

Amusement without excess and knowledge without fatigue
Modern transformations of the museum experience

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by

Margarida Dias Lima de Faria

Department of Museum Studies
University of Leicester

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**To Paulo, Mariana and Catarina
with all my love**

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INTRODUCTION

The museum is a cultural institution that is a product of modern times and reflects the rationale of a certain social and cultural order. Like any cultural setting it has evolved with the progression of western societies and has suffered the influence of other changes occurring in other spheres of social and cultural life.

In the last three or four decades, museum researchers have tried to understand how the public reacts to the communicational and aesthetic environment they consciously build inside the museums' halls. This preoccupation in creating more efficient exhibitions considered from the point of view of their educational goals and of the response they expect their audiences to give, is nevertheless historically and socially contingent. This evidence has, however, not been fully explored in museum literature which tends to see the museum as a self-sufficient environment which may be transformed and controlled according to its curator's will. This attitude may explain the reason why the work museum researchers have been producing about museum visitors has lacked theoretical consistency and has produced results that do not account for a broad definition of the museum experience but of particular contexts conditioned by the recurrent testing of quantitative methodologies. In the present research the museum is part of a broad process of social and cultural change which has implicated different social classes or class-fractions as well as different modes of cultural and social perceptions.

This thesis was conceived in three different parts following a sequence that will move from the more general to the more particular: the first part reflects upon social and cultural transformations in societies at large; the second part discusses leisure as part of the social and cultural aspects of individuals' everyday lives and the museum as a leisure choice inserted in the dynamic process described in the first part; and the third part is a case study on families visiting a particular museum exhibition.

The first part includes two chapters that correspond to two theoretical frameworks on western society's modern developments. The first chapter focuses on Scott Lash's theory of postmodernism which is above all a sociological analysis of *cultural change*. For this author each stage of the social and cultural process of change is associated with a certain *regime of signification*. This concept is sufficiently dynamic to accept its own disintegration to give rise to something else. However it is sufficiently stable to be taken as a coherent system that comprises simultaneously social and cultural roles and modes of perception. Each regime of signification, according to Scott Lash,

comprises not only cultural products, cultural institutions, cultural symbols and modes of signification but also cultural consumers and producers enmeshed in the same order of things called by this author: a cultural economy. Each cultural economy and the modes of communication and social interaction it produces, shares its existence with other phenomena such as industrialisation, urbanisation and the restructuring of the social hierarchy. The meanings museums create, the audiences they attract and the transformations they have suffered in the last two centuries gain an enhanced meaning when understood through this dynamic and comprehensive perspective. Curators and audiences are part of the same cultural economy and share the same modes of perception which are also consistent with other events happening in other spheres of everyday life.

The second chapter reflects upon another theory of social change: Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process. The concept of *civilization* in Elias's theory relates codes of conduct individuals have constructed for themselves and imposed on others to the formation of modern states and the complex web of social interdependencies that have come to characterize post-industrial societies. This analysis refers also to the imposition of greater constraints upon individuals' expression of emotions and feelings, a characteristic of society's upper strata and explains how, with the process of functional democratization, this came to be spread to society as a whole. These norms of behaviour have not only conditioned social interdependencies according to individuals' conducts and habits but also the spaces they attend, as defined by grades of respectability and distinctiveness. Elias, in conjunction with another researcher, Eric Dunning, has extrapolated this theory to the field of *leisure*. They have demonstrated, by means of empirical evidence, how the inculcation of behavioural restrictions and norms of conduct has not only affected social relations in everyday life, but has also affected, in a very particular way, leisure activities in terms of their intrinsic rules and of the kind of participation they allow. Even in those activities normally understood as forms of escaping the pressures of the daily routines, such as games and sports, rules and restrictions referring how to play and even how to watch came to be progressively imposed.

The second part of the thesis is an attempt to give a detailed view of changes occurring in leisure in modern times using the two previous theories' conceptual framework: that is, leisure as part of a certain regime of signification which implicates consumers and producers, and their modes of perception; and leisure as a stage for the expression of individual emotions and as part of the social context in which these manifestations occur. Leisure theory, and in particular historical examples concerning

the period following industrialisation have shown that leisure is a formidable field for the understanding of social life and, moreover, for the understanding of the social realm upon which the present study seeks to concentrate: the museum.

Museums which were for a long time enclosures for the individualistic and narcissistic pleasure of an elite against the progressive heterogeneity of social life, were forced with the process of democratization and increased pressures from below, to impose stricter behavioural codes in order to preserve a certain type of social atmosphere. This would have consisted of the imposition of a higher *didacticism* against the threat of *recreation* and *respectability* against that threat of *vulgarization*. The civilizing process (the tightening of roles and behavioural codes) that has operated within the museum field has left an imprint of dullness, behavioural constraint, and feelings of shame and embarrassment, that remain, even in current times, a barrier for the recruitment of public from lower social strata. It was the balance between how much *education* or *recreation* museums are able to deliver that came to characterize the building of the museum's social and cultural atmosphere in the last decades and to define their process of change. This option is so crucial that it is still the subject of vehement debate today.

Recently museums have been allowing greater spontaneity and accepting a greater participation by their public in the building of their visit experience. This important shift has nevertheless to be understood in terms of the regime of signification that implicates both its curators and its audiences, (and not in terms of its new curators' good will and open mindedness as some museum literature has tended to suggest). The new museum curators are no more the charismatic figures of the past, so sure as they were of their social power and professional positions, but they are specialised professionals forced to be constantly creative for the sake of their professional roles' stability.

These transformations are also the result of other pressures coming from outside the museum buildings. The weakening of state interest in controlling museum outcomes and budgets, and an increasing diversification of leisure choices and enterprises investing in the production of recreation and entertainment have created a commercial context from which the museums that aim to become more attractive to wider publics can no longer escape.

However, the recent appearance of these new leisure facilities is another phenomenon that is explained in the leisure theory of Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning . These

authors have demonstrated by means of empirical examples, how individuals seek, more than ever before, *active excitement* in their leisure time, due to increased constraints imposed on all aspects of their everyday routines. Yet this quest for excitement is not based upon principles of individualistic pleasure and relaxation, rather it is one that favours active stimulation and fantasy, a type of fantasy called by the authors *mimetic* as it reproduces tensions occurring in other fields of real life. Museums are tending to adopt such *mimetic* experiments by creating virtual reality atmospheres in which visitors are impressed by the horrors of the London blitz, or by dinosaurs "come to life".

Museums were and still are the result of a cultural economy built according to a certain social and cultural context which was bound to suffer the same effects of modernisation and spatial and temporal changes as other social environments. However, their history has been one of recurrent resistance as they were in the first place conceived to fulfil a certain class need for social distinction and were subsequently appropriated by other groups as a means to social enhancement.

The third part of the thesis is an example of how these theories may be applied to a particular context. It is simultaneously a criticism of and an alternative to the current evaluation studies on the museum public. Consistent with the previous theoretical framework this part starts with a detailed description of the social unit used in this case - the family visit - and is based on literature focusing on leisure and on families visiting museums.

This case study shows that this museum's biggest audience - the family group - still has an upmarket profile. It also shows how much these families still seem to praise this museum's educational role. It demonstrates how parents still use the museum's didactic discourse to teach their children scientific principles together with behavioural rules. However it has also witnessed the emergence of a new type of family who uses the museum for active enjoyment and the reinforcement of their affective links more than for learning from the exhibition contents.

"Amusement without excess and knowledge without fatigue" - a statement upon which a leisure entrepreneur of one of the great industrial exhibitions based his aims in the past - seems to have recovered its ground. This evidence is less important, however, than its sociological explanation, that is the recognition of the importance of the social and cultural context which constitutes this process of transformation and which is crucial for the understanding of the museum's present and future tendencies.

PART I

As previously stated, the museum as a cultural product and a social environment must be inserted into broader theories of social and cultural change as part of the process of modernization of western societies. What follows is an attempt to characterize the *social and cultural conditions* which have evolved with modern times, to assess how these have affected the everyday life of citizens and their cultural practices both as producers and consumers.

To achieve this purpose, two sociological theories will be introduced here and further developed in the following chapters.

The first is Scott Lash's sociological theory of postmodernism (1990), which is presented as a model for a sociological analysis of culture and of cultural change. According to this approach "culture" designates the social field for the production of meaning and refers to the processes through which people make sense of themselves and their lives within the frame of possibilities offered by the society of which they are members. This theory seeks to explain the production and consumption of culture as part of a broader process of social change in which producers, consumers and the institutions they create and use, form a net of interdependencies (*regimes of signification*) which have evolved with the development of societies. Cultural change is also analysed in terms of the *modes of signification* which have determined the conditions of production of meanings at the different stages.

This approach rests on the conceptual differentiation between modernism and postmodernism as two highly distinct "cultural paradigms", a distinction that was considered particularly enlightening for the present study. The concept of "paradigm" was first introduced by Thomas S. Kuhn (1962) in his famous work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Kuhn's aim was the criticism of the authority of scientific rules normally taken for granted uncritically. His theory rests on the assertion that science is not a self-ruled set of principles but the result of scientific achievements of a community of practitioners. Science does not progress by accumulation of discoveries according to a linear trajectory, but, according to Kuhn's view, it is instead the result of a set of achievements shared by the members of a scientific community within a specific *social context*. It is the *social dimension* inscribed in the concept of paradigm

that is crucial for the understanding of Lash definition of "cultural paradigms": culture is not an autonomous realm, it is part of a more complex process of social interdependencies which take shape, last for a time, and then give rise to a new order of things structurally different from the previous.

The second theory is Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process (1978b, 1982a). Although preceding the former by several decades (first published in 1939) this theory is here placed afterwards since it emphasises the function of leisure (as part of the development of the 'civilized' societies) thus introducing the theme of the following chapter. Norbert Elias has defined social change both as changes occurring in the "social macrosphere" (struggles for political power and social hegemony), and "micro" transformations occurring in the more intimate spheres of citizens' lives as related to the formation of modern states. According to Elias, during this process, the growing diversification of power structures impelled individuals to progressively control their emotions and adopt standardized behaviour in order to have their positions recognized within the more complex web of social interdependencies. Everyday life became more routinized, and the experience of leisure was invested with new meanings. In the context of the present thesis, this theory is of particular importance because it discusses leisure (where museum- going has to be inserted) in terms of a sociology of emotions and in terms of the transformations of the global social structure.

Both theories attempt to make the link between changes in societies' global structures and the social conditions of perception and communication. They are both intended as contributions to the constitution of a conceptual framework capable of analysing the dynamic qualities of everyday life. They are therefore *processual* as they seek to detect the effects of structural (historical) change, and *qualitative* as they are basically concerned with inner transformations in the quality of daily life experience and not with quantitative measures. In this way, the following chapters, as well as the case study with which this study closes, will only have significance as part of the context (both processual and qualitative) described in this first part.

CHAPTER 1

Modernism, Postmodernism and Scott Lash's theory of regimes of signification

INTRODUCTION

Scott Lash's theory is the result of three interlinked theses: a thesis of cultural change, a thesis of cultural type and a thesis of social stratification. These three theses relate, in a particularly enlightening way, cultural change to social change by discussing hegemonic agents of production and consumption, cultural producers and modes of cultural perception.

In the manner proposed by Scott Lash, the modernist and postmodernist cultural paradigms are above all *spatio-temporal configurations*. As Lash explains, "*spatially* they comprise a more or less flexible symbolic structure which, bent too much out of shape, begins to constitute another cultural paradigm. *Temporally*, they...take shape, persist for a duration, and then disintegrate" (1990:4).

The main key of Lash's theory is the concept of *regimes of signification*¹. This concept is found to be particularly attractive because it connotes a temporal dimension and the conditions of production and consumption of cultural objects. Each regime of signification, says Lash, comprises a distinct *cultural economy* which includes a particular institutional framework, a particular way cultural objects circulate, and a specific *mode of signification* which is the way meanings are produced. Each regime of signification relates for each different stage and in different ways, a signifier, a signified and a referent, (the signifier is a sound, image, word or statement; the signified is a concept or meaning; and the referent an object in the real world to which signifier and signified connect). Lash (1990:12) describes what he takes some of the advantages of this model to be as follows:

¹ A term Lash has adopted from political economists of the Regulation School (1990: 4) and their notion of regimes of accumulation. The analogy between the economic system and the circulation of cultural products was also adopted by Lyotard when he relates the production of knowledge with the production of money (1979:17). Also Pierre Bourdieu (1984) uses the concept of "cultural capital" in relation with "economic capital" and discusses the balance between the two in the definition of the individual's social status.

The idea of regimes of signification is aimed at covering the whole range of postmodern cultural objects, not just in say, architecture but right across the spectrum. It is equally a model that attempts to account for both "textual" aspects and cultural aspects as well as conditions of production and reception.

This theoretical perspective, confined as it is to the study of culture and firmly linked with social life, was found to be particularly applicable to the present study which is intended to be a *sociological analysis* of a cultural realm - the *museum*. The museum as a leisure setting and a cultural object, is here seen as being conditioned by the mode of production and reception of a certain time and as inserted in a particular cultural economy. It is also seen as an institution in which objects circulate and meanings are conveyed as part of a broader mode of signification. The transformations emerging within the museum field are the consequence of the emergence of new cultural paradigms and therefore of the decline and rise of different hegemonies and their specific cultural and social environments.

This is a brief introduction to Lash's theory. The theory will now be further developed and complemented by other examples and other analyses which together will enhance its understanding and coherence.

1. The rise and the decline of the bourgeois paradigm

Modern times have been repeatedly defined as having their origins in the scientific revolution of Renaissance and moreover of the further development of the seventeenth century Enlightenment thinking, which acknowledged the emanation of the scientific spirit, and meant above all the proclamation of the superiority of Reason as a guide to knowledge, and a belief that humankind could control the natural environment. The present, however, will ignore these remote origins and concentrate for the most part upon the period which followed the *industrial revolution* and marked the establishment of a new social group and social order: the *bourgeoisie* as a ruling class, the creation of big cities (and their citizens), and the emergence of the modern *nation-state* intended to regulate all spheres of citizens' lives.

According to Scott Lash, what defines the *modern paradigm* is a *discursive* cultural formation. *Discursive* means the paradigm is constructed upon a *narrative*, a sequence which has a beginning, middle and end, and in which events follow one another as cause and effect. This modern rationale comes to contradict the previously traditional cyclical conception of time determined by the recurrent transformations of natural life. According to the modern view, historic times were instead a sequence of distinct eras, each meaning improvement in quality over the previous. Behind this *linear* perspective there was an idea of perfection and convenience, which gave the modern citizen a sense of stability against a past viewed as traditional and obscure. Improvements in medicine, transportation, housing, education and other facilities had made life easier and safer for a great part of the population, and had given the elites of the time a new sense of optimism. "To be modern", wrote Marshall Berman (1990: 15), "is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world".

Lash has also defined modern times in terms of an aesthetic realism based on *cultural differentiation*². Different spheres become independent, self-legislating: the cultural is distinguished from the social, the aesthetic is separated from the theoretical and the secular from the religious. Lash conceives this process as consisting of three distinct phases: (i) the primitive, (ii) the religio-metaphysical and the (iii) modern. In primitive societies, culture and the social were undifferentiated, religion and its rituals were enmeshed in the social or in other words the sacred was immanent in the profane. In

²This idea of differentiation as a characteristic of modern times had previously been explored by M. Weber (1946) in an essay on the sociology of religions "Religious rejections and their directions", also it had been discussed by M.S. Whimster and S. Lash (1987) introduction to "Max Weber, Rationality and Modernity"; and J. Habermas (1981).

the second phase, the religio-metaphysical, modernization brought about the differentiation of the cultural from the social, and the spiritual from the secular in the world religions, (although according to the author this was more apparent in Protestantism than Catholicism). This automatization, which was brought to new extremes with the eighteenth century Kantian differentiation of the theoretical, ethical and aesthetic realms, opened up the possibility for the development of what Lash has named an 'aesthetic realism'.

This analysis has particular interest for the understanding of the *museum's* appearance as a cultural institution in the cadre of social life, and of the museum experience as an aesthetic experience. The separation of the aesthetic from social and religious life, has entailed, according to Lash, the separation of the subject (the viewer) from the cultural object. This separation opened a space, not possible previously, for *representations* in which one type of entity was able to represent another type of entity. Cultural objects were accepted as close representations of reality itself and able to speak for it in its absence. This explains their role inside the institution-museum as well as the need to create places such as museums where viewers could gaze upon them. The museum emergence has also presupposed, according to this view, a pre-existing differentiation of the cultural and the social. Culture is separated from the aesthetic realm and as a consequence of its isolation from the other spheres of life, it acquires a non-true value opposed to the *scientific esprit* where principles were sought to be true in their modes of valuation and consequences.

Another consequence of this process of *differentiation* was the emergence of "narrative realism" which was also dependent on the separation of the scientific from the religious view. Narrative realism presumes a *rational* "reading" of the surrounding world which came to be the basis for the first museums' discourse.

It is important to stress that this new rationality was, above all, part of an emergent institutional order which tended to regularise the citizens' behaviour in every circumstance of social life (this is consistent with Norbert Elias's theory as it will be described below). This rationality was also based on other *differentiations* expressed by a dual system of thoughts in which the first element was seen as having the power to control the second: Reason and nature; State and the citizen; bourgeoisie and the working class; private and public; work and leisure; present and past; "Us civilized" and "others uncivilized"; "Us transmitters" and "others receivers" (this last distinction is particularly important for the understanding of the museum's position in this order of things).

Behind these efforts to rationalize cultural and social life and the relations between individuals and their surroundings (be they nature, objects or other human beings) were the efforts of a new social formation engaged in the process of industrialization and embedded with ideals of perfection and social harmony intended to be global in their consequences and implications- the *bourgeoisie*. The new industrial bourgeois concerned as he was with copying the social ethos of the upper classes, saw himself as an example to be followed by the lower classes, which were considered socially undesirable although crucial for the economy and above all for the preservation of his position at the top of the social scale. The idea of lifestyles to be admired and reproduced by a whole population, would lead in turn to the concept of entire nations to be admired as centres of the world, and reproduced elsewhere. The notion of a universal history of dominators and dominated justified the idea of spreading the values of a country to the entire world. As a consequence of this, submitted to a strong economic dependency, citizens and countries had no choice but to accept and trust the protection and control of others (citizens and nations).

The *cultural differentiation* of the aesthetic, the social, and the religious spheres was thus part of the process of another kind of differentiation: the one of a number of institutional and normative spheres - the economy, the family, and the state. John Urry in his interpretation of Lash's theory called these latter *horizontal differentiations* which complement the vertical differentiations "between culture and life, between high and low culture, between scholarly or auratic art and popular pleasures, and between elite and mass forms of consumption" (Lash 1990: 84) as proposed by Lash. The conjunction of these two axes (vertical and horizontal) will help to put these changes in terms that go beyond the single notion of the production of culture.

1.1. *The bourgeois cultural economy*

The bourgeois cultural economy was therefore the result of the relation of superiority which positioned transmitter and receiver in opposite poles of the communication process. "According to this view, communication was a means of transmitting ideas from one mind to another to achieve understanding and influence" (Heath and Bryant 1992:29).

Transmitter ---- influence ----> Receiver

Fig. 1 The modern communicational model

The realist culture was based on a causation in which actions were effects whose causes were the goals of the dominant groups. The cultural producer (the transmitter) aimed to transmit meanings to a passive receiver who had no option other than to submit, admire and understand the cultural object precisely in the way in which it was meant to be understood. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), one of the originators of the bourgeois rationality, defined the behaviour of citizens as "a text written by the state": "the Common-peoples' minds", he states, "are like clean paper, fit to receive whatsoever by Public authority shall be imprinted in them" (as quoted by Hartley 1992: 124). Hartley's comments on this statement by Hobbes as follows: "This print metaphor presumes, of course, that the common people will stand still long enough to receive clearly enough the impressions designed for their edification" (Hartley *ibid.*: 119).

In this context, audiences were nothing more than spectators, and the cultural objects glorified the values of the cultural élites. The transmitter invested the cultural objects with his or her own social status. The value of the objects was validated by their own physical appearance in the presence of the viewer, who in turn did not have qualities of his or her own, was merely a passive recipient of information and was happy to understand it in the way proposed by the transmitter.

1.2. *The bourgeois mode of signification*

In terms of *modes of signification*, according to Scott Lash, the modern world made another kind of *differentiation*: that between the roles of the signifier, signified and the referent. This means in essence that an object could be perceived in its own materiality, a materiality to which it was possible to add extra information and context, although these extra qualities did not tend to appear simultaneously. This relation between the object and the viewer was called by Walter Benjamin the "auratic experience". According to Benjamin "to perceive the aura of an object we look at, means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return" (1979: 190). Objects like monuments, paintings, sculptures even buildings (especially those erected for museums), belonged to the material culture the élites had chosen to represent their identity and in which they invested their own power. The charisma of these objects was enhanced by the fact that they were to be seen by a multitude of admirers. The auratic experience as part of the bourgeois mode of signification, can also be explained as a straightforward relation between an object and its meaning. These objects are manipulated by the ruling classes in order to demonstrate that there was no

place for illusion. They only have one meaning which was strongly connected with the power of the group they represent.

If the previous order of Renaissance art was basically a symbolic order determined by the relation between Man and God, in which the artist just had to let the divine inspiration influence his or her creations, the bourgeois *realist* art is the result of the power of the artist to transform Nature according to his own will.

2. The modernist paradigm

The term *modernity*³ has been widely used to illustrate important transformations in the process of modernization. In terms of the development of western societies it meant basically advanced urbanization, expanded formal education, generalized health care, geographical and economic mobility and the materialization of the idea of the nation-state. If modernity on the one hand defines *in extremis* the bourgeois world, on the other hand it introduces the decline of this same bourgeois rationale and the emergence of a new realm from which the present scene originates. Modernity defines both the *status quo* of an epoch, and at the same time the tendency which has constituted itself against this same *status quo* (here defined as modernism). It is the consequence of the exaggeration of bourgeois values, but it is also the beginning of the end of the old hegemonies as a result of the appearance of new intermediate groups and of a greater diversification of power structures.

The analysis of *modernity* and *modernism* is crucial in this study since, as, as will be demonstrated, it precludes the changes occurring in the current social and cultural scene which were defined under the concept of postmodernism. According to some authors (Berman 1990, Rojek 1993, Giddens 1991), modernism is the greatest change since industrialization, as postmodernism has not yet proved to constitute a really autonomous order.

Modernism thus reflects a transition that was initiated in the late nineteenth century and is still prevalent in present times. It is a transition from a society based on a stable

³The concepts of **modernization**, **modernity/modernism** will be reviewed and clarified throughout this work. However, in order to make things easier for the reader, a short explanation may help by defining each of these notions before dealing with more specific examples: **modernization** taken as a process, is the most embracing of these concepts. It marks a long term trend in the history of western societies which is still the major reference for historians, economists and social researchers.

Modernity and **modernism** are terms that, although controversial, have served to explain processes of transformation occurring by the end of the nineteenth century mostly in the urban context, and have been especially applied by art historians and social and cultural analysts. **Modernity** is usually used to define the process by which intermediate groups - the middle class - become hegemonic and come to adopt the universal ideals of the enlightened humanism of previous elites. It represents the reinforcement of the dominant discourse of the *establishment* which tends to become widespread and to work as a moralizing force for the lower strata. It is the rise of funded and trading institutions both academic and commercial which, protected by a centralizing state, came to consolidate their achievements by means of the creation of standard products, and of non-critical consumers and non-critical audiences. **Modernism** has usually been applied as an *outsider* reaction to modernity. It is the emergence of new sets of aesthetic, intellectual, philosophical and political ideals which have developed as a result of inevitable urban social and cultural diversity and openness. Although keeping with a dogmatic style which characterizes these times, it is the creation of alternative discourses for alternative audiences. Therefore, in the present study, **modernity** will be applied as a shift within the process of modernization which comes to embrace society as a whole and which generates an institutional and centralized consensus; **modernism** is its uncontrolled and unpredictable effects.

social order and strict vision of the world, to a less predictable society. Marshall Berman (1990: 345/346) defines it through Karl Marx's metaphor "all that is solid melts into air"⁴:

To be modern, I said, is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that this fervid and perilous flow allows.

For Marshall Berman (1990) what modern times initiate and what is aggravated with modernism is the process of disintegration of the relationship between the individual and nature, it is the starting point of a society of permanent contradiction and *risk* (see also Ulrich Beck 1992). The *risk* introduced with modernism is, according to Anthony Giddens (1992), counterbalanced by *trust* and security in a complex dialectical relation. The modern individual appears in the new social sphere as someone who has gained the protection of the state but is losing the traditional protection of family, land, community and religious beliefs.

2.1. The city as a space for social and cultural change

The idea of modernity as a social and cultural shift in the process initiated with modernization, involves the emergence of the big metropolis and the chaotic heterogeneity of urban life, as a consequence of immigration booms and the mixing up of social groups and of different cultures. One of Scott Lash's intentions was to look at how the processes of modernism and postmodernism were played out in the context of the urban place. This perspective is of particular importance to the study of *museum* developments as museums were born as part of the city and throughout their existence have maintained with it a relationship of mutual dependency. "Buildings and cities do not circulate as do other cultural and material goods, but cultural and material goods circulate in cities and buildings" (Lash 1990: 32). It is assumed here that the city has been producing the communication environment (the modes of signification) in which museums' producers and consumers have been immersed (regimes of signification), and the changes occurring in the city had important implications for the museum's own communication environment. An understanding of

⁴The title of Berman's book about modernity.

what the city has meant for its citizens with the passage of time will therefore help the understanding of the audiences' different perceptions and expectations. It is also assumed that the social divisions within the space of the city and the possibilities of social interaction between the groups that constitute the city fabric, have been continuously extrapolated to the museum's interiors and have determined the museum's possibilities of social attraction.

If in earlier times the city has been predominantly an image of stable relationships and fixed elements, during the late nineteenth century it became more heterogeneous and undifferentiated, "a primary image of flux, of dislocations rather than location" (Pike 1981 :17). This process was, according to Giddens (1991:1), the result of "disembedding mechanisms" which he defined as "mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space distances". This disordering/ reordering of time and space in social life would strongly affect the perceptions of pedestrians in the urban realm as well as those of the public in public and private spaces.

Modernist literature is an important source for the study of people's lives in a city undergoing transition. Walter Benjamin (in the 1930s) was one of the first to use modernist writers as a source for his critical analysis of cultural change: "(they) have described the social types that might be encountered by a person taking a look at the streets and market places: the itinerant vendor of the boulevards, the crowds going to and from work, the new rich in the foyer of the opera house" Benjamin (1983: 163)⁵.

The modernist writer's critical eye is of great importance in understanding the forces of change and inertia present in the urban environment, the possibilities of social encounters and linked with the restructuring of urban space. Benjamin quotes Paul Valéry (1871-1945): "the inhabitant of the great urban centres reverts to a state of savagery - that is, of isolation" (1983:176); Friedrich Engels (1820-95): "a city like London, where we can roam about for hours without reaching the beginning of an end ... is really something very special"; and, "these Londoners have had to sacrifice what is the best in human nature in order to create all the wonders of civilization with which their city stems ... they rush past one another as if they had nothing in common" (1983: 169); and Baudelaire (1821-67): "they (the masses) do not stand for classes or any sort of collective; rather, they are nothing but the amorphous crowd of passers-by,

⁵Also Norbert Elias (1982: 275/276) sees in modern literature examples of lucidity of human observation, the capacity to see people in their entire social context and understand them through it. In this literature, says Elias, "the individual figure is never artificially isolated from the fabric of his social existence, he is simply dependent on others".

the people in the street" (1983:107). There is a pessimistic tone in these criticisms. The new social apparatus in the urban streets was having important effects on the way people see each other and are bound together, and was creating less apparent although no less important social barriers.

According to Benjamin (1983) the town described by modernist writers reflected the bourgeois need for *interiors*. The bourgeois occupied a certain space in the social hierarchy, yet also occupied a certain space within the city structure: it was not possible to stroll about everywhere in the city. The space devoted to the circulation of the bourgeoisie was the *arcades*: "glass-covered, marble-panelled passageways through entire complexes of houses whose proprietors have combined for such a speculation" (Benjamin 1983:30). Concurrent with the arcades the *museum's* building (as an interior) was fulfilling a similar role (as will be developed in chapter four): they protected the bourgeois from the pedestrian threat. This threat was more symbolic than physical as it was the bourgeois identity that required protection from the contact with other groups. The modern city was thus, in its origins, a space for *social differentiations* and for the display of different identities.

By the time these writers were beginning to describe the social atmosphere in European cities, some important changes were occurring. Previous spatio-social differentiations were about to be blurred with the emergence of a new phenomenon: the fear arising from the situation of the massification of habits and behaviours made some groups more conscious of their own social role and anxious to maintain codes of conduct that would work as marks of distinction (see Elias 1982a: 254).

Within the process of growth of the big metropolis it tended to aggregate, blurring social differences whilst at the same time trying to keep its differentiations by means of struggles for status and prestige. The atmosphere of the modern city also meant for its pedestrians an attitude of displaying, pretending, showing off, since the potential of proximity between people was still a proximity of solitary contemplation. As Benjamin puts it: "Interpersonal relationships ... are distinguished by a marked preponderance of the activity of the eye over the activity of the ear" (1979:38). For Norbert Elias (1982a: 202): "it is the transformation of what manifested itself originally as an extensive expression of pleasure, into the passive and more ordered pleasure of spectating, a mere pleasure of the eye". This activity of the eye, an eye that sees from outside the scene, reinforces the gap between the different groups that constitute the city's fabric and even more between rich (the old aristocracy) and poor (the lower working class). These two groups were forced to retreat to their own

realms. The aristocracy develops a repulsion from the vulgar which they associated with the bourgeoisie and retreats to its country houses whilst the lower strata, the oppressed and poorer *outsider* groups, tend to live in segregated areas.

The persistence of these separated worlds despite the greater homogeneization of the urban structure, is well exemplified in a poem by Baudelaire called *The Eyes of the Poor* quoted by Berman (1990:149). Two lovers were sitting down on the terrace in front of a *new cafe* that formed the corner of a new boulevard. The cafe "displayed proudly its unfinished splendours". As the lovers sit they were confronted with other people's eyes: a poor family dressed in rags (a father, a son and a baby), who were contemplating the new cafe fixedly. Baudelaire tries to interpret their thoughts. The father's eyes seem to say "How beautiful this is! All the gold of the poor world must have found its way onto these walls". The son's eyes seem to say "How beautiful it is! But it is a house where only people who are not like us can go". The baby's eyes "were fascinated to express anything but joy, stupid and profound" (it is not difficult to imagine the same scene happening in front of one of the big cities' museums). Berman (1990: 149) concludes:

their fascination carries no hostile undertones; their vision of the gulf between the two worlds is sorrowful, not militant, not resentful but resigned.

In a city where people pass, stand, watch the flowing of events without words, it is easy to understand the importance given to sight as a way of preventing emotional and physical involvement. However the act of seeing others was not exercised without a sort of trouble: Georg Simmel (as quoted by Benjamin 1983), refers to some obvious tasks with which the eye is charged: "The person who is able to see but unable to hear is much more ... troubled than the person who is able to hear but unable to see. Here is something ... characteristic of the big city". This type of attitude emerging with modernism has been widely identified with the word: *flâneur*.

For Baudelaire the *flâneur* was "a contemplative spectator of the world", a new social type defined as the one who "browsed" in the city streets, in the parks, in the shopping areas (and in the museum interiors), keeping the same disengaged attitude towards his or her surroundings. This disengaged attitude came to be internalized by other emerging groups - the middle classes - and it seems (as will be demonstrated later) to have persisted till the current scene (see Urry 1990).

2.2. *The emerging middle class*

The bourgeois identity came therefore to be threatened by their own admirers. If cultural domination has been traditionally related to economic power and to a relatively static social stratification, as soon as the profits of the economy were more fairly distributed reaching other social strata, the lifestyles of the élites became contagious: intermediate groups urging for social prestige appeared on the social stage and converted material goods into objects of desire. This important shift made possible a wider diversity of options and combinations, not only regarding consumption of goods and symbols but also regarding social encounters and places for these encounters to occur.

The rise of these intermediate groups, with fresh possibilities for social and cultural intervention presented an opportunity for aesthetic creativity and social diversification that had previously not been possible. However, and here lies the importance of Giddens's (1992) notions of trust and risk, the middle class phenomenon had two contradictory facets: if the growing social diversification opened up the possibility for the creation of more inventive lifestyles, at the same time, in terms of the social order, these new groups adopted part of the strict legacy of the previous elites. They did this by internalizing the constraints imposed by the upper classes upon themselves, and by imposing them in turn on the lower classes (fear of loss or reduction of social prestige is, according to Norbert Elias, one of the most powerful motive forces in the transformation from constraints through others into self-constraints).

Jean Baudrillard (1968, 1975, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1990) has built his theories of social consumption upon the tastes and expectations of the middle class. According to Baudrillard's semiological analysis of consumption, the goods people consume are *symbols* which relate to the structure of consumption, just as concepts are symbols which relate to the structure of a language (in the way Ferdinand de Saussure⁶ has defined it). People organise their tastes as signs through which they show their positions in the network of social relationships. It is no longer merely an economy that structures people's purchases, but a system of social significations attached to goods (and their *sign-values* rather than use-values). The groups that make most use of this symbolic system are those who are less secure of their own identity - the middle classes.

⁶Ferdinand de Saussure (Sanders 1979), a Swiss linguist, saw language as a system of signs in which words (the signifiers) have only an arbitrary relation to what they signify (the signified or meaning). A word, according to Saussure's view, gets its meaning from the way different signs relate to each other.

Baudrillard (1983) also uses the idea of *risk* to define the middle classes' ambiguous situation. On one hand they were able to move within the structure of social stratification, escaping the isolation of working class or rural people, while on the other hand they had to face the barriers the old elites had built to oppose those wishing to climb the social ladder. The level of aspiration of this class results, therefore, in a compromise between a realism based on the facts imposed by the bourgeoisie and an "unrealism" sustained against the dominant ideology. It is this false legitimacy that presses the middle class to invest in the accumulation of objects of prestige to try to compensate for the social recognition that tended to escape them.

What is important to note is that these intermediate groups, by investing in lifestyles, were responsible for shaking the system of the old bourgeois tradition not only as producers of culture but as its consumers. Even more significant than the creation of new cultural products was the emergence of *new audiences* able to receive and appropriate them as theirs. "The rise of new collective actors and urbanisation, makes an audience receptive to modernist cultural forms" Lash (1990: 70).

2.3. *Changes in space and time perceptions*

The *railway* was the first phenomenon responsible for this shift in peoples' perceptions: it enabled easy travel through regions removed from the charismatic metropolis. Its power had important cultural implications, among them the universalization of the urban lifestyles, transcending older social boundaries and spreading urban industrial centres to undeveloped areas (Mac Cannell 1976). Through the train's window it was possible to see that historical time was not progressing in a narrative sequence, but instead, for the traveller to gaze upon a plurality of different narratives that were flowing simultaneously: old worlds and new worlds were sharing a common existence. According to Giddens (1992) (who gives to the time and space dimensions an important emphasis among the causes of social change), the basic trust which had been connected with the interpersonal organisation of time and space, was replaced by the emptying of time and space by the dynamism of modernity. The effect on social relations was that they were suddenly to be articulated across indefinite tracts of time-space which tend to be progressively undifferentiated.

After the train, the telephone, the radio, and even more significantly the television, would introduce an era of mass communication which would challenge even more

dramatically spatial and temporal distinctions. They would basically introduce, not only new ways of spreading information, but also of perceiving the surrounding world through new juxtapositions of social groups, ethnicities, modes of appearance and behaviour.

2.4. A middle class cultural economy

The homogenization of citizens in anonymous crowds during the nineteenth century, had brought a new meaning for the production of culture. High- and low-culture were becoming more and more two distinct spheres and so were their settings and users. Meanwhile, a middle class culture was imposing its values which were increasingly based on commercial rules and conditioned by the market place. It is the starting point of a culture produced for the masses and having the masses in mind. It is simultaneously the retreat of the upper classes to their private high culture institutions (such as museums, art galleries, opera houses), in which their objects could be protected and their values could remain preserved from the public domain. This shift is concomitant with the appropriation by the middle classes of important positions in administration and decision spots. State and civil society were developing together and the capacity of the state to influence the everyday of citizens' behaviours tended to become institutionalized.

The public domain is that of the state, while the private is that which resists the encroachment of the state's surveillance activities.

Giddens (1991: 151)

This relates to the birth of a series of middle class plans to *educate* the people. To educate meant, more than anything else, to spread their ideology to all the population and to destroy the remaining social enclosures. However, despite being authoritarian in their aims and methods, these cultural programmes were induced by ideals of democracy and universalism. The middle class citizens considered themselves to be citizens of the world, a perspective the old bourgeois elites lacked, engrossed as they were in their own small and private worlds. As a result of this universal vision, there was the belief that it was possible to educate entire nations. The popularisation of *education* was in part inspired by the manifestos issued during the French Revolution, and was based on the idea (now taken for granted), that everyone had a right to knowledge, a right reflected in the unquestioning duty of the state to educate the public. In practical terms this was a means of maintaining the citizens under a strict

civilizing ethic, and of ensuring their passivity. In the short term, however, these same populations were to become avid consumers instead of avid pupils and the producers of culture would respond to their aims with products that were more commercial than educational.

The new consumers par excellence, were the *masses*. They were a new fragmented, semi-skilled working class combined with middle class workers. By the turn of the nineteenth century a proportion of the working class had reached a certain position in the social scale which has enabled them to share with higher groups the privileges of a more humane society: they had more time for enjoyment and more money to spend. Daniel Bell defines these post-industrial needs (1974:127) as follows:

If an industrial society is defined by the quantity of goods as marking a standard of living, the post-industrial society is defined by the quality of life as measured by the services and amenities - health, education, recreation and the arts - which are now deemed desirable and possible for everyone.

The city's consumption appeal, as has already been noted, was the major cause of most of the changes: "the forced-pace development of the great metropolises from the end of the nineteenth century is something which makes modernism, as it were, happen" (Lash 1990: 31).

One of the first reasons for this new consumption atmosphere was the improvement of the circulation of traffic and pedestrians. The urban symbol that best exemplified this shift was the *boulevard*: big avenues crossing the cities wherever they were needed. Also, created were the *public walks*: large pavements just for strolling up and down to see and to be seen. Yet this was not done without incurring important social risks, a concern expressed by Marshall Berman (1990:151):

The new boulevards would enable traffic to flow through the centre of the city, and to move straight ahead from end to end...stimulate a tremendous expansion of local business at every level... The new construction wrecked hundreds of buildings, displaced uncounted thousands of people, destroyed whole neighbourhoods that had lived for centuries. But it opened up the whole of the city, for the first time in its history, to all its inhabitants.

The boulevards were like arteries in a mass circulation system. However, "they also restructured what would be gazed upon" (Urry 1990:136), by locating the fashionable middle class taste at the centre and forcing the poor and their dull environments to

move to peripheral zones (Berman 1990). Also by displacing some charismatic buildings and monuments that previously used to be located at the centre of urban circulation (Lash 1990).

Within the city realm the feeling of being seen by others brought a concern for styles and fashion. These constituted new sets of restrictions imposed on people, restrictions whose imperatives were this time more subjective than objective. Lifestyles became increasingly important in the constitution of self-identity and daily activity (see Giddens 1992). The greater potential for consumption meant an increased potential for creativity favoured by the circulation of information by means of the new mass media. This has helped the creation of new symbols, apparently more personal, more inventive and more ephemeral, but in their essence more regulative than ever before.

Pierre Bourdieu sees in this aestheticization of life, instead of a reason for increased social "un-differentiation" (the same as Lash's de-differentiation), a factor for fresh social distinctions. In his study *Distinctions* (1984), he shows, by means of empirical evidence, how people tend to be organised by tastes and distinctive classifications which enable other possibilities of combination in the construction of their social ethos. This identity is no longer dependent on birth. Tastes, habits and lifestyles are acquired and transformed during the individual's life span. They organize social life and structure social relations. This more open system of social interrelationships is nevertheless not free from constraint; it is dependent on the mastering of specific systems of codification which compel individuals to chose certain figurations and reject others constituting coherent clusters of choices (*habitus*⁷). In order to participate in this more complex process of socialization, individuals have to deal with even more complex games of appearance and simulation.

Bourdieu defines the new popular aesthetic (a middle class aesthetic), as one in which art and life have become intertwined. The form of things is filled with social function. The way fashion is chosen and consumed is determined by socially acquired and transmitted competencies. This applies to the consumption of all cultural spheres (in which the museum has a place of its own). It applies also to the rejection of the tastes and places of others. People like certain places because they have learned to dislike others (the non-visitor is not defined only as someone who does not visit a place but who has chosen to visit other places instead). This aversion towards others' lifestyles

⁷ Bourdieu has adopted this concept from the German word *habitus* as applied by Norbert Elias whose work had a crucial influence upon Bourdieu's sociological thinking (see Mennell 1992: 30).

is, for Pierre Bourdieu, one of the strongest factors for the foundation of group identities as well as one of the strongest barriers separating "Us" from "Others".

2.5. *The modernist mode of signification*

After this discussion of fashion, tastes and lifestyles, and their importance for social appearance, it is easy to understand modernism as a time when *representations* came to be prominent as *modes of signification*. "To a certain point in historical time, representations came to constitute a sufficient proportion of all objects, so that they came to be taken seriously in their opacity and complexity" (Lash 1990: 15). It is not the reality that is problematic, but the representation, the quality of the relationship between the real thing and the facsimile, the referent and the signifier. The power of representations is their capacity to work as signs and to lose their link to any referent.

In terms of the perception of art, the mechanical reproduction resulting from the invention of lithography had destroyed the "auratic experience"- the viewer in front of the real object⁸. The work of art was losing its most important elements: the presence in time and space, the unique existence at a specific location. The way in which perception is organised, the medium through which it is accomplished, show the social transformations expressed by these changes. The shift from modernization to modernity, means as in Walter Benjamin's theory of the perception of art, *the decay of the aura* of the single object, the dissolution of the aesthetic distance between spectator and work of art, and with it, the decay of the élites that in the past had used these objects to impose their status upon others.

Cultural objects became signs without any referent to refer to, and came to share the same social and emotional appeal of other objects circulating in the market place. Just as the civilizing of citizens by means of the spread of manners and values had a universal scope, so had the modernist culture and its products. The middle class understood that to spread the message was to invest it with an extra glamour, since it could be received by millions and transcend time and space barriers.

According to Walter Benjamin modernity also creates with universalism, an *exhibition value of things*. "The reproduction of ancient statues of Venus for the masses to see, is justified by their universal meaning, emancipation and socialisation" (Lash 1990). The

⁸Lithography itself was soon to be surpassed by photography and with Edison's invention at the end of the nineteenth century, the recording of sound, a new emphasis was given to the art of reproduction.

cult-value becomes the exhibition-value of the work. "With the different methods of technical reproduction of a work of art, its fitness for exhibition increased to such an extent that the quantitative shift between its two poles turned into a qualitative transformation of its nature" (Benjamin 1979:227). The work of art becomes a commodity (see also Mac Cannell 1976). It is what Berman calls "the loss of a halo" (1990:115). The religious experience, the experience of something holy is profaned. Life becomes thoroughly desanctified. Culture becomes part of modern industry. For Andre Malraux (1954, 1976) who discussed the meaning of representations of works of art in museums - "the glory of the master who does not imitate anyone is replaced by the glory of those who want to imitate everyone"⁹. The artist is influenced by the reproduction which legitimated the oeuvre. This legitimisation is the result of the exhibition of all masterpieces museums have elected as Theirs, and of their reproduction in cards, posters, books which out of the museums' buildings circulate as Ours.

The *rights of exhibition* were also discussed by Bourdieu (1984). This legitimisation of art accords an aesthetic value (a form) to objects that had previously functioned mainly as curiosities, historical documents or ethnographic materials. The hegemonic aesthetic eye organises the material culture according to status (the *pure* taste against the *barbarian* taste) within a certain power hierarchy.

From the side of the production of culture and its dissemination, the emphasis on exhibition (as a product of enlightened transmitters) gave rise within the producers' world, to the concept of the *public* (the potential receivers). This modernist public, unlike the publics of previous eras, tended now to be constituted by *critical* although somehow *ignorant* admirers. However contradictory this may seem, the renewed concern of attracting new publics was concomitant to an artistic (upper middle class) production more elitist in character. This art (from which the term "modernism" derives) was much less accessible to the masses than the previous (bourgeois) realist "texts" were: it was meant to *epater le bourgeois* (Lash 1990: 25). This "privatization" of art by making it more difficult, was used by the intellectuals of the time as a way of preserving a symbolical space of their own, whilst outside trivialization and superficiality tended to prevail¹⁰.

⁹Translated from the french "la gloire du maitre que nul n'imita succeda la gloire de ceux que tous voulaient imiter"(1976:243).

¹⁰This same attitude (the fear of vulgarization), was also used by scientists in Science Museums (see chapter four and six) to protect their positions by means of the increasing use of a scientific jargon in order to keep a certain type of audiences as theirs. "A specialized language" say Dunning and Sheard (1979: viii) "can serve as a means of social control, e.g. of distinguishing between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in order to facilitate the exclusion of the latter".

However, the individual's increasing aspiration for status enhancement would bring to art exhibitions even those sectors of the public less prepared to understand these more esoteric works of art. The enrichment of the lay public's basic knowledge (through a much greater degree of educational attainment and cultural homogeneity), brought "to places such as museums and art galleries a new kind of people with a different approach towards the work of art: contemplation and ignorant surprise" (Benjamin 1979: 228); "the public is an examiner, but an absent minded one" (ibid.: 243).

This argument demonstrates the rise of a new kind of distinction as a result of the popularization of élitist culture: "those who understand it and those who do not understand it" (Bourdieu 1984: 31). It divides the public between those specially gifted and others who come to experience humiliation and feelings of inferiority, embarrassment and shame, (see Elias below). These different experiences opened the way to new subdivisions and social distinctions (*habitus*). For those intermediate groups not familiar with elitist languages and places, there were two basic choices: the refusal to adopt a realm that was alien through the choice of other alternatives, or the pretentious display of false skills, which were used as a way to achieve a higher status.

The distinctions between high and low culture forms and places were becoming more obvious both for producers and consumers although this did not seem to affect the growing tendency for cross-social attendance. It is the emergence of "the distinctions between true art, distributed by non-for-profit corporations managed by artistic professionals and governed closely by prosperous and influential trustees, and popular entertainment, sponsored by entrepreneurs and distributed via the market to whomever would by it" (DiMaggio 1982).

If part of the public of the institution of high culture has assumed a sense of inferiority (Benjamin's "ignorant admirers"), there was outside these elitist spaces, a tendency for an increased public participation. Within the new commercial leisure practices the fact that they were no longer threatened by the physical appearance of the author or the magic power of the unknown (as in theatre and cult) gave them a new sense of autonomy and the confidence to criticize (Lash 1990). "Criticism" may also be expressed in the way people avoided some places and favoured others: "the public, elusive at the best of times, has a historic tendency not to stand still and take impressions that are deemed good for it, but simply to walk away" (Hartley 1992:121).

The possibility of *criticism* from the public realm had the power to constrain the producer who created for the public and having the public in mind. Similarly, while facing the camera the cinema actor and producer knew that they ultimately would face the public, the consumers who constitute the market, and the same pertained to the painter, the sculptor, the writer (and the curator). There is in criticism something of the attitude of the bourgeois *flâneur*. The audiences observed from a certain distance and while observing they judged. The less intense the experience, the more judgements and criticisms would arise.

Yet, no matter how powerful, this sense of criticism does not entirely escape the control of the producers and other taste-makers. The middle classes' appropriation of the emergent mass communication channels: newspapers, magazines and all types of graphic material at an early stage, and later through more sophisticated and efficient media controlled by influential groups, has enabled the shift from ideological and paternalistic actions based on the use of drastic measures supported by bureaucratic acts, to a less authoritarian, although more powerful, language of persuasion. As Hartley states: "the quest for the public is not, or not only, a quest for a 'real' collective of human bodies or organized population; it is a quest for the discourses, imagining and communicative strategies by means of which those populations might be recognized, organized, mobilized and 'impressed', or even congregate to take collective action in their own name, the name of the public"(1992: 121).

The isolation of the transmitter at one pole of the communication process, and the receiver on the other was therefore challenged by the need for *feed-back* from the side of production and of critical participation from the side of consumption. Communication loses its linear, causal sequence and becomes a system in which information circulates and is continuously transformed:

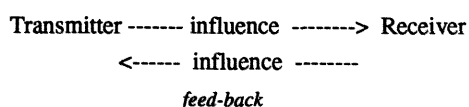


Fig. 2 The modernist communicational model

The concern for the *feed-back* of the transmission was legitimated by the emergence of two new sciences: psychology and sociology which, in the 1930s and 1940s, were

focusing their attention on the consumers' social characteristics as well as their external reactions and inner motivations. "It was soon discovered that audience members were not passive receivers of information, but rather they were active, and various intervening variables affected their reactions to messages" (Heath and Bryant 1992:269).

To summarize, if modernity saw the appropriation of culture by a larger and more diverse public, it also saw the creation of new types of distinctions according to the mastering of social and cultural codes. The increased possibility of choice and of cross-social attendance brought new challenges for the cultural producers and made them more responsive to the needs of the audience. Modernity meant the consciousness not only of the relative position each group occupied in the social structure of the time (both as producers and consumers) but also of the power of each side to influence the other's decisions. This is, as previously described, a consequence of important factual changes in the balance of power and the new social configurations that emerged not just in the economic sphere but also - and this is the one that is crucial for the present study - in the sphere of culture.

3. The Postmodern paradigm

According to Scott Lash's definition of postmodernism, it is an ideal type which can be combined, at the same historical time, with modernist configurations. Lash does not consider the whole of contemporary culture as being postmodern, but does consider the postmodern configuration as an emergent cultural paradigm. The schema of his book *Sociology of Postmodernism* is founded upon the assumption " that modernist cultural objects became pervasive from the late nineteenth century and postmodernism begins to make significant inroads in the past two decades" (1990: 13).

3.1. *Postmodernism as a regime of signification*

According to the author postmodernism is a regime of signification whose fundamental trait is *de-differentiation*. Lash defines *de-differentiation* by means of four components: firstly, the three main cultural spheres (aesthetic, ethical and political) lose their autonomy, in a process in which the aesthetic realm begins to colonise both the theoretical and moral-political spheres; secondly, the cultural realm is no longer "auratic" in Benjamin's sense, that is, it is no longer systematically separated from the social. This has to do with the partial breakdown of the boundaries between high and popular culture and the concomitant development of a mass audience for high culture. But it is also the result of a new immanence in social culture, in which representations also take the function of symbols; thirdly, the cultural economy becomes de-differentiated which, on the production side, means the disintegration of the figure of the author and on the consumption side the inclusion of the audience in the cultural product. Finally, in terms of the mode of signification, postmodernism problematizes the distinction and especially the status and relationship of signifier and referent (representation and reality).

Historically, postmodernism came to define the present cultural tendency which may have started with the radical transformations of the technologies of communication following the second world war. However, for most analysts of postmodernity, it was in the 1950s and 1960s, that several crucial social indicators came to characterise this new stage in a more obvious way.

If the railway was the most important motor of modernity, the television can be considered the most explosive invention of postmodernity. The most striking impact of television was the dissolution of the line between private and public; the possibility of travelling, learning, dreaming and escaping the daily routines within the comfortable space of people's own homes. It also brought an increased homogenization of tastes and lifestyles as soon as consumption became widespread reaching quickly and efficiently all social strata no matter their wealth or cultural background. It brought to households a world of simulation and illusion made available at the touch of a button. As Hartley puts it (1992: 90):

A glimpse, a frisson of excitement provoked by taking private pleasure from public contact, the pleasure of watching television to keep "in touch" by means of "the brush, not with skin... but with clothing, surfaces, textures, furtive appropriations of the look of otherness".

If the industrial era was a global effort to understand and control reality by all means, the postmodern era sought to show that reality itself was an illusion. "Postmodernism is an era of artificialization of making dreams come true, of imagineering as the Disney Corporation calls it" (Woolley 1992:1) .

3.2. *A postmodern cultural economy*

The postmodern cultural economy is thus *de-differentiated*. This means that both producers and consumers are engaged in the process of production. The decline of the work ethic weakens the moralizing efforts of cultural producers. The decline of meanings (which are lost within an oversupply of signifiers; with the bombardment of images and sounds) preludes their substitution by the impact on audiences.

Culture becomes part of the economic sector and its products become commodified. The distinction between material goods and cultural goods is drastically reduced as Lash explains: "both cultural and material goods possess both use-values and sign-values. In material goods, the use-value lies in the material properties of the good, and the sign-value in its signifying properties. In cultural goods both use-value and sign-value are inherent in the object's signifying properties" (1990: 43). The de-differentiation of cultural production means the recognition of the power of the public to make sense at first glance and to be prepared either to choose or reject the cultural product - "the public becomes the bearer of fashion meanings" (Hartley 1992: 98). Hartley even says that the idea of a potential public becomes so idealized for the

producers of culture who avidly seek to respond to its needs that "the belief in the public's existence is much more real than the public is" (1992: 119). The production of culture is now based on the idea that the viewer, or the audience, is part of a normally non-negotiable pact with the painter, director, curator (in the museum example), a pact which no longer involves producing on the one part and consuming on the other.

Transmitter and receiver, who used to be situated on opposite sides of the communication process, are hardly distinguishable since one cannot exist without the other. The idea of *feed-back* is substituted by the idea of *simultaneity*.

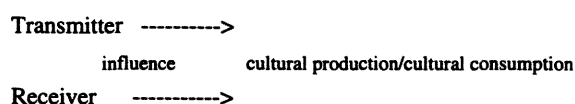


Fig.3 The postmodernist communicational model

This means that the critical participation of audiences which was a characteristic of modernism became even more enhanced: the author is diluted in the cultural product (which becomes the result of team work). The audience which is included in the process is no longer a homogeneous mass of receivers, but rather an aggregate of *specialized consumers* who demand more and more *specialized products*. "A major contribution of 20th century research has been to think of communication, not as a vehicle for transmitting ideas, but as a means for interaction" (Heath and Bryant 1992:29). The model these authors propose is the one adopted by the Office of Technology Assessment (in the United States):

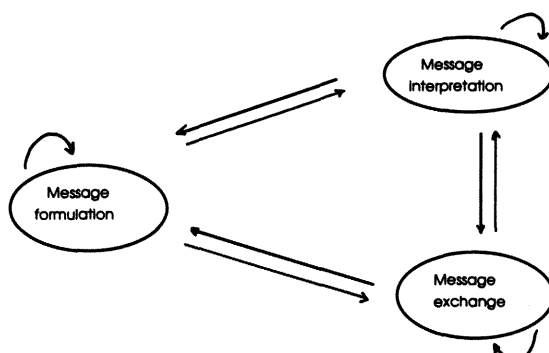


Fig.4 Heath and Bryant's transactional model of interactive communication.

Heath and Bryant defined this model as "a transactional model suitable for both interpersonal communication and interactive communication". Communication is in this context, "the process by which messages are formulated, exchanged and interpreted"(1992: 300). The term transmitter and the term receiver are absent in this definition. An interactive view of communication emphasizes the dynamic effort that all parties make while communicating. What counts is not the existence of transmitters and receivers but their united needs and efforts to achieve social communication.

This shift in the way the communication process is formulated is due to the banishment of the old and incontestable truths or principles. There are no authors, only creations which are more collective than individual. No one knows by heart the names of contemporary authors: memorising of authors and dates belongs to the past. The postmodern artist is the one who is able to put his own soul and sensibility in the transformations of daily life and to bring them to life in his work. By doing that he himself disappears as an individual.

For some *avant garde* postmodern artists, the criticism of the old institutions of culture, and the way in which culture was uncritically legitimized, gave rise to the criticism of the role of museums as "legitimizers" of respectable culture, and to the display of art outside the museum buildings, in places as ephemeral as the materials used: sculptures made of sand by the sea side or bridges swathed in paper. Cultural objects increasingly enter the cultural economy by way of markets and circulate among all types of people. Among the goods produced to respond to the postmodern demand are knowledge and information. The accumulation of knowledge and information becomes more important than the accumulation of wealth (Lash 1990). Cultural capital, as Bourdieu has demonstrated, has become one of the strongest bases for social differentiation. However, part of the information appeal is its connection with leisure, and its new forms of entertainment. Knowledge and recreation become interwoven (another de-differentiation) (see third chapter). To teach comes together with "to move" and "to delight", and these two last principles seem to cover the first (Jameson 1988).

The increasing value given to the manner in which spare time is spent increases the success of a leisure industry based on the same mechanisms of supply/demand as other superfluous goods. Leisure itself is becoming a commodity: it is offered in a packaged form which contains all the ingredients needed as both a social experience and a sign-value. In order to respond to its consumers' needs, the leisure industry is

employing new technologies which make experiences more unreal and consequently more exciting. The development of synthetic fibres and the sophistication of audio-visual technologies have reinforced the possibilities for illusion: a world of pastiche (Jameson 1988:17) superficiality, bricolage (Polan 1988).

High and low culture are now differentiated to a much lesser extent: in the sphere of high culture, a refusal to teach is due to the fear of a discursive referentiality and the recognition that the popular media are doing a much better job in terms of attaining their targets. Mass culture and high culture become competitors as their social functions become less precise. At the same time their economic goals become more pronounced.

When it is assumed that the separation between high and low culture is tending to disappear, it is normal to think of an intermediate zone to fill the gap. This intermediate zone has its own social actors, who Bourdieu (1984) named the new "cultural intermediaries". The new cultural intermediaries are a new version of the middle-classes which have replaced the old *élites* in the process of cultural production. They were defined by Bourdieu as those in charge of media, design, fashion, advertising, those who belonged to "para" intellectual information occupations, whose jobs entail performing services and producing, marketing and disseminating symbolic goods. These new professionals provide services based on an implicit notion of trust, a trust in the ability of people whom one does not know to provide an efficient and reliable service, a group of 'doers' rather than 'thinkers' (Walsh 1992). They are Hartley's "smiling professionals" and their success is measured by consumer satisfaction "where knowledge is niceness and education is entertainment" (Hartley 1992 : 135). They are the new cultural experts who rapidly circulate information between formerly sealed-off areas of culture, and who create new communication channels under conditions of intensified competition (Crane 1987). If the public is somehow unreal, so are these anonymous specialists. By their anonymity they are, according to Giddens (1992), removed from public access. Whilst protected from public criticism they try hard to popularise their products and make them more accessible to wider audiences.

This new group brought important changes in the balance of power and the interdependency between specialists of symbolic production and economic production. It is possible to speak of a cultural declassification of the traditional *élites* and the traditional legitimate cultural enclaves. They were called by Berman (1990:) the "1960s refugees" as they came from the counterculture which has survived from

the 1960s, which tends to create an alternative world based on alternative pleasures and desires (Berman 1990, Featherstone 1991). Among their number, as we shall see later, are the new museum curators.

However, these groups are less free and creative than they appear. They have to obey the rigidity of fashion and style within the narrow world in which they are forced to circulate (Lash 1990, Rojek 1993). Their struggles for hegemony are, according to Bourdieu, "classification struggles"; their habits, identities and classification schemata are rigid, artificial constructions with an ephemeral existence. The model which differentiates is the model of "distinction": Us in opposition to Others, not because Us are socially defined (as a group or in terms of class consciousness), but because they have the same rigid schemes of classification: the external images being shared and displayed in a society in which images are as important as the perceived reality.

They are, to summarise, the managers and interpreters of the postmodern cultural institutions in opposition to the old charismatic cultural élites, and this is what makes their position so crucial. They have to deal with the three "Ds": drama (performance), didactics (pedagogy) and democracy (participation), on a global scale (Hartley 1992: 183)¹¹.

The consumers of postmodern culture are the same middle classes who replaced the old bourgeoisie and integrated the skilled working class. They tend now to differentiate and value postmodern cultural objects rather than the old social performances. They are the service workers who tend, in their professional life, to be quickly trained and specialised for specific tasks, instead of having received long term education in universities. Whilst investing in the purchasing of goods (material or immaterial) these consumers are now aware of investing most of all in their social positions. According to the anthropologists Douglas and Isherwood (1980), the enjoyment of goods is only partly related to their physical consumption, being also crucially linked to their use as markers. The tertiary production of goods (information goods, education, arts, cultural and leisure pursuits) entails a lifelong investment in cultural and symbolic capital. "More than ever before employees in the service sector are removed from the experience of final production...With the distancing of the worker from the product, the experiences of everyday life have taken on a new confusion" (Walsh 1992:51).

¹¹ Their importance in the creation of the "new" museum in opposition to the products of the old curatorial staff will be emphasised in the fourth chapter.

Social differentiation no longer relates to positions within the system of production: proprietors and the working class can no longer be defined by their own identities. People tend to be organised by groups of interest, or with predispositions to adopt certain behaviours. A plurality of types of people defined by tastes and habits became a more consistent sociological reference than the old quantitative analysis based on economic and demographic data. Teenagers, "empty-nesters", young families, professionals, retired, disabled... came to represent social categories well known, if not by sociologists, at least by market researchers who believe in a higher segmentation of their markets and tend to target their products at increasingly specific audiences.

3.3. *The postmodern mode of signification*

Following Lash's theory, if in modernism the roles of signifier, signified and referent were clearly differentiated, in postmodernism the status of representations (signifier) and reality (referent) is problematical. If in modernism representations could refer, even if only loosely to a referent, in postmodernism representations take the function of symbols and objects tend to be forgotten. In this mode of signification called by Lash *figural* (replacing the modernist discursive), an increasing proportion of significations take place through images and not words. "Images resemble referents to a greater degree than words. Equally, a far greater proportion of referents themselves are in fact signifiers" (1990: 12). *Figural* means the manipulation of signs which float freely from objects and are available for use in a multiplicity of associated relations. The referent loses its importance in the triangle of the sign's theory. It is the relation between signifiers and signifieds that matters the most. "Signifiers are floating with no referents to attach themselves to" (Walsh 1992).

CONCLUSION

The analysis of modern and postmodern times in terms of developments in cultural production and consumption and in terms of the changes these developments have entailed in the way proposed by Scott Lash, has introduced new dimensions not normally taken into account in museum studies. It includes the role of struggles for hegemony within the institutions of culture in which both cultural entrepreneurs and publics are enmeshed in a complex system of interdependencies. Each system of interdependency tends to create its own rules by means of influencing individuals' tastes and behaviour, modes of perception and most of all the expression of their emotions. The institutions of culture, their producers and consumers as well as the products they generate, are part of the same web of relationships and the result of tensions created inside the system of stratification and its own dynamism. It is not possible to separate the ones from the others and from the global social environment to which they belong.

If contemporary cultural perception has tended progressively to lose its rationality, if it is tending to be based on sensation more than interpretation, if it operates by the spectator's immersion and the investment of his or her desire more than of his or her intellect, then a sociology of emotions based on empirical evidence which considers social change in a historical perspective, is crucial in order to understand how and why contemporary western societies have developed this way. A contribution to this question is given by Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process which will be summarized in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process

1. Introduction to Elias's theory

A number of central aspects in the development of western societies were described by Elias (1978b, 1982a) in his study *The Civilizing Process* (originally published in German in 1939). This study is based on a theoretical framework sufficiently comprehensive to explain broad transformations in the structure of western societies and its complex process of stratification and to produce simultaneously explanations of changes in the individuals' psychological make-up that is their expression of affects and emotions.

The basic idea is that the *civilizing process* is a long-term trend involving the development of power structures converging to the formation of modern states (defined by monopolization and centralization of taxes and physical force over a large area), in which the expression of affects and impulses has come under increasingly tighter social control and had important effects on the organization of individuals and groups within the social structure.

The process of *differentiation* of the different spheres of social life emerging with modern (bourgeois) societies (one of the central points in Lash's theory), is in Elias's model a key process in the transformation of social structure. According to Elias, from the earliest period of history of western societies to the present, "societies came to develop ... a great variety of specialized occupations, long chains of interdependence, and a comparatively high standard of living" (1978b: 159). A crucial aspect of this involved what Elias has called the "monopolization process". More particularly, it was his contention that the sort of differentiated and relatively autonomous "economy" that we take for granted emerged in conjunction with the monopolization of the means of violence. As Elias put it (1982a: 234):

The monopolization of the means of production, of "economic" means, is only one of those which stand out in fuller relief when the means of physical violence become monopolized, when, in other words, in a more pacified state

society the free use of physical force by those who are physically stranger is no longer possible.

Individuals formerly independent from each other became more and more dependent and were forced to regulate their desires and instincts to standardized rules regardless of social origins. A society in which forms of physical violence were used to release inner impulses in an uninhibited form, gives way to another in which each individual becomes the self-regulator of his own behaviour. This is the result of the monopolization of force by the central authority and its subjection to increasing public control. The cycle of violence that had characterized previous times "gradually calmed down and political conflicts came to be conducted more in terms of a set of non-violent rules and rituals, the rules and rituals of parliament" (Dunning 1989:45).

1.1. A processual analysis

In "What is Sociology?" (1978a) Elias describes what he considers to be "the problem of the inevitability of social development". This statement introduces a theory of social change that is not linear or deterministic but it is founded on a set of relationships particularly enlightening for the understanding of the present scene and for the anticipation of future developments. "One cannot see", says Elias, "whether this road or that road leads to a bridge over the river one wants to cross, so one uses a map". This "map" is in Elias's metaphor the discovery of previously unknown connections between phenomena (1978a:160).

When defining this process of change Elias denies the preponderance of some factors (like the economic as in the Marxist tradition) over the others. "Monopolies of physical violence and of economic means of consumption and production, whether co-ordinated or not, are inseparably connected, without one ever being the real base and the other merely a "superstructure" (1982b: 320). Economic factors are in this theory to be considered along with state-formation processes and forms of social interdependency.

Development occurs as a result of many plans and actions of individuals interacting to create an outcome that no individual person or group has planned or created. From these complex forms of interdependency arises an order more compelling and stronger than the will of the persons composing it. It is an order neither 'rational' nor 'irrational', it is neither the result of individuals' intentions, nor does it develop in an unstructured way. It is the progressively planned intervention that comes to order individual actions

as a result of the growing awareness of their complex differentiation. This interweaving of different factors acting simultaneously is better described in Elias's (1982a: 236) own words:

The closer the web of interdependencies becomes in which the individual is enmeshed with the advancing division of functions, the larger the social spaces over which this network extends and which become integrated into functional or institutional units - the more threatened is the social existence of the individual who gives way to spontaneous impulses and emotions, the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects, and the more strongly is each individual constrained from an early age to take account of the effects of his own or other people's actions on a whole series of links in the social chain.

What arises from this process is according to Elias empirical evidence, a sequence of stages in which it is possible to testify to: firstly the extent of individuals' control over "natural events"; secondly the extent of their control-chances over interpersonal relationships -that is over what are usually called "social relationships", and thirdly the extent of the control individuals exercise over themselves (Elias 1978a: 156). Elias refers in this connection to "the triad of basic controls". The three controls are: (i) the advance of *scientific knowledge* which increases people's ability to control "natural" events¹; (ii) *state-formation*, or the formation of relatively secure monopolies on tax and violence, which increases the capacity to control "social" events; and (iii) the *civilizing process* in which people's ability to exercise self-control increases.

Elias denies the assumption that "rationalization" was associated with the emergence of the bourgeoisie. Rationalization, according to Elias, grew with the development of the court society (although Elias warns against looking for absolute beginnings) (see Mennell 1992a: 102). Before the emergence of the new bourgeois order there was a "court-rationality" which specific form was based on "conspicuous consumption and was generated by the compulsion of the elite social mesh"; people and prestige were made calculable as instruments of power. The bourgeois-industrial rationality that followed was generated "by the compulsion of the economic mesh", prestige value and economic value became gradually interlinked. "The two variants of rationality have in common the preponderance of long-term reality-orientated considerations over momentary affects in the control of behaviour in particular social fields" (Mennell 1992a: 103). Changes of this kind do not begin in one class or another, "but arise in conjunction with the tensions *between* different functional groups in a social field and *between* the competing people within them" (1982a: 289).

¹People's control over natural events is in Lash's theory the result of the awareness of the role of the signifier as representation, which tends to become gradually more important than 'reality' itself.

1.2. A *figurational analysis*

The concept of "figuration" is crucial for the understanding of this "dynamic" relativism embedded in Elias's idea of process. It was first introduced in his work "What is Sociology?" (1978) and since then it has been widely applied by his followers as the basic Eliasian theoretical framework (see Gleichmann, Goudsblom and Korte 1977, Dunning 1986, 1989, 1992; Dunning and Sheard 1979, Rojek 1989, Dunning and Rojek 1992). As with other concepts it was applied in order to avoid the use of a sociological jargon already connoted with other perspectives not coincident with Elias's, for example, expressions like "social system" and "social structure" which gave "the idea of something separate from, beyond and outside individuals" (Mennell 1992a).

"Figurations" are in Elias theory, networks of interdependent acting humans continually in flux, and undergoing changes of many kinds - some rapid and ephemeral, others slower but perhaps more lasting (Mennell 1992a: 252). Development takes place, therefore, within the context of *human figurations* and it is an important aspect of their concurrent change. "Change" says Elias, "is not external or accidental to normality, on the contrary, it is the omnipresent, normal condition of social life" (1982a: 228).

What the concept of "human figurations" refers to is what Elias calls the "nexus of interdependencies" between people, the "chains of functions" and the "axes of tensions" - both in co-operation and in conflict - which can be identified for any social context. This *figurational approach* "has 'remarkable' potential for helping us to understand the social processes in which human beings are caught up" (Dunning and Mennell 1979: 499) as well as the uniqueness of specific modes of interdependencies (in which the figurations connected with and involved with museums can be inserted):

The image of the mobile figurations of independent people on a dance floor (or playing sport) [or in a museum] ... makes it easier to imagine states, cities, families and also entire (social) systems as figurations. (But) it would be absurd to say that dances (or games) are neutral constructions abstracted from observations of individuals considered separately.

The concept of *figuration* is also crucial to link "Individual" and "Society". "Society" and "Individual" refer according, to this view, to two different although inseparable levels of the human world, or in Elias own words, "(the concept of 'figuration') makes

it possible to resist the socially conditioned pressure to split and polarize our conception of mankind, which has repeatedly prevented us from thinking of people as individuals at the same time as thinking of them as societies" (1978a:129).

Finally the concept of 'figuration' relocates the meaning of struggles for social (cultural and political) hegemony, by moving it from the society's supra-structures or any sort of "macro" social consensus, to the field of "micro" social interrelationships. It is in the context of the diverse human figurations that these struggles take place and gain the form of actions moving to and fro, inclining to one side or the other. The idea of figurations also elucidates the idea of the blindness of the process of social change: individuals are linked to each other and compelled to act, without them necessarily being aware as "something comes into being that was planned and intended by none of those individuals, yet has emerged nevertheless from their intentions and actions" (Mennell 1992a:70).

1.3. *Increasing varieties and diminishing contrasts*

From early periods of the history of western societies to the present, social functions have become more and more differentiated under the pressure of growing competition. The more differentiated they became, the larger grew the number of people on whom individuals had to rely in their everyday social encounters. In order for these social encounters to work (socially) effectively, there was a growing need for coherence in codes of conduct which worked as vehicles for social acceptance and recognition. Social diversification and homogeneization progress together. They are, in Elias's theory, two complementary facets of the same process (which became more apparent in the phase which came to define the *modernist* paradigm described in the previous chapter).

The web of actions grows so complex and extensive, the effort required to behave "correctly" within it becomes so great, that beside the individual's conscious self-control an automatic blindly functioning apparatus of self-control is firmly established.

Elias (1982a: 234)

Consistent with the previous (Lash's) analysis, Elias (ibid.: 234) recognizes in the city realm the social environment within which this process becomes more apparent and uses it as an image for its elucidation:

Cars are rushing in all directions, pedestrians and cyclists are trying to thread their way through the 'melée' of cars ...A constant and highly differentiated regulation of one's behaviour is needed for the individual to steer his way through traffic. If the strain of such constant self-control becomes too much for one individual, this is enough to put himself and others in mortal danger.

The more *differentiated* they become, the more complex the functions individuals have to fulfil. In order to cope with this increasing complexification, individuals are forced to attune their conduct to that of others so that their social functions become easily decodified. Elias talks of "increasing varieties" and "diminishing contrasts", i.e. of simultaneous integration of differentiation and homogenisation.

1.4. *The civilizing process*

What has been described is the essence of what constitutes the *civilizing process*: it is the progressive establishment of an apparatus of self-control which, without the individual's consciousness of it happening, becomes an important key in the structure of social relationships and in the perceptions of the surrounding world. This process is set in motion (although unintentionally) by the upper strata and has its stronger influence in the lower orders' aspiration for social enhancement.

The concept of *civilization* was adopted by Elias both as a conceptual tool and in its semiological sense (the way it has been used as a symbol - an archetype - within the context of a certain perception of things). This concept has been recurrently adopted by western societies' upper strata to define their distinctive position both within social stratification and in relation to other nations. Elias is interested in how this concept came to be used as an emblem of competing groups and their ways of life in conjunction with the changes occurring with the social structure.

Elias distinguishes two phases in this process " a phase of colonization and assimilation in which the lower and larger outsider class is still inferior and governed by the example of the established upper group which, intentionally or unintentionally permeates it with its own pattern of conduct, and a second phase of repulsion, differentiation or emancipation, in which the rising group gains perceptibly in social and self-confidence, and in which the upper group is forced into increased restraint and isolation, and the constraints and tensions in society are increased" (1982a: 311). These two distinct phases show that not only upper classes influence the lower strata but that the reverse is also true, lower class characteristics are spreading to all classes. Elias (1982a: 256):

While on the one hand these upper classes ... are thus driven to maintain at all costs their special conduct and drive-control as marks of distinction, on the other their situation, together with the structure of the general movement carrying them along, forces them in the long run to reduce more and more the differences in standards of behaviour... In accordance with the power-relationship the product of interpenetration is dominated first by models derived from the situation of the upper class, then by patterns of conduct of the lower, rising classes, until finally an amalgam emerges, a new style of unique character.

This is particularly apparent in changes observed within the museums' sphere. After a period in which they served as prestige symbols for the upper classes - a means to distinguish themselves from the lower groups "only the initiated members should know the secrets of good conduct, only within good society should this be learned" (1982a: 257) - there was a point in the museum's history, in which museum producers were compelled to produce a discourse aimed at the middle classes and to adopt codes of behaviour more accepted by these lower groups. "Establishment groups" says Elias "engaged in competitive struggles among themselves are at the same time compelled to take into consideration the demands of the broad mass of outsiders" (1982b: 249).

1.5. A *sociogenetic and psychogenetic analysis*

One of the reasons for the superiority of Elias's theory, in comparison with other theories of social change, is that he conceives as part of the same order of things transformations occurring within societies and simultaneously within the moulding of individuals from childhood. The curve of the civilizing process, a curve of increasing self-supervision, engages simultaneously the social forces that blindly come to structure social relations but also the way children are brought up by their parents so that they can be prepared for the fulfilment of their future roles.

In order to analyse *sociogenetic* aspects of changes in codes of conduct, Elias starts his empirical analysis in medieval times (although he has repeatedly stated that there is no zero point in the process of civilization). According to the evidence of Elias's research, changes in *manners* since the Middle Ages have occurred mainly in connection with the social distribution of power-chances (in *The Civilizing Process*. vol 1: *The History of Manners* 1978b). As the power of the central ruler grew, that of the old warrior ruling class declined and they were forced increasingly into the service of the central ruler, the king, prince, emperor or whatever. Elias speaks in this

connection of "the courtisation of the warriors" (*die Verhöflichung der Krieger*). Also connected with this long-term process, however, was a growth in the power of bourgeois groups - groups whose social functions were connected with finance and trade - and increasing numbers of them became drawn into the circles of the royal court. These two main sections of court society were forced by royal power to cooperate relatively peacefully. What was created were longer and more differentiated "chains of interdependence", that is of greater functional specialization and the integration of these functional roles into wider networks.

Increasing division of labour and the emergence of longer chains of interdependence leads to a greater reciprocal dependency, and, hence to patterns of "multipolar control" within and among groups, that is to an overall social figuration in which specific individuals and groups are subject to increasingly effective pressure from others. Such pressure is effective because of the reciprocal dependencies involved.

Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986: 221)

Forced to live with one another in a new way, these people were more acutely confronted with the problem of what constituted a uniform standard of good behaviour. Very gradually, in accordance with new power relations, the sense of what to do or not to do in order not to offend the others became more refined. Lower strata imitated the upper class habits and manners in order to be accepted and "reasons of respect" were used to distinguish social encounters.

Elias's intention was to show, by the examination of empirical evidence, how and why this increasing awareness of the behavioural determinants of social positioning has happened. In tracing these changes, Elias draws evidence from many sources, including literature, paintings and drawings ... depicting how people were said to have behaved. His observations focus for the most part on the most basic "natural" or "animalic" of human functions - eating, drinking, blowing one's nose ... as the ones one cannot biologically avoid but can transform according to behavioural rules. Among his examples the appearance of the fork in the sixteenth century and the use of spoon in the seventeenth or the growing investment of feelings of shame and repugnance to "natural functions" together with the blowing of one's nose with handkerchiefs instead of the fingers are part of the same process of refinement of manners.

This refinement of manners is inserted in the web of social interdependencies and functions as a way to distinguish good from bad behaviour which is the same as to say *outsiders* from the *established* groups. The greater this web the greater the division of

social functions, the more the pressure increases for the spreading and homogenization of conduct. Individuals who are able to moderate their affects are at a great social advantage. This is particularly true in the modern bourgeois society "where success in the competitive struggle for wealth requires steady exertion in one's trade or profession, and the deferment of immediate gratification in favour of saving in the classic bourgeois syndrome" (Mennell 1992a: 98).

Yet the bourgeois society has not only adopted these rules but even attempted to incorporate them in their children's education since early childhood. "In due course children were trained by adults not only to conform in their behaviour, but to feel shame, embarrassment and disgust - feelings which arise automatically and unconsciously in circumstances which a few generations before would not have been felt at all, even among adults" (Mennell 1992a:46). From the earliest age individuals are trained to the self-restraint needed for the future fulfilment of adult functions. However, Elias also recognizes that this process is not void of some suffering and pain: "if the person is lucky ... the wounds of the civilizing conflicts incurred during childhood heal; the scars left by them are not too deep" (Elias 1982a: 243).

This self restraint is ingrained so deeply from an early age that, like a kind of relay-station of social standards, an automatic self-supervision of his drives, a more differentiated and more stable "super-ego" develops in him, and a part of the forgotten drive impulses and affect inclinations is no longer directly within reach of the level of consciousness at all.

Elias (1982: II 240)

Among the feelings internalized by individuals since early childhood are the ones of *shame* and *embarrassment* imposed progressively on the children partly consciously and partly automatically through the parents' example.

1.6. *Shame and Embarrassment*

The advance of the thresholds of *shame* and *embarrassment* is therefore another consequence of the civilizing process concomitant with the previous. Elias defines shame as "a kind of anxiety which is automatically reproduced in the individual on certain occasions by force of habit" (1982a: 292). It is a fear of social disapproval and degradation, "the fear that one's own behaviour will cause others to express disdain, withdraw their approval, or in some other way assert their superiority" (Mennell 1992: 105). It is the result of the conflict between the expression of emotions and its control.

The advancement of the threshold of shame and embarrassment is exemplified in Elias's theory of manners as a shift in the idea of respectability, which (as developed in the next chapter) gained an important relevance in the nineteenth century western societies. It constitutes a "filter" against the "pressures from below" from groups which recurrently have tended to climb the social ladder in order to substitute previous hegemonies. The fear of the effects of lower class "bad" behaviour has been no more than the fear of its social competition for places previously reserved to others (such as museums). "Repulsion of the vulgar,... increasing sensitivity to anything corresponding to the lesser sensibility of lower-ranking classes, permeates all spheres of social conduct in the courtly upper class ... Anything that touches the embarrassment-threshold smells bourgeois, is socially inferior; and inversely: anything bourgeois touches their embarrassment threshold" (1982:300)². The constant pressure from below, and the fears it induces above, are one of the strongest forces of the specifically civilized refinement by which people of the upper classes distinguish themselves from the others (Elias 1982a :304 and Mennell 1992a: 107).

The mechanism of embarrassment is similar to that of shame but instead of emerging within the individual's conscience, it is caused by the actions of others, or environments outside one's self. "Embarrassment" Elias explains, "is displeasure or anxiety which arises when another person threatens to breach, or breaches, society's prohibitions represented by one's own super-ego" (1982a: 296).

The fear of *embarrassment* and *shame* is related to the fear of transgressions of social prohibitions. It serves to regulate the individual's relations with other people as well as to distinguish individuals according to different social environments. This fear does not only condition norms of conduct but the experiencing of places in which these norms are more or less strictly applied. Shame and embarrassment feelings are in great measure responsible for the distribution of individuals according to social activities, especially the ones dependent on the individual's will (for instance leisure activities among which going to museums is a particularly pertinent example).

²It is straight forwardly the link between this statement and what is widely known about the origins of the museum as a (reserved) public realm.

2. A theory of leisure

This situation of increasing self-control over individuals' own attitudes and feelings, extended to society at large has generally speaking made people's lives more routinized and dull: "conditions of strong individual excitement, particularly of socially shared excitement become rarer and socially less tolerable" (Elias 1982a:174). "Routines" which are in Elias defined as "recurrent channels of action enforced by interdependence with others, and which impose upon the individual a fairly high degree of regularity, steadiness and emotional control" (Elias and Dunning 1986: 103), tend to capture all spheres of life, even those of greatest intimacy.

Elias's theory of the civilizing process was further developed in conjunction with Eric Dunning in a detailed *theory of leisure* presented in *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (1986). This leisure theory, which has been mainly tested in the field of sports, is still the main conceptual framework used by the Sociology of Sport group at Leicester University³. It will be introduced here, developed by means of empirical evidence in the following part and further applied to the study of the museum experience.

Elias considered one of the biggest problems confronting societies in the course of the civilizing process - in which the balance between external controls and self-controls has tended to change in favour of self-controls - to be that of finding a new balance between pleasure and routinization. If opportunities for a more unreflected expression of excitement are, in many spheres of social life severely limited there must be a field in which opportunities for the relaxation of these tensions are even momentarily provided.

2.1. The quest for excitement

This balance has been tried, according to Elias, in the way people experience leisure and in the increasing importance placed on the use of spare time as an *exciting experience*. Within the advanced industrial societies, leisure activities have become an enclave for the display in public of a relatively moderate *excitement*. This idea of a *moderate excitement* shows how the civilizing process has also penetrated a field that

³To introduce it here and to use it as an importance reference for the study of the museum's experience within the Department of Museum Studies in the University of Leicester, is in part to fulfil Eric Dunning's desire of keeping alive what he called the "Leicester tradition of Elias sociological teaching and research" (Elias and Dunning 1986:.x)

would seem at a first glance spontaneously (de-controlled) *par excellence*: the field of leisure. The restrictions imposed on people's conducts in their leisure activities are therefore another "measure" of "civilization" in the analysis of societies' processes of change. According to Elias and Dunning's theory, the *excitement* produced by some leisure events as a result of the "civilizing effect" is a *pleasurable excitement*. These authors use the Aristotelean idea of "enthusiasm" to explain the "cathartic" (a term borrowed from Aristotle) effect this excitement provokes. It is a sort of excitement blended with a kind of delight but it is not in any simple or direct sense a relaxing experience.

The strongest criticism these authors direct against common leisure theories is that leisure is not recuperation from work or the relaxation from the fatigues of everyday life, but involves specific kinds of tension. Elias and Dunning even argue that if people only sought relaxation they would use their leisure time to sleep. This criticism goes against a tradition of evaluating tensions negatively. What the authors propose is a look at tensions as having a positive function in people's lives.

2.2. A figurational approach to the study of leisure

These authors also propose that the analysis of leisure practices should be inserted in the context of *leisure figurations*, the one that involves - as in Lash's idea of regimes of signification- both producers and consumers and their mutual influence within the broad web of social interdependencies: musicians and audiences, football players and spectators, theatre actors and publics, or as in the present study - *museum visitors and curators*.

For Elias and Dunning (1986), the broad questions leisure studies should try to respond to are two-fold: (i) what are the characteristics of the personal leisure needs developed in the more complex and civilized societies of our time?; (ii) what are the characteristics of the specific types of leisure events developed in societies of this type for the satisfaction of these needs? This means that for all leisure needs which characterize each stage of the civilizing process, there is a socially established leisure event. The structure of these events, according to the *figurational* view, is to be found in the dialogue between institutions and individuals which evolve simultaneously, and not as a one-way causal effect of the former upon the latter or *vice versa*.

2.3. The "spare time spectrum"

If there is a growing tendency to seek in leisure the excitement or emotional extroversion lacking in other spheres of everyday life, not all spare-time activities fulfil this role. It is therefore possible, to conceive a scale which organizes leisure events according to the excitement they provide. This is what Elias and Dunning (1986) have called the *spare-time spectrum*. What distinguishes leisure activities in the spare time spectrum is their degree of *routinization* and *de-routinization*. According to these distinctions it is possible to state that all leisure activities are spare-time activities, but not all spare time activities are leisure activities:

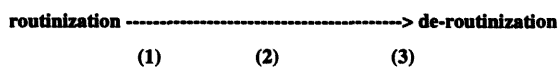


Fig. 5 The spare-time spectrum

Spare-time activities (1) are the most routinized: like catering for one's own biological needs and body, as well as household and family routines. *Intermediary spare-time activities* (2) are those mainly serving recurrent needs for orientation and/or self-fulfilment and self-expansion: private voluntary work for others, private work for oneself, demanding religious activities, orientation activities of a more voluntary, socially less controlled and often casual character (more or less serious and more or less entertaining). Finally *leisure activities* (3). The three main groups of *leisure activities* are: (i) Sociable activities; (ii) **mimetic activities**; (iii) activities involving "motility" i.e. movement. The groups correspond to the three main functions of leisure which are sociability, excitement and movement.

According to this view, **freedom** and **constraint** conceived in absolute and dichotomic terms, are no longer the principles which divide leisure from non-leisure practices; it is the *degree* of freedom and the *kind* of constraint in spare time that are of central importance. This theory also accepts more specific cases such as the one related to the role of women in leisure. It is not the fact that women have more or less leisure time than men that matters, but the quality of the experience which can be more or less routinized. If, whilst on a museum visit, the mother is permanently in charge of responding to children's biological needs, it is easy to locate her experience

as a "spare-time routine" instead of a "leisure activity". It is not just the setting where the experience occurs which defines leisure, but the experience itself and the emotional involvement and arousal it enables. In this case the mother in charge of the children's natural needs will have little space for the enjoyment of a mimetic experience (the one that allows a momentary escape from everyday life constraints) as she will be too much constrained by the pressures of "real life".

Among these activities, the ones that best describe the main area of present concern are *mimetic activities*. They are at the side of maximum de-routinization, that is offering but not necessarily providing optimum enjoyment. However mimetic activities can flop when they do not fulfil individual's expectations.

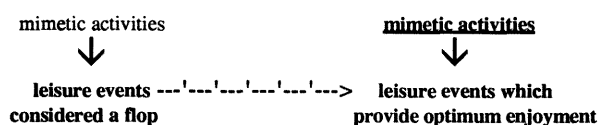


Fig. 6 From "a flop" to "optimum enjoyment"

These leisure activities are those in which arousal of excitement and a moderate decontrolling of people's emotions are possible. They have the power of reproducing the tensions occurring in other spheres of people's lives like feelings of danger, fear, pleasure, sadness and joy. Among them sports, cinema, theatre, dancing, card games, novels, detective stories, thrillers all perform a similar function. Elias and Dunning explain this function (1986:42) as follows:

Imaginary danger, mimetic fear and pleasure, sadness and joy are produced and perhaps resolved by the setting of pastimes. Different moods are evoked and perhaps contrasted, such as sorrow and elation, agitation and peace of mind. Thus these feelings aroused in the imaginary situation of human leisure activity are the siblings of those aroused in real-life situations -that is what the expression 'mimetic' means - but the latter are linked to the never-ending risks and perils of fragile human life, while the former momentarily lift the burden of risks and threats, great or small, surrounding human experience.

These activities favour forms of a *controlled decontrolling* of emotions fulfilling a function similar to nineteenth century fun fairs as described by Featherstone (1991:22/23):

They were not only sites where commodities were exchanged; they entailed the display of exotic and strange commodities from various parts of

the world in a festive atmosphere. Like the experience of the city, fairs offered spectacular imagery, bizarre juxtaposition, confusion of boundaries and an immersion in a melee of strange sounds, motions, images, people, animals and things.

2.4. *Modern transformations of games and sports*

Elias and Dunning use the example of games and sports as models for the explanation of the transformations of leisure within the civilizing process. The evidence of their research shows how most contexts and games became more and more regulated over time, and how they progressively gained the shape of "mimetic activities" in the modern sense.

Games such as the ones performed in Ancient Greece were played with higher levels of violence than the ones permitted today. Death and injuries were common: "the skills, physical and temperamental used in the game contest were closely related to skills necessary in 'real life'; the mimetic distance, so to speak, was relatively small... All this, Elias points out, is very much in line with what the theory of civilizing process would lead one to expect. The level of physical insecurity was much higher, and both state-formation and conscience-formation were much less well advanced in the city states of Ancient Greece. The level of internalized inhibitions against physical violence was lower, and the associated feelings of shame and guilt weaker, than in the relatively developed nation-states of the twentieth century" (Mennell 1992: 145).

Another example of the effect of the civilizing process on the rules and codes of conduct of a "sport" is provided by fox-hunting. Earlier forms of hunting imposed fewer constraints upon its participants than the ones developed later (eighteenth century) and the ones imposed today. As Elias describes it (Elias and Dunning 1986: 161):

People enjoyed the pleasure of hunting and killing animals in whatever way they could and ate as many of them as they liked. Sometimes masses of animals were driven near the hunters so they could enjoy the pleasures of killing without too much exertion. For the higher ranking social cadres, the excitement connected with killing animals had always been to some extent the peacetime equivalent of the excitement connected with killing humans in times of war.

A third example is the development of Rugby-football as analysed in *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* (Dunning and Sheard 1979) in accordance with the Eliasian

figurational approach. These authors show how rugby was one of the less violent games which emerged in the nineteenth century out of the common matrix of traditionally more violent folk-games. This process of change from higher to lower expression of violence is related to the tension between middle class players and their social inferiors. Violence in this game came to diminish when the middle classes aiming as they were to emulate the aristocracy came to suppress behaviours that could seem characteristic of the pastimes of the gentry. "The aristocracy was less able to treat the middle class with such unqualified contempt, while on the other hand the middle classes still deferentially sought to emulate the aristocracy" (Mennell 1992: 151).

The first thing to note is that Elias' theory and our own findings both relate primarily to *standards* of violence-control, i.e. to the social norms applied in that respect. It is these which have developed in the long-term in a civilizing direction, demanding that Rugby players exercise stricter control in respect of physical violence, at the same time, attempting to ensure that they do so via the imposition of specific sanctions by specialized controlling personnel.

Dunning and Sheard (1979:276)

To sum up, along with the civilizing process forms of more spontaneous and de-routinized leisure were forced to become more routinized and to involve more self-controlled behaviours on the part of the participants. They have become in a word more *respectable*. This was the work of the upper classes at one stage and upper-middle classes at a later time, and has affected a great diversity of leisure settings as well as a variety of other groups in the spectrum of social stratification.

Yet the civilizing process has also meant a decreasing of power-differences within and among groups. "The incumbents of specialized roles are dependent on others and can, therefore, exert reciprocal control. Increasing division of labour and the emergence of longer chains of interdependence leads to greater reciprocal dependency and, hence, to patterns of 'multipolar control' within and among groups ... this means, for example, that top-level sportsmen are not and cannot be independent ... they are expected to produce a 'sports-performance', i.e. to produce the sorts of satisfactions that the controllers and 'consumers' of the sport demand, e.g. the spectacle of an exciting contest..." (Dunning and Sheard 1979:278/279).

This mutual influence of consumers and producers, which meant a great importance attached to *excitement* and the extroversion of *emotions* in leisure activities, (even in its moderate or relatively controlled form), has also affected settings traditionally

reserved for the display of *respectable* conduct. The *museum's* case is a good example of this effect: more intense competition, more diversified and unstable professionalization of the museum's curatorship; a greater involvement with forms (modes of signification) of the so called "leisure industry"; economic pressures to attract as large a public as possible including the traditional "outsiders" (or non-visitors), have made (some) museums lose their sense of elitist respectability. Yet this was only possible when the civilizing process had already affected the way behaviours were expressed in public and therefore weakened the threat of "disorder" for so many decades feared by the museum's old orthodoxies.

2.5. *Current tendencies*

Drawing on Elias's theory, Featherstone defines *postmodernism* both through the persistence within the consumer culture of elements of the pre-industrial carnivalesque tradition; the displacement of the carnivalesque into media images, design, advertising, rock, videos, the cinema. And also through the persistence and transformation of elements of the carnivalesque within certain sites of consumption: holiday resorts, sports stadia, theme parks, department stores, shopping centres. For Featherstone (1991: 104):

The elements of carnivalesque which became displaced into art, and retained in consumer cultural sites and spectacles, and in the media of film and television, now have larger middle-class audiences who have moved away from the more rigid personality structure associated with the puritan ethic.

This role which leisure seems increasingly to be assuming has been successfully explored by the new leisure enterprises aiming to produce leisure for the masses. However for the time being it has not been proved that these new leisure experiences have brought the amount of freedom (escapism) needed for the achievement of the desired balance between routinization and extroversion (Rojek 1993).

The next part of this study will focus on the more detailed effects of the civilizing process on leisure practices within the context of everyday life. The museum as a leisure setting will be further analysed as part of the same context and according to the theoretical framework just presented.

CONCLUSION:

To study processes of cultural production and consumption in modern western societies is to study the process of increasing differentiation of suppliers and users (as well as institutions and products) resulting from efforts undertaken by some groups to impose their social hegemony by controlling the market, and by imposing their rules of social and moral behaviour on the whole society. Although this order of things - defined as modernist- seems to be acquiring new aspects in the present "postmodern" scene, modernity remains the main context for the analysis presented here, which will be discussed by means of a grid created by the interweaving of two different although complementary theories.

Scott Lash's analysis has for the present study of the museum experience a particular operative advantage, although his model risks being accused of "culturalism", centred as it is upon the realm of cultural production and consumption. Yet by taking into account the modes of signification which form the regimes of signification in the different stages of the developmental process, Lash introduces the subjectivity necessary to implicate the society as a whole. With the introduction of modes of signification his sociological analysis gains a greater complexity, as the idea of culture is enlarged to integrate people's perceptions of their surroundings (mainly within the city), and the implication of these in people's social relations.

Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process provides a deeper insight for the contextualization of cultural production and consumption within a broader process of social change. Elias's key concepts have the superiority of having been empirically tested; they are therefore more reality-orientated (Dunning 1989). The concept of spatio-temporal configurations, and the notion of a cultural economy that implicates producers and consumers in the same process of transformation, as proposed by Lash, is coherent with Elias figurational analysis. In the same way, Scott Lash's recognition of the spectator's investment in transcendent experiences as a postmodern tendency, finds its place in Elias's theory of emotions and moreover in the leisure theory of Elias and Dunning (which is an extension of the theory of the civilizing process) and its evidence of a greater need for excitement and emotional arousal in the present scene.

This leisure theory shows in broad terms that the transformations occurring in the way leisure is experienced since early times, are the result of the transformations occurring in other spheres of social life and the social interdependencies emerging with the

effects of civilizing spurts. The need for more or less routinized experiences is the result of the internalization of constraints imposed by the forced pacification of individuals in western societies and the pressures for a cross-social peaceful coexistence. This means that if leisure tends to work as "escapism" by enabling the extroversion of feelings and emotions normally kept under control, it has created for itself forms by which these escapisms do not lose the social regularity in which they are inscribed.

PART II

It is assumed in the present study that *museum visiting* is just one leisure choice among other leisure choices and that, in the same way as other leisure choices, it is part of the construction of everyday life that, in a context of broader processes of social and cultural change, individuals claim as their own. Therefore, the discussion of the meanings which leisure has for people, in present times, is of crucial importance for the understanding of museum visiting as a social phenomenon and not merely as a set of visitors' actions. The analysis of the process by which people have come to choose how to use their leisure time, and the pressures and constraints these choices have entailed, will help to explain the motives favouring the decision to visit museums or to stay away, as well as how the visiting experience might occur. In other words, the structural conditions of leisure choice need to be recognised, and simultaneously the conditions of resistance need to be considered.

In all theories, the problem is always to select some explanatory factors and exclude others. In this study, above all, a sociological explanation will be privileged. The sociological approach chosen, coherent with what has been said in the first part of this study, is the one that accepts that human societies are structured and that they change over time. The main contribution of sociology to the understanding of leisure must be the positioning of individual actions in relation to group dynamics and broader social interrelationships, rather than the quantification of leisure practices and practitioners. The study of leisure must be inserted into the social transformations that have shaped modern (western) cultural economies. This involves looking for the social agents who have been the active producers, as well as for those who have been the main users of these facilities. Leisure has been a stage for struggles for social and cultural hegemony. Also leisure, in the same way as commodities such as cars, clothes, furniture and housing, has been part of a cluster of social symbols which has tended to organise individuals' tastes and behaviours in their relations with themselves, in their most immediate social encounters and in broader and less definable interdependencies within the global society. Therefore it has to be inscribed within a broad definition of culture as the social field of meaning production and processes through which people make sense of themselves and their lives within the frame of possibilities offered by the society of which they are members.

To summarise, it is here assumed that it would be incomplete and misleading to consider the use of leisure time as a set of activities, out of the context of social and cultural transformations, that is to say, outside the *regimes of signification* emerging

within the process of cultural change described above. Also, leisure is a very important part of the global idea individuals have about themselves, and their emotional balance in a society that tends to impose renewed forms of self-constraint. It is through the leisure choices they make and the way they experience them that individuals attempt to provide a counterbalance to their routines, and to the others an image of their position in society.

CHAPTER 3

Leisure changes in Modern Times

INTRODUCTION

Leisure will be discussed here at two correlated levels: firstly through the example of practices and places that better reflect the transformations of social life as well as the groups or classes that have favoured them (and influence each other) within the process of modernization of western societies; secondly, as a stage for the regulation of people's emotions and impulses evolving with the same process.

This study will review literature focusing on the social history of leisure following the time of the industrial revolution. These examples happen to be mainly English, due to the kind of literature available. It is reasonable to accept that this does not constitute a serious limitation as this is meant to be a theoretical basis for the analysis of the following case study which concerns an English museum and its English public. It is also assumed that these examples are for the most part representative of the process of change in the broad western European world, in which England has undeniably had an influential role to play.

1. Leisure in the bourgeois world

If the industrial era has enslaved working people by attaching workers to the working path of the machinery, it has also determined times for machines to stop and times for workers to rest and recover. This new rationalization of time, which meant the formal imposition of hours for working and non-working, is the result of the work force being gathered into increasingly large factories, which in turn forced the concentration of working people in suburban areas, and thus increased the time spent in trips to and from work. However, if during the early stages of the industrial process, the demands of factory production dictated long hours of work and few of rest, the subsequent improvements in technology and the increase in profits were to result in the progressive expansion of free time, and the growth in the purchasing power of working populations.

Within the industrial bourgeois society, leisure was thus mainly defined in opposition to work. In a world dominated by the ideals of production, progress and success, it is easy to understand how work has tended to dominate all spheres of social life. *Work* and *leisure* were part of the binaries upon which the bourgeois experience was founded together with *rich* and *poor*, *men* and *women* (a distinction that has important repercussions in the way each group makes use of its spare time). Work was seen (for the bourgeois male society of that time and workingmen and some workingwomen) as the fundamental principle of well-being and growth, and leisure was regarded as the reward for work.

Leisure as time freed from work, was therefore a creation of industrial society and (for the time being of the prosperity of the system) it tended to be maintained under the control of the hegemonic bourgeois class. Time was perceived to have a literal dimension. The principle "time is money" upon which the capitalist society rested, introduced a new sense of spare time as an extension of the money economy: it was perceived as having an economic value very different from the previously undefined perception of the leisure of the idle aristocracy, or of the groups that were attached to rural life and its natural cyclical time.

1.1. *Individual pleasure under criticism*

However, despite this increasing rationalization of everyday life, the part of the bourgeoisie which was less involved in the industrial process tended to copy and exhibit symbols of status derived from the aristocracy and its idle habits¹. This aristocracy that, free as it was from the responsibilities of professional routines and the economic pressures connected with them, had traditionally lived in a relative isolation from other social strata and could therefore engage in private and refined pleasures. Inspired by Ancient Greek philosophies, these idle classes proclaimed an individualistic lifestyle in order to reach a certain state of being. For Aristotle, leisure was basically self-fulfilment, and self-fulfilment was only possible through the correct use of the mind. Knowledgeable people could wisely choose ways of conduct which would lead them to true happiness². However, if freedom from the necessity of being occupied was essential for Aristotle in order to make virtue possible, in a society ruled by the principles of work of the kind that came into being more and more after about 1750, individual freedom was inconceivable. Industrialization would soon impose forms

¹ It is what Dunning and Sheard called the process of *embourgeoisement*. "Embourgeoisement led at the 'intermediate' level to a struggle for control of major institutions" (1979: 66)

² "Scole", the Greek word from which the word "school" derives means leisure and education.

of social interdependence which would limit the exercise of autonomous will and convert it into collective codes of behaviour.

As Dunning and Sheard have described in *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, a mutual accommodation and value-convergence between the two strata (bourgeoisie and aristocracy) occurs as the result of the process of industrialization: "sections of the landed classes underwent 'partial bourgeoisification' and sections of the bourgeoisie 'partial aristocratization' (1979: 70). Within this context, the idle bourgeois (partially aristocratized) was targeted for strong criticisms produced inside the new industrial rationale. They were in the urban context, Baudelaire's *flâneurs*, those who invested in their self-images by displaying pleasure of living and beauty in public places. To the notion of leisure perceived as "freedom" and "realization", the new industrial class was struggling to impose instead the use of "reason" and the idea of "progress" as tools to be successfully invested in productive work (Rojek 1993).

In 1899, Thorstein Veblen in his *Theory of the Leisure Class* echoing the values of this latter group, launched an attack on the extravagances of those who were daring to proclaim leisure as an ideal (Veblen was the first to see leisure as a reflection of the social structure and to understand that an autonomous *social value* was emerging from the strict necessities of economic consumption). Certainly the "leisure class" that emerged during the late nineteenth century was part of an age of "extravagance", and of "conspicuous waste" (1953: 68). For Veblen this age of extravagance was threatening the equilibrium of modernization.

The existence of a relatively idle bourgeois fraction in complementarity with an industrious bourgeoisie, is important for the understanding of the emergence of cultural institutions such as *museums*. At this time, leisure was for the idle bourgeois the realization of the *ideals of the culture*. The bourgeois pride in his "civilized" world justified the urge to look for the origins of civilization by travelling to charismatic places such as Athens, Rome or Florence, where "true" knowledge would emanate from the ruins of the ancient world. "The aristocratic tradition of the Grand Tour established the idea of a period of 'intelligent wandering' in Europe as the indispensable part of gentlemen's education. Travel was expected to confer polish, sophistication and grace to the young nobleman" (Rojek 1993: 112).

The pleasure of travelling, though while not altogether consistent with the demands of the industrial process, had as purpose the ideals of self-fulfilment, ideals made easier by transportation improvements which were making both time and distance easier to

cross. Another reason for the bourgeois taste for travelling was the way this taste was rationally exercised: to visit a place was to look for the origins of western civilization and at the same time to consider that only the superior western European countries had the scientific means to authenticate these origins. Most trips were accompanied by exhaustive descriptions, which became the first anthropological and archaeological researches (as well as the first *collections* which would be part of many *museums*). This view of other people from the perspective of the centre of 'civilization', helped to create the collective myth of the "Universal Man" (male, urban, modern, rational) and to build attitudes which deprecated the value of everything connected with the supposed spontaneity of "natural life", cultural tradition, inherited habits and social minorities.

As a result of this bourgeois attitude, the working class was treated with extreme condescension: popular culture was considered morally offensive, socially subversive and a general impediment to progress. "The working class was to be 'saved' from the 'temptations of the flesh', the 'evils of drink' and the 'vanity of idleness'" (Rojek 1993: 32). The élite had realised that the control of the global industrial process involved not only the control of citizens' working habits and skills but also of their leisure activities by imposition of alternative forms. During the industrial revolution, observes De Grazia (1964), "Leisure disappeared under an avalanche of work. When it emerged it had not only been reduced but relocated in the life-space, forming a separate and self-contained sector in an increasingly compartmentalized way of life".

1.2. *A time for interiors*

As noted in the first chapter, modern times were times for *social differentiations* in spaces that worked as *interiors*. This also had important repercussions in leisure practices. The home came to be seen as a space for recovering from the stressful urban life, where factory work forced individuals to live in permanent pressure and tiring routine. Arriving at home from work, the bourgeois male (women stayed at home) would find the sense of family life and privacy. In the city realm (as has already been noted), the *private* and *respectable* dimension was provided by few places in which the bourgeois family could browse and escape contact with the masses. These spaces worked like shelters against the corruption from bad habits (the family and the children's education were at risk in the urban environment). Among these were some parks, or part of parks (as described below), some elitist sports and sport-grounds, and

high-culture "palaces" such as concert halls, opera houses, some theatres and obviously - museums.

In the later eighteenth century the wealthy tried, successfully in many instances, to appropriate these public spaces for their own exclusive use, to privatise them. At the same time, and as a corollary to it, they frowned on and became suspicious of public gatherings of the lower orders for whatever purpose. The result is that leisure became increasingly class-bound.

Hugh Cunningham (1980:70)

In order to keep the privacy of these leisure spaces, codes of conduct were appended to the activities developed by their attendants. "The fear arising from the situation of the whole group, from their struggle to preserve their cherished and threatened position", says Elias (1982a: 254), "acts directly as a force maintaining the code of conduct, the cultivation of the super-ego in its members". It is the fear of loss of prestige, which assures the reproduction of distinctive conducts.

Public domains were the doorsteps where the children played, the market places, the street pavements, and some open sport fields. *Public* were also the jungle fairs and fun fairs in which an atmosphere of medieval carnival brought, to the lower classes, the excitement necessary to forget the difficulties of daily life (Featherstone 1991).

Private spaces worked thus as a symbolic protection the upper classes had built against the increasingly undifferentiated nature of habits and roles that was emerging in social life. As a theatre promoter in the mid-eighteenth century stated: "nothing can be more disagreeable, than for Persons of the first Quality, and those of the lowest Rank, to be seated in the same Bench together"(Cunningham 1980:16). However this would be slowly transformed.

Their situation, together with the structure of the general movement carrying them along, forces them in the long run to reduce more and more differences in standards of behaviour.

Norbert Elias (1982a: 255)

1.3. The creation of the first open spaces

As towns grew bigger and were invaded by the chaotic circulation of the crowds going to and from work, increased contact between social groups became inevitable.

The space for private relaxing and healthy walks became more and more scarce. The concern over the lack of open space was accentuated by a wider concern for the health of the urban population regardless of social background. Towns were suffering the first effects of pollution as they had become noisy, smoky and dirty and as epidemic diseases were easily spread among the population.

Alexis De Tocqueville (1805-59) in a trip to England describes Manchester as a town where: "the footsteps of a busy crowd, the crunching wheels of machinery, the shriek of steam from boilers, the regular beat of the looms, the heavy rumble of carts (...) are the noises from which you can never escape in the sombre half-light of these streets" (1958:107). Green areas and open spaces were urgently needed to prevent the decay of the population's health. The citizens' health was thus the aim of a campaign for the creation of parks initiated in Britain in 1840. In 1833, the Report from the Select Committee on Public Walks had stated:

It cannot be necessary to point out how requisite some Public Walks or Open Spaces in the neighbourhood of large towns must be; for those who consider the occupations of the working classes who dwell there, confined as they are during the week days as Mechanics and Manufacturers, and often shut up in heated factories: it must be evident that it is of the first importance to their health on their day of rest to enjoy the fresh air, and to be able (exempt from the dust and dirt of the public through fares) to walk out in decent comfort with their families.

quoted by Patmore (1983:19)

Despite this professed philanthropic concern with people's health, however, these open spaces were also created as means of preserving the distance between the rich and the poor (Patmore 1983). De Tocqueville ends his description of Manchester saying: "you will never hear the clatter of hoofs as the rich man drives back home or out on expeditions of pleasure" (1958. 110). In the same way as other social enclaves, parks were meant to create a buffer between different classes in towns. According to Patmore, the favourite activity in the new urban green areas was 'promenading', (the same as 'flâner' for the *flâneur*). Promenading was undoubtedly a pleasurable attitude representing the taste of an idle life inconceivable for those working under strict factory timetables and under great psychological stress.

The first parks were therefore created to respond to restricted leisure needs, and designed according to the taste of social élites. They were like an extension of their own private gardens : "they had fountains, bandstands ... as well as open grass" (Patmore 195.: 112). Soon however, a movement for the opening of the parks to a

wider public was to increase their openness, keeping nevertheless some restrictions. *The Times* (quoted by Bailey 1978: 56) provides an example of the social discrimination still occurring in parks at the time. In 1841, when Regent's Park was opened to the public, this newspaper indicated that there were parts of the park specially reserved for the use of the lower classes who, even though separated from the upper groups, were still forced to wear "proper" clothes. This movement for opening of part of the parks to the lower classes was vindicated using educational reasons. *The Times* claimed that it was ...

an encouraging move in the redemption of the working class through recreation, after all why should the lower orders not enjoy the liberty of taking a walk in the more plebeian portions of the park, provided they have a decent coat on.

This moralizing role of parks was extended to other leisure settings. As a consequence of this policy for improving the behavioural standards of the lower classes, the second half of the nineteenth century saw city councils across England create *municipal museums*, art galleries, libraries and arboreta (Crump 1986: 54):

In Leicester collective institutions were set up to improve public behaviour (Crump *ibid.*): "notably the Leicester Domestic Mission (1846), *The Town Museum* (1849), The Free Library (1869) and the Abbey Park (1882)". This movement was part of the social policy of an emergent class (as described in the first chapter), which became the principal agent of change in the period called *modernity*.

2. Leisure and Modernity

As outlined in the previous chapter, *modernity* was the time when the bourgeois society started collapsing around its own contradictions. The strict structure on which it had based social life, its vision of the world, its relation with nature and all its irrefutable truths and principles were losing their truthfulness.

The history of modernity (although it is difficult to situate economically or politically), is most of all a history of cultural struggles between emergent groups in order to impose their leadership. It is a history of increased differentiation and fragmentation in social life despite the efforts at homogenization and universalization some groups have utilized in an attempt to "modernize" the entire society. It is also the history of the middle class and of the cultural audiences that have simultaneously emerged. In a context in which different classes tended to share more and more realms of their daily lives, *leisure* had become a source of considerable tension, a sphere in which some groups would seek to find social gratification and economic profit, and others a way to escape the tighter and more complex system of social control. The force of the increasing interweaving as a whole, together with greater complexity and functional differentiation has led to the rise of broader classes which "proved stronger than the barricade the nobility has been seeking to built around themselves" (Elias 1982a: 257).

2.1. *The rational recreation movement*

The *rational recreation movement* was the incursion of the work ethic into the leisure sphere, as a prevention against idleness and social anomie which would counteract the success of economic and social "progress". The work ethic determined the restraint of pleasure in order to reach happiness. According to its defenders, happiness was not a favour of God but could only be earned through sustained labour and the sacrifice of immediate desires. This was the idea that, according to the reformers, should also prevail in leisure practices.

By the time of the application of the rational recreation programmes (1830s and 1840s in Britain - what Bailey calls the "dark age"), the state and civil society were developing together as linked processes of transformation. The middle class could make use of a legal system and an institutional framework which were supplied by the state. The application of this system of rules was therefore the result of the combined

efforts this class and the state had undertaken in order to intervene in many aspects of the citizen's daily lives (Giddens 1991). 'Education, in the words of ...the chief government policy-maker in the 1840s, was meant not to teach occupational skills, but also 'the nature of the artisan's domestic and social relations ... his political position in society, and the moral and religious duties appropriated to it'(Bailey 1978: 37). It was a way to secure the fragile position of the new hegemonies, without history and identity and covering a wide range of groups in an area of pronounced social ambiguity. The movement to regulate *public recreation* was a consequence of this process. It was mainly directed against a working class culture perceived to be morally offensive, socially subversive and which was threatening to corrupt the internal rules of the state³. Campaigns were mounted against drinking, blood sports, bad language, and all sort of habits considered undignified (Bailey 1978, Cunningham 1980, Urry 1990, Rojek 1993).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, this movement would be directed against working class leisure settings and practices which were strongly persecuted. Yet as a result of this same wave of criticism, even the leisure habits of the upper classes were criticized. Peter Bailey refers to the outcry against pigeon-shooting at an aristocratic club in 1871, by quoting a representative middle class complaint: "with some illustrious exceptions there is not enough real education among our upper classes, or we should not find them gawking over sports that the middle class have long abandoned as brutal and undignified" (1978: 74). "The very essence of our laws" acknowledged middle class novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton in 1833, "has been against the social meeting of the humble, which have been called idleness, and against the amusement of the poor, which have been stigmatised as disorder", cited by Bailey (1978: 35). (See also Dunning and Sheard 1979).

Instruction had to be inculcated in the leisure times and spaces of the lower strata and interlinked with *recreation*. However, the danger that *amusements* might dilute or obliterate *instruction* was a constant peril to improvers. According to Bailey (1978: 54):

Plebeian recreation was, therefore, an alien world, and the middle-class interloper was least unhappy in it when decorating a platform or standing at a lectern. The first stance served to emphasise social distance, the second made plain the didactic intentions of rational recreation - a further obstacle to its success.

³As Norbert Elias has pointed out these lower classes were also influencing the upper strata as they were increasingly sharing spheres of social life.

Rational recreation failed, says Bailey, because the middle classes had two stereotypes of working class behaviour; they were either *rough* or *respectable*. For rational "recreationists" working people were either threatening and violent or have accepted the rules imposed by the *status quo*. The main aim of this movement was to move people from one condition to the other by telling them what to do in their leisure time. However, this middle class vision of the working class had little to do with the working class as it was going through the same process of modernization which was implicating the society as a whole. Working class people, Bailey explains, did not judge themselves and their habits as "improving" or "degenerate" whilst choosing their recreations and so they did not feel inclined to choose one over another. By the end of the nineteenth century the efforts of the "recreationists" were showing their uselessness and inefficiency: "a working class culture without the guiding hand of social superiors was being formed" (Baxendale 1992: 42).

Rich and poor tended to resist the encroachment of the state's surveillance over their private pleasures, which tended to be kept under what Giddens called the "sequestration aspects of modernity" (1991: 156). According to the middle class ethos, every behaviour that did not comply with the rules was marked as crime or madness. "The private becomes a matter of legal definition" (ibid). Giddens summarizes this argument by saying: "the ontological security which modernity has purchased, on the level of day-to-day routines, depends on an institutional exclusion of social life from fundamental existential issues which raise central moral dilemmas for human beings" (ibid.).

The perverse effect of the globalization of habits and behaviours would be an even greater compartmentalization of individuals by leisure habits and leisure places. Even the middle classes were forced to retreat to their own leisure practices. In order to escape from the increased intrusion of the working class in fields that were previously theirs, they developed their own holiday resorts, their own clubs, sports and pastimes (Baxendale 1992:43). At the same time, the upper class leisure places *par excellence* such as *museums* (see next chapter), were struggling against popularization responding to renewed needs for social exclusion⁴.

⁴This compartmentalization of leisure has been explained by Bourdieu as the result of classificatory principles (*habitus*) which not only favoured the *aggregation* of individuals according to tastes and habits but also the *exclusion* of others. They are in Bourdieu's words "systems of differential exclusion" (1984: 190)

2.2. The new leisure entrepreneurs

The failure of the middle class reformers to penetrate working class culture gave the latter the advantage of emerging with cultural forms representative of their own cultural needs: the emergence of music halls in the first decades of the nineteenth century is a good example of this reaction.

In order to gain the workers as part of their audience the middle class had no choice but to integrate these needs in their new leisure enterprises. In the years around the mid-nineteenth century, leisure became, according to Bailey, "more plentiful, more visible, more sought after and more controversial" (Bailey 1978: 56). Catering for the masses required the leisure entrepreneurs to develop a marketing strategy and a type of product that would appeal to many classes and groups at the same time, and to the family group which tended to become a dominant target audience as women were increasingly joining their partners in their spare time outings. However this was also an attempt to respond and at the same time create a middle class aspiration to upward mobility (see also Butsh 1992).

The characteristic recreations of the last decades of the nineteenth century were radically different from their predecessors: not only were they in many cases the product of new, less class bound, technologies and social groupings, but they now took place within the unique circumstance of modern leisure, a condition of individual free choice specific to modernity and the qualitatively new dimension of the experience of crowds.

The middle classes were the first to see leisure as a profitable area in which to invest their economic resources; they were the new leisure businessmen with pursuits which were more and more exclusive to themselves (Cunningham: 1980). Being themselves products of a market-economy and used to dealing with its specificities, leisure production appeared to be the perfect field in which to exercise business skills. Leisure practices became increasingly capital intensive and responding more to the consumers' needs than to the reformers' aims. The process of leisure commercialization represented basically an important shift in the nature of hegemony, which starts operating not through the traditional authority and personalities of the local elites, not through the power of capitalist employers and middle class reformers, but increasingly through the impersonal structures of corporate industries and mass markets. If rational recreation had failed due to its sinister aspects, eventually it would find ways to become gently imposed by gradually achieving key positions in leisure

management and leadership, and once there, by making the settings more appealing to their own peers' needs as their specific consumers. Their main tool was not so much the state as the market economy. As Chris Rojek puts it (1993: 39):

The rational reforms of working-class games and the organization of programmes of self improvement became increasingly exploited by the consumer culture of capitalist society.

"The new capitalist hegemony", says Richard Butsh, "is the child of the marriage of corporate profits and consumer 'fun'" (1992: 19). These decision-makers were middle class service workers and part of an enlightened working class who, among other specialized skills, were growing accustomed to respond to consumers' demands. They were the result of the commercial prosperity of the lower middle classes who had first invested in small businesses and, later on, in the new leisure industries such as music halls and outdoor amusements. They were the creators of the *new codes of respectability* embodied in guide-lines for the customers' use which were intended to modify old habits, not so much to educate the lower classes, but to create recreational spaces in which they could go with their own families (see chapter five). These guidelines became imposed by habit, as they were internalized by citizens whilst they were becoming aware of their position not so much as antagonistic groups but as citizens of modern towns.

In spatial terms, the need for more conscious, rational provision of recreation facilities grew as towns expanded in size and land costs escalated; the dictates of fashion and habit alone were no longer adequate.

Allan Patmore (1983: 118)

Respectability became the key word for citizenship. It signified social approval elicited by conduct and recognized by the new opinion-makers: the mass media.

Typically whenever a newspaper had occasion to refer to a member of the lower classes for whom a certain amount of sympathy had been spoken, he represented a consensus: it included "sobriety, thrift, cleanliness of person and tidiness of home, good manners, respect for the law, honesty in business affairs", and it need hardly be added "charity". Exercise of all these tended to content one's mind and equally important, to invite the approbation of others.

Altick (1973: 174)

By means of this new consensus, the middle class and the "respectable" working-class had found an agreement for the shaping of their leisure practices against those kept at the fringes of society.

2.3. *Changes within the structure of parks*

One aspect in the shaping of leisure were the developments occurring within the structure of parks. They came to reflect the needs of a wider range of the population which was getting used to "flowing" indiscriminately. It was perceived that the individual's *desire* to achieve a certain social position would do the work that all the authoritarian efforts of previous "recreationists" did not do. In 1847, one argument (Slaney 1847 as quoted by Bailey) to promote public walks opened to everyone was:

A man walking out with his family among his neighbours of different ranks, will naturally be desirous to be properly clothed, and that his wife should be also; but this desire duly directed and controlled, is found by experience to be one of the most powerful effect in promoting Civilisation and exciting industry.

Bailey (1978:41)

The middle classes understood that they had invested themselves with the power to influence both the idle aristocracy and the lower classes via their own example. This was only possible if there were to be places in the city where people could observe each other's habits. "To see and be seen". However some concessions had to be made in order to attract the working class as they would not be satisfied with the single act of walking up and down the park avenues. Parks started to include facilities which catered for the tastes of the newcomers: playgrounds and sportsfields were attached to the green areas. However, there was always the danger that *amusements* would contradict the *instructional* aims, and even the playgrounds were seen "as a source of moral training, wherein children could be taught to maintain mutual good offices ... and propriety of demeanour" (Bailey 1978: 46).

Lawrence Levine quotes a superintendent of New York's Central Park in 1857 complaining "of a 'certain class' of visitors which believed 'that all trees, shrubs, fruit and flowers are common property' and would not hesitate to graze their animals and gather firewood and any available flowers and fruits. 'A large part of the people of New York', he observed, 'are ignorant of a park... They will need to be trained of the proper use of it, to be restrained in the abuse of it'". In 1868, this same Park was

isolated from the disorderly surrounding world by means of the following regulations: "no shows of any kind are allowed on the Park's grounds; no jugglers, gamblers - except those disguised as gentlemen - puppet shows, peddlers of flower, players upon so-called musical instruments, ballad singers, nor hand-organ men'; in fact none of the great army of small persecutors who torment the outside world, can enter into this pleasant place to make us miserable in it" (Levine 1988:182).

Whilst this was happening in New York, in 1869 in England there was a "fight to allow the sale of refreshments in the Park on Sundays" (Bailey 1978:83). Ever since a tendency to allow active (although controlled) entertainment would influence all future leisure plans. After 1918 (in England), most parks included recreational playgrounds, and were providing a wider range of sports facilities. The providers were principally local authorities.

2.4. Entertainment versus education

The people's *quest for entertainment* would force decision makers to change their educational strategies. Reformers were changing their goals by retreating from didacticism in most schemes for rational improvement (Bailey 1978: 98/99 emphasis added):

Where the pill of "useful knowledge" had been sugared with entertainment, the more serious purposes had often been thwarted ...Reformers were learning that successful competition with the growing range of leisure attractions meant making some attempt to approach popular culture on its own terms, taking the workingman from what he was, rather from what he ought to be.

This change was mainly due to a more relaxed attitude of the middle classes who were gaining a stronger position within the social and urban milieu. It was also due to the fact that a certain level of self-control had already been attained by wider strata of society (Elias 1978b, 1982a). The middle classes were gaining the necessary *trust* (applying a Giddens concept) which enable them to run new *risks*: the decentralization of power with the democratization of political regimes also had effects on leisure activities which tended now to emerge in more peripheral decision areas and become more autonomous.

Even the physical location of parks in the urban structure has changed. In the inter war period, a conscious programme created by city councils matched the rapid expansion

of the built-area with a major park close to each emerging suburb. According to Patmore's study, a continuing need for space for *informal recreation* within the urban fabric became increasingly evident, a need to which the decision-makers responded quickly. One of these measures was the one devised in 1925 by the National Playing Fields Association for "permanently-preserved playing space": it imposed the use of 2.4 hectares of recreation space, in each council, per thousand population" (Patmore 1983). Yet if the campaign for informal play-recreation was gaining importance there was still a general suspicion of the idea of pleasure as a legitimate end.

2.5. The example of the music hall

Another paradigmatic example is the music hall. As a working class setting par excellence, the music hall was the result of the emancipation of this class, as they found themselves with more time and more money to spend. Music halls had a relatively short existence (due in part to the subsequent invention of the cinema) but they were one of the leisure settings in which the clash between *low-* and *middle-* class social habits was more apparent.

According to Crump's study of Leicester music halls (1986), whilst museums and libraries were created to "educate" (by teaching both knowledge and behaviour, see next chapter), working class people tended to respond to this plan by developing their own leisure settings. The need for active entertainment seemed to be fighting against the efforts for education: "the 1860s was a decade in which the number of provincial music halls doubled". In 1862, thirteen years after the creation of the town museum, the *Leicester Journal* noted the following about the music hall (which began relatively late in this town when compared to other places):

Demand for this kind of entertainments is still a growing one, and seems to satisfy a certain class of person who, although not caring to visit a theatre, are desirous of whitewashing an entertainment akin to it.

Leicester Journal, (LJ), 19 Set. 1862 as quoted by Crump (1986: 56)

As Crump explains: "music halls were free from the aristocratic educational and artistic pretensions of theatre (and museums for sure) which invited the ridicule of some sections of the audience" (1986). This notion of ridicule or *shame* was crucial for the process of social distinction which would divide individuals and spaces (Elias 1982a). If the lower groups feared entering spaces such as museums in which they felt

shame and *embarrassment*, in the same way middle class people would share the same feelings if they were to be found inside music halls.

The essence of music hall entertainment was the dialogue between performer and audience. People would sit at tables spatially arranged enabling face-to-face encounters involving drinking, smoking, eating and general good fellowship during the performance (Bailey 1986). In some cases, the audiences would become highly *excited* jumping on to the stage and dancing with the dancers. The middle classes attempted to change the music hall's magic and participatory atmosphere in order to create a more *respectable* milieu for their *families*. They were concerned with maintaining discipline and this was the professed reason for the establishment of a set of rules which forced some of the music halls to close and others to change drastically by imposing: "the gradual replacement of tables with fixed seating, the separation of drinking areas from the auditorium, a more rigid timetable of acts, and less dialogue between performers and audience" (Baxendale 1992: 44/45). Significant as these measures were, it was soon realised that they would be more successful in achieving their goal if the middle classes themselves became the managers of these places. "Some managers obliged the artists to sign contracts forbidding them to address the audience. Just as the entertainers and the entertainment had been censored, so too did the audiences themselves eventually come under restraint" (Bailey 1986: 165). Bailey concludes (*ibid.*: 188):

The eventual success of the reformed music hall in turning its customers into disciplined consumers adumbrated a new formula for capitalist growth which was to make the mass leisure industries of the present century more formidable agents of social control than anything experienced in Victorian Society.

As Levine also puts it "throughout these years the audience was being transformed ... into 'a spectator rather than a witness' and in the process 'lost a sense of itself as an active force', as a 'public'" (1988: 194). However as soon as the behaviours were regulated and the audiences could be trusted some kind of a controlled-decontrolling of excitement was allowed. Bruce McConachie (1992) describes how Victorian rules were applied in theatre going in North America in order to "clamp down on spectators' emotional outbursts". However he then says that "as more Americans adopted these norms after 1850, displays of emotions in the playhouse gradually withered into decorous laughter and polite applause" (*ibid.*: 59).

2.6. *The example of sports*

Stephen Hardy (1992: 71) describes the Yale and Princeton football game in 1873 in the United States as follows:

The players had no uniforms or equipment as we think of them now. They played a soccer-like game under rules agreed on just one month earlier... (it was) so casual in fact that no one had brought a football, and the game was delayed an hour and a half until one could be found.

To this short description Hardy adds "twenty years later, teams throughout the country were playing a distinctly American game of football under a standard code of rules, with standard formations and tactics".

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a whole range of sports as part of the new phenomenon of cultural commercialization, and the emergence of a public of sports spectators (sports consumers): football rapidly became a professional game, with attractions for spectators and not just for players. The games were not just for the "doers" but also for the "watchers". Both would experience a certain kind of "controlled decontrolling" excitement during the event (Elias and Dunning 1986).

Before reaching this stage however, sports had gone through the same moralizing process already described for other leisure activities: the rules became more precise, more explicit and more differentiated. Enforcement of rules became more efficient, and penalties (for offences against the rules) became less escapable. "In the form of 'sports', in other words, game-contests involving muscular exertion attained a level of orderliness and of self-discipline on the part of the participants not attained before" (Elias and Dunning 1986: 151).

The rules imposed upon sportgames were meant to balance tensions so that an equilibrium could be reached: "If players do not control themselves sufficiently, they are likely to break the rules and victory may go to their opponents. If they restrain themselves too much, they will lack the verve and the drive necessary for victory. If they follow the rules slavishly, they risk losing through lack of inventiveness; if they dodge or stretch them to the utmost, they risk losing by breaking the rules" (Elias and Dunning 1986: 158). Sport became a medium for training the young population to control their impulses and to be ready to meet the diverse challenges of a naturally

harsh and competitive world (Bailey 1978). What was lost was what Huizinga (in 1919) called the "pure play-quality", the spontaneity and carelessness (1976:142):

The attempt to assess the play-content in the confusion of modern life is bound to lead us to contradictory conclusions. In the case of sport we have an activity normally known as play but raised to such a pitch of technical organisation and scientific thoroughness that the real play-spirit is threatened with extinction.

The language of sport, as with other languages, was converted under modernism to sign systems composed of ambiguous meanings which for spectators meant the control of systems of *representations* instead of the practical experience. As with music halls, *control* and *respectability* were imposed and with them there was a shift in the way enjoyment and participation were understood.

2.7. Leisure in the city

Concomitant to these transformations of the public experience, was the global social environment in which the main actors of modernity were growing. The urban phenomena of homogenization and routinization were creating the conditions for an increased need for more intense experiences. It was described in the previous chapters how one antecedent of the swing from modernization to modernity was the opening of the public to the private which was made possible by a new arrangement of urban spaces, principally in the big metropolis. The city had become one of the most attractive leisure environments.

Together with the creation of zones intended for the free movement of pedestrians, the invention of electric lighting had opened the city to fresh possibilities for social interaction (Rojek 1993). By the end of the century, the city was losing its functionality and gaining instead a leisurely atmosphere. "Great sweeping vistas were designed so that each walk led toward a dramatic climax" Berman (1990:151). And Berman says about Paris: "all these qualities helped to make the new Paris a uniquely enticing spectacle, a visual and sensual feast". Leisure in the city was also becoming more classless. The hostility of the upper classes was being compromised by their growing commercial aims. Rubbing shoulders with lower classes was no longer a cause of moral panic, at least for the new cultural entrepreneurs (if not for the old bourgeois). These new cultural leaders, emerging in new patronage networks, were having a significant impact upon both popular and elite culture. They were the cultural

capitalists who erected the boundaries between high and popular culture by classifying settings, cultural products and public behaviour (see DiMaggio 1977).

Electric lighting also brought a new glamour to commodities displayed for the wonder of *window-shoppers* (Berman 1990, Rojek 1993). The windows were carefully arranged to give an illusion of a real world to be shared with the passing pedestrians. "The new department stores and arcades were temples in which goods were worshipped as *fetiches*" (Benjamin as quoted by Featherstone 1991: 73). Shop windows displayed the formerly private interiors to the gaze: sections of home interiors or images of unattainable foreign lands became available for the contemplation of all. They displayed the first "dioramas": artificial representations, of the countryside, made possible by means of technical artifices, to be displayed in the city centres (Featherstone 1991). These dioramas, according to Benjamin (1983:161), "signalled a revolution in the relationship of art and technology, and were at the same time the expression of a new attitude to life...(and).an attempt to bring the country into the town". Shop windows were bringing *outside* the *interiors* of private lives and other worlds, and, in doing so, were creating new emulations and expectations.

The desire to acquire and experience these things would be an obvious consequence of citizens being made aware of their social existence. Berman (going back to Baudelaire's poem of the poor family looking at the cafe), says: "the trouble is simply that they will not go away. They, too, want a place in the light. Below the electric light they see and are being seen. In the midst of the great spaces, under the bright lights, there is no way to look away" (1990: 153).

The production of commodified goods was orchestrated as part of a system which was organized from above. Communication was disseminated from a distance: through brochures, newspapers, and free media such as poster advertisements in the city streets. This was the beginning of mass media communication. What this meant was the propagation of promotional messages which would not be answered back. The impossibility of feed-back would situate the receiver in a passive contemplative position. The citizen, the man in the crowd, thus became the target for all sorts of stimulations. He or she in turn retreated into what Simmel described the "*blasé* attitude": "an indifference toward the distinctions between things".

We feel as if the whole meaning of our existence were so remote that we are unable to locate it and are constantly in danger of moving away from it...The lack of something definite at the centre of the soul impels us to

search for momentary satisfactions in ever-new stimulation, sensation and external activities.

Simmel as quoted by Rojek (1993: 138)

Simmel was one of the first sociologists to put leisure activities at the centre of the social life of individuals (Frisby 1985, Rojek 1993) and to define leisure for the urban crowd. For him the "*blasé* attitude" did not mean relaxation or self-fulfilment, it was no more than a defence mechanism: "Through inward retreat and remoteness the individual seeks to blockade the external stimuli which clamour for his or her attention" (Rojek *ibid.* :140).

Simmel refers to the democratization of leisure in modernity with scepticism. The best known examples of this are his *Alpine Journey* (1895) and the *Great Exhibitions* (1896): the convergence of the masses which took place at both sites was according to him "colourful but therefore as a whole colourless", suggesting the emergence of an "average sensibility" and, as with all social averages, "this depresses those disposed to the higher and finer values without elevating those at the base of the same degree"(Simmel 1991a :96).

Simmel also embodies the conscience of some cultivated intermediate groups opposed to the blindly moralizing bourgeoisie. He denounces the education of the lower strata as an extension of capitalist power: "the power of capitalism extends itself to ideas as well it is capable of annexing such a distinguished concept as education as its own private property" (*ibid.*). He criticizes the idea of connecting certain leisure experiences such as alpine travel with education and reveals instead the *emotional* and *unconscious feelings*, that were beginning to characterize leisure in the twentieth century, founded upon a need to escape from the worries of everyday life.

I think that the education value of alpine travel is very small. It gives the feeling of tremendous excitement and charge in its incomparable merging of forbidding strength and radiant beauty, and at the time the contemplation of those things fill us with an unrivalled intensity of feeling, prompting undisclosed inner feelings as if the high peaks could uncover the depths of our soul.

However, Simmel also recognizes that these intense "undisclosed inner feelings" are no more than ephemeral experiences.

Strangely this excitement and euphoria, which drive the emotions to a level more intense than normal, subside remarkably quickly. The uplift which a

view of the high Alps gives is followed very quickly by the return to the mood of the mundane.

Simmel (1991a: 96)

For Simmel the city created a tumult of emotions which made life difficult for the pedestrian who had to fight against the stresses of urban life. Despite this somewhat pessimistic view, he accepts two forms of escapism: socializing and adventure. Social contact, within or beyond the family, was understood as a way of developing personality and creating opportunities for human interaction. Adventure was possible through diversity (provided by transportation and communication media), and the frivolity of the unexpected. Adventure was closely related to travel. The "frivolous excitement" of the journey itself meant a greater concern for trip duration rather than destination: "recreational travel is unique in that the actual journey itself is frequently a part of the total recreation experience, rather than just a means to an end" (Patmore 1983:132). Movement to distant places gives deep enjoyment and lasting stimulation.

The possibility of indulging in cheap trips to escape the home environment was, however, not available to the whole population. The freedom from work cannot be understood merely as the availability of time: health, financial means and personal mobility were equally important and still represented strong factors of social differentiation. However mobility was available to a significant proportion of the lower classes, technological innovations did not chose users and had the power to cut across social barriers. They were diffused by world markets in which profit was the principal motive. The commodification of spectacle was just starting to emerge in the new cultural order: this gave a new dynamism to leisure settings which had to be improved frequently in order to keep their audiences.

In late modernity the possession of a car was in many ways the most powerful but still the most selective means of transportation as it was only available to a wealthy minority. The car owner had a wider range of choice. If cars permitted people to leave towns more easily, then they also gave the cities the power to attract people from outside. Collective motorized vehicles, such as coaches, which were becoming widespread, not only increased democratic participation but also enabled a greater range of facilities to be reached with ease. These changing patterns of transport have not only influenced the form of recreation, but also its location. Perhaps the greatest impact of the car and even more of the public bus, has been the conquest of the countryside which started to be seen as a good opportunity for private investment by the tourism and entertainment industry. Yet the conquest of the countryside has resulted in the loss of the pre-industrial pleasure of strolling through unspoilt yet

dangerous woods and meadows of times previous to industrialism. Set in wild landscapes people expected to find forms of entertainment and modern conveniences, so the trip would be exciting, safe and comfortable: good roads, shops, hospitals, restaurants, hotels, in all, "good value for money", a statement that reflects an economic evaluation of the use of time which is a reproduction of the industrialist rationale.

However these new provisions merely tended to create new rationalities as the normative (civilizing) society tended to impose new rules upon the leisure experience. "The search for adventure and self-realization was frequently neutralized by a sense of anti-climax and the impression that things were not really so different from home" (Rojek 1993: 167). This situation just increased the demand for more stimulating (decontrolling) experiences.

To summarize, the failure of rational recreation and the increasing awareness of a working class leisure inscribed in their own habits, was followed by a new kind of interference this time aimed more at profit than at moral education. Recreational differences, which had once seemed unbridgeable, were being seriously challenged by the leisure industry whose goals were mainly economic and targeted across the social spectrum. There was a retreat from didacticism as reformers were learning that they had to accept popular forms of leisure on their own terms.

It was no longer a question of social morals but one of supply and demand. *Amusement* became an exchange value. First the working classes' entertainments and later the upper classes' traditional leisure settings would have to face the increasing competition of well planned and well targeted entertainments offered by the new producers of mass culture: the managers of the leisure industry. The magic rule was to take hold of the leisure consumer where he or she was and how he or she was, and not where he or she was not, be he or she worker, intellectual or manager.

When the middle classes understood that they had truly gained control of the social and cultural order, they lost their determination to impose their specific ethic. They copied the pleasures of the upper classes and the amusements of the workers. At the same time, they were copying aristocratic habits and starting to go to places such as museums, and concert halls or to play aristocratic sports such as tennis and golf, they were also learning a lot from the leaders of popular culture (Bailey 1978, Cunningham 1980).

Popular entertainers also had a strong impact on high culture "the most obvious sign of this is in the appearance of animals on the *legitimate* stage. It was with an eye to profit but with a sense of betrayal of high culture that the managers of Covent Garden and Drury Lane admitted horses, lions and elephants to their stages. And having done it once it was hard to stop" (Cunningham 1980:37). This effect was also apparent in museums which after quite a long time of close respectability, progressively were forced to introduce participation and amusement in their ways of displaying (see chapter four).

3. Leisure in the postmodern world

As previously discussed, postmodernity does not represent a new rational order but it does represent higher discontinuities in the process initiated with modernity. In the words of Frederic Jameson: "(it) is the force field in which very different kinds of cultural impulses ...must take their own way" (1984:56). In terms of leisure, postmodernism reflects the crumbling of the foundations on which the bourgeois rationality was established. Basically of the two major differentiations between *work* and *leisure*, and *high* and *low* cultures, "high and low culture now connect with each other in an exhaustive, incestuous way" (Rojek 1993: 128). Rojek quotes Lyotard to demonstrate the eclecticism of postmodern lifestyle:

One listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonalds' food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and 'retro' clothes in Hong Kong.

What does "postmodern leisure" mean? It is after all the appropriation of leisure by the economic system and the commodification of people's needs for self expression by the production of experiences in which they can forget for a while their incapacity to change their own destinies. Chris Rojek characterizes postmodern leisure and tourism according to four unprecedented characteristics: (1993: 134):

In the first place, leisure and tourism are now equivalent to mere consumption activity. The modernist quest for authenticity and self-realization has come to an end. Instead we are in a stage of post-leisure and post-tourism in which we can relax enough not to bother about self-improvement or capturing the essence of every sight. The second point is that post-leisure and post-tourism are part of a social situation made up of generalized de-differentiation...the third point is that post-leisure and post-tourism question the state's moral density, its right to rule over others... the fourth point is that post-leisure and post-tourism forms celebrate fictive and dramaturgical values, it is reasonable to expect that these forms would be preoccupied with spectacle and sensation.

Postmodern leisure forms are therefore new tendencies which are "taking their own way" and becoming widespread albeit keeping with the traditional cultural configurations a relationship of passive coexistence (Lash 1990).

3.1. *De-differentiation in postmodern leisure*

It is again the concept of *de-differentiation* that best defines the postmodern leisure experience: the blurring of the distinction between *work* and *leisure*, *high* and *low* cultures, the incursion of the *public* into the *private*, the compression of *time* and *space* distances, and the interweaving of *amusement* with *education* (which is central for the purpose of the present study).

All the efforts of modernity were directed in order to keep leisure under a strict control due to the fear that in leisure time people would spoil the ethic of labour on which the process of modernization was based. The postmodern blurring of the distinction between *leisure* and *work* is not free of constraints, it means that *leisure* tends to be taken more seriously as the consumer society projects artificial images of how one should feel in leisure time which are hard to achieve; simultaneously increased involvement and enjoyment has been introduced at *work* with an increasing number of people working in the services sector, and the more humanized offices of today, decorated with colourful furniture and plants are sometimes difficult to distinguish from leisure centres.

Another distinction that was part of the modern rationale was *high culture* as opposed to *low culture* not only as spheres of production/consumption but as spheres of social and moral action. *High culture* and *low culture* were generalized by the emergence of a *mass culture* in which the previous class distinctions would be drastically reduced. Theme Parks and similar attractions are settings that do not distinguish customers. Their customers in turn do not seem to worry about their social ambience. As Berman (1990: 115) has stated: "for the first time in history, all confront themselves and each other on a single plan of being".

The distinction between *private* and *public* suffered the first threat, as previously described, with the "massification" of the new metropolis. However this incursion of the public into private life was drastically accentuated with the revolution of mass-media, and the invention of the most powerful medium of all - the *television*. After so many years of hard battles for the opening of the old social enclaves to the community, the revolution of the mass media was to destroy even the memory of places being private in the past. The privacy of households was invaded by information, commodification, distant spaces and remote times, and a world of simulations and sensations turned suddenly available for all.

3.2. *Disneylands and the leisure industry*

Disneylands symbolise the new *high-tech* leisure *adventures* promoted by the new leisure industries. Jameson (1988:48) cites Disneyland as paradigmatic of postmodern hyperspace and simulation. They clearly offer good examples of sites at which it is possible to experience a *mimetic* experience. This means that people do not quest for an authentic experience but are prepared to engage in "the play of the real" and seem to have a new capacity to open up to surface sensations "without the nostalgia of the real" (Featherstone 1991: 96).

Yet this simulated environment is not confined just to recreational places. It tends to be found everywhere to a greater or lesser degree: both in the city and in the countryside. They are even symbols of a country's economic growth and indeed work as sources of economic expansion by means of their power to attract foreign visitors (the Eurodisney in the Parisian catchment area, and the Spanish efforts to show their growing position in Europe by means of the International Exhibition in Seville are good examples of this). The city again:

The postmodern city is therefore much more image and culturally self-conscious; it is both a centre of cultural consumption and general consumption, and the latter, as has been emphasized, cannot be detached from cultural signs and imagery, so the urban lifestyles, everyday lives and leisure activities are influenced by the postmodern simulational tendencies.

Featherstone (1991: 99)

The consumer's uncritical response to the increasing production of sophisticated leisure programmes, is responsible for the incredible boom of the leisure industry which seems not too much concerned with the risks of economic crisis.

There was a carefully crafted package of pleasure designed to maximize profits, a multimedia package calculated to keep audiences enthralled throughout one show and eager to spend money on the next.

Gomery (1992: 146)

Paradoxically (and this is another way of seeing the work and leisure de-differentiation) leisure is even conceived as a way to save the economy and to create employment. The leisure industry is after all a business which seeks economic profits and is aware of its capacity to accompany (and create) change. As a leisure manager puts it:

Nothing deceives like success in our business. We're only as good as last week's business and our business changes very quickly.

Conland (1992:19)

A new class of leisure managers, (the postmodern cultural intermediaries) is thus creating leisure resources using the most powerful technologies: multi-media, multi-effects, multi-attractive. Their projects occupy huge areas of land all over the country wherever there is a space within a large catchment population with good transportation links (good access to motorways for instance). As with every business, their main language is a persuasive discourse about low economic costs and essentially about high emotional profits. They are totally dedicated to encouraging consumption.

Most leisure markets depend for their growth on the confident consumers, who are willing and able to spend freely on their enjoyment.

Martin and Mason (1992: 27)

It is hard to tell whether these new commercial leisure organizations are selling services or consumer goods or both. The leisure industry is not concerned with attracting the lay public because the lay public is already there. It is concerned with attracting more public, and even to go where the non-goers are. Leisure is no longer a luxury; it is something that the great majority of people have increasing time and money to enjoy. To achieve popularity, it makes use of a powerful language and uses powerful channels to reach all households.

As with any other product, the language surrounding leisure talks about everything people desire and dream, and takes the form of a new and exciting proposal:

A Fantasy world journey taking travellers back to the dawn of time is the centrepiece of Blackpool Tower... Called the secret of the Rocks of Dawn of Time, the ride will be produced by the Sally corporation of America and feature time capsules travelling through space in the history of our planet. There will be an attraction in the history of showbusiness. A food hall and live entertainment, venue will be developed, and the children's playground doubled in size.

Leisure Opportunities 92 (16) Oct (1991: 4)

It is what Jean Baudrillard (1983) calls the "democratic alibi of universals": consumption is presented with a democratic social function "as a counterbalance for a

hierarchy of power and social background, a democracy of leisure, motorway and fridge is possible".

3.3. A "romantic" or a "collective gaze": a discussion of the leisure present and future

According to John Urry's study of tourism, the revitalization of high culture against the threat of homogeneization was expressed in the *romantic* movement in the late eighteenth century, and early nineteenth century. This romantic movement was aimed at the valorization of the intensity of emotion and sensation, it was an appeal to a "poetic mystery rather than intellectual clarity" (1990:20). According to this author, the affirmation of individual pleasure never ceased to be opposed to the threat of the *collective gaze* which became one of the strong characteristics of modernity. The *romantic gaze* was also responsible for the preservation of certain spaces and habits in order "to contradict the denial of pleasures by their cultivation".

Indeed this was a period in which many other events came to be organised- there was a plethora of traditions invented between 1870 and 1914, often promoted and rendered sacred by royal patronage.

Urry (1990:20)

The pleasure of being able to be on one's own had become rare with the expansion of the middle class and working class cultures. In 1939 in England, says Urry, car owners rose to over two million. As a consequence of this increased mobility, seaside resorts which have been the holiday resort of the *respectable* were invaded by mass holiday companies: this was the effect of the spread of the *collective gaze* in late modernity. This *collective gaze* according to Urry's definition was/is based on the pressure of large numbers of people which gave to some places an atmosphere of *carnival*. The feeling of being inserted in a crowd "indicates that this is the place to be and that one should not be elsewhere" (ibid.: 35). It is conviviality that gives certain places their distinct excitement and glamour.

Focusing on the opposition between a *romantic* and a *collective gaze* seems a good way to initiate a discussion about postmodern leisure. We can say about postmodernism that the objects of the *collective gaze* became imposed in all spheres of life as they were spread by mechanical and electronic reproduction. The aim of the leisure industry has been to attract as many consumers as possible and by doing so they were/are the main defenders of this type of experience. It is the loss of the

capacity to marvel, it is the spread of a *blasé* attitude⁵, of a permanent "state of distraction instead of contemplation" (Urry *ibid.*). This *collective gaze* came to symbolise a postmodern anti-hierarchical tendency opposed to the existence of a knowledgeable élite equipped with means to understand things that the masses could not understand.

The postmodern culture became more interested in the immediate impact of an intense experience, than in the formal properties of an aesthetic object. However the *collective gaze* introduces a sense of *anti-climax* and *anxiety* not giving a solution to the needs it seeks to fulfil, it seems instead to enhance the demands for innovation. "The consumption experience" says Rojek is accompanied with a sense of irony: "one realizes that what one is consuming is not real, but nonetheless the experience can be pleasurable and exciting, even if one recognizes that it is also useless" (Rojek 1993: 134). The continuous search for innovation is the result of a new approach to pleasure characteristic of the *new middle classes* in the way they were defined by Bourdieu (1984):

These new middle class groups urge a morality of pleasure as a duty. This doctrine makes it a failure, a threat to self-esteem, not to "have fun"...pleasure is not only permitted but demanded, on ethical as much as scientific grounds. The fear of not getting enough pleasure...is combined with the search for self-expression and "bodily expression" and for communication with others.

Bourdieu (1984: 132)

There is something of the old bourgeois work ethic in this attitude; it imposes new types of self-restraint and creates new types of tensions. This definition shows a new type of de-differentiation: the *romantic* search for self-fulfilment and the *collective* need for "communication with others" have become a source of conflict between personal and collective pleasures.

⁵The postmodern individual seems more skilled than ever at dealing with *simultaneity* (another type of de-differentiation). Television watching can be combined with all sorts of activities and channel-hopping is said to be a characteristic of the postmodern perception. A postmodern version of the *blasé attitude* is perhaps what explains these extra skills: the individual retreats and protects him or herself from external stimuli which seek too much of his or her attention. "TV may not have the cultural impact that its hours imply due to the low intensity of much watching" (Kelly 1983:19). It will be discussed in the next chapter how this *blasé* attitude is also becoming a characteristic of the museum experience and how the new designers are taking profit from this *de-differentiation* of visitors' perceptions.

To sum up, leisure has not reached in the present scene the freedom of choice and of emotional investment that has been attributed to it. However, it is based on the illusion that this freedom although ephemeral is possible. If a great percentage of the population seems happy to accept this as it happens, a growing awareness of the loss of individual freedom is being integrated in the current discourse of the threats of present daily routines.

CONCLUSION:

Historically leisure has been the stage for the dominance of some groups over others. However it is possible to conclude from what has been said so far that this imposition was not unproblematic, instead it was a struggle of class identities and their symbols which varied between two main poles: *education* and *amusement*.

If *education* was the tool imposed upon the lower social orders and their specific settings and habits in order to spread civic behaviours, it was also imposed upon the elites and their closed leisure practices, who were forced to change or lose their privacy as well as their idle or violent pastimes. Excessive amusement was fought with *respectability* and excessive *respectability* was fought with *amusement*. The present leisure scene tendency to become de-routinized is however an illusion; the postmodern leisure forms are creating new kinds of restrictions from which it is difficult to escape.

The developments of the museum as a leisure realm, in terms of the notions of *respectability* or *excitement*, *education* or *amusement*, and of their defenders and critics, within the process of transformation described so far, will be the theme of next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The museum as a leisure choice in a changing world

INTRODUCTION

The museum is a cultural institution that was born¹ in modern times and evolved in conjunction with the process of modernization of western societies. Museums have started with collectors and collections. Collections reflect the need to store objects according to a certain rational order which evolved within the framework of western industrialization and was subsequently adopted by other cultures. They also reflect a linear perception of time and space, and a nostalgic view of the past. Finally they reflect an individual's will to mark this order of things with personal or group views. As has been frequently argued (Hooper Greenhill 1992, Pearce 1990, 1992), museums do not only store objects but also visions of the world and of power: the power of an individual or a group to transmit its ideas to others. They have been used by cultural élites to express their view of nation, community, class and material culture, as well as their image of other groups and other nations.

A *processual* analysis, (one that takes into account historical developments), facilitates the understanding of the museum's conditions of access by different social groups, as well as of what being inside its walls has meant in different times and for different people. It also makes it possible to read the relations that have been constructed between its producers and its consumers by the way in which each group has tended to influence the other. Finally it shows the *modes of communication* each group has favoured, both as curators and as public in each stage, that is how objects have been used and interpreted, how meanings have been constructed and understood.

Local museums reflect the history of local communities. National museums reflect the history of big cities and their citizens as well as the history of entire nations. The observers of modernity could well have seated themselves in front of a museum's entrance and observed who goes inside in order to grasp the changes of the time. Many researchers in the field of museums tend to forget that (like themselves) the public is engaged in a complex social realm which is undergoing continuous change. They have also forgotten that museums exist within cities and, (like Benjamin's

¹As a public provision.

boulevard or Baudelaire's *coffee shop*) are part of a certain order of preservation/innovation.

An institution-centred approach has been strongly privileged in museum studies. This considers how museums create their collections, who the collectors are, the methods curators use to interpret the museum's objects, what these interpretations represent as constructions of knowledge, and how the public receives the *intended* message. These approaches have been too much centred on "Us"- *the established*, for the internal use of museums curators. Although this kind of approach is certainly necessary, other perspectives must be considered in order to obtain a more rounded picture. In what follows, it is assumed that firstly the museum is a *cultural product* and that, like other cultural products, it is part of a *cultural economy* - a process of cultural production and consumption; secondly, that the museum is a *mode of signification* characteristic of a certain historical time and is therefore socially contingent; thirdly the museum experience (for its publics) is part of their global experience of *leisure time*, and shares its role with other spheres of people's lives, from the most intimate to the most open.

A *figurational model*, as defined by Norbert Elias and presented in previous chapters, will be adopted in this analysis. This model considers that the *public* and the *curators* are mutually dependent groups, whose interdependence limits each other's scope for action, and the result is the building and rebuilding of the total museum environment. Also, the figuration curators-public exists within the figuration of a wider state-society. This is to accept that what happens in museums is, in the long term, the result of the interweaving of different actions, the aggregate consequences of which are most of the time unplanned, and which can be shown retrospectively to have followed a certain direction. This is what Elias has called the "blind process" that results from "the immanent dynamics of the figuration" (1982a).

According to this view, the museum will be conceived as an open system continuously interacting with the outside world, through the experience of both its curators and its visitors. Visitors bring their way of being together, the meaning they attribute to leisure, as well as their past experiences and memories. Curators are themselves continuously influenced by pressures and challenges from other social, cultural and economic spheres, and by the "city" with its continuous attractiveness and innovation. As Robert Avery (1991:15) puts it, "making, sending, choosing and responding to the media messages involves a set of understandings, which are, up to a point, shared by 'makers' and 'receivers' and which are usually both complex and unspoken. Thus

diversity, ambiguity, and even some mystery are to be expected on the 'side' of production and content as well on the 'side' of reception".

It is therefore not possible to separate the visitors' actions inside the museum from their global needs and expectations. Following this assumption, it will be argued that it is not possible to take the "museum-visitor" as an abstract category, whose relation to the museum is wholly defined through interaction with displays. Research in the field of museums has been so far - if not consciously at least unconsciously - regulated by the need to control and influence the public experience, which seems to continually evade any attempt to control it. This differentiation which positions *transmitters* and *receivers* at opposite poles of the communication context, is, as already analysed in the first chapter, part of the *modernist regime of signification* which is tending to lose its significance in the current scene. This chapter will also consider the most recent trends in the museum world and the link we can establish between the new communication atmosphere and the *postmodern paradigm* as defined in previous chapters.

It is also assumed that museums are an ideal microcosm for the study of the *civilizing process*. Since their very beginning, museums have tended to keep and display objects aimed at reinforcing the western cultures' archetype of *civilization* in the way defined by Elias, that is to say, they have reflected the self-image of "an orderly, well organized, just, predictable and calculable society" (Mennell 1992:30), and imposed *codes of behaviour* upon its publics as will be demonstrated below.

A number of studies have been published discussing either new ideas for the making of museums' interiors, or attempts to understand the public's expectations and needs as an independent realm. The present study seeks to integrate the museum experience within the global process of social change, and with the conditions of *emotional control* or *emotional tolerance* characteristic of different historical times.

1. The museum as a cultural product of modern times

In the first chapter it was described how the bourgeoisie used objects as symbols of power to consolidate their identity. They tried to emulate the tastes of the aristocracy and the gentry which "were rooted in the husbandry of their landed estates and (were) nourished by a high amateur tradition in the civilised arts" (Bailey 1978: 64). Among the objects of desire the idle elites favoured were old and exotic objects. For a recently formed group without historical roots, the old (pre-industrial) object was a way of finding legitimacy, a noble sanction for its still fragile triumph, and a means of acquiring a certain stability in a world which was facing radical changes; the exotic object was a symbol of power, the power of travel (which was a considerable status marker at the time), and the power of leading fashion, taste and technology.

1.1. *The museum as an interior: individualistic pleasure*

The bourgeois era was also, as already stated in previous chapters, a time for *interiors*. The museum was, when it first appeared, a place where rare, precious or peculiar objects were stored for a close group to admire narcissistically, as well as a setting in which their close social encounters could take place. Museum's collections were normally private collections which belonged to individuals who had built them from nothing, in most cases just with the desire to *possess*.

The possession and appreciation of valued objects seems to have had the capacity of satisfying specific individual needs and inner desires. *Astonishment, surprise* and *admiration*, were the feelings responsible for a large part of the museum's attraction for its visitors, although these visitors were restricted to close groups of friends and reliable acquaintances. Although the museum's social atmosphere had an important role to play, the search for *pleasure* in its interiors was thus mainly individualistic. The museum's objects contained part of the individuals themselves as they projected upon them their values and feelings. This attitude is demonstrated in the following quote of a German visitor of an English museum in 1830 (Hudson 1975: 29):

I passed here six happy hours in quiet solitude ...It is only when so left to oneself, that by degrees, penetrating into the spirit of works of art, one can consider all their peculiar beauties. But when, as often happens in England,

and, as I shall doubtless again experience, an impatient housekeeper rattles with her keys, one cannot of course be in the proper frame of mind, but must look at everything superficially, and with internal vexation.

This visitor was seeking for a *romantic gaze*, "a private and passionate experience of beauty and the sublime" (as defined by Urry 1990). These feelings were first experienced by the owner of the collection him/herself who admired with great pleasure the objects with which he or she maintained a strong relationship of affection (Hooper-Greenhill 1992).

The museum was also part of the bourgeois strategy for exclusiveness, as Hugh Cunningham puts it (1980: 76):

The leisure class retreated to the home or to those fenced-off private enclosures where they might look at pictures or botanical specimens, or listen to music, safe in the knowledge that they would meet only their own kind.

Kenneth Hudson (1975 :8/9), describes a visit to the British Museum in 1784, which had just "opened" in 1759, by citing the impressions of a (middle class) bookseller who had special permission to go inside its doors on a Tuesday at 11 .am: " the company seemed influenced; they made haste and were silent. No voice was heard but in whispers. If a man pass two minutes in a room, in which are thousands of things to demand his attention, he can not find time to bestow on them and glance at each... I went out as wise as I went in". Hudson concludes "the original rules and regulations of the British Museum seem to have been expressly calculated to keep the general public out to make sure that the few who did eventually make the tour got as little pleasure and profit as possible". The bookseller represents a materialistic middle class ideal type, who needs factual information in order to understand the value of the objects on display. As he himself also states "if I see wonders which I do not understand, they are no wonders to me", he also represents a group of people used to some sort of amusement: " (I) had lost the little share of good humour I brought in, and came away completely disappointed"(ibid.).

Pleasure was thus restricted to a closed group, used to contemplation in the same way as they were used to "promenading" in parks. As with parks, the relative openness of museums' doors meant the imposition of social divisions: different groups were differentiated in different times and spaces. To the British Museum "the general public were admitted on Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, Fridays were selected to select parties" says Hudson. A museum director in the mid eighteenth century also stated: "I am now come to the resolution of refusing admittance to the

lower classes except they come provided with a ticket from some Gentleman or Lady of my acquaintance ...they will not be admitted during the time of Gentlemen and Ladies in my Museum" (Hudson 1975: 9 and 24).

1.2. *The formation of a "public"*

The museum was not only a space in which objects were protected in glass cases, but also where *behavioural standards* and *ways of seeing* had to be learned. Behind this attitude of privacy was the need for the creation of *specific audiences* which would constitute the "desirable public". Habermas, in a study of the structural transformations in the public sphere, in which the *private* and the *public* are discussed as symbols of bourgeois society, explains how this need to create a *public* was the result of the emancipation of the bourgeoisie from the spheres of the aristocratic courts, and simultaneously a need to keep for themselves a similar kind of *courtois* ambience. The idea of *public* for the bourgeois was for that reason "anticipated in secret, as a public sphere still existing behind closed doors" (1992:35).

According to Habermas the bourgeois need for *interiors* was also a reaction to the threat of criticism. The bourgeois idea of *public* consisted of intelligent and cultivated although uncritical human beings who needed to be protected from another 'public' as heterogeneous as the emerging urban crowds, the public "at large", that was being formed outside the institutions of high culture. These institutions of high culture also displayed their superiority and restrictiveness through the architectonic magnificence of their buildings: the front doors at the top of high and sumptuous staircases just for those who had the privilege to climb. Roland Barthes (1990) has described the act of entering these buildings as: "to shut oneself up, to make the rounds of an interior, a little in the manner of an owner". He also says "every exploration is an appropriation; this tour of the inside corresponds, moreover, to the question raised by the outside: the monument is a riddle, to enter is to solve, to possess it".

Inside these sumptuous spaces redundancy, saturation, hierarchy and order were the rhetoric of display (Hooper Greenhill 1992). The wealthy private collectors covered the walls with objects from floor to ceiling simply to get everything in. This way of displaying could be compared with the bourgeois' own homes defined by Baudrillard (1983) as: "closed and full like an egg in which "heritage and accumulation are signs of 'status' and prosperity"; "in the same way" he continues, "the bourgeois interior can be defined by *superposition*: the less space we have the more we accumulate" and also

"*redundancy* of signs and of their connotations: the table is covered with a table-cloth, the table cloth with a plastic towel, each plant has a vase, each vase is on a small plate".

If the bourgeois attitude was at first an attitude of astonishment and surprise towards the mysteries and rarities of the world, later collectors and curators, embedded with the ideals of industrial utilitarianism and scientific *esprit*, would profess instead an attitude of being cultivated through the study of collections. Collections became more organized, and systematized, a systematization that would also influence the way of displaying. "The new elites ...needed a forum for displaying and exchanging ideas and practices: scientific theory, material artefacts, scenic beauty, social morality which were all part of the same 'polite' culture" (Daniels 1993).

1.3. *Pleasure or instruction?*

Increasingly *instruction* would come to overshadow the previous feelings of surprise and individualistic pleasure and this was the attitude behind the creation of many new museums, a real boom in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the middle classes were becoming strongly influential. However before this time, debates between those who defended *instruction* and those who were seeing their *enjoyment* threatened, started being aroused. In 1781 the new designer of the Belvedere Museum in Austria displayed the paintings in a way comparable to a library. It was defended that the museum would be *educational* rather than *enjoyable*. "The pictures were put in rows ... and small sculptures were regimented in cases" (Hudson 1975: 28). The new scheme was, according to Hudson, "praised by those who liked to see order instead of confusion and attacked by those who found the machine-like regularity offensive to anyone possessing taste and sensitivity."

To become cultivated in a pleasurable way was thus one of the reasons behind the creation of most museums. However, if one of these two experiences (*learning* or *pleasure*) had to be sacrificed - under the middle classes' efforts to submit the individual pleasures to a collective rationality -, it would be *pleasure* not *learning*. According to Elias, in this differentiation what was played was the role of short- or long-term effects on individual's behaviour. In the delicate balance between affective and reality-oriented commands, the greater the importance of the latter the more "rational" the museum experience became.

2. Museums and modernity

Modernity was basically a time of conflict in which the middle classes' efforts for hegemony were taken to extremes not previously envisaged. At the same time at the fringes of society began to emerge new fragmented tendencies more free and creative. However despite some exceptions², most museums seemed to remain an upper class realm in which the city crowds were still not allowed.

In the way proposed by Scott Lash as described in the first chapter, cultural modernity entailed the rational *differentiation* of social activities and social sectors, including, within the cultural sphere, art, science, ethics, and religion. Each sphere became *self-legislating*. Art was considered untrue, and definitely separated from science and religion. Therefore the aesthetic experience of the *status quo* was tending to lose the capacity of engaging the individual in an attitude of marvelling, like in previous times, since a bigger gap between the subject and the object was being created (Lash 1990). The object desanctified became instead rationalized, intellectualized. Museums gradually became temples of scholarship. Yet, even among the middle classes (more highly educated than the lower strata) most people would feel ignorant and lacking the right knowledge to decodify the vocabulary used in museums. This came to produce a more acute *differentiation* between *high* and *low* cultures which tended to follow autonomous processes.

2.1. Increasing exclusiveness in the museums' world: nobility against vulgarity

Within the *modernist* realm, the old cultural elites feared the chaotic metropolis recently invaded by people from different cultures, and the masses' demand for new cultural products. This increasing materialism of urban life meant disgust for the unreality of art. Men of affairs doubted whether the arts had much place in a busy society like theirs (Altick 1973). The interest in art was reserved for a close circle of "idle" people who formed the canons of taste and decided what was of value.

²Henry Cole the director of the South Kensington Museum organized the museum with the needs of the public in mind. Admission was free for half the week, and its hours of opening included evenings for the convenience of working people, yet it was a notion of education individualistic and naïve. What was meant by education was the teaching of how to increase individuals' self-fulfilment in front of the objects on display. (see Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 19)

It is against the expansion of a culture for the masses and the threat of a single national mass culture, tending to blandness and triviality, that the upper classes have built their cultural strategies by means of *new more specific and socially exclusive organizational forms* (DiMaggio 1977, 1982, 1986, 1987; Levine 1988). As already mentioned, museums, art galleries, concert halls, opera houses, some theatres among other spaces within the city tended to increase their privacy.

At the same time, out of the walls of the sacralized culture, new artistic movements were emerging, more expressive and creative. What these movements were trying to recover was the space for individual freedom and a kind of hedonistic pleasure similar to the one previous to the rationalization of the aesthetic experience. The artistic movement, called *modernism*, came from decentralised places in the city where people lived in a certain degree of marginality and freedom. "They became, so to speak, a refuge for the opponents of the bureaucratization process, preserving in artistic form dreamlike promises of spontaneous happiness, mutual recognition and solidarity" (Keane 1984: 105).

Paul DiMaggio has demonstrated how the definition of the boundaries between *high* and *popular* culture in the United States took place in the period between 1859 and 1900. According to this author it was then that the private and semi-private, non-profit orientated cultural institutions (museums and art galleries, concert halls, theatres and opera houses) which defended the tradition of a high culture, were built as opposed to the *commercial popular-culture industry* (1982: 33).

Once these organizational models developed, the first in the bosom of elite urban status communities, the second in the relative impersonality of emerging regional and national markets, they shaped the role that cultural institutions would play, the career of artist, the nature of the works created and performed, and the purposes and publics that cultural organizations would serve.

To illustrate these cultural changes DiMaggio uses the example of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Before 1850 this museum was organized on a commercial basis: it exhibited fine arts in conjunction with Chinese curiosities, stuffed animals, mermaids and dwarves. Visitors could also attend a theatre and see works of Dickens and Shakespeare as well as performances by gymnasts and contortionists. However, by 1910 this combination of high and low cultural forms was no longer possible and this distinction was, according to the author, the work of "clerics" and "critics" (the middle classes seeking social recognition) who had developed an *aesthetic ideology* that distinguished between the *nobility of art* and the *vulgarity of entertainment*.

Using Bourdieu's concepts, DiMaggio refers to the entrepreneurs of high culture institutions such as museums as individuals who possessed high levels of economic capital from industrial ventures which they combined with high-cultural ideals. They were also collectors of "cultural capital" that conferred prestige upon those who had mastered it.

According to the author, the spirit of the museum founders of the second half of the nineteenth century was based upon three different strategies: *entrepreneurship*, *classification* and *framing*. *Entrepreneurship* meant the creation of an organizational form that members of the elite could control and govern; *classification* meant the erection of boundaries to define high art that some publics could appropriate as their own cultural property, and the legitimation of this classification by other classes and the state; and *framing* was the development of a *new etiquette of appropriation*, a new relationship between the audience and the work of art³.

It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that these strategies came together to define a *rationale for the institutions of high culture*. Prior to this time, "the organizational models through which art was distributed were not equipped to define and sustain such a body and a view of art" (DiMaggio 1982: 35). However, this change would have made no sense without the threat provoked by the appearance of certain strategies from commercial enterprise which "tended to exhibit art as spectacle and had the power to attain larger audiences even crossing the traditional social boundaries".

In order to protect them from the influence of popular culture, high cultural products such as museums had thus to be monopolized, legitimated and made sacred, even more strongly than before. If the *aura* of the object of art was being lost outside the museum's walls (replaced as it was by mass produced objects and a panoply of reproductions), inside, the importance of the unique object as well as the importance of the unique aesthetic experience was brought to new extremes. Audiences, who despite the increased restrictiveness now included ambitious sectors of the middle class, "were to approach the masters and their works with proper respect and proper seriousness, for aesthetic and spiritual elevation rather than mere entertainment" (Levine 1988: 146). In this relationship between the individual and the object, any sort of *fun* was repressed and replaced by increasing *seriousness* in order to educate the new visitors, who despite these tensions "wanted to be addressed directly, on a single

³The civilizing of visitors' manners.

unambiguous level of communication, seeking edification rather than aesthetic pleasure (Altick 1973).

"The middle classes were victims of the puritanism of their age"; "their problem" says Edward Royle (1987: 118) "was that they neither approved of nor had access to the lax countryside pursuits of the gentry; they did not ...have the refinement to patronize Culture; and they did not care for the rowdiness of popular recreations. 'We really do not know how to amuse ourselves'; admitted the (middle class owned) Saturday Review in 1871".

Middle class visitors responded more easily to realism in art than to expressionism. They were more impressed by skills shown in representing reality, than by their subjective interpretations. As for any other good in the market, the artist's skills became a value. It is said that when the painting "Derby Day" was first exhibited, "it had to be railed off to discourage those who wanted to linger in order to 'read' it close-up, square foot by square foot as their artistic sensitivity was not used to the unobtrusive" (Royle 1987: 278).

These new intellectual elites had as allies the new industrialists as well as many members of the new middle classes which also sought to avoid public disorder and supported the promise of cultural legitimacy (R. Kelly 1987, Levine 1988). "At the side of high culture, not-for-profit corporations were governed by prosperous and influential trustees, whilst at the side of popular entertainment, commercial enterprises would try to adapt to people's broad tastes via the market" (DiMaggio 1982: 35).

These divisions in cultural production entailed important social differentiations: for each form had its distinct publics. They also represented different visions of culture, defined through the separation between *seriousness* and *fun*. By the end of the nineteenth century these differences had increased. Each culture had adopted its own tone and so did the settings in which it was performed. It was according to DiMaggio, "a retreat of the upper groups from the *know-nothings*" (ibid.) who tended to control state government and broader sectors of society.

The *institution of criticism* (as Scott Lash has called it) was the main threat to the élites' identity. They had to face a public with more leisure, wealth, physical mobility, and educational opportunity than ever before (Sheets-Pyenson 1988, Habermas 1992) divided between the desire to engage in commercial strategies or to join the upper classes in their cultural restrictiveness.

The *institution of criticism* was therefore one of the biggest dangers of the opening of the private to the public: "the private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meanings as their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalize it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority" (Habermas 1992: 37). However, whilst these conflicting feelings of willingness and unwillingness to open the museum's doors to a wider public have persisted, a great proportion of the population remained outside the museum's entrance and were becoming active users of other facilities.

2.2. *The museum's process of differentiation*

The modernist aesthetic took time to find a place to be accepted by the cultural elite. However, when it was legitimated it did not help to improve the openness of the art galleries to a broader public. In artistic terms, the modernist aesthetics meant the loss of the realistic frame, that is, the emancipation of the work of art from the real world. Instead of the obsession with real things, *subjectivity* took the lead without any reality to refer to. Or in Lash's terms, the new objects became *signifiers* without referents in the outside world, by reflecting instead individual states of mind and ways of escape from the increasing rationality of life.

Modernity meant an increased specialization and definite separation between the aesthetic and the scientific. These distinct guide-lines came to oppose *art* and *science* in different places and for different publics. *Art galleries* were displaying a new freedom of creation beyond the limits of any rationality where "pure pleasure" was allowed to those who were prepared to reach it; whilst museums which had stories to tell about others (ethnographic), themselves (local history) or nature (natural history), would adopt a preferential *educational* posture. The non-art museums therefore rested on foundations which were, at least potentially, more democratic (Hudson 1975).

Non-art museums had definitely embarked upon on a new *educational mission*, which brought with it questions of organization and rational arrangement, and a new responsibility of conveying knowledge to the public. For the natural history and ethnological collections, this was the time of classification, taxonomic, geographical or otherwise (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:5). Museums were intended for instruction and compared with libraries, organized by themes and topics rather than by the aesthetic

beauty of their objects (Pearce 1990). This reordering of things was reinforced by a more structured and strict cultural order and an extended state intervention. Museums were receiving increasing support from the state and their actions were even included in programmes aimed to educate the population.

The presence of a dedicated, charismatic museum director was of paramount importance to the success of most museums founded in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The role of the individual personality had become increasingly important (Cameron 1968, 1971). "Only those directors who possessed considerable energy and charisma could mobilize the power and financial support for the survival of their museums" (Sheets-Pyenson 1988: 25). William Henry Flower, one of the first directors of the British Museum (Natural History), says about curatorship:

What a museum really depends upon for its success and usefulness is not its building, not its cases, not even its specimens but its curator. He and his staff are the life and soul of the institution.

quoted by Susan Sheets-Pyenson (1988: 26)

These museum-builders were also the first museum theorists. They came to this field with enlightened purposes and structured ideas (ideas that would persist much longer than they would have ever envisaged). They came with renewed plans to attract more visitors although keeping their social background and behaviour under control.

2.3. Museums and the rational recreation movement

As outlined in the previous chapter, museums were part of the same schemes for education imposed by the dominant groups from the early decades of the nineteenth century. They followed, "a conviction in the power of art to humanize and civilize" says Hooper-Greenhill (1991b:10) "and a desire to provide neutral spaces where all sections of society could meet". Despite the directors' philanthropic aims, some authors have argued however, that there was not a genuine desire to attract the lower classes, but as Edward Royle states: "Museums and art galleries, like libraries, were intended primarily for the middle and upper classes. The Derby Town and County Museum, for example, which opened in 1836, was run by nominated subscribers who paid an annual subscription of half a guinea" (1987: 250).

Consistent with the *civilizing process* as defined by Norbert Elias, the campaign for the education of people in museums, was meant to teach not only subjects in the way normally taught in schools, but also *social behaviour*. Like other *respectable* places, museums could prevent bad behaviour by keeping people away from immoral environments, like pubs and public houses. The (English) select committee on drunkenness in 1838 in order to solve the problem of alcoholism and its consequences for citizens' behaviour, recommended (Bailey 1978: 38):

The establishment by the joint aid of government and the local authorities and residents on the spot ... of district and parish libraries, museums and reading rooms, accessible at the lowest rate of charge; so as to admit of one or the other being visited in any weather, and at any time.

Also Henry Cole from the South Kensington Museum, "saw the museum being of use to working people ... as an alternative to the gin palace, and he demonstrated that it was in fact performing this role through analysing the sales of liquor in the cafe" (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 18).

However, in an *Edinburgh Magazine* issued in February 1834 (quoted in Hollis 1973) it is said: "it is not by being told about the caves at Elephanta, and the size of the Pyramids; the Upa Trees, and the Falls of Niagara ... that the labouring poor are to be taught the regulation of their wicked propensities, or the means of withstanding their innumerable sensual temptations by which they are surrounded. They may amuse one hour, but they will not improve a life; they may interest the imagination, they will not correct the heart".

Despite the social snobbery that was behind most of the programmes, insistence upon certain prerequisites of conduct and appearance undoubtedly affected working-class attendance. Admission to a free exhibition in Bury's new Town Hall was denied to those wearing clogs (Bailey 1978:51). The Bishop of Bloomfield (1846), speaking in the Lords announced that:

it must be obvious that before the needful recreation of the people can be attained, before museums and public places could be made available, habits and cleanliness must be diffused throughout the whole community.

as quoted by Peter Bailey (1978:51)

However, due to increased pressures from outside, the primary debate moved from a concern with *who* should enter the precincts of the museum to a concern over *what*

they should do once they did enter, or "what the essential purpose of these temples of culture was in the first place" (Levine 1988: 167), as the amalgam of strangers that composed the city crowds was forcing its entrance in all the places previously restricted. According to Levine (in North America), the response of the elites to this increasing pressure was tripartite: firstly, to retreat into their own private spaces whenever possible; secondly to transform public spaces by rules, systems of taste, and canons of behaviour of their own choosing; thirdly to convert the strangers so that their modes of behaviour and cultural predilections emulated those of the elites (1988: 177). They wanted people who would be not totally illiterate and could be trusted to behave themselves.

When in 1891 New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art decided to open its doors to the public on Sunday afternoons, "the staff braced itself to greet a crowd of twelve thousand that was younger, more working class in its composition, and less used to the decorum of art museums than the Metropolitan's usual visitors" (Levine 1988: 183). The *New York Times* announced that "Kodak camera fiends would be barred and that visitors would have to check canes and umbrellas at the door "so that no chance should be given for anyone to prod a hole through a valuable painting, or to knock off any portion of cast". Levine cites a *Boston Herald* reporter who testified "that many came armed with large baskets of lunch and restless babies" (ibid.).

Also the Metropolitan's director, Louis di Cesnola (also cited by Levine 1988: 185) complained that some "brought with them peculiar habits which were repulsive and unclean....many visitors took the liberty of handling every object within reach; some went to the length of marring, scratching, and breaking articles unprotected by glass, and a few proved to be pick-pockets". In addition to that..."gleeful voices were heard through the corridors...boys tagged at their mother's heels and laughed at the queer-shaped pottery of the Egyptians". Cesnola was reminding the city that the museum was a closed corporation that had the right and obligation to monitor behaviour:

we do not want, nor will we permit a person who has been digging in a filthy sewer or working among grease and oil to come in here, and by offensive odours emitted from the dirt on their apparel, make the surroundings uncomfortable for others.

and proud of his *success* he recognized the *efficiency* of his campaigns:

you do not see any more persons in the picture galleries blowing their nose with their fingers, no more dogs brought into the Museum openly or concealed in baskets. There is no more spitting tobacco juice on the gallery floors, to the disgust of all other visitors. There are no more nurses taking children to some

corner to defile the floors of the Museum. No person comes now with 'Kodaks' to take 'snap views' of things and visitors. No more whistling, singing, or calling aloud to people from one gallery to another.

From the examples referred to in these quotations we can conclude that a *civilizing process* really was involved in the museums' realm. The leaders of culture were now turning their actions to the establishing of appropriate ways of *receiving* culture. Their success in disciplining and training the visitors is crucial for the understanding of the social meaning museums have acquired for the general population. Once people realized that these places were not for them they would happily stay outside and look for other places where they could satisfy their leisure needs more freely.

The threat of an *uncivilized* audience was also obviated by the museums' timetables which prevented working people attending on Sundays, their only day off. In reaction to these restrictions, enlightened working-class movements were founded (in the 1840s in England), in order to press museums to open their doors at more convenient times. According to Edward Royle (1987), in 1829 there was a petition for the opening of the British Museum, "and other exhibitions of art and nature" on Sundays (ibid.: 251). However, "the Sabbatarian lobby delayed the Sunday opening of art galleries until 1886, a stand which exasperated many working-class leaders" (Bailey 1978: 82).

Museum curators not only did not want the working class inside museums but were even afraid of their proximity in the neighbourhood. London was in the middle of the nineteenth century a stage for demonstrations and debates conducted by the Chartist movement which fought for working class political rights. On 10th April 1848 a public meeting was arranged by the Chartists at Kennington Common from where the participants would go in demonstration carrying a petition to the House of Commons.

Robert Cowtan (1872), an assistant in the library of the British Museum, described how this museum got itself barricaded against the threat of the demonstrators that day:

The close proximity of this place to the Museum made it the more necessary that everyone connected with the establishment should be on the alert, and be prepared for any emergency....All the persons employed upon the establishment...were sworn in as 'special constables', making in all two hundred and fifty...Provisions for three days were laid in, and we all left our homes and families on the morning, on the 10th of April determined, if necessary, to defend the establishment against the risk of life and limb... business, of course, was entirely suspended, and every entrance to the Museum but that in Great Russell Street, was closed and strongly barricaded....Some of

the younger men among us were under a good deal of excitement at the bare thought of not only wielding a truncheon, but possibly being called upon to use a cutlass, shoulder a musket, or handle a pike...In the course of the afternoon tidings were brought that the meeting on Kennington Common had taken place; that there were about 20,000 assembled ... that not the slightest disturbance was made, and that everything went off quietly. We remained, however, at our posts at the Museum till late in the evening, when it was thought that those of us who had left anxious wives and little children trembling waiting at home, might be spared, and we were accordingly released from the state of siege.

Cowtan (1872: 145-159).

The Smithsonian Institution founded in 1846 by James Smithson whose will was the "increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" (Levine 1988: 156-157), also went through obscure times whilst managed by John Henry who defended that "increase" and "diffusion" were not comparable terms: "he fought successfully to keep the museum within bounds, always warning that without vigilance the tail might begin to wag the dog; always reminding anyone that would listen that 'the objects of the Smithsonian Institution are not *educational* and that the collections were intended essentially for *study* and not 'to gratify an unenlightened curiosity' ... Henry's defeat came only with his death in 1878"(ibid.). As an example of this attitude, Levine cites an anecdote published in 1884 in *Life* magazine about New York's Lenox Library in the shape of an imaginary dialogue that is representative of the "will" to make elitist culture available to all:

What is this?
This, dear, is the great Lenox Library.
But why are the doors locked?
To keep people out.
But why?
To keep the pretty books from being spoiled.
Why! who would spoil the pretty books?
The public.
How?
By reading them.

However, as previously discussed, whilst museums went through this dark age, the lower classes were starting to have their own recreation and leisure habits and to conquer all the spaces available in the city for their own amusement. It is said that (and this is a striking irony) "the fields at the back of the British Museum (were)...covered every night in the summer by at least from one hundred to two

hundred people at cricket and other sports" (Cunningham quoting John Stock 1833, 1980: 81).

2.4. *Education or recreation?*

Engaged as they were on their didactic mission, museum curators began to concern themselves with questions of purpose, organization, and arrangement regardless of their visitors' needs. "A generation of curators was less interested in the public use of museums, and more interested in the accumulation of collections" (Hooper-Greenhill 1991a: 25). This attitude just helped to increase their isolation within the community. Meanwhile the new middle class with more leisure, money and physical mobility "wanted 'acceptable' activities that provided the perfect mixture of education and amusement" (Sheets-Pyenson 1988: 4). The producers of mass culture were at the time engaged in making strategic (economic) alliances with the respectable sectors of the working class. If part of the middle class accepted the need for *education*, they also recognized that it was difficult to attract the working class without providing any sort of *recreation*. William Lovett, a Chartist quoted by Bailey (1978: 48), echoes the prescriptions of similar workers' institutions of the period in the discussion of rules in his *People's Halls*:

Let us blend, as far as our means will enable us, study with recreation, and share in any rational amusement (unnassociated with the means of intoxication) calculated to soothe our anxieties and alleviate our toils.

According to Bailey, Lovett was an early agitator of the Sunday opening of art galleries and museums. Yet this call was not heard by the deaf ears of museum's directors and curators.

2.5. *The Great World Exhibitions: amusement, excitement and exoticism*

At the same time that museums were seeming to choose to enhance their restrictiveness and didactic role, the museums' wonders were brought outside for everyone to admire, adopting for this circumstance a more *playful* and *exciting* appearance. This was the phenomenon of the Great World Exhibitions. The first Great Exhibition in London (1851) was installed inside a building designed in an *anti-interiors* form: it was wholly made of glass and was like a gigantic shop-window full of light in the middle of Hyde Park (Berman 1990).

According to Walter Benjamin, "world exhibitions were places of pilgrimage to the fetish Commodity" (1983:165): "all Europe has set off to view the goods...This was a result of the desire 'to amuse the working class', and becomes to them a festival of emancipation" (Taine said in 1855 quoted by Benjamin *ibid.*: 165). The framework of the entertainment industry had not yet been formed but there was already a commercial glamour expressed in Taine's words when he speaks of "goods" instead of displays. The World Exhibitions were the first to glorify the exchange values of commodities combined with works of art, ethnographic material and everything likely to impress the potential customers. They were very crowded places which looked more like fun fairs than anything else, and had certainly nothing to do with the museums of the time ruled by curators who whilst these events were happening, were arguing that:

a public exhibition which is intended to be instructive and interesting must never be crowded. There is, indeed, no reason why it ever should be. Every such exhibition, whether on a large or small scale, can only contain a representative series of specimens, selected with a view to the needs of the particular class of persons who are likely to visit the gallery, and the number of specimens exhibited should be adapted to the space available.

Sir William Henry Flower (1898: 19)

As Georg Simmel said in 1896 about the Berlin Trade Exhibition, "the sense of amusement emerges a common denominator due to the petty but psychologically subtle arrangement .. one's curiosity is thus constantly aroused by each new display, and the enjoyment derived from each particular display is made to seem greater and more significant ". Simmel concludes that "it appears as though modern man's one-sided and monotonous role in the division of labour will be compensated for by consumption and enjoyment through the growing pressure of heterogeneous impressions, and the ever faster and more colourful change of excitements...no part of modern life reveals this as sharply as the large exhibition" (1991b:119)

For the first time, a cultural event in a city had economic and political goals and was aimed at the "public at large". Even when their message was not so obviously appealing (like the show of new machinery), these events had from the start, the power to attract the crowds no matter what their social background. Peoples' attitudes were nevertheless similar to those observed in the city realm, more inclined towards *window shopping* than purchasing. As Greenhalgh (1988: 4) describes it: "people were

willing even keen it seems to amble through stalls and stands of quality goods even if purchase was not an intention".

Part of the success of these exhibitions was the miscellany of things (diversity and simultaneity), and the way they brought *interiors* to the public's gaze. This was not only the result of their rarity and exoticism in the layman's eyes, but also of the space where the events took place: the heart of the cities (Hyde Park in London and the Champs de Mars in Paris). They were shoulder to shoulder with the shopping areas where other *interiors* were being displayed. According to Paul Greenhalgh the secret of mass attraction was "the strange combination of carnival and ceremony, of circus and museum, of popularism and elitism" (1988: 5).

The museums refused to accept this kind of approach. It was to take more than a century before it was cautiously introduced inside the old buildings. The experience of the world exhibitions remained at the margins of the museums' world because museum curators were not prepared to give up their ideas and status. According to Edward Royle (1987) in the 1850s after the "glories of the late Crystal Palace", a campaign for the opening of the British Museum on Sunday afternoons was unsuccessfully led. The argument expressed by the pressure-groups was that "civilization was better than the public house on a Sunday". However the prevailing argument was that "all that people ought to do on Sundays was to go to the church (1987: 252)".

This debate even went as far as parliament in the form of a motion which said "in the opinion of this house, it would promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the working classes of the metropolis if ... the British Museum and the National Gallery were open to the public inspection after morning services on Sundays" (ibid.: 252). This motion was proposed in 1856 and defeated by 376 votes to 48. It was not until 1932 that the majority of museums and art galleries were open on Sundays. Yet in 1958 (a quarter of a century later), Lothar P. Witteborg in the first issue of the journal *Curator* (1958: 32) was still recognizing that the lessons from trade exhibitions in terms of attractiveness were still being learned:

while 'science' museums were being founded and establishing a tradition of exhibiting curiosities to a fickle public, the industrial and trade expositions that were developing simultaneously showed much more imagination in displaying their goods..... and for this reason played a much greater role in the evolution of present trends of exhibition techniques than did museums themselves.

One of the innovative aspects of the Great Exhibitions was their openness which allowed visitors to walk freely without pre-determined rules or any pre-organized educational programmes. This *risk* was assumed however together with a certain amount of concern:

For many days before the "shilling people" were admitted to the building, the great topic of conversation was the probable behaviour of the people. Would they come sober? will they destroy things? will they want to cut their initials , or scratch their names ...

Henry Mayhew in 1985 as quoted by Greenhalgh (1988: 31)

However soon these fears would disappear to give place to a relaxed ambience both for its users as for its producers. This atmosphere would last even when the exhibitions were over:

Long after the Great International Exhibition was over, the masses embraced it as a site for family outings, for children's play, for romantic encounters and assignations. Far from milling around quietly and being reduced to silence, they seem to have found all their energies aroused and engaged; no building in modern times, up to that point seems to have had the Crystal Palace's capacity to excite people.

Marshall Berman, quoted by Rojek (1989: 92)

According to Susan Pearce (1990: 18/19), the Great Exhibition of 1851 had two important effects on the destiny of the Victoria and Albert Museum (its director Sir Henry Cole was one of the promoters of the Great Exhibition): firstly there was an economic effect; "it was the funds which were used to establish the Museum's permanent site at South Kensington" and, secondly the success of the Great Exhibition was that it "served to encourage confidence in public participation in the funding of institutions such as Art schools and the Museum". "Public participation" means the work of the new investors who for the first time seem to become interested in arts and museums.

Hudson states that these exhibitions gave museums a social power that they had never had before. They attracted a very large number of visitors and they compelled "the leaders of fashion and taste to recognise that the sciences and the useful arts were the proper concern of the community as a whole". However, this influence did not last long. Hudson situates it from 1851 till the 1914-18 War (Hudson *ibid.*: 41).

As described by Jacqueline Eidelman (1988: 176) in her study of the *Palais de la Decouverte*, "the gigantism embedded in the Great Exhibitions ...was absent in exhibitions of 'pure science' with which, due to their cold atmosphere and avidity, does not cease to be in contrast". Unlike other science museums the *Palais de la Decouverte*, inaugurated in 1937 in Paris, claimed to be inspired by the Great Exhibitions and their intention to offer "moving and grandiose spectacles".

2.6. Museums and the modernist mode of signification

Inside the Great Exhibitions, the object was being supplanted by the *viewer* and the *quality of the experience*. One of the most important innovations in the way the Exhibitions were designed was a *concern for the public* in the process of conception and planning (Greenhalgh 1988). "Many of the exhibits inside it were self-consciously showy, providing a source for spectacular entertainment for the crowds" (ibid.: 12).

As *modes of signification* the objects on display were losing their *aura* as signifiers of objective and real truths, and becoming instead signifieds connoting social and cultural meanings, making appeal to other (lower) spheres of knowledge and perception of things. It was no longer the object on its own which was the source of attraction, but its qualities and the space it occupied in people's imagination no matter their social or cultural background. The use of *representations* instead of objects is parallel to the substitution of the earlier taxonomic classification for ideas and themes (the narrative form as Lash has defined it). Even museums of science previously based on the display of objects, adopt this "descriptive" approach. "The fundamental issue is no longer the quality of the presence of the object itself, but the value of the item in the ambient harmony of signs". Experiments replaced objects with the intention: "to make people understand instead of to make people know" (Eidelman 1988: 178).

Together with the organization of objects in a narrative form, the debate of whether to display the real object or its *representation* was at the very heart of the museum's struggle between *popularity* and *elitism*. Despite copies of museums' objects being part of a campaign for universalization, some curators saw copies, such as casts, as a profanation. Lithography and subsequently photography were also strongly criticized by the more conservative curators. "Photography, a process that rendered an expressive form relatively simple, definitely accessible to large numbers of untrained amateurs, and almost infinitely reproducible, was a radical departure from an ethos

that judges art and culture to be sacred, unique products of the rare individual spirit" (Levine 1988: 160).

The uniqueness of the work of art as well as that of any museum object was thus threatened by its mechanical reproduction. As Walter Benjamin argues: "around 1900 technical reproduction had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes" (Benjamin 1969: 218-219).

The birth of *representations* signalled a revolution in the relationship between the viewer and the museum objects. Representations as signifiers have introduced a new direct relationship between signifiers and signifieds, to the detriment of the real things. This has led to the breakdown of the referent-signifier-signified triangle, with the latter two becoming more and more autonomous and generating on their own a new kind of meaning: the visual impact, the arousal of new visual sensations. It was the starting point of an era that would evolve a much higher level of sophistication with the creation of other media and techniques. The technique of simulation tended to create an exciting (*mimetic*) experience not easily reached in the increasingly tiresome and routinized world of urban life.

It has already been described how, in the commercial world of shop windows, *dioramas* came to bring an extra glamour to the goods on display, and how, for the window shopper, this meant an incursion into the upper classes' *interiors*, which had previously been denied to the common pedestrians. However, like other techniques, the fashion of dioramas and their associated communication impact took a long time to be introduced into museums as means to enhance their public appeal. They were still being introduced in 1958, as the words of a curator of the Chicago Natural History Museum illustrate:

Model-making *per se* becomes of greater and greater importance as the cases are filled with representations of animals and plants or other objects. A need arises to reduce the number of objects displayed and to put the remaining selection to more effective service in education.

Karl P. Schmidt (1958:7)

The use of *reproductions* such as these was an attempt to bring in the "environment" from which these objects belonged in order to give them a more powerful

communication value. They were used to represent landscape for natural history displays or foreign lands for ethnographic exhibits. "The dioramas strove to produce life-like transformations in the Nature portrayed in them, they foreshadowed, via photography, the moving-picture and the talking-picture" (Benjamin 1983: 161).

According to Paul Greenhalgh, in order to achieve their purpose, the world exhibitions had to share some of the glamour of the city in which they were located: "after the First World War entertainment facilities were given far greater consideration than those aimed specifically at education...the British had discovered education did not pay, but that entertainment did" (Greenhalgh *ibid.*: 19).

Objects were replaced by the idea of *total displays* intended to teach everything to everybody in an Encyclopaedic way: "the very poorest student in the poorest school, the most incapable, the most ignorant, the least gifted". Greenhalgh states that "the provision of knowledge" was going down the class structure. The Duke of Argyll, honorary president of the Imperial International Exhibition (held in London in 1909 as part of the White City Exhibitions) expressed the duality of popularity and respectability in his opening speech, stressing "amusement without excess and knowledge without fatigue" as the main aims of the exhibition (Greenhalgh *ibid.*:19). This meant that "the crowds were to be educated not by selective instructions but by the presentation of every aspect of existence in one spectacular edifice" "Amusement without excess" meant that the universal advance of *civilization* through the display of the latest technologies was in the world exhibitions also the universal advance of its moral principles ("to educate the people into acceptable modes of behaviour" Greenhalgh *ibid.*: 24).

2.7. Museum producers of late modernity: towards increasing professionalization

The museum's producers at the turn of the century were no longer charismatic figures chosen in a closed social atmosphere, but were instead knowledgeable specialists. They were chosen because of their competence in their field of knowledge, as the ratification of the social role of science had accompanied a professionalization of research (Eidelman 1988). These specialists represented the need of a new class of intellectuals to be recognized in a culture that distinguishes upper from lower strata

(and men from women) as the following quote shows: "He has been to college and after that through graduate school to become proficient as a mammalogist or a coleopterist or a paleontologist, more often than not without any thought of ever being a museum man" (Colbert 1958: 7). "A fear of being swallowed up by the larger and more powerful educational world may have lain behind this emphasis on maintaining the status quo and upholding the institutional integrity of the museum" (Hooper-Greenhill 1991: 34)

This had created a new sort of *differentiation*: museum curators were divided between the scientific research which was their most important duty, and the exhibition's work which was sometimes seen as an intrusive element in their research work. This state of things was still prevalent in the fifties: "the sad part of this aspect of the curators' life is that exhibition work can overwhelm him ... but after that, for compensation, he should for a considerable time be entirely free from exhibition problems in order that he may catch up on his neglected research" (Colbert *ibid.*: 11).

The museums profession is now constituted of individuals with a huge variety of academic and specialist skills, who come into museum work from very different backgrounds. Subject specialists work along side service and management specialists. The interdependence and balance of professional skills have become critical to effective museum provision.

Kavanagh (1991:48)

Museums thus became closely connected to the academic system and were seen as laboratories for complementing the knowledge acquired in other institutions of respectable culture. Despite curators now being more aware than ever that it was the duty of the new élites to contribute to the development of all human beings (Eidelman 1988) - their visitors were mainly the new intellectuals who possessed sufficient background knowledge to be able to communicate with these curator-experts. "The population that did not visit museums believed that the ...criteria they valued most highly were, for the most part, not present in museums. They perceived museums as environments that restricted activity and were socially and physically uncomfortable. Museums were described by this group as formal, formidable places that were physically or socially inaccessible to them" (Falk and Dierking 1992: 18). These authors recognize that these people "preferred to spend out-of-home leisure time participating in or watching sports, picnicking, or going to shopping malls" (*ibid.*).

It was the combination of a science made by specialists and of educational methods learned in the academic system that was creating the museums' learning environment

in the period after the wars. Still there was not much place for *excitement* or *amusement*. The innovative character of some museums (even of the Palais de la Decouverte) remained in the realm of scientists and of the receivers of a "scientific" culture (Eidelman 1988).

According to Pierre Bourdieu's empirical results (1984) the enlargement and social widening of the museum's public has been basically a reflection of the democratization of schooling and its broader access for the lower classes. Museums had become educational institutions which aimed to set forth abstract concepts and principles rather than, as previously, to display objects. As with modernist art, this conceptualization of the museum experience turned it into a more difficult environment for those who would prefer to let themselves marvel at the real things. Between science and aesthetics, science possessed the superior claim. However museums had become for a large portion of the population status symbols. They were attracting visitors who more than *enjoying being there*, were more keen of attaining a state of *having been there* (R. Kelly 1987). This was the result of a study by Robert Kelly in which he also states: "being in a museum or gallery ... (is becoming), *prima facie*, evidence of the intellectual (and social) credentials necessary for belonging" (ibid.:13).

2.8. Museums' evaluation: a middle class ontology

Evaluation is a methodology which was first applied to museums during the fifties and sixties in North America and which gradually extended to Europe in the late sixties and seventies. However, its roots seem to have earlier precedents, as demonstrated by the work of the North Americans, Edward S. Robinson (1928) who wrote "The Behaviour of the Museum Visitor", and Arthur Melton (1935), who tried to understand the public experience by observing what visitors did during their visits, which resulted in the term "museum fatigue". In England, it was the British Museum (Natural History) in London which pioneered the application of evaluation methods. Despite its relatively recent appearance in historical terms, the evaluation paradigm will be analysed here as a *regime of signification* characteristic of a previous order defined in this thesis as *modernist*. In many ways, as it has been proved in the course of this work, the museum institution has been more conservative than the prevailing spirit of the times and only recently has it seemed to try to recover its lost path.

It is the awareness of the museum's social dilemma previously described that is in the origins of evaluation studies: "why this public?", "what are their needs?", "how to attract other people?". It is also the result of the recognition that curators were at the margin of having to choose how much *education* and how much *amusement* they were prepared to deliver. However, despite the *risk* that these new evaluation programmes represented, and how strongly they have shaken off the old principles, their aims were still too much vectorized in a single direction as their question was still "do visitors get our message?". Evaluation plans started with questions more relevant to the needs of the doers than of those of the users, and by doing so they can be located within the *modernist* paradigm.

The idea of a *middle-class ontology* was put forward by Theodor Adorno (1959: 474) and seems a good way to introduce the attempts at evaluation in a museum world growing more open and democratic and striking a balance between its communication and its educational role. According to Adorno: "modern audiences, although probably less capable of the artistic sublimation bred by tradition, have become shrewder in their demands for perfection of techniques and for reliability of information, as well as in their desire for services; and they have become more convinced of the consumers' potential power over the producer, no matter whether this power is actually wielded." (1959: 476). The *middle class ontology* (applied here to the *evaluator's ontology*) "is preserved in an almost fossilized way, but is severed from the mentality of the middle classes. By being superimposed on people with whose living conditions and mental make-up it is no longer in accord, this middle-class ontology assumes an increasingly authoritarian and at the same time hollow character" (ibid.: 477). "Middle class" requirements bound up with internalization - such as concentration, intellectual effort, and erudition - have to be continuously lowered". Adorno recognizes that the curse of mass culture at the time was still very much in tune with the ideology of the middle class society, "whereas the lives of its consumers are completely out of phase with this ideology".

Adorno opposes this middle class effort to convey meanings and intellectual erudition inside their institutions, to the polymorphic experience of a cultural industry "organized in order to enthrall the spectators on various psychological levels simultaneously" (ibid.: 479). The efforts made by museum "evaluators" are a good example of the gap between their perception of the public experience, and what really happens on the public side. This gap is well expressed by the words of one of the mentors of evaluation programmes in the United States, Chandler Screven: "we probably should be focusing more on teaching people how to think....The museum, it

seems to me, is more appropriate as an environment for affecting how people learn" (Hicks 1986:33). Evaluation had about it aspects of a modern version of the rational recreation campaigns, however using more democratic means.

Evaluation was meant to give a better understanding of the impact of a certain museum programme on its audiences. It was based on two basic goals: firstly to assess whether the programme (normally an exhibition) was effective, by assessing whether it was popular and kept people's attention: (its attracting power and holding power, how many and for how long, demonstrated by means of quantitative measures); secondly to assess whether people have learned the intended messages (if it enhanced their knowledge about the subject or corrected their misunderstandings). This last goal involved a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. These methods will not be discussed here, as the focus of the present study is not the strategies of museum curators, but to consider *why* they happen and *how* they can be inscribed in an order of things that is changing, has its origins in the past, and is in some way helping to produce the future. Evaluation methods are inscribed in a dynamic of transformation which is already showing innovative aspects.

Who are the museum's "evaluators"? It is not possible to conceive of evaluation programmes having been implemented at the time of the old charismatic curators completely sure of their goals and positions in the social structure. The evaluation methods were/are the creation of a group of "cultural specialists" (*cultural intermediaries* to use a concept of Bourdieu already presented in previous chapters), skilled in exhibition design or education, but not having the total control of the museum's management. They were/are not the product of the *old curatorship* whose political and economic power remain unchallenged.

Despite a greater democratization and the increasing importance of team work in the way decisions are taken and exhibitions are planned (a *functional democratization* using a term of Elias's), compared to the previous museum directors, these new specialists constituted a class fraction who would never be able to have the *absolute* privilege of the real spheres of decision. They were (and still are) permanently under pressure to prove their worth and the effectiveness of their actions. "Evaluation" says Roger Miles (1993a: 24), "embraces feedback in order to assess progress, to facilitate decisions, to demonstrate success and so on". This compels these new curators to engage in audacious programmes, which challenge the old traditions, and therefore have to prove their worth. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory, Lash and Urry (1991: 295) described how "in promoting themselves" they encourage, 'symbolic rehabilitation

projects'; that is, they give cultural objects new status as part of rehabilitation strategies for their own careers ... in their work in the media , in advertising, in design, as 'cultural intermediaries' they are *taste-creators*".

They are crucially positioned as a numerically increasing fraction with a rising trajectory in the social space. They also occupy a key role as cultural intermediaries, symbol creators and transmitters, able to legitimate and purvey lifestyle information, to promote the stylisation of life in fashion, design, leisure, sport, the new arts, popular culture. A stylisation which we hasten to add should not be taken to amount to a coherent ideology, for their role as intermediaries sensitises them to a constant re-cycling of old styles and a modernist search for the "new".

Featherstone (1993: 127)

In times of scarcity of financial resources, the position of museum staff members is as unstable as the economy itself. To evaluate museum programmes is above all to evaluate the evaluators. About the use of evaluation in renewing exhibitions, an "evaluator" tells us that "there is also the danger of insensitive and unsympathetic commentators demanding to know 'Who made the mistakes?' or 'Who wasted the money?'" (Miles 1988a). Or as Steven Griggs from the Natural History Museum argues "it (evaluation) can also be politically dangerous since, by agreeing to incorporate modifications, one is implicitly agreeing that the first version had 'failed' in some way" (1983: 31). Evaluation is the result of the introduction of *risk* and is aimed to be a protection against the effects of that same *risk*. The need to have their new programmes recognized explains in part the boom in evaluation research in periods of economic crisis from the seventies up to the present. Ross Loomis (1987: 4) in his book *Museum Evaluation: New Tool for Management*, set out to encourage museum staff to engage in evaluation studies, introduces the topic by stating:

There is much concern just now about the future of museums as viable social institutions. Public financial support for museums will probably continue for many institutions, but possibly not to the degree that it has in the past. Admission fees appear increasingly the rule rather than the exception for museums in the United States. With admissions and other direct charges levied for visitor programs and services, there is growing interest in marketing the museum, making it desirable to and used by the public.

This concern with the economic value of museums locates them in the market place just like any other purchasable good, and this juxtaposition of different goals (educational economic and personal) in part explains the difficulties "evaluators" have experienced to prove to the *old curators* that evaluation was worth doing (see Loomis 1987). "Just attend a staff meeting and see for yourself how critical everyone is" (Linn

1976: 291) (see also Shettel 1988). The viability of the museum as an institution was never questioned in the glorious times of the old curatorial elite. Museums were part of the identity of dominant groups (according to Bourdieu high in *grid* and *group* classificatory structures) that no longer exist as such. The emergence of evaluation studies is also the result of the weakness of state intervention, and of the role of local government which provoked attacks on the professions, especially those in the public sector in order to enhance their efficiency as an imperative to survival in the market-place. As Walsh puts it : "the need to survive in the market has had its consequence in a new emphasis on those who can produce something of financial worth" (1992:45).

Evaluation programmes may be a threat to museum directors when the terms "success" and "failure" are introduced into the process. As one director puts it, "certainly it is more satisfactory for evaluators to discuss 'degree of success' in most cases" (Reich 1988, 32). This director differentiates himself and his group from the group of "evaluators" when he states: "evaluators who allow the director to provide input into the formulation of questions etc. will find that the administration will be less likely to dispute any results" (ibid.: 379)

The emphasis on *effectiveness* has turned much evaluation work into *effective* "non-time consuming", "easy to apply", "do it yourself", methods analysed by means of increasingly powerful hardware and software. However these methods have not been that efficient in terms of the final information provided and lack a theoretical framework to which the results can be referred (see also Lawrence: 1991, 1993 and Hudson 1993).

Another issue that makes curators engage in evaluation studies is the *educational* character of the museum experience. It is not difficult to relate this goal to the middle class's educational strategies of the past. The new technologies that have started being introduced in museum design have the power of being highly manipulative. This attribute gave the producers the impression that they could more than ever before *affect* how people learn. The question is "are they willing or not to pay attention?".

Increasingly, there are no doubts about the new shape of educational programmes which have to compete with other educational inputs from more influential media, targeted at an increasingly heterogeneous population. Aware as they are of the gap between their scientific codes and those understood by their visitors, curators seek to create new languages which are more powerful in educational terms without being too scholarly or difficult. Changes in visitor learning are established in terms of their

performance on controlled tests (which draw on laboratory psychology) prior to or following attending various exhibitions. The language used to assess these results is *their effect on visitors' behaviour* (leaving little space for the visitors' free creativity). The quantitative data of visitors' behaviour tend to be subsequently organized in lists of "principles of visitor behaviour" in order to be applied to the building up of new programmes (Bitgood 1986, 1987, 1988, Patterson and Bitgood 1987, Bitgood, S., Benefield, A. & Patterson, D.1991. This kind of study is still dominant in North America⁴.

2.9. *From education to communication: a more open perspective*

In 1968, Duncan Cameron, wrote a controversial article aimed at opening a debate "which (would)... force those concerned with museum dynamics to consider prior assumptions" (1968: 33). In this paper he discussed the communication role of museums in relation to unpredictable areas of non-verbal communication in which the "effective communication between exhibitor and visitor remains dependent on the ability of the visitor to understand the nonverbal language of the 'real things'". The museum is, according to Cameron, primarily "a visual language, and, at times, an aural or tactile language". He also states "the museum is not a communication system that can be described in terms of transmitter, medium, and receiver; it is rather, a complex system, often with a variety of transmitters, many media, and many widely differing types of receivers". Cameron questions the power of curators' discourses in influencing the public, and introduces as a counter perspective the idea of *feedback loops*, "or means by which the message decoded by the visitor is fed back to the exhibitor for comparison with the intended message". This idea came to contradict the power of the curator in influencing the way visitors interact with displays as the American school of laboratory psychologists-evaluators wanted to prove.

The group from the Natural History Museum in London (Alt 1977, 1980, 1982, 1986, Griggs 1981, 1983, 1984a and 1984b) has also strongly criticized the type of evaluation based on behavioural psychology created in the United States, who attempted to gather the *affective* responses of the visitors to the displays by monitoring their attitudes and impressions. One of the most vehement attacks launched toward this American behaviourist tradition, comes from Michael Alt (the Natural History Museum) against Harris Shettel (1977). Alt criticizes Shettel's entire concentration on

⁴There is even a Laboratory for Visitor Studies set up in 1987 by Chandler Screven in the United States, which concentrates all the researches.

the didactic/pedagogic functions of museum exhibits as "most of his data indicate that visitors to museums do not 'learn' from educational exhibits" (1978: 248). Alt concludes that "it would make more sense to talk about the visitor's intentions and expectations with respect to a museum visit and subsequently hope museum exhibits fulfilled and altered these intentions and expectations" (ibid.).

The Natural History Museum team has therefore invested preferentially in determining different types of museum visitors and their specific motivations in order to meet their preferences, rather than to impose or change their behaviour. However they have come out with a set of rules and principles to be used in exhibition design - an "Outline of a technology for effective science exhibits" (Miles and Tout 1979) - which is contrary to the recognition that the public's needs and perceptions are also doomed to change. Yet the superiority of this Museum's group seems to be the acceptance of the visitors' emotional involvement with the exhibition, a facet that they seem today, more than ever before, willing fully to explore.

To describe something as an exhibition is to raise the expectation that it will in some way move or touch us, emotionally. If we fail to find ourselves moved or touched by something that has been described to us as an exhibition, there is a corresponding tendency for us to feel 'let down'.

Roger Miles (1982: 2).

This sensitiveness to visitors' *emotional involvement* shows a much greater openness in the way the new museum producers were seeing their audiences. However, most of these studies, based upon conventional quantitative methodologies, seem to take for granted that the visitor and exhibition are enmeshed in a single communication experience from which there is no escape. In this resides their limitation and controlling facet. Although they believe that in their communication strategy "feedback should be provided after a correct response" (Miles and Tout 1979). The importance given to the *feed-back* of the communication process is, as already noted in previous chapters, a characteristic of the modernist rationale.

All the infra-structure of the theory of communication, says Jean Baudrillard, "is solidary with the dominant practices as it was and still is the one of the classical economy". According to Baudrillard in his *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981), "the theory of communication is the equivalent of the bourgeois political economy applied to the field of communication". Evaluation studies in the

way they are often presented are based on the theory of communication and follow the sequence:

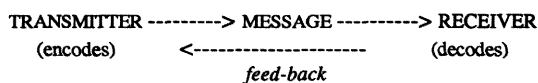


Fig. 7 A communicational model applied to exhibitions' evaluation

Each process of communication is thus vectorized in a single direction, from the *transmitter* to the *receiver* and the evaluation is an attempt to determine its *feed-back*. In face to face communication this *feed-back* is immediate, but in terms of the museum's publics, it is very complex, since the visitor can also become a transmitter and initiate another process. The two poles never touch each other. The idea of *feed-back* is, according to Baudrillard, an illusion. What the *transmitter* gets from the *receiver* are some superficial insights about how exhibits work, which give evaluators some idea of how to start a new programme and propose a new communication process. Baudrillard (ibid.) also states that "this structure pretends to be objective and scientific, as it follows the rules of scientific method: the decomposition of its objects in to the simplest elements. In reality, it just formalizes an empirical data: the abstraction of the evidence of the vivid reality, that is the social categories on which a certain type of social behaviour is established - the one where one speaks and the other listens, one has the voice and the other only the freedom to submit to it or to withhold from it".

Some curators have progressively understood that communication could not be imposed but it had rather to occur in a more free environment in which "visitors should feel at home, with no sense of intimidation and coercion,...they should be able to learn if they so wish .. and they should be able to leave without feeling guilty" (Miles 1988) (without sense of *shame* or *embarrassment*).

Aware of this gap, Miles opposes a "scholarly perception" to a "visitor perception" of the museum experience. The former "is based on funding the Museum as a place of learning rather than leisure. The Museum is concerned with education, which is seen as a strait-laced matter involving principally the memorising of facts that are obtained by examining the objects on show and by reading their captions". In this perception, and according to the same author, "visitors are seen as quiet and well behaved, dedicated to learning and equipped with enormous reserves of mental energy. They are believed to come to the Museum ready to pass judgement on the level of

scholarship exhibited". The "visitor perception" is, instead, the eyes of the lay public who see the museum as "a social event". This perception recognizes that visitors expect that their museum visit would fulfil their needs for *socialization* and *enjoyment* more than *education*: "they perceive the Museum as a place of entertainment, and no firm distinction seems to be drawn between *recreation* and *education*. From the visitors point of view, an ideal exhibit ...is one that makes the subject come to life, and be quickly understood, has something for all ages and is memorable" (Miles 1986a:75).

The above analysis presupposes the existence of a reality already discussed in previous chapters: that most people in their leisure time have a *blasé* attitude, a distancing attitude not coherent with serious educational purposes. "Most visitors to a museum are window shoppers, just wandering around to see what there is to see, with no more serious purpose in mind" (Miles *ibid.*).

Showing the influence of what may be called a postmodern perspective, Roger Miles (1987) in a subsequent paper, presents a counter proposal to this dualist theory of *scholarly* versus *visitor perceptions* by recognizing the existence of a third perception "that of the museum communicator". By doing so he is recognizing and vindicating the commercial role many museums can no longer avoid. He recognizes that the previous distinctions corresponded "to high culture and mass culture views of museums respectively" and assumes "the need to attract commercial sponsorship and paying visitors as governments reduce public funding", as "there is growing competition for visitors' leisure time and cash.... marketing is now a major factor in all of our work, and it does not always sit easily with our educational aims". He concludes that "we have to learn to live with the fact that for institutions working within mass culture, attracting an audience takes precedence over communicating information (1987: 159, 160). "Design values of impact, drama and sensation" says Chris Rojek (1993: 87) "were particularly important at a time in which government funding of public sector museums and heritage sites was being cut back".

When the blurring of the boundaries between *high* and *low* culture, which has characterized the period in which evaluation evolved, became more apparent, it relocated museums in the difficult position of having to compete with other leisure facilities, and having to reconsider their position in the binary: to *control* to keep their *routinized* ambience or to allow *excitement* to occur, that is an increasing *controlled decontrolling of emotions*.

Moreover, recent technological improvements such as the ones that have been used in the Natural History Museum in the 1990s (such as the exhibition on Ecology opened in 1990), are not facilitating the work of evaluators. How does one evaluate a multimedia exhibition in which visitors are bombarded from different sources at the same time? What means are available to evaluate the impact of an experience that is after all sensational? How is it possible to evaluate it if it is widely recognized that audience social composition, expectations and behaviour are heterogeneous? The control over the individual's perceptions was becoming obsolete. Today researchers must concentrate on what people are *actually doing* inside museums (Falk and Dierking 1992) by means of a highly *detached* attitude.

3. The postmodern museum

The postmodern museum is a tendency adopted by a minority of museums in the extensive museum world. The museum's message and the way it has been communicated to the visitors has changed very little and only very slowly since the nineteenth century. "The static, modern display, which contributes to the maintenance and promotion of an idea of a linear progress ... is still predominant in the twentieth century" (Walsh 1992: 39). "This fixed view of the identity of museums has been firmly held and, until recently, little has disturbed it" (Hooper-Greenhill 1992:1) or the same is to say that the modernist ethos is still dominant in the museums' world.

However there has been since the 1950s and 1960s an attempt to humanize most of the museum's spaces, to make them more "user-friendly" by adding to the previously austere atmosphere new facilities such as cafeterias, shops, restaurants, and spaces for families to rest and feel comfortable together. These features had already proved to be among the main factors for the attraction of other leisure facilities. There has been a homogenization of the museum experience with other leisure settings such as theme parks or fun fairs (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). They are becoming *de-differentiated*.

If the majority of museums do not fit into a postmodern definition, most museums are nevertheless trying to improve considerably their communication techniques in order to respond to the needs of contemporary museum visitors, and by doing so are even predicting/creating needs for the future. This section explores the significance of these needs and the ways they can be and are being fulfilled.

The most frequently cited characteristics associated with postmodernism (Jameson 1984) are: firstly, criticism of the theoretical framework of the past and the foundations upon which western modernity has been grounded, and the affirmation of non-ethnocentric and less pretentious modes of knowledge more sensitive to local and small group differences; secondly, the privileging of the small is translated into a democratic language which is the result of the collapse of distinctions between high culture and mass culture (the collapse of the symbolic hierarchies within the academy and old intellectual circles); thirdly a shift from discursive (textual) to figural forms of culture, that is, an emphasis upon images over words and objects; fourthly and finally, an organized flow of meanings, a conglomerate of images, instead of an ordered historical development, images as fragments endlessly reduplicated and simulated without the possibility to discover order or point of value judgement.

For people involved in the museum world, it is not hard to find similarities between what is happening in the present scene and the topics presented above to characterize the postmodern paradigm: the shift from object-centred to community-centred museums, an explosive growth of small museums and of specialized subjects, a greater concern with representing the needs of minorities and with choosing themes that in the past would have been banned, a greater scientific openness by proposing different readings, an increasing use of multi-media technologies and a diversity of impressive devices in order to enthrall the visitor and enhance communication.

Walsh describes the "Blitz Experience", one of two "experiences" of the Imperial War Museum opened in 1989, as follows:

The two experiences include both sight, sound, and smell sensations, and in the case of the Blitz, earth-moving experiences. The visitor sits in an air-raid shelter and listens to ex-soap star, Anita Dobson, whose voice is immediately recognized by schoolchildren, who in turn tend to giggle all the way through the experience. The chirpy cockney tell us how they are not worried by the bombs; the fortitude of the beleaguered, but loyal and patriotic English working class, is an important theme. After the raid is over, the visitor is taken into a smoke-filled room, which is supposed to be a devastated East End. In the distance, the lights flicker around a model of St Paul's supposedly representing the flames threatening this national monument. Here, an ability to suspend disbelief is a prerequisite. (Walsh 1992: 111).

This is a good example of a "mimetic experience" as defined by Elias and Dunning (1986:42):

If one asks how feelings are aroused and excitement elicited by leisure pursuits, one discovers that it is usually done by the creation of tensions. Imaginary danger, mimetic fear and pleasure, sadness and joy are produced and perhaps resolved by the setting of pastimes.

The *loss of the object's aura* and its replacement by the glamour of unreal and complex representations and signs, has opened the museum's world to a new type of "adventure". As Marshall McLuhan predicted in 1969 at a conference held in the Museum of New York City (1969:3):

The museum as a retrieval system for classified objects is not going to be acceptable very long. People now feel the need to have a sense of the total surround of these objects and the total environment that produced them.

McLuhan, considered to be one of the mentors of postmodernity, enthusiastically applauded the invention of new media and encouraged their use in education. His was the celebrated statement: *the medium is the message*. McLuhan predicted the advent of a global society as the result of media reducing barriers of time and space between people: the world turned into a "global village". This view destroys the idea of the museum as an *interior* and proposes instead the opening up of the museum to the global space of the community. McLuhan at a conference where museums communication was discussed, described a world exhibition⁵ which clearly falls in the "postmodern paradigm":

EXPO67: it is perhaps the first worlds fair which had no story line whatever. It was just a mosaic of discontinuous items in which people took an immense satisfaction precisely because they weren't being told anything about the overall pattern or shape of it, but they were free to discover and participate and involve themselves in the overall thing.

Marshall McLuhan (1969: 3)

The postmodern terrain is defined almost exclusively in visual terms, including the display, the representation of the real seen through the camera's eyes, captured on videotape, and presented in moving pictures. One reason that is frequently given to justify this kind of choice in exhibition design is a concern for users rather than objects: museums are not about objects, they are about people (Loomis 1987, Miles 1987, 1988, 1993b). At a conference held in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, on "Hypermedia & Interactivity in Museums", other reasons for a museology "decentred" from objects were presented:

Museums need to think of information, rather than of material objects as their basic resource ...It is important to remember that human culture can not be fully presented through material objects alone... Information does not exist in our environment in discrete, independent elements, but in the form of an intricately interwoven structure - an information complex.

Alsford (1991:8)

Multimedia devices (which use images and sounds to help contextualize objects) are now supplemented by "virtual" reality (information intensive environments aimed at cheating people's senses and perceptions by inviting them to "navigate" beyond real

⁵At that time (1960s) some museums seemed more available than ever to let themselves be influenced by the lessons of these great exhibitions.

time and space). It was Baudrillard (1982) who coined the word *hyperreality* and defined it as a "destabilized, deaestheticized hallucination".

Another reason to use such technologies in the museum realm is to achieve *diversity*: diversity of media, diversity of visitors and diversity of the experiences they seek. The public is seen now more as a heterogeneous mass of individuals involved in discontinuous ("on" and "off") relationship with displays (McManus 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990; Walls 1992; Falk and Dierking 199; Miles 1993a). Hypermedia programmes are, according to their defenders, able to deliver different levels of information to meet different skills and expectations. They also have the power to condense and convey a large quantity of information in a very short time. The speed of images and sensations is aimed at the casual visitor who is defined as a "browser" (the *flâneur* of postmodern times), instead of a "serious learner". "This audience needs an orientation to main themes of a subject area, through exhibits that communicate to several senses at once" (Alsford 1991: 10). The visitor is free to make his or her own combinations.

Education has gained a broader sense: according to the results of an AAM meeting in 1991 it now includes "exploration, study, contemplation, and dialogue" (as quoted by Peters 1991: 325).

It is no more the audience but the text that is regarded an empty vessel which the audience fills up with its own meanings (Avery and Eason 1991). As a consequence of this process, the curators' modes of thought and their understanding of the public experience became more social-critical, interpretative, and ethnographic than scientific-experimental.

3.1. *The postmodern de-differentiation of education and recreation*

The proposal of a new direction for evaluation studies comes from Roger Miles who received the title of "Researcher of the Year 1989"⁶ as a result of his work on evaluation at the Natural History Museum in London where he has been a curator (at present as head of Public Services). Miles is one of the best qualified to explore new avenues for visitor studies in the context of the direction the exhibitions in the Natural History Museum are taking today. Consistently with Scott Lash's definition of the postmodern cultural paradigm, Miles positions the contemporary museum experience

⁶This title was given by the "International Laboratory for Visitors Studies" and presented in its journal.

within "a society with a pluralist culture in which the boundaries between high art and mass culture have broken down". He develops this argument by stating (1993a: 27):

Why, you might ask, should we not ignore these changes - as indeed many do and retain our traditional museums? The answer is, I believe, that if we want to present our subjects so they are seen to be part of today's world, and therefore relevant to today's young people, then we have no choice but to use today's communication techniques.

Miles is opposed to the curator's understanding of the audience as a homogeneous entity, calling instead for "empathy with a large, heterogeneous and ill-defined group" (ibid.: 28). Concerning learning, he states: "visitors are rarely single-minded learners and, with the exception of school parties, are free to make their own choices about whether, and for how long to attend to the exhibits. Museum shops, restaurants and toilets, as well as family jokes, group dynamics and so on, compete with the exhibit for attention". The main shift is from "how does this exhibition educate?" to "what is the nature of the visitor experience?" (see also Shelton 1990).

3.2. *The post-curator*

With the arrival, from the 1970s, of various types of management consultant, the situation changed drastically, and some have wielded immense power (Cannon-Brookes 1991). Museums tend to employ people for specific tasks and short periods of time enabling a more creative participation in the process of change.

Boards of trustees and governors are more likely to believe consultants than directors, although both may have access to the same facts and both may reach the same conclusions. In an age of doubt, indecision and anxiety, the more experts one can consult before taking the plunge, the better (and safer).

Kenneth Hudson (1993:34)

Increasingly these new professionals have never worked in museums before and are only good in their specific specialities which they apply wherever their skills are required. The contractual relationship has been on a "job-by-job" basis with specialist services purchased by the museum in much the same way as its goods. As Miles puts it (1993a: 27): "the system normally gives rise to temporary team-structures, which are not around to benefit from the results of later evaluation...projects are the responsibility of professional exhibition makers, not subject-matter experts". This

provokes an inevitable distancing from the museum identity and its historical tradition.

One of the great challenges facing museums today is that their public needs and expectations are increasingly shaped by the mass media and the entertainment industry. However, museum curators are still convinced of the superiority of museums as compared to the other facilities: "We may deplore the use of entertainment by the commercial sector to misinform the public, but this should not prejudice us against the careful employment of entertainment to achieve museum goals. Danger arises only when we imagine that entertainment is itself an end, rather than a means to facilitate transmission of interpretative messages...we know well enough that museum-visiting is motivated not solely by a desire to learn, but also by the quest for enjoyable recreational experiences. We also know that, to capture large audiences, museums must wean them from television, cinema, theme parks and other similar magnets of their leisure time. To do so, museums need to be more relevant to the tastes and interests of an entertainment-bound public" (Alsford and Parry 1991:8).

3.3. *The post-visitor*

According to Scott Lash (1990), postmodern consumers are members of the post-industrial middle-class. They are also described by Walsh (1992) as members of a service-class, having a good education and possessing higher educational qualifications (Walsh 1992:64).

The postmodern consumer will have had access to the cultures of the old elites: a little bit of Vivaldi, a little bit of archaeology through the good offices of television presenters ...Much of this cultural capital will have been received through media presentations: the world known but not necessarily visited. The country house will have been visited but never owned. The heritage centre will have been patronized, but the history therein not necessarily understood or questioned. This is the culture of the gaze. It is a culture founded as the consumption of specious events.

Kevin Walsh (ibid.:66)

It seems that Walter Benjamin's description of modern citizens as "ignorant admirers" still holds true. There is no doubt that the ideal postmodern museum-goers are lovers of new technology. They arrive at the museum with pre-conceived ideas about machinery and effects. They evaluate the "value for money" of each place in terms of the technical devices and the excitement they provoked more than anything else. They

arrive at the museum with pre-conceived expectations, perceptual biases and technological preferences, which they have learned in the entertainment industry, at home or on the big city streets. They are happy to spend some hours in a noisy setting and to be involved by images, sounds and unexpected sensations.

According to Theodor Adorno (1959), the most striking changes in mass culture are due to the changes in the sociological structure of the audience. As he puts it: "the old cultural elite does not exist any more; the modern intelligentsia only partially corresponds to it". At the same time, huge strata of the population formerly unacquainted with art have become cultural 'consumers'. These new audiences want new symbolic goods and experiences but as Wouters (1986) says (following Elias) they do not reach a greater break-down of controls. Rather they depend upon greater self-control, they are increasingly concerned at gaining social recognition.

However, despite Adorno's fears in the late 1950s of a mass culture, and the genuine democratizing efforts undertaken ever since by the new, creative and less prejudiced curators, demographic studies on museum attendance do not indicate a significant change in the profile of the average museum goer. Support for this view, in the English context at least, comes in the results of a survey by the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, published in *The Independent* (6 June 1993:3), which, showed that "the typical theatre, concert and museum-goer is a relatively high earner and middle-aged individual", while "museums remain a middle- and upper-middle-class activity, with the audience from the top quarter of the population as far as income goes".

These journalists, like art promoters (they have a similar social background) are oblivious to the decades of *rational recreation* dark ages, and to the profusion of alternative leisure settings that have been created to satisfy *other* social needs and meet *other* social expectations.

3.4. *Romantic or collective gaze: more or less constraint?*

Duncan Cameron suggested in 1968 that "the communication process in the museum is essentially a dialogue between the individual visitor and the exhibit, it is an intimate experience"(1968: 38). In another article he develops this idea as follows: "too often, we measure museum 'success' in terms of the traffic volume, of the number of thousands of school children processed through our exhibits and galleries. Sometimes

we seem to forget that meaningful museum experiences are qualitative, not quantitative. Should we fail to recognize this now, we will in the future, find ourselves working in museums where we have more exhibit halls, more travelling shows, larger education staffs, more visitors...but no more to offer than before our revolution began. We'll be the smiling hostess with six sausages in the frying pan and sixty guests for dinner" (1968:29).

What Cameron proposes here is the preservation of the *romantic gaze* against the threat of the *collectivization of the museum experience*. This is the main focus of controversy in discussion about the future of museums. Maxime Feifer (1985) says about the post-tourist: "the quest for romantic exotica is still alive ... with all its attendant illusions and well-meaning blunders". She reinforces her description of the post-tourist experience with the example of a Canadian friend who travelled to Europe "just to see a few specific things she wanted to see but she was looking forward, in a non specific way, to whatever might lie in the way between them". Jameson compares modernist visual art with the postmodern by saying: "Andy Warhol's Diamond shoes evidently no longer speak to us with any of the immediacy of Van Gogh's foot gear: indeed, I am tempted to say that it does not really speak to us at all. Nothing in this painting organizes even a minimal place for the viewer" (1984a:59).

Another example of the current recognition of the need to recover "pure" romantic pleasure is this ironic description of the postmodern visit: "to alleviate the discomfort of actually looking at a work of art, museums provide many distractions: the restaurant, the bookstore, the reproduction shop, the postcard counter and the information booth...headphones are provided for the customers who, God forbid, should actually want to attempt looking at things with their own eyes and responding with their own impressions and emotions" (Talley 1992:357). The postmodern discourse adopted today is in many senses more closed than ever, it is written with less expertise and is conveyed through powerful media from which it is difficult to escape: "the director's text (in the headphones) will usually have been written by a member of the education department who ... decided a career in a museum sounded like fun (ibid.)". With no doubt there is more freedom when the visitors can chose to stay in front of the object they favour and travel to their "escape" land on their own.

The postmodern paradigm is not irreversible. It is after all an open stage for free discussion in which everyone has a place of his own without the fear of going against the crowd. It accepts diversity and contradictory experiences of pleasure: the old aristocratic marvelling in front of a master piece and the enthralling adventure of the

hypermedia. There are still, and may be there will be more in the future, enclosures where it is possible to retreat to greater privacy. A good example of this is the *Secret Museum* at Perry Green as described (with pride) by one of its curators Levrant (1992: 275):

(its visitors) are enthusiastic of Moore, or of late 20th century art... they need no flashing lights, no sirens, no bells to pull, or buttons to push. All they need is peace and quite, and the opportunity to visit the environment in which Moore worked

The question here to be asked is..."what would happen in this museum if someone would start running or screaming?".

CONCLUSION

A supra-museological perspective was adopted in the present research. As described in the second chapter, the history of leisure has much to tell us about moralizing programmes and the opening and closing of many different doors, some of each offering more civilized ambience whilst others more possibilities for excitement. Different groups choose different spaces according to their system of taste and social appeal which Pierre Bourdieu termed "habitus". The idea of "habitus" places the concept of the museum's openness in the same context as that of other leisure choices. The history of leisure in the context of different social struggles and as part of the *civilizing process*, and the history of museums as a leisure choice, makes it more clear why museums are still so connected with restrictiveness, how they are still the forum for vivid debates between old hegemonies and new class fractions, and why they seem to resist capturing the non-goers *par excellence*, the lower groups which have internalized the museums' role in previous times and would rather go to places where they can have fun without the pressures of fulfilling the curators' needs for *effectiveness* and *success*.

Museums are part of a process by which the viewer and the object were progressively separated as independent units, the former acting upon the latter in order to construct his or her own interpretations and discourses. From the act of collecting to the one of displaying there has always been an attempt to use objects as means to create something influential and powerful. The first attitude towards objects, however, was one of admiration and individualistic pleasure, each individual feeling free to interpret each object according to his or her personal needs. Yet the history of museums is not isolated from what was happening simultaneously in other spheres of social life. Museums would become an enclosure the upper classes have built for themselves, fearing the destruction of their cultural values by the wave of cultural popularization and homogeneization. They became an interior for their needs for socializing and special pleasures and a forum for the distinction between rough and respectable behaviours.

However, and because again museums are not independent from the wider society and its process of change, they would be subsequently appropriated by the emerging middle classes avid to share the upper classes' tastes in order to have their positions legitimated. Museums were incorporated by these new groups in plans for the education and moralization of the lower orders (after being themselves forced to internalize the rules imposed by the upper classes). The separation of the individual

from the object went to further extremes with the dissolution of the real object in a discourse of representations enabling a more powerful manipulation of meanings and narratives.

A concern with education came to overlap the importance of the museum collection and the objects came to be integrated in an informative logic, and into a structured scheme to influence the visitor's perceptions. To build didactic exhibits in order to educate the public had nevertheless to be complemented with the recognition that the public was free to escape the informative context. Museum *evaluation* was a consequence of the recognition that museum visiting was an informal and voluntary experience and that curators, in order to build effective exhibitions, ought to create their public's viewing habits. These efforts are consistent with the middle class rationale as they are based on the belief that a group of transmitters can control the receivers' experiences by any means, even if they had to be forced to project their aims to a fictional image of an average population. Museums lost their respectability in favour of a more *exciting* ambience however under increased rationalization of what the public experience *should* or *should not* be.

PART III

The third, and last, part of this study is an attempt to illustrate with empirical evidence the theories described in the two previous parts. It is focused upon one of the most popular European museums, and, undoubtedly, one in which there have been stronger incentives for experimentation and innovation, as well as a higher level of reflection on the risks taken and on the results achieved - the Natural History Museum in London.

This study is also an attempt to apply the Eliasian *figurational approach* to a concrete case- families visiting a specific museum - by referring to the interdependencies established between these families and the museum's environment. As it is focused on families and the parents' mediation of the museum experience to their children (both in terms of knowledge transmission and behavioural rules), it also refers to Elias's theory of the *psychogenetic* effects of the civilizing process. Finally, through the observation of the way people use the exhibition and their manifestations of enjoyment and excitement or passivity and boredom it introduces new elements for the discussion of Elias' and Dunning's leisure theory.

The questions this case study discusses and the methods it applies are also the consequence of the theoretical debate introduced with Scott Lash's notion of *regimes of signification* and the distinction of *postmodernist* and *modernist* paradigms. Methodologically it attempts not to fall under Lash's criticism of what he calls a *modernist sociology* which is "tantamount to a search for a set of regularities, even of rationality in the social itself" (1990:10/11), the one that is based on a causation in which actions are effects whose causes are the goals of researchers¹, thus centred on the transmitter's aim to introduce changes in the receiver's perceptions and experiences, (a receiver which in turn is conceived as a "good" passive audience). The present study will be instead closer to a *postmodern* view of the visitors' experience, that is a more critical understanding of the phenomenon of museum-visiting as a whole, one that aims to be non judgmental and void of "educational efficiency" goals. It is based on the

¹Lash says "the causal arrows point both ways here. First, in order for realist cultural forms to persist on any extensive scale, an appropriate audience must exist as a reception class. This reception class must subscribe to an ontology compatible with the realist paradigm. For realism this was importantly a secular ontology, with a mechanistic world view, and correspondingly a sense of a linear temporality in which history was seen as progress. (1990:16)

assumption that, as defined by Richard Wood (1990:22), family visitors are "window shoppers (who) browse around enjoying a pleasant social time, making a few purchases on impulse when something takes their fancy."

Finally it favours a *qualitative analysis* of the museum's publics, that is an analysis of the actions and interactions inside an exhibition as they happen, and as part of broader social conditions and processes of these people everyday lives. It is an attempt to know these visitors on their own terms: how they accomplish their fundamental operations, their construction of routines of interpersonal communication as part of the practices that structure everyday life. Its main goals are to describe and explain how families interpersonally construct their time within an exhibition - composed by different communication media and sensory appeals- and how these media intervene in other aspects of communication between family members and in connection with their previous experiences elsewhere.

It is assumed that these descriptions cannot be analysed *per se* but need to be integrated in the *processual analysis* of leisure and museum-visiting as described in the second part of the thesis. What people do inside museums today is the consequence of a process of change which is not just confined within the museum's world but with the functions of leisure and the role it has been fulfilling at different stages and for different individuals. It is also the result of transformations which have occurred within the social structure and with the relative positions individuals have occupied, their needs for social recognition and the possibilities they have been offered (or denied) in connection with the fulfilment of these needs.

CHAPTER 5

Museums and families

The weekend for the Clarks is occupied with church activities and local trips to visit relatives or places of interest to the children. Neither parents show much enthusiasm for these activities, but the children obviously enjoy them a great deal. In Mr Clark's words: "Sunday is occupied with church, morning and evening. Saturday we do different things - go for a ride or visit relatives on the west side of town, perhaps stay in bed late. Interviewer: "what things don't you like to do with the family?" Mrs Clark: "going to the museum, I hate those places and they love them. If I can, I stay at home so it doesn't tear up their day".¹

INTRODUCTION

There has been a considerable amount of research done recently on family leisure and on families visiting museums as part of the recognition that families account for a great percentage of leisure audiences, and are the ones that seem to profit most from the commodification of culture that tends to define the present leisure scene. However, the use of the family as a research unit has introduced a considerable amount of complexity into leisure (and museum) studies. The consideration of the family as a cultural consumer has challenged surveys based on anonymous masses of individuals supported by quantitative methods. In the museum's case, the family-visit led to the consideration of the social and emotional exchange occurring simultaneously with viewing and understanding the museum's message.

Paulette McManus (1985, 1987, 1988, 1989a, 1989b, 1990) was one of the first researchers to carry out studies, in the UK, aimed at considering the museum visit as a *social* rather than an *individual* experience, by focusing on verbal interaction in front of exhibits. This perspective, obviously more realistic and valuable than those which consider the visitor on his/her own in front of a single display (the "optimum" situation for researchers), has nevertheless brought into visitor studies necessary complexity.

¹in Hess, R and Handel, G. (1989).

McManus's results point to an increase in visitors' learning achievements when they come in groups. However, McManus has not taken into account the museum's own complexity as she has preferred to focus on single displays and not on the museum's global context². Yet the whole is more complex than its constituent parts both for families as for museums. As Leichter et al. have put it:

Recognition of the diversity of family values and interests may at first seem to represent a bewildering array of possibilities with which museum educators must contend. Yet it is better to recognize the extent and nature of diversity in both museums and families than to assume that one kind of family program will be suitable for all families.

Leichter, Hensel and Larsen (1989:24)

There seems also to be in most of the studies about families visiting museums, a recurrent tendency to try to solve the complexity of social interaction related with learning processes, by organising the family experience into observable categories and according to different gender functions, in order to obtain data curators may use to maximise their work efficiency.

Before introducing the case study, this chapter will describe the recent theories on families and their leisure practices and some of the studies that have recently focused on families' use of museums.

1. Leisure for the family group

Leisure for the family group is, as already discussed, a *middle class* phenomenon and the result of the leisure commercialisation boom in late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Before the appearance of these intermediate groups, both the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and the working class had kept over the years a well defined gender distinction in their pastimes (the ladies in the parlour and the gentlemen hunting, the men in the public houses or in pubs and the women at home with the children and the house work).

²According to Cone and Kendal's results (1978), as people progress through the exhibition hall they stop at fewer exhibits, spend less time at those to which they do attend, and interact with each other less. Therefore, the location (in relation to the exhibition entrance or exit) of the exhibits is crucial for the analysis of the interaction individuals-individuals and individuals-displays.

Leisure for the family is therefore a consequence of two related phenomena: on the one hand, the capitalist incursion upon leisure facilities (as a market for amusement and entertainment which was struggling for the expansion of profit-making opportunities), which brought an increased need to attract as many diversified consumers as possible; on the other hand the new positioning of male-female relationships in society and the growing "de-differentiation" of their roles.

The *family group* was found by leisure entrepreneurs to be the best ground for the creation of consumer habits and for the attraction of larger audiences.

During the course of the nineteenth century the holiday unit had increasingly come to be made up of such a couple plus their children. And by the inter-war period the family holiday had become very much child-centred.

John Urry (1990: 149)

As leisure activities outside the household were traditionally a male environment (both for upper and lower classes) it was the creation of facilities suitable for women which became the big challenge. Inviting women to participate in activities that were previously forbidden to them, posed nevertheless enormous problems: the imposition of *respectable* behavioural rules (as discussed in chapter two and three) was part of the process of turning some leisure settings into environments more appropriate and appealing to middle class women and children.

To lure the middle-class trade, the showmen developed strategies to convince mothers that their theatres were proper places for themselves and their children. Half-price afternoon "specials" were designed with the female spectator in mind. A theatre that could draw a family audience could make more money and establish a favourable image in the community.

Douglas Gomery (1992: 138)

By the late nineteenth century, a new type of ideology signalled greater personal autonomy and social participation for women who wanted more than housekeeping, church and excursions to parks. Yet according to Peiss (1992: 108):

to gain female patronage proved a complex task for amusements entrepreneurs, who sought to foster an aura of respectability, appropriate female sensibilities without emasculating the entertainment.

These women were not only becoming part of the crowds in the streets but were starting to go to the theatre, pubs, dance halls and commercial recreation grounds.

1.1. *The family life-cycle*

Inside the family there is a complex organization of roles and value orientations which evolve through the family life-cycle. The connection between the life-cycle and the attitude towards leisure was studied in detail by the couple Rhona and Robert Rapoport (1975) in their work *Leisure, Family and the Life Cycle* and remains an important contribution to the analysis of family leisure. These authors were particularly concerned with the effects of the family on the individual's development, and with the way different spheres of influence interact at different times in the life cycle. They recognised the importance of multiple factors acting inside and outside the family sphere. Although diverse effects from "diffuse macroscopic sources such as the mass media and the larger institutional structure" to more specific sources such as those "assignable to actual people known" (1975: 21), operate easily, what is problematic is the way people *feel* their influence as it comprises the *process of satisfying life styles*.

According to the authors, families have cycles which make them change their *preoccupations, interests and activities*. *Preoccupations* arise at a deep motivational level, *interests* take form from the interactions of an individual with his preoccupations and his social environment and both determine the choice of *activities*. The concept of *preoccupation* seems consistent with Elias's analysis of *shame* and *embarrassment* (it appeals to feelings that occur at a *deep* motivational level). Also, the link the Rapoports make between *preoccupation interests* and *activities* matches Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* (as families interests are in this theory defined as the result of the interaction between individuals' preoccupations and their social environment).

There is a phase in the family life-cycle described by the Rapoports - the one they called the *establishment phase* - which corresponds to a great majority of museum-visiting family groups: it is the one occurring when the parents are between twenty five and fifty years old.³ The authors described this phase as follows (ibid.:):

³"Most people who visit museums" say Falk and Dierking (1992: 20), go in a family group with parents between the ages of thirty and fifty and children between the ages of eight and twelve.

The process of investing in a meaningful life pattern is most salient at this phase. While patterns of living are diverse, the preoccupation with major life investments in work, family, friends, community activities and with some abstract ideas gives some unity to it.

Within this phase the authors define three sub-phases: early-establishment (pre-school children); *mid-establishment* (children at school); late-establishment (children out of school). Again it is the *mid-establishment phase* that best describes the families commonly found in museums (see also Prince 1983): their preoccupation is (according to the Rapoport) with performance and effectiveness⁴, competence and what is chosen. "Their potential problems are conflicts of loyalties and obligations". However, despite these concerns the mid-establishment phase is also described as a "period of great enjoyment". "One's identity has usually been consolidated... It is in this period that there is a peak in family-centred activities that can be carried out as a family ... For some this is a prelude to the later phases, offering a stepping-stone to a style of life that will be enjoyed following retirement, for the others it is a status symbol".

These various phases have not been fixed but have undergone historical change. As Elias (1982a) has demonstrated, in the Middle Ages adults lived in a world in which the constraints were external, they therefore generally lacked strong internal restraints on the emotions, and so could not impose them on their children. The distance between parents and children was thus not so great. The differentiation of adulthood and childhood positioning adults in a role of transmitters and children in the position of receivers of parents knowledge is another effect of *modernity*:

Modernity has not just seen the construction of childhood as a phase of dependence but the construction of adulthood as a phase of independence, of alleged psychological maturity and authorised citizenship.

Featherstone (1993: 118)

This perspective allows the understanding of families' expectations as part of their investments in success and performance efficiency which are not a property of the

⁴It is interesting to note that the concern with *effectiveness* so used by museum researchers is also in the mind of families visiting museums, both groups share this common denominator. It may be hypothesised that also there is a mid-establishment phase for professional carriers comparable to the families' life-cycle phase.

place itself, but of the context (phase) the family is living in at the (historical) moment of the museum visit. The setting selected depends a great deal on the family social and personal needs to be fulfilled. Another important contribution of the life-cycle perspective is the acceptance that families' expectations are influenced by past experiences and present circumstances. Since the current needs of families result from past experiences, it means that some form of residual impression is retained together with affective responses to it. This response (good or bad) is important in predisposing the family group towards the activity and in whatever will be retained from that experience as family memories for the future.

2. Families in Museums

In the museum's case the aura of bourgeois *respectability* was so deeply established and imbued with the atmosphere of the place as a whole, that, for a long time, museums tended to keep middle class families away instead of attracting them. "Museum program developers have been slow to recognise the family as a target unit for museum programming" (Butler and Sussman 1992:2). Also there seems to be a developing common sense that "museums that are more concerned with objects than with the effective communication of ideas about objects ... have little to offer to families" (Wood, 1990: 21). In order to change this situation, (later rather than sooner) some of the new decision-makers (the new cultural intermediaries), in the last decades of the nineteenth century, understood that *respectability* had to be blended with *information*, *entertainment* and *participation* suitable for the whole family group.

Museums have, in theory, a great deal to offer families, yet their social impact remains limited. To most people, museums may well be in the category of things "good for you", but hardly yet in that of "enjoyment" and still less of fun. So the question is raised: how can museums through their educational programs, activities and services help, extend, change, or give new meaning to family experience?

Wolins (1989: 12)

If in most places *respectability* was imposed more or less suddenly and strictly - as was the case with the music hall and some games and sports- in the museum's case, after a period of increased restrictiveness, the process would follow the reverse direction: it was a *decrease of respectability* and formality that was brought about by middle class families. More *recreation* and *participation* (in conjunction with the imposition of self-control and a fair amount of respectability) was the price the upper class had to pay to attract this public.

Household-like environments were also added to the previous austerity of some of these settings: restaurants, cafeterias, gift-shops, and comfortable resting areas, were made suitable for a cross-generation experience. However, just recently there has been an emergent tendency to recognise that family visitors account for a high percentage of museum visitors (Selbot and Morgan, 1978: 29, Alt, M.B. 1980, Prince and Schadla-Hall 1985, Falk et al. 1985, Wood 1990:20, Falk and Dierking 1992). Also the fact that families are visiting museums in ever greater numbers reflects the changes in the leisure

market place and the increasingly competitive position museums occupy within this market.

2.1. *Studies on family-visitors*

Studies on family-visitors are to be inscribed in the already mentioned behaviourist (*modernist*) "evaluation" tradition. These empirically based studies like the one of Cone and Kendall (1978), have attempted to analyse family behaviour according to gender and generation-role differentiation focusing on the amount of verbal interaction in which each adult (male or female) is engaged and to whom (son or daughter) this interaction is directed. Girls are, according to these authors' findings, ignored by their fathers and generally more passive than their brothers ..., the question they aim to solve is "should museum designers be concerned with these family interaction differences?". However the question they should have put was "are gender distinctions a pertinent question?" and "are these results reliable?"

The studies of Diamond (1988) and Rosenfeld and Terkel (1992) concluded that males tend to assume the dominant role in the family, often choosing which exhibits to view and engaging their sons in conversations about exhibits, while females tend to deal with issues such as tying children's shoes or checking to see who needs to use the rest room. These studies compare mother/ daughter interactions with father/ son interactions as if other combinations could not exist. However, Dierking's research (1989), which referred to mother/daughter, mother/ son, father/ daughter, father/son interactions, did not confirm these findings. Her results suggest that fathers tended to interact similarly with sons and daughters; it was mothers who varied their behaviour tending to be more exhibit-focused with sons than with daughters.

Other studies on families in other leisure situations indicate comparable focuses on gender differences. A study in a zoo revealed that men consistently led the groups, and women expressed multiple social roles (Rosenfeld 1980).

In 1988 a study about how boys and girls learn science differently was conducted at the Centre of Science and Industry in Columbus, Ohio (Kremer and Mullins 1992: 40). From this study, gender traits were detected (boys generally more interested in science than girls) and its conclusion has pointed to the need for a balance in the creation of exhibits to

favour the needs of both male and female children (a "gender-balanced science learning environment").

This kind of approach is totally contrary to a *figurational* analysis of the family visit. It follows a tradition of laboratory psychology which leaves out everything that does not comply to standard statistical methodologies. Also, the belief that museum designers can use such results to enhance the exhibition's effectiveness, entitles curators/designers with the power to use the family's own dynamics and forms of interaction as ways to enhance their (the curators) influential role.

In another article titled "Sons and Daughters: Observations on the Way Families Interact during a Museum Visit", Linda Blud (1990b) draws on Cone and Kendal's study although borrowing another researcher's theoretical framework in order to get more precise data: Doise's socio-cognitive conflict hypothesis⁵. Blud (1990a) tries to underline the educational aspects of the family visit, to show that the family visit can be educational without the families being aware of this role. Her aim was to understand how *learning* occurs by examining the *quality* of interaction (taking for granted McManus's findings that a good quality of interaction means higher learning results), and how it varies with different types of displays. She criticises studies which "have tended to ignore the nature of the visitor, or visitor group, and have focused instead on the nature of the exhibit, and how effective different types of exhibit are in stimulating learning" (ibid.:43). Her idea is to understand learning as a social rather than an individual experience, accepting the principle that interaction between visitors may be as important as interaction between the visitor and the exhibit. According to this author's observations, interactive displays favour the most efficient moments of social interaction in terms of knowledge transfers. However, she recognises that this result "was not statistically significant"⁶(ibid.: 49).

wider social factors also need to be taken into account, to ensure that the social context of an exhibit complements the cognitive context it creates.

Linda Blud (1990a: 50)

While acknowledging this methodological pitfall, she seems confident enough to state, after her results, that children understand a display better if they interact with it under a

⁵This hypothesis is based on Piaget's model of cognitive development which asserts that interaction between the child and the physical environment leads to learning.

⁶Blud refers to the "difficulty of controlling extraneous variables in a field setting like this".

social condition, as interactive displays seem to stimulate a constructive exchange between parent and child. Blud also distinguishes the amount of verbal interaction in which each adult (male or female) is engaged and to whom (son or daughter) this interaction is directed. Again girls are considered less favoured than boys. They are, according to her findings, ignored by the fathers and generally more passive than their brothers.

2.2. A more family-centred approach

Another author D.D. Hilke (1988, 1989) challenges museum professionals to temporally suspend their traditional focus on museums' learning resources "and to consider instead the resources that family visitors bring with them to the museum" (ibid.: 120). Hilke recognises that family behaviour "so deceptively chaotic on the surface, actually reflects a complex, well-balance interweaving of personal and cooperative agendas to learn". Albeit not centred on the museum resources, it is again "learning" which is the main focus of Hilke's reset: do family visitors act as if they are trying to learn something about the museum exhibits?; what strategies do family visitors use to learn about museum exhibits?; what implications do these strategies have for exhibition design? The main contribution of Hilke to the study of family visitors is the assumption that families have *an agenda to learn* which is heavily influenced by their *social context*.

From Hilke's observations a "cross-generational bias" in choosing interactive partners was considered to enhance the learning potential of the family experience. McManus (1987) who compared families with other visitors, found that families have their own way of using the exhibition information; they spend the most time at displays they have selected for attention, they engage in the most conversations and are the most likely to use interactive displays. However, they are the least likely to read labels or graphics. Another important issue is that families do not seek relationships within the context of the exhibition, but they will seek relationships between their own knowledge and the context and structure of the exhibition. Hilke concludes (ibid.: 124):

By adapting strategies for family learning that have been practised for many years, family visitors pursue personal agendas to learn about the exhibition, while enhancing the experience of family members. What could be better for our museums?

Rosenfeld (1980) also concluded that families (unlike other groups), come with a range of social agendas, such as spending time together or sharing a meal, that are as important as viewing exhibits. He observed that parents use their children to justify their visit to the museum, although it was also evident that the parents were enjoying it.

Robert Lakota (1975) also compared families with other adult groups and his results point to stable patterns of interaction within families: the adults choose which exhibition to visit and whilst there the children determined the type of interaction. Using the concepts of "attracting" and "holding power" this author concluded that the former was, for families, more influential than the latter: once attracted to a particular exhibit, families remained, interacted with the exhibit, and then moved on; there was little variation in the time spent at each exhibit.

Also Diamond (1986) observed that learning resulted primarily from interpersonal interactions rather than from interaction between individuals and objects. Children were more likely than parents to manipulate exhibits; parents were more likely to look at graphics and read labels. However before reading labels and explanatory texts they first try to discuss things among themselves and work by trial and error.

John Koran Jr. and colleagues (1984) found that children prefer to interact with participatory displays than their parents. These authors suggest that novelty and curiosity are typical children behaviours and that they interact more readily because unlike adults they have not been socialised "not to touch in museums". However, "when asked about their expectations, family museum visitors at several institutions", say Falk and Dierking (1992: 26), "responded that they expected to find things to do that everyone in the family would enjoy; that they would find an attractive, friendly, safe environment; that they would see something that they had not seen before; and that they would have an opportunity to do more than just look at things, but rather would get to be personally involved with the exhibitions".

2.3. Museums among other leisure choices for families

In a study conducted in Toledo Art Museum (United States) (1981), Marilyn Hood considers six criteria that are instrumental in leisure-time decisions (having the challenge

of a new experience, having an opportunity to learn, participating actively, being with people, feeling comfortable and at ease, and doing something worthwhile) and uses these criteria to characterise three types of populations: (i) frequent museum-goers; (ii) those who do not visit museums; (iii) occasional visitors. These populations made decisions about their leisure choices on the basis of these very different criteria.

The population that *did not visit museums* believed that the three criteria they valued most highly (being with people, participating actively and feeling at ease in their surroundings) were, for the most part, not present in museums. They perceived museums as environments that restricted activity and were socially and physically uncomfortable. Museums were described by this group as formal, formidable places that were physically inaccessible to them. This group preferred to spend out-of-home leisure time participating in or watching sports, picnicking, or going to shopping centres (46% of Toledo's population).

Frequent visitors perceived that museums were places that could satisfy all six of these criteria. Of the six attributes, the three most important to this group were opportunities to learn, challenge of new experiences, and doing something worthwhile (14% of Toledo's population). "These persons are empathetic with art museum values - they know the social norms of participation and how to read the code. ... They are interested in learning opportunities and the challenge of new experiences in their leisure activities, they do not mind attending the museum alone (which may even be a plus for those who wish to concentrate on learning and exploring at their own pace) and they do not regard comfortable surroundings as important probably because they are at the museum so frequently, they feel at home" (1981: 297).

Occasional visitors greatly enjoyed *family centred activities*. They were more likely to visit museums during special exhibitions, museum-sponsored family events, or at special times. Hood suggests that this group in particular seemed to equate "leisure" with "relaxation", which is "more akin to interacting socially with a family or friendship group than it is to the intense involvement in a special interest that is evidenced by a museum enthusiast" (40% of Toledo's population).

Hood comments that museum professionals' values tend to be more in line with those of frequent visitors. For example "selling" the museum as an extension of school (in fact, emphasising learning at all), might entice frequent participants, but could deter occasional

visitors and be a reason for non-participants to avoid museums. Falk and Dierking drawing on Hood's results conclude (1992: 19): "Museums that promote themselves as good places for families to explore, discover, and enjoy themselves in a relaxed setting would be more likely to draw visitors among the groups that do not visit, or visit only occasionally".

2.4. Parent-child modes of interaction in museums

Leaving the problem of learning aside, which was not considered central in this research due to the obvious partiality it embodies (it is not just for learning that museums are chosen by families), lets go back to the problem of the relationship between generations as part of each family's own dynamics, and how they are favoured by each specific setting. One of the most important contributions to leisure theory is John Kelly's (1983) model of relative freedom and the notion of *role-determined* attitudes parents may display in leisure places. Not surprisingly, the museum seems to favour a parent's *role-determined* attitude in greater measure than most other leisure settings families may use. This means, in short, that children tend to see the museum through their parents' eyes and according to their choices and interpretations. "In considering the relationship of families to other institutions, in terms of interactions and educational processes, the concept of mediation is useful", say Leichter, Hensel and Larsen (1992: 34). "Mediation has been defined as the processes by which the family ' filters educational influences - the process by which it screens, interprets, criticises, reinforces, complements, counteracts, refracts, and transforms'".

One way adults mediate the museum experience for children is by teaching them how to visit a museum - what behavior is appropriate, what they should look at and for how long.

Benton (1979: 52)

According to Deborah Benton (1979: 58) who observed the interactions of family group members with each other and with exhibits at four museums in the New York area, the majority of adult-child visitor units interact among themselves as though adults *brought the kids* to the museum. "The adult is the authority, the director of behaviour, the focuser of attention, the leader". Another orientation (with apparently few adherents) is coming *with the kids*. Benton also found that the leadership style of each family group influenced the time spent at each exhibition.

"It is also recognised that children normally acknowledge the adults to use their leadership and authority". This statement is reinforced with others as follows: "Children experience a sense of powerlessness in museums, as they do in many aspects of their lives. Unlike other age groups, they are rarely in museums by free choice. For the most part adults tell children what to do; adults have control, while children wish they did" (Jensen 1982: 25). "Museums" says Richard Wood, "are public places where particular codes of behaviour, probably unfamiliar to children, are expected." "Teaching between parents and children" says Diamond "can range from playful to very directive, some interactions can be extremely directive" (1986: 152). In a study of parents and children in a Discovery Room, Diamond and Bond (1988) observed that "parents such as ... (a certain) mother expressed fears (shame and embarrassment) that the children might behave in ways that would be unacceptable to the museum"

These somehow authoritarian educational efforts, occurring in early childhood, contribute to the building of the negative image museums have had throughout their history. They have a parallel in the impression the lower ranges of the social hierarchy have had when subjected to similar processes in previous times (as described in chapter three and four). Museums have been connected with the upper classes and a *routinized* well behaved adulthood. This same group or those aspiring to become part of it, seem still to make use of these old values to "educate" their own children. They are, in the middle class families' case, good examples of what Elias has described as the conversion of external social constraints into individual self-constraints. By doing so museums supply both *psychogenetic* and *sociogenetic* facets of the civilizing process.

CONCLUSION

Most studies on family interaction, behaviour and learning experiences inside museums have tended to keep a too museum-centred approach, not questioning the family as a specific social unit or the choice to visit the museum as a specific leisure choice. Instead they have tended to analyse group interactions by means of functionalist models that oppose males to females, and different generations to one another, and by attributing to each sub-group different roles, and different levels of learning from isolated exhibition displays.

The following case study, by the way it is presented - a description of what families really do inside the exhibitions as an on-going experience and not as a set of specific interactions among adults and children and with selected exhibits - comes to prove that museum-visiting for families is an extension of what happens in the wider social structure and of the goals each family has chosen for itself which can be more or less coincident with what the museum has to offer. "Family visitors" says Richard Wood "are 'window shoppers'. They browse around enjoying a pleasant social time, making a few purchases on impulse when something takes their fancy" (1990: 22). However they can be "serious buyers" of the museum's message or "serious behaviour inducers" whatever the museum's message may be.

The museum creates an environment which does not change the family configuration as it is, but adds extra elements to it.

CHAPTER 6

Fifty families in the Natural History Museum: a case study

INTRODUCTION

From what has been said in the first two parts of this study, it is easy to understand how audience members bring to any leisure setting a consciousness formed, totally or in part, by the logic provided by various communication vehicles and their corresponding social sanctions. Social interaction in museums presupposes, therefore, a process based on prior experience and expectations developed both through mass-media (and their modes of signification) and on-going social encounters.

While legitimate taste becomes hegemonic and is recognised, different social class and class-fractions pursue tastes which are a reflection of their particular position within the social context. These tastes are dependent on a set of classificatory practices assimilated by virtue of their common sharing of a specific position in the social field, and of the building of certain antipathies and hostilities developed towards the "strange" tastes of other social fractions.

In the case of the family, the leisure setting chosen may also provide validation for its members' structured responsibilities and their communicational strategies, already exercised at other places and in other times. Familial roles have thus to be understood through a processual approach as they are defined and redefined throughout their life. They are also dependent on changes occurring in the social system as the way social spaces are "classified" by different groups, and have an important influence in the families' tastes and in the evaluation of their social gains.

The purpose of the present case study is to demonstrate how the museum can be the mantelpiece for personal meanings and interpersonal actions, within a specified social context. More specifically, it aims to demonstrate how social reality is constructed by members of a certain type of family unit, and how a specific museum - the Natural

History Museum in London - in the way it is currently designed, contributes to the communicational exchange between its members, within the context of their visiting experience.

To achieve this goal it was necessary to consider the *context* of visiting as much as the *object* of the visit.

There is more to cinema-going than seeing films. There is going out at night and the sense of relaxation combined with the sense of fun and excitement Rather than selling individual films, cinema is best understood as having sold a habit, or a certain type of socialised experience. The experience involves a whole flavour of romance, warmth and colour.

Corrigan as quoted in Morley (1988: 47)

This argument applies with equal force to the study of museum audiences. Just as it is important to understand the phenomenology of "going to the pictures", so it is important to understand the phenomenology of "going to the museum", and in the present case "the phenomenology of going to the Natural History Museum": that is the significance of the various modes of physical and social organization of its environment for the context in which the family visit happens.

In this case study, leisure is understood primarily in terms of what it provides for the fulfilment of families' expectations and needs, and the museum as a setting freely chosen by the families to respond to these needs. The family is a primary group where intimate relationships are developed and where social representations and identities are transmitted from older to younger generations. The museum is a setting in which these intimate relationships may occur more or less freely, together with the transfer of cultural and social knowledge and values.

The idea of looking at museums in terms of the interpersonal use of their interiors, leaves aside somehow the questioning of the museum reality itself, in the ways in which it is usually analysed. However, the study of the social interdependencies of the museum visit is the one that best relates the museum with everyday life and the one more capable of transmitting a visitors perspective to the museum visit.

If it is not new that there is an idea of *effectiveness* for museum curators, it is however crucial to introduce here the perspective that there is also an idea of *effectiveness* for the family unit. The latter is inexorably connected with the way they construct and reconstruct their relationship throughout the visit. The families' expectations are also determined by the way they see the museum (more or less as an *educational* or a *recreational* setting), and the way they see themselves and their position within the social structure. The families invest in their own way the time spent inside exhibitions, and evaluate for themselves and (which is crucial) for their closest friends, the success of that particular choice. It is this chain of social interdependencies that creates the museum's public.

1. The Natural History Museum

In its time the Museum has been host to some five generations of children and indeed the most frequent remarks when the Museum is mentioned are "Oh yes, I remember going there as a child" or "I've been meaning to take the children again".¹

The Natural History Museum, in South Kensington - London - was created following the phenomenon of the Great Exhibitions, as part of a block of three museums (together with the Victoria and Albert and the Science Museum), with a dual purpose: *research* and *popular education*. These three spaces, innovative in their origins, were influenced to a great degree by the informal and recreational atmosphere which characterised the Crystal Palace event (previously described in chapter four).

In the South Kensington area, before these new museums were installed, exhibitions held to celebrate the progress of industry and the values of the emerging middle class entrepreneurs had taken place and had left their special (commercial) glamour²; As described by Greenhalgh, the substantial profit made by the Great Exhibition was used to organise display activities on land purchased at South Kensington. This would be the centre for British international exhibitions until the turn of the century, by which time "a splendid array of permanent museums had been built on the site" (1988:31). It is here hypothesised that these arts and trade events have left an "intention" of change in the museums' figurations, that were to appear later on in the same area. This configuration seems consistent with Donald Horne's description (1984: 121/122):

The South Kensington buildings represent the voice of nineteenth-century capitalism at its most enlightened, buoyant with optimism and reason and the belief in improvement. Education, science, art and technology would bring light. Free enterprise would bring abundance to the world and this abundance facilitate eternal progress.

¹Whithead, P. and Keates C.(1981: 116)

²"At the 1874 exhibition at South Kensington" says Greenhalgh (1988: 19) "education was the professed rationale behind the whole event. The official guide made this clear by informing the visitor that 'It must always be remembered that the main object of these series of exhibitions is not the bringing together of great masses of works, and the attraction of holiday-making crowds, but the instruction of the public in art science and manufacture, by collections of selected specimens. Such motives remained close to organisers' hearts through to the outbreak of the First World War, although by then entertainment facilities were given far greater consideration than those aimed specifically at education".

The Natural History Museum opened its doors to the public on 18 April of 1881, "the first visitors filed into the newly built Natural History museum in South Kensington, a part of London that was already an important site for exhibitions in the arts and sciences"(Whitehead and Keates 1981: 116), and since then it has been governed by educational aims combined with a spirit of innovation that made it evolve at the head of the (English) museum's world. In the 1960s, it was strongly influenced by the United States technological and democratic achievements, and its aim has been to educate the general public through ideas and ideals (Leichter et al 1989), adopting as a result communicational tools and know-how which, with the progression of time, would transform quite radically its discourse as well as its global ambience.

In the 1970s The Natural History Museum was facing, more than ever before, the challenge of being relevant and accessible to wider "less sophisticated" audiences and was thus striving to create new discourses that were inventive and enjoyable. During this decade the body of curators and exhibition designers (the new cultural intermediaries) would suffer the strongest criticism a museum team had ever suffered in the press (Halstead 1978, Bellairs 1979), but this has not seemed to trouble its development as well as its popularity, which was clearly enhanced with the new proposals. "While the academics were busily criticising the new exhibitions in the learned journals" says Griggs (1984a), "the visitors were voting with their feet". Following these criticisms, a visitors survey was made, aimed at clarifying further the reasons why visitors preferred the new exhibitions. According to its mentor Michael Alt (1983):

Generally, the results from this study have clearly indicated the reasons why visitors evaluate the Museum's newer exhibitions more favourably than its more traditional galleries. The older exhibitions tend to be less intellectually stimulating, less easy to understand and less exciting. These findings should provide little comfort to the old guard of the museum world who, for whatever reasons, prefer the traditional exhibitions. Academics tend to be out of step with the public opinion and their favoured exhibitions do little to stimulate an interest among casual visitors in their own disciplines.

Certainly as a consequence of these debates, in the late 1970s and 1980s, the Natural History Museum felt the need to assess the *effectiveness* of its so controversial exhibition approaches and to undertake what would become the first systematic *evaluation* studies made in England. The purposes of its *Evaluation and Development Section* set up in 1975 was "to monitor the success of new exhibitions with a view to providing information that

will help better designs for future exhibitions...(and) to obtain data about people's knowledge, opinions and behaviour in connection with the Museum's activities". This Museum evaluation programmes were thus basically aimed to make its new "concept-oriented" displays accepted and recognised (Alt 1977, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1983; Alt and Griggs; 1984, 1989, Alt & Shaw 1984; Griggs 1981, 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Griggs and Alt 1982; Miles 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1988b, Miles and Alt 1979; Miles and Tout 1979).

The argument of these critics, who came largely from the academic world, was that the new exhibitions failed to meet the needs of zoologists, professional biologists, post-graduates, young naturalists, undergraduates, teachers (Griggs 1984a).

The vehemence of these debates shows, once more, how the "institution-museum" has over the years strongly reacted against change, and how, at each stage, it has found its own bastions. These bastions have been, if not always class bound, at least class-fraction- (in this case professional-) bound, and have had therefore, at each stage, their own hierarchical positions to secure. These reactions have been even stronger in times when these professionals have felt their positions threatened.

In the 1990s this Museum has been introducing new technologies and the most up-to-date audio-visual forms in a way that is closer to spectacle than to the traditional seriousness of science.

1.1. *The Natural History Museum today*

Today the Natural History Museum is one of the most popular museums in London despite having been forced to introduce admission charges (since April 1987), in order to maintain its high expenditure. According to a report issued in 1988³, its visitors tend to be younger and more middle class than the national average. This upmarket characteristic of its public, which belies its aims to widen its audiences, would remain stable in the following years (and not lowered despite its communicational efforts).

³ MORI, 1988. *Visitors' Attitudes to The Natural History Museum* August-October

It is a museum more organised around themes and concepts than collections, more preoccupied with leaving a positive impression by creating moments of overt enjoyment and excitement, than with academic content. It is a museum more about *popularity* and economic success than *respectability* and a certain group's prestige. It is an experimental museum in the sense of its impact upon its public. However, it is in the present situation much less concerned than before in measuring the effects of that impact.

In many senses it is a museum that is becoming more *postmodern* than *modern*. This is apparent in the weakening of its effective commitment to *evaluation* and its current investment in *simultaneity* and *diversity* of experiences (multi-media, multi-sensorial), of discourses (*narrative* combined with *figural*), and times (old methods together with the most innovative ones) which seem to share a peaceful co-existence able to attract large audience numbers.

1.2. *The general survey of 1991*

In order to provide visitor demographic profiles and to monitor "changes and trends, both in the nature of the Museum's visitors and their responses to the Museum's offer" a survey was conducted in 1991 using comparable questions to those of 1983 (by Griggs and Alt) and 1988 (by MORI).

This study has concluded that (i) the demographic and educational profile of visitors seems to have changed little over the years: the bulk of the visitors were aged 25-44 or under 11, slightly more than half were men and the profile was decidedly an upmarket one (forty one percent in social class AB⁴). Also, slightly more than half the sample had completed their full-time education. However, (ii) "it appears that their behaviour has (changed)": there were more repeat visits than in 1981, also "a greater proportion of the visitors were visiting in a family group with a corresponding decrease in the numbers coming alone or with friends", the number of overseas visitors has halved since 1981, and there has been an increase in the average duration of the visit (maybe due to the entrance charges after 1987).

⁴Upper middle class and middle class groups composed of higher managerial, administrative or professional (A) and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional (B), according to *The Joint Industry Committee for National Research Surveys* in UK.

The newer interactive exhibitions were more frequently visited: the most popular was *Ecology* followed by *Discovering Mammals*. Also interesting was the finding that in the latter, "the majority of visitors' perceptions of their most interesting exhibit were associated with the physical characteristics of the exhibit, with evidence that they learned something from it a close second".

It was also concluded that age and status (measured by social class and cultural activity) were the main factors influencing the frequency of museum visiting. Evidence from this study has also suggested that the composition of the visiting group and the origin of the visitor also had a role to play. Family groups accounted for sixty eight percent of the sample: they were formed by, on average, three members being predominantly two adults and one child aged under 11 years.

One interesting point of difference between this and previous surveys was an increase in the number of "cultural activists" in the sample (defined as people that frequently undertake activities such as opera/ballet/art gallery visits, etc.). According to the researchers, one possible reason for this change was that many such cultural activities may have a higher profile and be more accessible than in the past, (they give as an example Pavarotti in the Park, which is relevant to what has already been described in this thesis as a postmodern high and low culture de-differentiation phenomenon).

1.3. *Studies carried out in the Discovering Mammals exhibition*

For the setting up of the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition, a *front end* research on visitors' knowledge and interests in mammals was carried out in January 1982 (Griggs). This survey comprised visitor details, their answer to the question "what is a mammal?" and the visitors' interests in mammal groups and topics. Misconceptions were identified as well as visitors needs and expectations in relation to specific exhibit contents.

The *Discovering Mammals* exhibition was also submitted to *formative evaluation*⁵ in order to give immediate insight and feedback relating to some exhibits' communicative effectiveness in April 1982 (Edwards, Magidson 1982), July 1983 (Griggs et al. 1983) and

⁵Formative evaluation incorporates feed-back from the visitor into the exhibition development process. It tests the efficiency of information transfer, exhibit ideas are mocked up and are shown to a small sample of the target audience.

1986 (Jarrett 1986). These evaluations were made by means of mock-ups aimed at identifying difficulties visitors would encounter before the final setting up of the exhibits. Some problems with interpretation of charts and diagrams were detected, as well as with the use of Latin words and of some concepts used in texts. The section called *Artiodactyls in the Arctic* was evaluated (qualitatively) in October 1984 by Anita Morris (1984), also by means of a mock-up. Open questions like "can you tell me what it's about?" were asked. Some displays were shown to work better than others and the exhibits that caused problems (such as "keeping warm") were further corrected.

In order to "complete the picture", a detailed *summative evaluation* was undertaken from January to June 1987. It was intended to be "a gauge of public reaction to the finished exhibition ... (providing) direction for future exhibition development". This exhibition was at the time "the most recently opened permanent exhibition at the Natural History Museum". It was also defined as one that "has followed a textbook prescription of exhibition development making use of frequent reference to the visiting public". Different methodologies were applied including semi-structured interviews and unobtrusive evaluation.

The results show that sixty one per cent of the sample has visited the Museum before and over half of the visitors incorporated museum visiting with (which is most interesting) "a fairly recreational day of sight-seeing, shopping and visiting friends". Without any theoretical explanation, recreational needs were (intuitively) linked with family-group specificity:

The recreational context of the visit ties in with the predominance of family groups who made up 46% of the sample.

(unpublished report 1987)

One third of the sample were under 16 years old and an equivalent proportion fell into the 25-44 age group. Most visitors did not plan to see the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition and 74 per cent had been in the Museum for over one and an half hours before finding the gallery. Forty one per cent of the interviewees said they had spent up to 30 minutes in the exhibition and a further forty three per cent, 35 to 60 minutes. When asked which exhibit they liked the best, interviewees' answers revealed that the first floor housed more

favourite exhibits and the sheer size and scale of the blue whale continued to impress and inspire.

The section which stimulated most enjoyment was "Sounds and Echoes". What it is now possible to call, the *mimetic function* of this exhibit was curiously described as follows:

Visitor reaction showed that the subject matter effectively captured their imagination by using a range of different media inviting them to use different senses to experience how a whale picks up a sound.

(unpublished report 1987)

Following the same principle, it is not surprising that the most popular exhibits were those which also "employed highly specialised and unusual media and invited the visitor actively to participate".

Eighty percent of the visitors said that the exhibition was for people like themselves. However they could not identify properly the different topics according to which the exhibition was organised. More seating areas, cutting down of the crowding and lowering the noise levels were suggestions for improvements. Interesting was one comment of a visitor who said that some exhibits "were more fun to do than to absorb why you are doing it".

Unobtrusive observation investigated measures of "stopping power", "holding power" and "walk-through rate"⁶. The authors' statements resulting from these measures are a good example of how this kind of approach belongs to what was defined as the *modernist rationale*. They seem very concerned with keeping the visitors' attention and with making visitors stop in front of the exhibits, which concerns they show by means of the following assessments: they advise that "later exhibits have to work harder to combat museum fatigue", and regret that "unfortunately a general increase in the ratio of dynamic exhibits is not a universal solution for improving stopping power and holding power" and they advert that "nodes near the end of the gallery (are)... less likely to arrest the browsing visitor".

⁶"Stopping" or "attracting power" are the percentage of total visitors at each exhibit who stopped for a count of three seconds; "holding power" is the mean length of time that visitors spend at a specific exhibit; "walk through rates" are percentages of total visitors who walk straight through an exhibition node without stopping for the minimum of three seconds at any exhibit.

A *summative evaluation* was made (also in 1987) and focused on the use of the audio-visual. The aim of this evaluation was "to discover through head counts, unobtrusive observation and interviews, just what makes a museum audio-visual successful and to make suggestions to optimise the use of audio-visuals in an exhibition". "Holding power" was one of the measures investigated. The Hippo audio-visual was one of the most popular. According to the researchers "the stopping behaviour at this audio-visual is based on visitors following the correct route through the exhibition, although this only amounts to half of the visiting public". Also "unobtrusive observation showed that this audio-visual provoked considerable affective reaction, evident through interaction, pointing at the screen, etc. Group members were often seen to call over the rest of their group to watch the film". Certain audio-visual had properties that visitors said attracted them such as seating, crowds of people watching the film (the collective gaze) and novelty value (the touch screen). When asked if they wanted more audio-visual seventy seven percent said yes. It was also concluded that the shorter the audio-visual, the more likely it was to hold visitor attention for its duration.

In the general survey conducted in 1991 the *Discovering Mammals exhibition* (as it was already described) performed better in the physical and aesthetic parameter than in the educational parameter. In what concerns the high level of content recalled it was in the *Discovering Mammals* "the sheer size of specimens". The comments that were specific to this exhibition were: the size of the whales, dolphins, different species of whales, hunting of whales/survival of the species, migration/sonar.

This review of studies pursued by the Natural History Museum was here included here in order to introduce the following case study (which was done in the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition of the Natural History Museum). Despite being too general and short as they were meant not to be published but were conceived for this museum's staff internal use. The description of the methodology applied, they can serve as introduction and basis for comparison with the case study that follows.

2. Methodology of the case study

An observer is a prince who is everywhere in possession of his incognito¹.

Charles Baudelaire

2.1. A narrative form for a qualitative analysis

The way this case study has been designed is an attempt to follow the purposes of *risk* and *creativity* that have characterised the Natural History Museum in the last decades. It is also aimed to constitute a counterpoint to "evaluation" studies which in the present thesis were defined as part of the *modernist* rationale, which is centred on a perspective of performance effectiveness. What is proposed is instead a detached and *figurational* (*postmodern?*) view of the public experience.

Jean-François Lyotard (1991: 54) says about the type of scientific knowledge prevalent in the postmodern paradigm, that it is the searching for counterexamples in the process of reasoning or questioning of the legitimacy of one's own research. Lyotard's theory of knowledge is based on the principle that science develops by asking questions of legitimacy such as "what is your 'what is worth' ?". Following this assumption Lyotard speaks of the return to the narrative form: "it is not inconceivable that the recourse to narrative is inevitable, at least to the extent that the language game of science desires its statements to be true but does not have the resources to legitimate their truths on its own". Further, "scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is the true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, proceeding on prejudice" (ibid.).

¹ As quoted in Frisby, D. (1982: 68).

2.2. *The criticism of empiricism and quantitative methods*

"What is it?" and "is it efficient?" are the questions resulting from the performance-oriented (*modernist*) paradigm which tends to characterise the post-industrial scientism.

"This creates the prospect for a vast market for competence in operational skill" says Lyotard: "Those who possess this kind of knowledge will be the object of offers or even seduction policies". Eric Dunning (1992: 244) defines this "scientism" when applied to social sciences as "an uncritical attempt to copy the methods of natural science".

Evaluation studies of museum exhibitions are doomed to fall under Lyotard's and Dunning's criticism. The main goal these surveys move towards seems to be to acquire the capacity to actualize data in order to solve ephemeral problems "here and now", and to organize them into "efficient" strategies. They are part of a world of perfect information accessible to any expert, but seriously lacking a theoretical frame of reference. Habermas (1992) has also explained the failure of modernity as the result of the actions of independent specialities which are *left to the narrow competence of experts, while the concrete individual experiences are forgotten*. He considers that the remedy for this separation of scientific culture from life can only come from "changing the status of aesthetic experience when it is no longer primarily expressed in judgements of taste", but when it is used to "explore a living historical situation", that is, when "it is put in relation with problems of existence".

The strength of "theory" is regarded by empiricists as its fundamental weakness. Its success is measured not in terms of its correspondence with some objective "truth" but according to how well it performs in the greater world market of ideas, how well it generates other readings and how much interest it arouses. Everything, even itself, is a story, and its validity rests on how good a story it is. However, "theory" does not even exclude science. Indeed, Lyotard sets out to show how the authority of science rests on stories or, how it is "legitimated" by "narratives". The recuperation of the narrative form, as Lyotard sees it, is a consequence of the facilitation of data and tools (the use of computers' hardware and software). According to Lyotard, as a consequence of this facilitation there seems to be greater space for imagination "which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game" (*ibid.*: 52). The importance of Lyotard's ideas rests on the assumption that it is narrative itself that ultimately justifies what science does. Lyotard argues that there is a "renewed dignity for narrative (popular)

cultures". He sees the resurgence of narrative as part of the "liberation of the bourgeois classes from the traditional authorities".

In the case of visitor studies the use of a *narrative analysis* is assumed as a liberation of the public experience in its own right from the curator's investment in controlling and shaping behaviours, getting the right answers and correcting misunderstandings. What is proposed here is a change in the rules of the game that allow for more freedom for scientific analysis and give a deeper insight into the understanding of the museum's experience as it happens.

2.3. A *figurational approach*

In the way Norbert Elias has described figurational analysis - as a theoretically informed concrete analysis - neither the theoretical nor the empirical has precedence over the other. Figurational sociology presupposes a self-conscious detachment from the object of study. For Dunning and Rojek (1992: 17) this method has two complementary facets: on the one hand it is a "self-disciplined practice of science which enables one to study a given object dispassionately" on the other hand it is used "to refer to a condition of social development".

In the present study the concept of figuration refers to acting human individuals and their interdependence. A figurational analysis means the acceptance that social structure and individuals actions are interdependent contexts as are institutions and their producers and users. The museum (as already expanded in considerable detail in previous chapters), is a manifestation of a paradigmatic context involving curators and publics in a non-negotiable pact. It is an institution that has to be inscribed in more global educational actions, power relations and social interdependencies which contribute to the construction of systems of thought, perception and actions.

2.4. *Involvement and detachment*

The way this case study was undertaken is closely connected with the modern literature *flâneur* attitude which was described in the previous theoretical framework. As already discussed, the modern literature of the late nineteenth century was a reaction against bourgeois rationalism and the attempt to organise and transform the social structure according to a class will. In opposition to this view, modern writers have tried to give an impression of social life as it was, that is "whilst the pedestrians were walking up and down the boulevards". They understood that social life was far more complex than it seemed to be, and that the elites of the time suffered a kind of blindness based upon selfish beliefs and unrealistic principles.

The modern writers' attitude was the attitude of "the person who wanders through a variety of social situations and contexts and remains detached from them because he or she is merely an observer" (Frisby 1992: 78). This *flâneur* experiences social life with both involvement and detachment. The *flâneur's* involvement is so strong that it became a new social type working as a symbol for a society in transition. Moreover, the *flâneur* was the one who observed the world around from outside and by doing so was able to make pertinent links between the past and the future. As a consequence of this *involvement* and *detachment*, *modernist* narratives became a powerful source for the understanding of the social life of that time.

This balance of *involvement* and *detachment* is an important component of the Eliasian methodology. "It was for reasons such as these that Elias always encouraged students to carry out research in areas in which they were directly interested and involved, while urging them to strive as hard as possible when they were engaged in the research process to distance themselves from the objects of their research, to take the 'detour via detachment' in order to maximise the degree of reality congruence of their findings, that is in order to make these findings correspond as far as possible to the objects themselves rather than to their personal fantasies and feelings or to personal or group interests and myths of various kinds" (Dunning and Rojek 1992). These were the principles that led to the present case study and determined the choice of unobtrusive observation as the main methodology.

It was decided not to call this case study an "ethnographic research" as this is normally defined as involving "stepping outside of our social and cultural backgrounds to view our

presentations from the perspective of others who live by different meaning systems" (Hensel 1982a: 261). This is the same as to accept that researchers live an existence outside and alien to the observed situation. This view, taken to an extreme, would be the same as accepting (as so many researchers have done) that curators can manipulate the public experience, a principle against which the present research has been conceived.

2.5. *An Eliasian analysis of the family-visit figuration*

As stated before, Norbert Elias has traced in considerable detail the European civilizing process with regard to behavioural standards, paying particular attention to the changing normative regulation of people's manners in their social encounters (1978b). It is not hard to identify the civilizing process museums have gone through after the empirical evidence of their increased social distinctiveness as described in chapter four. This distinctiveness was achieved by means of the adoption and imposition of *behavioural codes* in museum interiors. These behavioural codes have been transmitted as it has already been discussed, not only through social contact between different groups (upper strata influencing lower strata) but also from older to younger generations.

The weakening of the monopoly of the state over the cultural institutions has gradually transformed museums, allowing as a result less regulated behaviour and more participatory experiences. However, this was possible not only because other groups were in charge of the museum's direction and had different goals in mind, but also because the *civilizing process*, had affected (and is still affecting) individuals' conduct in public places, of which museums are a particularly good example. Throughout museums' history a *controlled-decontrolling* of peoples' emotions and instincts has been achieved by a wider public.

For Elias the family is the first social unit in which civilizing behaviours are acquired. This process, which is in great measure unconscious, happens naturally in the everyday interaction of its members. Parents are the first mediators with the outside world and in the case of museum-visiting they have a great responsibility for the way their children see and build their relationship with the museum's environment.

What follows is an attempt to add some knowledge to *how* this *mediation* occurs, which boundaries are still being created inside this environment and which are the ones that

tend to be destroyed as a result of a greater openness, higher freedom and increased participation.

2.6. The observation method and the questionnaires

Fifty families were *unobtrusively observed* from the moment they entered the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition until they left. They were observed by a single observer, following an "observation guide" (see appendix 2). The family group was defined as a group composed of at least three persons and no more than five (it would be too difficult to follow more than five), and at least one adult and one child (under fifteen years old). It was accepted, as sample procedure, to select the first group entering the exhibition that fulfilled the characteristics previously defined. For greater efficiency no more than two observations in a row were made, and no more than three per day. These observations occurred from October to November 1991 (the same year the General Survey was made). Before starting to work with the final sample, ten families were pre-tested and, as a consequence, some questions in the questionnaire were reformulated². The observer used a clipboard for recording every detail of the family visit, keeping in mind the observation guide's structure. No problems arose during the observations. The observer remained unnoticed pretending to be taking notes from the exhibition labels and texts. These observations (recorded in narrative form) were then organized in *family interaction matrixes* for each family observed (as exemplified in appendix 6).

A questionnaire was administered by a research assistant when the families were leaving the exhibition hall. Three questionnaire sheets were devised: one for the whole group (see appendix 3), one for each adult member (see appendix 4) and one for children (see appendix 5). The information gathered was quite concise and was in response to mainly socio-demographic questions and about time spent on their trip to the museum, the means of transport used and exhibitions seen before. These questions were aimed at providing a better understanding of the pre-conditions and dispositions preceding the visit. Short individual questionnaires were also given to each family member in order to understand

² For instance people did not identify correctly the question "write anything that you remember from the exhibition" and tended to refer everything they have seen in the museum - therefore the name of the exhibition had to be written in bold; in the semantic scale people tended to choose more than one characteristic in each pair - this problem was reduced by underlining "choose one" and "each pair".

their family links, their age, educational level and present occupation (for adults). A semantic rating scale enabling an "evaluation" of each visitor's own experience was also administered, and Minda Borun's semantic "faces" (Borun 1982) were used for children under fifteen. Finally an open question - "what do you remember from the exhibition?"- completes this personal enquiry (see appendix 3 and 4). The research assistant approached the family that had just been observed when it was leaving the exhibition. Probably because the place for the fulfilment of the questionnaires was comfortable (a table and a chair were provided) and well lighted (which also meant that the museum's direction had agreed with the survey), just two families have refused to answer the questionnaires.

3. Fifty families in the Natural History Museum

3.1. *Who are the fifty families?*

Thirty of these families are couples with children. Most of these couples (19) came with children under eight. There are seven "single" parents with their children (five mothers and two fathers). There are also five three-generational families (grandparent(s)/parent(s)/children). Two other families are composed of uncle/mother/children as well as uncle/aunt/nephews. Two families are composed of grandparents-grandchildren and finally one is composed of mother, an adult friend and both women's children.

Families' composition

Parents+children	30	(families with children under 8=19)
Mother+children	5	
Father+children	2	
Grandmother+mother+children	3	
Grandmother+father+children	1	Total number of adults =92
Grandparents+mother+children	1	Total number of children =102
Uncle+mother+children	2	
Uncle+aunt+nephews	1	
Grandparents+grandchildren	2	
Grandmother+grandchildren	1	
Grandfather+grandchildren	1	
Friend+mother+children	1	

This information shows how important it is to interview the families observed in order to understand their composition. Usually the concept of "family", as it is used in museums literature, is intuitively and uncritically associated with the "nuclear family" (parents and children). Yet, in reality the family-visit unit is more complex than that.

Adults' age:

Within the fifty families, 59% of the men are under forty years old and so are 63% of the women. The age group (31-40) for both male and female groups is the one with highest rates (51% for men and 48% for women). As there are also grandparents in the sample, these values are even greater if just the parents group is taken into consideration. The phase corresponding to these parents' ages was called by Rhona and Robert Rapoport (1975) the *mid-establishment phase*, this (as described in chapter five) is the one during

which the parents' investment in their children education is higher as is their concern with the effectiveness of their family's leisure-performances (NR = Non Replies).

Men		Women	
16-20	0%	16-20	0%
21-30	8%	21-30	17%
31-40	51%	31-40	53%
41-50	23%	41-50	21%
51-60	8%	51-60	4%
61-70	8%	61-70	6%
>71	0%	>71	0%
N R	2%	N R	8%

Fig.8 Adults' age

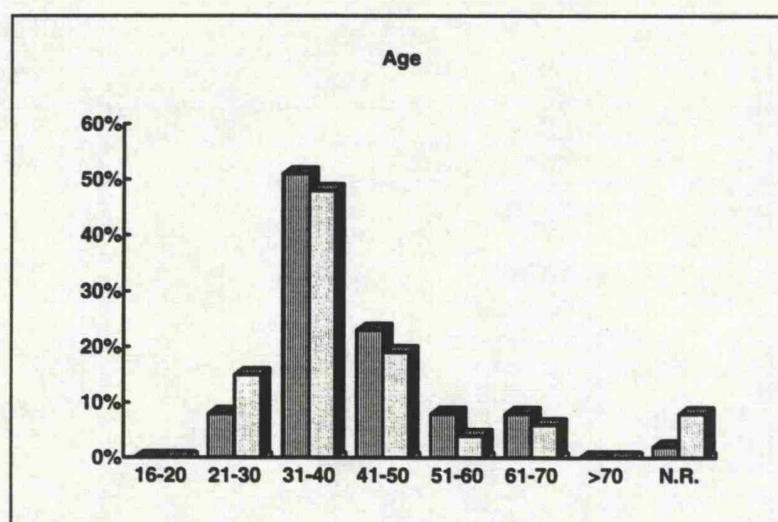


Fig.9. Adults' age

The families' social status

The families' social status was defined according to the profession of the men due to a high rate (58%) of housewives, and the evidence that no wife possessed a professional status higher than her husband. Seventy nine percent of the families correspond to grades A, B and C1³. Fifty six percent correspond to grades AB, which shows that this sample has an even higher upmarket profile than the Museum's population at the time (41% according to the General Survey made in the same year). There are ten percent of men in grades C2 and thirteen percent of women in grades C2 and D⁴. These values testify to a considerable rate of lower-middle class individuals in this sample. It may be hypothesised that this is a consequence of this Museum's move towards a more recreational atmosphere (increasingly based upon the creation of *mimetic* events) and therefore one that accepts a more cross-social audience.

Men		Women	
Retired	5%	Housewives	64%
A	18%	Retired	6%
B	38%	A	0%
C1	23%	B	9%
C2	10%	C1	17%
		C2	11%
		D	2%
Non Replies	6%	Non Replies	1%

Fig.10 Families' social status

³Defined by The Joint Industry Committee for National Readership Surveys as A: upper middle-class, B: middle class and C1: lower middle class.

⁴C2 skilled working class and D working class also according to JICNARS.

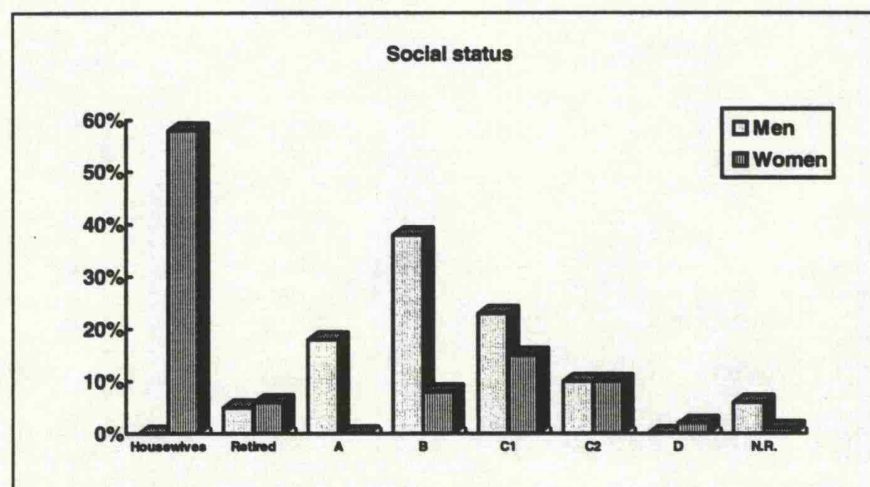


Fig.11 Families' social status

Educational profile

This index was obtained by reference to the highest level of schooling these adults have completed. In the male group, 57% percent have completed at least A levels. In the female group this value is lower (43%). However, the percentage of those who have at least a degree is similar for both groups (26% for men and 21% for women). These numbers show a considerably high level of education (cultural capital) for this sample. Yet 33% percent of men and 45% percent of women have not been through higher education, they have just attended compulsory education. These values suggest that this museum has an "non-academic" image for a significant part of its public which reinforces the previous hypothesis of its relatively important (if it is to be compared with more traditional museums), recreational appeal.

Men		Women	
CSE	15%	CSE	15%
O levels	22.5%	O levels	29%
A levels	15%	A levels	11%
OND/HND	7.5%	OND/HND	11%
Degree	25%	Degree	21%
H.Degree	0%	H.Degree	2%
Other	2.5%	Other	2%
Non Replies	13%	Non Replies	10%

Fig. 12 Educational profile

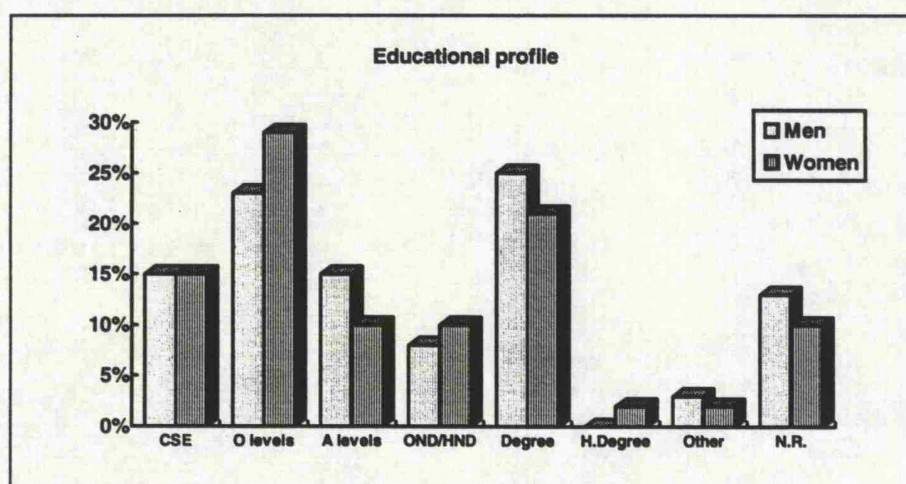


Fig.13 Educational profile

How did they come?

A high percentage of these families came by train (44%), which means that they came from outside London. Car and Bus/underground followed with 23% each. Others came by taxi, other means of transport and even walking (two).

Bus or Tube	23%
Taxi	4%
Walking	2%
Coach	2%
Mixed	2%

Fig.14 Transport used

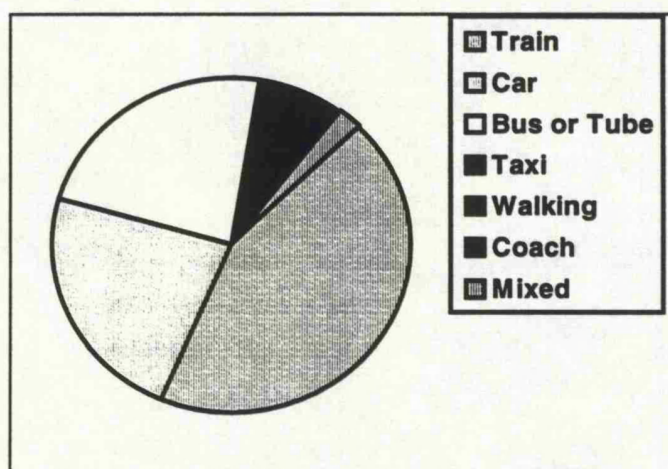


Fig. 15 Transport used

Sixty percent of the families travelled by car or train (the most expensive ways of travelling) to get to the museum. This confirms these families' high social profile. It also means that coming to this Museum was, for this sample, a *strong* decision in terms of distances and travelling costs.

How long did their journey take?

50% of the families spent more than one hour on their way to the Museum and 84% more than half an hour. Only eight families spent less than thirty minutes. These values confirm the high "cost" of this leisure choice (increased with the fact that most of the families have travelled with small children).

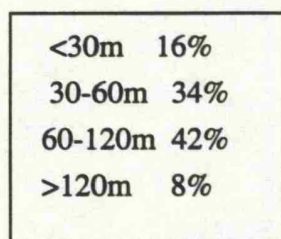


Fig. 16 Time spent in the journey

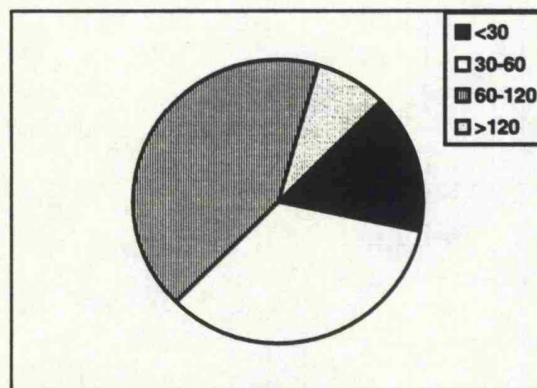


Fig. 17 Time spent in the journey

Where did they go before arriving at the Museum?

80% said that they came straight to the Museum. The other 20% went to other museums (2), monuments (2) and shops (4). This confirms that coming to the Natural History Museum was the main choice for most of these families.

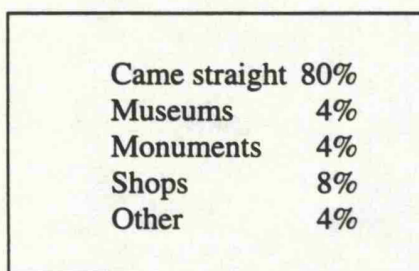


Fig. 18 Places visited before entering the Museum

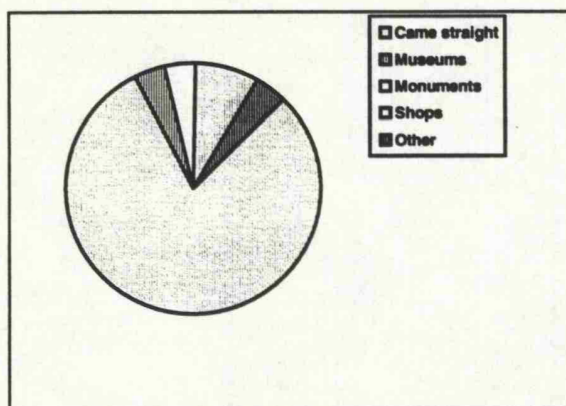


Fig. 19 Places visited before entering the Museum

The fact of privileging this Museum as their main choice, increases the families' expectations and thus may result in higher individual or group investments.

Where have they been (in the Museum) before entering this exhibition?

Most of the families (sixty percent) visited other exhibitions or went to the cafeteria and restaurant (twenty eight percent) and (less) to the museum shops (sixteen percent). This anticipates the emergence of *museum fatigue* which may be reflected in low role performance and low interaction with this exhibition. However, it is notable that twenty percent came straight to the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition despite its location quite far from the main entrance.

Came straight	20%
Exhibitions	60%
Restaurant	16%
Cafeteria	12%
Shops	16%

Fig.20 Places visited before entering the exhibition

This suggests that these visitors came with previous knowledge of this exhibition's contents and worth, as they have been preferentially attracted to it even when exhibitions

more technologically sophisticated (such as *Ecology*) have just opened. It may be that these parents wanted to show their children something which they remember positively from previous visits to this Museum⁵. The families that did not come straight to this exhibition referred to more than one place, therefore these percentages have to be taken separately and not relatively.

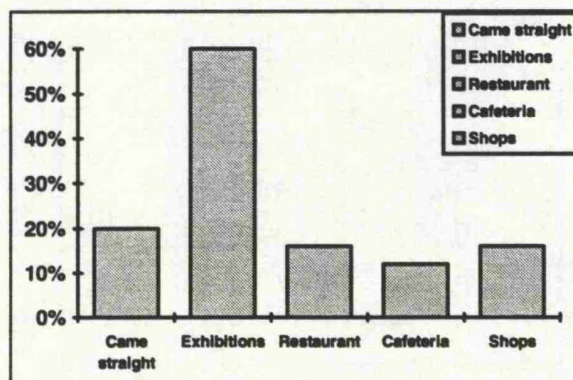


Fig. 21 Places visited before entering the exhibition

The time they spent inside the exhibition:

The time spent inside the exhibition was measured during the observation process.. It gives an idea of the exhibition attractiveness and visitors' investment.

<30 minutes	79%
30-40 minutes	11%
>40 minutes	9%

Fig.22 Time spent inside the exhibition

⁵When observing these families, two statements that confirm this prediction were heard: a mother asks the guard if the Big Whale is the same whale she used to see in her childhood; another parents says "there it is!" as soon as the family passes the exhibition entrance.

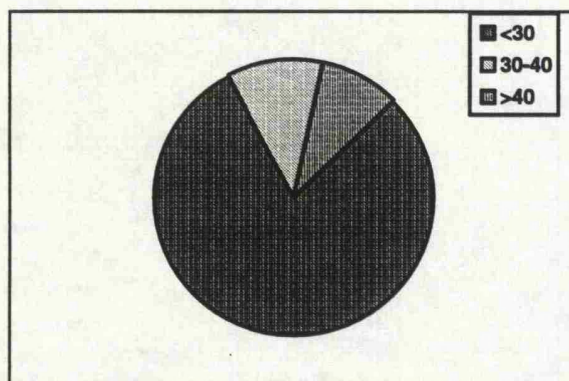


Fig. 23 Time spent inside the exhibition (chart)

The big majority of these families spent less than 30 minutes inside the *Discovering Mammals* exhibition (79%). This shows a distancing attitude; they either browsed and saw most of the exhibition at a glance or chose to stop and see carefully just some of the exhibits.

3.2. The fifty families in the "Discovering Mammals" exhibition¹

Entering the exhibition

The *Discovering Mammals* exhibition had an aesthetic impact upon the families. They experienced a kind of *mimetic excitement* immediately entering.

Different sorts of whales and dolphin models and skeletons hanging from the ceiling and an enormous model of a blue whale across all the exhibition's length, were the causes of high emotional arousal: "Look the whale!" says the father, "Wow!, wow!" the children reply. The mother asks "What is this?" The children say "It's a whale!" A child asks "is the blue whale the biggest animal in the world?", "Very big!" says a grandmother. "Who killed them?" asks a child. "I think no one killed them" answers an adult. "That's the biggest sort of whale!" says the mother crouching near her son. The mother enters holding her child's hand and says "My Gosh!". A family arrives and when they see the whale one of them says "There it is!", "Look at this!". Yet some families prefer instead to look at the whole environment in silence. Near the big whale photographs are taken.

The families enter the exhibition dispersed and wait for each other to move forward. They do not go straight to any single display, but seem instead to enjoy an overview of the whole the environment and before taking a decision about where to go, normally towards one of the biggest animals (hippopotamus, buffalo, elephant and giraffe) or to the closest text from where they can get some information. Some families start the visit with a discussion of the exhibition's theme. Normally one of the adults is involved in explaining what mammals are, before they see the displays. They start normally by turning left and are immediately confronted with the decision of whether to go upstairs. This may cause some problems as one of the group members normally tries to influence the others.

The aesthetic pleasure families experience when they enter is repeated (although less intensely) upstairs. They stop near the balcony and point to some details, which they discuss with each other. As the balcony goes around all the exhibition these stops may occur several times at different viewing points. The exhibition overview concentrates the

¹The sentences in inverted comas are excerpts from the observer's records. They refer either to descriptions such as: "a father is holding too many things in his hands"; or to the individuals' own words as they were heard by the observer such as: "Where is dad?", "not far".

group and is used for relaxed chattering. Some children take advantage of these breaks to lean on the balcony or to play by climbing on it (which may cause some tension). Whilst upstairs they have to decide again to turn left or to turn right. They try to follow the signs and seem happy when they find the arrow that says "this way". However, most of the time, they do not follow an organised path but wander haphazardly from one place to another.

The family figuration

The relationship of family members may acquire different forms in the course of the visit. Leadership may alternate with companionship and as it passes from member to member it will be variously directed. The group tends to work either together, or to divide into sub-groups or isolated individuals.

The father and the mother sometimes go in different directions and seem to enjoy different things and to have different viewing rhythms. Small children tend to join one of the adults or run from one to the other and from them to the displays. When they see something more exciting they call the rest of the group to come and see. Older children may create their own sub-group or work as mediators for smaller ones. Sometimes one of the adults makes the decision to mediate the exhibition for part of the group: the father chooses to go with a child and the mother with the other or others. However, this dyad may last just a few minutes till it is replaced by another. In some other cases one of the adults keeps throughout the visit an attitude of leader and/or "educator" whilst the other tends to stay in the background. In the cases where they go in different sub-groups or even dispersed, there is nevertheless a sense of togetherness manifested from time to time. It is common that whilst seeing the displays they interrupt viewing to look for each other "Where is dad?", "Not far", "You've lost them?, OK, we'll find them", "Let's keep an eye on mummy where is she?". If part of the group stayed downstairs in order to let the others know where they are, some members shout and wave hello from the balcony.

Visiting the exhibition does not occur most of the time in the best physical conditions as the family has to carry different things (the same kind of things that they would have brought to other leisure settings): one of the adults, normally the father, carries a rucksack with the family's needs (normally a picnic); "A girl carries her coat", "A father is holding too many things in his hand", "A child carries a teddy bear inside a plastic bag". If there is

a pram it is normally the mother who pushes it. In some cases she is replaced by her husband. The person who pushes the pushchair either stays behind or marks the family's viewing rhythm.

The interaction with the exhibition environment is sometimes interrupted with looking after the children or ones' own needs. This is a role in most cases assumed by women (mothers or grandmothers). "The mother sits on the bench, then she goes to the toilet and comes back". "A child says 'can I have my coat in a minute?' the mother gives her the coat and she looks for something in its pockets". "The mother asks her daughter if she wants to go to the toilet". "The mother helps the child put on her coat".

This exhibition, maybe due to its location, seems to be at the end of some itinerary the families have defined for themselves: some families sit on a bench to eat a picnic just after entering. Others sit and eat upstairs. These breaks may last fifteen minutes (more than the average time of the whole visit). "They stop to drink orange juice". "The grandmother says 'it's lunch time'". "The mother takes some cookies from a bag in order to feed the children". They also combine satisfying biological needs with interacting with the exhibition: whilst eating, a child asks some questions about the exhibition. The mother sees an exhibit while attentively eating cookies; the grandmother opens a bag and gives her grandson a piece of cheese in front of the video.

When an adult comes on his or her own (the father or the mother) with the children, he/she is more concerned in mediating the exhibition to them and with their satisfaction, and less with his/her own enjoyment. Some other parents, however, read labels for themselves and seem not to care much about the children for a while. This lack of attention normally results in the children starting to interact with all the interactive displays without any purpose, or to wander around without showing any particular interest in anything. "A child asks a question and does not get any reply". "The child calls insistently but the grandfather replies 'hold on!'".

Physical contact, meaning affection, is frequently combined with explanations. This can also be used to keep the children concentrating and under the parents' supervision. From time to time one of the adults (more often the mother) crouches in order to speak to the children, or an adult picks the child up in order to interact with an exhibit. "A grandmother shows the exhibition from upstairs to her grandson by putting her arm over his shoulders". "The father explains something to a child whilst walking along the

corridor". "The father puts his arm on his wife's shoulder and they walk forward". "A mother takes her child in her arms to show the exhibition from upstairs". "The child sits on her father's knees and leans her head on his chest". "An adult puts her hand on the child's hand to help him press a button". "An adult hugs a child while explaining something". "A child picks up another child up so she can interact with a display". "The grandfather holds the girl in his arms and she laughs a lot". "The mother explains something to a child putting her arm around her". "A child runs towards his father, who tells him not to run and holds him in his arms". "The mother kisses her daughter whom she holds before putting her down". "An adult strokes a child's hair when watching a display".

Some members experience boredom (the visiting experience seems to be for them a *flop*) whilst the others seem to be enjoying it quite a lot. In this sample boredom has seemed to be more a characteristic of men than of women. "The father looks around to see where everyone is and then sits on a bench". "The father is bored and is getting anxious. He looks at the other family members with his hands clasped behind his back and stands in the middle of the exhibition". "Children looking very tired tell the others 'you keep going, we are going to have a rest' and they sit eating crisps whilst the father goes forward with a girl". "The father looks silently and does not seem to be reading anything. He walks with his hands in his pockets". "A child sits on the floor". "The mother explains something whilst the father lags behind". "A child (ten) looks very bored". Another child "is tired and sits whilst his mother helps his sister to fill a worksheet and the father goes off on his own". "Because of a pram the mother cannot go upstairs so the children go on their own and she stays behind looking tired". "The mother lets out a sigh when she sees the father stopping and suggest that they move forward. She is pushing a pram".

The exchange of information is an occasion for different sorts of interaction, even when the information does not comprise an accurate or complete explanation. Some adults read labels loudly and discuss their content with the others. "The mother says 'look at that, that's a sea cow', the boy turns round and moves forward, 'where are you going?' asks the mother, 'I am going to tell daddy that that's a sea cow'" says the child excitedly". "The mother reads loudly 'can sea cows survive?' the child answers 'yes they can' and they move forward". Other do not seem to pay much attention but they still reply: "The child says 'this is an elephant' pointing at the rhinoceros's leg the father says 'hum, hum' showing agreement". Some children tell other children what a display is for, and give them some useful directions. One child explains to another child who approaches an

interactive display "you have to pull it down". Other children seem instead to compete with each other over the things they have already seen by saying to each other "I have seen this, I have seen that".

The figuration families/exhibition

The family figuration cannot be isolated from another figuration involving the family members in relation to the exhibition's proposals and stimuli. The family, although unconsciously conditioned by the exhibition atmosphere, is in great measure free to interact with its surroundings.

They read some of the labels loudly and point to the display whilst explaining. Explanations are often preceded by an introduction "I'm going to explain how this works" or "I'll tell you what this is", "Do you want to see how this works?" in order to keep everybody's attention, "Stand there and listen to the sound of the whales". "A child (eight) takes notes on a piece of paper, and the mother corrects her spelling". "Some children make a drawing of the big whale". Some displays are seen in greater detail and seem to have the power to provoke the excitement of all the group (hippopotamus running under water, the voices of the elephants). Some displays are used in ways for which they were not designed: "a child sits on a display and says loudly 'I can sit down on here'". "A child says 'can I sit here?' the mother replies 'yes you can sit there' and sits her on a display".

Some parents make real efforts to interpret the exhibition to their children by using all informative materials available: "The mother reads a label loudly but the child looks around not paying attention". "The mother demonstrates her child's skeleton by running her hand down his back". "One of the adults points out the text so the child can read". "One of the adults makes an exhibit move in order to explain something to the children". "A grandmother explains how to interact with the video programme 'come on, you have to touch the screen to choose what do you want'". However, some other parents do not seem too interested in fulfilling this mediation role: "when a child asks the adult to read loudly the adult reads unwillingly showing anxiety", a mother explains things in a way her child (four) cannot understand like "it's about how whales use their senses to communicate".

Not only the exhibition theme is discussed but also museographic details. Comments in front of the exhibits vary from the contents and the physical characteristics of the displays to discussions of whether the animals are stuffed. Frequent comments are "is it real?", "this is a model", "the father touches the dolphin in order to feel what it is made of". The son asks: "is that a real one?", "no, it is just the shape of a whale" says the father. Individuals also seem to notice and comment on exhibits that are missing.

Family members may share different types of interaction with displays. While the children interact with a video programme the adult reads loudly the closest labels. Whilst the child looks through the hole the father turns the wheel. An adult relates what is on the screen to some photographs nearby pointing at them, or related one display with another.

Comments are sometimes made by the parents using a childish language "these legs are so tiny that". For the younger ones parents also try to make the displays look more realistic "you see they are making cuddles", "look at this tiny deer". This "virtual" realism confuses a child (four) who, when watching the video of the hippopotamus swimming, calls loudly "hippopotamus!". Another very young child listens to elephant sounds through the telephone, and says "hello".

Sometimes the parents' explanation attracts other group members. A child leaves the exhibit with which he is interacting in order to listen to the father's explanation elsewhere". In order to be more efficient these explanations often follow a question "Do you know what echo is?".

All the displays that move are energetically activated (the globe showing the oceans is turned by most of the families just for the pleasure of seeing it turning). When children are forced to move quickly through the corridors they like to pass their hands on the exhibits. Generally both children and adults like to touch objects (and not just children) "the elephant's trunk is touched by the mother", "the inside of the tapir's mouth is touched by the uncle followed by the nieces", "the mother touched the elephant's teeth". Some interactive displays are activated without any understanding of what they are made for and buttons are pushed without any purpose. Sometimes this may happen in the case of adults too as parents also seem to be willing to play with an interactive exhibit without any understanding of its content.

Families often have to wait for their turn to interact with exhibits. As some members have to wait for the others this may create some anxiety. "A child becomes very anxious" "I want a go" she says, the mother replies "you'll have a go in a minute!".

However, some family members seem happy just to look at the others doing it. Others like to help which may happen more or less easily. Some children like their parents to watch them interacting with a display: "the child pushes a button and turns round to see where the father is. When she sees that he is not there any more she shouts 'dad!'" . Other would rather play on their own: "A child plays with a computer while the others are watching. His sister presses a button, 'she is pressing 'continue' complains the child looking very annoyed". After pressing the buttons vigorously the child starts to understand what is happening. His sister tells him to calm down "can I play now?" she says. "Next time you can". "Come on, let's get out of this," says the girl looking very cross as she moves to the next display. The father helps the child to work with the computer. He says, "are you ready? press continue". If there are other people around, audio-visuals tend to be watched silently. The father is interacting with a display, the mother leaves the video she is watching and comes to see what he is doing. Father participates with children in an interactive game saying "very good, to the left, to the right...". Before starting an interactive game the father says "let's see if you can do this right". The father lets the child press the button after he has decided which is the right answer.

Sometimes they *evaluate* the exhibit content after experiencing it. "After an interactive experience the mother asks, 'was it good?'" . "It was very interesting", says the mother after the video programme. "It is telling us how the whale breeds. It is hard to understand isn't it?" says the grandfather. Or a mother says "it is so depressing!" referring to what is happening to the whales. "How did they kill all the family?" says a child referring to the stuffed elephants. "It's a shame" replies the father. A child says "they look disgusting", pointing at the camels. The father says, "this is a true story. I think they would not put it here if it wasn't".

Most families after some moments of concentration on a display suddenly move on through along the corridor without looking at anything, as if they needed a break. However, some displays, such as video programmes, seem to have the power to make all the group suddenly stop and concentrate in front of the screen. After seeing a video the group tends to miss the exhibits that follow walking along the corridor as if they were

leaving the cinema. Headphones with the voices of elephants are also a good attraction for most groups. Normally someone discovers them first and then calls the others to come and listen.

Parents' leadership

Leadership is often connected with teaching and forcing the children to make the most of the visit. Despite the exhibitions' informal ambience, parents may also impose constraints upon their children's behaviour and show their dissatisfaction each time their rules are not followed.

Very frequently one of the adults calls the children by saying "This way" making a gesture and leading them along the corridors. Often children resent this intrusion. "Okay kids!" says the grandmother suddenly and decisively showing she wants to move forward". "The mother, looking very cross, asks her daughters if they have been wandering around 'missing everything'. The girls reply that they thought 'this place was the beginning of the exhibition". The mother leads the group using a worksheet she is holding and which says "turn right and find...", the mother reads loudly and the child writes on the worksheet. The father stays downstairs. When the child goes upstairs the mother says "hang on, let's wait for your daddy, let's go here first". "What do you think this is?". "Think!" says one of the adults.

Leadership is also used to correct behaviour: "Have I been good?" says the boy "Have I been good, mum?". "The child interacts with a display and the mother says he is making too much noise". "A father tells his child off". "A child climbs onto a display and his grandmother smacks his bottom". "You were not supposed to jump on this!" she says. "Get down!" says another mother when her child was climbing on to a display". "The child is whistling whilst watching the video'. Are you watching this?', asks the grandmother looking cross".

A mother tells her child off near the stairs before leaving. "The mother is cross with her son because he is walking too fast". The mother says, "You've got two choices do you understand?...stay together". The boy turns right but the mother rectifies his movement. The grandfather says they are not going upstairs. Mother gets anxious and says "Please!" waiting for her children. They just come when she says "Bye, bye". A child climbs onto the bench and the mother says "Oh! don't do that!". A child says "I don't want to go that

way" and pushes the mother in the opposite direction. The father says "No!" and holds her arm pushing her.

A child says she wants to go around but the father replies, "Let's go, there is lots to see". A child walks forward but the father makes her come back. The mother asks the child not to make that noise because, "It is getting on my nerves". A child turns a wheel and the mother shouts "Stop doing it!" The father wants to try an interactive display but the child is there and screams. The father says, "If you do not move from there you shall never come back again".

The balcony seems to be a cause of conflicts. In some cases a father runs to take his children off whilst they are climbing on to it. An adult takes a child from it and she responds by rolling on the floor and crying loudly in a temper tantrum. Not having the children by their side may cause anxiety and the arousal of tension. "A child disappears on his own; the father comes along with the child holding his arm; the mother is very cross and makes the child go closer the wall "Do you want to stay with us? or do you want to go home?"; the child cries as he holds the pram sobbing; the mother is still very cross, "Don't go anywhere else!"; after a short time the boy says, "I am going there" and moves forward a bit. The mother proves how her son is not listening by saying "Are you listening? I've just said something to you". The boy goes on a bit further to reach his father. The mother calls him again and he comes back to the pram. The girl in the pram wants to stand up but the father puts her back on her seat and says, "Come on, there is a lot more to see". Whilst having a picnic a child stands up and the mother shouts "Sit down!". Some parents respond anxiously to their children's calls "What do you want?" or "Wait a minute!".

If part of the group is engaged in making something work and forgets a child, this child wonders around without purpose. The movements through the corridors are either slow or quick depending on who leads the group, normally adults. Some children get very anxious as they are forced to follow the adults or listen to them. A mother shouts "Just listen!". Some other children seem to accept the parents' guidance "Mummy what are we going to do next, are we going this way?" says a child to the mother who is pushing a pram.

Moments of open excitement or less controlled behaviour

Children tend to have a more emotional approach to displays than do adults. This excitement is mostly expressed before something visually impressive. Moments of fun and the exchange of jokes among family members were also observed as a reaction to some of the displays.

Expressions such as "Oh my gosh!" or "That's impossible!" can be heard mainly in front of big animals (the big whale, the bison). The video of the hippopotamus running under water provokes laughs. "Baby elephant!" shouts a boy near the elephant. A child laughs and whistles. A child looks scared and does not want to enter the exhibition. In some situations the other members of the group seem to experience a certain amount of pleasure just by looking at the others interacting with the displays. "Jenny!" says the mother pointing to the mammoth. The boy says "Mammoth" with excitement. A child makes a lot of noise laughing near "extreme temperatures". "This is amazing", "This is funny" "Wow!" says a child after interacting with a display. The grandfather whistles from time to time. The adults are more aware of details and call the children to experience things that they find interesting, such as hearing the voice of African elephants by means of a headphone. The children look very excited about the "bison".

Sometimes it is the child who discovers it first: "Hey daddy watch this funny noise!". A mother pretends to be excited in order to keep the children's attention "Who knows what this is?". "That's incredible!" says the mother whilst interacting with "Massive Mammals". This display is a good pretext for laughing and teasing: when the wife is on the scales the husband starts laughing as she pretends to give him a pat with her hand. A child laughs on his own whilst interacting with a display: he says excitedly "It jumped through!". The parents' manifestation of enthusiasm seems to have a positive effect on children. Children wave hello excitedly to the mother from the balcony. A child sings uninterruptedly on her mother's back. Some children passing by make strange noises resembling the animals' voices. "I'm watching telly" shouts a child. A small child (four) looks very scared of the balcony while the others push him forward saying, "Don't be scared". Mother laughs when she sees the milk bottles.

In order to increase the exhibition *mimetic* effects, sometimes one of the family members imitates the animal's voice: a mother says to her daughter "Oh Jessica look at this ooooh!" (a wild boar) the mother makes the noise of the dolphin eating a fish. The father makes strange noises in order to explain something. The girl puts her hands on the floor in order

to demonstrate how the horse walks. "Show us" says the father laughing. The father explains to the mother how elephants walk making gestures. The girls imitate the whale's sounds by pressing their nose with their hand (as the display suggests); the mother corrects their hands' position. The mother smacks her daughter's bottom tenderly with her foot when she achieves a good result with the computer. Whilst interacting with a display a father seems to enjoy playing with the children a lot, the children copy his gestures making a lot of noise. A child laughs when he sees the goat's excrement.

Relating the exhibition to other family experiences

Individuals link what they see and learn in the Museum with their common memories and family routines. Their lives are not kept apart from the museum experience.

A child relates what he sees with what he has seen on a television programme: "This is like the one I saw on the programme". In front of the big whale one group refers to Pinocchio. A grandmother says, "When I was educated in Australia ...". In the middle of the exhibition a child says to his mother, "Are we going to the McDonald's now?". A mother says, looking very annoyed "If I knew that you were coming to play with video games, I would have let you stay at home playing with video games". A father explains the birth of a dolphin comparing it with the birth of a baby repeatedly saying "like you".

A mother enters the exhibition with a child and asks the guard if the whale is the same as the one she used to see in her childhood. The guard says it is. "I'm watching telly" shouts a child. Near the globe the father asks, "Where is England?". A grandmother explains to her grand-daughter, pointing at the globe "When I went to Australia I had to fly all this way from here to there!". A child wants to know where England is on the globe. The parents turn the globe and show London. "Have you seen a whale before?" asks the mother, "No we have not seen a whale before". A mother says, "Look, you know what these are!". "We must buy a book about this" says the mother. "I prefer *Home and Away* to *Neighbours*²" says a lady to another near the elephants. Listening to the voices of elephants a girl (four) shouts "it's a dinosaur!".

²The name of two soap-operas currently showing (daily) on English television.

Interaction with other visitors outside the family group

The family is not alone in the exhibition. Their visit experience is also shared by other people that go there that same day. These strangers may impose constraints on access to the exhibits or instead they may help to create a highly sociable environment.

Mother holds the child's hand and says, "come on, there are too many people here really". Some families seem to look around in a state of confusion, too many people. A group has to be in a queue in order to interact with an exhibit. The video is normally seen with other people silently. "Do you see that lady there?" says a mother to her child in order to keep his attention. Waiting for their turn the group watches a child using the computer. As he takes too long the family group gives up waiting. A lady asks if the mother (of the group being observed) has seen her children and gives a description. This interferes with the mother's concentration and she does not listen to what her children are saying until she is sure that this lady has found her daughters. The mother holds the child's hand in order to cross a crowded space.

Exiting the exhibition

The family leaves the exhibition usually after deciding where to go next, by looking at the exhibition map or catalogue, or without any map. More often it is the father who handles the map and leads the discussion.

In one case the discussion about where to go took more time than the visit itself. Sometimes all the family rests before leaving. One of the adults tends to lead the group towards the exit. "Before leaving the exhibition the father looks around in order to be sure they have seen everything". There is a last glance at the exhibit or a last interaction with a display. In some cases they walk together hand in hand towards the exit. Sometimes the discussion of where to go next is based on the evaluation of the time they have left, "we just have seven minutes".

3.3. Four types of family interaction

Martin Herbert (1988)¹ has defined a range of Parental-Behavioural-Types within two major dimensions: Autonomy/Control and Hostility/Warmth. These two opposed dimensions will be adopted as a conceptual grid to describe these families' interactions whilst they were in the exhibition.

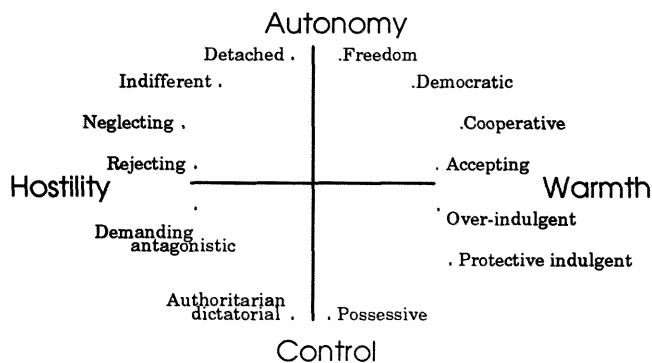


Fig. 24 Martin Herbert's model

To Martin Herbert's grid were added zones in which these families' interactions were inscribed².

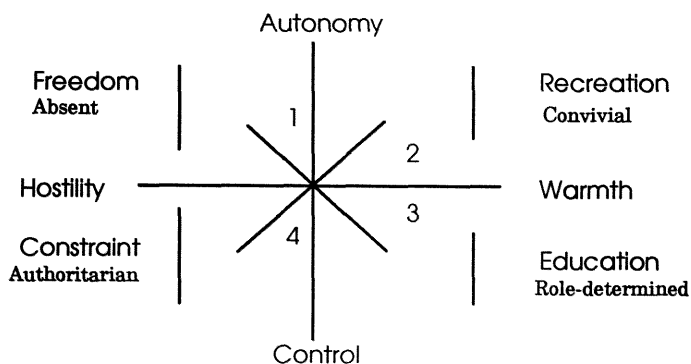


Fig. 25 Adaptation of Herbert's model

¹Professor of Clinical Psychology, University of Leicester.

²The idea of zones was thought to be more flexible than Herbert's points joining the different axes' co-ordinates.

The typology: "absent", "convivial", "role-determined" and "authoritarian" families created according to this grid (more or less autonomy or control, combined with more or less hostility or warmth) is consistent with Elias and Dunning's crucial recognition of different grades of *control* (or *decontrol*) of individuals' emotions and affects in their leisure activities.

In order to enhance this distinction with a dimension of *meaning*, that is one that makes the link with the families' *recreational* or *educational* expectations (a distinction central to the present thesis), the notion of *convivial* and *role-determined* modes of interaction was adopted from John Kelly's "relative freedom model" (1983: 13).

John Kelly has distinguished between *positive relational satisfactions* such as "I enjoy the companionship", "I feel I belong" and "it strengthens relationships" and those which are *role-determined* such as "expected to by the family" and "it's a duty". In other words, families' interactions that are valued primarily for the experience can be distinguished from activities that first of all meet role expectations. According to Kelly, "in this model not only is freedom retained as a central defining element, but the social meaning of leisure is stressed to recognise the reality of recuperation from the constraints of other roles and the centrality of primary-group interaction as a kind of leisure". More or less freedom allowed among the family elements determines more or less *convivial* experiences. In other words, the higher the importance given to the positive-relational dimension the more convivial is the experience, the higher the importance given to the role-determined factor the less convivial is the experience. In the latter case the high is the importance given to the family *civilizing* (imposition of constraints on oneself and the younger generations) functions in leisure.

The *recreational* meaning the Museum may have for some families is here related to what Kelly has called positive relational satisfactions (*relational leisure*). Its *educational* function and the way parents use it in their interaction with their children is related to the parents' sense of duty, that is, it is role-determined. It is also possible to state that the former is the attitude that is favoured in a *postmodern* environment (the *figural* discourse captures both generations and equalises their roles) and the latter the attitude that best corresponds to a *modernist* discourse (the modernist narrative favours the construction of

a relationship of dependence, the parents interpret, the children listen, (when there is informative material to teach and to be taught³.)

Methodology

A matrix was produced for each family visit with a column for each family member in which their movements, attitudes and oral discourse were marked together with arrows showing from whom and to whom interaction was directed and how often (see example in appendix 6). This was the method used to classify these families according to four family types:

1 - Absent families: the ones in which parents show great disaffection in their interaction with children. They seem not to have any concern about what their children might gain from the visit. Their dominant attitude is one of non-interventionism. The family as a whole shows passivity and low or non-existent emotional arousal. Children look frustrated and lack concentration: they interact mechanically with displays by pushing buttons haphazardly or by just passing their hands over the displays. The group tends to be dispersed and the visit is normally very short. Parents act as if they "brought the kids".

An example of an absent visit: The parents see everything silently, they do not reply or care about what their child does or says. The mother explains something in a way the child cannot understand. The boy is permanently behind and talks to himself. Nothing seems to keep the parents concentrating or interested. They do not stop to look at anything. The global experience is very routinized. The father walks with his hands in his pockets. The boy asks "is it real?" but does not get any reply. They enter the video box "sea cows" but leave immediately. The boy asks where England is but the mother just says "you can't see it" and does not make any effort to hold him so he can see". The parents walk without speaking to each other. They see everything from far away and nothing seems to catch their attention. The boy asks something, but the father is looking at the map and does not reply. They exit.

2 - Convivial families: they value relational leisure, "the one that is chosen because of the interaction rather than the form of the activity or the locale" (Kelly 1983). The museum is used more for entertainment and to demonstrate family solidarity than for educational

³This link is not very important for the present argument yet it enhances the whole study's coherence.

purposes. A fair balance between control and autonomy is achieved, or "a controlled decontrolling" of individuals behaviour to use an Elias and Dunning concept. Children are free to wander around the exhibition, albeit under their parents' friendly supervision. From time to time the parents call their children and invite them to come and see some display. There are often kisses and cuddles as well as laughs and jokes. Parents may also be called by their children to come and see, do or listen. If the children want to see something the parents follow them and wait patiently. They wait for their children to push buttons and seem happy just to see their excitement even if the children do not understand what they are doing. Each individual rhythm is respected. No one works as leader and so they tend to see the exhibition either dispersed or as a (spontaneous) block. The group is together when seeing videos or when interacting with more appealing displays. "Mimetic" experiences are the most favoured. The exhibits "Massive Mammals" and "Heavy Going" are used in a recreational way: jokes and friendly competitiveness shadow their instructive content. Children running and parents whistling reflect a relaxed atmosphere. They stop to have picnics or to do other things not connected with the exhibition. The visit lasts till someone shows tiredness or lack of enthusiasm. However, it may last longer than the average time. Parents act as if they "came with the kids".

An example of a convivial visit: They seem very excited with the exhibition overview when they enter. The parents go to the front, the children stay behind. They all stop near a display. The mother explains but the children prefer to go and see something else. They all stop near "Who's who?" and then walk together through the corridor without seeing anything and talking animatedly. The children stop to play with an interactive display whilst the parents read labels. The girl joins her mother and both listen to the elephant voices. She asks the child if she wants to go to the toilet. All the family sees together the video "sea cows". The girl takes some photographs near "sounds they make". The mother laughs when she sees the milk bottles. The girl lies on the balcony. The children are excited interacting with "squeal, whizz, squeak". The child calls "come on mummy" and she forces the mother to go back to the video. The mother hugs the girl whilst seeing the elephants. The parents join their children near the computer. The mother gives her children some cookies. The father looks at the map. The mother imitates the wild boar and the children laugh. The father waits near the entrance. The mother approaches holding her children's hands. They exit together.

3 - Role-determined families: both parents or just one of them *leads* the group and assumes the role of mediator/educator throughout the visit. The leader tends to be

omnipresent and has the control of both time, space, and group interaction. The leader seeks to maintain the group's cohesion for the sake of the visit's educational function. However, group dispersion is allowed from time to time following also educational purposes. The parents' mode of interaction is basically concept-orientated and thus it favours the children's intellect more than their emotions. "Mimetic" experiences are approved as a way to enhance learning. The controlled decontrolling of children's behaviour is tighter (more control less decontrolling) in this case, as parents have educational goals in mind they want to fulfil. The visit's duration is prolonged even when children look tired. Parents act as if "they came for the kids".

An example of a role-determined visit: the father explains before he allows the children to move ahead "I'm going to explain how this works". The mother reads the text before the child pushes the button. "Let's see something else" she says. The mother says several times "Look at this". When pointing to the horse she says "That's a horse, a domestic horse". The father makes the girls stop interacting by saying "All right". The mother says "We went the wrong way round". The father shows Artiodactyls in the Arctic and says "They live in very cold places". The child wants to see a video but the mother says kindly "Come on lets see this instead". The mother says "Slowly" when she sees the child moving the wheel too quickly. The mother says "Now you watch this!". The grandmother explains "they are just showing you that they look very similar." She asks the boy: "Do you want to see the video?" as soon as he seems to be losing concentration "Are you watching this?" she says looking anxious. They move forward. The father says "Come on, I think we should go now" but before leaving he still explains "This is an African elephant because it has got big ears".

4 - Authoritarian families, educational goals are less important than discipline. The parents' investment favours children's correct behaviour in the site. It is a very routinized experience. Keeping the children at hand all the time becomes obsessive and creates a permanent tension which spoils the interaction with the displays and with the global exhibition atmosphere. The adult leader dominates the children by means of permanent surveillance, sanctions and threats. The group works as a block. No emotional arousal or excitement is allowed. Instead there is constant constraint. It is a very routinized experience. The visit is normally short. They act as if they would "prefer not to be with the kids".

An example of an authoritarian visit: The father pushes a push chair. He decides to go upstairs and holds the little one's hand. The mother shows that they must start from the left hand side. The child asks a question but the father does not reply, just says "that's it". The children fight. The mother is very cross and tells them off. The mother reads labels without speaking to the children. The father explains something. "I have just told you something", he says to the children who were not listening ". "Do you want to stay with us or do you want to go home?" says the mother angrily. The father shouts, "stop taking your sister's hands from the displays". The mother says "come on!" each time the children stop. The boy cries and looks very frustrated. The father refuses to wait for the boy's turn to interact with a display. The child shows disappointment. The father speaks loudly and makes all the family move to the exit.

Results

Convivial	23	
Role-determined	20	(the leader is a woman = 15)
Absent	5	
Authoritarian	2	

Due to these results' obvious subjectivity it is not possible to refer to their quantitative meaning. It is nevertheless acceptable to state that *convivial families* were in this sample almost as numerous as *role-determined* and that they were together the two major types of interaction observed on the site. This must be understood not only in the context of these families but also in the context of this exhibition and of this Museum. It has been recognised from the beginning of this thesis, that the setting itself creates modes of perception according to a certain communicational logic that favours some attitudes and tends to exclude others, in the same way as it favours or excludes different social groups.

A high percentage of these families (*convivial*) chose a relaxed and not very engaged attitude. They were "window-shoppers or browsers", rather than "serious buyers" and preferred a positive intra-group relationship. It is nevertheless important to highlight the considerable proportion of *role-determined* families. Although this statement may lack empirical evidence it may be hypothesised that despite this Museum's *mimetic* appeal there is still a very considerable number of parents that try to get the most of its

educational content and to be *effective mediators* between the exhibition and their children.

Absent families were very few and this may be the result of "museum fatigue". Authoritarian families were almost non-existent at least in their "pure" form. However some authoritarian behaviour observed showed, (again this is just an hypothesis), an old fashioned view of education and/or of what is appropriate museum-behaviour.

3.4. *What kind of experience did they say they had at the exhibition?*

The questionnaire, also contained a *semantic scale* from which it was possible to learn how these people evaluated their own experience.

Relaxing or Stimulating
Active or Passive
Play or Work
Inspiring or Ordinary
Educational or Recreational

Individuals were asked to choose one concept out of each pair (stimulating or relaxing) (see appendix 4), however in some cases they just chose one or two out of the whole set. The percentages thus refer to each concept in relation to the total number of men or women. Women (mothers, grandmothers, aunt) considered their experience to be much more *stimulating* than *relaxing* (64% against 10%). They also considered the experience to be more *active* (57%) than *passive* (11%). However for these women it was a *playful* (*active*) *stimulation* (51% chose *play* against 11% who chose *work*). Between *inspiring* and *ordinary* they were positive that it was *inspiring* (51% against 17%). Finally, despite having a playful side, this exhibition was for these women much more *educational* than *recreational* (73% against 15%).

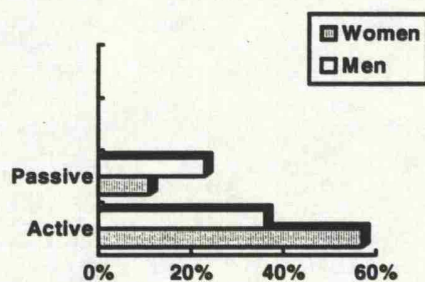


Fig.26 Passive or active

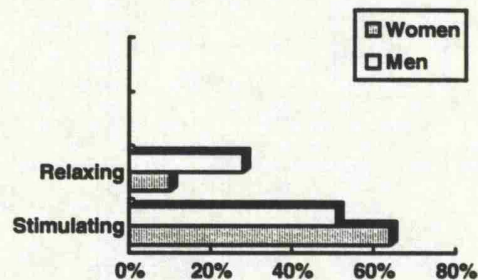


Fig.27 Relaxing or stimulating

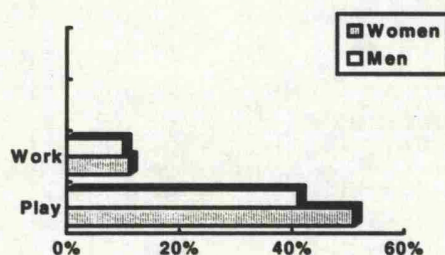


Fig. 28 Work or play

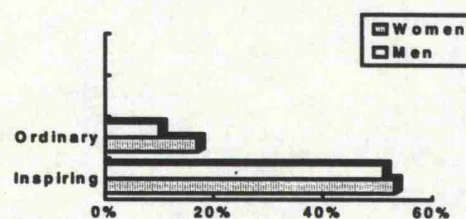


Fig. 29 Ordinary or inspiring

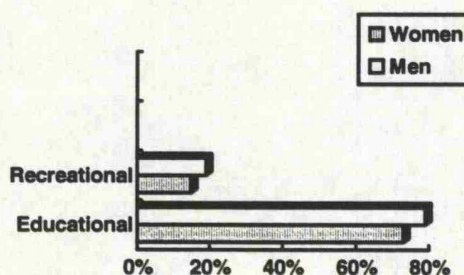


Fig. 30 Recreational or educational

Men (fathers, grandfathers and uncles) also considered the experience to be more *stimulating* than *relaxing* (51%, 28%). However, for them it was more *relaxing* than for their women partners (28% against 10%). In keeping with this result, the difference between *active* and *passive* was also less accentuated (36% for active and 23% for passive). Forty one percent of men said it was a *play* experience and just ten percent related it to *work*. In what concerns the opposition - *inspiring* and *ordinary* - the results

were similar to those of the women. As far as the distinction between *educational* or *recreational* is concerned, the results were also close to those of women: (79%) considered it *educational* and just (19%) considered it *recreational*.

The importance thus given to *education* (79% in both cases) is not consistent with the observation records. According to the observations, for half of the families (convivial, absent and authoritarian) the commitment to learning from the exhibition was considerably low. It may be that these people relate the *museum* with *education* even though they do not behave accordingly, or that these people know that this is the kind of answer they are expected to give in a written questionnaire of this kind.

The importance of *activity* against *passivity*, *stimulation* against *relaxation* together with the dimension of *play* (against *work*) while keeping a strong commitment to *education* (against *recreation*), seems to be a good hypothesis of what family visitors experience in a visit to the Natural History Museum today. Starting with *education*, which is the strongest function, this Museum is seen to *educate* through *active* and *stimulating* forms without losing its *ludic* content. However, it is also experienced as not providing a *recreational* atmosphere, (a word that may still connote loss of *respectability*).

Women are nevertheless, the ones that seem to be more available to be engaged (active) and stimulated by the museum's educational role which they can combine with looking after their children's biological needs⁴. However as regards the distinction "play or work", they were more positive in relation to play than men were. This may be due to the fact that most of these women spend their time at home and are used to playing with the children and to communicating with them by means of written materials such as books or magazines or through audio-visual media such as videos and television. Their domestic role may have also created a greater need for active and stimulating (exciting) experiences outside the home, and a need for self-actualisation which makes them become more receptive to learning whatever the museum has to offer. Men, working full time, seek for a more *social-relational* role (like being with the family) and are thus less committed to the museum's contents.

⁴When referring to women watching television with their families Brodic and Stoneman (1983) found that mothers tended to maintain their roles as "domestic manager" across program types, whereas their husbands tended to abandon their manager/parent role when viewing materials of particular interest to them".

Children could also reveal their feelings about the exhibition by choosing among different faces (Minda Borun's "rating scale" 1982): showing a big smile, a short smile, neutral, sad and very sad. This question was completed even by four year olds. Forty eight children answered it. Seventy three percent chose the face that showed greater enjoyment, twenty two percent the less happy face and two percent the neutral one. First of all, these results demonstrate that even very small children can be critical. It is easier for a child to choose the face with the biggest smile as children are normally positive and this is the one that "invites" the more straightforward answer. However, twenty two percent said that they liked the exhibition but not that much, and one child was not sure whether he liked it or not. It is not safe to speculate about these results. Nonetheless, they are here presented as a way to complete the families' evaluation of their experience in this exhibition.

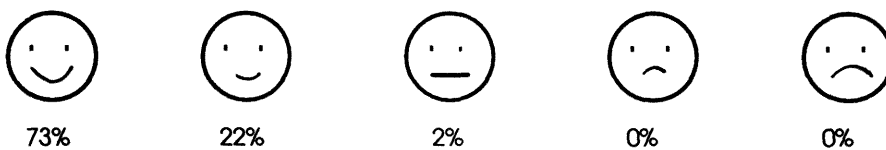


Fig.31 The children's semantic scale

3.5. What do they remember from the exhibition?

The comments these family members wrote in the questionnaire about what they remembered from the exhibition were further organised according to the following topics: (i) physical aspects, (ii) basic content; (iii) content showing knowledge gains; (iv) praise; (v) criticism.

(i) Physical aspects were amongst the most mentioned. They related mostly to size, and to the "Big Whale": "the whale was big and I never thought that they got that big". They use expressions like "impressive size", "massive" and mentioned the importance of seeing the "actual" or "real" size. Noises and sounds were also mentioned.

(ii) Comments showing basic understanding of the exhibition content were about *variety*, *differences* and *similarities*, or just the names of the animals in the displays: mammals, whales, dolphins, zebras, horses, pre-historic elephants, seals, sea-cows, rhinoceros, hippopotami, giraffes, Arctic Animals, water-hogs. Other exhibitions contents were also mentioned (mostly by children): *Ecology* ("with all the mirrors to make a globe"), *Creepy Crawlies* (the insect house "with all the insects in it"), *Dinosaurs* ("titanosaurus and almasaurus"), *Jupiter*, *Saturn*, *Uranus*, *Neptune*, *Pluto*, *Human Biology*. This shows that different exhibition contents are mixed up in the final memories about the visit to the museum.

(iii) Comments showing knowledge gains are as follows: "fish listen under water"(child), weight of different animals, different types of whales, "some whales suck in food and let out the water by pushing their tongues up" (child), "mammals breath air"(child), "300 whales stranded at once"; "different hunting methods", "how dolphins use sound to tell how far they are"; "the killer whale"; "whales' feeding movements"; "differences between horses and zebras"; "information about whales dying stranded and why"; "endangered species"; "range of creatures who are mammals"; "how whales learn, communicate and have babies"; "use of language and communication"; "breathing and feeding techniques"; "development of whales"; "integration with ourselves"; "the effects man has on other mammals and how destructive we can be"; "most alarming reduction in population of large whales in relatively short time"; "sperm whales dive 1,000 metres"; "the way feet work"; "the history of horses"; "hippo rides"; "camel furs"; "extinct mammals"; "how dolphins learn and communicate"; "how camels adapt to environment"; "killing"; "evolution of mammals"; "whale communication". These comments show that people either read or listened to someone reading or explaining, and understood contents over and above their superficial perceptions of visual forms or topics.

(iv) Most of the praise referred (again) to (i) *size*: "liked size", "amazed by size"; (ii) The exhibition's *design*: "a very good display of Dolphins and the explanation given"; "good 'hands on' exhibits"; "excellent hands on exhibits"; "the layout is good"; "lots of informative displays"; "lots of information". (iii) The *exhibition content*: "interesting, informative and massive"; "the sum of the whole is more than equal to its constituent parts"; "well balanced exhibition"; (iv) *Personal and group feelings*: "enjoyed

exhibition"; "children also enjoyed"; "whales very large made good impact on children".

(v) *Comparisons with the past*: "big improvement from previous visits"⁵.

(v) Criticisms were as follows: "not much about whaling and anti-whaling"; "all the children running about"; "groups of small children greatly affect the over all atmosphere"; "difficult to find exhibits".

These comments show that definitely in this particular exhibition the physical aspects had a profound impact, as was suggested in the 1991 General Survey . It is interesting to note that this tridimensional impact of life size specimens (difficult to find in everyday life and hard to suggest on television screens), is still⁶ an important reason for the museum's attraction. They also show how, despite the visual (mimetic) strength of the audio-visual, tridimensional objects still strongly impress the public.

Comments referring to knowledge gains reveal how people remembered things in organised sequences as if they had been given stories rather than scientific jargon, and how these people reacted positively to exhibits reflecting humanist ideals and ecological principles such as conservation and saving endangered species (or at least, those were the contents they liked to show they remembered). These principles correspond to current "universal" concerns also widely explored by the mass media.

These families also praised the exhibition layout and the designers' museographic skills. This reflects a detachment from the museum's scenic atmosphere. The expression "good hands on exhibits" shows how the public is becoming aware of different forms of exhibition design and how they praise the use of interactive displays. Moreover it shows a critical eye which is becoming (as described in the first chapter) characteristic of the public today, and is increasingly taken into account by contemporary cultural communicators.

Finally, parents evaluate the enjoyment the exhibition provides for their children and the way information is made accessible. This child-centred concern is one that tends increasingly to influence the choice of "where to go today with the kids".

⁵A child wrote "thank you".

⁶Size and shape were already the focus of the main attractions in the nineteenth century Great Exhibitions.

CONCLUSION

This case study has revealed how this Museum creates a leisurely atmosphere in so many respects similar to other (traditionally more open) leisure settings. This is apparent in the way these families use its proposals and organize their gestures and actions inside this exhibition. They seem to have "recovered" the relaxed and playful attitude of previous times, when carrying picnics in rucksacks, pushing push-chairs ("with restless babies"), looking forward to seeing the shop, the restaurant or just enjoying being with their children. There is, relating back to Elias's theory, a greater *de-controlling* of emotions facilitated by a global *mimetic* environment which is perceived as soon as the exhibition's main entrance is crossed.

From what has been described, *a sense of the 1990s* has emerged. What has resulted from this study is the recognition that the family-visit to this Museum is enmeshed within a series of interdependencies characterized by *de-differentiation*: an atmosphere which can be defined as both directive and relaxing, educational and recreational. An atmosphere in which what the families bring from outside tends to be linked with the way they experience what is proposed inside. Boundaries that were previously uncritically established tend to be blurred: parents' and children's roles are exchanged and so are the museum's instructive and mimetic functions. Interacting with exhibits may be combined with awareness of other needs (such as eating, running, laughing, cuddling and joking). The exhibition is full of a crowd of people that is there either to have a good time or to learn, or both. However, what is more crucial, they are as they never were before, free to choose their own mode of interaction without seeming to be disturbed by the choices made by others around them.

The *narrative* and *qualitative* form of presenting the data obtained through observation, was the one that seemed to give the most loyal picture of the variety, complexity and discontinuity that constitutes the family visit to this exhibition. The observer has tried to catch the totality of the whole family/exhibition figuration by continually interrelating the level of visitor interactions with the level of the exhibition environment as they were simultaneously happening.

From these observations it became apparent how these families' behaviour patterns inside the exhibition were as diverse as the individuals' that constitute each family as well as the different spaces and moments (*spatio-temporal configurations*) forming the whole visit. Families may start the visit together and then separate, a mother may go with her son than with the daughter and suddenly she may prefer to stay on her own for a while whilst her husband is explaining something to the children, ... and so forth. Also displays that are very attractive for some families, for others may remain unnoticed depending on unpredictable moves such as: one of the family members suddenly wanting to follow another direction, too many people near the site, or someone deciding it is time for a rest.

This observed lack of regularity came to reinforce the idea that studies on family interactions and learning achievements from displays as they have recurrently been presented, are the outcome of artificially made cuts in both the exhibition and the family dynamics, designed to facilitate the production of quantitative results.

The questionnaires have served to add extra information to the observation records on these visitors' social and cultural backgrounds in order to contribute to the whole picture of this Museum *regime of signification*: who are its consumers in the context of the cultural economy in which this Museum and the attitudes and modes of perception described through the observations find their coherence. The questionnaires have also made it possible to obtain information about these families' impressions of their experience (through the answers to the semantic scale and their memories as expressed in the open question) - that is their own perception of its exhibition's *mode of signification*.

From the questionnaire it became apparent that these families are middle class people with considerably high social and cultural capital which is consistent with the museums own statistics but contradicts its curators' efforts to widen the audience. Probably what has changed more than its social influence, is the Museum's image and symbolic role for the same type of people it has been attracting for a considerable time.

Yet there are among the families researched few from lower strata and of low educational attainment which suggests that this Museum is currently (although timidly) attracting other publics. Here its participatory displays and global mimetic ambience has undeniably an important role to play.

Most of these families are couples with small children who have travelled to the Museum from out of London. Their investment in this day out was therefore high, and thus they had good reasons to make the most of it. This fact may contribute to their change of attitude towards the whole experience, as they are there for a whole day long and thus have to combine visiting the museum with a multitude of other functions (functions that the museum happily provides). Yet from the record of the time they have spent in the exhibition (less than 30 minutes and in most cases around fifteen minutes) it can be assumed that they have maintained within the museum an attitude of disengaged *flânerie* which is a symptom of their freedom to visit this setting in a more *de-routinized* mood (that is without so many constraints or feelings of embarrassment).

The observation of these families within the exhibition has also revealed a tendency to stop and watch carefully some (few) displays whilst leaving behind unnoticed a considerable amount of the exhibition. This tendency may be a mirror of this exhibition design: it is highly interactive, although it is still fairly informative for people who want to invest their time in learning new themes and concepts. In this way, it forces the families to choose which of these levels they want to adopt, and enables them to try to combine both levels by leaving behind a considerable amount of displays. It is the result of the conjunction of a *modernist* narrative and a *postmodernist* figural communication.

The conjunction of these different levels and the distancing attitude of these families made it difficult to define *types of interaction* in the ways they have been defined by the researchers that have studied families in museums. It was nevertheless possible to detect more or less structured ways by which parents have *mediated* the exhibition to their children. These parents-children sequences of interdependencies were the only fairly consistent whole (figuration) that resulted from the observations. Therefore, it was accepted that these figurations involving not only the family but their interactions with this particular leisure environment, would in great measure reveal the dominant families/exhibition figuration - this case study main goal.

Consistent with the undifferentiation - *de-differentiation* - of the modernist and postmodernist paradigm (which seem to coexist peacefully) were the two main types of figuration that resulted from the observations. If a considerable number of these families were investing in their social encounter so as to favour family *conviviality* - the *convivial families* - (an attitude more close to a postmodern rationale); other were using the museum's informative support to communicate with their children by teaching them the

exhibition concepts - the *role-determined families* - (using the museum's modernist discourse responding to modernist aims for personal achievement and for the regulation of their children's experience).

What is evident from both types, is parents' effort to fulfil *effectively* their parental role as consistent with the Rapoport's description of this family phase in their life-cycle: this concern with their parental performance meant for some adults the display of their affection and great enjoyment in sharing this day with their children by allowing them to create their own rhythm and by letting them and themselves being enthralled by the exhibition's mimetic function; yet for the others it meant exercising control over their children's use of the exhibition, interpreting the displays for them, and exploring together its educational function

In terms of the *mode of signification* as it was perceived by the families, both groups defined this exhibition as being stimulating rather than relaxing, active rather than passive, more close to "play" than to "work" and inspiring rather than ordinary. From these results, it can be seen that the mimetic (figural) aspects seem to have had a greater effect than its informative (narrative) discourse. Yet when defining their experience in terms of education or recreation, there is a manifest preference for *education*. Education has a positive connotation for these relatively highly "educated" families and is still perceived as the museum's dominant role, no matter how this role is actually fulfilled.

This is consistent with the considerable number of *role-determined* families observed, despite the informality of the atmosphere. This shows how stable museums audiences are from one generation to the next. They adapt to environmental circumstances such as technological and communicational modernization while maintaining the fundamental activities of their children's socialisation, reproducing values and behaviour and providing emotional support in spite of all the changes and stimuli occurring around them. Their *modernist* rationale is stronger than the museum's postmodern tendency, yet consistent with the curators' aims. Authoritarian families even show at what point the psychogenetic form of the civilizing process still finds in the museum a preferential setting (may be one of the best insofar as family leisure is concerned), for the transfer of good manners and respectable conduct.

However there is a new type of family- the *convivial type* - which is responding differently to the greater openness of this Museum's discourse. This is the attitude that

seems to be becoming dominant and the one that best reflects the process of transition this Museum is going through.

CONCLUSION

At most science centres and museums, the exhibits are almost always morality tales, with a solemn little homily of explanation. Their designers' mission is to impart a particular fact as painlessly as possible; there is a pill beneath the sugar. At Eureka! children are simply given the opportunity to play, presumably in the wise belief that man is one of those animals for whom play in itself is naturally a learning process⁷

Today museums seek to serve larger audiences and reject their exclusively high culture connotation to become sites for spectacle, sensation, illusion and montage. They tend to be places where one has an experience rather than where knowledge of the rules of the established hierarchies is inculcated. The present study has attempted to demonstrate how important it is to inquire into the process of the articulation, transference and dissemination of the experience of these new spaces, by intellectuals and cultural producers to various audiences. It has further attempted to examine the way in which these new perceptions are incorporated into everyday practices. In so doing it discussed the museum's social and cultural role in western societies, in terms not normally taken into account by museum researchers.

It has been shown that what museums represent for their public today is the result of a complex process of change involving society as a whole, and reflected in its spatial environments and symbolic representations. In order to make this perspective clearer, two important aspects of the museum's reality were incorporated in this discussion: the social characterization of its social actors (both as producers as consumers), and the modes of signification that have characterized the museum's communication context at the different stages of its process of change.

⁷John Brown (1992: 32).

Scott Lash's model of regimes of signification defining different social and cultural paradigms, has made it possible to characterize the process of museum's production in social terms. Further, his definition of modes of signification in terms of meaning and symbolism facilitated the understanding of the process of change in terms of peoples' perceptions at each stage. Moreover through the idea of modes of signification it became easier to view the museum within the global context of the everyday life of its surrounding community.

This was the first step towards freeing the museum from the traditional research forms, which have tended to isolate it from the world outside and to see it as depending on its curators' will to introduce innovation and its visitors' availability to respond to it.

Using the perspective of regimes and modes of signification, the total phenomenon of the museum figuration took shape. It became apparent how, historically, the museum has moved from a realistic discourse based on charismatic objects physically displayed before the public eye, to the display of objects as narrative supports to educate the public, and finally to audio-visual productions (replacing the objects) designed to impress the crowds. This has happened because the groups that were once in charge of the collections and which have invested them with their own sense of social distinction and exclusiveness, have progressively disappeared from the centre of decision, giving way to others. The decision-makers that followed, due to their fragile social position, had to struggle to become hegemonic and therefore to spread their values and visions of the world to the lower strata. Yet from the discussion of this process it also became apparent how this involved more than the individuals' mere recognition of their social status and the way it could be reflected in the museum's design. By means of empirical examples it was shown to what extent this process has also operated in the regulation of individuals' emotions, as was to be crucial for the creation of a certain kind of public that would remain stable for a long period of the museum's history.

This study has also demonstrated how important it is to take into consideration the museum's role as a leisure choice and the way in which it has fulfilled the individuals' needs and expectations as related to the use they make of their spare time, along the same dynamic process of change. Norbert Elias's, which explains the civilizing process in terms of the changes operated within the individual's regulation of emotions, and the social strata that have adopted them, shed new light on the understanding of why some sectors

of the population came to chose some leisure settings and others did not, and in the same way, why some went to museums and others have preferred to stay away.

By analysing in detail the actions and behaviour of both its curators and audiences, or how the former have influenced the latter, it was explained how the museum's regime of emotional regulation and control has been linked to its power structure. For a long time museums were meant to educate their publics both in terms of the inculcation of important ideas on civilization and humanity and in terms of how to behave in public places. By limiting their visitors gestures and keeping under constraint their physical relationship with the objects on display, they were defining from whom and for whom they were conceived. These restrictions imposed on people's actions and forms of expression were a way of protecting this institution of high culture against the vulgarization and homogeneization of urban life. Initially these pressures were controlled by the tightening of internal regulations. However, as soon as museums lost the protection of the state their curators, who were for a long time unquestionable charismatic figures, saw their power weakening, their careers becoming economical and political contingent and their traditional publics less loyal. Furthermore, the role of the objects was replaced by a language they did not dominate with the result that they were forced to borrow know-how from specialists recruited from other fields. The power of the museum's institutional and hierarchical structure was therefore progressively transferred to the hands of specialists who would invest heavily in its communicational context and would be increasingly concerned with its effect upon a public that tended to become increasingly demanding.

Therefore, the inter linkage of both these theoretical models (Scott Lash's and Elias's) made it clearer why the discussion of "education" and "entertainment," which has occupied museum curators in the last decades, has above all to do with different perspectives related to the individual's position within the social hierarchy as well as to different views on the regulation of the individual's feelings and emotions in his or her use of leisure time. This discussion implicates two different social paradigms: the modernist and the postmodernist. A modernist regime and mode of signification is one that values education and the construction of coherent discourses. By doing so it tends to exert some control over its visitors' behaviour as it takes for granted that a well behaved visitor gets more benefit from the museum's content. This corresponds to a well known and common sensual view of museums which tend to prevail even in the present scene. This perspective reflects a museum's sense of self-identity and specificity when compared

to other leisure experiences. This perspective is shared by most of the visitor studies aimed at increasing the museum's success and effectiveness. A postmodernist regime and mode of signification, makes use of everything that may enhance the museum's attractiveness. Its discourse is conceived in terms that deny any sense of narrative, which is replaced by a variety of visual and sensorial stimuli which tend to act simultaneously. The arousal of individuals' emotions is not only accepted but encouraged as part of the strategy to attract more people especially those looking for a counterpoint to their routinized everyday lives.

Some museum are at the present in a transition situation combining therefore a type of figuration common to the modernist order with another which precludes the postmodern wave - in which (as Rojek has defined it 1993:134) "people can relax enough not to bother about self-improvement or capturing the essence of every sight". Each time there is a new event, their curators have to decide which of these perspective s they will favour. Some are currently arguing, in the same way as the leisure entrepreneurs of the first decades of this century, that the "pill" of education has to be sugared with amusement so that investments in it will be rewarding. This attitude creates problems for those who still believe that museums are repositories of culture with a big "C" and find their identity threatened. For others it is the amount of "sugar" that is becoming problematic. These different standpoints reveal a continuity in the struggles between transformation and resistance that has characterized the museum's history. Museums as leisure settings continue to be a battle ground for dominant groups.

However, most museum decision-makers seem to be unaware that by applying a new communication aesthetic, they are also educating the public into new styles and tastes which will result in them expecting everlasting improvements. These styles and tastes are, though, more than ever before, not exclusive to museums but part of a communicational context that is having an impact simultaneously on urban environment, formal education strategies, mass media, leisure facilities, countryside resorts and so forth. The museum's thick walls of the past have become increasingly transparent and are increasingly reflecting social life in the city outside.

This interconnection between the museum and the environment in which it is set is also reflected in its public's expectations. Much less than before does this public expect to see objects in glass cases supported by labels and texts. They do not expect anything more than an exciting yet somehow educational experience. Greatly favouring innovation they

tend to celebrate anything that is new and different. This public has "grown" to be increasingly effective and successful in the way it occupies leisure time, and to have a greater sense of criticism. These two factors are having a considerable influence in the process of museums' building. This public has also grown to avoid thinking about life and themselves, and to avoid having to deal with their conscience and feelings: "we shrink" says Rojek (1993: 212), from deep commitments and cast our energies in leisure out toward reassuring, consumerist experience which requires passive involvement or transitory relationships which avoid putting ourselves on the line". They have grown used to the collective gaze and fearing the individual subjectivity of the romantic gaze.

The current museum scene seems, at first glance, more permissive than the previous one recognizing as it does the public potential for dissociation from the learning context. However the use of highly sophisticated equipment condenses even more the museum's "texts" in impressive curator-made discourses from which it is hard to escape, and upon which it is difficult to build anything personal. This communication context can thus be in its own way hegemonic and authoritarian. Children playing in open spaces have more freedom to explore their imagination and creativity than in a playground. The playground is a way of controlling the children's playing activities and of keeping their imagination under the constraints of climbing frames and slides. Within postmodern museums a new type of hegemony is being created as expressed by the "frame" of television screens and buttons to push, which depend for their functioning on museum technicians. However, this new kind of power over the audience escapes the total control of museum producers, who are unaware of the new technologies' perverse effects.

The future of museums will be the result of a struggle between the defenders of the modernist and the postmodernist paradigms (the new established and outsiders) and the public which favours each of these two different rationales as enmeshed in the context of a single figuration. Established and outsiders positions are nonetheless becoming critical and difficult to define: the old established may become the new outsiders. More than a struggle involving definable positions within the social hierarchy, this is a struggle of social and spatial identities (*habitus*) and of the modes of signification attached to them. It will have also to be discussed through the balance of offers and demands of leisure products and environments and of the resources museums (and some groups) will have available in order to keep their relative autonomy.

However the non-dogmatic aspects of the postmodern scene add to it greater diversity and fragmentation: small museums and big museums, old and new, mimetic or narrative, keeping more or less their visitors under control, ... all may have a place of their own if they can afford the law of the market place. As in the English Perry Green Museum on Moore (described in chapter four), old bourgeois values may be imposed once again this time against a new era of vulgarization. Old values will probably be disguised under educational concerns, or expressed under a timid debate on the collectivisation of these places.

The present debate is more open than it ever was, and this is why it is so important to discuss it here and now. Yet it has to be honestly assumed and not clouded by embarrassed class or group intentions. If curators really want to enhance their museums' economical profits they should discuss their success in economic terms. If they instead have a nostalgia for the past and want museums to go over old ground, they should bring to the discussion their personal or group values and feelings. However, if they want to do any serious research they have to sustain it with a theoretical analysis of the kind that has just been proposed here, as must be their studies on visitors' behaviour and exhibitions' effectiveness.

To summarize, the contemporary debate, which locates the object against the subject or the latter against the former, is more than a reaction of the old to the new ideologies. It is a reaction in social status of one group against another. If this debate is to be fruitful it needs to be rooted not merely in the web of our immediate impressions and social predilections but in the matrix of history, which allows us to perceive more clearly what shape cultural and social life have assumed in the past. This may in turn allow us to understand better both the possibilities and the effects of the types of the cultural boundaries we embrace. In defining and redefining the contours of cultural and social life, and the way they have evolved together, we are not merely dealing with intellectual abstractions, but with everyday practices and with people in the most broad and human sense. If the public is enjoying a great deal the new interactive and participatory museums, they are also becoming more demanding as a consequence of their greater detachment from the museum's glamour and "auratic experience". If children run freely from one display to another, if families have picnics, it is not because history has gone backwards but because a system of self-regulation is operating such that this public is

now able to have a controlled-decontrolling of its behaviour inside the museum, whilst thinking that it is able to decide for itself what kind of experience it wants to have.

What this study concludes with reference to future decision-making is that the main debate will continue to be between *education* and *recreation* and that methods will have to be found in order to engage the museum audiences in this debate, so that it will be fully possible to understand how and why they favour one or the other function. Another issue from the present research is how much in the present scene the discourse of the "ought" or "must" has lost meaning. Museum curators do not have to attract wider audiences so much as they do not have to teach or to educate their public's behaviour. They would rather become critical witnesses of their own role in the building of the museum future.

Appendices

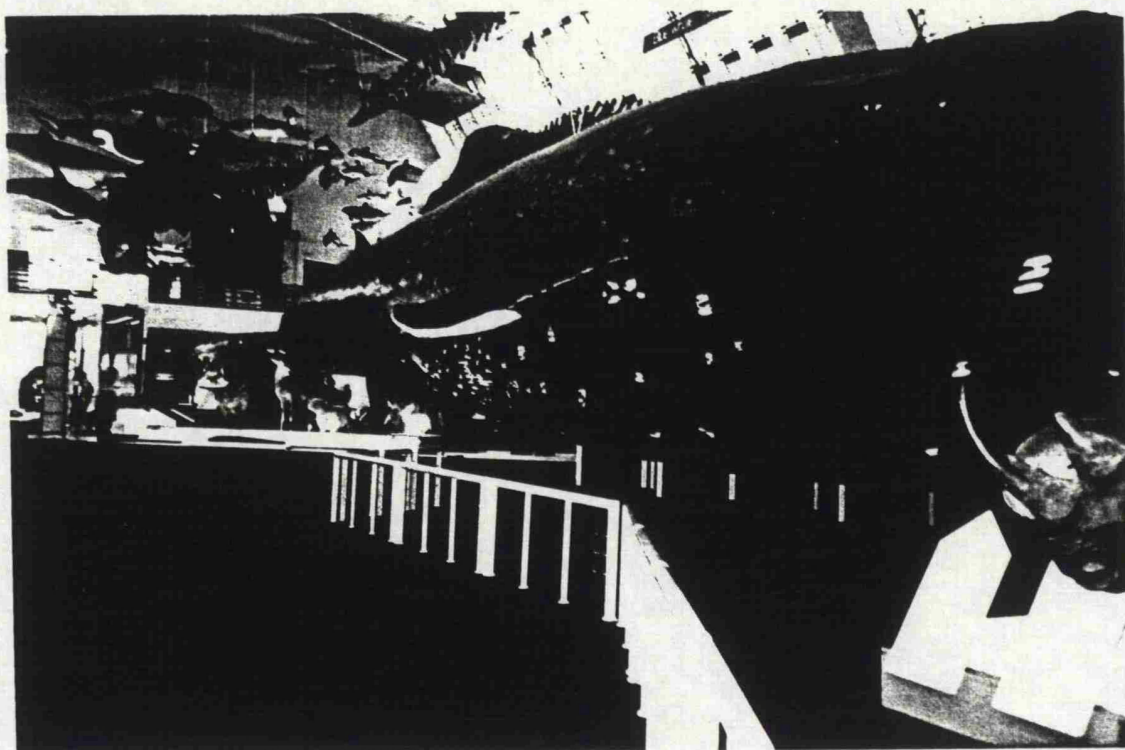
Appendix 1



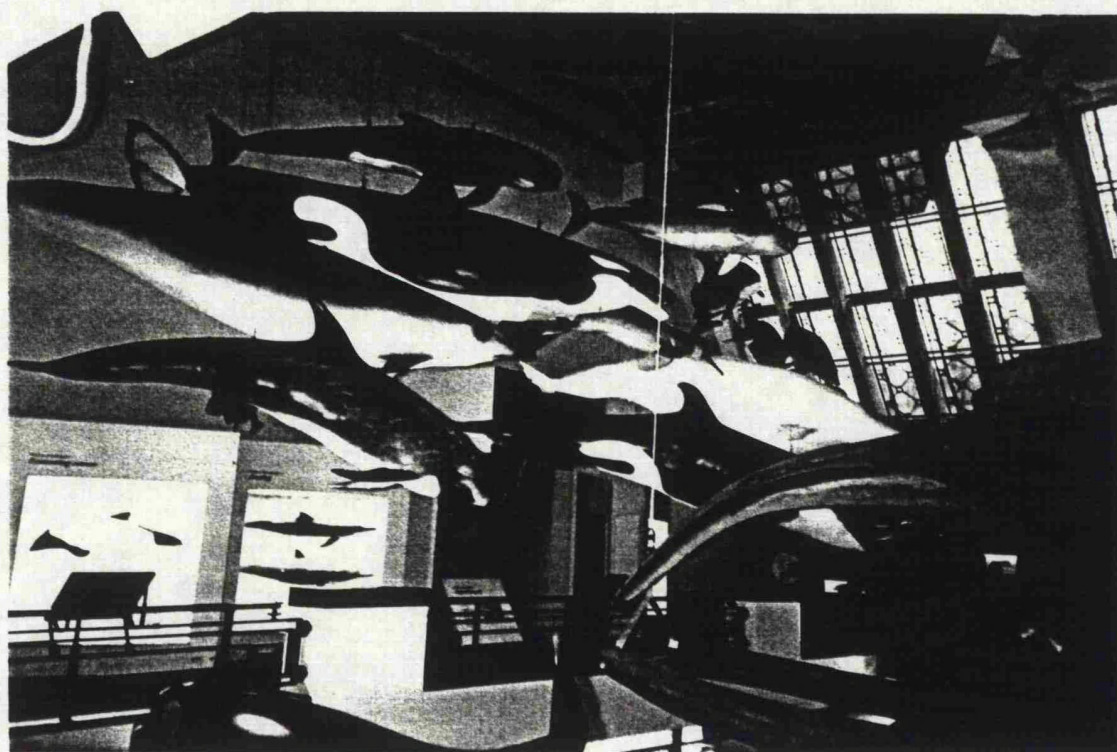
1. A family filling a questionnaire near the exhibition entrance



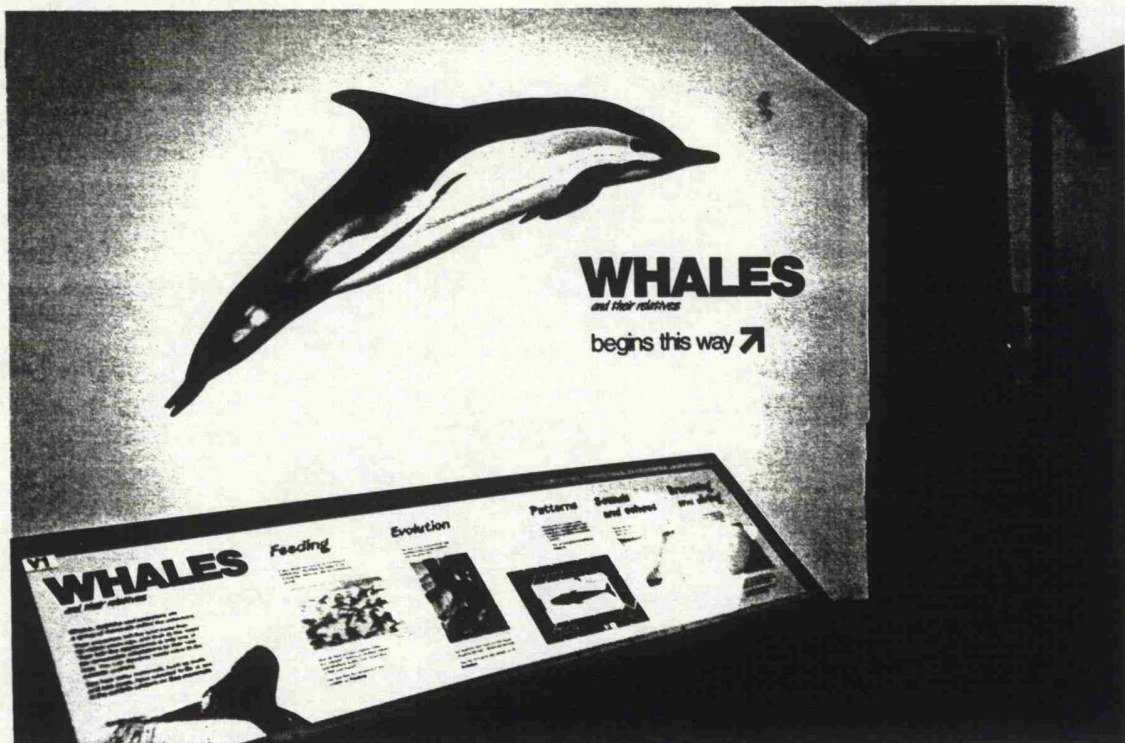
2. The *Discovering Mammals* exhibition entrance



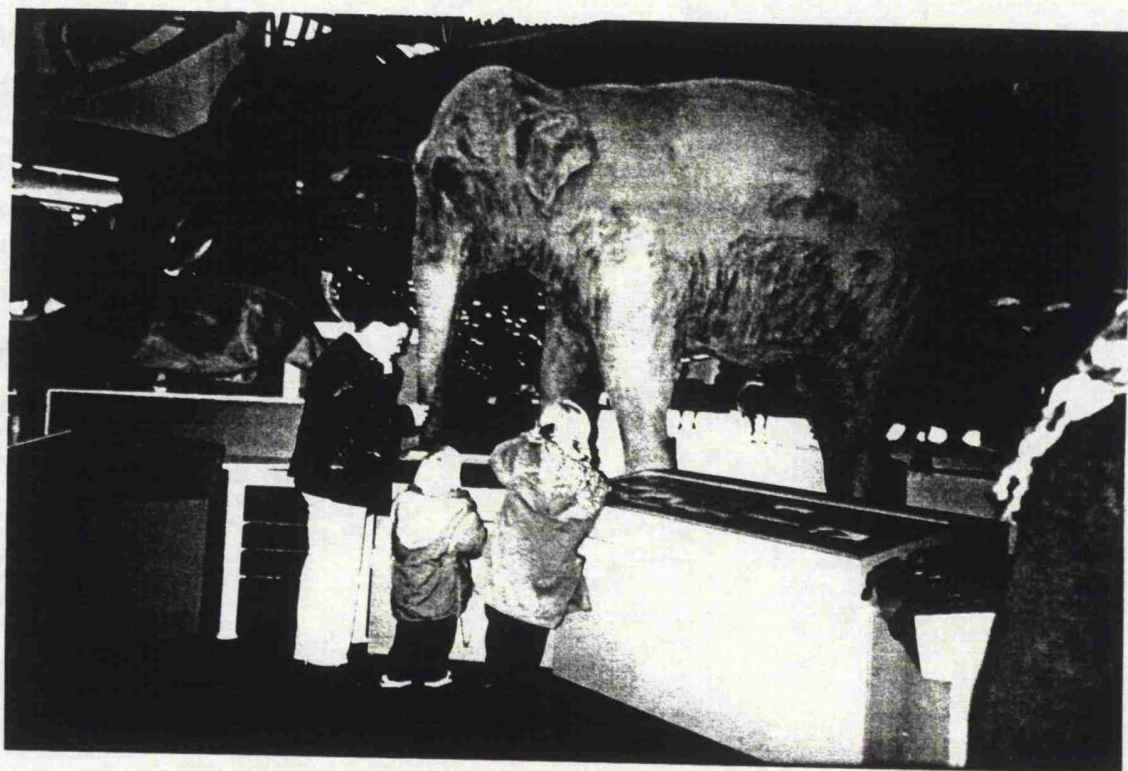
3. "Entering the exhibition..."



4. "Different sorts of models and whale and dolphins skeletons hanging from the ceiling..."



5. The staircase leading to the upper floor



6. Listening to the voices of elephants

Appendix 2

OBSERVATION GUIDE

Unobtrusive observation of fifty family groups (a group is defined as an assemblage of 3 to 5 people composed at least by one adult, entering the Exhibition together). A random sample will be achieved by starting observing the first which enters the exhibition. All hours of the day, during which the exhibition is opened will be covered.

1 Intra-group interaction

- 1.1. Movements from spreading to congregation (who, where, how).
- 1.2. Is there any individual conducting the group? (who, where, how), with the support of which mediators (written, text, audio-visual, objects).
- 1.3. Kinds of dominant interaction:
 - Verbal (questioning, explaining, making statements)(who, when, where, how)
 - Gestural (pointing, touching, interacting with displays) (who, when, where, how)
- 1.4. Manifestations of relaxation or tension (who, where, how)
 - Affective (physical or verbal)
 - Aggressive (physical or verbal)

2. Spatial interaction

- 2.1. Following the intended scheme (who, when, how)
- 2.2. If other patterns (who, when, how)
- 2.3. Changing from one pattern to another (who, when, how)

3. Temporal interaction

- 3.1. Time spent in the whole visit
- 3.2. Time spent in each display (if possible)

4. Interaction with the exhibition

- 4.1. Written materials. Do visitors read labels and texts? loudly or silently?(who, when, where, how)
 - 4.2. Graphics: do they look at, comment or discuss (who, when, where, how)
 - 4.3. Audio-visuals: do they look at, comment or discuss (who, when, where, how)
 - 4.4. Dioramas: do they look at, comment or discuss (who, when, where, how)
 - 4.5. Publications: do they look at, comment or discuss (who, when, where, how)
- The visitors use the above silently, loudly, use them to interact with each other and/or to make links with other interpretative materials?

5. Inter-group interaction (with other visitors in the exhibition)

- 5.1. Who
- 5.2. When (in each situation)
- 5.3. Why
- 5.4. With whom
- 5.5. For how long
- 5.6. How

Appendix 3

Questionnaire for the Group

1. How did you come to the Museum?

- ☐ walking
- ☐ by car
- ☐ by train
- ☐ by coach
- ☐ by bus or tube
- ☐ other (please specify) _____
- ☐ mixed (please specify) _____

2. How long did you take on your journey?

- ☐ less than 30 minutes
- ☐ from 30 minutes to 1 hour
- ☐ from 1 hour to 2 hours
- ☐ more than 2 hours

3. Have you visited today other places before arriving here?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

- if Yes
- ☐ Other Museums
- ☐ Monuments
- ☐ Shops
- ☐ Other (please specify)

4. Within the Natural History Museum, before coming to this exhibition, have you been to:

☐ Other exhibitions

☐ Shops

☐ Cafeteria

☐ Restaurant

Appendix 4

Questionnaire for adults

By completing this survey you will be participating in a PhD Project which aims to obtain a better understanding of museum visitors. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND VALUABLE ANSWERS.

1. With whom did you come today?

- ☐ With husband/ wife
- ☐ With parents
- ☐ With children under 15
- ☐ With grandparents
- ☐ With family and friends
- ☐ With friends
- ☐ With other relatives (please specify) _____

2. What kind of experience did you have at the Exhibition?

Please choose one of the words in each pair

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxing | <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Passive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play | <input type="checkbox"/> Work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inspiring | <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational |

3. Use this space to write anything that you remember from the **Discovering Mammals** exhibition

4. The highest level of schooling you completed is:

- ☐ CSE
☐ A levels
☐ O levels/ GCSE
☐ Degree (specify subject) _____
☐ Higher Degree (specify subject) _____
☐ Other (please specify) _____

5. Your age is:

- | | Male | Female |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16-20 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 61-70 | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 71+ years | | |

6. Occupation

Your present occupation (be as precise as possible)

Your last occupation was (be as precise as possible)

Appendix 5

Questionnaire for children

By completing this questionnaire you will be participating in a Research Project which aims to create better exhibitions. THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND VALUABLE ANSWERS.

1. With whom did you come today?

- ☐ With parents
- ☐ With grandparents
- ☐ With family and friends
- ☐ With friends
- ☐ with other relatives (please specify) _____

2. What do you feel about the exhibition?

Please, choose one



3. Use this space to write anything that you remember from the exhibition

4. Your age is:

- ☐ 8-12
- ☐ 12-15

Boy
☐

Girl
☐

Appendix 6

Four examples of family-figurations compiled in a matrix shape.

CONVIVIAL FAMILY VISIT (Obs.4)

TIME	EXHIBITION	FATHER	MOTHER	GIRL (12)
11.50				
		←		→
		They move forward together		
		←		→
		They talk with each other		
		←		→
		They see a display together		
	Fossils	Is a bit far from the group and looks around	Points to video hippo	Tries to understand "sounds and echoes"
			←	→
	Go upstairs		Point at the whale and skeletons hanging from the ceiling	
			←	→
	"Close relatives"		Stop near globe "Artiodactyls in the Arctic"	
		Ask question		
		←		→
	"Contrasting Colours"	They observe exhibition from the balcony		
		←		→
		They talk with each other		
		They stop and look at a display silently		
		They look from the balcony again		
		Is the first to move forward	←	Asks question
		Goes in the front	Gives a quick reply	→
			←	→
14.00	Go down	and exit	walk together	

ROLE-DETERMINED FAMILY VISIT (Obs. 11)

Time	Exhibition	FATHER	MOTHER	Girl (12)	Girl (7)	Boy (5)
11.32			←			Asks something
			answers			
				"Is the blue whale the biggest animal in the world?"		
			They talk a lot			
			Points at the whale	←		Asks about the whale
			Reads labels			
	"Sieves"		Stops			
			shows "feeding"			
	Go upstairs		Mother answers, reads explains "just listen!"			Becomes anxious
		Helps the girl with the wheel and explains		Observes display and makes wheel move		
			Explains after studying label	←		Asks something
			"Wait a minute!"			
	Shading		"What do you want?"			
			Reads loudly			
			Listen to headphones			
			Explains			

ABSENT FAMILY VISIT (Obs.13)

Time	Exhibition	Father	Mother	Boy (?)
14:10		Carries a rack-bag	Points at the whale	"Is it real?"
	Move towards 'ancient relatives'		←	→
		Do not reply		
		walk silently		Points at balcony
		←	→	
	Globe		"You can't see"	"Where is England?"
			→	says near the globe
			←	
		Do not pay attention to the boy		Touches globe
			Does not reply	Says "Mum look!"
		Are not paying attention		Points at "wild boar"
	Artiodactyls in grass lands	See everything from a big distance and silently		Makes the globe move
	Artiodactyls in deserts	They keep walking along the corridor		Speaks but no one listens
				Listens to elephant voices with headphones
		They stop near central area always silently		
14:17				

AUTHORITARIAN FAMILY VISIT (Obs. 17)

Time	Exhibition	Father	Mother	Boy	Girl
10:00	"Oh look at this!"			"That used to be real?"	
		← stop near the centre →			
		Pushes a push-chair			
		I have to go upstairs			
	Go upstairs	Holds the boy's hand	shows they must start from the left		
	"sounds and echoes"				
		Does not reply and just says "that's it"	← Asks something		
		Holds the children's hands and moves forward	says "come on that is not every thing!"		Makes the wheel move
		Tells them to look at "shading"	Tells the boy off and makes the children look at central area	→	
		Reads labels but does not speak with the children	stop take your sister's hand from every thing!"		
			says "come on!" each time the children stop		

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