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Established-Outsider Relations and the Socio-Genesis of the Museum

Gordon J. Fyfe*

Abstract: »Etablierten-Außenseiter-Beziehungen und die Soziogenese des Museums«. It is surprising that little research has been conducted by Eliasians on museums and that, with some exceptions, academics working on museums do not cite *The Civilizing Process*. All the more so given that: (i) museum research supports Elias's claim that elements of modernity originated in court societies, (ii) the nineteenth-century museum was a leading edge of the West's belief in itself as a singularly civilized place and (iii) there is a contradiction between the museum's universalism and its latent capacity to stigmatize some visitors as uncivilized outsiders. Indeed, Elias's theory of established-outsider relations offers profound insights into the museum dimension of social stigma and the socio-genesis of the museum. First, an Eliasian perspective illuminates the relationship between museums and the peculiar structures of feeling that flowed from the interdependencies of modernization. Secondly, in studying European upper classes, he stressed the co-existence of different propertied strata *within* nineteenth-century states. This explains the apparent inchoateness of European national museums as they emerged at the interface of ruling dynastic elites and upwardly mobile bourgeois outsiders. Thirdly, documentary evidence reveals the museum to be a place where middle class people incorporated and transformed a courtly habitus whilst simultaneously stigmatizing both aristocratic and working class ways of living the body. Finally, Elias elaborated dynamic models of established-outsider relations, emphasizing their 'complex polyphony' as the key to explaining the power to stigmatize. The museum performed that polyphony at the interface of established-outsider relations; it could be said that they were the very causes of museums.

Keywords: Norbert Elias, established-outsider relations, museums.

1. Introduction¹

It is surprising that so little work has been done by Eliasians on museums and that few museum researchers are familiar with Norbert Elias's *On the Process*

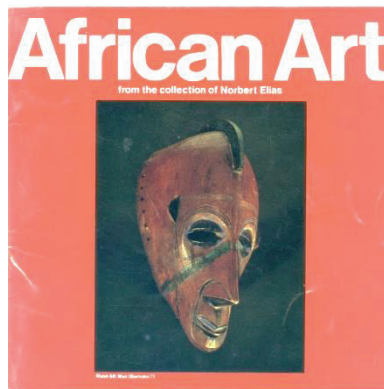
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¹ Earlier versions of this article were delivered as a Public Lecture at Mary Washington University (Museum Studies) and at the conference, *From the Past to the Present and towards Possible Futures*, University of Leicester, 2014.

of *Civilisation* (2012) [1939].² Many European museums trace their origins to the palaces and houses of the dynastic elites that Elias investigated. Some contain the treasuries and armouries of mediaeval warrior kings, princely cabinets of the early modern period and the royal collections of *ancien regimes*. Museums of art, decoration and design exhibit the luxury consumer culture of Europe's extinct courtly elites. And, largely forgotten, behind the scenes at the museum there is the savagery and the symbolic violence that accompanied the formation of many European and North American collections.

Elias knew his museums and was a collector in his own right. His significant collection of African art was exhibited at Leicester's City Museum in 1970.³

Figure 1: Catalogue Cover from Elias's African Art Exhibition, 1970



Note: Coll. author. Reproduced with permission of the Norbert Elias Foundation.

His writings are peppered with references to museum masterpieces. Appreciation of renaissance artists and familiarity with art history informed his writing. Elias's knowledge of human pre-history, of natural history and his insistence on a long-term perspective speaks of the museum's deep time. One can readily imagine the author of *The Retreat of the Sociologist into the Present* (2009) lingering in the Assyrian galleries of The British Museum. Amongst historians of the museum there has been some recognition of Elias's work (Findlen 1996) and (Classen 2007). Nonetheless the museum is not an Eliasian topic in the way that is for Foucaultians and Bourdieusians. The museum is not a place in which Eliasian ideas have been put to work in any major way.

² A significant exception is Classen (2007). Also see Faria, Margarida Lima de (1994).

³ The Elias archive at Marburg contains a letter from Elias to the Keeper of Arts at the Leicester Museum, setting out his approach to collecting. I am grateful to Adrian Jitschin for this information and for his help in other related matters. Elias owned original prints by the Dutch artist Karel Appel (1921-2006) which were displayed at his house in Leicester.

In the years since Elias's death in 1990 there has been some convergence between the social sciences and museum practice. A key aspect has been the so-called New Museology with its emphasis on meaning, access and inclusion.⁴ In that respect sociology and museum professionals have a shared interest in the outsider, or in what Elias called established-outsider relations. In a community study conducted with John Scotson, *The Established and Outsiders* (2008) [1965] Elias formulated a theory of established-outsiders. His theory resonates with the visitor research that figures in contemporary museum studies. Understood as relationships of power between groups, established-outsider relations are tension-charged group interdependencies. The groups might be classes, estates, castes or otherwise segregated social categories. They might be the old and new families of nineteenth-century Good Societies or those of a modern suburb. They have in common that they are relations of inclusion and exclusion where social tensions are sublimated as group fantasies and stigma. Whilst it was in his community study that the concept first received close theoretical attention, it figured in *The Civilizing Process* (2012) [1939] and it can be found threaded through Elias's corpus including investigations of scientific communities and academic institutions (Elias 2009). Indeed, he was only too aware of how academic power relations secreted stigma and humiliation: at the middle of the last century his own work was judged 'old fashioned,' 'out of date.'

The aim of this paper is to show what an Eliasian perspective on museums might entail. Established-outsider theory is my way in. I show that Elias's theory is museum-relevant *and* that museum research enlarges the scope of the theory. The museum, it is argued, opens a window onto the dynamics of established-outsider relations. I show: (i) that the history of the museum supports Elias's claim that elements of the twentieth-century bourgeois habitus originated in court societies, (ii) that the museum was a leading edge of the West's belief in itself as a singularly civilized place and (iii) that there is a contradiction between the museum's universalism and its latent capacity to stigmatize some visitors as uncivilized outsiders. The conceptual backbone is provided by *The Established and the Outsiders*. I begin with some observations on the sociology of museums and with a view to establishing the relevance of an Eliasian perspective for museum studies. From there I expand on the three themes identified above before proceeding to a more detailed consideration of how established-outsider theory illuminates the nineteenth-century museum.

⁴ The New Museology cannot be interrogated here. Amongst other things it amounts to a multi-dimensional transformation in museum theory and practice, a symbolic revolution that gathered pace from the 1980s. One aspect has been the shift away from the curator-scholar's emphasis on objects towards meaning-making (including that of visitors) within museums.

2. Sociology, Museums and Outsiders

Sociological interest in the museum is comparatively recent for it is in the 1960s that museums entered the discipline as a topic (Fyfe 2006). The leading edge of sociological research has concerned the impact of social class on visitor experiences. In what was to become a canonical text in the New Museology Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel famously showed that different visitor experiences might be explained in terms of the social distribution of cultural capital, and that some working class visitors found themselves alienated by the museum. In their conclusion, widely repeated and endorsed, they claimed that ‘museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion’ (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991 [1969], 112).

Thus, along with others (e.g. Merriman 2000) they showed how museums can be places where established groups close ranks against outsiders. Elias argued just that in the case of the Marburg Museum around 1900 (Elias 2013). But he was well aware that domination does not necessarily incorporate the excluded into the dominant group’s view of the world. In this paper I argue that museums always exhibit a certain indeterminacy; whatever the balance of power between established and outsiders they contain the ingredients of a ‘conversation’ about domination. We ought not, I argue, confuse a particular state of the museum with its wider syncretic properties as a social space. Thus, museum meanings are not exhausted by dominant ideologies; they may flow down to visitors but they also flow back to the centre as the desire, response and performances of diversely situated and embodied visitors (Huyssen 1995, 15; Trodd 2003). We require a concept of the museum which grasps its properties as a space of social interdependencies between different life-worlds, and which does not incorporate instrumentalism into its definition.

An important strand in the New Museology has been the work of James Clifford. Clifford (1997) drawing on Mary Louise Pratt (2008) [1992] argues for a relational perspective on the museum. Thus, for Clifford (1997, 191-4) museums are not collections of objects, but *contact zones*, ‘where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination’ (Pratt 2008, 7). Clifford argues amongst other things that museums, especially ethnographic museums, are contested spaces where issues of interpretation and repatriation have surfaced. Thus, erstwhile outsiders such as the descendants of previously colonized peoples, have asserted their rights to interpret artefacts and to determine their meanings. But as Clifford makes clear the outsiders may be the urban poor who live only a block away from the museum.

A contact zone perspective speaks to the outsiders of Eliasian theory. From an Eliasian perspective contact zones are spaces in which established and outsiders encounter each other as visitors; they are fluid places marked by flux and

by shifting balances of power. Museums are zones of contact between the material cultures of established and outsider groups; they may be, for example, places at which competing ways of living the body collide and where some ways of organizing the body may be privileged and others stigmatized. The concept captures well the dialogic nature of museums as spaces in which subjects are constituted in and through the medium of their social intercourse; it illuminates the link between museums and modernity and provides clues about the museum's power to generate new meanings such as those of national identity (Fyfe 2012).

The outsider is no stranger to sociology. Deviants, school truants, delinquents, urban gangs, drug takers and artists are amongst its long standing subjects. Most museum visitors are outsiders in the sense that, like medicine, law or politics, museums are worlds of professional experts and lay people. But we might expect not to be humiliated by a consultation or a museum visit. Much of course depends on the balance of power. Some clients may be cut off from the resources that enable access to a common good whilst at the same time self respect and dignity may be denied to them. The problem hangs on how structural failure is internalized as failure by individuals as their *failure* to be complete human beings. And this is a matter of understanding how the great divisions of modernity may be folded into public institutions such as museums. Museums matter much because it might be thought that, founded on citizenship, there should be no outsiders.

3. Theorizing Established and Outsiders

We are concerned with stigma. Elias is unusual in advancing a theory of stigma and its social dynamics irrespective of the setting.⁵ For Elias the outsider was no mere topic. Though marginalized, outsiders were not of marginal interest for they were one side of the coin of difference. The differences might be those of class, race or sexuality. What mattered was the way in which one group might close ranks against another and refuse it dignity. He argued that closure was linked to symbolic resources, for example old buildings and masterpieces – the material culture of a community, rather than say, economic or political assets alone.

The established and outsiders of the Leicester study were two groups of working class families, resident in a suburb of the city. The established, leavened by a few middle class families, dominated the means of respectability, including key institutions such as clubs and churches. Resident in the area for generations, they were exclusive old families whose collective identity flowed

⁵ Cf. Goffman (1968) for an interactionist perspective on the subject.

from the threat posed by outsiders who had settled more recently in the suburb. The former adhered to standards of behaviour and assumed that certain entitlements went with being 'old' families long known in the community. The outsiders, lacking the resources of cohesion, were in their newness atomized, labelled as inferior and unable to marshal the resources of respectability.

Elias and Scotson argued that their study had relevance beyond 1960s Leicester. It may have startled some readers to find them comparing 'old' suburban families with the old landed families of the European past. But the authors argued that, just as with the old families of extinct European upper classes, there were social constraints that compelled self-restraint amongst their old suburban working class families. In suburban Leicester, as in the Good Societies of the nineteenth century, there were tensions between established and outsiders who were locked into struggles for privilege which compelled self-restraint, and delivered distinction for established groups. The dominant group paid a psychological price for its domination. That price *was* the self-restraint, the civilized behaviour, which the established group took to be the difference that was second nature for them. A reference to *The Civilizing Process* (2012) [1939], at that time yet to be translated into English, was likely passed over by most readers. Some, however, would have realized that Elias was concerned with the compulsions of civilizing processes that, for all their historical variations, were patterned as a duality of self-restraint *and* social restraint. That is as simultaneous changes in personality structure and social structure.

The authors had gone 'below deck' to the engine room of distinction and discovered what fuelled stigma. We might be thinking of a suburban working class or of old landed classes who found bourgeois professional people to be without honour. What they had in common was that as erstwhile independent groups they were bonded in asymmetric relations of power; the powerful could think of themselves as the better human beings. They stigmatized outsiders as uncivilized and persuaded them of their own inferiority. At the heart of this pattern, which Elias came to conceptualize as a figuration, was flux and change. Indeed, he insisted that an adequate theory of established-outsider relations required that we move on from stationary to dynamic figurational models. This meant grasping the 'still largely concealed' and 'complex polyphony [...] of rising and declining groups,' who, over time, might switch places and partners as oppressors and oppressed (Elias 2008, 20). The capacity to stigmatize was a function of established-outsider relations and, crucially, its focus and intensity was a function of the balance of power between groups. An Eliasian axiom was that such problems could not be understood by means of a snapshot survey alone. A working theory of group stigma required a long-term perspective.

How does this relate to museum studies? One of the moral puzzles about public cultural institutions such as schools, universities, libraries and museums – one that concerned Bourdieu – is why they sometimes fail to be inclusive by

implicitly encouraging people to exclude themselves. Now, Bourdieu and Darbel's mid-twentieth-century visitor study is sometimes dismissed as dated and as 'too French.' However, they had uncovered not just confused and alienated visitors, but a *relationship* of cultural power between visitors and curators. The latter were a relatively closed elite that had entered the profession in the pre-war period and displayed an aristocratic ethos (Bourdieu and Darbel 1991, 95-9). They were recruited through personal and family connections and were 'scholar-curators' often with little interest in public access to collections. Yet, the curators' attitude to their visitors was a principled one, rooted in their belief that great art spontaneously revealed its meaning to those who had the eye to see and the gift of taste. In being good curators they distanced themselves from some of their visitors. In Eliasian terms they were the established to the working class outsiders whose taste they stigmatized. Moreover, as Elias would have put it, the curators had an 'ally in the inner voice' of the stigmatized visitor (Elias 2008, 10).

4. Modernity, Museums and the Old Order

A distinctive feature of Elias's sociology was his insistence that elements of modernity had their origins in court societies. His was not the well-worn theme of the survival of tradition, of its deleterious effects on industrial capitalist development or 'the invention of tradition.' Rather, it was an argument which took the long view of western rationalization. His thesis was that elements of modern bourgeois rationality and its material culture had 'strong links with court rationality' (Elias 2006, 123). For example, he emphasized how enlightenment thinkers such as Leibniz, Rousseau and Voltaire owed something to a courtly habitus which had civilized and rationalized the expression of feeling. In *The Court Society* he noted: (i) the importance of classical art, High Art and academic theory which had made taste into an object of distinction, reflection and calculation *and* (ii) the passage of a courtly material culture, its furniture, pictures, clothes, into the modern world. Elias alerts us to the museum's dual function in the passage of aristocratic ingredients into the modern world: as an iconographical contribution to the nation state and as design features that fed the expansion of a nineteenth-century consumer culture.

Absolutism had invested in symbolic power as a way projecting its hegemony over the estates (Burke 1992). Great collections projected a universal order centered on monarchy and were accessed through the sovereign's court. Gradually, royal and aristocratic collections were opened to albeit narrowly defined 'publics' as projections of royal power and munificence. Whilst the rites and rituals of visiting were a far cry from contemporary museums, distinguished visitors augmented the reputations of collections and their collectors (Findlen 1996; Macdonald 2005). The development of museums, and other public spac-

es, gradually separated courts from control over upper class conviviality and widened participation. As public spaces they came with the uncertainties of an increasingly urban world of entertainment and social intercourse that had put upper class pleasures beyond courtly control. Academy salons and exhibitions open to visitors appeared in these new spaces, where royal authority and markets now intersected.

Museums had evolved out of diverse early modern collections and collecting practices – royal treasuries, reliquaries, pageants, cabinets, *wunderkammer* and princely collections. Amongst the first institutions to be declared as public museums were the Ashmolean (1683), The Medici Collections (1737), the British Museum (1753) and the Louvre (1793). The pace of museum development varied from nation state to nation state and reflected differences between absolutist and parliamentary regimes. Absolutism is the key to the early public access we find with the Vatican and Russia. By contrast, in those countries without a strong absolutist tradition or where the balance of power favoured parliaments ‘more complex negotiations and recollection of resources were needed’ (Aronsson 2011, 45). Thus, institutional variation reflected different national transitions from tradition to modernity and also different interpenetrations of aristocratic and bourgeois life-styles.

By the middle of the nineteenth century no self-respecting capital city could be without a museum. Innovations in architecture, display, lighting and glazing shifted the emphasis from the patron-collector’s taste to the visitor’s need to see and appreciate exhibits. They secured the point of view of the visitor, so enabling the focused attention of the Kantian gaze. Change was implemented in a bid for a rational organization that accommodated the needs of wider publics and facilitated the viewer’s systematic comparison of art works. These changes were aspects of the development of cultural capital. What is distinctive and modern about the museum is its piling up ‘of all times, all ages, all forms, all tastes in one place’ (Foucault 1998, 182). However, accumulation of artefacts is but one side of the coin of cultural capital; there is also the internalization and augmentation of cultural capital by visitors. Theorizing established-outsider relations at the museum requires that we acknowledge processes within the built museum; for example those that relate to the histories of collections, curatorial practices and the development of curatorial specialists. This is in part a matter of showing how the disposition of things within the museum is linked to the internalization of bodily dispositions that are attuned to the accumulation of cultural capital. It is also a matter of linking two histories: those of cultural capital and collecting. That is, the birth of the museum presupposed a separation of knowledge from ownership of collections whilst that very knowledge was to become a basis for social exclusion.

Bourgeois incorporation of an aristocratic material culture is perhaps most evident in the institution of national galleries. For example, London’s National Gallery, established in 1824, had begun life as the amateur leisured taste of

collectors of European Old Masters. Whilst aristocratic cultural assets were incorporated into the lives of bourgeois people, they converted those assets into new forms of cultural capital. It was partly as museum objects and as design principles that the buildings, religious symbols, decorations, furniture, paintings and sculpture, that is the material culture of the old order, passed into modernity. The museum was a site at which elements of an aristocratic habitus were internalized as the habitus of bourgeois people. The transition was evident in bourgeois life-styles and collecting habits of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was too a feature of the expanding consumer industries that serviced bourgeois and middle class households.

Thus, museum formation was not only a matter of art museums. Museums, exhibitions and expositions displayed the conspicuous productivity of bourgeois science, technology and design and it was partly through these institutions that High Art entered the bourgeois imagination. And it was also through the inventories of design museums that memories of the eighteenth century craft-industries fed into late nineteenth-century styles such as Art Nouveau (Silverman 1989). Museum collections contained art historical vocabularies of courtly styles, of classical, baroque, rococo, neoclassical and so on, that ignited new tastes and provide opportunities to raise the standards of style and distinction.

By 1850 the number of annual visitors to the British Museum was in excess of a million. Across Europe there was a substantial increase in the number of museums. Elias's Germany is a case in point: in the years 1900-1914 179 museums were established (Wittlin 1949, 136). Museums, which co-existed and overlapped with a wider urban culture of fairs shows and showmanship, regularized and rationalized exhibitions and displays. They formed part of a wider complex, an 'exhibitionary complex' that included department stores and international expositions (Bennett 1995). Thus, the museum was part and parcel of an institutional configuration that included urban development, travel, transport and retail; it was deeply implicated in the formation and diffusion of the taste, knowledge and discrimination that constituted Victorian cultural capital. As one historian puts it: the 'utopian impulse to turn every house into a museum rather than a castle is the final realization of the ever expanding nineteenth-century dissemination of aristocratic and church art' (Black 2000, 71).

Finally, in following museum history where it takes us, from one civilized body to another, we find a courtly aristocratic body based on honourable conspicuous consumption ceding place to a virtuous consumption that augmented conspicuous production. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these different ways of living the body had gradually interpenetrated as bourgeois outsiders migrated into the ruling class; 'modes of conduct of court-aristocratic upper class were amalgamated with those of various bourgeois strata as these rose to the position of upper classes' (Elias 2012, 470). And courtly *civility* was incorporated and perpetuated [...] in what was now called 'civilization' or, more precisely, 'civilised conduct' (Elias 2012, 470). This process of assimilation,

between erstwhile established and outsiders, was a facet of the growing interdependencies of commercial-industrial development which, in turn, raised the stakes in the struggle for distinction (Elias 2012, 470). Elias stressed that a ‘particular kind of social control, that is the self-control associated with sensitivity to the behaviour of others was strengthened in the shaping of the habitus, or second nature (Elias 2012, 470). The museum, as we shall see, welcomed that habitus.

5. Civilized Spaces, Contact Zones and the Authorship of Museums

Elias argued that a counterpart to the elusive complexity of industrial nation-states were the fantasies and emotional bonds that were consecrated in numinous national symbols (Elias 2013). Museums have a bearing on his argument. They were places where nineteenth-century people could see that they were civilized because they were French, British or even European. Museums, promoted belief in particular nations; they also established belief in nation states as the very basis of civilization (Duncan and Wallach 1980; Macdonald 2003). How else could one live? Universal survey museums, such as the Louvre, were ceremonial sites, which transfigured society as the nation-state. Thus visitors navigated sequences of rooms that punctuated collections as periods and rendered visible the story of the nation and the providential benevolence of the state. The museum gave civilization legs. Visitors rehearsed the story of civilization as the present’s improvement on the past as they progressed from room to room and along its corridors of power and knowledge. The museum enabled people to classify the things of the world in a way that was compelling; they might place their nation within the universal story of human progress and imagine that the rhythms of nations were all that mattered.

Thus, in collecting, conserving and re-ordering the things of the past, the museum normalized the nation state as a form of human association. Visitors could, as Sharon Macdonald argues, imagine that they *were* the People; that *we* were all connected as citizens of nation states. It enabled people to see that they were disconnected from others and to imagine themselves as *we* Europeans who were natural colonizers of *they*, the non-Europeans. Ethnographic and anthropological museums stigmatized the ‘other’ and pandered to western hubris about the universality of its own civilization. By the eighteenth century the world was dominated by a western-centred configuration of interconnected trading, competing and warring nation states. It was this network of power which had inflated and sucked in other societies, colonized or not, into the world system. Its imperial zenith was reached with the colonization of Africa in the late nineteenth century and the final subjugation of native peoples turned them into exhibits (Blanchard et al. 2008).

In Britain the development of parliamentary power shaped museum policies. In 1800 access to nascent museums and established metropolitan sights was limited. Though formally public, the early British Museum featured restrictive practices that discouraged visitors and which would have 'kept working people at a safe distance' (Burton 1999, 77). Limited access was underpinned by aristocratic norms of rank, station and entitlement anchored in negative stereotypes about the lower classes. Theirs was the plebeian world of country fairs, gawping visitors and popular shows from which the museum was to be distinguished. However, the growing political power of radical bourgeois groups in the 1830s, flowing from long-term processes of commercialization and industrialization, exposed aristocratic cultural privileges to challenge. Augmentation of parliamentary power was expressed in the bourgeoisie's interest in the museum dimensions of citizenship, industry and public education. Thus, in Britain from the 1840s working class access to museums acquired an increasingly political significance with the gradual incorporation of working class males into the body politic (Fyfe 2000, 137-40).

Within the developing nation states of Europe, the functions of public collections and museums changed as occupations came to form the backbone of social structure. Occupation gradually displaced aristocratic rank and landownership as founts of dignity. Identity coalesced around the notion of productive occupational work. Museums and exhibitions were amongst the public spaces in which emerging social classes began to perform the occupational identities of an industrial civilization. Across Europe museums emerged as national spaces in which the life worlds of different classes, dynastic and ascending bourgeois strata, as well as peasantries, working class and colonial peoples began to appear as components of publics. Some identities such as mannered aristocratic connoisseurship were eclipsed whilst others emerged and crystallized as new social types. Styles of visiting, recognizable as different modes of consumption, became stereotypical signs of worth.

These topics take us beyond Elias's primary focus on earlier upper class phases in the civilizing process (Mennell 1989, 125-6). How a civilizing process shaped the habitus of other strata such as the urban working classes was not the substantive focus. Mennell, thinking of nineteenth-century France suggests that mass communication, military conscription and schooling were dimensions of a nineteenth-century civilizing process which incorporated working class people. Museums were also important and for three reasons. First, they were outward expressions of the interdependency and interpenetration of urban social classes who converged with each other as different publics at expositions, galleries and national collections. Secondly, just as courts had been sites where aristocratic mentalities were formed, museums (and exhibitions) were amongst those where characteristically bourgeois mentalities, dispositions and habits were shaped within the Good Societies of nineteenth-century Europe, and then selectively transmitted to outsiders: that is to the

peasants, workers and colonial subjects who populated the great exhibitions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thirdly, museum expansion registered a new kind of state; one that went beyond monopolies of violence and taxation, to *pace* Bourdieu, symbolic violence. Museums democratized collections but as with other national institutions, they drew populations into the net of a new common calculus of distinction and stigma. Moreover, they were places at which subjectivity, the interior life of the mind, was uniquely performed on a public stage and thus visible and open to collective judgment.

The state did not invent the museum. The museum's causes are located elsewhere in the wider history of collecting and its transformations from the early modern period. Museums were certainly put to use in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in enlightened and in instrumental ways. But those uses or functions were not their causes. Museums, emerged organically out of a latent socialization of dynastic collections and in association with class interdependencies that were different to those of an estate society, namely those of class stratification. Modernity had generated an ambivalence that was absent from decentralized and weakly integrated medieval societies. The latter were estate societies organized as ranks of people whose life-worlds were strongly insulated from each other; these were societies where dominant groups had little interest in the inner being of subordinate groups and where hierarchy was guaranteed by Divine Providence. Moreover, a medieval world of personal service and warfare, of giving and theft, was one in which loyalty and enmity were sharply defined. It was a compartmentalized and dangerous world without ambiguity in which collections, in the form of treasuries or *Schätze*, displayed dynastic certainties and stored the wealth necessary for prosecuting war and forming alliances. These accumulations were collections but they were not museums.

Elias detects, in the transition from estate to class, the emergence of a social structure that secreted new patterns of emotion, one in which feelings between strata became increasingly complex, ambiguous and uncertain (Elias 2012, 352-3). These observations help us to appreciate the museum's emergence as a 'conversation,' an argument even, between strata. Thus modernity was not just a matter of the waning of tradition and the triumph of the bourgeoisie, but of a complexity that was expressed in new modes of collecting and display that expanded the horizons of different social strata. Gradually, aristocracies were losing the power to wage conspicuous consumption at the expense of the state, at public cost, whilst conspicuous consumption itself was a target of bourgeois criticism. Just as feudal warriors were brought under the hegemony of absolutist monarchs and lost their capacity to wage war, so too were aristocratic and courtly elites separated from private ownership of those collective representations, those objects, which had acquired a wider national significance.

The tensions were expressed differently at different kinds of museums and cultural institutions and refracted through the field of the developing cultural state. Thus, for example art academies, with their royal and aristocratic antecede-

ents were decentred, devalued and separated from control over museums (Fyfe 2000). Tensions between residual aristocratic and bourgeois mores pulled the art profession apart, splitting the late Victorian art world into two camps, each attached to different visions of the creative life. In the early twentieth century modernist outsider artists and their commercial dealers fused new exhibiting and business practices with an aristocratic disposition that fed into romanticism and bohemianism (Grana 1967). These new symbolic specialists formed partnerships with early twentieth-century culture industries, spreading an aristocratic ethos that was incorporated into the professional and new middle class life-styles of the last century (Featherstone 1991). This constituency in turn laid siege to museums of art as modernism became the official art of twentieth-century western nation states whilst the art of academies was stigmatized (Fyfe 2000).

However, established aristocratic interests in collecting did not evaporate. The old order was digging in on a new cultural terrain (Fyfe 2000). Tensions within the propertied class were played out at the museum and these help to explain the inchoate character of early nineteenth-century museums (Prior 2003). It was not always evident that a museum entailed more than opening the aristocrat's house and that rebuilding and development were required if access was to be meaningful. Nor was it patent that a public picture gallery or museum might differ from a private gallery in what it offered up to the eye of the visitor; the interiors of early nineteenth-century museums and galleries in the UK did not really differ from private galleries (Whitehead 2005, 3). The museum as a public institution was a process. What today might be judged a private and exclusive space 'could have seemed in the eighteenth century much more open' (Duncan 1995, 36).

Inchoateness does not to justify the conclusion that these institutions were less museums than those of the later nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Rather, I would argue that inchoateness made the museum. Museums were born in the spaces between interdependent classes in rapidly urbanizing societies where the balance of power between established and outsiders was in flux. Museums drew their energy from the interdependencies of social strata that were never completely integrated either by providential consensus or by domination. The authorship of museums resided not with *a class* or with *the state*, but with a configuration of established and outsider classes that emerged in the nineteenth century. These considerations point to the museum's collective authorship by a figuration of classes. Expressed in Eliasian terms: figurations of established and outsiders were the authors of museums.

6. Museums, Outsiders and Stigma

The historical outlines of a contested embourgeoisement of museums are to be found in recent writing and research (Fyfe 2000; Prior 2003). The museum was

connected with the ascent of bourgeois social classes – although we should not assume that the early nineteenth-century middle classes necessarily saw the first museums as *their* institutions (Shapiro 1990, 233). Moreover, other social classes are factors in the contested equation that constituted the museum. Interdependent groups cultivated different and often contradictory relationships to cultural forms, to space-time and to the body. The museum dramatized the tensions between classes, it was one of the places at which different modes of consumption and different cultures of the body were brought together and competed for room within the public spaces of museums.

Aristocratic collections and early museums were re-ordered none-the-less, especially from the late eighteenth century, to meet the priorities of the bourgeois gaze. A shift from decorative to historical hangs of paintings is the sign of an ascending bourgeois people for whom the visit was a means of augmenting cultural capital. Museum case-histories, such as Whitehead (2005) and Prior (2003) show how the discursive changes at national collections such as the National Galleries in London and Edinburgh presupposed a break with courtly and aristocratic culture. In revolutionary France hanging art at the Louvre was disputed between adherents to different museological principles: between mixed and decorative hangs which juxtaposed the Old Masters and historical expositions of the development of national schools. The debate was coloured by a republican politics bent on stigmatizing the old order for its conspicuous consumption (McClellan 1994, 106-8).

The museum's direction of travel was towards the individualized visit of the 'metropolitan bourgeois subject' (Hetherington 2010, 113). Whilst, of course, visitors might arrive in groups, the codes of visiting were increasingly premised on a silent, restrained and close visual communion with exhibits that was normalized as the preferred mode. If the collective visit is by and large an experience of 'looking round' the individualized visit is about the gaze and the productive visit of close attention. Here, the privatization of the reading public went hand in hand with the formation of a visiting public; the expanding world of illustrated journalism showed what was expected of the contemplative rather than convivial museum visitor.

Museum rules and installations gradually crystallized around the priorities of an individualized mode of accessing cultural capital (Alberti 2007, 380-7; Sherman 1987). Constance Classen (2007), inspired by Elias, examines the history of museum-visitors' manners. Just as Elias investigated changes in conduct through manner books, she investigates the rules of visiting at Oxford's Ashmolean in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Visitors, she shows, were permitted not only to touch exhibits, but to engage with them through other senses such as taste and smell. In due course however the visit was normalized as a purely visual experience without auditory, olfactory or tactile involvement. The museum demanded new sensibilities and an inner

control over spontaneous expressions with the evolution of new rules and codes of behaviour which defined the normal visit.

Figure 2: The Nineveh Room at the British Museum. Wood engraving. Illustrated London News, 1853



© Trustees of the British Museum.

But as Classen shows, that was a contested ordering. The museum was, after all, born into a European world where people had a sense of living simultaneously in different worlds of dynastic time, local time, task-oriented time and universal clock time. History book time (Eisenstein 1966) was still in the making and people could remember what it was 'to live materially and spiritually, in worlds that are not modern at all' (Berman 1983, 17). Politicians, intellectuals and elements of the press representing radical bourgeois challenges to the old order pointed to museums, and especially art museums, as a medium that would help enrol all classes as citizens in a national time-space. Civilizing, instructive and redemptive museums, it was imagined, might extend from London's West End to the rookeries of the East End and in partnership with a reforming state. *Pace* Elias one of the most significant aspects of the nineteenth century was not just the upward pressure by bourgeois classes into the old order, but of industrial classes as a whole. Industrial and design museums, such as London's South Kensington, were sites where the entitlements of patronage and aristocratic connoisseurship were challenged by industrial interests and by ascending bourgeois classes who pressed the case for working class inclusion.

Museums made demands on the bodies and psychologies of their visitors (Leahy 2012). They placed a premium on reflexivity, on the self-regulating behaviours appropriate within crowds that went hand in hand with an awareness of being observed by others – the paradox of visibility and isolation (Sen-

nett 1976, 13). Cities required a new etiquette, not courtly but urban in recognition of a space where rank was dissolving. As with other public spaces museum visitors managed proximity to others by retreating into themselves whilst simultaneously keeping others, strangers, under observation. Nineteenth-century visual artists were experts in depicting the ways of seeing associated with urban life: e.g. gazing, glancing, looking, surveying. A painting by Giuseppe Gabriella depicts visitors at London's National Gallery.⁶

Figure 3: Giuseppe Gabriella, Room 32 The National Gallery. Oil on canvas, 1886



© Government Art Collection.

Elias might have described them as monads for they are mostly self-contained enigmas lost in thought. We cannot know what they are thinking for their expressions reveal little. Gabriella captures the reflexive glance, the self-regulating behaviours appropriate within crowds of strangers that went hand in hand with an awareness of being observed.

However, visitor experiences were multiple, not reducible to individuals but refracted through different cultures of pleasure and education associated with an industrializing society. People responded to the anomie of exhibitions through the medium of their class culture. For example, the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition of 1856 reveals a collective working class presence with visitors arriving by train and parading together through the exposition (Leahy 2012, 82). Kate Hill (2005) identifies the working class presence at the museum less as a crowd and more as one of mutual self-improvement premised on a collective experience of what was collectively owned. And another significant

⁶ A colour reproduction is available at the Art UK website: <<http://artuk.org>>.

feature of nineteenth-century museum was the working class club movement which, flourishing from the 1860s, sponsored excursions to museums and stately homes (Marlow 1980; Rose 2010).

Figure 4: *A Party of Working Men at the National Gallery*. The Graphic 1870

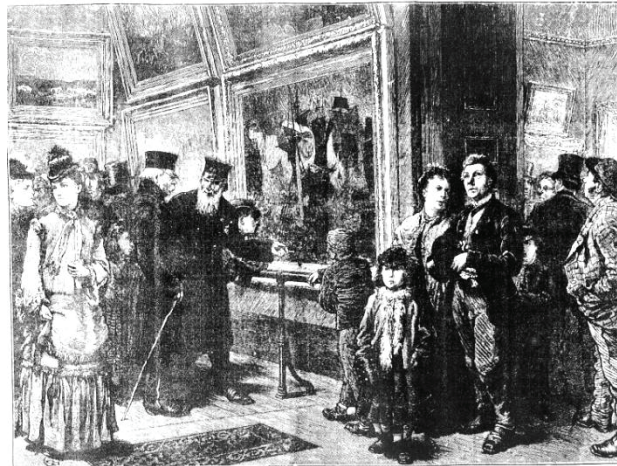


Note: Coll. Author.

There was, then, a museum and exhibition dimension to the process of class formation, one in which different classes composed their own modes of visiting. Jeffrey Auerbach (1999) is illuminating in the matter of how different and contradictory notions of the dignity of labour coexisted at the 1851 Great Exhibition. Auerbach advances a compelling argument that, whilst the Exhibition did not dissolve social difference, it was a space in which classes could co-exist, one where the components of national identity were put to the test and where new notions of dignity were emerging but had still to coalesce (Auerbach 1999, 128-58). Museums registered the ambiguity and ambivalence that marked changes in the principles of social stratification as class displaced the residues of sealed estates. Working class ‘use and abuse’ of public galleries was a matter of concern to nineteenth-century reformers as they fretted about crowd behaviour. It is not only that class differences were subjects of public debate. It is that visitors, appearing in the wider consciousness of those who read the periodical press, were illustrated and coded in class terms. It is against this background that complaints flourished about idle gawping Sunday visitors. The ‘great unwashed,’ with their spittle and breath, raised concerns. Museum expansion and the growth of visitor numbers went hand in hand with a *cultural*

stratification and with a middle class stigmatization of the working class as culturally deprived.

Figure 5: *Holiday Folks at the National Gallery*. The Graphic 1878



Note: Coll. author.

Museums were a part of the bourgeoisie state's onslaught on both aristocratic conspicuous consumption and working class conspicuous fecklessness. A mid-Victorian painting⁷ by George O'Neill, though not of a museum, shows the difference that now mattered.

Figure 6: George O'Neill, *Public Opinion*. Oil on canvas, 1863

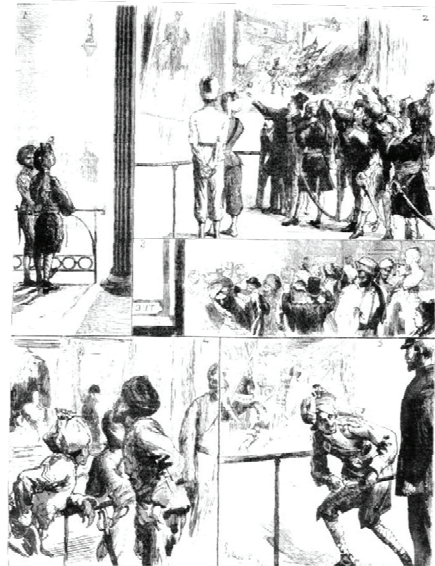


© Leeds Art Gallery/Bridgeman Images.

⁷ A colour reproduction is available at the Art UK website: <<http://artuk.org>>.

The scene is London's fashionable annual Royal Academy exhibition. The judgment of a group of middle class people, top hats and well turned out, is the subject of this 'subject' painting. A painting, one which we cannot see, commands the visitors' interest. Their pleasure flows from self-control and not from the external agency of a curious object or a wonderful thing at which they might gawp. It is the capacity of the viewers to manage knowledge and pleasure from 'within' the psyche that matters here.⁸ Whilst O'Neill seems to have in mind art's universal public appeal, the painting also invites invidious comparison. Two male figures are lurking in the shadows, looking around the room; one has his eye on a young woman. There are clues about class that would have registered with Victorian observers; these two are marked out by their fustian status as workers. The artist invites us to witness the contrast between a distracted eye and a disciplined eye. There is, a however, a promise of redemption for the picture contains a third working class face, catalogue pressed to mouth and apparently absorbed by the painting. We have a public in the making.

Figure 7: *Our Indian Visitors*. The Graphic, 1882



Note: Coll. author.

⁸ See Campbell (1989, 73) for an illuminating account of the link between modern cultural forms and the dualism of the self-conscious observer who was increasingly aware of 'object-ness' of the external world alongside their 'subject-ness,' and with their awareness 'poised between the two.'

The working-class visitor was newsworthy. In connecting people and things in new and surprising ways the museum came with all the interest, excitement and moral panics that tend to follow expansion of cultural markets and the admission of outsiders (e.g. readers and novels, students and universities or children and the internet). Two newspaper images document the mentality of the middle class reader. The first, of visiting soldiers of the Raj (figure 7), belongs to a recognizable museum comic trope in which the outsider arrives with the wrong habitus and performs the wrong rituals (Bennett 2006, 273-4).

Only under instruction from what is presumably a native British lecturer do the soldiers display the disciplined attention appropriate to the museum (panel 2). Otherwise there is the anxiety and embarrassment of being caught before a nude (panel 4), and a naïve fight or flight reaction before a battle scene (panel 5). Still worse these visitors have mutated into ‘native servants’ providing ‘piggy-backs’ to their colonial masters (central panel). And of course in figure 8 the Charwomen are not visitors; they are at work, caught in a moment of respite with the tools of their trade. There must be a question as to whether they would be there under any other circumstances.

Figure 8: The Madonna and the Charwomen. The Graphic 1898



Note: Coll. author.

Implicit in these images is the gift or, as anthropologists have taught us, *the gift relationship*. Many European collections and museums had medieval origins in

personal giving. But museum expansion was driven partly by an impersonalization of the gift relationship and its rationalization through new public institutions. The philanthropy of rich bourgeois collector-donors is well established in the history of museums. But we should also note the work of middle class cultural philanthropists by ways of instruction and outreach work with working men's clubs. For example, in the 1880s and 90s some social reformers developed a moral programme for exhibiting established British art, promoting it to the working class of London's East End (Borzello 1987; Koven 1994). Seth Koven's perceptive essay shows how complex, contradictory and subtle was the relationship between reformers and East Enders. The latter might undermine the authority of the former; middle class guides might be exposed in their ignorance by the visitors' questions. Koven's conclusion, supported by evidence, is that the flow was not one-way. For one thing we cannot assume that the 'message' or gift given was the one received. For another there are, as Koven, Hill and others argue, good reasons for thinking of museums and galleries as sites of cross class exchange and interdependence. We can never be sure that recipients, our children, our relatives or the deserving poor, will do with our gifts what we might imagine or prefer them to do.

7. The Dialectics of Observation

Museums exhibit Eliasian themes. They are places of knowledge, mimesis, excitement, emotion and manners and above all perhaps, of civilization. In drawing the threads of my argument together I turn to the matter of social observation. In *The Court Society* Elias emphasized the visual dimension of social interaction and with special regard to the premium that seventeenth-century court life placed on individuals' capacities to observe and to interpret others' behaviour whilst concealing inner feelings and intentions. On the one hand observation was an aspect of the rationalization of the courtly body and the subjection of a self that must command and conceal its real sentiments about others. And on the other the rhythms and conditions of court life intensified the social constraints that invited self-awareness and vigilance about co-present others, thus privileging the eye over other senses. It is clear that for Elias the habitus, of not only the twentieth-century middle classes, but also of working class people contained ancestral aristocratic ingredients. A key question concerns the way in which bourgeois societies selected, assimilated and remodelled elements of an aristocratic visual habitus through the medium of the museum.⁹

⁹ The pioneering works of Hooper-Greenhill (1992) and Bennett (1995) are especially important for our understanding of museums as site of visibility, observation and surveillance.

Visibility, observation and surveillance are major concerns in museum studies. Tony Bennett argues, that museums and exhibitions developed as places both to see and to be seen at and that, most importantly, they provided vantage points which permitted visitors to distance themselves from the multitude, to see the vista that was the multitudinous exposition (Bennett 1995, 80-86). My emphasis, *pace* Elias, has been on figurations of established and outsider groups who were the authors of museum discourse and who visualized themselves. The point I wish to make, one elegantly rehearsed by Binkley et al. (2010) is that discourse is always embedded in the compulsions of figurational processes. Techniques of subjectification, such as those associated with museum visitors, are facets of established-outsider figurations. As my illustrations suggest, the Victorian press articulated, voiced and visualized stereotypes of outsiders who were not 'on message,' but whose discursive weight cannot be ignored. I now turn to a closer consideration of discourse, visualization and figuration.

Now much has been made *pace* André Malraux (1954) of the museum without walls, of the imaginary museum that might be composed from reproductions of art. But less has been made of how, developing in tandem with illustrated journalism, the interior life of the built museum was opened up to surveillance through visual documentation, and through observations by officials, committee witnesses and others about life in its galleries and rooms. Illustrated journalism was a component of an expanding visual world that included museums and expositions as well as the press (Fox 1977). So too was the official discourse of visiting and visitors that circulated through the developing cultural state.

We should hold in mind Elias's emphasis on the relational dimension of discourse and on the flux and latent possibilities that mark established-outsider relationships. One thing that makes museums so significant is that knowledge of how visitors conducted themselves comes from a variety of documents: satire, newspapers, novels, visual depictions, scientific investigation, institutional reports and the official discourse of governmental bodies that furnished the public sphere. These had different functions as evidence for what people did at exhibitions and museums and were often exercises in exhortation and judgment. We should note that they are bourgeois people's observations and judgments about people who are looking at things and observing other people. We know what we do know partly because reformers wanted to know what to do about class and citizenship and to calculate the effects of 'their' civilization on the uncivilized outsider. And we also know what we do because visiting itself placed a premium on self-observation and an awareness of others. And that awareness included everybody's awareness of others observing and knowing that they were observed (Bennett 1995).

Holiday folks, Indian soldiers and charwomen at the National Gallery were newsworthy. These depictions of otherness have, of course, more say about the readers, editors and their captions than the visitors. The fiction must be not

only that we know what is going on in the heads of the Indian visitors and the charwomen, but that we are their judges. What makes the pictures interesting is the way in which the outsider 'visitors' appear in the consciousness of the established: the editor's 'humorous' and clumsy captions evince a need to know. In a quite different context Michael Taussig has argued, in relation to Western explorers' hubris about technologies of sound recording or photography, that the important questions do not concern the sociology of their effects on 'the natives.' Rather, what matters is 'the white mans' fascination with their fascination with these mimetically capacious machines' (Taussig 1993, 198). Mimetic power is at stake here for it is just that fascination that would have made these images newsworthy in the 1880s and 90s. We cringe, but there is something for us to think about. The images suggest frisson about the outsider's consumption, the middle class excitement about working class excitement, something that can be found in the pages of the periodical press and in the official discourse of museums. What are *they* making of *our* civilization? It is just possible that the answers might change both interlocutors.

One observer, the bourgeois reformer of the British state, Henry Cole (1808-1882) was the most significant figure in the nineteenth-century museum world and the driving force behind London's South Kensington Museum. There is ambivalence in his observations concerning the safety of exhibits. Before a Select Committee in 1860 he reports damage to a sculpture of a Mother and Baby at South Kensington. Mothers, with their babies, he explains have made it grubby. However, in 1864 before another Select Committee he repeats the anecdote, this time adding that the toes of babies and sculpture are being compared by mothers. By now he is more sanguine and tolerant: the presence of children and artisans is a 'wholesome feature' and the mothers are cause for a joke by him about what is in the final analysis a humanizing experience: 'I cannot help thinking that the artisan and his wife and children are in that way undergoing a very humanizing influence, and I am of opinion that that we ought to be glad of it' (Parliamentary Papers, Select Committee, 1864, XII, Q2407). And we might wonder, civilizing for him also?

8. Concluding Remarks

In *The Civilizing Process* Elias argued that twentieth-century Europeans had inherited personality traits from a courtly past. Their tastes, rationality and intelligence appeared to be natural attributes of civilized individuals whose way of life was superior to the dynastic elites that they were displacing and the subordinate groups that they encountered as citizens, workers, consumers and colonial subjects. They, the established group, had forgotten (as they turned their reforming gaze on outsider groups) that their own 'superior standards' had been developed, shaded and nuanced, in the course of historical change (Elias

2012, 107). But buried in the psyche of bourgeois people were aristocratic ingredients, tastes, reflexes, bodily inhibitions and psychological restraints that they had absorbed from declining aristocracies and internalized. For Elias, then, the seventeenth century was more than *the past*; elements of its way of life, blended with those of the bourgeoisie had passed into the twentieth century as the second natures of modern people. I have argued that the nineteenth-century museum was a medium through which ingredients of an aristocratic habitus were carried forward and melded with those of the bourgeoisie and transmitted to other classes.

Bourdieu argued that the museum's elitism was a precipitate of past struggles for distinction (Bourdieu 1984, 12). Elias would have identified past struggles as phases in a long term process of civilization and identified that *process* as the object of analysis. Viewed in this way, historical examples of conflict are way stations on the road to amnesia. Forgotten was the history of self-constraint, of civilized dispositions, that were generated by struggles for distinction between established and outsiders that had raised the stakes in the past. Elias emphasized the long view; the past was not the historical background to present day problems for contemporary problems *are* historical problems. Historical research established the regularities of shifting power-balances that registered in prevailing patterns of stigma.

In the mid-1970s Elias wondered why as the movements of former outsiders into positions of power multiplied and as the main axis of tensions globalized there was not more attention paid to changing power balances (Elias 2008, 20). Over the past thirty years many Western museums have been reshaped by a politics of inclusion and by an emphasis on visitors and their experiences as opposed to the curatorial object. These developments are no doubt linked to the decentring of western nation states whose core identities have been transformed by relative economic decline, decolonization, migration and globalization. Many museums register the shifting balances of power associated with globalization and it is their flux and energy that has led to a renewed understanding of the difference between collections and museums and to new visions of what a museum might be. After all there is a case for saying that museums should not express established-outsider relations. How then might we theorize the tension that is evident from the beginning of the museum, that between the formal rights of citizens to see their heritage and the substantive inequalities that flow from the great divisions of modernity?

We might begin with an Eliasian approach to museums. It would be one that does not pin down the discourse and then proceed to look for the actors. Put simply there are no museums without contradictions because they are creatures of social ambivalence. Museums I have suggested, opened up a conversation between social strata and within the developing nation states of Western Europe; they were *contact zones* populated by established and outsider groups. Contact zones are contested spaces; they may over time be marked by shifting

balances of power in which established and outsiders, for example curators and visitors with disabilities, may encounter each other. Museums are zones of contact between different material cultures; they are collections or displays, which register those encounters and, in so doing, emancipate symbols from particularism. We have seen that they are spaces in which different bodies and different ways of living the body may collide and where particular ways of organizing the body may be privileged.

Here for example we might, as does Classen, write the history of the museum in terms of the privileging of sight over touch. It is the story of how handling and touching things was gradually denied to visitors and reserved for curators. The more asymmetric they become the more that the dominated subject is absorbed into the dominant and the more that the former experience themselves as outsiders through the categories of the dominant group. In the mid-twentieth century the balance of power was skewed towards the curators but it may also tip towards those for whom museums (as well as other public institutions) did not traditionally cater. Carrying on the conversation must change the museum.

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