurate picture of the world. But a photograph is an arrangement of tones and colours on a flat surface.' Another panel in this section compares the tonal range of 'true' colour films of different brands. Panels about the photographic advertising addressed to dedicated amateurs at the 'top' end of the market are entitled 'Men of the World', 'Gentlemen's Clubs' and 'Over whose Body?'; the images and texts draw attention to the exclusive and gendered roles of male photographer and female sitter implicit in such advertising. In the

section on snapshooters, a panel on the family album shows examples of albums which celebrate happy times: 'the sun always shines in the family album'. This is juxtaposed with a question: 'What's missing from the family album? Work ... unemployment ... homelessness ... discord ... illness'. Beyond, the 'unofficial' memories are represented - the informal and offbeat photographs, often taken by children, which don't reach the album.

In the centre of this gallery, but tucked behind the archway so that visitors see it only as they leave the gallery, is a small booth with a digital imaging installation: 'The screen in the corner'. On this screen, they can operate controls to form and manipulate images of themselves and others.

The last segment or gallery of the Kodak Museum is a small temporary exhibition area. Here, the work of amateur photographers is exhibited, to link with particular galleries in the exhibition, or to make a connection with broader exhibition themes in the exhibition galleries of the main building. For example, the opening exhibition in this area showed work from the collections of Edgar Tarry Adams - an amateur photographer, who photographed family, workers in the brewery he owned, and boatyards in Essex where he lived in the late ninteenth century. In an exhibition in 1991 which spanned all the temporary exhibition spaces in the museum, 'The electronic age', this gallery was used to exhibit 'The electronic snapshot album', with still and moving images on video and laser disc.

<u>Illustration 6</u>

'Who's the fool?' display panel in the Kodak Museum.

6.5 'You Press the Button, We Do the Rest'[10]: a Critical Analysis of the Kodak Museum

In this analysis, I examine the external and internal control and containment which were exercised over the Kodak Museum and the story of popular photography. This control and containment carries, and in some places is articulated through, construction of gender: of sexual difference. I describe the external factors of the identity and history of the NMPFT, and the identity and expectations of the Kodak company. I describe the internal factor of the complex organisation of space and materials. I draw on the analysis of Peponis and Hedin at The Natural History Museum to examine the relations between space and knowledge (Peponis and Hedin 1982). Finally, I examine the apparent contradiction in the Kodak Museum between a high degree of determination and control, and the existence of competing discourses within the space. In this section, I draw on extensively on interviews with the Kodak Curator, Head of Education and Head of Public Relations (see Appendix), and a visitor survey (Wilkinson 1989), as well as my own working knowledge. All sources are cited in the text.

The NMPFT had already established and developed an identity as a museum 'about art and science'; a friendly, informal, inviting museum; and a museum of national, and international stature. This identity and development rested on a show of superior (male) knowledge, skills and apparatus. As presented in the NMPFT, photography as 'pure' art or science, and in its applications, privileges the individual and the male. Men predominate, as artists, inventors and entrepreneurs, studio photographers and photojournalists. Women in this view of photography

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[10] The slogan coined by George Eastman to promote the first Brownie camera (Coe 1978: 85).

are sitters, operatives, readers and spectators; they are passive, silent, or absent. Women are implicitly marginalised, by the limited treatment of those areas in which they were active, and explicitly excluded, by the use of language which assigns photography to men.

Thus, for example, the gallery on photography's early history built that history around a series of portraits of men: Niepce, Fox Talbot, Herschel. These were the innovators, men of genius and action, men of achievement.

The Victorian Studio referred to the photographer as male[11]. The adjoining portrait gallery offers studio photography as the domain of enterprising men, from Daguerre and Beard to Walter Scott and Patrick Lord Lichfield. This gallery contains the reconstruction of a studio in the West End of London, in the 1930s. The reconstruction is based on the studio of Dorothy Wilding. But Wilding is not visually acknowledged; the camera is displayed without the figure of a photographer (male or female) behind it. The viewer sees only an elegantly dressed woman, seated, the sitter for the portrait. In labels for the studio, the sitter is anonymous; the studio is described as typical and the photographer is not named; the portraits on the studio wall are ascribed to Paul Tanqueray.

The device of personalising the narrative, and naming the actors, is not extended to photographic production and the supporting work of photography - those areas in which women were employed[12]. Mass production is virtually ignored[13]. The hand skills of daylight printing, hand-

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[11] These were removed when texts were revised in 1985 and 1989 respectively.

colouring, retouching, and other aspects of photographic production are described as techniques, but the people who did this work - mainly women - are scarcely acknowledged.

The press gallery refers exclusively to male photographers and editors. In the initial displays[14], male dummies stood in the foreground of the newspaper office, bending over the picture desks, while a female dummy sat typing at a desk in the background. In a free handout to visitors, on picture-taking and -editing, the masculine term was used seventeen times to refer to photographers and editors, without qualification or explanation.

Equally, the mass of photographers, as amateur photographers, had neither voice nor place within the NMPFT until 1989. Thus, visitors were not addressed directly as photographers themselves. The museum distanced itself from the generality of photographers and photographs; it located its interests in speciality, artistic quality and technical superiority, national and international excellence. It demonstrated these interests in collecting, exhibitions, publications and fellowships. Visitors were invited to interact with the content of the museum in predetermined places and parameters - looking into huge cameras and walking through others; turning levers and pressing knobs to reveal the workings of technical and optical systems.

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[12]   John Taylor (1986: 75) quotes the rising proportion of women working in the photographic industry as a measure of its industrialisation.

[13]   In the gallery 'An introduction to photography', reference was made to the vast number of films processed every year, but not to who processed them, how, or in what conditions.

[14]   Modified in 1986, when the news gallery was truncated and new television galleries added.

When the NMPFT extended its galleries to include the Kodak Museum, it had the opportunity to address many of its visitors directly in an inclusive representation of photography, by giving names, voices and space to amateur photographers in the same way that it had provided these for professional, technical and art photographers. Also, the museum had the opportunity to extend the definition of photography in its permanent archives, by acquiring the work, tools and histories of amateur and popular photographers for the permanent collections.

However, the acquisition of the Kodak collection answered a different imperative for the NMPFT: the opportunity to move from 'outstation' to museum in its own right; and to counter the criticisms of it as 'lightweight'. Thus, as I described (see above, 5.1), the Kodak Museum offered anchorage and ballast. The NMPFT accepted the collection with tight conditions attached - the name, and the requirement to display most of the collection in one area. It did so without any accompanying financial contribution from the company, and without a full, working knowledge of the collection.   These indicate its enthusiasm to acquire the collection, and some of the subsequent difficulties with it.

For the Kodak company, the transfer of the collection meant a large, visible place in photographic history (section 5.2). The company's demands and expectations were relatively conservative; they wanted to obtain the location and exposure of the NMPFT but to retain features of the old Kodak Museum: the name, the object-rich displays; the emphasis on George Eastman, hero and founding father. These interests were intertwined in the development of the Kodak Museum.

The NMPFT chose to control and largely to contain 'the story of popular photography' and the people who practised it. It did so physically, by separating it from the main displays, and curatorially, by containing the genre as a subordinate form of photographic activity. A small temporary exhibition area created within the Kodak wing gave exhibition space to amateurs without impinging upon the temporary exhibition galleries in the main building, and without infringing on the profile of photography established through the programme of exhibitions. The obvious ooverlap between the new Kodak Museum and existing parts of the museum - particularly the portrait gallery and camera obscura - were not resolved.

The collecting policies of the NMPFT did not change to include popular photography as a new area of collecting. The Keeper continued to judge the photographs of this genre according to art, and to find them wanting:

> photographs could be taken by any man, woman or child[15], and the results could hardly be works of art. Nor, usually, were they. Whatever the fascination of snapshots and the social lessons to be learned from them, they were rarely 'art'. Hereafter, amateur photographers were no more likely to advance the art of photography than Sunday painters. (Ford 1989: 7).

Much of the material collected through public appeal for the more recent sections of the Kodak Museum was acquired as fixed term loans, for the duration of the displays. The opportunity to collect provenanced groups of items, with detailed profiles and histories of users, was lost. Cameras and equipment were acquired where they filled gaps in existing collections, organised

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[15]   Ford was echoing the description of the Kodak system by its founder, George Eastman: 'We furnish anybody, man, woman or child, who has sufficient intelligence to point a box straight and press a button..' (Coe 1978: 83).

by sequential and technical categories. The photographs and albums collected through the appeal were considered for acquisition by the museum's review board, and rejected as below the standards required for a national collection. Those which were retained were given a secondary status, as study collections: they are kept in less favourable conditions; they are not fully registered, and therefore more difficult to retrieve; the museum has the power to dispose of them without recourse to the full disposal procedure. Many of these photographs and albums were the work of women, active in amateur photography as 'snapshooters' and keepers of the family album.

Internal control was exercised over 'the story of popular photography' both physically and curatorially, by the arrangement of space and objects in the Kodak Museum according to a sequential and narrative structure. As we have seen, 'popular photography' was defined in the terms of the market. In the marketplace, amateur photographers, sitters, and viewers of family albums, are addressed as consumers whose desires and needs are satisfied by the industry. In the museum, the same people are addressed as visitors whose histories are told <u>for</u> them in the new galleries. They are invited, through ownership of objects, to make a connection with the history presented in the galleries, and to then place the object they own - and therefore themselves - in the wider historical and cultural context. They are not invited to consolidate their connections with that history through active participation, by adding experiences, images, insights. These may become disruptive or detract from the main story - a progressive, Whiggish history of technology which incorporates amateur photographers as the beneficiaries of technology. Created with the active involvement of a major international company, this history tells how a disinterested industry 'served' the market for photography. Just as technology is presented as

progressive, flowing outwards without impediment to remove the barriers to photography, so history is presented as an unproblematic and progressive story - the diffusion and absorption of that technology. In this history, camera ownership spreads from richer to poorer; technology transforms photography from difficult and costly to easy and cheap; pictures and their subjects grow from small and stiff to large and 'natural'. Again, women are positioned and portrayed as the satisfied consumers in this history: as the main users of cheap and 'foolproof' models, they are the (assumed) main beneficiaries of these 'easy-to-use' technologies.

These technologies 'arrive' and the rest of the story is assumed. Roberta McGrath, in a critical review of the Kodak Museum, notes three key images in the introductory rotunda: Queen Victoria, Henry Fox Talbot and an anonymous woman with a child and a camera.

> We could be forgiven for thinking that photography was a divine gift mediated
>
> through Monarch and landed-gentry. In true nineteenth century fashion, this is
>
> then handed down to the ordinary people, as if to remind us of both our place in
>
> the class system and the democratising powers of photography. There is no
>
> suggestion that it was not from largesse that 'ordinary people' were granted access
>
> to photography. (McGrath 1990: 61)

Against this progressive view, McGrath opposes a rigorous materialist reading of the spread of photography:

> it happened because the expansion and accumulation of capital demanded not
>
> only surplus derived from labour, but in the ever-increasing drive to maximise
>
> profit, had to ensure that workers were efficient consumers of those products they
>
> produced.

McGrath makes an explicit link between the museum's presentation (or omission) of the relations of production of the photographic industry and its own relations of production of history. She finds that, in both,

> the factor of labour is missing. There are few traces of it, either of the factories where photographic equipment and materials are produced, or indeed of the labour of the museum itself which manufactures and sells history.... Just as factories have closed doors behind which we cannot see, so behind the panelled walls the Museum has its own production lines, its own hierarchy from Keeper down to warders, and its own struggle for survival which depends on ability to prise a larger share of the market from its competitors. (McGrath 1990: 61)

She suggests structures of control and limitation which seem to contradict the apparent informality and openness of the displays, and the choice offered to visitors, within the Kodak Museum and in other galleries at the NMPFT. This contradiction may be explained by analysing the relationship between space and knowledge in the Kodak Museum.

The NMPFT celebrates its informality and accessibility: for example, advertising itself as 'the friendliest museum in the north' - a quotation drawn from an early review (Vaizey 1984). In part, this accessibility resides in the museum's identity and raison d'etre: the popular and mass media of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In part, it is because, in the design of its galleries, the NMPFT embraces new ideas about museum exhibitions. Among these are the ideas and expectations that: exhibitions are informal, entertaining and interesting; they encourage active learning through discovery and exploration; they offer choice to visitors; they reconstruct a historical milieu, a glimpse of the past (Lumley 1988: 10-15; Stallabrass 1989).

By analysing the relationship between space and knowledge, we see that the appearance of informality conceals control and determination at a deeper level. The analysis applied by Peponis and Hedin to the relations between space and knowledge at The Natural History Museum is relevant here. According to the authors, the knowledge which museums present and the forms in which they represent it have changed over time to become increasingly abstract. In the new exhibition form, 'knowledge ceases to take the form of a map and takes the form of a proposition'. This creates an asymmetry between the public and its educators.

> Today, the relation to knowledge is indirect, in that it is mediated by interpretation, and elaborated in that it is mediated through a complicated spatial pattern. The principles of control are not explicit, as control is diffused to many spaces, and as the overall coherence of the pattern is less clear. The transmission of knowledge is individualised. (Peponis and Hedin 1982: 25)

In the main building of the NMPFT, the galleries are arranged in the shape of an 'L' at the side and back of the auditorium, which spans the full height of the building (Figure 3). Thus, the arrangement of space and knowledge is not immediately visible and accessible to visitors entering the building; they have to go deep into the galleries to understand them; they have to mount the separate floors because the galleries are cut off from each other on five separate floors, with the added complexity of half-storeys or landings at the front of the building.

The complexity and depth of the building were increased with the annexation of additional space in the basement of the adjacent multi-storey commercial entertainment/office block. Structural problems and the requirement for access to these commercial premises prevented the museum from breaking through from its main galleries to make a direct link. Visitors have to cross the full depth of another gallery and mount a flight of stairs to reach the Kodak Museum.

Once there, the rotunda introduces and lays out the space by setting out the radial arrangement and chronological sequence of galleries (Figure 4). It provides visitors with a choice of galleries to enter; but it does not synchronise the space by allowing visitors to comprehend the whole spatial pattern and to move through it with ease. The path that brings visitors to the rotunda does not traverse the whole space of the Kodak Museum, nor even reach deep into it. Standing in the rotunda, visitors see the archways leading into each gallery, but they may not view the full depth of each gallery. There is no single point at which they may see all there is to see, in order to gain an understanding of the whole of the Kodak Museum: they have no physical map. In this sense, the spatial arrangement of the Kodak Museum does not enable visitors to make an informed choice. Because they do not have a clear understanding of the space, which would give them control over their movement through it, they follow the official guidance provided through the chronological and clockwise arrangement.

Objects and exhibits may be arranged to block the view into each gallery, and the way through it. Each gallery contains spaces of varying depths and complexity. To understand these spaces and relationships, visitors must enter the gallery and perhaps turn several times. In doing so, they lose sight of the central axis, or rotunda, and whole space. Within the first three galleries, the narrative and space are arranged in a loop, leading from the entrance archway to the outer perimeter and returning by another route. The fourth gallery ('The Serious Amateur') is arranged in concentric rings, along a single line: visitors move along this line from the centre to the outer edge: the journey is shorter, the gallery is not as deep, and the visitors are in a different place at the end of their journey. The fifth gallery ('Photography for All?') is different again: has both

concentric rings (the industry; selling and advertising; using) and a loop (the numbered panels).

Moreover, if visitors move logically from the 'end' of the previous gallery (at the back wall), they come into the fifth gallery from the side, through a visible storage area, between the rings of industry and selling on one side, and advertising and use on the other. Thus, there is inconsistency <u>within</u> the Kodak Museum in its spatial arrangements and propositional forms.

The arrangement provides alternative routes from one gallery to another, at the intersecting walls deep in the galleries, as well as through the main archways in the rotunda. Visitors may choose to return to their starting point, the rotunda and entrance, without retracing their step. But, if they exercise this choice, they cut across the linear arrangements of space within each gallery. Thus, they may enter a sequential story half way through, or encounter strange juxtapositions of approach. For example, they may move from a brightly lit section of a promenade to a dark corner with displays about societies and trophies ('Snapshot Era' to 'Serious Amateur'); or, as in the previous paragraph, from this latter area to the visible storage area for the next gallery, a room of cabinets stacked with post-war cameras.

These properties of the Kodak Museum are intuitively grasped by visitors and articulated as a gallery confusing and lacking in cohesion. A survey was undertaken in the Kodak Museum in the summer of 1989, on a random sample of visitors (Wilkinson 1989). Among the improvements they suggested were a more prominent plan and a more linear arrangement. One respondent 'suggested that the visitor was bombarded from too many directions.'

For the visitors questioned, the complexity of spatial arrangement was compounded by the variation of appearance and approaches. At a literal level, visitors were confused at the difference between the title, 'Kodak Museum', and the content of galleries: many other manufacturers and products are represented[16]. They believed the Kodak Museum was trying to do too much. One respondent stated that 'the Kodak Museum was trying to capture a wide range of people's interests and was perhaps overdoing it. That is, by trying to appeal a little to everyone, it appeals greatly to too few' (Wilkinson 1989: 4, 5). The same point was made by McGrath:

> What the galleries lack is an overall perspective, any real sense of cohesion, or
>
> even any continuity in format, design or use of text... The result is liberal and
>
> pluralist, a mix-and-match approach to history. (McGrath 1990: 61).

The diversity <u>between</u> galleries was also continued <u>within</u> each gallery. The different elements of social chronology (carried throughout the galleries on overhead panels), interpretive displays and visible storage, added to the confusion. Visitors were overwhelmed by the number of elements, objects, images and texts. People were exhausted - particularly those who came at the end of their visit to the NMPFT. 'Visitors who came to the Kodak Museum last said that they had reached "saturation point" and did not read much of the text' (Wilkinson 1989: 4).

The project team had recognised that the profusion of material in the Kodak collection was a potential problem in the displays: 'the dangers, in an object-rich collection, of showing either too much or not enough' (Martin 1990a: 33). The team created 'visible storage' areas in order to

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[16]   The NMPFT has subsequently considered reversing the title so that the primary identity
of the gallery is 'The Story of Popular Photography'.

reconcile the ideas of selective and thematic interpretative display with the contractual requirement to make a large part of the collection publicly available.

An additional problem lay in the characteristics of the artefacts themselves: virtually everything in amateur and popular photography is small and hand-held; much of it is familiar. Cameras are cased in opaque wood, metal or plastic and are necessarily lightproof - 'black boxes', impenetrable to the gaze. Many photographs are intimate and individual, recording personal achievements and family occasions. Photographs, too, are made in the dark.

The solutions which the designers chose to make impact and to impose cohesion on this proliferation of tiny things were: to create experiential 'milieux' in galleries; and to enlarge some things to provide major, dramatic features. The choice of these features, and their positions, was largely design-led. The visual and physical emphasis given to each individual feature may be unrelated to their importance in the historical narrative; collectively, they are confusing and disorientating. For example, in 'Photography for the Few', the space is dominated by a huge case containing a scene of a portrait studio. This scene is based on a small daguerreotype portrait by Jabez Hogg, taken in 1842. Through this elaborate diorama, the curator and designer sought to establish an atmosphere more powerful than the daguerreotype itself; to 'restore' colour, depth and scale, so that visitors would have the impression of the 'real' studio. However, the case is constructed in such a way that visitors are removed from any 'reality' the diorama might offer. The floor level of the studio is lifted above the floor level of the gallery, so that the lifesize figures in the case tower above the visitors; the whole diorama is behind glass.

Again, the giant lens in the rotunda at the centre of the Kodak Museum is artifice rather than artefact, produced solely for the museum display as a giant pun, to give focus to the galleries. It was made (and donated) not by the companies who produce camera lenses, but by a British glass manufacturer, Pilkington's: it has no direct connection with the amateur photographers, whose story the Kodak Museum purports to tell. But its size, and the prominence accorded to it by its position, attract disproportionate interest. People want to know more about it (Wilkinson 1989: 3, 5), but what more is there to know?

The lens is blown up from fragment to spectacle, 'the world's largest lens'. It is an appropriate centrepiece, referent and unique selling point for 'one of the world's greatest collections' (Kodak 1984). The museum has celebrated and traded on such spectacle and singularity from its opening (housing the Imax cinema, 'Europe's largest cinema screen') onwards. It has much greater difficulty in meshing these celebrated and spectacular objects and events into the history recounted in the museum's displays. The lens distorts, rather than clarifies, our view of popular photography.

The lens takes on a symbolic importance, as an identifier and also an identity. It raises other questions, of emphasis and gender, which were not considered by the designer and curator: because these lines of enquiry were closed off, the feature is misleading, puzzling, or even off-putting. The lens, and the shutter which is marked on the floor, 'stands in for', and also stands for, a whole area of activity or history, with a strong, and specific, emphasis on the machine.

Technology dominates all. The galleries are segments radiating from a central

rotunda which is meant to resemble a giant shutter. The lens at its centre slowly

revolves, magnifying the entrances to each of the five galleries in turn. (McGrath

1990: 61)

A camera lens is a fragment of the instruments which we use in photography. The

emphasis is not only on technology, but on particular aspects of technology: the hardware

of cameras (rather than software of photos) and the features and performance of a specific

component. As I showed above (6.2), this is a gendered emphasis. Women are more

likely to buy cameras with built-in features and separate viewfinders. They are less likely

to engage with exhibits which assume technological competence and interest (Corn

1989). 'Serious amateurs', mainly men, are more likely to buy camera 'outfits' with

interchangeable components and reflex, through-the-lens, viewing, and to diversify and

upgrade the outfits with extra features - particularly lenses. They are familiar with

looking through lenses, manipulating them to take photographs, and interchanging them;

when they change a lens, they see the shutter; they understand about shutter speeds and

exposure. They are more likely to positively celebrate technology: the quality,

engineering specifications and performance of each component is stressed in advertising

and copy addressed to them (Porter 1990: 45-7).

The visual and material message opposes the historical narrative in the converse way, too. Just as

some objects appear overblown in relation to their historical importance, others are dwarfed. In

'The snapshot era' gallery, the introductory panels and cases are a prelude, building up to the

George Eastman hand camera. In the whole history which the Kodak Museum propounds, this is

probably the single most important object. Yet it is a little, insignificant camera in a little glass

case. 'Photography for All?' is without any experiential milieu or central feature: without these, it seems empty and bleak.

The visitor survey concluded that visitors' experience was generally positive: 'the Kodak Museum received very many general compliments from the majority of its visitors' (Wilkinson 1989: 5). But informal observation and other surveys, conducted as people entered the main museum entrance, indicated a low level of interest in the Kodak Museum among visitors to the NMPFT. Attendant staff (warders) working throughout the museum observed that the Kodak Museum was much quieter than other galleries; they estimated that less than one-third of visitors went there. It was not a primary attraction for most museum visitors; very few knew about it in advance, although the Kodak Museum was the lynchpin of the museum's public relations strategy throughout the year preceding the survey (Wilkinson 1989: 3).

Audience research commissioned by the NMPFT suggests that the assumptions on which the Kodak Museum was developed were flawed. Ownership of photographic equipment, and/or photographic activity, were equated with an interest in photography. Six months after the Kodak Museum opened, in the autumn of 1989, the NMPFT commissioned qualitative research to inform the direction of a major advertising campaign. The company which undertook the research worked with focus groups of different sex, age, socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds to identify awareness and attitudes of visitors and non-visitors to the NMPFT (Carne Martin 1989).

The research identified a positive attitude and general satisfaction among those who visited the NMPFT, confirming previous visitor surveys. However, the research identified an unfavourable 'ingoing climate', in which non-visitors perceived the museum according to the colloquial title, 'The Photographic Museum'. Their perceptions of both 'photography' and 'museum' were negative. 'Photography' was assumed to be specialist, adult and technical. 'Museums' were associated with static rather than interactive features; the past rather than the present; unchanging exhibits and serious/uncomfortable atmosphere (Carne Martin 1989: 21, 35). In this respect, the Kodak Museum could be seen to reinforce the preconceptions of non-visitors: as a permanent, static exhibition; in the heavy concentration on photography and technical aspects; and in specific aspects, such as the high density of equipment, displayed in visible storage units, and titles such as 'Serious Amateur'.

The Kodak Museum is a display with an underlying traditionalism, backward-looking in its themes and methods: using stories from within, from the collections; and providing static displays, predominantly objects in showcases and frames. By numbering the galleries, it suggests to visitors that they should start at the 'beginning' of history, with founding fathers (sic) and work forwards in time to find their place within that history, rather than to work with and from their own experiences in the present.

The displays are immovable, literally weighed down by the inertia of objects and history. The interactive elements in the Kodak Museum are few, and weak: the lens in the rotunda and, sequentially, the race for photography; the mission hall; the shooting gallery; the 'Pepper's Ghost' home darkroom; and the screen in the corner. The lens renders us passive: whereas, in the hall of

mirrors, we walk and gesticulate to create and change distortions of ourselves; in the Kodak Museum, we stand and wait for the lens to revolve and cross our vision. Equally, the mission hall and home darkroom are better described as moving than interactive: they move, but visitors sit or stand, look and (in the mission hall) listen. The race is a competition between national emblems, not directly to do with photography; the shooting gallery is not much fun, and doesn't tell visitors much. The most popular interactive is the screen in the corner. The fascination of this exhibit suggests that the Kodak Museum could have exploited new technologies to mobilise history in a new kind of display: one which uses new technologies; which creates a dialogue between the visitors as they use exhibits and move around the exhibition; and which allows them to manipulate images and experiences, to play around with different possibilities and outcomes.

The Kodak Museum contains within it different, opposing approaches and discourses, but each of these is determined and highly structured: the effect is to fragment the visiting experience and confuse visitors, rather than to engage and mobilise them. The Kodak Museum was described by the Head of Education as 'a rapid series of nods in many directions' (see Appendix). In the project team, 'external' expertise and internal resources (design and curatorial) were brought together, but rarely met together; their different philosophical and curatorial positions were not fully discussed and synthesised. The overall layout, and first three galleries, were designed by the Museum Designer; the fourth and fifth galleries was delegated to Claire Dart, a graphic (rather than three-dimensional) designer at the Science Museum. Consequently, they have a much stronger graphic identity, and less substance. The curatorial teams in these galleries adopted a different intellectual structure, which was not chronological: this raised issues which were difficult to resolve. In 'The Serious Amateur', the issues centred on the language, length and

'pitch' of textsn and on editorial control. In 'Photography for All?', they centred on the interrelationship of collections, themes and design. Because these were not resolved, the gallery is sparse and bleak: that part of the Kodak Museum where people might feel that they belong appears unwelcoming.

This case study shows that change cannot easily be achieved; it is enormously difficult to create new discourses within an existing institution: especially, where some of these unsettle and oppose the dominant discourse. The 'production process' in museums is a deep and complex process: it resides in collections; donors; the allocation and design of space and collections; audiences and interest groups; external relations with visitors; internal working relationships with colleagues. The depth and complexity of this process is examined in the next chapter. It also throws up the difficulty - for me personally - of both 'writing' and 'reading'. Again, this is a point to which I return.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

I set out in this thesis to develop a critical practice relevant to museums, drawing from feminist and poststructuralist theory. I challenged the claims of museums to show the past as it really was, and questioned the empirical approach underlying these claims. I proposed that the museum 'text' depends as much as any other text on an underpinning theory.

In the preceding chapters, I demonstrated that the museum text is not natural or given, but is actively made by people working in, and for, museums through processes of choice, inclusion and exclusion. These are, in turn, shaped by wider social factors and expectations.

I analysed three museum case studies, or texts, to demonstrate that such texts come to be true only within limited and shallow readings. I used the position of 'reading as a woman' to expose their limitations, exclusions and contradictions, and to reveal their sexual codes. I showed how gender is articulated in these museum texts; I suggested that the interrelated notions of masculinity and femininity are constantly invoked and enrolled in a range of relationships through which meaning and identities are shaped.

Finally, I set out to demonstrate that, while museums offer an increasingly open and accessible face, they maintain a closure of space, authority and authorship. I suggested that a feminist and poststructuralist critique offers a way of seeing beyond the immediate level of the museum project, and a method for disturbing and subverting the closure of the realist text; it opens up opportunities for dynamic, and multiple, interpretation.

In this chapter, I look back critically to review what I have done. In the first part, I return to the hypothesis, and the questions which I set out to answer. I draw conclusions from the overview and case studies to support the hypothesis and to provide answers. In the second part, I describe the rhetoric of the museums: their different visual and textual devices. In the third part, I evaluate the methods used in the research: their strengths and also their limitations. In the concluding part, I point to further tasks and projects in museums, and further studies and analysis in research, which might feed and nurture the development of a critical culture.

7.1 Working Parts: How Meaning Is Made in Museums

I return here to the hypothesis that the interrelated notions of masculinity and femininity are central to the processes of making meaning in museums; that they are enrolled in a series of relationships in which the feminine is the subordinate partner.

I have argued that museums choose identities, themes and collections which strengthen those histories in which men have predominated, and marginalise or exclude those spheres where women have been more active. Here, I draw together the material presented in the overview and case studies to show these processes at work. I argue that these processes work through exclusion and through a splitting, division and cutting-up of knowledge and experience. Using Foucault's analysis of discourse, I identify these as procedures of limitation and rarefaction (Foucault 1981). I show that these limited and rarefied elements are then mobilised in a history which presents itself as complete, continuous and full with meaning (hence the title, working

parts.) Against this traditional form and method of history, I oppose another method, of effective history, which is disruptive, discontinuous and partial (Foucault 1977a; see Chapter Two).

History museums work through splitting and dividing knowledge and experience in five ways: divisions into disciplines, which cut across the integrating and holistic approach; specialisation and differentiation; periodisation; sectorisation; and an emphasis on progress, on temporal and technological change.

From the received and surviving material culture, and from the intellectual field of history, museums make selections to make meaning, to tell (hi)stories. In doing so, they divide up the world into the disciplines which they have chosen: fine and decorative arts, technology and industry, folk life and social history, natural history. Many museums hold collections which replicate those in the custody of other kinds of museums but continue to operate the conceptual distinctions of discipline, and their concomitant practices, to hold these apart. (For example, a sample of wallpaper is held by the Whitworth Art Gallery as an example in its decorative art collection; the same, or a similar, paper is held by the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester as an example of local production; it might also be held by a local museum as evidence of local living conditions and social history).

Since the middle of this century, the process of division into disciplines has gone further with the development of many more museums of industry and technology: motive power; transport by canal, rail and air; coal, iron and steel; textiles. Most recently, under commercial pressure to raise income, museums have specialised further (section 3.3). Industries common to many large

towns and cities, such as laundries, clothing, catering, are not selected as overarching themes because they cannot be celebrated as unique and distinctive.

While museums become more specialised, they remain within the terms and disciplines of the rational discourse. Those spheres and modalities which women have come to represent are lacking: museums of nurturing and nursing; museums which speak of emotions, of love and grief, of birth and death (Sandahl 1991 and 1993).

The identities, themes and collections of museums are formed around notions of historical periods, which are charged with gendered meanings. Dividing lines are set between 'before' and 'after', ancient and modern, stasis and progress. Jette Sandahl, director at the Women's Museum in Denmark, illustrates this with a potent example from her country:

> If ... the dividing line for 'modern history' in Denmark is the one traditionally used of 1660, one subscribes to a version of history that interprets or belittles the witch trials as a closing phenomenon of the dark ages, and therefore of little relevance for our epoch. If one works, however, with the alternative date of 1536, one would have to treat witch hunting as belonging, as part of or even essential to present day consciousness and identity (Sandahl 1992).

In Britain, the dividing line for most history museums is that of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. As I showed in Chapter Three, this is a crucial period for the breakdown of the household economy. Whereas before this period production, maintenance and reproduction were seen as complementary, from this period paid work outside the home - production for profit - was separated from and elevated above unpaid work within it - production for consumption, and reproduction. As areas of production were split off, the definition of domestic and housewife

became narrower and more circumscribed. This separation was strongly gendered: men were primarily associated with the (superior) culture of paid work outside the home, and women associated with the (inferior) culture of unpaid work in the home, consumption and reproduction.

Technology and industry museums, in particular, are linked to the industrial revolution and industrialisation. They take as their starting point the watershed between an earlier, static, less organised, labour-intensive and less productive economy, and the dynamic, rational, capital-intensive and productive economy. As in the example in the Kelham Island displays ('Lifted from obscurity?'), in such a narrative women are associated with the 'prehistory' of industry.

The museums of contemporary media deal with a shorter history, of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, they are based on the presumption of an industrial economy and the creation of a mass market; they frame their narratives through reference back to an earlier, less informed and less favourable state of society. At the National Museum of Photography Film and Television (NMPFT), this is made through reference to photography's antecedents in portraiture and silhouettes; and to the stiff, small, monochrome and expensive images of early photography.

Closely linked to this periodisation is sectorisation. In this, the greatest divide is between production and consumption, which are crudely equated with 'work', and 'home' or 'leisure'. The areas and jobs in which men predominated have taken precedence in museums over those where women have traditionally worked. Those areas where men have worked in large numbers have become the theme for museums which elaborate the process of production itself and the people who worked in the production process. Those areas where women have worked in the largest

numbers - clothing, food and service industries, cleaning and the home - are turned into items of use and consumption; visitors are encouraged to enjoy and appreciate the finished product but its makers are subdued or invisible. In the classification of collections, material associated with areas of work split off from the home to become male domains have become classifiable as occupations and professions within the 'Working Life' section. Material associated with areas of work such as cleaning and childcare remain in the domestic and personal categories of the classification system. Tools and materials used by women may be classified under the headings of cooking, handicrafts and hobbies, for example; the articles which they made may be classified for their use value, as furnishings or meals.

Sectorisation works on a vertical paradigm. It cuts off the lateral links and interrelationships between production and consumption, 'work' and 'home'. It also separates the interrelationships between sectors of industry and between individual industries, and the exchange of services and supplies through which they depended on each other.

In the museums studied, these sectors of production and consumption are separated, and each is treated differently. The Kelham Island Industrial Museum celebrates production, and develops its narrative through production sequences and over time; the products themselves, the places and people who used the products, and the social context of work, are relatively subdued in the museum. Where the products of industry are included, the emphasis is on ceremonial, exceptional and masculine technologies (the Grand Slam Bomb; the jet engine). At the York Castle Museum and the NMPFT, on the other hand, the products are celebrated and the work of production is subdued. Making cameras and film; making microwaves, washing machines and televisions: these are jobs which today are done mainly by women, working on assembly lines, in

a system of globally organised production (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993; Porter 1990). These jobs and processes do not appear in the foreground of the museums' narrative; visitors are encouraged to believe that the products 'arrive' miraculously and without agency, for the benefit of consumers (Porter and Wombell 1991).

Within the productive sector, the preoccupation of museums with the capital intensive, staple industries, and with histories of the industrial revolution and its aftermath, have created a sectoral imbalance the consequence of which is to represent women as relatively insignificant. Museums which have developed since the middle of this century have concentrated their activity on the industries of the primary (extractive) and secondary (manufacturing) sectors; the tertiary (service and distribution) sector is not well-represented. This is the sector where women worked in the greatest numbers: in food, clothing, catering, shops, hotel and residential service.

This imbalance is not circumstantial. Many towns in the north of England have industrial museums relating to local industries: industrial museums in Bradford, Leeds and Halifax for the local woollen industries, for example. In Sheffield, with the Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet already established around the early steel industry, the Museums Department decided to pursue and extend the theme of steel at Kelham Island, taking precedence over the other famous local industry of sweet-making. York, with extensive tertiary sector industries such as food, catering, hotels and residential work, has no equivalent industrial museum. (The National Railway Museum is concerned with national collections, and with transport artefacts and histories, rather than with local occupations, travel and tourism).

Within the industries which they choose to represent, museums create a progressive narrative, with an emphasis on temporal and technological change. They concentrate on the obvious technologies of production and the central processes. Implicitly, through the chosen themes, and the progressive sequences and genealogy of collections, museums glorify a history which expresses itself through a rich, diversified and highly differentiated material culture. They downplay those areas of work where tools, materials and skills have endured in simple and undifferentiated forms, with few observable changes. They tell a story of smooth, unfolding technical development which is strongly progressive and celebratory, as I have shown in each of the case studies. At Kelham Island Museum, the narrative pays tribute to technical achievements and to working craft skills; it elaborates and develops the narrative through a series of inventions and improvements, and downplays the more enduring, less capitalised and differentiated edged tool industry. At the NMPFT, the narrative offers the progress towards lighter, cheaper, hand-held and 'foolproof' equipment and larger, cheaper, more colourful and life-like images; towards moving images without the judder of cine and, in the future, further individual control through image manipulation. At York Castle Museum, the narrative similarly offers progress towards more available and sophisticated home appliances which, increasingly, take the work out of housework and allow 'us' to sit back. This is a history of unfolding development, from which agency is removed.

Poststructuralist theory points beyond the forms present in the text to the silences, gaps and omissions. What is missing from these accounts is any reference to the social relations through which these histories were achieved and maintained. Particularly, those stories of struggle and resistance; doubt or hesitation; incomplete achievements; and failure, reversal or decline. The museums present a linear trajectory of better technology and, at the Castle Museum and the

NMPFT, benefits to consumers. In relation to the construction of masculinity and femininity, divisions of sex and skill at work, at home and at leisure are presented as 'given'. Feminist studies, on the other hand, have shown that such divisions in the workplace are the outcome of actions by organised male labour over time to exclude women from the high wage areas of the central production process; that these actions were contested and only partially achieved; further, that employers played off men's and women's labour against each other to their own advantage (for example, Cockburn 1981). They have shown that the relations of work and leisure in the home are shifting and changing; that 'the home' and 'the family' do not carry fixed and transcendent meanings; they are constantly shifting through internal and external changes (for example, Bereano, Bose and Arnold 1985). Technology studies have focussed not on the trajectory from origins to the present, or from raw materials to finished goods; rather, they have sought 'critical moments' in which the stability of meaning of a technology collapses through some external event or 'shock', and it is re-shaped and re-formulated to take on new meanings and a new stability (Ormrod 1994). Here, technology studies make a connection with Foucault's analysis of discourse, in concentrating on discontinuity, and the imposition of event (Foucault 1981: 67).

In the case study of Kelham Island Industrial Museum, I suggested that such 'critical moments' existed: for example, the Sheffield Outrages of the mid-nineteenth century when men and masters fought over skill and pay; or the first and second world wars of the twentieth century when women worked in those areas of production which had previously 'belonged' to men. I described how these were not included: the first because it was considered too difficult and contentious; the second, presumably, because it was not considered sufficiently important. The static form of museum displays makes it more difficult to convey these conflicts than, say, in theatre or writing;

but some museums have developed exhibition techniques through which the dynamic of conflict can be represented, for example the struggles between employers and workers at the Museum of Work in Sweden described in Chapter Eight.

In the case study of the York Castle Museum, the most obvious omission is the social and sexual division of labour in housework. In the displays, domestic service is described as a former occupation for women, and the presence of servants is assumed in some panels; but the fact that paid domestic work continues in the home is not acknowledged. Equally, the displays do not refer to the contradiction between women's increasing labour force participation outside the home, and their continuing labour within it[1]. Finally, the progressive stories of technological improvement and labour-saving appliances are not offset by any account of the long hours which are still spent on housework. Cockburn and Ormrod's study of the microwave oven shows how such an artefact can be dissected in a way which cuts across the linear story told in museums; examining the new work which the microwave produces, for example, and at changing patterns within households for preparing and eating food (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993).

Domestic work is notoriously difficult to represent, because it is ephemeral and obvious only when it has not been done; but two examples show that it can be achieved. A brilliant depiction of housework was created and photographed by Nina Leen, for the magazine Life; this might equally have been created in a museum (Life 16 June 1947)(Illustration 7). The studio 'set' included twenty-eight beds, made up, piles of crockery and rows of cutlery, washed and cleaned;

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[1]   According to research carried out by Gallup in 1990, 62% of women do all their household's dusting, cleaning and vacuuming, compared with 3% of men; 87% of women do all their household's washing and ironing, compared with 1% of men (all washing) and 2% (all ironing) (Bedell 1992).

clothes washed, ironed and folded; food prepared and consumed; cleaning materials used. The whole setting was framed by the 'obvious' technologies of the home: a washing machine, a clothes line, an ironing board and iron; a vacuum cleaner, mop and bucket. Again, an exhibition at the Women's Museum in Denmark (described in Chapter Eight) shows that issues of sex and skill can be included in displays, in a way which light-heartedly shows that technological progress doesn't necessarily operate to women's advantage.

In the Kodak Museum at the NMPFT, efforts were made in the final section of the gallery to create a story which challenged technological determinism. For example, the display 'Who's the fool?' showed the faults of 'foolproof' cameras and placed the blame on their design and not on the users; the graphic panels 'Pictures of Affluence' exposed the pictorial rhetoric of affluence and poverty; panels on colour resolution showed that different colour films are not more or less 'truthful'. However, these sit awkwardly within the larger frame of the whole Kodak Museum, which tells the conventional story of progress.

<u>Illustration 7</u>

'One Week's Work for a Housewife', <u>Life</u>, 16 June 1947: this photograph brilliantly captures the work of the home.

In these case studies, we can see the discontinuity <u>within</u> the museum discourse: the different rituals of each discipline, or genre, and the incomplete and contradictory characteristics within each. We can see these as distinct discourses and consider them as 'discontinuous practices which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other' (Foucault 1981: 67). Broadly speaking, the museums studied are all dealing with a similar historical period - from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century to the present - in Great Britain. They are all focussed upon the material culture of production and mass consumption for use and pleasure. Yet a particular discipline, selection, narrative and design has been imposed on each; because of this, it is difficult to read across them, to make connections or to merge them into any coherent understanding of the past.

Each museum studied, in its discipline and displays, adheres to a narrow definition, and to the exercise of certain rules and procedures which suppress or exclude other viewpoints, expressions and possibilities. In the Kodak Museum, for example, the curators and designers might have made a reference to the ways in which women supported the predominantly male activity of 'serious' amateur photography at home. In the Pepper's Ghost display, as the scene of the bathroom shifts to makeshift darkroom and back again, it might have included a figure of a woman scouring the bath clean. Again, the displays at Kelham Island Industrial Museum used strongly masculine examples in the section 'What is Steel?'; they might have chosen to add examples of the widespread use of steel in the cutlery, food packaging and white goods industries.

Most of all, this narrow and myopic view excludes everything which lies outside its chosen frame of local or national activity. Thus some narratives cannot be concluded, and others cannot be told

at all. The relations of multinational production and the global assembly line, with their
corollary, of local and national deindustrialisation, are excluded or downplayed: yet these have
had a major impact in all of the industries (domestic appliances; steel; photography) around
which the museums in the case studies base their identity and histories. Michael Wallace argues
for exactly the opposite approach: instead of avoiding the story of capital flight, museums should
confront it. He suggests that museums might, for example, trace the destination of local
companies which closed factories and left; compare the working conditions of new company
employees with those of nineteenth century employees in the same company or industry; pay
attention to the way that expansion of multinationals abroad creates new flows of immigrants to
the host country; and present the debates over the responses to deindustrialisation (Wallace 1987:
17-19).

In the museums studied, past production and present consumption are glorified. The
consumption stories at the Castle Museum and NMPFT exclude industrial production processes
and people, to focus on the technologies in their promotion, selling and consumption. The
production story at Kelham Island cannot be concluded, because production has moved beyond
the frame set by the museum, of local production, and beyond the exhibition techniques on which
it relies. In their exhibitions, industrial museums use the huge scale and open architecture of
nineteenth and early twentieth century industrial machines to stand for productive capacity and
performance, and the power of capital over labour. They suggest the heroic stories of inventors
and the worthy toil of craft and skilled workers, wielding power and skill in a close and
interactive relationship with technology. However, they have no equivalent artefacts, techniques
or metaphors to depict contemporary industrial production: the technologies are less obviously
specialised and their internal workings are hidden; the scale of industrial production is enormous

and lies in the sequence of work, rather than individual elements; production is mechanised and vertically integrated; much of the labour force is semi-skilled, working at routine and repetitive tasks. Indeed, the characteristics and skills of this work are those traditionally associated with women's work which, as I have shown, is difficult to convey through a system of representation based on artefacts and has usually been omitted from the museum narrative.

Museums do not depict the movement of capital and jobs from their locality, and the increasing feminisation of industrial work which remains; nor do they represent the economic activities in the tertiary industrial sector and in consumer services where more and more people earn their living. Life insurance, household services, hotels and catering, medical services, hairdressing, vehicle services, travel and tourism: these are the growth industries of the last decade (Hutton 1991). Yet they are subjects which very few museums have addressed. Those which have done so have found that such subjects are challenging, demanding new ways of collecting, exhibiting, and thinking beyond distinctive and local cultures (Jenkinson 1989: 149-51). For most museums, it is easier to continue to rescue past curiosities than to survey and select from present commonplaces: to take the cobbler's workshop rather than the modern heelbar (Kenyon 1992).

In the three museums studied, the York Castle Museum is concerned with the material culture of the home, predominantly associated with women; Kelham Island Industrial Museum with the material culture of industrial production, predominantly associated with men; and the NMPFT with the material culture of a leisure industry and activity, common to both men and women. Comparing the examples, I argue that these are positioned within a gendered discourse of difference, in which masculine attributes are relatively superior (Figure 5). In the examples, objects associated with men appear to speak for themselves, in an active and masculine discourse

of power and achievement; the narrative structure, interpretation and subject position invite the reader/visitor's identification and, sometimes, participation. They celebrate past achievements, and offer the promise and excitement of future possibilities and opportunities, further control and exercise of individuality. The representations are deep and varied. On the other hand, those objects associated with women appear to be spoken for, in narratives which render women themselves - as workers, operators and users - passive and redundant, or peripheral. The narrative structure, interpretation and subject position close off the possibility of close identification or participation by readers/visitors. The representations are shallow and muted. This is a feminine discourse of utility and passivity: it does not celebrate power and achievement; it shows the certainty of the present, but does not promise possibility and opportunity in the future.

Figure 5: <u>A Table of Difference, and Differential Table</u>

The relationships of sexual difference through which meanings and identities are articulated in the case studies of museums.

<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>
public	private
production	consumption
productivity	utility
named	un-named, anonymous
workplace	no place at work
man	girl
crafts	chores
skills	natural attributes
products, work	appearance, self
value	price
quantitative, performing	labour-saving/-removing
work	hobbies
head, intellect	body, heart
men of steel	hearts of gold
in control of	controlled by
named occupations, professions	housewife
speaking	spoken for
active voice	passive voice
serious	funny
weighty	light
exchange	gossip
hardware	software
interacting with (technology)	recipients of (technology)
heroic	unreliable
exposed to danger	dangerous to men?
modern, progressive	archaic, static

open   closed

subject   object

discovery   understood at a glance

deep   shallow

us   them

<u>Illustration 8</u>

'We won't play nature to your culture': Barbara Kruger presents the woman as blind, supine; but also suggests that this position is part of a game whose rules can be broken (Kruger 1983: 28).

7.2 A Table of Difference, and Differential Table: the Rhetoric of the Museum

In this title, I seek to capture the idea of difference as distinction, and difference as comparison and interrelationship. 'Difference' is defined as 'a quality which distinguishes one thing from another'; a 'differential' expresses a relationship between two different parts brought together as, for example, in a differential tone: when two tones are sounded together, the tone of the differential frequency is the difference of their frequencies. The difference with which I am concerned is sexual difference. I see the museum as a chart, or table, on which these differences and differentials are marked out. In Figure 5, I define the different qualities attached to masculinity and femininity in museums, as traced in the preceding case studies. In this section, I show that how these differences brought together in a differential and interrelated rhetoric in the museum.

By rhetoric, I mean the way that the museums expresses itself and persuades others. This includes: the museum's position and location; the design and divisions of external and internal space; the character of the museum as expressed in the methods of interpretation and communication, through the use of space, light, colour, sound, texture and language. I treat these as elements used actively within a gendered discourse, to clad the stage for the chosen and explicit message, the subject matter, themes and content of collections and displays; to reinforce or subtly revise the messages of objects and texts. I argue that, in this rhetoric, the chosen and dominant expressions are those of the head versus the body, of science versus the senses, and of hard materials and textures versus soft ones.

Of the museum sites and buildings studied here, none is purpose-built; each has been chosen for adaptation from another purpose. These carefully restored and remodelled buildings are as constrained, and as deeply imbued with meanings, as the earlier 'classical' museum buildings; but museum staff are less sensitive to them. The obvious meanings of the imposing nineteenth century public museum buildings are recognised: elevated, with steps, pillars and pediments, they literally and symbolically imposed their meanings as temples of worship to the (classical) deities of knowledge and civilisation. These meanings are culturally problematic, imbued with Eurocentric and imperialist values, and inappropriate to the more multicultural, informal, local and modest ambitions of contemporary museums (Bernal 1988; Haraway 1991). In such programmes, these buildings also present many practical constraints on access, internal flexibility, operation and maintenance.

Those creating and working in the newer museums, in carefully restored and converted historic buildings, are less sensitive to their meanings and constraints. In this way, museums with a strong commitment to democratisation, to local people and their experience have been created in buildings where previous generations were interrogated and incarcerated. For example, the Merseyside Museum of Labour History (opened in 1987, closed in 1991) occupied the former Magistrate's court in Liverpool: the working men and women of the city would have known the inside of this building only as defendants, witnesses or perhaps as observers in the public gallery. The Norfolk Agricultural Museum is housed in the former workhouse at Gressenhall.

Similarly, the York Castle Museum was created in the former Female Prison, and later extended into the Debtors' Prison. The court still meets in the same complex. Thus, a building of detention, designed to deter voluntary entrants or escapees, and to control its involuntary

occupants, has been turned into a place of public spectacle and display, where collections and assemblages are offered to the gaze of many. The deep plan of the buildings and the narrow spaces of cells make the museum into a complex and, at times, claustrophobic internal space. The former exercise yards offered the only large, high spaces within the buildings: these were converted to form the larger display areas and 'streets'. Moreover, the prison buildings were designed to maintain strong boundary defences; thus, the museum has been unable to expand laterally into adjacent open areas, with associated buildings and large artefacts on open display.

At Sheffield, the Kelham Island Industrial Museum is located in a former industrial area; as a transport depot and substation, it was a building used not by a huge local workforce, but by a small core of transport maintenance staff. As an operational unit for a public service which had its public interface in other parts of the city, the depot was built with little attention to its public face and external appearance. The choice of this building for the museum neither directly meets the museum's purpose, as a museum of the later steel industry and a repository of memory and experience for former steelworkers, nor appeals to its public through location and accessibility. Although the museum 'stands for' a large rolling mill or steelworks, it does not present the specific characteristics of site, scale and interconnections with other buildings and services of the steelworks elsewhere in the city. The building is surrounded by neglected and derelict buildings, with few passersby; the area is poorly served by public transport. Converted to a museum, the buildings have been stripped of any references or indications of former use (because these would be 'misleading', given its current status). The yards have been paved with setts and the brickwork cleaned. The 'sign' by which it announces itself, the huge Bessemer converter, is difficult to understand and foreboding. Together, these messages amount to a stark and uninviting statement about the museum.

The NMPFT was built in the 1960s as a civic theatre in a mixed culture, leisure and commercial complex. Thus, unlike the other case studies, it was designed for popular use and mass attendance. The building has a huge, curved convex glass wall framed within the concrete structure at the front of the building, looking out over the town centre. The glass wall gives the impression of a television screen, echoing the building's new identity; it conveys a message that the museum is extrovert, looking out and open to those who wish to look in, contrasting with the more inward-looking and closed messages of the other museums studied. Inside the building, the galleries for permanent and temporary exhibitions are tucked along the side and back of the huge IMAX auditorium: the function of 'museum' is relatively subordinated to that of 'show' (Figure 3).

In the three case studies, we have seen that spatial arrangement, design and display are employed to convey messages about the museum, exhibitions and collections. The most immediate difference is between the dark, subdued displays at Sheffield, and the light, colourful and playful displays in the exhibitions at York and Bradford. These echo references used in many other museums: the first indicating labour, toil and the past; the second indicating supply, consumption, leisure and the present/future.

Kelham Island Industrial Museum builds upon references to a plant room or factory floor. The layout of space in the museum is relatively simple and linear: the designers used a simple floor plan with a linear aisle for the main narrative, and wings or small rooms for developing aspects of the narrative (Figure 2). The walls are bare brick; the screens are painted in flat, muted colours; the materials used for display are hard and flat textures: metal sheeting, matte rubber or linoleum for floorcoverings; industrial mesh for barriers and screens. There are no folds, rich

weaves or tactile surfaces. The introductory section of the display, 'What is Steel?' is clean, even

clinical, with panels and exhibits which are sleek and gleaming, and bright lighting. After this, in

the rest of the displays, the light levels are low, with a clear passage of light down the aisle, and

pools of light to focus on different portraits, cameos and settings within the narrative in the aisle

and wings. The design provides an understated and evocative backdrop; spectacle is provided by

the huge scale of the objects themselves: the Bessemer converter, the River Don engine and the

big ladle. Thus, the design both adds to and is part of the masculine idiom: suggesting the cool

and mechanical, rather than warm and corporal, power of the technology exhibited.

The narrative here is presented in texts and diagrams on graphic panels. The typefaces and

graphic styles are solid and uncomplicated; they harmonise with the display environment and are

suggestive of straightforward, serious talk: black-and-white facts. The exhibits - particularly the

working exhibits and engines - are interpreted in what J J Corn has called the 'internalist' mode:

they are described in terms of their internal characteristics, performance, materials, perhaps

manufacture - a system which appeals more to men than to women (Corn 1989). Colour,

humour and inflexion in the panels are reserved for women - as subjects and objects of the

humour - in the texts for the medieval period, and the buffer girls. As I suggested in the case

study, the narrative of this display is a cul-de-sac, leading only to the small shops of the 'Little

Mesters'. The cul-de-sac is symbolic; the spatial arrangement and design are retrospective and

reverential, with no visual, verbal or material reference to the 'clean' technologies of the

contemporary steel industry, or to their location in central and south-east Asia.

The NMPFT, by contrast, is full of visual, verbal and material references to 'clean' and 'sweet'

technologies. It makes few references to the derivation of these technologies; the people who

produce them; or their environmental impact. The message of the displays is of science and progress, delivered into our hands, for consumption and pleasure/leisure. The visual and spatial message and pace are varied, upbeat and playful. In the Kodak Museum, the designers divided the exhibition space into a complex plan, arranged around a central core, to create the effect of discovery and revelation (Figure 4). They created spectacle and surprise through the central lens and the variety of the displays. They divided the space into further compartments for each chronological period. In these, they used differing materials, textures, colours, light levels, graphic styles and interpretative techniques to add to the experience as well as to explain the message. Lighting arrangements are used to accentuate atmosphere and exhibits: for example, subdued uplighters in the 'Serious Amateur' gallery contrast with bright fluorescent signs in the latest gallery. Some of the gallery messages are transmitted audio-visually, with sound and projection and with 'period' effects, such as the magic lantern show; others through hands-on interactive mechanical and electronic exhibits, such as the fairground shooting booth; others again through special effects, such as the Pepper's Ghost darkroom/bathroom, where mirrors are used to show a two-way scenario. In the last gallery, the newest technologies themselves become exhibits, with the video manipulation device. The museum uses sensation, discovery and new technologies: its style is more commercial than the older, didactic museums (Fisher 1990: 34).

In 'Every Home Should Have One', the York Castle Museum uses a rhetoric which again suggests 'clean' and 'sweet' technology, consumption and leisure through the shop-style layout, and through the use of light colours and clean surfaces. But the layout of the gallery is open and simple (Figure 1). In other galleries at the same museum, there are references to domestic settings: lower ceiling heights and smaller spaces; warm and comfortable colours; variations of colour, texture and pattern; local lighting. Here, however, the rhetoric suggests a commercial

environment: grouping and separating the exhibits according to type; elevating them on stands; mounting panels of coloured advertising on the wall behind, as backdrops; providing small, low graphic panels, like showcards or pricetags, which place emphasis on price and consumption rather than on labour and production or, alternatively, on exploration and discovery or variety. The atmosphere of the gallery is cool, clean, sanitised and quiet. The only sounds and movements are those of the compilation of programmes played through a television set in the section on home entertainment. There is nothing in this gallery to suggest the smells, noise, mess and unceasing repetition of housework, nor the processes which would accompany these machines, if they were working: disposing of food or vacuum cleaner waste; loading and emptying the washing machine; washing the mixer-blender parts; clearing the blocked plumbing under the sink. Compared with the displays at NMPFT, the gallery has a flat arrangement with little variety. Few sophisticated technologies are used. There are no striking centrepieces or surprising corners: this is not a place of spectacle, drama, play, discovery and revelation, but a place of affirmation and prescription.

In all of the case studies, the designs use references and modalities which are seen as masculine, supporting the selection of material and narratives. They are abstract and formal, rather than organically ordered, fixed rather than flexible. The idioms chosen for lighting, flooring and wallcoverings are associated with production and promotion, the factory floor and showroom, rather than with the office or the home: pattern and decoration are minimised, materials are hard and spare, colours are subdued or harsh. These create an environment which confirms the popular notion that museums are fixed and intransigent, rather than fluid and flexible.

Here, I have shown the discontinuous, and sometimes inconsistent, messages and expressions in the rhetoric of the museums studied. I have shown that they all, in different ways, resort to references and modalities which have masculine connotations. These may be unintended and innocent; they are, nevertheless, messages which can be <u>read</u> as masculine.

We might dream of forms and spaces outside these heavily determined collections and spaces; but in discourse all space is determined, there is no space outside or beyond it, even in the unconscious. Rather, the prospect of new forms and spaces can be achieved through new forms of determination, new expressions and discourses which suggest the transient and incomplete nature of meaning, represent the discordant and competing discourses in circulation, and invite new kinds of participation and identification.

In the concluding section of this chapter, I argue that museum staff must develop production methods appropriate to the complexity of themes, materials and spaces which they are working with. They must grasp the complex and symbiotic relationship between message and method: between abstract ideas and themes, and concrete objects, texts and pictures. They must also understand the museum as a public space, and the messages it sends out to visitors about who is welcome and who is not. In Chapter Eight, I describe some projects which set out from a different premise to create new messages, methods and forms for the museum exhibition.

7.3 Evaluation of the Methods of Study; the Difficulty, and Necessity, of Theory

I set out to undertake a work of criticism; to deconstruct the text in order to reconstruct it as newly intelligible, and plural. In deconstructing the text, I took the position of reading as a woman. This position unsettles the stability of museum representations as objective and inclusive. It raises questions of history and fiction, identity and subjectivity. It calls on different registers and opens a wider repertoire and range of themes, techniques and readings.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I examined theories relevant to this study: literary criticism; Foucault and the power/knowledge relation; poststructuralism; psychoanalysis. These theories have been used to analyse other forms of cultural production: here, I have applied them to museums. Through all of these runs the thread of feminism - not as a theory in itself, but as a perspective and concern throughout.

In this study, I examined museums as 'texts'. I analysed their public presence, chosen identity and themes, displays and exhibited collections, as the public, most accessible and prevalent forms. In Chapter Three, I examined the development of museums in England, and especially the development of history museums in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I described elements during this period which are crucial to analysing the articulation of history and the construction of notions of femininity and masculinity in museum developments. I described how these are embodied in the identities and positioning of museums; in the selection and organisation of space and collections; and in the practices of museum staff. I mapped out significant developments and underlying currents.

Moving from a general overview to specific case studies, I examined the articulation of history and gender in museums. I used these case studies to illustrate and develop the hypothesis. I

illuminated particular aspects of the theory developed in Chapter Two in each of the case studies.

For the case studies, I selected museums with identities and themes related to production and consumption, work and leisure; crucially, also, to masculinity and femininity. The York Castle Museum is a museum concerned with everyday life and the home - the domestic production of services and small crafts, comfort and consumption. In the division of activity and history which museums construct, these are the areas associated with women. The Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield is a museum of work - industrial production, performance and achievement. In the same division, these are the areas associated with men. The National Museum of Photography, Film and Television in Bradford is a museum which takes as its theme contemporary mass media and their consumption. In this case study, I dealt with an area which is less clearly demarcated as feminine or masculine: both men and women are actively involved. This case study also allowed me to examine the text more closely, both as writer and reader.

In the case studies, I sought and used a range of sources, where these existed and were made available (see below, 7.4). The first was the museum itself, its presence, layout, public displays and promotional literature. The second source was quantitative and qualitative market data on the museum's visitors and audience: who visits, where they come from, what they are looking for, and who doesn't come. The third source was reports, papers and accounts relating to the museum: 'internal' documents, such as committee reports, and 'external' papers, such as published accounts of projects and interviews, and museum publications. The fourth source was working notes, records of meetings, research files and plans relating to the specific projects studied. The fifth source was interviews conducted with the staff who played a key role in the projects studied,

as authors/curators. The final source was critical reviews of the displays and of the museums themselves from relevant journals and, occasionally, seminars.

In using these methods of study, the major problems which I encountered were: the insubstantiality of source materials to 'ground' the reading; the complexity of the museum itself, making it difficult to 'read' as a 'text'; the difficulty of - and my difficulty with - theory.

In the course of this research, and especially in the case studies, I have sought source materials but found them absent, or few and scattered. I have sought access to materials, in interviews and letters; these have not been fruitful (see Chapters Four and Five). This presented me with practical problems: it took longer to trace the materials, becasue they were scattered, and the searches were discouraging. It presented me with a methodological problem, too: I feel that the research, and consequently the conclusions that I reach, are insubstantial; I feel that the case studies in Chapters Four and Five are weaker than that in Chapter Six, where I had direct, 'inside' knowledge and experience, where I both created records and had access to others. But, at the same time, this lack of substance is evidence in itself: evidence of a lack of rigour and methodology among museum staff, in creating records of their work; and in maintaining and giving access to those records as a body of reference to which they, and others can return.

In 'reading' the museum exhibition as representation and text, I have confronted its complexity - its many layers of production and meaning. These reside in (at least) the physical layout and design; the sources and choices of objects, images, texts and other materials; the condition, position and presentation of these elements; the light, movement, sounds and smells; the visitors who come to the museum; the way that they enter, move around and leave the space; whether it is

at the beginning, or the end, of a longer visit, or whether it is the sole purpose of their visit. This complexity at the level of the exhibition is further compounded by the complexity of the museum as a much larger system of production: its hierarchical organisation; the conceptual, and physical, separation and devolution of disciplines or departments; the competing demands and pressures to raise money and visitor numbers, and to care for the collections; the role of external specialists, consultants and opinion formers. I have attempted to show that these different pressures or internal forces are sometimes overlapping, sometimes combined, and sometimes in opposition to each other. The methodological difficulty here was that of deciding where to 'pitch' the research to 'ground' the reading: which materials to select; which staff to interview?

Together, these problems - the insubstantiality of sources, and the complexities of the museum - explain a gap which I have encountered in my research: the absence, or paucity, of a strong critical culture which resists the intended meaning of museum texts and produces alternative readings - and new texts. In Chapter Six, such materials were available to me, and they gave me leverage on the museum text: to see it much more clearly, from the outside as it were, and make comparisons between my own and other readings, other points of view. As described in Chapter One, the intellectual climate in which museums operate has already developed considerably during the time in which I have undertaken this research, and contributed to my methodological approach and understanding. But detailed, critical and constructive studies of individual projects are still lacking in Britain. The insubstantiality of records, the complexity of museums, and the need for detailed, critical studies - these are points to which I return in the final section of this chapter.

I emphasise the value of theory to this study. Only through theory have I been able to analyse the museums studied, and to understand their underlying patterns, silences and contradictions. Further, the theory has assisted me in understanding how museums can change, or be changed. This will happen not at the immediate level of the case study and individual display but through a full understanding of the theory in context, in the whole body of the museum and in the relationship between writer and reader; museum producer and museum consumer, or visitor. In this way, theory has enabled me to see more clearly and to select what might be relevant and useful in developing a new museum practice.

However, the process of developing an adequate and robust theory has been difficult for me, for many reasons. I studied at undergraduate level in economic history, an empirical and non-theoretical course; at the time when I undertook museum professional training, the course concentrated on learning practical skills rather than developing critical techniques. Therefore, at the outset of this research project I was inexperienced in the reading, or application, of theory. The whole field was unfamiliar and of no apparent use to me. Theory was difficult also because there were few points of reference for applied research in museum studies (see above, 1.1). The feminist movement, from which I drew initial inspiration and encouragement for this work, was undergoing its own processes of development, fracture and disagreement about theory (see above, 2.2).

Throughout the research process, I felt that I was groping for appropriate theories without a clear knowledge of what was available, or what might be useful, to me. The postgraduate seminars at the Department of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester brought new theories to my attention, and enabled me to share the experience of using theories in museums with other

students. I came across other theories almost by chance, by following lines of enquiry in articles, informal discussions and occasional seminars.

My goal in this research was programmatic: to increase and improve the representation of women in museum displays and collections. Initially, I felt that this could be done simply, by adding material which represented women's lived experience in the past to displays and collections. As I studied further, I began to understand that the whole structure of museums - abstract knowledge and organisation as well as concrete manifestations of buildings, exhibitions and collections - was built upon categories and boundaries which embodied assumptions about men and women, masculine and feminine (Porter 1987). As a further step, I understood that these assumptions about men and women could not be anchored by reference to any 'real' men and women, but were positional, imperfect and always in the making (Porter 1991a).

The theories which I found most compelling were those which were developed in literary criticism and language: in discourse. There are connections and parallels between literary and linguistic forms and museums, but the latter are much deeper and more complex in the interrelationships of conceptual and material, two- and three-dimensional things, and the layers of selection, arrangement, images, texts and collections. While film studies and cultural studies offered some middle ground between literary texts and museum exhibitions, these studies have been largely concerned with obviously constructed, fictional and less solid forms of representation. Consequently, it was difficult for me to apply the theory and to develop appropriate methods of criticism. I found that detailed physical descriptions were necessary to ground the subsequent analysis: however, in the process of writing them, I was drawn into the more familiar empirical, and personal, forms of description. Throughout the research process, I

found that the material 'thingyness' of museums and the substance of forms contrasted with the abstract, relational and provisional theories of positionality, subjectivity and fictional identity. The certainty and insistent physical <u>presence</u> of museum exhibitions clamoured for attention and appreciation, as it were, and threatened to obscure the view and muffle the sound of those things which lay behind, beyond, and beneath it: the gaps, silences and omissions which, as a critic, I have sought to 'speak'. Further, these theories rejected any humanistic view of the author as the founder and source of meaning; yet, at the same time, in gathering the materials for the analysis, I had to rely on individuals and authors. I return to this point below.

As I pointed out in the conclusion to Chapter Five, the theories which I used, and the deconstructive method, can become self-perpetuating, circulating endlessly through difference and deferral without closure. I have had to remind myself of the goal of this research project and to step out of endless deconstruction into reconstruction and recommendations for change. In this, I have benefited from sharing the research and its implications in professional and academic seminars and publications. In seminars, people have emphasised the importance of making clear and constructive suggestions; they have made other suggestions; they have brought relevant projects to my attention; they have given me encouragement and the courage to write and speak. I was extremely fortunate to be invited to participate in a seminar with a global perspective on women and museums; this, in turn, gave me information and access to projects in northern Europe which have fed back into the research (Porter 1991b; see Chapter Eight).

My role as a museum practitioner, speaking from inside the museum profession, has been both a strength and a weakness in this research. It has been a strength because I speak with professional knowledge: my work cannot be ignored, or dismissed as irrelevant and ill-informed, in the way

that criticism by people working outside the profession might be. The research itself, and my work as a practitioner, have been strengthened because I have moved constantly between research, reflection and writing, and the testing and application of theory and ideas in everyday practice. On the other hand, my position has been a weakness because the research has been conducted through specific, local case studies and critical analyses which have sometimes complicated, and threatened to jeopardise, professional relationships. These issues were complicated by the insubstantiality of research materials: I was forced to rely heavily on individuals in order to compile materials, so that the research itself became very personal and individual. At the same time, the core of my research method has been a practice of <u>reading</u> which rejects the <u>author</u>ised version of the text and opens up other versions and readings. In this way, I placed myself outside the text, and aligned with other audiences - the readers - rather than with my fellow professionals - the authors. I bit the (author's) hand that fed me (the materials).

Biting the hand that fed me: this figure of speech potently describes another, very immediate and personal, difficulty which arose from my position as a museum practitioner and as a researcher. In relationships with colleagues in the museums where I worked, I encountered suspicion and tension; some felt that I was distancing myself from immediate concerns and constraints, or undermining real achievements; that I was disloyal. My difficulty with theory was not simply my own struggle, as described above; it was also the difficulty which other people had with my research, and with the theoretical position which underpinned it. In the spirit of criticism, I laid my own work open for discussion; in the spirit of museums, this was seen as a breach of faith.

7.4 Towards a Critical Culture? What Remains to be Done

In this research, I have demonstrated the importance and the productivity of criticism in museums, in opening to scrutiny the closure and fixity of narrative and discursive forms and in producing new meanings and possibilities. I have demonstrated that the <u>effects</u> of uncritical and inward-looking museum practices are not merely stylistic and rhetorical, but reductive, limiting and unequal. These practices limit the future of museums: setting them on an course of apparent decline and stagnation by tying them to an increasingly distant past; or on a course of self-destruction by attaching them to an increasingly exciting and mediated present and future which is not restricted to, nor primarily resides in, museums. These practices limit the audiences who come to museums, the reflections of themselves that they find there, and the ways that they behave and communicate with each other and with the museum. I have shown that these practices serve to reduce and limit women <u>and</u> men through discursive constructions of masculinity and femininity. In this section, I discuss the conditions which would feed and nurture the development of a critical culture, and some directions that future research might take. In the concluding chapter, I describe some projects which are already contributing to a critical culture, through new practices and working methods.

Museums are a form of cultural production, to be compared with other forms. Museums claim that they are an important medium, contributing to our cultural life and enriching our understanding of history and, through history, the present; they claim to speak authoritatively and objectively. In the last twenty years, museums have felt the challenge of other media - particularly, television and leisure or theme parks - and have responded by emphasising their special strengths of integrity, authenticity and truthfulness to the past. To endorse these claims, museums should expect to provide the evidence to substantiate their aims and their practice: for

broad aims and objectives; for strategic, policy and programme, issues; for the decisions in any particular project relating to selection and editorial control, audience and education, evaluation and revision. They should also expect to be subjected to the same review, criticism and analysis that is exercised in other forms of cultural production, such as television and film. Indeed, this study is such an exercise.

In pursuing this research, I have chosen three case studies, each of which examines a relatively new project, created within the last twelve years. Yet I have found that the process of research and enquiry is difficult and unwelcome; that evidence to substantiate the decisions and choices made is fragmentary and scattered, with huge gaps; and that, where the evidence does exist, it may be sketchy and even ill-researched or ill-informed. The absence and/or weakness of such evidence has, in turn, led to gaps and weaknesses in the analysis. In this section, I turn to what remains to be done: both in museums, and in further research and analysis.

In all the case studies, I found a lack of clear and detailed information about the museum, its foundation, identity, philosophy and collecting intentions. The NMPFT is a relatively new establishment, enacted by Parliament, and with a high public profile; it therefore has a clearer description and set of pronouncements of itself than the other museums. Even so, these cannot be located in a single archive: they are scattered and incomplete.

In moving from the general descriptions of the organisations to detailed studies of the projects, I found an almost complete absence of information, research notes or supporting data for the projects studied at the York Castle Museum and at Kelham Island Industrial Museum. At the NMPFT, the underlying philosophy was documented; formative meetings to develop the brief for

displays were minuted; and research notes for the individual galleries were kept. In none of the projects have I found evidence of a clear 'commissioning process': a brief with specified objectives, audiences, resources and standards, and editorial control; and a specification which details how the project will meet that brief, both practically (in terms of resources and materials) and intellectually (in terms of philosophy, interpretative approach and method). Nor have I found any evidence of product testing - neither in the broad themes for exhibitions and collections, nor in particular approaches and methods of interpretation. In the preceding section, I have examined the effects of these on my research.

The immediate conclusion might be that these documents exist, but are not available for research or enquiry. This conclusion would be supported by the fact that relatively greater resources were available at the NMPFT, where I was a staff member for the duration of the project studied. If this is the case, we must ask why? The museums in the case studies are public organisations, receiving public funding because they exist for the public benefit and to deliver services to the public. Therefore, they should be open and fully accountable to their funders and publics for basic questions relating to function and performance. These might include: what is the precise nature of the service they provide; who is/will have access to these services; what choices are available; what representation and redress will service users be offered (Potter 1986)? Withholding such information from funders and service users is a defensive behaviour which limits accountability and democratisation, and seriously compromises the claims of openness, friendliness and accessibility which museums make. Of more immediate relevance to this study, withholding such information inhibits the development of a vigorous critical culture and dialogue; it raises barriers between those in museums, with the knowledge and information, and

those outside them who, in ignorance, are disempowered and must defer to their superior knowledge.

The second, and more disturbing, conclusion is that this material simply does not exist, because either it has not been collected in the first place or, once collected, it has been neglected or lost. This latter conclusion was confirmed in the course of my research and in the interviews which I conducted with museum staff. For example, the Castle Museum had recorded an interview with Jack Gooddall, a carpenter who worked with John Kirk in setting up the museum at the outset, in the late 1930s. Kirk did not leave any detailed notes or records to explain the sources and methods for the displays which he created; thus, that recorded interview is of great value - both to the museum itself, and to researchers. I was guided to this recording when I interviewed the curator (Suggitt 9 April 1987). However, when I later requested a copy of the tape, or transcript, I was told that the recording had never been transcribed, and could not be located. A further enquiry confirmed that it had been lost (Greaves 30 November 1989).

A second example, from Sheffield, is the absence of any market research information about audiences, visitor expectations or visitor satisfaction at existing service points in the Museums Department. This might have been gathered to inform the choice of location and the planning of the new industrial museum. The process of research itself might have stimulated interest and triggered contributions of memory and collections to the project. Yet no front-end research was carried out; nor was any subsequent, summative research undertaken to establish whether the museum itself and the new displays were successful in achieving their goals, or to inform any modifications and the further planned phases of display.

At NMPFT, market information did exist, but was not directly connected - in time and focus - to the project studied. The first substantial piece of qualitative research was undertaken in 1989, shortly after the Kodak Museum project was fully committed and achieved. It suggested that the whole emphasis of the museum towards photography was relatively unattractive to audiences. However, this research was undertaken primarily to inform a promotional campaign for the whole museum. It was not fully discussed and developed by the Kodak Museum project team. As I showed in Chapter Six, it had profound implications for the collecting, display and interpretation of photography which might usefully have been explored further through follow-up market research.

The fact that this material is lacking has far-reaching implications, both for the organisational development of museums - and, arguably, their very existence - and for their intellectual development through research, analysis and criticism. Recently, services in the public sector have been encouraged to become more customer oriented: to be attentive, responsive, accountable and flexible to their users, or customers. Reports by the Local Government Management Board and the National Consumer Council have criticised organisations which are 'enclosed', self-absorbed, and insensitive to customer needs (Local Government Management Board 1987 and 1988; Potter, 1986). The broad principle of customer focus, with an additional emphasis on value for money, has been applied specifically to local authority museums and art galleries by the Audit Commission. In the report of its findings, The Road to Wigan Pier?, the Commission comments that 'in practice ... museum services have tended to evolve in a piecemeal way, often without clear objectives' (Audit Commission 1991: 5). The report recommends that:

> Many local authorities need to carry out a fundamental reappraisal of their
>
> support for museums. This should address the authority's objectives in

supporting museums, the services to provide and at whom to aim them, collection

management policies, management and operation of the service and performance

monitoring[2]. (Ibid: 29)

Such a recommendation calls for a very different organisational culture in museums - one which

is purposeful, planned, reflective and responsive. Without this sense of purpose, I believe that

museums are extremely vulnerable to cuts and closures at a time of cutbacks. I cite the example

of Sheffield again, and believe that the absence of clear objectives and planning, customer focus,

and market data have contributed to the heavy cuts in staff and services which the Kelham Island

Industrial Museum suffered in 1993. The geographical location of the museum is a much greater

barrier to visiting than had been anticipated; the museum has a weak market presence; the

running costs are high: at the time of these cuts, Kelham Island cost a third of the whole service's

budget, and the cost to the council per visitor was #12 to #13 compared with #2 to #4 at other

sites (Murdin 1993). The response of the council has been to establish the museum as a private,

limited company in 1994.

Of more immediate concern to this study is the effect of the lack of a sense of purpose on the

intellectual development of museums. Unlike other forms of cultural production, museum

displays do not have named authors, footnotes and appendices. Hiding behind the facade of the

display, and behind the guise of an anonymous, authoritative voice, my research suggests that

museum staff are slack, unsystematic and unsophisticated. Their acquisition, research and

production methods are inadequate to the breadth and complexity of theme and material which

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[2]   Some museum authorities have entered into the detail of this exercise but not its spirit: at
      the York Castle Museum, performance review was cited as the reason for withholding
      research information (Letter 6 December 1989).

they undertake to deal with. They read off, and take meaning from, the surface features of objects, images, texts and events; they do not pursue other possible readings, or questions of difference; they close these off with a recourse to fact and truth. Further, they fail to pay attention to, or understand, the wider context of the exhibition and the museum as a public space. This context includes the complex and symbiotic relationship between the abstract - ideas or themes - and the concrete - objects, texts and pictures, arrangements and architecture. It also includes the dynamic relationship between the museum text and the visitor, or reader.

In their practice, museum staff are removed from direct public comment or criticism. Unlike many other public servants, and even other museum staff within their own institution, the museum staff who 'write' the museum 'text' work in isolation from the people for whom they are writing. They have little or no direct, face-to-face contact with their visitors and users. Nor are their texts subjected to vigorous criticism: museum projects are rarely reviewed; most of the reviews which are written are by and for peer museum professionals. The communication model which museum staff use is a one-way, didactic rather than a two-way, dialectical model.

Without a strong sense of direct responsibility to readers - whether colleagues, regular visitors or critics - the authors of museum texts may show an astonishing lack of sophistication and detailed understanding of their material, as the case studies illustrate. For example, at the Castle Museum, the author of the display recounted how he had considered a feminist approach in the displays but had decided to adopt a factual, and humorous, approach instead. Within this simple statement, offered without embarrassment, are contained two equations and their opposites. First, fact is equated with a non-feminist, or masculine, approach; thus, by implication, feminist approaches are not fact, but fiction or distortion. Second, humour is equated with a factual,

therefore masculine, approach; therefore, a feminist approach lacks humour, is humourless. He chose to express humour in the exhibition on the display panels, by uncritically re-presenting texts and images from contemporary handbooks and company advertising. The 'voice' with which the text 'speaks' is a complacent, and patronising, middle-class voice, at odds with the lived experience and class position of many of the museum's visitors. The images in the advertising are humorous only within a discourse pejorative to women and to working people. This humour is as biting and divisive as any feminist humour; but the butt of this humour is different.

Even where museum users, or customers, are invited to participate in the design and development of new museum 'products' - displays and services - they may be unable to comment constructively about what might be done. In the absence of any robust body of museum criticism, widely disseminated and generally known, museum users cannot construct or suggest alternatives; they fall back on what they are familiar with. Another example from the case studies illustrates this point. Sheffield City Council created user panels for many of the service areas, in line with the broad principles of customer focus and accountability cited above. At the Kelham Island Industrial Museum, the user panel and the Keeper did not agree on the issue of armament and disarmament and, specifically, on a single, 'obvious' object, the Grand Slam Bomb. The panel thought that, in line with Council policy against war, the bomb should be removed from display. The Keeper believed that the bomb should remain and that he should not be influenced by short-term political considerations. The reason he gave was that he was acting professionally and impartially to represent an aspect of Sheffield's history and industry (Bostwick and Snowden 20 May 1987). A more informed panel of users, with access to different advice and knowledge, might have challenged this argument. Firstly, the panel might have perceived

that the whole structure and emphasis of the museum was weighted towards the heavy trades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, serving the burgeoning armaments industries of Britain and Europe; they might have called for the inclusion of other, less militaristic and destructive, histories and for a full and explicit acknowledgement of this weighting. Secondly, the panel might have suggested that the bomb should remain on display, but should be suspended from the ceiling, as if about to fall. This brilliantly simple suggestion was made by Samuel Batzli with reference to the National Air and Space Museum, in Washington, to counteract its message of technological optimism and progress (Batzli 1990: 836). The museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution, which invites academics to meet annually to receive reports from senior staff and to debate the activities of the various museums: a debate which acknowledges the skills, perspectives and knowledge of people outside the museum. A user panel in an atmosphere which encourages and fosters informed debate and criticism can generate constructive suggestions for alternatives and, in the process, may subtly challenge the claim of museum staff to a single, objective, truth.

At the NMPFT, local people were invited to participate in the Kodak Museum directly, by bringing their photographs and equipment in and by themselves becoming subjects and objects of display in personal profiles which told their histories. However, the NMPFT ensured that these photographs and histories were admitted to the displays, but no further: the items were taken in on fixed term loans, for the duration of the exhibition, and were not accepted as part of a more permanent history, in the collections.

Arguing from the premise of social responsibility, museums, as public service organisations, should provide mechanisms to learn from service users and to feed back what they have learned

in the shaping of future services. They should be prepared to let the public in to every area of their activity - including the collections. They should be prepared to share the process of criticism, evaluation and feedback with others - their publics, other professionals and interested groups. Only in this way can they develop a more considered and reflective practice, and one capable of dealing with the increasing complexity of contemporary history; with the new array of technologies of representation; and with the increasing sophistication and expectation of audiences themselves. The lack of rigour in museum research method, recording and representation, and the reluctance to engage in the critical process, which I have encountered in the course of this research are not adequate to deal with these trends.

What directions might future research take; and what might museums themselves do to promote future research and development? The research which I have undertaken could be usefully expanded, and extended, by other detailed case studies. As I have explained, my work has developed without recourse to a strong body of criticism; any work which succeeds it will, I hope, build on it and take it further than I have been able to do. This study is limited: it is confined to one region of England (the north), to museums located in cities; and to some permanent exhibitions within those museums. Further research studies might usefully include a broader, or at least different, geographical spread. They might include a museum of agriculture or rural history; and a museum of decorative arts. They might include other aspects of museum programmes: the educational programmes, temporary exhibitions, or specific collections research projects, for example. They might extend the international and cross-cultural dimensions which I have briefly explored (Porter 1991b and Chapter Eight).

Further studies might develop this research by linking it with other museum research in progress which has a strong relevance and relationship to feminism: I cite Helen Coxall's research on museum language as especially relevant (Coxall 1990, 1991). They might also link this research to the social, and feminist, studies of technology with which it has much in common (Cockburn and Ormrod 1993; Wajcman 1991).

This research has been undertaken while I have been working in museums: this has been strenuous and, at times, stressful. On the other hand, the close interaction and dialogue between research and practice has been productive. I suggest that partnerships of museums and academics with critical perspectives and with a purchase on, and knowledge of, the museum as institution are fruitful, and should be continued and developed in projects with a feminist dimension. These might take the form of the close observation of working methods and their effects (cf. Macdonald 1993; Macdonald and Silverstone 1992); or the participation of academic staff in museum project teams.

Teamwork which combines staff from different departments or positions within the museum, and academic staff outside the museum, creates a critical exchange in the making of exhibitions. These teams, when encouraged and supported with appropriate management and resources, can move beyond the narrow boundaries of discipline and territory or beyond the academic conventions of writing to make a productive engagement between the practical and material knowledge of those inside the museum and the fertile ideas and perspectives of those outside (Jenkinson 1993; Fitzgerald and Porter 1994; see also Chapter Six).

Museums may develop a critical understanding by entering into partnerships such as these, and by participating in relevant debates with academics. In Chapter One, I noted and welcomed the increasing number of such debates, and the publications which are produced as a result: but these are attended by a tiny minority of people who actually work in museums. In Chapter Three, I noted and welcomed the more rigorous and critical methods of curatorship being taught at the Department of Museum Studies in Leicester, and already injecting change into museum practices. I also welcome the entry to the profession of people from other vocations and with different backgrounds: for example, with skills in advocacy and a commitment to equality and diversity. The professional association itself is broadening the definition of professional to encompass a wider range of skills and positions within museums - crucially, to include front-of-house staff as professionals - and encouraging debate and action across a wide range of issues through the professional journal. All of these are encouraging the development of a more open, and critical, culture.

Finally, museum staff can engage with their wider audiences in such participatory projects and debates: 'moving away from our historical roles as the gatekeepers and legitimisers of culture' to involve people 'as critics and creators' (Jenkinson 1993: 23). Arguing from the theoretical position which I have chosen, museums have no prior or superior claim to meaning as authors of the work. Poststructuralism <u>author</u>ises readers to re-make the work in their readings. However, the power and authority of the museum, and the messages which it chooses to transmit, are difficult for readers to challenge or dislodge. The question then becomes, how can museums encourage and empower these different readers and readings? In Chapter Eight, I describe some museum projects in Europe, and a small number of projects in Britain, which develop a more

thorough approach to study and to representation; which stimulate and provoke, intentionally and

constructively, as an active element within the displays.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NEW WAYS OF WORKING, NEW REPRESENTATIONS

Underlying my thesis is a presumption that museums, like broader social practices, are flexible and adaptable. The landscape of museums has changed enormously in the last decades. Museums have changed their geography and location; identity; design and interpretation of displays; education, visitor services and management practices. In this chapter, I suggest steps for further change and development, and outline how these might alter the social relations of museum work, and the relations and representations of gender which museums produce.

As I have shown, many museums still presume an authority and monopoly over meaning in their programmes which is inappropriate to the resources and collections they manage, and inattentive to the public on whose behalf they manage these. The histories which they tell continue to be fixed and seamless, rather than flexible and negotiable. The voice with which they 'speak' remains didactic and superior (declarative), rather than questioning or seeking for response and exchange (interrogative).

Some museums have used market research to become more informed about, and attentive to, their public. On the whole, this research has been quantitative, to identify the profile of visitors (geographic, socio-economic, cultural) and the amount of time, and money, they have spent in the museum. A small number of museums have embarked on qualitative market research, to evaluate levels of satisfaction and interest among visitors. For example, they have evaluated the responses of visitors to existing exhibitions and prototype exhibits; they have tested the interest of visitors (and, in some cases, non-visitors) in future exhibition themes; some have collected visitors' and non-visitors' ideas for interpreting existing collections and for future projects (Bicknell 1990; Fisher 1990, 1993; MacDonald 1991; Webb and Wetton 1993). Such research is important: it represents an acknowledgement of the audience and an appreciation that the

effectiveness of the service can only be determined with feedback from users: whether what is provided does what it is supposed to do; how satisfied people are with it; whether it interests them and motivates them to visit, or to make a return visit. However, market research may provide a tool of refinement in the production relations described above, rather than a catalyst for more fundamental changes in the relations between museum and audience. The evaluation process may be conducted entirely within the values and terms of the institution commissioning it and according to the services which that institution has already decided to provide; the techniques may be applied only to specific ideas and projects, already formed and developed, to test pre-set objectives; the translation and implementation of research findings into programmes and exhibits rests with the museum. In these ways, such research may be closed, rather than open-ended, in its process and outcomes; the museum continues to keep audiences at arm's length and retains authorship and authority (Lawrence 1991).

The flow of information between institution and public which underlies audience research in museums is one-way rather than two-way. This also limits the terms within which audiences can respond and contribute to a discussion about choices of exhibition or programme, and effectiveness of products or services provided. In the absence of clear, published and public, objectives and targets for museum exhibitions and services, users are unable to assess what is currently provided and to compare museums with other services. In the absence of a thriving critical culture and active debate about museums, it is difficult for people to grasp the choices available to them, to articulate what services they want, and to appreciate the benefits and costs of alternative approaches. A fully consumer-oriented approach to decision-making would charge museums with the responsibility of establishing a two-way flow of information, communication

and discussion, and of engaging audiences as active partners in the design and provision of museum services (Potter 1986: iii).

One of the most crucial issues which arises in any museum project to establish a closer relationship with audiences is the issue of difference. Different attitudes, expectations and experiences will be expressed by different groups among the museum's actual and potential audience. Will the museum acknowledge and respond to these? If so, will it do so by attempting to resolve and iron out the differences through narrative closure, or by recognising and giving voices to the different groups? As I have shown in the case studies, museums have tended to avoid themes and approaches which are 'difficult' - such as themes of labour struggles, or feminist approaches - and to suppress differences within a dominant narrative which supposedly resolves them. Anthony Shelton points to this 'contradiction between institutional discourse and external voices ... current in museum representations of ethnic minorities, popular culture and women' (Shelton 1992a: 25). Describing a small number of projects in which museum staff have released the 'curatorial monopolies over exhibition space and narrative', he recommends that

> museums should relinquish their absolutist, and sometimes debilitating authority,
>
> and re-define themselves as facilitators whose custody of space and meaning is
>
> loosened to enable new relationships with indigenous representatives, minorities,
>
> artists and academics to be constructed. (Shelton 1992a: 26)

Shelton, unusually, combines the practice of curatorial work in museums with the analysis of academic research in museum ethnography[1]. Elsewhere, he advocates exhibitions which are

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[1]   Shelton is Keeper of non-Western art and anthropology at Brighton Museum and Research Fellow in museum ethnography at Sussex University.

visually pleasing, critical and reflexive; and which have a strong historical and cultural narrative that provides critical contextualisation. He encourages exhibitions 'that question distinctions between art and material culture, galleries and museums, the interdependence of the West and the Other'; that are concerned with the political control of discourse and the changing meanings imposed on objects (Shelton 1992b: 15).

As Shelton suggests, museums may call upon and mobilise different registers to dislodge the idea of the past as a simple, single and universal experience; to unsettle the conventional themes and practices of museums, and the certainties and identities on which these rest; and to develop new practices and relations, broadening the repertoire of museum work in its broadest sense.

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I described Foucault's analysis of discourse - as the social process of making and reproducing sense -through tracing the procedures of exclusion, limitation or rarefaction, and restriction. Rather than offering fullness of meaning and creativity, discursive practices operate through determining and setting constraints on possibility, and through cutting up the range of possibilities into discrete and separate disciplines. Further, I drew upon studies in feminism and psychoanalysis to show that identity and subjectivity are themselves unstable and uncertain; that there is no fixed point of reference. Here, I describe projects which expose the narrow and exclusive repertoire of the conventional museum discourse, and the instability of their premise, and which move towards a new museum discourse. They do this precisely through speaking the unspoken, and calling upon registers beyond those to which, through internal convention and external expectation, museums and their visitors have become accustomed. These projects are proposed not in the expectation that there is a territory <u>beyond</u> determination:

there is no space outside, or beyond, discourse, beyond meaning, and all meaning is determined. Rather, it is to look for new and varied forms of determination.

I suggest that the registers of change lie outside museums, artefacts and machines; they lie with people, in making them central as actors and users, their experiences, histories, beliefs and diversities. To call on these registers might involve changing the identity and identification of the museum itself to one which puts people and activity to the fore, and which merges subject-based boundaries and disciplines: this would challenge what Foucault calls the exterior procedure of exclusion, or the delimitation of a field of objects, and also the interior procedure of limitation or rarefaction, maintained by the divisions between formal disciplines. They might also include working with people outside the museum, and with different agencies and organisations, whose concern with history might cut across those of the museum: thus breaching the procedure of restriction, whereby only certain people and ideas are authorised to 'speak' and be spoken of in the museum. They might take different themes and occasions, or critical incidents - moments of flux and change - in order to show the discontinuity of history rather than its even progress. They might express those spheres and modalities which women have come to represent - emotion, tenderness, caring - as themes and factors in public histories, thus breaching the accepted boundaries of public and private. Equally, they might work with abstract ideas and analyses which are experimental and consciously partisan or partial, thus challenging fixed assumptions and showing that ideas and approaches to history are themselves constantly in the making. To suggest the instability and contradictions in history and identity, museums might change the rhythm and pace of public programmes from fixed 'permanent' display to temporary and changing exhibitions which express different, and shifting, viewpoints and histories. In these, they might work with symbolic, 'artificial' and obviously constructed things, new arrangements and

juxtapositions, to evoke atmosphere, emotion, pathos and humour and, in so doing, to challenge the cultural conventions of museum work.

8.1 Linking to Experience
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The first challenge to museum conventions lies in the identity of the museum itself. I suggest that museums might adopt more general identities through which to explore issues linked to people and their experience, rather than compartmental, specialised identities which derive from subject disciplines, groups of objects or sectors. As I described in Chapter Three, the trend in museums has been in this direction, towards division and specialisation. In the local authority sector, new branch museums have been set up with unique identities, such as the Kelham Island Industrial Museum in Sheffield or the St Mungo Museum of Religion in Glasgow (Chapter Five; O'Neill 1993). Independent museums have taken specialised themes, such as the Silk Museum in Macclesfield (Stevenson 1991). Equally, the national museums based in London have developed through setting up specialist and smaller museums at a considerable distance, devolving collections to these museums, and drawing visitors primarily from the immediate region.

These development strategies are successful in the short term, attracting new sources of funding and creating new audiences. The NMPFT, for example, was formed in partnership with the local authority and, through this, acquired development funding from the European Regional Development Fund; it is visited by around three quarters of a million people each year (see Chapter Six). In the longer term, these museums may be faced with relatively high running costs, declining visitor numbers, and stagnation because of the high capital cost of replacing 'permanent'

displays. The specialised identities may positively draw in some visitors, who share a strong interest in the stated identity and subject matter. They may deter others, who identify the museum with a narrow enthusiasm which they do not share. Again, using the NMPFT as an example, non-visitors saw photography as an unattractive, narrow and technical topic; this perception was strong, despite the widespread ownership and practice of amateur photography (Carne Martin 1989).

Further, these disciplinary divisions may themselves become restrictive or redundant over time. This is illustrated most clearly in the field of science and technology. British museums of science are still primarily concerned with the 'big sciences' of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the technologies assoicated with those sciences: physics, mechanical and civil engineering and, to a lesser extent, chemistry; museums of natural history cover the life sciences. Today, 'big science' lies somewhere between these two, in biotechnologies and genetics: areas of immediate concern to people, and particularly to women, but peripheral to museums as they are presently constituted (Haraway 1987; Porter 1993).

The process of specialisation and differentiation works against the concept of history as a web of interactions and interdependences; particularly, it works against the histories of women, less skilled men and those whose histories are less publicly acknowledged. It tends to celebrate public life and male achievement, subjugating the more mundane and general aspects of life. It hinders collecting activity and interpretation which draw in women and men across a broad range of experience.

I suggest that museums should seek looser and more general identities which actively engage people through contemporary experience. Those which are more specialised might re-orientate themselves towards people: for example, the National Railway Museum might become the Museum of Rail Travel; the Gallery of English Costume to Clothes or Clothing. These identities might, in turn, be developed to represent people strongly as active subjects and participants in the histories which museums collect and display. Exhibitions might start from the present and from the experiences and feelings of people as they enter: thus offering what is relevant and immediate, rather than sending them to the furthest points of history, in the search for origins and prehistory. Museums might engage different groups of people by covering a range of themes and by varied public programmes. Collections may be built up or borrowed from other museums to develop special themes or perspectives. Such changing programmes provide museums with new audiences, new resources, and new contacts for collecting. These, in turn, may be incorporated into more permanent displays, or gathered into collections to be stored and accessed as a resource by museum visitors and interest/study groups for other projects and programmes.

Such a strategy was proposed to the National Museum of Labour History by members of its advisory group in 1990, to provide direction for displays in its new premises; and to develop an identity and profile, audiences and collections. The museum's title is one which few people understand: it is connected to abstract ideas and political orientation rather than to people's working lives and experiences. Ousted from its London premises in 1986 when political control of the local council changed from Labour to Liberal, the museum moved to Manchester at the invitation of the city council. At this time, its collections were small and represented the larger organisations and the male leaders of the organised labour movement; the vast majority of material in them was archival. The museum's advisory group advocated a change in the title to

indicate a broader, more accessible and immediately relevant, intention, such as Museum of Working Life. They suggested that this might be developed through a series of temporary exhibitions to build the museum's public profile, and attract people to the new venue, with such themes as health, housing, working conditions and safety. At the same time, through these exhibitions, the museum would gather contacts, community links and collections as the basis for fuller and expanded displays in the future.

The Museum of Work (Arbetets Museum), which opened in 1991 in Norrkoping, Sweden, has used strategies similar to those recommended in Manchester (Westerlund 1994). Like the National Museum of Labour History, it is linked to the organised labour movement, and has few collections[2]. It has chosen to create short-life exhibitions, and to develop them in partnership with local residents and workers' associations so that people are enrolled and engaged directly and immediately in the museum and the collections. For example, museum staff worked part-time with children on a notorious local housing estate, which has first- and second-generation immigrants from many different countries, to make an exhibition about the environment of the estate, and the many different lifestyles and cultures which it includes. Other staff worked with office cleaners to make an exhibition of their work; at the same time, staff collected their histories and experiences in a tape archive, from which excerpts have been published. An exhibition on social work, in 1993, used oral testimonies of social workers, the written and printed records of case studies and fieldwork, the office and clerical tools of their job; the exhibition also traced social workers' lives before and outside their work. In the longer life (three-year) exhibition 'Sixth Sense', visitors are encouraged to record and share the memories

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[2]   The Museum of Work has an agreement with Nordiska Museet in Stockholm: Nordiska Museet receives and stores the material which it collects.

which it provokes, in notebooks and boxes which are added to the display beside the main exhibition stands (see section 8.3).

Some museums have been created around a specific site or collection; here, an appeal to a broader identity may be unachievable. The opposite approach may be appropriate: to focus on the particular associations of that location or collection, and to expand, laterally, into the wider connections and histories associated with them. For example, Quarry Bank Mill at Styal, Cheshire, is a late eighteenth century cotton mill now owned by the National Trust. The mill is an exceptional, rather than typical, survival in the region's textile industry: it continued as a manufacturing concern in the twentieth century through particular circumstances of family, locality and product. In exhibitions planned for 1994, the museum will show how these particular circumstances, and the influence of the Greg family, shaped the relations of production and the lives of the people around the mill; while in the Apprentice House, museum staff already trace the histories of the pauper children who provided part of the mill's labour force.

8.2 Mobilising Difference
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The procedures of exclusion and limitation may also be exposed, and shifted, by articulating and mobilising difference - particularly, by rupturing the discursive boundaries with subject positions, themes and approaches which generally lie outside the museum discourse. In Denmark, the Women's Museum (Kvindemuseet) in Aarhus has adopted an identity which cuts across the more conventional disciplines of history, science or art and creates another, in which everyone is addressed directly by inclusion or exclusion.

The museum, established in 1982, is staffed by women; it has a substantial proportion of men among its visitors (between 25% and 40%, depending on the exhibitions). Its audience and concerns are built into its organisation. The collective directorate is responsible for the day-to-day running of the museum to the general assembly of a voluntary body, the Women's Museum Association. Since 1990, it has received a state subsidy to cover part of its costs, but is staffed and resourced largely through subsidised employment schemes. These staff are not qualified museum personnel; many are young women from school or college, or older women returning to the labour market. Because of this, the museum has developed a non-elitist base and profile, and an unapologetic commitment to exhibitions which are personal and subjective. It thereby challenges the dominant, though implicit, subject position of most museums (Sandahl 1991 and 1993; Hudson 1991).

The Women's Museum uses an approach which might be described as non-disciplinary rather than multi-disciplinary: drawing in material and knowledge from many different fields to develop its exhibitions; merging the usual boundaries of home and work, nature and culture. The museum addresses women in two ways: by representing them directly in the content of exhibitions and collections, and by taking a woman's point of view on more general themes. In the first, women are subjects of exhibitions such as 'Women Inventors' (1992). In the second, themes are explored as women might perceive and experience them. In this, no territory is neutral or beyond difference: even the former civic hall in Aarhus, which the museum occupies, has been 'peopled by women'. Searching through records of the council when it held court in the building, staff found women present in these records only as prostitutes and criminals, being cautioned or punished. When the hall was restored and re-opened in 1993, museum staff recreated these scenes in new displays.

In an exhibition on housework in 1989-90, the staff of the Women's Museum used redundant line assembly machinery to build the dream technology of many women they had spoken to: a conveyor belt moved soiled materials and tasks towards the homeworker in her centre of operations, and distributed clean materials and tools around the home. The exhibit humorously built upon women's dissatisfaction with conventional domestic appliances, which they fetch and carry, fill and empty for specific tasks in different rooms and locations around the home. The exhibition challenged the progressive view - that new technology is always and inevitably better than what it replaces - by expressing how women felt de-skilled and downgraded by innovations such as automatic, thermostatically-controlled gas and electric cookers.

'In The Night' (Om Natte), an exhibition at the same museum in 1993, explored themes and associations common to women: fear; desire and pleasure; dreaming; caring for the very young and very old; working in factories and theatres. The exhibition began in a small, dark room, with the sounds, smells and animals of the night: an owl, a nightingale and a wolf. Visitors then passed through a town gate: this symbolised the desire to lock the night out, and to lock people in. In a white 'room of fear', harsh light and sound were triggered by visitor movements across a black and white geometric spiral with a fallen bicycle at its centre. Around the wall of the room were small cases with weapons and safeguards collected from women who carried them for protection, and their testimony. In a bedroom reconstruction, a woman's voice narrated her dream while sequenced dream images were projected onto a white sphere over the bed. In the dark 'room of love', casts of classical sculptures were juxtaposed with medical teaching torsos to suggest the historical shift from abstract and romantic ideals of love to explicit and anatomical definitions of sex. The exhibition ended with the night wolf in bed.

The concerns of the Women's Museum are carefully and precisely articulated in the placing of exhibitions, in the organisation of space, in display techniques and texts. Jette Sandahl, a member of the museum's collective directorate, emphasises that 'the overall message transmitted from an exhibition depends on the coupling, relative placing, structuring and sequencing of the individual elements and displays' (Sandahl 1992). This careful consideration was disturbed when exhibitions from the museum were transferred to other museums, with different concerns. In one exhibition, a reconstructed home birth of the 1930s was arranged so that visitors stood directly behind the woman's head; their perspective was that of the woman, looking down her own body. Sandahl has described how the exhibit was:

> structured so that the direction of the room and the woman correlated with the direction of contractions, rippling down the woman's body. The rhythms and the temporal spacing of the contractions, the continuum of contractions alternating with the breaks, was "felt" from a tape of a woman's breathing marking contractions, while stories of giving birth were told in the pauses.

As a travelling exhibition, the room and the woman were turned round, her genitalia were exposed, and the soundtrack was removed. The agent, or subject, changed from the woman giving birth to the (imagined) doctor:

> A baby was introduced and enacted by the helper as it had to be because neither
>
> woman nor baby was alive; a birth was enacted as an instant climax instead of the
>
> indefinite suspense and quiet drama of the stories we used. (Sandahl 1992: 29)

8.3 Exploring Abstract Themes, Atmosphere and Emotion

Those museums with few collections are less constrained by 'the real thing' and the narrative, sequential form; they are more imaginative, creative and experimental than conventional museums. They tend to work through programmes of temporary exhibitions where there is a presumption of change, allowing different perspectives to be expressed and new approaches to be explored. These museums develop ideas and themes that are not determined by the availability and structure of collections; they rely on loans from other museums and collectors. Working with abstract ideas and themes, they do not rely on the explicit, literal message of written texts and labels which, in didactic exhibitions, are regarded as final. They recognise that the exhibition message is communicated at many different levels, and in the whole space, form and material of the museum display. These museums may, for example, commission designers whose work is obviously theatrical and 'staged'; they may employ artists to evoke atmosphere and feeling, or to respond to work in the museum rather than to represent truths about it; they may use materials and techniques which are short-lived, fluid and ephemeral, suggestive of a transient and less solid history.

These techniques are particularly appropriate for exploring themes which have little material evidence: about relationships, feelings and experiences between men and women, for example; about aspects of work which are ephemeral and repetitive; or in themes which cut across the conventional disciplinary boundaries of museums and collections. This approach has hardly been used in Britain at the time of writing. I therefore draw on examples in European museums.

The exhibition 'In The Night' at the Women's Museum, referred to above, is one example of this approach. Another example is the Russelsheim museum in Germany. Russelsheim is the home of the major car manufacturers Opel. In the museum, industrialisation is presented as part of

history, society and the wider context - not a departure from it. In the displays and exhibitions, staff develop themes which unite different periods in history, and also different subject areas and media in the collections (Hudson 1987: 108-112; Schirmbeck 1982). In an exhibition in 1990, 'People and Nature' (Mensch und Natur), museum staff worked with local academics and activists to explore issues of environmental exploitation and damage; the process and effects of industrialisation, agriculture and consumption on the environment. To do this, they juxtaposed works of art, machines, models, contemporary photographs and historical collections (Schirmbeck et al 1990).

The exhibition 'Sixth Sense' (Sjatte Sinnet) at the Museum of Work in Sweden is another example of an exhibition with abstract themes and associations. It was produced by the Museum's Exhibitions Director, Eva Persson, and a leading interior designer, Stefan Alenius. The exhibition explores how we use the senses of hearing, sight, sound, smell and taste in the workplace. It describes how the senses are acute, creative and vulnerable instruments; how, with stricter manufacturing requirements, they may be dependent on other tools; and how they can be exploited (for example, through repetitive and strenuous work) or deceived (by odourless and toxic gas, for example), leading to injury or death. These descriptions are made through inviting visitors to search, touch, listen, smell and see, but rarely to read; the exhibition uses very little written text. Materials from natural history, fine and decorative art, technology and ethnology collections are juxtaposed. The exhibition uses bold staging: for example, the section on taste includes a tableau of 1867 - a time of famine. In the countryside, people lived off plants and bark; in the towns they rebelled against grain merchants and employers. The display vividly depicts these contrasts and tensions. Tables are laid with linen and silver, and set with different courses, based on the menu card of a local dinner for manufacturers. They are interspersed with

guns, pointing out of the windows; the last table is arranged to suggest that a stone has been thrown in, smashing the dishes, and the window behind is smeared with slogans, apparently written in blood.

In all these ways, museums may depart from the factual, story-telling forms of display which provide the 'message' of the exhibition in written texts, and draw materials for exhibition from the collections, with some embellishment and set-dressing. These are the forms which are still most used in Britain. Where theatre techniques are employed, they are applied to enhance the sense of realism in specific, fixed tableaux (for example, at the National Fishing Heritage Centre in Grimsby), rather than to dramatise the whole exhibition space as a dynamic form of theatre. Artists and others have been invited into some museums in Britain to work with collections, often in museums of archaeology, anthropology and ethnography: for example, the Museum of Mankind's exhibition 'Lost Magic Kingdoms' (1985); 'Snares of privacy and fiction', a series of mixed media installations by a group of artists at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, including music, film, poetry, text sculpture, sound sculpture, painting and photography (1992); and 'The ?Exhibition?' at the Ashmolean Museum (1993; Beard and Henderson 1994). Artists have worked in history museums, such as the Geffrye Museum in East London and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester (both in 1993). However, such installations are temporary, and are removed in time to 'restore' the permanent product.

8.4 Reaching Out and Bringing In: Audience Participation

Another procedure for maintaining discourse which Foucault describes is that of restriction - determining the application of discourses by restricting those who can speak, and binding them to

certain kinds of speaking. The projects which have created new forms in Britain are those which have challenged the restriction by authorising new people to speak, in their own words. These have transformed the relations between exhibitions, their organisers and audiences through outreach activities and through involving people as participants in the museum.

The new approaches are stimulated by dual concerns: to create a less static and more vigorous intellectual culture in museums, and to reach, engage and respond to a wider public. The most active museums are those in big cities, with diverse and multicultural populations. These dual concerns are described by Peter Jenkinson, in an article suggesting future directions for museum work:

> We should welcome partnership and collaboration as the sources of new energy, new ideas and new museum meanings. We have to respect cultural pluralism and cultural diversity as cornerstones of the long-term goal of a cultural equity in which there is free exchange of information and values beyond the hierarchical, canonically disciplined structures of the past. (Jenkinson 1993: 23)

Research by Nick Merriman has shown that museum and heritage visiting appeals to limited socio-economic groups (Merriman 1989 and 1991). He suggests that museum staff should get closer to their public, shifting their activity to work with people outside the museum. This, combined with strategies to change the profile of museum staff, buildings and exhibitions, is more likely to produce new relationships and stimulate cultural production of a new kind. Outreach work may, in turn, feed back into the museum: those people who have made contact with the museum at one remove, through outreach activities, may be encouraged to participate in shaping future programmes in the central services (Trevelyan 1991). In these activities, museum workers shift their role to become facilitators, managers and providers of resources for programmes with people beyond the organisation. Those who work in the museum listen to,

mobilise and enable groups outside it to use its resources in making <u>author</u>ed statements within it.

Projects stimulated by these concerns do not claim a single and objective truth, presented without effort and passively consumed. Participants speak clearly with different voices: for example, speaking as women. Such projects create new working relationships between the people who work in museums and those outside them. They also encourage those who visit to behave differently, by stimulating comment, debate and intervention. They may bring in new audiences through the contacts and relationships they have made.

Such projects include the Springburn Community Museum in Glasgow; the People's Story Museum, Edinburgh; community initiatives at Sheffield Museums and Walsall Museum; education and archaeology initiatives in Southampton; and art history exhibitions at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester (O'Neill 1987; Clark and Coutts 1989; Robinson and Toobey 1989; Suggitt 1990; Jones and Pay 1990; Hyde and Smith 1991). Below, I describe three of these in detail: the projects at Sheffield, Manchester and Walsall.

At Sheffield City Museum, a Community Outreach Officer, Annie Robinson, was appointed in the late 1980s. She worked with audiences and agencies outside the traditional buildings and centres of museum activity to develop programmes from the outside in. She recognised the importance of reaching people who did not visit and use these museums, in order both to provide services which were relevant and interesting, and to develop a different kind of inclusive, rather than exclusive, 'cultural product'. She saw that new audiences were a rich resource: to offer themes and areas for future exhibitions and interpretation; as a body of critical readers with view

on the interpretation and presentation of collections; as a source of contacts and, perhaps, collections (Ara et al 1989; Robinson and Toobey 1989). Robinson worked with other council officers - the Art Gallery staff, Community Arts and the Multi-Cultural Support Unit in the Libraries department - to make touring, temporary exhibitions in libraries and in the Mobile Museum unit. These served a dual role: to stimulate interest, test response and develop contacts for exhibition themes which would be developed more fully in the main museum and/or art gallery buildings; to take exhibitions to new audiences and to areas of the city not immediately accessible to the established museums and art galleries.

One such exhibition was 'Reflections of the Future', the title clearly marking its intention to look both back and forwards. The exhibition portrayed the lifestyles and experiences of the city's Afro-Caribbean community. There were two venues: the mobile museum, housing a small touring temporary exhibition in which evocative tape recordings, materials and graphic techniques were used to stimulate recall, participation and response; and a large temporary exhibition in the Mappin Art Gallery, adjoining the main City Museum. Museum staff were interested in gathering responses to that exhibition 'but in addition we were looking for guidance for future projects and collecting policies' (Robinson and Toobey 1989).

Similar techniques were used at Sheffield to generate ideas and material for other exhibitions with broader themes, not necessarily attached to a particular social or ethnic group, but with a multicultural dimension. Examples are 'The Wedding' (1989) and 'Souvenirs!' (1990). These large exhibitions at the Mappin Art Gallery comprised three elements: the community-based projects developed in libraries and/or mobile centres; larger, mainly object-based, displays; and contemporary works by one or more artists (Ara et al 1989). In this way, they encompassed and

celebrated diverse cultural practices and histories, as well as representing different and critical views of, for example, romance and marriage through contemporary feminist artwork.

An exhibition at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester in 1992 took sexual difference as its theme and as a perspective to examine and interrogate material in the gallery collections. The exhibition 'Women and Men' raised questions about the producers of works of art, craft and design. Have there been any great women artists? Is women's art different from men's? Does it matter? The gallery staff raised questions of gender and difference at two further levels in the exhibition: among those who selected and interpreted the works for exhibition and those who viewed them. They invited women's and school groups to select works for the exhibition and to write the interpretative materials. In this way, 'a number of different viewpoints emerged to challenge the dominant gallery discourse of a single authorless, though authoritative and, by implication, male voice' (Hyde and Smith 1992: 36-7). In the exhibition, works were hung in pairs which were similar in subject matter and date. In each pair, one was by a woman and one by a man. Information about the works was concealed from immediate view and visitors were asked the same question: 'Which is by a woman?' The intention of the organisers was that, through answering the questions, visitors would be prompted to:

> ... consider that notions of femininity are culturally and historically, rather than biologically, determined, as well as to make them aware of the preconceptions and stereotyped views about women's work which we still carry despite the achievements of the women's movement. (Hyde and Smith 1992: 36)

By organising the exhibition around questions, the organisers encouraged social interaction between visitors, stimulating an exchange of views among 'readers' themselves. In this exhibition, the organisers engaged with visitors as a sophisticated and heterogeneous audience.

The organisers brought their expertise, in the forms of knowledge and control of the collections, the concepts of art history, and the exhibition medium. With a small number of people, working in groups, they shared the selection and interpretation of the exhibits around the theme. Some of the selections and texts produced were openly critical and biased: for example, expressing distaste for the prevalent assumption and acceptance that women were the objects of male sexual desire and possession[3]. With a larger number of people, as visitors, the organisers shared some of the questions, uncertainties and excitement posed by new art histories. Visitors were also invited to create their own works and pin them to a wall space designated for women or men; they were invited to browse through copies of the infomration and relevant books at a table in the exhibition.

In this and other projects, developed in conjunction with staff and students of the Art Gallery and Museum Studies course at Manchester University, the Whitworth Gallery staff have sought to involve people in the permanent collection and the gallery's work. At the same time, they have sought to create new and complementary exhibition formats. They seek to challenge 'the art-historical methodology underlying most galleries in this country [that] encourages visitors to believe that pictures have a single "correct meaning".' By using different methods, posing questions and showing different opinions, they engage visitors <u>in</u> the debates: 'actively experiencing the disruption that the new art histories cause to the unacknowledged assumptions of more traditional methods of display' (Hyde and Smith 1992: 36). These exhibitions are achieved cheaply and provide a way of attracting visitors who might not regularly visit the permanent collections. However, the exhibitions remain traditional in the sense that they adhere

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[3]   I am grateful to Helen Coxall for her notes and comments on this exhibition.

to the gallery's collections and forms of presentation: they consist mainly of framed works attached to the walls, or works on pedestals, with written texts. These texts presume familiarity with the English language, literacy, and a reasonably high reading age; without reading them, visitors might be unaware of the exhibition message. In a more radical project, people might engage in challenging these assumptions and methods too.

At Walsall Museum and Art Gallery, exhibitions have been organised which reverse the relations between museums and audiences. The People's Shows are formed around the collections of people outside the museum; the organisers visit and photograph people and collections in their homes; the design and presentation of collections in the gallery is decided jointly between their owners and the exhibition organisers (within agreed limits of space and money). The purpose of these shows is to 'demonstrate the pleasure of collecting and to display "the secret world behind people's front doors"' (Suggitt 1990: 31). The project's strength and vision lie in the willingness to hand over that vision, as it were, by encouraging people to bring their own collections into the museum, and to arrange and furnish the displays according to their own tastes and preferences. With the success of this project, and the encouragement of museum staff at Walsall, other museums across Britain have followed their example: fourteen museums held People's Shows with local collectors in 1992. The Walsall project has been criticised: it has been described as 'tacky, wacky and weird', lacking in judgement, lacking in discrimination, 'an exercise in bad taste', 'a freak show' and 'a museological side show' (Butler 1992: 15). The collectors and collections shown constitute a critique of the museum itself: a critique which touches the traditional heart and core of museum activity - the collections - and one which, by direct juxtaposition and comparison, can be easily read and understood. It is part of a wider strategy within the same service 'to regard people not just as consumers and spectators ... but as critics and

creators ... [to] welcome partnership and collaboration as the sources of new energy, new ideas and new museum meanings' (Jenkinson 1993).

In these projects, the organisers emphasise that interest among visitors is wider than the audiences immediately addressed (Robinson and Toobey 1989; Sandahl 1991). The methods of production and presentation enliven the project, stimulating visitors to interact with, and debate, the approach. They have the maturity to understand and engage with a more complex and sophisticated product, as active readers rather than passive consumers. In the best of these projects, too, the totality of the exhibition complements the theme and message. The methods of display used contribute to an understanding that the exhibition is a construction. By giving voice to different, even opposing, experiences and viewpoints, the exhibition makers show that there is no single, and final, reading. By building images and scenarios, montages and dummies, they draw attention to the work of <u>making</u> displays and representations. By using different boundaries, definitions and language, they encourage people to think about underlying structures and assumptions. In doing this, they reveal not only the technical processes upon materials but also the ideological effects on meaning.

APPENDIX

SCHEDULE AND STRUCTURE OF INTERVIEWS

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Schedule of interviews

York Castle Museum (Chapter Four)

9 April 1986   Mark Suggitt, Keeper of Folk Life

30 November 1989   Gill Greaves, Keeper of Folk Life

Kelham Island Industrial Museum (Chapter Five)

8 May 1987   Peter Smithurst, Principal Keeper, Industry and Technology

20 May 1987   David Bostwick, Keeper of Social History and Karen Snowden, Assistant
                     Keeper of Social History

National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (Chapter Six)

1 November 1989   Roger Taylor, Senior Curator of Photography

17 November 1989   Adrian Budge, Head of Education

4 December 1990   Jean Hunter, Head of Marketing

Correspondence cited (Chapters Four, Seven)

10 November 1989   Letter from author to Dr Andrew Hodges, Director, York Castle Museum

6 December 1989   Letter from Dr Hodges to author

Structure of interviews

Criteria for selection of collections

Is there a collecting policy?
If yes: who compiled it? when?
         what is its research base?
         does it take account of women?
         how is it applied?

If no: how are decisions made about collecting?
         who makes them?
         how are these decisions informed (research base)?
         do these decisions take account of women?

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<u>Contextual research</u>

What fieldwork does the museum do in relation to collecting and display?

Who collects? who conducts this fieldwork?

What other records are collected with an acquisition (notes/tapes/photographs/other)?

What questions are asked at the time of an acquisition?

<u>Organisation of material and related information</u>

What classification scheme is used in the museum?

Who does the cataloguing?

Who classifies and cross references each item?

What is the extent of cross-referencing?

Are there special categories for women?

If yes: what are they?

If no: can the museum easily trace collections relating to women's work?

<u>Interpretation of material</u>

What are the criteria for making decisions about displays and exhibitions? Who makes them? On behalf of whom?

How are displays put together?

What is the relationship between curators and designers?

How is material chosen to support the theme? How are illustrations/other objects/materials chosen?

Are there any positive measures to represent women/other groups? If so, what are they?

How are the displays evaluated?

What are your future plans for exhibitions?

<u>Access, applications and users of the museum</u>

Is there a museum education service?

If yes: how does the service use the displays and collections?
         what emphasis dies it place on women's history?
         does it influence the making of collections/ displays/policies?
         does the museum offer a loans service to schools?
         is it aware of any special interest in women's history in schools?

What range of publications and catalogues does the museum offer?

Are there any specially concerned with women?

Does the museum have links with local groups?

If yes: does this include women/women's history groups?

If yes: is this a mutually productive relationship, or are they seen as users only?

If no: does the museum know of the existence of such groups?
         has it made any effort to establish links with them?

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