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## Pedagogic Objects, Clean Eyes, and Popular Instruction: On Sensory Regimes and Museum Didactics

[Tony Bennett](#)

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In opening his essay "Museums as Contact Zones," James Clifford transports his readers to the basement of the Portland Museum of Art to eavesdrop on a meeting that had been arranged between Tlingit elders, the Museum's curators, and himself to discuss the future of the Museum's Rasmussen Collection of Northwest Coast Indian artifacts. The curators, Clifford tells us, had shared his own expectation that the elders would want to focus their attention on, and to organize the discussion around, the objects in the collection--but this proved not to be so. Although the artifacts were referred to from time to time "as *aides-mémoires*, occasions for the telling of stories and the singing of songs," <sup>1</sup> it was the stories and songs that took center stage. The objects were left to keep pretty much to themselves, lying undisturbed "on the museum tables or in storage boxes," <sup>2</sup> for the most part unheeded and, indeed, unseen, their role eclipsed by the cross-cultural exchanges--in stories, songs, and conversation--that they had occasioned. In Clifford's telling, the Museum thus emerges as primarily a scene of conversation rather than one of exhibition.

The imagery is a fitting one for Clifford's argument that museums should now be understood as "contact zones" that aim to facilitate a greater degree of cross-cultural communication between the different [End Page 345] communities that are brought into contact with one another within the museum space. This entails that curators should conceive their roles in new ways. In place of the curator as the possessor of an authoritative knowledge that results in museum artifacts being arranged as the vehicles for a one-way transmission of messages, Clifford suggests that curators should rethink their relationships to the objects entrusted to their care and see these as artifactual mediators in, and of, complex histories of cultural exchange. It is equally clear, however, that the program Clifford proposes for the museum entails a shift in the ratio of the senses that are to be brought into play in the artifactual environment that the museum constructs. If, for the past two hundred years and more, the curator's role has been to arrange an authoritative message for the museum's public, this has been done by exhibiting collections in a manner calculated to render that message visible. This centering of the eye within a conception of the museum as an institution of the visible is now to be displaced in a conception of the museum's function that--in the stress placed on dialogue across cultures caught in reciprocal, although unequally structured, exchanges--views objects as vehicles for promoting complex kinds of cross-cultural talk and listening, rather than simply as collections that are to be displayed to be looked at. This becomes clear as Clifford outlines the difference between what the Portland Museum's curators had looked forward to obtaining from their meeting with the Tlingit elders--that is, another context for the display of the collection, one rooted in and

authenticated by an authoritative indigenous cultural perspective--and what they actually got:

As evoked in the museum's basement, Tlingit history did not primarily illuminate or contextualize the objects of the Rasmussen Collection. Rather, the objects provoked (called forth, brought to voice) ongoing stories of struggle. From the position of the collecting museum and the consulting curator, this was a disruptive history which could not be confined to providing past tribal context for the objects. The museum . . . was urged to act on behalf of Tlingit communities, not simply to represent the history of tribal objects completely or accurately.<sup>3</sup>

Clifford is not alone in suggesting the need for a change in the sensory regime of the museum. Indeed, the dominance of the eye has been put in question for some time now across a range of museum practices--from hands-on exhibits that promote tactile involvement in the museum environment, through museums in which the sonic element predominates over the visual, to avant-garde **[End Page 346]** experiments in which sound and vision are gratingly misaligned with one another. My purpose here is to place these concerns in historical perspective by looking at the processes through which the sensory regime of the museum came to privilege sight, and, in doing so, to organize distinctive relations of vision and pedagogy, with a view to considering what light these might throw on contemporary attempts to lessen the dominance of the visual by reordering its relations to the other senses. The relations of vision and pedagogy with which I shall be most concerned are those comprising the didactics of the late-nineteenth-century public museum, whose ocularcentrism was succinctly expressed by Frederick McCoy, the first director of the National Museum of Victoria, when he suggested that museums were best thought of as "affording 'eye-knowledge' to a class of persons who have neither time nor opportunity for lengthened study of books."<sup>4</sup> As we shall see, formulations of this kind were routinely repeated in the professional museum literature of the period, especially in the context of debates about the relations between labels and exhibits and their role--as a subset of the relations between words and things --in directing vision. As such, their intelligibility rested on the confluence of a number of historical processes that, in transforming the museum artifact into a pedagogic object, sought also to cleanse the eyes of the public so that, in absorbing the lessons of those objects, they might be effectively instructed in the meaning of history. If we are to place the sensory regimes that governed museum didactics in this period in a proper historical perspective, however, it will be necessary to appreciate how they were indebted to, while also differing from, the relations of sight and vision that governed the program of the Enlightenment museum. It is accordingly to these matters that I turn first, by tracing how the museum was transformed from a place for civic conversability, in which relations of speaking, hearing, and seeing were more or less equally balanced, into a place for looking and learning in which the eye--directed by reason--was, at least theoretically, to reign supreme.

## **From Civic Conversations to Directed Vision**

The Italian Renaissance played a crucial role in the early development of the museum as a distinctively secular and civic institution. This was especially true of the new functions that were accorded natural history collections, as these were refashioned to form nodal points in a new network of institutions dedicated to cultivating new **[End Page 347]** forms and relations of urban sociability--for it involved, and for the first time, a clear conception of the museum as a secular and civic space that was detached, physically and conceptually, from the monastic forms and relations of scholarship with which it had earlier been associated. Paula Findlen, in describing this transformation, construes it mainly in terms of a transition from one socio-sonic regime to another, a shift from a world of silence and solitude into one of sound and civic sociability:

The quietude of the monastic *studium* and eremitic retreat from society gave way in the late Renaissance to the visual and verbal cacophony of the museum, marking the transition from study to collecting. Humanists from Petrarch to Machiavelli had valued the dialectic between silence and eloquence. For them, the study was a space of contemplation. Situated

between the bedroom and private chapel, it belonged to the inner recesses of the domicile. Dark, often windowless, the visual monotony relieved only by a table, a desk, a chair, and a niche for books or a chest to contain them, the earliest museums (in the original sense of the word) were spaces bereft of the signs of sociability that we have come to associate with the museum. <sup>5</sup>

With the development of the practice of collecting and the redefinition of the museum as the repository for a collection, the museum, in shifting its function from *studio* to *galleria*--from a space of "containment and privacy" to one of "openness and sociability" <sup>6</sup>--made a journey from the inner spaces of the house to more public and accessible locations that was simultaneously a journey from silence into sound. As a consequence, the museum was refashioned into a "conversable space," a place where the exhibition of nature's curiosities served as "a prelude to conversing about natural history" <sup>7</sup> in a manner--heavily ritualized--that was calculated to forge and strengthen bonds of civic solidarity.

This is not to say that the eye was uninvolved in the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities. On the contrary, in moving from the inner recesses of the household to more accessible spaces, collections also became more publicly visible and, as well as involving their visitors in conversations, addressed them as spectators. The forms of looking that this involved, however, supposed a wandering rather than a disciplined eye, and an eye that, rather than functioning in isolation **[End Page 348]** from the other senses or being distanced from the collection, was pulled into it to be caught in a system of side-way glances between objects whose organization was dialogical. <sup>8</sup> For Barbara Stafford, this system of relations functioned to involve sight in, and subordinate it to, a universe whose governing logic was conversational, in which the roles of viewing, speaking, and listening mingled complexly with one another. The manifest incompleteness and deliberately perplexing organization of cabinets of curiosities precluded their "incorporation into a seamless narrative and controlling taxonomy." <sup>9</sup> Instead, Stafford suggests, such collections functioned anamorphically to the degree that their puzzling contents "awaited resolution in the delectating vision of the beholder." <sup>10</sup> This practice of vision, however, was to be brought into play in a world whose disorder resembled that of speech, just as the solutions it worked to effect depended on mechanisms in which relations of sight were modeled on, and inscribed within, relations of spoken language: "Crammed shelves and drawers, with their capricious jumps in logic and disconcerting omissions, resembled the apparent disorganization of talk" in which a miscellany of objects "'chatted' among themselves and with the spectator." <sup>11</sup> Bereft of labels, detached from any fixing context, curiosities "resembled rumours," "garbled messages," or "snatches of muttered speech"; as such, they comprised "unreadable details" belonging to "a totality forever evading the spectator," who nonetheless became involved in an attempt to construct totality by filling in the bits, the spaces, between objects. <sup>12</sup> However, since the relations between objects were not subtended by any classificatory logic, they could be cohered into an order only provisionally through a dialogic social practice whose operational logic was much like that which enables speakers to fill in the missing pieces of each others' speech in order to sustain their conversation. This, then, was a totality to be made and held, fragilely, in and through conversations in which the side-glancing words of collector and visitor colluded with side-glancing objects to sustain a temporary order-- **[End Page 349]** rather than, as in the museum's Enlightenment conception, a given totality resting on an authoritative knowledge that was "invisible to the untrained beholder." <sup>13</sup>

The tension between, on the one hand, "an Enlightenment classifying culture," and, on the other, "a waning baroque oral-visual polymathy" <sup>14</sup> in which nature was a "browsing field of pleasing fragments to gather, discuss, and gape at" <sup>15</sup> was worked out in favor of the former, as the cabinet of curiosities was transformed into the museum of natural history and, in the process, was charged with the task of public instruction. Stafford singles out two key figures here: Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton, appointed by Buffon in 1745 as the chief curator at the *cabinet d'histoire naturelle* at the Jardin du Roi, and Joseph-Adrien Le Large de Lignac, Daubenton's more severe and exacting rationalist critic. <sup>16</sup> Daubenton's chief innovation consisted in a system of labeling that aimed to give each object its own label so that it should be clearly and distinctly recognizable, and to arrange the relationships between labeled objects in a manner that would make the order underlying nature intelligible to the

ordinary visitor. As Daubenton put it in his 1749 description of an ideal cabinet:

Everything in effect will be instructive; at each glance not only will one gain knowledge of the objects themselves, one will also discover relationships between given objects and those that surround them. Resemblances will define the genus, differences will mark the species; those marks of similarity and difference, taken and compared together, will present to the mind and engrave in the memory the image of nature. <sup>17</sup>

In this radical systematization, the object, no longer a vehicle for civic conversations, functioned as part of a system of directed vision in which words, losing their side-glancing dialogism, were to relay an authoritative knowledge from the curator to the visitor. For Daubenton, however, there were allowable exceptions: specimens that were regarded as inherently agreeable to the eye were to be **[End Page 350]** sprinkled through the museum in a random fashion in order to provide some visual respite from the rigors of taxonomy and, in thus adding to the overall appeal of the spectacle, to increase the museum's popularity.

It was this concession to aesthetic principles of display that Lignac seized on in elaborating an uncompromising visual didactics in which sight was to be entirely subordinated to the regulation of an ordering mind, just as things were to be placed beneath, and to become accessible only through, the grid of words. It is this, of course, that Michel Foucault has in mind when, in his account of the principles of classification governing the classical *episteme*, he refers to natural history as "nothing more than the nomination of the visible," <sup>18</sup> a system in which words and things are so laminated upon one another that seeing and naming are one and the same activity: to see is to name correctly, to name correctly is to see. Stripped of the commentary and cultural detritus that had been attached to them in Renaissance natural history, forms of life are now arranged in systems of visible differences and resemblances in which they are "the bearers of nothing but their own individual names." <sup>19</sup> While this presents things to the eye in a manner that makes it seem that "it is the thing itself that appears," the relations between thing and eye are ordered by the purified discourse of classification in which the thing is located within a "reality that has been patterned from the very outset" by the name it bears and the relations this establishes with other things. <sup>20</sup>

The items displayed in the museum, then, were to be arranged so as to make visible the structure that governed the order of things. To the degree that this structure was discernible through the intellect rather than by means of unmediated sense perception, the eye, if it were to see that structure, had to be appropriately directed. Arranged by experts--by "eyes that know how to see" <sup>21</sup> --rationally ordered collections were to instruct untutored eyes in what was to be seen within the realm of the visible by placing a filter of words between sight and its objects: a rationalizing nomenclature in the form of a system of labels that, since their purpose was simply to nominate the visible that they made transparent, attached themselves to objects like cling-wrap. If the eye here is still centered in comparison **[End Page 351]** with the other senses, it is an eye that has been subjected to reason and one that, no longer able to range freely within the side-glancing relations of words and things that had characterized the Renaissance cabinet, has been disciplined by being allowed access to things only via the mediation of a rationally ordered language.

Stafford's account of these changes in the relationships between the epistemic and sensory regimes of the Renaissance cabinet and the Enlightenment museum (the latter, of course, never entirely freed itself from the influence of earlier practices of curiosity) forms part of a broader discussion of the processes through which an oral-visual mode of learning--mainly southern and Catholic in its provenance, but transmitted throughout Europe during the Renaissance--was called to heel by the requirements of a literate-visual mode of learning based on a mainly Protestant and print-based ocularity that aimed to convert "ignorant listeners and gullible onlookers" into "silent and solitary readers." <sup>22</sup> Viewed in this light, the natural history collections of the Italian Renaissance were part of a wider communications network in which conversation functioned as the key operator in knitting together gestures and the display of objects as parts of an art of public casuistry in which truth was demonstrated via an appeal to both the eyes and ears of listeners and seers, who were

addressed as participants in that demonstration rather than as detached observers. From the perspective of a literate and Protestant visuality, however, this world of conversations and accompanying visual performances was full of "gulling words and duping icons" <sup>23</sup> likely to deceive the ear and wrench the eye from its proper position--as figured in the camera obscura--of detached and intellectually controlled observation. <sup>24</sup>

The tension between these two different articulations of the senses, truth, and reason was evident as epistemic and sensory regimes wrestled with one another through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In the early seventeenth century, a tradition of baroque mathematical recreations designed for the household converted the forms of public witnessing that had been developed to establish the truth-claims of the experimental sciences into a form of diverting entertainment. <sup>25</sup> **[End Page 352]** By the end of the century, however, the emerging tradition of rational recreations proposed a different form of visual pedagogy for the home, one that, in place of the undemanding spectacle of baroque recreations, required the intellectual labor of visual persuasion to be made manifest as a way of guaranteeing that the sense of sight could be trusted, that the exhibited truth was based on reason rather than being the unreliable effect of a flashy illusionistic trick. In the eighteenth--and, indeed, well into the nineteenth--century, the clash between these two different principles of visuality came to be connected to the discordant claims of different forms of expertise, which, in their turn, were related to the emerging class divisions of capitalist society. As rational instructors ordered the world of things in a manner calculated to help visualize an order of reason, thus demoting the realm of the visible by casting it as merely a mediator for the transmission of reason from mind to mind, so this new class of experts also waged war on the popular entertainments of mechanics, artisans, showmen, and prestidigitators by chastising as illusionistic their manipulation of the realm of appearances in order to conjure up a world of the fantastic and grotesque, of popular wonders and oddities. This involved a contrast between the "invisible quality of mind" that informed the rational instruction of, say, the museum, and the "visible agility of hand"--the mere mechanical trickery--of the fairground entertainer. <sup>26</sup>

The program of the Enlightenment museum of natural history, then, depended on an interacting set of processes through which a pedagogic arrangement of objects was placed in front of a set of eyes that had been cleansed of the clouding and illusory influence of the oral-visual culture that had sustained the civic conversations of the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities. It is therefore not surprising that, in concluding her account of the Renaissance cabinet by offering us a brief glimpse of the Enlightenment museum, Paula Findlen transports us into a different sensory universe, one in which the museum visitor is no longer to be engaged in conversation but is rather envisaged as an eye that is both detached from and placed before nature, as a reader before a text. She thus quotes the constitution of the University Museum of Turin to the effect that "a well-organized **[End Page 353]** Museum is like a universal Natural History" in being meant to "be seen at a glance . . . as one great and well accomplished open book." <sup>27</sup> The historical struggle of the Enlightenment museum against its predecessors, however, was complemented by its ongoing struggle to distance itself from the visual culture of contemporary forms of popular culture in which elements of earlier scopic regimes persisted alongside the illusionistic effects of new mechanical contrivances.

On the face of it, if we look forward a hundred years to the end of the nineteenth century, little had changed. Frederick McCoy's conception of the museum as a place for "eye-knowledge" in fact rested on a conception of classification that remained essentially Cuvierian and whose rationalism, as David Goodman has shown, McCoy explicitly opposed to the gulling words of Melbourne's popular showmen. <sup>28</sup> Nowhere was his undisturbed confidence in the system of relationships between words and things that this entailed more evident than in his assertion that a botanical garden in which the classes, families, and genera are clearly labeled "will teach the principles of botanical classification, even if but poorly furnished with plants." <sup>29</sup> McCoy, however, was the exception rather than the rule. This was comprised by the different role that was accorded to ocularcentric conceptions within the program for the museum that was proposed by the advocates of evolutionary thought. We shall understand the didactics that these conceptions gave rise to, however, only if we bear in mind Jonathan Crary's warning that vision "can be privileged at different

historical moments in ways that simply are not continuous with one another." <sup>30</sup> For the relations between words and things were, in fact, significantly altered by virtue of their location within a distinctively new scopic regime in which the eye, which had now to absorb the lessons of an evolutionary rather than a taxonomic ordering of things, was subjected to new forms of regulation and regimentation.

## Governing the Eye

Martin Jay suggests that the 1860s witnessed the onset of the critical questioning of the atemporal, decorporealized, and transcendently "unmoving gaze from afar" that the Enlightenment had **[End Page 354]** identified with "dispassionate cognition," <sup>31</sup> --a questioning that, in the 1890s, was to develop into Henri Bergson's insistence on "the equiprimordiality of the senses in the apprehension of the world." <sup>32</sup> While this was doubtlessly so, these developments had little impact on the practices of museums in the English-speaking world. On the contrary, from the 1860s through to the end of the century and beyond, the lines the Enlightenment had sought to draw between the museum and the cabinet of curiosities were drawn once again, and with a peculiar tenacity and insistence, as museums, which were falling increasingly under state control and direction, came to be linked more closely to formal education systems and were called on to function as instruments of popular instruction. For F. W. Rudler, professor of natural science at the University of Wales and an important voice in the movement for the reform and professionalization of museums that had resulted in the establishment of the Museums Association in 1889, museums were "educational engines." <sup>33</sup> As such, their efficient functioning required them to eschew "pretty and attractive things, such as are to be found in some museums, heaped together in bower-birdish fashion, where they gratify the senses without nourishing the intellect" and to focus, instead, on "a limited number of typical specimens" that, precisely because of their sparsity, would not confuse or bewilder the visitor. <sup>34</sup> Similarly, when, in 1883, Oxford University was considering whether to accept the Pitt Rivers collection, it was assured in the report prepared to guide its deliberations on this matter that the collection was no "miscellaneous jumble of curiosities, but an orderly illustration of human history; and its contents have not been picked up haphazard from dealers' shops, but carefully selected at first hand with rare industry and judgement." <sup>35</sup>

It is clear throughout this revived Enlightenment discourse, moreover, that the role of a carefully coordinated ocularity in which the thing is subordinated to the word, and thereby sight to the direction of a controlling intellect (the curator's), remains pivotal to the museum's conception as an instrument for popular instruction. **[End Page 355]** In the annual proceedings of the Museums Association in the 1890s, for example, we constantly find the museum's task referred to in ways that stress its ocularcentrism. One contributor to these debates saw the museum as "an important and valuable instrument of instruction--instruction which is directed to and assimilated by the eye"; <sup>36</sup> for another, nature displays were to do their work among "the crowded districts of the lower parts of Liverpool" through their ability to "effectually open the eyes, and through them the ears and hearts of boys and girls." <sup>37</sup> Regulated vision, moreover, was to play a role in organizing the visitor's behavior by ensuring that a museum visit did not degenerate into an occasion for aimless wandering. "How hopeless," Jonathan Hutchinson argued, "is the vacant gaze of the uninstructed as they wander through galleries in which on every side are accumulated objects which would enchain their interest if only they could understand them." <sup>38</sup>

We need, however, to recognize the class-specificity of these conceptions. Reverend H. H. Higgins warned that the stress on an unrelieved visual didacticism would tend to drive away the better class of visitors, who, he believed, were attracted to museums by "a wish to lay by a store of topics for conversation and subsequent intercourse with sympathising friends . . . something to talk about." <sup>39</sup> Where the working-class visitor was concerned, however, the stress, in British debates, was constantly on the need to arrange exhibits so that they might "speak to the eyes," allowing their meaning to be taken in "at a glance" by those whose conditions of life did not give them time either for book learning or for leisurely conversations. The museum's message, insofar as it was a message for everyone, was to be presented in a manner that would allow it to be impressed on the passing and harried

eye of the hard-pressed worker, mechanic, or miner who, as one Australian curator put it, "want science to be put before them in a popular light, which speaking to their eyes, spares their time, and remains deeply impressed on their memory."<sup>40</sup> **[End Page 356]**

This concern was frequently expressed--we find it in Thomas Huxley's educational writings as well as in Henry Pitt Rivers's descriptions of his typological method--in terms that stressed the need to so arrange exhibits that their meaning would be perfectly clear to everyone, so that even "those who run may read": a phrase that has its roots in Habakkuk when the Lord, in appearing before a prophet in a vision, commanded him to "write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it" (or, in the new revised standard version, "Write the vision, make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it"). The intention of writing clearly for ease and speed of dissemination is plain. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, "those who run" had come to function as polite shorthand for the working classes--that is, for those whose occupations offered them little scope for independent knowledge or book learning. This was due, in the main, to the legacy of the late-eighteenth-century culture of civic humanism, most influentially represented by Sir Joshua Reynolds, in which the term had functioned to describe those who, like mechanics and artisans, were regarded as disqualified from citizenship owing to the fact that their occupations, in being "concerned with things," prevented them from "exercising a generalizing rationality" of the kind necessary to distinguish the interests of civil society as a whole from the egoism of private interests.<sup>41</sup> The economic subservience of those in menial occupations also meant that they lacked that capacity for independent thought, unconstrained by the will of others, that was viewed as necessary for the exercise of civic virtue. It was through this route that the relations between civility and science that had characterized seventeenth-century thought, in which economic independence--and the lack of subjection to others that this entailed--functioned as a significant measure of the reliability of a person's statements, were carried over into eighteenth-century aesthetic debates. For, as Stephen Shapin makes clear, the connections that these criteria established between civility and credibility entailed, as their correlate, the disqualification of other categories of persons whose conditions of life--whether because they involved subordination to the will of others or because they dulled the senses, destroying their harmony and balance--meant that they could no more be relied on to either speak the truth or understand it, even when presented to them plainly, than they could be expected to appreciate beauty properly. Unreliable as witnesses and gullible in their susceptibility to the tales **[End Page 357]** circulated within a predominantly oral popular culture, "children, common people, women and the sick" were, as one contemporary put it, "most subject to being led by the ears."<sup>42</sup>

While the term retained these aspects of its earlier usage, the references to "those who run" in the educational programs of late-nineteenth-century British liberal reformers like Pitt Rivers and Huxley also acknowledged the implications of the extension of male suffrage in recognizing the need to develop forms of popular instruction that, in overcoming the sensory and intellectual limitations of the workingman's occupation, would qualify him--led by experts--to exercise his judgment in a manner consistent with his new civic responsibilities. This challenge was allied to the related one of a shift in the nature of what it was that the workingman had to be led to see and to understand.<sup>43</sup> For, in comparison with the fixed positioning of the observer before the table that had characterized the world of classification, post-Darwinian evolutionary thought introduced a degree of mobility into the positioning of the museum visitor--which, in turn, generated distinctive problems for the ordering of vision within museum didactics, of a kind that had not been present in the Enlightenment program for the museum. This was evident in the new forms of emphasis that were placed on the spatial aspects of museum arrangements, and their implications for the positioning of the visitor in relation to the orders of time that evolutionary displays constructed.<sup>44</sup> The more it became committed to the exhibition of an evolutionary order of things, the more the museum, in its ordering of series, aimed to embody its message in spatial arrangements that the visitor was to enact as much as to see. For Professor Boyd Dawkins, the curator of the Manchester Museum and one of the most influential museum reformers of the period, the primary task of museum displays was to articulate the relationships between different times--archaeological, ethnological, and geological--in a manner that would allow their interconnections to be readily perceived. The museum, as he put it, must aim for a form of "time arrangement" in which the interconnectedness of human, natural, and geological time

would be [End Page 358] "placed plainly before the eye" <sup>45</sup> in a manner that also allowed this "eye knowledge" to be physically confirmed and recapitulated in the visitor's itinerary: "It is a practical advantage for the Zoological and Botanical student to walk from the cases where he is studying any living group, to those Geological cases which mark its position in the history of the world, and thus to understand its place *in time*." <sup>46</sup>

Foucault argues that it was Cuvier who, "by substituting anatomy for classification, organism for structure, internal subordination for visible character, the series for tabulation, was to make possible the precipitation into the old flat world of animals and plants, engraved in black on white, a whole profound mass of time to which men were willing to give the renewed name of *history*." <sup>47</sup> This was also, Foucault stresses, a mutation in the earlier understanding of history in which "*historical* knowledge of the visible" had been opposed to "*philosophical* knowledge of the invisible, of what is hidden and of causes." <sup>48</sup> In the subsequent development of evolutionary thought, the substitution of the series for the table forms part of a significant shift in the functioning of the visible. If, in the classical *episteme*, naming and seeing were the same within a system of visibility in which the *ratio* of things was attached to their surface, the intelligibility of the evolutionary series consisted in a history of cause, effect, and succession that could not itself be seen but was simply evoked by the temporally ordered arrangement of objects. This also involved a problem concerning the relationship of the observer to those series. This was resolved in the projection of a vantage point--Man--which, emerging from the series as their summation, provided a position from which their development might be observed.

Yet, however much this disturbed the relationships between words and things that had characterized the Enlightenment museum, there can be no doubting that words retained their priority over things within the visual economy of the evolutionary museum display, where they functioned as parts of a system of directed vision that aimed to govern the eye of the visitor by subjecting it to the influence of new forms of expertise. There are contexts, it is true, where this seemed not to be so. <sup>49</sup> Henry Fairfield Osborn, during his [End Page 359] terms as director of the American Museum of Natural History, frequently extolled the virtues of learning directly from nature rather than from books. When elaborating his arguments in detail, however, it was clear that, when arranged in the museum, the things of nature needed the verbal supplement of the scientific expert if they were to speak to the eyes at all clearly:

In a Library the young reader may find books which will either make or unmake him as a citizen. The French and the Russian anarchies were bred in books and in oratory in defiance of every law of Nature. In the Exhibition Halls of the American Museum we are scrupulously careful not to present theories or hypotheses, but to present facts with only a sufficient amount of opinion to make them intelligible to the visitor. In the *Hall of the Age of Man*, for example, are brought together reproductions--as nearly as can be--facsimiles of the actual facts which have been discovered bearing on the pre-history of man in various parts of the world. These facts are put together conscientiously by experts who have been trained to clearly distinguish between fact and opinion, between truth and hypothesis or theory. The exhibits in this hall have been criticized only by those who speak without knowledge. They all tend to demonstrate the slow upward ascent and struggle of man from the lower to the higher stages, physically, morally, intellectually, and spiritually. Reverently and carefully examined, they point man upward towards a higher and better future and away from the purely animal stage of life. <sup>50</sup>

Osborn's belief (albeit belied by his practice) that objects impressed their lessons directly on the senses owed a good deal to the Pestalozzian system of education that, in the earlier history of American museums, had formed part of a culture of sensory democracy according to which museum objects provided all observers with a means of judging the truth for themselves rather than relying on the [End Page 360] judgment of experts. <sup>51</sup> A similar object-centeredness had characterized the European development of archaeology and geology, in which literary and philological techniques of reading from the artefactual domain were displaced by them in developing techniques for interpreting the material evidence of things themselves, independently of their textual mediation. <sup>52</sup> No matter how much things were said to be able to speak for themselves, however, there was, in museums, an

incessant effort to provide a written supplement that would help anchor their meaning.

The role of labeling in imposing the priority of words over things, and, in so doing, subjecting the visitor's experience to the authority of new forms of expertise, was especially significant in this respect. This is made graphically clear in the correspondence between Henry Balfour, during the period when he was responsible for arranging the Pitt Rivers collection at the Oxford Museum, and Alfred Robinson, a member of the Hebdomadal Council to which the Museum was responsible. Because Balfour had refused an earlier request to produce a definite number of labels per year, Robinson urged that he should instead commit himself to finish labeling the collection within a definite number of years, and advised that he would inform the Council that "unless we can capture on the way some expert such as Tylor or yourself we shall derive little pleasure and no instruction from our visit to the larger part of the collection, in its present unlabelled and uncatalogued form." <sup>53</sup> While Balfour replied with a defense of the rate of labeling he had achieved so far, he agreed that there "is no Museum in the world, that I know of, in which it is not desirable to secure the company of an expert as showman, and this Museum can hardly be expected to be an exception." <sup>54</sup>

A similar stress on the importance of labeling as a means of ensuring that the eye did, indeed, absorb the museum's object lessons correctly recurs throughout the museum literature of the period. Its **[End Page 361]** advocacy, moreover, was most urgently and insistently pressed by museum administrators committed to the challenge of reorganizing the museum environment in order to allow it to function as a means for popular instruction in the lessons of evolution. For Sir William Henry Flower of the British Museum (Natural History), labeling went hand in hand with a battery of other measures designed to ensure that things were placed before the eye clearly and distinctly, in a manner that would leave the visitor with no doubt as to what was what or why it was there:

The number of the specimens must be strictly limited, according to the nature of the subject to be illustrated, and the space available. None must be placed either too high or too low for ready examination. There must be no crowding of specimens one behind the other, every one being perfectly and distinctly seen, and with a clear space around it. If an object is worth putting into a gallery at all, it is worth such a position as will enable it to be seen. . . . Above all, the purpose for which each specimen is exhibited, and the main lesson to be derived from it, must be distinctly indicated by the labels affixed, both as headings of the various divisions of the series and to the individual specimens. <sup>55</sup>

George Brown Goode of the Smithsonian Institution was of a similar persuasion. In urging that the "museum of the future in this democratic land should be adapted to the needs of the mechanic, the factory operator, the day labourer, the salesman, and the clerk," <sup>56</sup> he pinned his hopes on a visual economy that would reduce the visitor's work to a matter of looking and seeing, of reading and understanding:

The specimens must be prepared in the most careful and artistic manner, and arranged attractively in well-designed cases and behind the clearest of glass. Each object must bear a label giving its name and history so fully that all the probable questions of the visitor are answered in advance. Books of reference must be kept in convenient places. Colors of walls, cases, and labels must be restful and quiet, and comfortable seats must be everywhere accessible, for the task of the museum visitor is a weary one at best. <sup>57</sup>

Indeed, it was Goode who best summarized the priority accorded to words over things in late-nineteenth-century museum didactics **[End Page 362]** when he suggested that an "efficient educational museum" was best regarded as "a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well-selected specimen." <sup>58</sup>

There can be no doubting, then, the continuing emphasis that was placed on the role of expertise in arranging the relations between words and things to ensure that the visitor's eye was properly governed. In part--and Balfour's phrase "the expert as showman" captures this aspect exactly--this was the result of a continuing struggle with the illusionistic tricks of popular showmen, represented, in the late-nineteenth-century context, by fairground

entertainers, the popular shows of the midway zones of the international exhibitions, and the fakes of popular museum managers like P. T. Barnum.<sup>59</sup> There was also a renewed urgency attached to these matters in the *fin de siècle* context owing to the apprehension that the new forms of urban life, and the taste for sensationalist forms of entertainment that accompanied them, had occasioned a disorientating perceptual dislocation in which vision was constantly distracted, led from one object to the next in a relay of illusionistic thrill-seeking without ever being able to settle, to take in the meaning of things.<sup>60</sup> But the expertise of the evolutionary showman did not go unchallenged: John Ruskin, in his insistence on the autonomy of the individual object and his critique of detached observation, doubted that insistent labeling did much to make museums either appealing or intelligible to those "whose minds are languid with labour."<sup>61</sup>

There was, however, a competing articulation of the relations between things and vision that impinged more directly on the didactic terrain of the evolutionary museum. I refer to the burgeoning practice of popular natural history and the countless domestic collections--richly evoked by Asa Briggs<sup>62</sup>--to which this practice gave rise. Lynn Merrill's account of Victorian natural history makes clear **[End Page 363]** how radically different its organizing principles were from those of the evolutionary biology that, from the 1870s, began to acquire an increasing influence over the arrangement of displays within state-funded natural history museums. Within the latter, a sparsity of objects was the ideal, each object being placed in relation to other objects and described in accompanying labels in a way that would make its function of representing a stage in a developmental sequence clear. The hallmarks of popular natural history, on the other hand, as Merrill summarizes them, were "curiosity, wonder and close vision."<sup>63</sup> While the discourses of natural history also centered the eye, the object within the domestic cabinet did not have a representative status of the kind that, within the representational economy of evolutionary displays, allowed one object to represent the many; rather, it was "the apotheosis of singularity,"<sup>64</sup> of the "unique (that is, noteworthy for being so unlike anything else) and extraordinary (that is, exciting because so peculiar)."<sup>65</sup> This was, in other words, a universe in which baroque principles still reigned, in marked contrast to the forms of visuality aspired to by the deployment of new forms of expertise within the museum:

Or, to put it another way, the discourse of science endeavours to be transparent, a clear glass through which the reader can see the idea behind it. The discourse of natural history, however, is highly coloured, meant to be beautiful and pleasing in itself, a gaudy mosaic.<sup>66</sup>

The popularity of the microscope was linked to this "gaudy mosaic," its role, like that of the domestic collection, being connected to Romantic notions of the sublime in aspiring to offer a close-up vision of the "minute infinite . . . a secret world in small compass, which astonishes and awes the eye."<sup>67</sup> It is, then, not surprising that when Huxley, in his 1868 lecture "On a Piece of Chalk," places chalk beneath a microscope, it is in order to make visible a quite different reality, a series of invisible past worlds that evolve into the present through a number of successive and orderly stages:

Thus there is a writing upon the wall of cliffs at Cromer, and whoso runs may read it. It tells us, with an authority which cannot be impeached, that the ancient **[End Page 364]** sea-bed of the chalk sea was raised up, and remained dry land, until it was covered with forest, stocked with the great game the spoils of which have rejoiced your geologists. How long it remained in that condition cannot be said; but "the whirligig of time brought its revenges" in those days as in these. That dry land, with the bones and teeth of generations of long-lived elephants, hidden away among the gnarled roots and dry leaves of its ancient trees, sank gradually to the bottom of the icy sea, which covered it with huge masses of drift and boulder clay. Sea-beasts, such as the walrus, now restricted to the extreme north, paddled about where birds had twittered among the topmost twigs of the fir trees. How long this state of things endured we know not, but at length it came to an end. The upheaved glacial mud hardened into the soil of modern Norfolk. Forests grew once more, the wolf and the beaver replaced the reindeer and the elephant; and at length what we call the history of England dawned.<sup>68</sup>

The long, slow mechanisms of change operating through *la longue durée* of evolutionary time: these were what the evolutionary showman wanted to show the visitor--while, at the same time, being perfectly clear that this was not a message that could be carried on the surface of things. The labels that he had to prepare if the visitor were to see what he wanted to show therefore functioned differently from their Enlightenment counterparts: their role was not to cling to things, so much as to fill up the gaps between them. With appropriate labels, the linear arrangements of objects within series might indeed be read as both the manifestation and the sign of a set of processual, developmental realities whose value, viewed from the perspective of a reforming liberalism, was as a means of teaching that evolution (in society as in nature) was inherently and unavoidably gradualist.<sup>69</sup> For Baldwin Spencer, Frederick McCoy's successor at the National Museum of Victoria, this was the purpose he had in view in his exhibition of Aboriginal boomerangs (see [Fig. 1](#)). In itself meaningless, the accompanying label tells the visitor how to read the exhibit as a sign of the evolutionary processes through which differentiation and complexity arise out of an undifferentiated and simple origin:

The different series exhibited are intended to illustrate the various forms and also the possible development from a straight stick of (1) the ordinary, curved, flat fighting boomerang; (2) the return boomerang; (3) the large double-handed **[End Page 365] [Begin Page 367]** sword; and (4) the club-headed structure called a "lil-lil." The possible relationship of these various forms of missiles may be illustrated by the following diagram, the actual specimens illustrating which are shown in Case 4, Series L, and Case 5, Series A:-

[70](#)

In contrast to the cabinet of curiosities, in which the eye was left to meander in the spaces between things, here, through the web of words that is cast over them, the eye is directed as to how to read the relations between things.

## Roving Eyes, Glancing Words

It is noticeable that, in the passage quoted above, Spencer, reflecting the influence of Goode's formulations, regards the function of the actual specimens as that of illustrating the developmental logic displayed in the diagram. Labels, that is, provided the grid of intelligibility through which things were to be looked at. "By means of descriptive labels," as Spencer put it when writing to Edward Tylor to explain the purpose of his ethnographical collection, "I have tried to make it a kind of record of the Aborigines which the ordinary public can understand and take an interest in. It is quite refreshing to see visitors reading the labels and examining the specimens."<sup>71</sup> This is **[End Page 367]** precisely the kind of relay structure of vision--from words to things--that Bernard Smith had in mind when he complained, in connection with the modern art museum, that "we only see what we read we are seeing."<sup>72</sup> This is not to say that nothing has changed over the intervening period. The history I have sought to trace--one in which the eye, in being disconnected from the relations of words to things that had characterized Enlightenment didactics, was placed once again on the leash of the written word in the programs of evolutionary museums--has focused mainly on the late nineteenth century. That similar conceptions have played a continuing role in subsequent museum practices is, however, clear enough. We find their echo in the 1920 aspiration of John Cotton Dana, the director of the Newark Museum in New Jersey, to make rigorous use of descriptive labels in order to transform art museums from mere "gazing museums" into "institutes for visual instruction."<sup>73</sup> This was about the same time that, according to Martin Jay, the "ancien scopic regime" of Cartesian perspectivalism and the subsequent ocularcentric Enlightenment project of "illuminating reason" was called into question--initially in the work of Bataille and the surrealists, and then in the ensuing history of vision's philosophical denigration, from the work of Husserl, through Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and on to Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault.<sup>74</sup>

It is too early to say yet what impact, if any, these developments have had on the relations of knowledge and vision governing the pedagogic practices of museums, for this--together with related issues concerning the relations of museums to the new visual technologies of cinema and, later, television--is a topic on which research is still in its infancy.<sup>75</sup> The overall impression, though, is that, from the early twentieth century through to the 1960s, the didactics that were developed in the late nineteenth century remained pretty much as undisturbed as did the evolutionary knowledges that continued to organize museum displays in the form of authoritative curatorial messages prepared for the visitor's passive reception. Certainly, we can see the legacy of this earlier history in the formulation [End Page 368] chosen by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, in their 1969 text *The Love of Art*, to describe the role of labels and museum guides as that of aiming to "give 'the eye' to those who do not see"<sup>76</sup>--a formulation that remains central to the intellectual underpinnings of contemporary access policies.

Yet the assumptions underlying such practices have been called into question in what W. J. T. Mitchell has characterized as "the pictorial turn"--that is, as he defines it, "the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality."<sup>77</sup> Indeed, it is from a perspective of this kind that Barbara Stafford objects to the dualism that still often pits "an 'aesthetic' display, whereby purposeless objects are left to speak for themselves, against the demands of an overwhelming *textual* documentation" that "too often means that artifacts of little intrinsic merit are put in the service of a theoretical distribution as tokens of an immaterial age, culture, or social system."<sup>78</sup> In place of such conceptions, Stafford recommends that the eye should be let off the leash of the written word and be allowed to rove more freely in a new audiovisual environment--and she sees a possible (but limited) model for museum practices here in "the chatty cyberspace of the 'virtual gallery'"--that would revive "the eighteenth-century notion of an instructive, cross-disciplinary, and entertaining spectacle, based on a conversational give and take."<sup>79</sup> This echoes, albeit from a different perspective, James Clifford's view of the museum as a "contact zone" in which objects become the props or occasions for forms of cross-cultural talk in which the role of words and their relation to sight is changed. No longer descriptive labels for things, the bearers of an authoritative knowledge from the curator to the visitor, words--like things--function, in Clifford's museum, as side-glancing entities, to be constantly defined and adjusted in their relations to one another in performing their roles as dialogic bridges between different cultural worlds.

It is fair to say that in the debates that have been under way since [End Page 369] the 1960s to adapt the museum to new purposes, attention has been mostly focused on the inadequacies of the frameworks of knowledge bequeathed by the nineteenth-century museum when these are viewed from the perspectives of the various constituencies that they have marginalized, excluded, or exoticized. The most insistent demand has consequently been that exhibits should be arranged in accordance with the requirements of the alternative knowledges--indigenous, feminist, postcolonial--that have supplied the primary vehicles of museum critique. The merit of Stafford's and Clifford's perspectives (different though they are from one another) is that of reminding us that a politics of knowledge in relation to the museum does not concern merely the *content* of knowledge. How the *social relations* of knowledge are organized in terms of the distribution of roles between different participants in the museum scene--curators, members of communities, visitors--is an equally important question that involves, among other issues, the relations between the senses that are produced by different articulations of the relations between words (written and spoken), other sounds, smells, things, and persons within the museum environment. This is not to suggest that there is any simple or singular organization of the senses that ought to be aimed for here. Museums--and Clifford recognizes this clearly enough--are involved in multiple relationships of exchange that, depending on the constituencies concerned, may be governed by different principles. To arrange materials from "other cultures" in a manner calculated to produce relations of discursive equality and reciprocity between the cultures of societies caught in contact histories may--and Clifford cites the exhibit *Paradise: Continuity and Change in the New Guinea Highlands* at London's Museum of Mankind as a case in point--generate new divisions within the museum's public

between those who are "let in" on the significance of what such experiments represent and those who are not. <sup>80</sup>

There can be no shying away from these difficulties, however. It will be only by experimentally tinkering with these aspects of museum display that the days of the "expert as showman" can give way to new forms of expertise that, in facilitating a less hierarchical exchange of perspectives, may allow a renovation of the museum's earlier conception as a conversable civic space that--going beyond the social confines of its Renaissance predecessor--functions across the **[End Page 370]** relations between different cultures. This it must do if it is to be of any value at all.

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## Notes

1. James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 189.

2. Ibid., p. 191.

3. Ibid., p. 193.

4. Frederick McCoy, *On the Formation of Museums in Victoria* (Melbourne: Goodhugh and Hough, 1857), p. 14.

5. Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1994), p. 101.

6. Ibid., p. 109.

7. Ibid., p. 100.

8. In describing this system of glances as dialogical, I am drawing on the work of Bakhtin: see Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). I should make it clear, however, that this is a gloss that I place on Stafford's discussion, rather than an interpretation she herself offers.

9. Barbara Maria Stafford, *Artful Science: Enlightenment Entertainment and the Eclipse of Visual Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), p. 238.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

[12.](#) Ibid., p. 251.

[13.](#) Ibid.

[14.](#) Ibid., p. 218.

[15.](#) Ibid., p. 225.

[16.](#) Daubenton was something of a go-between in the debates and struggles between Buffon's approach to natural history as still centrally concerning the story of life on earth, and Condorcet's campaign to reform natural history displays in accordance with the principles of a tabular rationalism. See Pietro Corsi, *The Age of Lamarck: Evolutionary Theories in France, 1790-1830* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[17.](#) Daubenton cited in Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 80.

[18.](#) Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1970), p. 132.

[19.](#) Ibid., p. 131.

[20.](#) Ibid., p. 130.

[21.](#) Stafford, *Artful Science* (above, n. 9), p. 266.

[22.](#) Ibid., p. 1.

[23.](#) Ibid., p. 5.

[24.](#) Jonathan Crary makes clear how, in this period, the importance accorded to the camera obscura was connected to a technology of vision in which the observer was decoporealized—-an isolated and autonomous individual, detached from the world in an enclosed space within which vision was to be directed by the understanding; see Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996).

[25.](#) For discussions of the importance of public witnessing to the truth-protocols of the experimental sciences, see William Eamon, "From the Secrets of Nature to Public Knowledge: The Origins of the Concept of Openness in Science," *Minerva* 23 (1985): 321-347; Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985).

[26.](#) Stafford, *Artful Science* (above, n. 9), p. 134.

[27.](#) Findlen, *Possessing Nature* (above, n. 5), p. 402.

[28.](#) See David Goodman, "Fear of Circuses: Founding the National Museum of Victoria," *Continuum* 3:1 (1990): 18-34.

[29.](#) McCoy, *Formation* (above, n. 4), p. 8.

[30.](#) Crary, *Techniques* (above, n. 24), p. 57.

[31.](#) Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French*

*Thought* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), p. 146.

[32.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 205.

[33.](#) Rudler cited in Geoffrey Lewis, *For Instruction and Recreation: A Century History of the Museums Association* (London: Quiller Press, 1989), p. 3.

[34.](#) F. W. Rudler, *On Natural History Museums, with Suggestions for the Formation of a Central Museum in Wales* (London, 1876), p. 4.

[35.](#) Pitt Rivers Museum Archive, *Foundations and Early History*, ff. 3-4.

[36.](#) F. E. Weiss, "The Organisation of a Botanical Museum," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1892): 25.

[37.](#) John Chard, "On Circulating Museum Cabinets for Schools and Other Educational Purposes," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1890): 63.

[38.](#) Jonathan Hutchinson, "On Educational Museums," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1893): 49.

[39.](#) Rev. H. H. Higgins, "On the Cultivation of Special Features in Museums," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1892): 40.

[40.](#) Australian Museum Archives, Series 24: Curators Reports to the Trustees, box 1: 1881-1887, p. 5, Australian Museum, Sydney, Australia. The comment is taken from an anonymous review of the Museum's geology collections and exhibitions.

[41.](#) John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: "The Body of the Public"* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 8.

[42.](#) Steven Shapin, *A Social History of the Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 90.

[43.](#) I have discussed elsewhere why these concerns, with their focus on the workingman, were gender-specific: see Tony Bennett, *Culture: A Reformer's Science* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin; London/New York: Sage, 1998), chap. 6.

[44.](#) These issues were perhaps most extensively canvassed in the 1870s debates regarding the appropriateness of the rotunda as a spatial form for the exhibition of evolutionary anthropology displays; for a discussion see Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London/New York: Routledge, 1995), chap. 7.

[45.](#) Boyd Dawkins, "On Museum Organisation and Arrangement," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1890): 42.

[46.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 43 (emphasis in original).

[47.](#) Foucault, *Order of Things* (above, n. 18), p. 138.

[48.](#) *Ibid.* (emphasis in original).

[49.](#) I should make it clear that my remarks here are limited to museums in the English-speaking world. Nélia Dias's work on anthropology museums in late-nineteenth-century France makes it clear that a different economy of the visible was organized through the use of display techniques that, in aiming to ward off the tendency toward relativism that was

associated with the *fin de siècle* subjectivization of vision, relied increasingly on statistics, charts, and tables rather than words to regulate the visitor's vision; see Nélia Dias, "The Visibility of Difference: Nineteenth-Century French Anthropological Collections," in *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, ed. Sharon MacDonald (London/New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 36-52. As Dias notes, however, this was related to the strongly biological focus of French anthropology. In the English-speaking world, anthropology, ethnology, archaeology, and natural history tended to form parts of a single, interacting, interpretive and textual system from the 1870s through to the 1890s.

[50.](#) Henry Fairfield Osborn, "The American Museum and Citizenship," *Annual Report of the American Museum of Natural History* 54 (1922/23): 2.

[51.](#) For an account of Osborn's familiarity with the Pestalozzian system of education, see Ronald Rainger, *An Agenda for Antiquity: Henry Fairfield Osborn and Vertebrate Paleontology at the American Museum of Natural History, 1890-1935* (Tuscaloosa/London: University of Alabama Press, 1991), pp. 105-111. The role of this pedagogic system in earlier American museum history is discussed in Joel J. Orosz, *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870* (Tuscaloosa/London: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

[52.](#) For the best synoptic account of these developments, see Alain Schnapp, *The Discovery of the Past: The Origins of Archaeology* (London: British Museum Press, 1996).

[53.](#) Pitt Rivers Museum, *Foundations* (above, n. 35), f. 152.

[54.](#) *Ibid.*, f. 153.

[55.](#) Sir William H. Flower, "Modern Museums," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1893): 4.

[56.](#) George Brown Goode, "Museum-History and Museums of History" (1888), in *The Origins of Natural Science in America: The Essays of George Brown Goode*, ed. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), p. 307.

[57.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 308.

[58.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[59.](#) Barnum's fakes and hoaxes, however, also made a calculated appeal to the sensory democracy of American traditions, in urging visitors to trust to the truth of things as evidenced by their senses rather than rely on the judgments of experts: see Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).

[60.](#) See Ben Singer, "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, ed. Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1995), pp. 72-102.

[61.](#) Ruskin cited in William White, "The Function of Museums as Considered by Mr. Ruskin," *Museums Association Proceedings* (1893): 89.

[62.](#) Asa Briggs, *Victorian Things* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990).

[63.](#) Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 5.

[64.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[65.](#) Ibid., p. 60.

[66.](#) Ibid., p. 93.

[67.](#) Ibid., p. 218.

[68.](#) Thomas H. Huxley, *Discourses Biological and Geological: Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1896), p. 69.

[69.](#) I have discussed this point in greater detail elsewhere: see Tony Bennett, "Speaking to the Eyes: Museums, Legibility and the Social Order," in MacDonald, *Politics of Display* (above, n. 49), pp. 25-36.

[70.](#) Baldwin Spencer, *Guide to the Australian Ethnographical Collection in the National Museum of Victoria* (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1901), pp. 23-24.

[71.](#) Baldwin Spencer to Edward Tylor, September 1, 1900, Tylor Papers, box 13A, folio S16, Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, England.

[72.](#) Peter Beilharz, *Imagining the Antipodes: Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 15-16.

[73.](#) John Cotton Dana, *A Plan for a New Museum: The Kind of Museum it Will Profit a City to Maintain* (Woodstock, Vt.: Elm Tree Press, 1920), p. 13.

[74.](#) Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, (above, n. 31), pp. 149 and 212.

[75.](#) For a very suggestive introduction to these questions, however, see Mark B. Sandberg, "Effigy and Narrative: Looking into the Nineteenth-Century Folk Museum," in Charney and Schwartz, *Cinema* (above, n. 60), pp. 320-361.

[76.](#) Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and Their Public* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 53 (first published in French in 1969).

[77.](#) W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 16 (emphasis in original).

[78.](#) Stafford, *Artful Science* (above, n. 9), p. 264 (emphasis in original).

[79.](#) Ibid., p. 279.

[80.](#) This discussion is contained in Clifford, *Routes* (above, n. 1), chap. 6. For a related discussion of the same exhibition, see Henrietta Lidchi, "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures," in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications in association with the Open University, 1997), pp. 151-208.

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