Museum & Society Special Issue:
Sociology and Museums

Introduction
Sociology and Museums: Visitors, Policy, Knowledge

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Museum and Society (*M&S*) was established in 2003 as a forum for researchers working on the social context of the museum. The first articles were the fruits of a seminar series organized in the late 1990s and sponsored by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Sociologists, historians, art historians, political scientists, anthropologists, museologists, and practitioners attended the seminars at Keele University, The University of Leicester, and Tate Liverpool. One function of interdisciplinarity is, of course, to bring differing perspectives to bear on intellectual and social problems. Another is to sharpen our understanding of what a particular discipline might bring to the table (and indeed take away for itself). Thus, for example, we might expect to see sociology adding something new not only to our knowledge of museums, but also more ambitiously, to our understanding of human society as a whole.

How this might be accomplished is a complicated business and we begin by pulling on three threads. In terms of sociology it is more than a matter of 'plug-and-play'; there are no theories and methods sitting on the shelf ready for application to the museum. Equally, sociologists must be careful about the problems they are commissioned to investigate. These are, often as not, the official, but nevertheless, controversial, matters that the state mandates sociology to investigate (Abrams 1982: 8-16; Bourdieu 1992: 238-9). Thirdly, the museum has, since the nineteenth century, when it was seen as means of 'civilizing' the urban working class, been viewed as an instrument of social policy and improvement. So we might begin by acknowledging three things that are entangled with each other: an academic discipline, the museum, and the social problems that are to be addressed.

Turning to social problems there is the question of their gestation. How, as the sociologist C. Wright Mills once put it, do private troubles become public issues? Mills argued that social problems, or public issues such as unemployment, are best grasped as crises in 'institutional arrangements' as when, for example, structures of opportunity collapse (Mills [1959] 1970: 15). But understanding this requires that we think about the way in which the state mediates and legitimates issues as social problems. Sociology must not be an automatic response to the problems delivered by the state or by museum. There has, for example, to be consideration of their socio-genesis and of the way in which they appear in official discourse. What is at stake here, as John Seeley once argued, is the difference between 'making and taking' problems (Seeley 1967). Why, as he asked in the 1960s and in a formulation that reflects much of the cultural context of our own day, do we take the unwed mother rather than the unwed father to be a social problem? We might also remind ourselves, as do some of the contributors to this issue of *M&S*, that immigrants and emigrants are migrants, and that the problems of global migration are in part those of international relations. And we might ask, as one commentator recently has, that if national collections are to retain their nineteenth-century imperial loot on the grounds that they are universal institutions, might they not be rebranded with more global names?

How do private troubles become public issues? Thinking about the museum visitor helps us here. In The Love of Art ([1969] 1991) Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, reported what people said about their visits, and showed how some working class visitors to art museums, wondered

what it all had to do with them. Some were uneasy visitors who were haunted by thoughts of their unworthiness. The authors were, however, doing more than counting visitors, measuring their cultural assets and eliciting their feelings. They had uncovered shifting relationships of cultural power and latent conflicts that had irrupted into the French state. The problems of the museum world, they argued, were the outward signs of deep-seated conflicts within a divided museum profession. The state had sought to rationalize and bureaucratize recruitment to the museum by means of formal qualification. The trouble was that patrician connections, personal networks and private favours were the very assets upon which official scholar-collectors drew in fulfilling their public duties. The problems of the museum were the outward signs of long term contradictions between universalism and particularism which pulled the profession in different directions, and exploded into the public realm. The news that Bourdieu and Darbel brought to us was, in part, that the curators confronted the cross-cutting pressures of scholarly research and public education. It was also that they reconciled this tension with an aristocratic pessimism about the incomprehension of their working class visitors.

In the twenty-first century it is perhaps easier to see that many of the museum's problems reflect the tensions and frictions of an institution whose claims to universal authority have been progressively challenged on three fronts. Sociologists and museum people may not always have the same expectations of museum research or even define their museum problems in the same way. But they do nonetheless intersect and coalesce around three sets of challenges that museums have faced since the late twentieth century and to which sociologists have also responded.

First, there has been recognition not just of the association between museum visiting and social inequality, but of the way in which this is linked to the culture of the museum, and to its ways of representing the world. Thus, there has been a growing conviction that an explanation of the contrast between the rhetoric of universalism and the reality of visitor profiles requires an answer to the question: what counts as a museum and to what extent has universalism cloaked particularistic assumptions of age, class, gender and ethnicity?

Secondly, a number of contemporary writers whose work is informed by broadly 'postmodern' ideas have argued that the nature of the museum is altering because the enlightenment project is now exhausted. Thus, notions of progress towards certain knowledge upon which the museum was founded have been called into question by changes that have undermined the museum's foundational claims to truth and certainty. Here there are shared intellectual and practical problems that require us to think about the museums' cultural authority as it negotiates new relationships of inclusion with outsiders. Problems such as the public understanding of science, charging for visitors, disability access and others, such as conservation, are manifestations of shifts in the politics of culture. These changes not only present challenges to established museum authorities but, as Vera Zolberg has shown, they may transform the organizational dynamics of museums themselves (Zolberg 1981).

Lastly, there is the question of how the birth of the museum was interwoven with modernity, with globalization and with the cultural formation of nations and states. It is partly that a post-industrial world has become more 'cultural'; twentieth-century middle class expansion went hand in hand with the growing weight of cultural assets. Here, for example, just as the nineteenth-century museum movement drew on memories of dynasties and peasantries, memorialization of labour, skill and industry have been components of contemporary expansion. At the same time shifting balances of power associated with globalization have led to some changes in matters of ownership and control: 'communities that are socially distant from the museum world can effectively constrain the display and interpretation of objects representing their cultures' (Clifford 1997: 209).

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Turning to the papers published in this special issue, they reflect the complex relationship between a discipline and its topic. It is for that reason that we resisted the ostensibly straightforward title, 'sociology *of* museums'. The papers express a variety of sociological themes and approaches, but they also reveal much about the museum insofar as the latter implies an analysis of the social world. With this in mind, we have presented the thirteen articles under four headings:

sociology of museums; *theorizing policy*; *sociological museums*; and *sociology, buildings, objects*. On reading the papers it will be evident that they resist complete confinement to our thematic boxes, for they often speak across our themes and to each other. Nonetheless our judgement was that this way of framing the issues was a useful means of taking stock of our discipline and its subject.

Knowledge, visitors, bodies.

Let us begin by saying that when sociologists claim to be studying society, the social, or social structure, what they are investigating are groups of interdependent human beings. As was pointed out by Raymond Williams in *Keywords*, the relational is crucial to conceptions of society (Williams 1976). Yet, the museum is amongst a number of public spaces in which it is sometimes difficult to detect sociability. Visitors may seem to move through an exhibition space in quite idiosyncratic ways. In their paper Dimitra Christidou and Sophia Diamantopoulou, reveal the social ordering of the visit as an intrinsically social practice in being a form of collective action. The action is exhibited in language, in what visitors may say to each other as companions and even as strangers. But it is also displayed in the bodily interactions of the visitors, in the visual cues they give each other as they slide from one exhibit to another, glancing, gazing, stepping back, signalling inclusion in a conversation or opting out and so on.

The authors show that museum meanings are properties of interdependent visitors, companions and strangers, who collectively compose their visits. The visit, however much individualized, is a form of collective action with some of the properties that we would normally associate with dancing. Visitor behavior is of course formally regulated by the institution. But there are also, however implicit they may be, other rules that govern what happens; these rules are emergent properties of the interdependent visitors under study. What the authors have done, by means of direct observation and visual recording, is to make visible something that normally passes unremarked, *viz* the bodily methods through which people sustain or break of social interaction, what sociologists Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks called the formal structures of practical action (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970: 338-66).

Over the past twenty years the sociology of the body has emerged as a central pre-occupation for social theory. In the past sociologists have tended to veer in one of two directions: either towards biological reductionism or towards social reductionism. If the former see 'the social' as little more than the froth bubbling up from 'nature', the latter see the body as something constructed in language, in discourse. But, as Chris Shilling has argued that there is another way of approaching the body and society and it is one that requires us to abandon the dualism, body and society. As Shilling points out: 'The human body… forms a very real base for social relations' (Shilling 2003: 11) but not in the manner proposed by biological determinism. He identifies a third perspective in which we might:

> 'recognize that the body is not simply constrained by or invested with social relations, but also actually forms a basis for and possesses productive capacities which *contribute towards* these relations. (Shilling 2003:12, emphasis in original)

Some sociologists have drawn on this kind of approach as a way of deepening our grasp of modernization and the rationalization of social life. One of the key concerns has been with the rationalization of the body, understood as a historical process associated with modernization. As Shilling has argued, 'rationalization of the body' involves its progressive differentiation of bodily functions (Shilling 2003).

There is a case for arguing that the museum is a site of sensory differentiation and rationalization, and that its development was linked linked to the dominance of the eye over senses. Historian Constance Classen (2007) has opened up new lines of inquiry with her historical work on museum manners, the habits of visitors and their *self* control. She shows how, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century museums, ocular powers were given precedence over other senses, and how touching exhibits came to be prohibited. The importance of such work is that it offers a kind of historical anthropology; it sheds light on the evolution of the museum as a privileged cultural space which may be receptive to particular ways of living the body and not to others. It also helps to illuminate the way in which people became

conscious of their own subjectivity as something outside the objectivity of nature. Here, in her paper Gemma Mangione focuses not only on the body of the visitor, but also on the way that museums may acknowledge the bodily differences we know as disability. She bends the light so that we see the sensory conventions of museums and the ways in which two museums, with their different organizational cultures, invite different sensory engagements with objects. Mangione's paper is particularly significant for the way in which, as an investigation of a 'social problem' (access for disabled people), it expands our sociological appreciation of the museum as a cultural space.

The next two papers are critical extensions of the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu. As a way of contextualizing them it may be useful to make a few points. Bourdieu's corpus represents a hugely ambitious attempt to synthesize two strands in sociological theory. What is sometimes called classical sociology developed at the turn of the last century with the puzzle that the human world was both think-like and meaningful; it had structural features that constrained people and yet society was the meaningful outcome of human creativity and action. These two aspects were expressed in the internal ordering of the discipline with its competing theoretical perspectives. Thus, a central problem for mid-twentieth century sociologists was: how many sociologies are there in the discipline?

Bourdieu was amongst a number of theorists who sought to overcome this dualism with a single integrated view of the social universe. The concept of *habitus* was the linchpin of action and structure. Habitus introduces the unconscious frame of reference or mental structures, the durable dispositions acquired by individuals in the course of socialization, into the equation. The idea is that we focus on how the priorities of their social structure are internalized by individuals but whilst, all along, keeping human agency in the frame. Habitus then refers to the generative principles, a second nature, through which people improvise as they act in the world. Thus, habitus is simultaneously structure and action, structured and structuring: 'it gives form and coherence to the various activities of an individual across the separate spheres of life (Wacquant 1998: 221).

Bella Dicks's paper focuses on the concept of habitus. She revisits her previous research into heritage museums and the working class visitor. At the heart of her paper is the question of how agency may or may not be refracted through the hierarchies of social class. The matter that Dicks addresses concerns the possibility that art museums may fail to reveal a working class agency that is to be found elsewhere; she argues that heritage museum research raises a new questions concerning other and very different ways in which a working class habitus may mesh with the museum. A distinctive feature of Dick's argument is that there is a biographical and reflexive dimension to the formation of the habituses of the visitors she interviewed.

Bourdieu's work, something of a storm centre for visitor studies, has spawned a huge critical literature and substantial bodies of research into taste and consumption (much of it conducted in the UK). His research into museums and taste may seem to be dated and some, no doubt, see it as a 1960s statistical snapshot rendered redundant by social change. But taste was anyway profoundly historical and relational in its author's perspective. The visitor statistics he presented were visible expressions of hidden 'relationships between groups maintaining different, and even antagonistic relationships to culture' (Bourdieu 1984: 12). The problems of the 1960s were precipitates of struggles for distinction that had been going on since the seventeenth century and it is clear that those struggles were related to one of the most distinctive features of modern societies: *viz*. growing weight of cultural capital, as opposed to economic and political assets in the struggles for power and privilege.

Viewed in this light cultural capital is a process. It is in drawing out this often overlooked element of Bourdieu's analysis that Laurie Hanquinet's paper addresses the spatial character of the classed relationships that underpin museum visitation. Drawing on recent research in the Belgium context, Hanquinet argues that: (i) that the concept of cultural capital should not be framed by reference to highbrow and lowbrow culture alone; (ii) that there are differences within highbrow culture that should not be considered *de facto* coherent; and (iii) that social changes associated with modernist and postmodern tastes may be interwoven with place. Hanquinet shows that there is a spatial dimension to the formation of cultural capital, and her paper teases out the affinities between museums and how place matters in context.

The contested semiotics of museums are linked, and often intimately so, to processes of

nation state formation. A key concept in that respect has been pace Anderson (1993) imagined communities. In museum studies the concept has gained traction as a way of explaining the function of museums in relation to the complexity and impersonality of modern societies. We are dealing here with the way in which the state's authority may be condensed in national monuments whose histories often speak of times deeper than the state itself. The museum, as a collective representation of the nation, simultaneously connects and disconnects groups of people whose complex and contested histories are recognized or not by the state which places them in the time and space of the nation. Knell has called it 'the implicit language of things' and Magdalena Gil calls it the 'hidden curriculum' of the museum. Her exploration of national museums shows how the nation, imagined in the face of ethnic diversity, presents a selective tradition in which the indigenous people of Chile have been marginalized. Gil's Foucault-inspired analysis of the historical development of Chile's museums is a reminder that when society is put on display in the museum, there are symbolic and material exclusions revealed. An equally important insight is the author's global emphasis in tracing a Eurocentric aspect to museum development in Chile.

Theorizing policy

This then is a story, not just about museums, but a narrative that concerns the development of modern states. Elaborating on Norbert Elias's thesis that modern states emerged from contested processes of monopolization over the means of violence and taxation, Bourdieu observes that another monopoly warrants consideration: 'the monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence', that is the power to impose 'within the boundaries of a given territory, a common set of coercive norms' (Bourdieu 1992: 112). This, he demonstrated, implicates and imbricates public culture with the state. In our own time the museum has come to look more and more like a creature of state policy, a product of what has come to be called cultural policy (see McGuigan 2004) for an authoritative overview and assessment of this political field).

A key issue concerns the emergence of neo-liberalism as the guiding thread of state cultural policies aimed at 'freeing' the individual from the 'big state'. The marketization of museum services is entangled in new modes of governmental regulation, as are changes in the museum labour force and those organizational and co-operative initiatives taken by museums in institutional partnerships and consortia. These developments have amounted to fundamental shifts in the relationship between museums and the state in the UK and elsewhere: the mode of regulation for museums has become one in which provision and co-ordination are managed through a new governance. Thus, museum functions that were once legitimately exercised by the state on behalf of taxed citizens have become progressively regulated and diffused through a configuration of quasi-state and non-state agencies such as the UK's Lottery Fund.

As noted above, how things become public issues and how those issues are identified by states as problems that require investigation and solution is, in and of itself, a matter for sociological investigation (Mills [1959] 1970). Of concern in this context then is the question of how social problems are articulated and expressed in state policies that are in turn, and in one way or another, executed 'on the ground'. To borrow and rephrase an argument about educational policy we might say two things here: a theory of museum policy must attend to the workings of the state, but there is more to it than control by the state. As Stephen Ball puts it: 'Policy is what is enacted as well as what is intended' (Ball 1994:10). Policy problems, solved or not, arise out of the collective action of chains of interdependent people, only some of whom have face-to-face relations with clients and customers such as museum visitors.

The papers by Vikki McCall, Clive Gray and Ian McShane can be read in that light, as contributions to understanding the aporias of cultural policy. McCall draws on the influential work of Michael Lipsky to show us that policy is the action of the street as well as that which is handed down. Lipsky's book Street Level Bureaucracy constitutes an impassioned plea for ethnographic research on the translation of policy into context. McCall's paper is a valuable reminder that museum policy is practised. Interrogating the UK devolution contexts of cultural policies, she enhances our understanding of cultural policy as a distinct kind of social fact.

The sociologist Margaret S. Archer has, in her morphogenetic approach to the puzzle of structure and human agency, argued for a close understanding of reflexivity: 'of how

agents… reflexively examine their personal concerns in the light of their social circumstances and evaluate their circumstances in the light of their concerns (Archer 2007: 41). If we are to know how structure influences agency, then we must know something of how people deliberate about themselves as they work out what they must do. Clive Gray's paper is informed by Archer's theoretical perspective in its concern with how museum staff manage 'the multiple pressures and demands that they perceived as affecting both the limits to their choices and their opportunities for policy determination'. Gray shows how museum staff employed in publicly funded institutions 'manage the range of external and internal structural constraints and opportunities that concern them'. His paper is concerned with the opportunities afforded reflexive individuals by their organizational constraints. In that respect he addresses and illuminates one of the central problems in sociological theory: that of reconciling structure and action in a single theoretical perspective. The papers by McCall and Gray are contributions to substantive issues of policy and also to those of sociological theory.

Much has been written, and with good reason, about the museum's function in promoting belief in the nation and in national citizenship. In his paper Ian McShane notes that Australia was one of the first examples of museums promoting cross cultural national understandings in the context of culturally diversifying populations. This, however, is only part of the story, for as McShane makes clear, cultural policy is about national public goods and economic interests in culture industries. This dualism has been an enduring feature of the of cultural states since the nineteenth century. Here McShane investigates the official discourse of cultural policy, but with a critical eye to the unintended possibilities it may open up and afford the museum. His analysis of two Australian policy documents point towards a 'sharpening focus on the language of productivity, innovation and creativity' over the past 20 years. McShane's concern is that this shift has marginalized the museum, squeezing it out of the picture, But he points to an opportunity in cultural policy, one which is linked to the realities of culturally plural societies as much as to economic reality. After all, work in a globalized society requires the imaginative, emotional and reflexive labour of the museum in connecting across boundaries by means of 'cultural competency'. Taken together the three papers in this section provide different, but complementary insights into how the process of state formation is interwoven with museums.

Sociological Museums

A topic of interest shared by museum professionals and sociologists alike is surely that of the outsider. And relatedly one area of museums research, one that has profound implications for museums studies, is migration. There has been a growing recognition of the way in which nineteenth and twentieth-century modernization folded the great divisions of modernity, class, gender and ethnicity into the museum. One thing that makes the museum a site of such sociological significance is that it is a public space where established and outsider groups intersect. And of course, some museum research, including visitor research, points to the museum as an institution where established groups close ranks against outsiders. Here one of sociology's contributions has been to illuminate the 'hidden injuries' of symbolic power that may flow from those encounters.

There is a pressing need for better understanding of the dynamics of established-outsider relationships and the ways that they are interwoven the power of one group to stigmatize another. Nowhere perhaps is the need for greater understanding in such matters more pressing than in the case if migration. There are several reasons for suggesting that the museum is or might be, a locus of understanding. First, many museums developed as instruments of nation building; they played a key role in organizing national identities and in marking the boundary between established and outsider groups. Second, many museums are, today, increasingly enmeshed in global networks of communication and migration across communities. Thirdly, there are sub-national patterns of migration which have generated patterns of cultural exclusion within cities. And, as the anthropologist James Clifford reminds us that, for the majority of poor people who live within easy distance of an art museum, it is another world. Finally, much of twentieth-century sociology suffered from what the late Hermino Martins once called methodological nationalism. Methodological nationalism frames problems as being those of nation states, blotting out the interdependencies that states choose to blot

out for themselves. It may also be that the nation no longer provides the ideal horizon of the most authoritative museums.

In their different ways the three papers by Peggy Levitt and Katherine Caly, by Robyn Autry and by Francesca Lanz show how there can be something sociological about what the museum has to teach us. Levitt and Cali report the findings of their study of Salem's Peabody Essex Museum (PEM). They focus on global migration's impact on the identity work of museums. How, they ask, might the museum enable people to be both national and global? They bring globalization theory and urban cultural economics to their account of PEM's renaissance as a museum. Born out of two moribund institutions, PEM was 'reinvented' in the 1990s, and as a place for conversation about the global and the local. Levitt and Caly explore the post-industrial opportunities at an old maritime museum; they encourage us to think about the emergent possibilities secreted by a post-industrial culture, for re-imagining the social at the museum. What is particularly interesting about their case-study of PEM is that it presents a sociological analysis of how one museum, in responding to collective memories of migration, is a site of sociological imaginings.

If the museum is an imagined community just whose imagination do we have in mind? Writing in the 1970s the sociologist Cesar Grana must surely have been thinking of The Frick Collection when he observed the 'silent discrepancy' between visiting school children from polyglot New York and the 'symbolic world' of an established patrician art museum (Grana 1971: 101)). In Washington Robyn Autry's paper is concerned with just that discrepancy, and with how it might be studied from a relational perspective. Her point of departure is Benedict Anderson's thesis about imagined community and national museums. But what, she asks, of the street corner and the everyday world of the urban poor in the capital city of a nation state? How do we theorize the relationship? How are these worlds connected other than through top down notions of public education, which speak the language of cultural deprivation? Autry offers a powerful analysis of a community museum, of its origins and development, and of the way in which its people navigated their way through the institutional thickets of Washington's Smithsonian. Again, we are concerned with reframing our imagination. Autry notes that there are unanswered questions in the museum literature about the relationship between sub-national communities, the national, culture and memory.

Francesca Lanz examines the different ways in which museums and museum installations represent migration, immigration and emigration. In recent years, as she argues, the migration museum has emerged and taken its place alongside other museum forms, spreading across Europe since the turn of this century. Her focus is on the display settings and what she calls the museography of the museum. What is at stake here is the emergence not just of a museum topic, but of a new epistemology. Lanz reminds us that nineteenth-century museums, were premised on a particular way of seeing, 'one based on the detachment of the viewer and the possibility of offering a privileged viewpoint'. The author reviews and assesses the innovative and experimental approaches associated with, but not confined to, migration museums. Lanz shows how they may detach the visitor from the fixed co-ordinates of the nation state and immerse them in the experience of migration.

There is then an overall duality to the three papers in this section which warrants reflection. They point on the one hand to the social structural conditions of change and innovation at the museum. They point also to the emergent possibilities, the opportunities for re-imagination that inhere within dominant cultural institutions and which are reflected in museums and museum practices that illuminate the social world. The early twentieth-century British sociologists, Beatrice and Sydney Webb once observed that whilst most of us can get through life without becoming 'practical engineers or chemists… no consumer, producer, citizen can avoid being a practical sociologist' (Webb & Webb 1902: xvi)'. Again returning to the *The Sociological Imagination,* Mills there famously argued the case that people might, in understanding the world, grasp what is going on in themselves: as 'minute points of the intersections biography and history within society (Wright Mills 1959: 14). It is clear that Mills did not regard the sociological imagination as the monopoly of a professional academic class.[1]

How does this relate to the museum? We have heard much of the museum's function in relation to the public understanding of natural science in recent years. Yet we hear little

of sociology in that respect. Albeit somewhat under the radar so to speak, museums of sociology can be detected and there is something of that about PEM and Anacostia as well as the examples reported by Lanz. It seems to us that there is important museum work going on here. But, against this backdrop it might surprise sociologists and museum professionals alike to know that in the early twentieth century there were museums of sociology. There is a hidden though fragile history of association between them. It was a French sociologist and engineer, Frédéric Le Play, who was commissioned by Napoleon III to oversee the planning and installation of the Paris Exposition of 1867. A generation later the Scottish sociologist Patrick Geddes established a museum of sociology in Edinburgh and, along with other members of his circle, wrote about the museum as a means of sociological exposition and communication (Fyfe 2012, Fyfe 2015, Scott and Bromley 2014, Zueblin 1899).

Sociology, buildings, objects

Visitors are sometimes said to compare museums with churches or chapels in their reverential atmosphere. There is certainly a comparison to be made. But it resides not in the museum or church's atmosphere or ethos, but in an underlying and quite universal function of museums and churches as places where action and thought manifest themselves. Museums are like churches because like religious institutions they lead into action and lead into thought. Visitors queue, gather, walk and talk, pause and converse. They may also eat and shop. The museum, like religion, leads into thought in the sense that, like religion, it gives material expression to knowledge and belief (which are of course not the same thing). There is, for example, the knowledge of a nation revealed in its art history and belief in the primacy of the nation as form of human association. Deeper still the museum exhibits the categories which inform our thinking: the subjective and the objective; nature and society, past and present, human beings and objects.

The museum and science were deeply implicated in the rationalization of the world that gave us such dichotomies. Thus nature was turned into mere objects of inquiry that were set apart from society. By and large twentieth century sociology staked a claim to the study of a *sui-generis* world: society, social relations or social structures which were to be clearly demarcated from biological phenomena. Sociologically speaking objects, natural or artefactual, were the inert things that people put to use in the social production of their lives. On this argument agency is assigned to human beings. Yet there is a case for arguing that modern thought, including sociology, confiscated agency from what may be described as non-human actors (for example animals, machines, objects). A question we might consider is whether or not a concept of 'social structure' might confer agency, not just on interdependent human beings, but also on objects. It is here that Actor-Network Theory (ANT) has since the 1980s made its mark in breaking down conventional dichotomies of thought about human beings, objects and agency.

One concerns structure and agency and here ANT has conceptualized agency as a property of networks, and as distributed through networks. The second concerns the idea that the stuff of the social might include objects, that agency is not a property of human actors alone. As John Law observes: '[m]achines, architectures, clothes, texts –all contribute to the patterning of the social' (Law 1999: 7). This is Laurie Waller's point of departure. In drawing on ANT his paper challenges the dualism that would place objects and society in different boxes. Waller uses insights from ANT to interrogate the material productions associated with curating exhibitions. His paper makes a theoretical contribution to the object-oriented sociological approaches associated with studies of laboratories and science. In reporting an empirical study of curation, Waller showcases the wider insights to be derived from sociology of the museum.

Paul Jones and Suzanne McLeod focus particularly on the architecture of the museum, and attempt to tease out the social production of the built environment of the museum. Drawing on their previous research into architecture, and assembling together a hitherto disparate literature in the process, the authors make the case for an increased analytical engagement with the designed environment of the museum. And they go on to identify new lines of inquiry with respect to the task. We have suggested that analysis of relationality is crucial to sociological approaches generally understood. This starting point is interpreted by the papers in the final

section in a particular way. The papers by Jones and MacLeod, and by Waller, reflect an interest in the museum as 'contact zone'. Both seek to unpack something of the complexities associated with human social relationships that exist within/alongside the material, designed structures and objects of the museum.

Conclusion

Finally, a few words about the overall contents of this issue and our introduction. We make no claims for complete coverage of museum-related sociological topics. Our central concern has not been the encyclopaedic one of covering everything. Rather we have reflected on the relationship between museums and sociology and on shared intellectual interests. On the one hand we have shown, as do our contributors, that there is a museum dimension to the social world. Anyone wishing to understand social interaction in public places would do well to follow in the steps of Christidou and Diamanopolous as they follow their visitors. Or they might follow Laurie Waller as he follows hybrid objects, the 'quasi-objects' that are ANT's complex mixtures of science and society. Gil's paper is an invitation to think about how nation states are made by museums. And as we have suggested above, there might be a museum dimension to the discipline, to sociology itself. We have noted that they have 'past history'.

As we have seen museums may help us to incite a sociological imagination in relation to migration. But there is surely much else there besides for our students learning about processes of state-formation, de-industrialization, gender inequalities, consumption, corporate power and much, much more. We might begin by taking them to the museum, drawing their attentions to corporate sponsorship, to the donation boxes and to the friends' rooms. And then we might invite them to read Marcel Mauss on the gift relationship, to speculate about the returns on giving and to make a donation.

Notes

[1] '…the end product of any liberating education is simply the self-educating, self-cultivating man and woman…'. (Mills 1970 [1959]: 207)

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