Public learning and the art museum: Future directions

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Statement.

I hereby certify that this work has not been submitted for any other degree at any other institution or university.

Signed: [Redacted]

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Abstract.

For the past decade, engaging museum professional discourse internationally, often referred to as The New Museology, has focussed on the critical assessment of the museum as a site of cultural democracy. This is the principal focus of the 1989 publication, The New Museology, a collection of critical essays of museum history, theory and practice. This collection of essays represents a significant shift away from concerns about museum methods such as collection management, conservation, display and so on to a more fundamental examination of the purpose and social responsibility of museums and the quality and nature of the visitor experience. Within this critical discourse art museums are defined as the least accessible of museums in terms of cultural democracy. This question of the art museum’s failure to engage wider audiences remains relatively unexamined and has neither widely catalysed nor changed professional practice either in curatorial, educational, or public program domains.

In this study I discuss the educational aim of the art museum - whose role at present is trapped uneasily between an aesthetic position that ‘art speaks for itself’ and a more empiricist position that museums are places for the transmission of knowledge. I propose that one of the factors which contributes to what I contend is the inaccessibility of cultural meanings in art museums has been the intellectual habits and traditions associated with modernism. The aesthetic position of modernist art theory, and art curatorial practice growing out of it, implies that an explicit educational platform is unnecessary, and even undesirable, because art appreciation is at best the result of taste or intuition and cannot be learned.

I examine the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu argues that museum display principles, interpretative strategies, and educational techniques, propagated within the paradigm of modernism, implicitly assume possession of cultural literacy skills which are the sole privilege of the educated. I investigate how Bourdieu’s work can provide a critical vantage point for examining The New Museology. Related to this, I investigate connections between the evolution of modernist art history and orthodox modernist curatorial and pedagogic practices in the art museum. I trace influences of modernist curatorial and educational practices in Australia, with particular reference to the advocacy of a public learning program at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in both the 1940s and the 1970s.

In the late twentieth century postmodernism’s deprivileging of any one interpretative framework allows multiple curatorial approaches and perspectives, replacing one definitive, received history with many different histories, stories, meanings and interpretations. In elaborating possible new directions via a multiplicity of meanings and learning modes within the art museum, I use as a case study the Australian National Portrait Gallery. This is an institution which interrogates the interstices of history, biography, and portraiture. I conclude that working within and across the curatorial and educational environments of an art museum, while avoiding the pitfalls of the modernist tradition, is also a significant step toward engaging wider audiences than the cultural ‘elite’ in the development of visual literacy skills.
Introduction. Disconnections: Reviewing pedagogic and curatorial practices.

I believe that the majority of people really long to experience that moment of pure, disinterested, non-material satisfaction that causes them to ejaculate the word 'beautiful'; and since this experience can be obtained more reliably through works of art than through any other means, I believe that those of us who try to make works of art more accessible are not wasting our time. But how little we know of what we are doing.


The educational role of the art museum is longstanding and well-established, but its concept, focus, character and aims are the subjects of much professional debate. Historically education in the art museum has been referenced by many different discourses. Different approaches to art interpretation unravel in the public spaces of the art museum as threads of different disciplines; education, art history, museology and curatorship. These discourses have disparate voices that do not ‘hear’ each other, and do not ‘speak’ to the same or broad audiences.

This thesis consists of an analysis and overview of literature relevant to the field of inquiry, application of theory and a case study of practice. I propose a new pedagogic direction where a pluralistic model that follows the hermeneutic tenet which says there is no ‘last word’, only multiple readings, which opens the art museum to wider audiences.

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3 My focus is the art museum. At times throughout the thesis I make reference to museums from a historical perspective. To make the distinction between types of museums and the primary focus of my study, the art museum, I will use the American terminology 'art museum' to embrace what in the Australian and British context are usually known as 'art galleries'.
Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, a major contributor to the most recent research in the field of museology, has argued that a rapid development in the scope and the significance of the educational role of the museum has led to the need to broaden the theoretical analysis of educational practices. It is no longer sufficient to focus only on the learning processes - broader social questions need to be asked. Educational theory needs to be supplemented by sociological and philosophical theory if we want to develop and articulate these broad themes.4

My study examines constructivist educational theory and the interpretative model which focusses on understanding how people construct meaning of the events and phenomenon they encounter in their lives. Central to this model of learning, constructivism, is the idea that knowledge is constructed by the process of accommodating and integrating new knowledge with prior knowledge of the learner. Constructivist learning theory insists that people make their own active interpretations of experience. It represents the most contemporary view of learning and holds that people construct new knowledge and understanding based on what they already know.5 Today, constructivist learning theory works together with post-structuralist epistemologies and post-colonial cultural politics to position the visitor/learner as both active and politicised in the construction of their own relevant viewpoints.6

In addressing the questions of this investigation I am interested in broadening the concept of the art museum as an educational institution, which provides opportunities for people to bridge different sociocultural practices by enabling contact with diverse communities of practice, and, through this process, to bridge different institutions, communities and relationships. The biggest challenge facing museums at the present time is the way in which the museum conceptualises its relationship with its audience.

**Methodology.**

In this inquiry I investigate these various discourses in the interest of building a better understanding of the complex communicative base of the art museum. My aim is to build possible bridges between theory and practice, education and curation, within the art museum. I

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ask how can art understanding be promoted and increased through an understanding of connections between curatorship; the disciplines of art and its histories; education, and museology? My main research question - how to achieve greater learning potential for wider audiences in art museums by generating and catalysing resonances between visual culture and audience groups - is framed by a proposed practice that integrates the disparate discourses named above, repositioning the internal intellectual, professional and organisational structures toward the objective of extending the museum’s responsiveness to a range of audiences.

Pierre Bourdieu’s work suggests an inspirational relationship to *The New Museology.* Bourdieu’s research, undertaken in France in the 1960s, demonstrates the social inequities in accessing meaning in art museums. Bourdieu’s work remains relevant to questions of cultural democracy and the current redefinition of the educational role of the art museum. The more recent work of Eileen Hooper-Greenhill brings to bare broader philosophical and epistemological issues into the minutiae of museum practice like display, object taxonomies, interpretative frameworks and language, separation, designation and mediation of space, with a special emphasis on the construction and communication of knowledge. I explore the intersections between the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill and *The New Museology.* I use their work to position the future directions for a new pedagogy in the art museum.

John Dewey (1859-1952) argued that one of the main functions of educational institutions is to give an individual

‘an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment.’

According to this definition, an educational institution is a crossroad of a great variety of communities of practice. Visitors to the art museum are past, present, and future participants of different communities of practice, including professional, religious, political, recreational, ethnic, and other communities. Dewey’s work anticipates ideas that intersect in contemporary critical literature bridging learning, museology, sociology, visual culture, and knowledge.

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7 John Dewey, (1938), *Experience and Education,* Macmillan, New York, p. 27.
production, which have inspired my research for this thesis and inform my practice as educator at the Australian National Portrait Gallery. Within the art museum the phenomenon of exhibitions is the major form of pedagogy. It is through exhibitions that art museums produce and communicate knowledge. I explore the high aesthetic and formal constituent of modernist art practice and its implications for learning in the museum. I review the academic discipline of art history as the museum’s auxiliary discursive practice. I suggest the educative function of the art museum is based on operating principles that have an after the fact, or even de facto relationship to the primary discourse of curatorial practice, that the current situation in museum education presents a cross-roads of change. In the most recent decade there have been some particular qualities about change in museum education. The most significant of these changes has been relations between museum education and the primary intellectual discipline from which it derives - both theoretical models and practical strategies. Museum education has frequently been on the periphery of the museum’s stated mission.

Related Literature.

The literature on art museum education, and, to a less extent museology form the basis of my inquiry. The leading principle in selecting the literature was to find material for positioning current practice, critique, and proposed new directions in the public learning dimension of the


art museum. The literature field is written from several perspectives. Significantly the literature on art museum education written in the last two decades has a theoretical basis which meaningfully builds on the practical guide or operational approach of much of the earlier literature. Museum practitioners themselves have written about the politics of representation and display, often from a discipline based perspective, in particular art history and anthropology.\textsuperscript{11}

Much of the literature on museum education is centrally concerned with learning from objects and the relationship between the museum and its visitors. It considers the biggest challenge currently facing museums is the reconceptualisation of the relationship between the museum and its audience.\textsuperscript{12} This relationship is frequently discussed in terms which prioritise an educational relationship. There is very little literature on museum education in the Australian context, even less on art museum education. This is reflective of the sporadic and haphazard development of education in art museums generally in the twentieth-century,\textsuperscript{13} but more particularly in Australia.

In the area of learning in the museum the recent work of educator George Hein has been seminal to my discussion focussing on new pedagogic directions for the art museum.\textsuperscript{14} Hein outlines components that combine to make up a constructivist position on education, and that have been considered in designing the constructivist museum. The constructivist museum focuses on an understanding of how to enable individual learners to find meaning and relevance in learning in this environment. It embraces the idea that knowing objects lies in the experience of not only looking and having conversation but that objects are interpreted through ‘reading’ using the gaze which is combined with a broader sensory experience involving tacit


knowledge and embodied responses. Constructivist learning theory argues that people make their own active interpretations of experience. Hein contends that there are three basic ideas central to a constructivist view of the museum as a learning environment. What is done to acknowledge that knowledge is constructed in the minds of the learner? How is learning itself made active? How is the situation designed to make meaning - physically, socially, and intellectually accessible to the visitor?

As 'museology' continues to evolve as a discipline influenced by developments in hermeneutics, epistemology, and education, important steps forward have been made in museum criticism with the publication of several books and essays, largely British authored and many by current or past museum practitioners. Their marriage of theory and practice is admirable. But their work has been slow to reach Australian museums.

Chapter One introduces the main themes of my study. Many of the ways in which the art museum works today are derived from ideas that emerged during eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe and have accumulated and coalesced into a professional practice that is called into question by The New Museology. In this chapter I position the art museum as a site for investigation, using the critical framework of The New Museology to enable transparency of its multi-layered complexities.

Educational perspectives have, in Australia, remained largely absent from museum studies literature. Publications that do exist do not reflect an awareness of a broader critical and historical tradition of museum education, but focus more on practical issues. The New Museology provides a valuable critical frame of reference for viewing how museums might balance their social, aesthetic and cultural responsibilities.

In Chapter Two I examine critical discourses of learning, art historical, and curatorial practice in the art museum. I contend that these separate discourses have worked against an effective museum pedagogy and helped to maintain it as an elite cultural institution. I conclude this chapter by arguing that the modernist paradigm informing twentieth-century art practice, art education and museum practices, has functioned as a barrier to access and equity to all but a small cultural elite, that the educative function of the art museum is a contested arena. While this criticism has been repeatedly levelled at aspects of twentieth-century cultural life its application to, and implications for, the learning enterprise of the art museum, has not been the subject of critical interrogation and it is my particular focus in this thesis.

In Chapter Three I analyse the work of Pierre Bourdieu\(^\text{17}\) to establish an agenda for a reformed and distinctive art museum pedagogy. I draw on the work of Michael Parsons and Gene Blocker\(^\text{18}\) in the the field of aesthetics and education in my discussion of modernism as a formalist aesthetic validated by elitism and open to charges of exclusivist and antidemocracy. How museums respond to modernism to achieve greater cultural democracy is a central concern of my study. Modernism refers to an international tendency arising in Western European culture in the last years of the nineteenth-century and subsequently effected the character of most twentieth-century art. For the purpose of this study modernism encompasses philosophical and political ideas which celebrate ‘progress’, and include experimentation and innovation in the visual arts comprising an interest in the rational, functional, simplified or reduced form, and abstraction. In its presentation and attitude modernism denotes a radical shift in the representation and function of form, and requires, for its comprehension, criteria different from those appropriate to earlier art. The central ideas of modernist art practice include the universality of visual language, a high aesthetic constituent, the autonomy of the artwork, priority of its formal surface qualities, innovation with colour, form and abstraction. Principles of modernism assert that art is an independent self-contained practice with aesthetic issues and values which are not related to the world of society or culture.\(^\text{19}\) These characteristics are explored further in Chapter Three.


In Chapter Four I establish an historical case study of the development of public learning within the context of an Australian art museum. I explore the Art Gallery of New South Wales as a useful site for the investigation of a public learning program in the field of art. The public education program, entitled the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme, initiated in 1944 offers an opportunity to investigate at close proximity issues raised in the earlier chapters. Two periods of this institution’s public education service, the 1940’s and the 1970’s, stand out as significant because they represent foundational developments in the area of education in Australian art museums. These decades were precursors to, and continue to be valuable legacies for contemporary educational practice in art museums and are, therefore, worth commenting upon.

Chapter Five draws the themes of my thesis together. I have developed my investigation to raise questions about the relevance of contemporary and future pedagogic practice in the art museum. To this end I have chosen to investigate national portrait galleries. I limit my investigation to national portrait galleries because there is currently a ‘moment’ for the special relevance of portraiture. It comes out of the current concern with identity. What identity is and where it lies. Portraiture comes right into centre stage as a point of experiment about how the experience of being human can be represented and national portrait galleries, in particular, the recently instituted Australian National Portrait Gallery, have a role in exploring this. Thus positioning portraiture as an accessible, potent, and pedagogically pertinent domain for inquiry, providing possibilities for the application of new learning theories which enable and facilitate the engagement of diverse audiences.

A rich complementarity results from recent theoretical writings which reposition portraiture and enable its intersection with new interpretative frameworks of visual cultural theory, freeing it from the constraints of a canonic art history. Theoretical frames for viewing and interpreting visual culture broaden the meaning of portraiture to include questions about the social practices

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of looking and seeing, which are related to the practices of learning and knowing. The nature of portraiture as an art practice along with its recent release from the conventional art historical hierarchies, described and defined by recent theoretical writings, also promote interdisciplinary interpretative crossings with the domains of history and biography. Paradoxically the democratising project of *The New Museology*, and the accessibility of portraiture to broad audience groups, along with post-modernism which places the viewer within a cultural context, offer new pedagogic opportunities for exploring art as a keystone to interdisciplinary study.

My study concludes by defining the present time as a significant moment in art museum history, for both museum educators and the institution itself. Educators stand to play an important part in adapting the institution to change. They are charged with the responsibility that, what on the surface appears straightforward but actually holds radical implications for what an art museum is. Educators have brought visitor perspectives to bare on the treatment of collections: how they are displayed, what is said about them and who does the saying. In her most recent study Hooper-Greenhill refers to the ‘post-museum’ contending that it must play the role of partner, colleague, learner (itself), and service provider in order to remain viable as an institution. My central concern in this study is to redefine the educational role of the art museum with the objective of extending its responsiveness toward achieving greater learning potential for wider audience groups.

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Chapter one. The New Museology.

If a museum is good, then it continues to operate in the minds of the visitors after its closing hours. It continues to be an image which can be filled with dreams, analyses and thoughts. So there is no doubt that a museum performs many other functions which stretch beyond the most obvious utility and can be discussed in very objective terms.


Many of the ways in which the art museum works today are derived from ideas that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe and have accumulated and coalesced into a professional practice that is called into question by *The New Museology*. The art museum is a complex institution with many different influences which have impacted on it over several centuries. The premise of *The New Museology* is that many of these ideas and practices are no longer relevant. In this chapter, I discuss the art museum in its broad historical context, exploring some of the significant ideas and cultural assumptions shaping its development. My intention here is to position the art museum as a site for investigation, using the critical framework of *The New Museology*, to enable greater transparency of its, often concealed, multi-layered complexities. My purpose in this chapter is to set the structure for analysis of the art museum in order to examine its practices for the purpose of proposing a new pedagogy.

When using the concepts of *The New Museology* to understand the educational processes and pedagogy of art museums a fixed application is not intended. Important issues abound in *The New Museology*, some of which are fluid and evolving. While it is not the key focus of my thesis, many of the issues it raises underpin my inquiry, particularly in the context of Australian museological practice. More research on the concept of *The New Museology* needs to be undertaken.

An understanding of the broad interdisciplinary critical framework which *The New Museology* is, is crucial for analysing the practices of the art museum. In raising the issues of the knowledge-base and its social role as central concerns of the museum, *The New Museology* brings into the light the hidden agendas, assumptions and practices of these institutions. Underlying concepts of The *New Museology* put strong emphasis on the relationship of the
museum to its immediate social, economic and political environment, in determining its principles of relevance, meaning, and praxis.

**International and historical overview.**

Museums embody a number of fundamental concepts, which together constitute the basis of institutional practice and policies. Some of these concepts relate to technologies of mass education, disciplines of knowledge deriving from the Enlightenment, aesthetics and the development of ritualised art. Carol Duncan argues that from the mid-eighteenth century through to the mid-twentieth centuries, art museums were deliberately designed to resemble ceremonial monuments like palaces or temples. These same monumental forms, Duncan says, carried with them the notions of spaces as public rituals - such as corridors scaled for processions, halls implying large communal gatherings and interior sanctuaries. Like most ritual space, museum space is carefully marked off and culturally designated as reserved for a special quality of attention - in this case for contemplation and learning. Duncan argues that once we question our Enlightenment assumptions about the sharp separation between religious and secular experience - that one is rooted in belief while the other is based in lucid and objective rationality - we may begin to glimpse the disguised ritual content of secular ceremonies, which she considers inform the underlying practices of art museums. Thus it is important to understand the development of the art museum in the historical context of the Enlightenment that remained influential in western philosophy into the twentieth century. This era was characterised by the emergence, of progressive and liberal ideas in politics, the arts and education generally. The museum was established to raise the level of public understanding, it was to elevate the spirits of its visitors, it was to refine and uplift the common taste.

In her analysis of the ritual function of the art museum during the Enlightenment Duncan goes on to argue that to control a museum meant to control the representation of a community in its

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1 Enlightenment is the term characterising the cultural prevalence in Western Europe and North America of certain shared ideas during the eighteenth century. Although not a single unified movement, the Enlightenment was founded on a belief in progress an in the power of reason. Achievements in science encouraged the belief that, through the acquisition of knowledge and the application of reason, social intellectual and moral reforms could be effected.


highest values and truths. This aspect of Duncan’s argument I will come back to in Chapter Three through the application of the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu.

In the course of the eighteenth century critics and philosophers increasingly interested in the visual experience, began to attribute to works of art the power to transform their viewers spiritually, morally and emotionally. The real impetus to the idea of aesthetics as a distinctive branch of philosophy occurred in the work of Baumgarten (1714-1762) and, especially Kant (1724-1804). For each came to regard aesthetic consciousness as a significant and unitary element of human experience. In Kant’s view, aesthetic judgement is unlike either theoretical cognitive judgement, or practical, moral judgement, in that it is a subjective and, wholly individual response and experience. The same era in which aesthetic theory burgeoned also saw a growing interest in galleries and public art museums with the rise of the art museum a corollary to the philosophical invention of the aesthetic and moral powers of art objects. In philosophy ‘liminality’ became specified as the aesthetic experience, a moment of moral and rational disengagement that leads to or produces some kind of revelation or transformation. Meanwhile, the appearance of art galleries and museums gave the aesthetic cult its own ritual precinct.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, those who were most interested in art museums were a minority of the educated upper classes. In the course of the nineteenth century, the serious museum audience grew enormously: and also adopted an almost unconditional faith in the values art museums propagated. Through most of the nineteenth century, an international museum culture remained firmly committed to the idea that the first responsibility of a public art museum was to enlighten and improve its visitors, morally, socially and politically. By the late twentieth century, the idea of art museums as sites of wondrous and transforming experiences became commonplace among those with any pretensions to ‘culture’ in Europe and America and, I would add, Australia.

The ways in which museums work today are based on ideas that emerged in nineteenth-century Europe but the idea of the museum is changing.\textsuperscript{9} It is being transformed and re-imagined. It is not certain yet what this new museum form, which Eilean Hooper-Greenhill calls the ‘post-museum’, will be, nor where it will come from, but its development is being driven by questions of meaning.\textsuperscript{10} Typically the public for art museums has tended to consist of a body of visitors and members who enter museums of their own volition, and, until recently, with little active effort by art museums themselves to look beyond the self-selected core for their public.

This fact is highlighted in relation to Australian art museums in the recommendations of the report, \textit{Art Galleries: Who Goes?} authored by Tony Bennett and John Frow, commissioned by the Australia Council. The report indicates that art museums need to operate with clearer conceptions of what art is, of how and why it should be displayed, and at whom it should be directed.\textsuperscript{11}

Another aspect that adds to the complexity of the art museum’s function is that art education is not defined as a right that either state or cultural institutions should be called upon to implement.\textsuperscript{12} For example, in Australia currently art education does not have high status in education curricula or processes, neither is it taught as a generalist subject at pre-school, primary or secondary levels in the formal education sectors. This means that visual education is not central to education. It should be as central to education as numeracy and literacy. In its capacity to provoke an understanding of contemporary values and ideas art has a social and cultural role and should be written into the core script of curriculum.

\textbf{The Concept of The New Museology.}

For the last decade there has been debate among museum professionals and commentators

regarding the extent to which art in the museum environment is contextualised with its concomitant histories. Recent theoretical writing is generally concerned with retaining a sense of the museum as held in trust for the public, emphasising that museums are public collections, in public buildings, staffed by public servants yet much of the literature articulates a need for change in terms of relevance to contemporary culture, curatorial orientation and redistribution of power.  

One of the central questions of my thesis asks why there is such a disjunction between the critical theory of museum practice, discussed in the following chapters, and the actual practice of exhibiting, curating and interpreting art in the museum? Much of the critical commentary on museums produced in recent years has emanated from the academic establishment. This has included an analysis about the appropriation of culture, the production of meaning, and power relations in collecting and displaying which have brought attention to the covert aspects of museum practice. Although the term ‘the new museology’ has not been widely adopted in museum theory the concept explored in a collection of essays, by Peter Vergo, entitled, The New Museology, has also been explored in several other important publications. Particularly significant are two collections of essays with an anthropological emphasis published by the Smithsonian Institution: Exhibiting Cultures; the Poetics and Politics of Museum Display and Museums and Communities; the Politics of Public Culture. The art museum is addressed in Stephen Weil’s, A Cabinet of Curiosities: Inquiries into Museums and their Prospects. In the context of my discussion here I apply the term ‘the new museology’ to


writers, ideas and concepts, that are consonant with the authors such as have published under the *The New Museology* title. *The New Museology* addresses such questions as: Who are museums for? Who visits them? Whose knowledge is acquired, stored, preserved and presented in them? How is this knowledge organised? How do visitors respond to exhibits? What is being communicated overtly and covertly by objects, interpretation, building, education and public programs? Are there impediments to the attraction of a broad democratic audience to museums? If so what are these impediments? Central to *The New Museology* are democratic, audience-focussed concerns.

Questions relating to the ways in which museums address their roles in relation to wider cultural, social and political dimensions, such as education, public accountability and audience access are raised in Marcia Pointon’s collection of papers, *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology Across England and North America*. Another major contribution to the body of literature about the museum is Hooper-Greenhill’s, *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, whose approach in this publication makes a seminal contribution to the field in its drawing together of the disparate discourses about visual culture in the context of the art museum. It is an interdisciplinary study that addresses questions of meaning-making and posits new understandings of how museums will develop in the future. Hooper-Greenhill contends:

> Where the modernist museum was (and is) imagined as a building, the museum in the future may be imagined as a process or an experience. The post-museum will take, and is already beginning to take, many architectural forms. It is, however, not limited to its own walls, but moves as a set of processes into the spaces, the concerns and the ambitions of communities.

Focussing attention on pedagogy and visual culture, Hooper-Greenhill in this work raises a lot of questions. How and why is it that museums select and arrange objects, shape knowledge, construct a view? How do museums produce values? Most importantly Hooper-Greenhill asks - how do active audiences make meaning from what they experience in museums?

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In her article, *The Informed Muse*, Deirdre Stam reviews ‘New Museological Ideas’. Stam suggests that these ideas fit the definition of Stephen Weil (1988), of the key concepts underpinning the Smithsonian Institution’s international conference of that year. The conference theme was *The Poetics and Politics of Representation*, with topics meant to deal with how one culture should present another in the museum setting. Throughout the conference two issues central to *The New Museology*, the ‘poetics’ of presentation and the political agenda of museums as social institutions were raised. According to Weil:

Poetics, in this case, may be understood as identifying the underlying narrative/aesthetic patterns within exhibitions. The politics of representation refers to the social circumstances in which exhibitions are organised, presented, and understood ... Clearly these are intersecting domains which draw on a common pool of historical memory and shared (often unconscious) assumptions.

Stam points out in her review that the key concerns of the writers contributing to *The New Museology* are namely value, meaning, power, control, interaction with visitors, interpretation, understanding, authenticity and authority. All are cognitive concerns because:

They centre on processing of knowledge: creating information, interpreting information, receiving information and understanding information. The changes sought by The New Museologists lie in this cognitive realm involving new kinds of understanding and conceptions of the self in relation to society and its institutions.

By emphasising the cognitive Stam appears to stress their critical focus on the knowledge production, meaning- making aspects of museology. It is this focus on the cognitive elements that offers fresh direction for museums and educational practices within them. *The New Museology* calls for not just more education, but a new and radical approach.

I want to focus on *The New Museological* concepts of ‘value’, ‘communication’ and ‘context’,

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as defined by some major contributors to this field. Value, according to Harold K. Skramstad,\(^{25}\) is not an inherent property of objects, but more importantly, Skramstad argues, it is an attribute bestowed upon objects by their inclusion in the museum. So the context in which an object is exhibited determines value and meaning and this is changeable. The ‘aura’ giving rise to the notion of value comes from the traditional cultural role of the museum as the embodiment of established social values.

Also, meaning, is altered by museums, through the recontextualising of objects in the museum setting. Thus meaning, argues Edwina Taborsky,\(^{26}\) resides not in the actual object itself but is, socially determined and assigned, determined by our own “fore-knowledge” about our society.\(^{27}\) Meaning is arbitrarily assigned, which makes it changeable and, therefore, a potential lie.\(^{28}\) Access, another contentious issue here, and central to the new museological concerns, deals with, and foregrounds for analysis, the communication base of the art museum and how it mediates meaning. As Stam points out a critical focus on the cognitive elements of museum practices is new. It opens up important questions about the effectiveness of the museum’s communication base while creating opportunities to explore greater and more diverse audience engagement with the knowledge it produces and mediates.

The discourse of *The New Museology* has focussed on critical assessment of the art museum in achieving cultural democracy. Art display in the museum is critiqued by contributors to *The New Museology* as being presented with minimal interpretative material, as maintaining an anonymous authority; distancing the viewer from the object viewed.\(^ {29}\) Although in the last two decades of the twentieth century a large body of literature on museums and museology has been published it has not had a noticeable impact in art museums. It is clear that significant progress in understanding the remarkable properties, mechanisms, and effects of museological


\(^{27}\) Edwina Taborsky, (1990) 'The Discursive Object', p.53.


practice remain elusive. It would appear that a major rethinking of many historical and theoretical assumptions as well as modes of interpretation and explanation is still needed. Central to this concern is a growing awareness that art museums are often unwelcoming public spaces for large sectors of society and that the meaning of the particular art exhibited, while greatly celebrated and revered in publicly ‘owned’ collections, is not necessarily successfully mediated beyond a small cultural elite. A wide body of research undertaken in the UK, USA and Australia indicate barriers to participation across groups of society and an uncertain sense of ‘ownership’ by these groups.

The New Museology can be seen to have theoretical roots in other fields also and its implications and future should be understood to exist within a broad intellectual tradition. For example, insights into a new museology can be found in the Annales school of historians who focussed attention on material culture, everyday life and the political and economic interpretation of common place objects. Some significant sources in the development of The New Museology are Annalesian like, Fernand Braudel, Phillipe Arias and Peter Gay. The Annales school was a group of French historians, from the 1920s, who believe economic, social, cultural and political history should be integrated into a total history. Links between the Annales school and ideas expressed by contributing writers to The New Museology are significant because of a similar emphasis on analysis, long term structures, and socio-cultural trends. And I suggest there is a strong inspirational link between The New Museology and the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Almost all concepts of The New Museology deal with the museum’s information base, a base that represents the full complement of data to organise institutional activities, from acquisition to interpretative display.

Peter Vergo is another champion of The New Museology who challenges accepted notions of

how museums construe objects and exhibitions. Vergo writes,

every acquisition (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or a work of art, together with other objects or works of art means placing a certain construction upon history. Beyond the captions, the information panels, the accompanying catalogue, the press handouts, there is a subtext comprising innumerable diverse, often contradictory strands, woven from the wishes and ambitions, the intellectual, political, social or educational aspirations and preconceptions of the museum director, the curator, the scholar, the designer, the sponsor - to say nothing of the society, the political, social or educational system which nurtured all those people and in so doing left its stamp upon them. Such considerations, rather than, say, the administration of museums, are the subject matter of The New Museology.34

My interest in investigating the educational process and practices of the art museum requires a probing analysis of the complexities of its multi-disciplinary functions. The 'new museologist's' penetrating exploration of the subtexts attending these functions is most useful in its critical examination of received practices. At an important level it asks - What is the museum for?

Among the structural changes advocated by writers contributing to the The New Museology is the implied removal of the organisational barriers between traditional departmental units. Underpinning this advocacy is the understanding that the activities of curators and educators, for example, are entwined and require organisational structures to support and foster their integration. As someone working in the art museum as an education curator, I am aware of the potential benefits resulting from the integration of curatorial and educational processes. Some of these benefits I will discuss in the context of the National Portrait Gallery in Chapter Five. The New Museology offers a useful theoretical framework for informing these practices.

Charles Saumarez Smith35 is another contributor to The New Museology who in his contributing essay, entitled, Museums Artifacts and Meanings, criticises the ways in which museum exhibitions are labelled. He notes:

museum labels conceal a complex history; that one of the things that is uncomfortable about the way a state-run museum operates is that it maintains a belief in

34 Peter Vergo, ed, (1989) 'Introduction' The New Museology, p.3.

Chapter one - The New Museology
anonymous authority. Instead of viewing the display of a gallery for what it is, a set of complex decisions about a number of alternative methods of representation, there is an idea held by museums that the procedure must be suppressed. Labels for example, tend to state straightforward information which pertains only to the artifact on its own, not to its place in the gallery.36

An arresting example of this suppression referred to by Smith is the text panel relating to remanent pieces of the Parthenon exhibited in the Duveen Gallery at the British Museum. Nothing in the text refers to, or explains, how, why, or when they became part of the collections of the British Museum, or what these works mean, in this context. This failure to enable the viewing public to be a party to knowledge of the provenance of this work and its dislocation from its original context and recontextualisation in the British Museum makes meaning ambiguous. Clearly visitors are not encouraged to view the museum as an arbitrary construction, or within the context of its own socio-political history.

In discussing the display of artifacts in museums Saumarez Smith refers to,

a problem of epistemology; of how artifacts are perceived and represented by the museum curator, and of how they are perceived and understood by the museum visitor. It becomes clear that this is a highly fluid and complex activity, which is not susceptible to straightforward definition.

and, he argues:

curators equally have a particular and personal representation of historical and aesthetic significance; that artifacts do not exist in a space of their own, transmitting meaning to the spectator, but, on the contrary, are susceptible to a multiform construction of meaning which is dependent on the design, the context of other objects, the visual and historical representation, the whole environment; that artifacts can change their meaning not just over the years as different historiographical and institutional currents pick them out and transform their significance, but from day to day as different people view them and subject them to their own interpretation.37

The idea that objects have a complex presence which is subject to multiple interpretations has crucial implications for the ways museums think about and present themselves to their public.

Most art museums are still structured according to late nineteenth century taxonomic concepts or laid out to tell the grand narratives of modernism, in a linear way. This is criticised by Saumarez Smith as he notes that:

Intellectual ideas have moved away from a belief in a single overriding theoretical system to a much more conscious sense of the role of the reader or spectator in interpretation. How, it should be asked, should museums restructure their activities to relate more closely to a changed epistemological environment?  

Saumarez Smith’s question here is highly significant because visitors bring a multiplicity of different attitudes and expectations and experiences to the reading of an artifact, so that their comprehension of it is individualised. The way art museum’s are responding to new interpretative frameworks for visual art is the focus of my case study in Chapter Five. While not writing within the context of The New Museology, nonetheless Hooper-Greenhill’s work, has made a valuable contribution to the field in addressing many of the challenges raised by The New Museology. She writes that:

the lack of examination and interrogation of the professional, cultural, and ideological practices of museums has meant both a failure to examine the basic underlying principles on which current museum and gallery practice rests, and a failure to construct a critical history of the museum field. The structure of rationality that informs the way in which museums come into being, both at the present time and in the past, is taken as unproblematic, and therefore as a given.  

In her early work, Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (1992) Hooper-Greenhill focusses on the epistemological foundation of the museum. Drawing on the work of Foucault she examines systems of classification alongside received theories of knowledge, in order to challenge western ways of thinking. Hooper-Greenhill suggests Foucault’s Preface to, The Order of Things, as a point of reference. If we can travel down the track of the ‘unthinkable’ and, indeed, the ‘irrational’, the journey would demand new ways of

thinking about the world and the world of museums, and so would offer new possibilities of classifying the world. Hooper-Greenhill considers one of Foucault’s most useful tools is his approach to history, for he

rejects the notion of a continuous, smooth, progressive, totalising, developmental history. He works instead with ‘effective history’, a view of the past that emphasises discontinuity, rupture, displacement, and dispersion. The targets of Foucault’s work are not ‘institutions’, ‘theories’, or ‘ideologies’, but practices, with the aim of grasping the conditions which make these acceptable at a given moment.

The basis of ‘effective history’ is in opposition to the pursuit of the founding origins of things, and a rejection of the approach that seeks to impose a chronology, an ordering structure, and a developmental flow from the past to present. Foucault claims history must abandon its absolutes, and instead of attempting to find generalisations and unities, should look for differences, for change and for rupture.

The way in which the work of Hooper-Greenhill exposes how exhibited and other contexts for works in the art museum have determined meaning and interpretation offers a framework in which to better understand the educational potential of the art museum. Like the advocates of The New Museology Hooper-Greenhill asks for a critical examination of received museological practices, especially those practices shaping knowledge and the museum’s communication base. For example, releasing art from the ‘grand narratives’ of its traditional canonic history, that have been appropriated by the practices of the museum, frees it, and its viewers, to envisage new meanings and directions associated with objects. Enabling the disconnections rather than the connections between objects become significant for holding the viewer’s interest while shaping their curiosity to find out more.

The Space of the Museum.

Studies of museum visitors make it abundantly clear not only that museum attendance varies directly with such variables as class, income, occupation and, most noticeably, education, but

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also that the barriers to participation, as perceived by non-attenders, are largely cultural. Those sections of the population which make little use of museums clearly feel that the museum constitutes a cultural space that is not meant for them. Hooper-Greenhill argues, the division between the hidden space of the museum in which knowledge is produced and organised and the public spaces in which it is offered for passive consumption results in a monologic discourse dominated by the authoritative cultural voice of the museum. She argues for the space of the museum to become more fully diologic, allowing the museum to function as a site for the enunciation of the plural and differentiated statements, enabling it to function as an instrument for public debate. Hooper-Greenhill concludes that the public museum was shaped into being as an apparatus with two deeply conflicting functions: 'that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of the utilitarian instrument for democratic education'. I suggest that this conflict has endured, that it manifests in the contested space of the art museum as a conflict between the aesthetic position that art speaks for itself and a rationalist position that museums are places for the transmission of knowledge.

What should shape culture?

Impetus for critical inquiry into museums and their practices has come from several directions, particularly from the field of cultural studies. Museums are being asked to re-define the terms of their contract with society. By way of example, to consider the contribution from the field of cultural studies I will look at the work of cultural theorist Robert Connell. Connell’s work is pertinent to my work in two ways; one in its attention to the ‘culture’ of arts’ workers and two in its critique of notions of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art. Connell suggests:

there is nothing intrinsic to an excellent performance of a Bach prelude that makes it more ‘culture’ than an excellent performance of an embroidered wedding-dress. Both are delicate and use elaborate skills but one is much more prestigious than the other. In

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other accounts ‘culture’ is not itself a separate kind of activity, but something that crops up in every setting in which social life occurs. Thus we hear of the ‘shop floor’ culture of factories, or of ‘political culture’, or the ‘culture of poverty’. The idea here is that culture is the side of human life that has to do with meaning, symbolism, forms of expression, self-conceptions, images of the world. No human product or activity fails to convey meanings.\textsuperscript{49}

For Connell culture is not a separate or higher sphere of life, it is everywhere where humans live and interact and has within it a plurality of meanings, symbols and ideas according to a particular group’s social life and habits. Connell writes:

It is important to hold to the substance of these wider conceptions of culture, as a counterweight to the social biases embedded in the High Art conceptions. It is sometimes important to know there are sound ways of thinking about culture which start from the social life of ordinary people, and concern its creativity, symbolism and patterns of consumption, rather than from starting with notions of ‘excellence’ and the image of a creative minority.\textsuperscript{50}

The concept of high culture separate from everyday life is not found in every society. I will come back to the separation of art from the experience of everyday society in Chapter Three where I discuss the impact of modernism on the curatorial and educational practices of the art museum. In European society it is mainly the product of a history of class relations. The age of Renaissance aristocracies gave us neoclassical architecture, oil painting, vernacular epic and drama; seventeenth and eighteenth - century ruling classes gave us baroque music, the essay, secular philosophy; the bourgeoisie of the industrial age gave us the novel, the concert, modern architecture and sociology.\textsuperscript{51} Connell contends that the prestige of these forms, their power to dominate conceptions of what ‘culture’ is, derive largely from the social and economic power of the classes that shaped and consumed them. Cultural production goes on all the time, everywhere. The shape that it takes, - what activities are honoured, funded, institutionalised, what is stressed in the education system and what is not; what symbols become dominant and which do not - is profoundly affected by the general structure of power and inequality in the

society.52

There is, Connell writes,

an ideology of ‘professionalism’ which plainly has appeal to people in the arts, as it has in libraries and in education. The social meaning of ‘professionalism’ is also mainly a message of exclusion directed at non-professionals. Our chances of a democratic cultural policy actually working are bound up with the willingness of cultural workers to see themselves as workers, rather than as potential millionaires. Part of what is involved is changing working relationships away from the dichotomies of artist v audiences, teacher v pupil, professional v client - towards an interplay of full-time and part-time participants in a basically co-operative process. It requires a rethinking, not just of what counts as ‘culture’ or ‘art’ but also of the social practices in which cultural meanings are embedded.53

Connell argues that ‘professionalism’ becomes a means of exclusion, a support of social privilege which values particular groups and devalues others. He implies that social and cultural inequities are perpetuated by the ideology of ‘professionalism’. It is useful for my thesis to apply Connell’s critique of ‘professionalism’ to the art museum. Particularly if it is seen as a continuation of power and subordination which was embedded in eighteenth century European aristocratic art collections, from which the public art museum has evolved. Seen in this light I would argue that the democratisation of the modern art museum has been held up by an over determined ‘professionalism’ which has masked a slippage, or appropriation of, social practices inherited from private collections.

Curators and educators working collaboratively as participants in a co-operative process across the spaces of the art museum to mediate meanings embedded in exhibitions to wider and more diverse audience groups challenges many entrenched practices and assumptions both within the museum structure and external to it. In Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge (1992), Hooper-Greenhill argues that knowledge is now generally accepted as the ‘commodity’ that museums offer but that an analysis of the various elements that together make the ‘reality’ that we call ‘the museum’ has barely begun.54 What, she asks, does ‘knowing’ in the museum mean? What counts as knowledge in the museum? What is the role of the visitor and what is

the role of the curator? How are material things constructed as objects within the museum? How are individuals constructed as subjects? What is the relationship of space, time, subject and object? These are important questions for every museum curator and educator to consider because they are central to effective museum practice.

From a stance similar to Connell’s, Hooper-Greenhill claims that museum workers have, until recently, remained uncritical of their practices, and of the processes they are engaged in everyday. Their lack of examination and interrogation of the professional, cultural, and ideological practices of museums has been both a failure to examine basic underlying principles on which current museum and gallery practice rest, but significantly has also resulted in failure to construct a critical history of the development of the museum. The structure of rationality that informs the way in which museums came into being, both at the present time and in the past, is taken as unproblematic, and therefore as a given, according to Hooper-Greenhill. Stephen Weil suggests that beyond the recognition that museums are not inherently virtuous organisations, perhaps the greatest single factor contributing to the loss of their once superior position, has been the bankruptcy of the underlying ideologies upon which they were founded. Where this can most clearly be seen is in the case of the art museum.

I have described and defined The New Museology and its antecedents, mapped the territory across which many of the critical challenges to traditional museum practice move. I have outlined the main concepts of new museological research in the work of Hooper-Greenhill, which makes a seminal contribution to this field, and indicated that the inquiry is significantly informed by the interdisciplinary work of cultural theorists. Throughout the next chapter I will consider the opportunities for learning in the art museum that can opened by the intersections of pedagogy, visual culture and curatorial practice.

Chapter two. Intersections and Opportunities: pedagogy, art history and curatorial practice.

The philosopher Michael Oakshott has defined learning as ‘acquiring the ability to feel and think’, which he believed can only be acquired by listening for and recognising these abilities in the conduct and utterances of others. Learning suffuses almost every moment of our daily lives.


Educational perspectives have, up until the 1990s, remained largely absent from museum studies literature. This is not to say that museum educators have not been actively publishing their work, but rather that their publications have tended to be grounded in practical needs like linking collections with curricula of the formal education sector or forging cross institutional partnerships, and with few exceptions, do not reflect an awareness of a broader critical and historical tradition.¹ In the previous chapter I have outlined the concepts of The New Museology to provide a contextual framework for the debate in museum literature that engages with questions of how museums are balancing their social, aesthetic and intellectual responsibilities. Questions raised in the collection of essays under this title have profound implications for the educational dimension of the art museum. They disturb the disciplinary borders that have demarcated the disparate practices of education, art history and curatorial practice in the art museum.

For many years, public educational policy was based on the assumption that, for the majority of the population, the most important learning took place in the classroom. In recent decades, understanding of the process of learning and education has changed beyond recognition.

Today, learning is seen as a life-long process, growing out of our everyday experience, to which formal education at school and university, and training at work contribute. Informal

learning, the kind that begins at birth, and develops throughout life through social interaction with other people provides the foundation for all other learning.

While the educational role of the art museum, has, in a broad sense, been long established there has been very little in-depth examination of the philosophies and pedagogies on which this long tradition has been based. No extended or elaborated discourse about the layers of philosophical depth that exists in educational theory since Plato and Socrates is evident in the body of literature on museum studies. The art museum’s educational enterprise, both its educational perspective, and educational roles, would be more clearly defined, articulated and understood; thus better informing its pedagogic practice, if there were processes that linked educational philosophy with art historical and curatorial theories and practices.

However recent literature in the United Kingdom and America has shifted focus from the operational educational role of the museum to the museum as a producer of knowledge and this has meant a redefinition of its educational perspective and role. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests that knowledge is now well understood as the commodity that museums offer.2 This, I suggest, is not so well understood or reflected in the practices of the art museum. In this chapter I want to examine critically discourses of learning, art history and curatorial practice in the art museum. I suggest that these separate discourses have worked against an effective pedagogy in the art museum and helped maintain it as an elite cultural institution. I will conclude this chapter by arguing that the modernist paradigm informing twentieth-century art practice, art education, and museum education, has functioned as a barrier to access and equity to all but a small cultural elite.

In the context of this study pedagogy is defined as a system or instructive practice which provides an introductory study of art in the museum environment. Museum pedagogy is structured through the narratives produced through displays, and also through the style in which these narratives are presented. Many museums use methods other than those of display as part of their educational provision; these might, for example, include dramatic events, workshops, discussion tours for students and adults and family groups. These methods can be very creative and successful; however for most visitors most of the time, it is the exhibitions

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and displays that make up the educational experience of the museum. Hooper-Greenhill (2000) presents two paradigmatic formations of pedagogy; pedagogy as transmission and pedagogy as culture. Pedagogy as culture represents a paradigm shift and currently informs new understandings of learning in the museum environment which embrace a perspective based on communication and educational theory. Whereas pedagogy in the modernist museum can be summarised as based on objects which, if properly disposed, speak for themselves. The facts and concepts relevant to exhibitions or the display of objects may be absorbed by visitors if they themselves can make connections with the material provided. For the modernist curator, the end product of the process of exhibition development is the exhibition itself. I suggest that the cultural democracy process of the art museum will be more quickly promoted through its engagement with critical pedagogic practice based on the acknowledgement of culture not as monolithic and unchanging. Moreover, as Henry Giroux describes, the museum: a site of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences and voices come together amidst diverse relations of power and privilege.

A major factor influencing change in the pedagogic practice of the art museum is the deepening and widening concept of ‘education’, arising from the acknowledgement that teaching and learning is not limited to formal institutions but takes place throughout life in countless informal settings. Lifelong learning defines the concept of learning as a life-long process that is supported through both informal and formal education in a range of ‘learning communities’. Museums can contribute to every stage of educational development, from early childhood to old age.

**Museum education.**

Museum education as a specific activity within the wider scope of museology developed in the

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nineteenth century as the movement toward universal education progressed, and museums took
on their share of the responsibility for educating (or enlightening) the masses.\textsuperscript{10} Throughout
most of the nineteenth century, an international museum culture remained firmly committed to
the idea that the first responsibility of a public art museum is to enlighten and improve its
visitors morally, socially and politically.\textsuperscript{11} In the twentieth century the principal rival to this
idea, the aesthetic museum would come to dominate. According to Edward Alexander the most
full and influential statement of this doctrine is Benjamin Ives Gilman’s, \textit{Museum Ideals of
Purpose and Method}, (1918).\textsuperscript{12} According to Gilman,

works of art, once they are put in museums, exist for one purpose only: to be looked at
as things of beauty. The first obligation of an art museum is to present works of art as
just that, as objects of aesthetic contemplation and not as illustrative of historical or
archeological information.\textsuperscript{13}

However, not until the second half of the twentieth century did museum education begin to
emerge as a profession. This evolution can be traced in the United States in recent major
museum policy documents issued by the American Association of Museums (AAM). In 1969
\textit{America’s Museums: The Belmont Report} stated that education was an important function of
museums; in 1984, \textit{Museums for a New Century} argued that the educational function of
museums was equal in importance to the preservation and aesthetic functions, and in 1992
\textit{Excellence and Equity} stresses the primacy of education.\textsuperscript{14}

Moreover it was only in the later part of the twentieth century that staff and departments
devoted to education began to appear in art museums in Australia.\textsuperscript{15} Even now, education has
remained the poor relation when compared to other museum operations such as collection,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Gilman cited in Edward, P. Alexander, (1979) \textit{Museums in Motion. An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums}, American Association for State and Local History, Nashville Tennessee, p 36.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Carol Duncan, (1995) \textit{Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums}, p.16.
\item \textsuperscript{15} It was in the immediate post war years of the 1940s that the state galleries in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide developed organised public learning dimensions. The Art Gallery of New South Wales implemented the most comprehensive and ambitious of these programs.
\end{itemize}
research, and display, as evidenced by its lack of integration into these museological practices. As I have commented above education has not engaged with, or been engaged by, and certainly not on an equal footing, with the discourses of art history and curatorship in the context of the art museum. For years, museum educators have ranked low in the museum professional hierarchy. Education departments were often in unfriendly places where underpaid part-time employees carried out school and community programs, usually in isolation from other museum activities. Fortunately, the situation has begun to change. Growing professionalism - along with a climate whose watchwords include accountability, customer service, and educational reform - is giving education a new and central function in museums. Driven by a range of different forces museums are, at last undergoing a seminal change for the better into centres for public learning.

**Art history and curatorial practice.**

Aspects of curatorial practice have a genealogy which dates back to late-eighteenth century systemic structures relevant to collection development and management. These structures have evolved with the history of museology, and continue to inform current practice, yet remain unexamined. For example, what particular theory of knowledge is being used by curators in the development of exhibitions and in permanent collections in art museums? What theories of art history have shaped curatorial practice? What are the key elements curators are wanting to communicate or mediate to visitors? What are the assumptions and understandings behind labels and text panels? What is it that the art museum wants the visitor to experience? These are some of the fundamental questions to be considered about the theory and function of art museums in the twenty-first century.

Theory about curatorship is limited although there is a growing body of literature on art history and its methods (Art history being the term employed to denote the discipline that examines the history of art) and many art historical tools have informed curatorial practices in the art museum. Most notable of these is the assumption that works of art ‘speak’ directly to the viewer so that access to them need not be mediated by the social and historical experience of the viewing subject. According to a modernist paradigm by responding to purely visual

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characteristics for example - form, colour, composition, brushwork - it is assumed, we are able to access the essential genius of the artist, or a school or period. There is rarely any reference to anything outside of the objects themselves to provide broader cultural links, or wider reference or prompts to their meanings. What is absorbed by visitors is what they themselves can make connections with, without assistance or intervention.

The issue of quality is also of immense importance in art historical practice, which works on the assumption that there is an agreed scale of values that operates to endorse a canon, universally and across time. The aesthetic experience is important in art historical scholarship, as is tracing the history of the object and establishing its authenticity. These are seen as important art historical practices essential to scholarship. Development of these skills in art historical analysis, which support and develop visual literacy, imply a high level of looking at, and training in visual culture. Not surprisingly, when these art historical practices are transferred to the context of exhibitions in the public art museum, access to the meanings of art, through a canonical art historical framework, becomes difficult for viewers without training or experience in the field of art and thus creates a lost opportunity for the viewer.

Philip Wright argues that the art museum, still fundamentally functions as the working tools of the art historical trade, and the grounding for the art collectors business. He states that art museums act as a warehouse resource in order to define individual artist's oeuvres, stylistic groupings of 'movements' and ('national) schools', to trace the threads of master pupil relationships in a posited sequence of stylistic developments. Wright considers the art museum teaches hierarchies of quality in subject matter and in technique, thus justifying a triumphalist, still Vasarian canon (1511-1574) in the search for (visual) truth as constructed by the History of Art while concealing or glossing over the originating circumstances of the work.18

Furthermore, he argues the visiting public is offered what those “in the know” call treasures, or masterpieces, or an anthology of one artist or group of artists or an anthology of a certain medium, period, style or nationality by those deemed to be experts in these fields and who take it upon themselves to transmit their superior knowledge.19

Contrary to this, a central argument of *The New Museology* is a concern for the quality of visitor experience as well as an appeal to curators to address the questions of the educative process, a process that ought not to be restricted to the acquisition of factual information alone, but must foster the growth and development of the whole person, enabling potential openings for experience and pleasure of art. This implies a view of learning that is broader than mere information acquisition. Learning however, involves an open process of interaction with the environment. This experiential process develops and expands the self, allowing the learner to discover aspects of themselves that might previously have been unknown. Thus the learning experience involves the whole person, not only the intellectual but the sensory and emotional faculties as well. Therefore the emphasis placed on the ‘eye’, on learning through looking alone is very limiting and appears to derive from the dominance of the aesthetic in the art museum. This leads to an assumption that meaning in art is self-evident, requiring no other learning strategies than looking for its mediation. Danielle Rice writing about the dominance of the visual in current museum culture points out:

Two notions of art are current in museum cultures. One is the concept of art objects as valuable pieces of property. The other is the belief that seeing equals understanding, or that one has merely to look in order to appreciate art [...] The irony of people who devote their entire lives to studying art proposing that all one has to do is to look at art in order to understand is not lost on museum critics. To the uninformed eye, the fragments of other times and other cultures, removed from their original settings and rituals, are mere curiosities made by unknown people who are suspect because they are so different from us.  

Philip Wright endorses Rice’s observations as evidenced by the majority of permanent displays of Old Masters in art museums where, he points out, there is hardly ever any discussion and/or illustration of the Weltanschauung i.e the attitude to, and the concept of, the world as perceived in a certain epoch of a region, a kingdom, a court, or a so called national school.  

Neither is there a shift of balance between religious and secular values, or of the relationship between the patron, the art market and the particular artist’s work, the ritual or social meaning of the work; the prevailing circumstances of war, peace, the economic situation in society or, the state of life of the individual at the time of a work’s creation. Instead, what is shown is a

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history of style, as written by assumed experts and divided up by media - oil paint, watercolour, printing, and so on. It is accepted, according to Wright, that ‘this best allows works to speak for themselves,’ but to those who lead busy lives outside art history, it must at times seem as if the intent is deliberately to conceal the meanings of works of art.22

This leads to a state where there is apparent polarisation of the role of educator - who should function as a participant in a group effort - contributing her/his specialist and professional expertise as ‘the advocate of the viewer’ while at the other pole is the curator who is more likely to be ‘the advocate of the work of art’.23 Museum educators also regard art history as the intellectual core of their field and have given it the highest priority in their own professional preparation.24 However, the common discipline base of art history has not historically facilitated a discourse that crosses or intersects with the educational and curatorial spaces of the art museum.

Art historical training is necessary for aspects of effective professional work in an art museum, but concepts and practices important for creating viable educational programs do not necessarily emerge from the preparation of art historians. Exhibitions are the primary learning resources that art museums develop and need, therefore, to reflect some underlying understanding of how people experience, or learn to experience art. Visiting the art museum is a social activity, a potential self- exploratory activity that may lead to opening up complex perceptual, intellectual, emotional or spiritual realms. Different kinds of predispositions to learning and learning styles imply different priorities and display techniques and interpretative strategies to cater for different learning dispositions in visitors. For adult learners one of the key questions is: What is the knowledge for? Knowledge for the sake of knowledge? I suggest that art for the sake of art is not what most non-art educated adult learners are motivated by.

Many viewers would like to know more about an object so they can understand more about its place in a particular context, or a range of different contexts, or its social relationship. In this context ‘looking’ only is not always enough to convey meaning.

That museums serve an educational function has long been a basic rubric of the field. It has also been long supposed that the way they serve that function is through exhibitions in which the curator, by the arrangement of objects and placement of labels, spells out a lesson that the visitor will have learned, or at least will have learned some part of that intended lesson. However recent research concludes that rather than communicating new information the most satisfying exhibitions for visitors are those that resonate with their prior experience and knowledge and provide new information in ways that confirm and enrich their own view of the world.25

For visitors who are not trained in art history or who do not have other forms of knowledge on which to draw the contextualization and interdisciplinary presentation of objects will make it more probable that the experience will lead to learning for them. Information about materials and techniques of art production and their relationship to technology can be a step in the development of a visual literacy. The representation of relational links between contemporaneous social, political or cultural history and a particular art work provides the visitor with the opportunity to develop insights into its meaning.

Certain questions arise about art museums and their relationship to the visitor. Do art museums strive to enhance people’s engagement with art? What do art museums pre-suppose about their visitors? Do they even want to attract new visitors and a more comprehensive cross-section of the public? The habitual defence of some museum curators to critics of gallery hanging and interpretation has been to say that these aspects are catered for by their Education Departments and leave it at that.26 An investigation of these questions throws some light on current curatorial and interpretative practices and in turn raises further questions about how these practices could become more audience inclusive.

In fact, neither curators nor educators are likely to gain theoretical understandings about how people learn, or how their appreciation of art can be nurtured, from university art history programs. Neither is art history training alone likely to enable them to make their unique

contributions as educators. One reason that art history has credibility as a locus for professional training, is that similar opportunities for training in museum education have not been readily available, a serious omission. A result of this situation is that museum education practice lacks a strong intellectual base and theoretical foundation. Museum education is a practice whose practitioners have come primarily from school-based practice which has been appropriated to a museum setting. They have been trained around but not in it, so it lacks status and recognition.27

American art educators Elliot Eisner and Stephen Dobbs define museum education as a discipline still in the process of being born, indicating that a long list of conditions will have to be met before adequate pre-service and in-service professional preparation are available. According to Eisner and Dobbs this preparation must include models of scholarship, primary and secondary text books, journals that are widely available and circulated, tertiary training programs. They argue that in order for practice to be made more effective and intelligent, both child and adult learning theory and research must be instituted. Until such elements are firmly in place, the field of museum education is likely to be perceived as lacking theoretical and intellectual rigour - a poor cousin and unlikely to attract the levels of funding and support it needs. This state of play, that is, the lack of theoretical foundation and training for art museum education, particularly in the Australian context, has contributed to the lack of dialogue between educators and curators.

According to this state of play, it could be argued that this indicates a general lack of training, research and evaluation among museum educators, which has consequences well beyond the validation of individual programs. Failure to ascertain the adequacy of their methods leaves museum educators ill prepared to build a base of scholarship to establish its own intellectual foundation. Research and evaluation are two significant processes to demonstrate the achievement of goals in museum education, including the attainment of its own maturity.

The fundamental aim of art museum education should be to provide as many visitors as possible with a personal, significant experience of art; in other words, to enable viewers to realise that art is a reflection of their life and times. What is needed in this encounter is to

promote further knowledge and enjoyment which is founded on the prior knowledge and experience of the viewer i.e. it needs to include rather than exclude. Museum education programs need to recognise and build on the different and diverse social characteristics and cultural attitudes of audiences. New partnerships between museum visitors and user communities are required which are based on interactive methods of communication, and on much broader approaches to teaching and learning. The question of what might be the nature of the relationship between the museum and its visitors is frequently discussed in terms which prioritise education. The educational role of the museum is long-standing and well-established, but its focus, direction and future are the subjects of much professional debate. The concept of museum education has been broadened to embrace new understandings that teaching and learning cannot be limited only to formal educational institutions, for learning takes place throughout life, in countless informal locations and environments. A more progressive view of learning within the museum field has occurred later than in the formal sector educational institutions such as schools. Interestingly concepts underpinning early twentieth-century progressive education are traceable in the theory of constructivist learning currently impacting on learning in the museum. However the old concept of ‘education’ as a formal didactic process limited to specific times and places is still prevalent, and thus in museums too, there will be a formal provision for pre-booked groups such as school children. Furthermore, there is little understanding of the potential of museums for life-long learning, beyond school years, while potential educational aspects of exhibitions is barely acknowledged and seldom researched. With this in mind, the museum must adopt a whole new attitude to planning exhibitions to include all learners and not just children engaged in direct program delivery.

The uncertainty about what art museum education might contain, and what processes it could entail, is, in part, due to a lack of knowledge within the museum itself of the profound changes that have occurred over the past century in educational processes and structures in the wider

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society.

In 1987 the Getty Center for Education in the Arts sponsored-study indicated that there are still unanswered questions about how best to organise and conduct the enterprise of museum education. Entitled, *The Uncertain Profession*, the study pointed out that the field of art museum education was problematic and there was a widespread perception that it lacked a map to plot its destination or direction. The report cited theories and research that could in future, provide a solid foundation upon which to design educational programs. In the study both museum directors and education department heads were enthusiastic about the educational mission of the art museum. There was consensus about the place of education in museums, but, as a growing body of literature indicates, there is still considerable confusion over what the specific role might be within the context of the larger institution.

A further question of this report from the Getty Center is how far the educational role and perspective of the museum is related to broader questions about the uses of culture within society. Hooper-Greenhill argues that the pedagogic function of the museum can be on two levels, by reviewing both what is exhibited, and, how meaning is mediated by exhibitions. Museum pedagogy is structured, first, through the narratives constructed by museum displays, and second, through the methods used to communicate these narratives. Museum pedagogy produces a visual environment for learning where visitors deploy their own interpretative strategies and repertoires. As I have argued above, the major form of pedagogy within the art museum draws on exhibitions. Methods of producing exhibitions are well developed, with museum professionals stating clearly on how objects should be brought together, considered from the point of view of curatorial themes and physical care, and placed on public display. However, the interpretation made by visitors of exhibitions is much less well understood, analysed or researched. The concept of reviewing both the interpretations of visitors and the interpretations of curators, as part of the development process of specific exhibitions, is still not understood or explored in most art museums.

In his recent study, *Learning in the Museum*, (1998) George Hein considers the educational

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theories of John Dewey, (1859-1952), Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)\textsuperscript{32} and the implications of their work for learning in the museum. Hein's analysis of these progressive educators points to the potential opportunities for a new critical pedagogy in the art museum. Hein has chosen these three because their learning theories emphasise the active participation of the mind in learning, and recognition that the process of learning is one in which the learner plays an active role in the construction of knowledge.

Recent interest in the application of learning theory to art museum education is approached from the perspective of enabling people to create their own meanings. This is a shift from the museum determining what must be learned. This approach creates a way forward to opening up the institution as a learning site to more people. Contemporary learning theory and an interdisciplinary approach applied to the diverse interpretations of museum exhibitions are hopeful signs for a more progressive and innovative educational program in the art museum.

Along with its ritualistic spaces and architectural form, meaning in museums in the past, has been constructed in relation to the collections which the museum holds. An example of the construction of meaning within museums is the presence or absence of particular objects while a second is the framework of intelligibility into which collected objects are placed. Pedagogic content refers to the subject-matter for learning which is shaped by curatorial processes. In museums this means the statements made by the museum with regard to its collections. Collaboration between curatorial and education staff, at the earliest stage of concept development in exhibition planning should be an element toward enhancing the educational potential of the art museum. For example in association with the Asia-Pacific Triennials of Contemporary Art (1993,1996,1999), the Queensland Art Gallery presented a range of dynamic cross-cultural creative programs designed for children and adults, offering cross-generational informal learning experiences. Text panels and exhibit labels specifically coded for an audience of children and, incidentally used by adults, provided necessary cultural and artistic information and interpretation to enable insights and access to ideas contained in art works. Participative workshops designed for 'learning communities' of families and friends provided direct experience with creative processes and materials.

The aesthetic experience.

I introduce aesthetics for consideration at this point because as I argue below the educational enterprise of the art museum, dominated by a belief that aesthetic response to art cannot be taught, has encumbered the public learning dimension of the art museum.

It is worth considering here how the educational practices of the art museum could be promoted by further understanding and articulation of the dynamics of the aesthetic experience. Indeed is there such a thing as the aesthetic experience and if so what are its characteristics? Consideration to these questions is important in establishing an effective pedagogy for the art museum. The notion of the aesthetic experience is manifest in both curatorial and educational practice, specifically in the emphasis on the ‘eye’ as an instrument for making-meaning, and the claim that art ‘speaks for itself’ and therefore requires no contextual frame, have been major stumbling blocks to an effective art museum pedagogy and practice.

This dominance of aesthetics, in part, explains the practice in the art museum of providing minimum interpretative frameworks for art in an exhibition context. Exhibit labels, in the main, only detail the name of the artist and the work, production dates and medium. In many art museums interpretative frames, such as historical context, are seen as intervention, perceived as interfering with the aesthetic experience, at the expense of engaging wider viewing audiences. In Chapter Three I consider how interpreting and contextualising art becomes the sole responsibility of the educator, who, historically, and by dint of the practice that privileges the aesthetic experience and the modernist paradigm in Australian art museums, has had an ‘after the fact’ relationship to exhibition development and presentation. I will further explore these points in Chapter Four and Five. In Chapter Five I focus on the pioneering work of Bernice Murphy at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1970s when she initiated structural reform that provided an integrated model for educational and curatorial practices that many educators today strive to achieve in state and national art institutions throughout Australia.

A study by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson in 1993 was undertaken in order to
better understand what constitutes the aesthetic experience, and so make it possible for more people to experience intense enjoyment from the use of their visual faculties. It was commissioned by the Getty Center for Education in the Arts to contribute to the understanding of how to make looking at works of art more widely experienced and enjoyable. Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of this study is the separation of the 'content' of the aesthetic experience from its 'structure'. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson, Alexander Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant have argued for the universality of the structure of the experience, remarking on the centring of attention, sense of clarity, wholeness, freedom, and other qualities that characterise the experience. Their research concluded that the content of the experience must also be universal. This in part explains the practice of exhibiting art with minimal mediation in the autonomous spaces of the modernist art museum. However, Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson in their study differentiate between the content of the aesthetic experience and its dynamic structure. When these components are seen as two separate issues, it becomes much easier to see that while the felt quality of the experience may be the same for every aesthetic encounter, the details that make the experience possible are infinitely varied. As Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson conclude, the implication of their interpretation of the aesthetic experience is that we are free to be as eclectic and pluralist as possible in approaching art and therefore in educating people to appreciate it.

Application of the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson to the strategic direction and formulation of a new pedagogy for the art museum is most useful. In their definition of the content of the aesthetic experience it breaks down a range of content categories that provide entry points which potentially could facilitate greater appreciation and understanding of art - ways of opening up access to meanings. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson conclude that:

The content enters the discussion in terms of two sets of preconditions that make the (aesthetic) experience possible: the challenges contained in the object and the skills of the viewer... the challenges of art are mainly of four types: the formal structure of the

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work, its emotional impact, the intellectual references it carries - its art historical, cultural, historical, and biographical implications, and the communicative possibilities it presents - and the opportunities it creates for dialogue with the artist, his/her time, and within the viewers themselves. Without this content there would be nothing to arrest the viewer's attention, and consequently there would be no experience. 36

The findings of this study, gathered from interviews with art museum professionals and visitors, suggests that while the same dimensions - such as clarity of goals, feedback, the perception of challenges, the use of skills - are equally important parts of the aesthetic experience, the actual stimuli that will trigger the experience are different for different people. For example, the curators of premodern art trained in art history, may tend to perceive the challenges of the aesthetic encounter mainly in terms of knowing more about the object, while art educators may see the challenges as communicating the content of the work to a wider audience.37 So the best strategy for the art museum is to potentially provide as many bridges as possible between the viewer and the art, drawing on all the dimensions that the work contains, from the historical-anecdotal to the starkly formal. But according Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson this bridging between skills and challenges must be done in an unobtrusive way that will not diminish concentration on the work itself.

**Art museum pedagogy.**

I argue that there is a lack of clarity about what museum education should mean and just who its primary agents are within the museum. The word ‘learning’ comes with a great deal of baggage; some of it useful, much of it not. Much of the confusion can also be attributed to the tendency to treat as synonymous the words ‘learning’, ‘education’, and ‘school’. One manifestation of the confusion is the misguided notion that learning is primarily the acquisition of ‘new’ ideas, facts or information, rather than the consolidation and slow, incremental growth of existing ideas and information based on the learner’s prior knowledge and experience. Failure to distinguish between learning, education, and schooling causes confusion for unpacking concepts such as cognitive information, facts and thoughts, affective learning, including thoughts, feelings, attitudes and beliefs, and psychomotor information, how to centre

clay on a potter’s wheel or focus a microscope. Falk and Dierking confirm the belief that the confusion lies in the narrow ways learning is defined as well as in some of the underlying assumptions of traditional learning theory.\textsuperscript{38} According to Falk and Dierking, for purposes of evaluating learning in the museum setting, we need a broad definition of the term to encompass the richness and variety of experience occurring within museum settings and emphasising, while uncovering memories, desires and human events. We need to develop a comprehensive museum-centred model that embraces certain elements of mainstream learning theories, but which prescribes a much stronger role for the variables of motivation, beliefs, and attitudes of the personal, social, political, and even economic cultural context of those who enter museums. There can be no one received form, or way of learning, or knowing, but rather an infinite variety.

The view of education as a process that prioritises the experience and learning needs of the learner, combined with greater recognition of the diverse social characteristics and cultural attitudes of differentiated audiences, means that museums need to develop new forms of relationships with users which are based on interpersonal and interactive methods of communication and learning.\textsuperscript{39} John Berger writes,

\begin{quote}
The way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe. In the Middle Ages when men believed in the physical existence of Hell the sight of fire must have meant something different from what it means today. Nevertheless their idea of Hell owed a lot to the sight of fire consuming and the ashes remaining - as well as their experience of the pain of burns.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

John Berger refers to the significant role of experience and prior knowledge in shaping our viewing and the interpretation of what we view. In considering the learning processes used by viewers in the art museum, it is important to acknowledge that learning is a multi-faceted, social process that builds on prior knowledge. Art is culturally specific and not a universal language.

\textsuperscript{39} Eliean Hooper-Greenhill, (2000) \textit{Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture}, p. 3.
Modernism and art history.

Coinciding with the dominance of the aesthetic experience in the art museum has been the modernist thesis of art history. I want to move now to consider aspects of the paradigm of modernism as contributing factors in creating barriers to accessing meaning in art in the museum context. The impact of modernism as an interpretative instrument in the art museum has had an enduring impact on both curatorial and educational spaces. It was predominant for most of the twentieth century and has shaped ways of seeing and the kinds of knowledge mediated by the art museum.

Museum educator, Danielle Rice argues that the constraints which defined collecting, exhibiting, and museum education in the 1970s in the US were informed by a specific ideology that has since been absorbed under the umbrella of ‘modernism’. Under the influence of the modernist project, museum educators had the paradoxical task of teaching visitors to recognise and appreciate the silent language of art. That art museums are primarily about pleasure derived from the unmediated encounter with art, is an assumption grounded in the modernist conviction that art is devoid of content or politics. This will be explored further in Chapter Three.

In this chapter I have argued that the art museum’s educative function has always been a contested arena. As discussed, there is evidence that art museums are failing in their educative functions. This is explored by the Eisner and Dobbs study, quoted earlier. The historical tensions surrounding the museums’ education function, that is, the traditional conflict between an aesthetic position - that art speaks for itself - and a rationalist one - that museums are public learning places for the transmission of knowledge - have to some degree been superseded by post modern tendencies to deconstruct and de-centre knowledge, to pluralise ‘Meaning’ into meanings. I suggest that museum educators can become border-crossers by making different narratives available, by bridging gaps/knowledge between disciplines, by working in the liminal spaces that modernist museum practices have produced.

In Chapter Three I consider the aspirations of modernism in art history, which aim to transcend regional or local arts, has contributed to the divorce of art from its broader social context to its

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detriment. Modernism’s emphasis on the organisation of the visual elements of works of art, the formal and the surface qualities, requires a particular and well developed visual literacy for reading meaning - a literacy limited to particular social groups. Modernism, I argue, as a formalist aesthetic, is elite, exclusive, antidemocratic and antithetical to the broader and public serving aims of the art museum and its prevailing educational platform.
Chapter three. Modernism and its impact on museum pedagogy.

At the present time, art museums serve a small well-informed audience that is relatively satisfied with what is on offer. This audience need not be compromised by making additional provision for new audiences that need more information, more introductory frameworks and more reasons for becoming involved with art.


In the previous chapter I focussed on the discipline of art history as a force shaping curatorial practice in the art museum. I suggested that the genealogy of art history, and its influences on curatorial practice, the modernist paradigm, and, what I define as an unresolved pedagogy, have combined to leave education without a clear role or function in the art museum. In this chapter, I examine the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and the principal tenets of modernism in the context of the cultural practices of the art museum. I suggest that art practice, art education and museum education, have colluded to become barriers to meaning, resulting in the need for a reformed museum pedagogy; the central theme of The New Museology. Finally, I propose that the art museum’s educative function has been thwarted by the dissonant discourses embedded in its professional practices, in particular the discourse of modernism, which has helped maintain it as an elite site for a small well-informed audience only.

I have suggested an effective pedagogy in the art museum is a pedagogy which embraces learning strategies in the domain of art to include wide audience groups in the provision of visual literacy skills enabling access to meanings of visual cultural material.

Modernism is the umbrella term for an international tendency arising in the arts of the West in the last years of the nineteenth-century. With its high aesthetic, it is often seen as a movement attempting to preserve the purely aesthetic realm against intellectual, social, and historical forces threatening it. What is clear, is that modernism represented a radical shift in the social status and function of the artist, of art, and form, that it is the style of a changed space-time
continuum. Hence modernist art requires for its comprehension criteria different from those appropriate to earlier art.\textsuperscript{1} An important consideration, therefore, is, has an effective art museum pedagogy been sabotaged by modernism? What has the impact of modernism been on art museum education? To what extent has modernism acted as an impediment to greater social inclusion of wider audience groups in the activities of the art museum?

It is argued by Elliot Eisner \textsuperscript{2} that teaching processes and content of art education are founded on modernist aesthetic and pedagogical practices which have developed in the Western world during the twentieth century. According to Clive Bell (1881-1964) and Roger Fry (1866-1934), modernism rejects mimetic art, it introduced expressionism and formalism, and is committed to the notion of autonomous art.\textsuperscript{3} Where modernism based art understanding on a single aesthetic, the post modern view suggests each viewer constructs a personal set of meanings in a work. In contrast, modernism neglected to place the viewer within a cultural historical context.

The social history of art and the so called ‘new art history’ have challenged an older art historical practice and canon (and its institutions) which unreflectively recorded ‘great artists’, ‘great works’ and important art movements. Although this challenge has hardly revolutionised the establishment, its impact has been significant. The ‘new art history’, which evolved in the 1970s, challenges the idea of academic objectivity and acknowledges that reading visual art involves multiple meanings which will be to an extent determined by the individual doing the reading.\textsuperscript{4} It deals with reading images in relation to social, political and ideological meanings. This decoding process exposes the myth of aesthetic purity on the one hand, while on the other, insisting on maintaining a view of paintings as social products.\textsuperscript{5} For example, in the case of a portrait, analysis of the circumstances which generated its production, codes of


\textsuperscript{3} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p. 50.


representation specific to its time of production, the materials and techniques utilised in making it, are all pertinent aspects to consider in constructing its meaning.

An interdisciplinary approach to the interpretation of art releases it from the constraints of an orthodoxy uncovering a range of potential access points for new pedagogic practice. This is yet to be fully explored in the art museum, which I suggest is still bound by the paradoxical constraints of modernism. I will discuss further the application of interdisciplinary interpretative frameworks in the context of portraiture in Chapter Five where I investigate the Australian National Portrait Gallery as a case study of practice. The dominance of modernist theory, with its universalising aspirations in the visual arts, has contributed to the dislocation of art from its broader social context. This is evident in the art museum in the emphasis on the organisation of the visual elements of works of art, the formal surface qualities, that 'speak for themselves'. Minimal reference to the historical context of art works in label text is a component of modernist art museum practice. It implies a particular and well developed visual literacy for reading meaning: a literacy not taught in schools and limited to particular social groups. Therefore it can be posited that modernism, and its aesthetics, validated by elitism, is exclusivist and, antidemocratic in its audience appeal.

Clive Bell's manifesto for early twentieth-century modernism asserts that 'significant form' is the essential quality in a work of art, the one quality common to all works of visual art. Bell defines 'significant form' as the relations and combinations of lines and colours which, combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, elicit an aesthetic response.6 The exclusivist, antidemocratic audience appeal of the modernist aesthetic is reiterated in Bell's statement that:

Before a work of art people who feel little or no emotion for pure form find themselves at a loss. They are deaf men at a concert. They know they are in the presence of something great, but they lack the power of apprehending it. They know that they ought to feel for it a tremendous emotion, but it happens that the particular kind of emotion it can raise is one that they can feel hardly or not at all.7

Throughout much of the twentieth century, I argue, both curatorial and educational practice in the art museum was influenced by a modernist discourse with its lineage in Clive Bell’s notion of ‘significant form’.

Applying Bourdieu.
The attack on the art museum and its underlying premise by the eminent French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu thirty years ago, although focussed on the European art museum, has relevance for museums in Britain, the United States of America and most importantly for our concerns here, Australia.

Although conducted in the 1960s in a European context, the museum research of Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, published in the highly regarded, *The Love of Art* provides a baseline for comparison with more recent observations in an Australian context. Bourdieu’s subsequent work, *Distinction*, is also of significance to this study in order to shed light on the disjunction between the educational and curatorial discourses of the Australian art museum and the visitor experience. Bourdieu’s project of social analysis detects a relationship between culture and power that results in inequality. He argues that the art museum has been implicit in helping to propagate and maintain certain controlling myths, which Bourdieu charges sociology with the task of exploding. These are: greatness in art is manifest through some innate quality of the human spirit, (something akin to grace) so that merely by having access to art, those with this special gift exercise it - like a skill but unlike a skill, it cannot be taught and those lacking by contrast, cannot truly apprehend or appreciate greatness in art when they see it and so expose themselves to ridicule. According to Bourdieu, since taste in art is innate, ineffable, and spontaneous, the argument goes, its appreciation is equally impossible to define or describe. You either have ‘it’ or you do not. Interestingly, Bourdieu points out, it seems to be the prerogative of the wealthy elite. Some art museums, perhaps unintentionally, continue to perpetuate a relationship between culture and power that results in inequities of access to their cultural resources through a range of unexamined museological practices.

For Bourdieu, the purpose of the art museum is neither to educate and preserve (as the museum

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itself would traditionally claim) nor to bestow value on the art it chooses to display (as its public might think to be the case). From his survey data identifying those who do and do not visit art museums and his investigations of how those who do visit such museums respond to their visits, Bourdieu concluded that the true function of the museum in no way resembles what the museum claims it to be - i.e. an educational institution.¹⁰ There is a serious discrepancy. The true effect that the art museum produces on its visitors, is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging and for others the feeling of exclusion.¹¹ For purposes of this study we might contend that the aim of any museum’s educational agenda is to build on the feeling of belonging in its various and diverse viewers.

Concerning the rebalancing that the art museum has traditionally given to the aesthetic and to other-than-aesthetic aspects of the objects it displays, it is not proposed that aesthetic considerations be discarded entirely, or even subordinated. What is proposed, I argue, is that aesthetic claims be put in perspective, and that the very notion of a primarily aesthetic viewpoint toward works of art be understood to be in itself a social construct and one of relatively recent origin and specificity.¹² The research of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson on the nature of the aesthetic experience to which I have referred in the previous chapter I suggest will be usefully applied to learning strategies in the art museum and will go a way to place the aesthetic claim in perspective.¹³

**The aesthetic in perspective.**

In the context of the aesthetic experience it is useful to look at Bourdieu’s essay, ‘The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic’,¹⁴ in which he offers a useful thumbnail sketch of the historical processes involved in the formation of an aesthetic structure of vision - what Bourdieu calls the ‘pure gaze’ - in which the work of art is attended to in and for itself.

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¹³ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson, (1990)*The Art of Seeing: An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter.*
Bourdieu writes:

What is forgotten in self-reflective analysis is the fact that although appearing to be a gift from nature, the eye of the twentieth-century art lover is really a product of history. From the angle of phylogenesis, the pure gaze, capable of apprehending the work of art as it demands to be apprehended (i.e., in itself and for itself, as a form and not as a function) is inseparable from the producers of art motivated by a pure artistic intention, which is itself inseparable from the emergence of an autonomous artistic field capable of formulating and imposing its own ends against external demands. From the side of ontogenesis the pure gaze is associated with very specific conditions of acquisition, such as the early frequenting of museums and the prolonged exposure to schooling and to the skhole that it implies. All of this means that the analysis of essence which overlooks these conditions (thus universalising the specific case), implicitly established a universal to all aesthetic practices the rather particular properties of an experience which is the product of privilege, that is, exceptional conditions of acquisition.15

Bourdieu’s analysis is useful here for understanding the tensions produced by the contradictory aim to educate a modernist curatorial approach, which implies exclusivity, in the aesthetic and modernist art museum. However, the research of Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 16 significantly differentiates between the content of the aesthetic experience and its structure, thus countering what has been previously recognised as the universality of the experience or encounter. The implications of which free art from the limitations of a modernist interpretative framework, for a pluralistic approach to understanding it and greater inclusiveness for wider audiences.

Extending Bourdieu’s analysis of phylogenesis (the evolution of a tribe) and ontogenesis (the development of an individual) to the incompatibility of a modernist paradigm and an agenda of cultural inclusiveness, central to an effective art museum pedagogy, I contend that modernism has operated as ‘an autonomous artistic field capable of formulating its own ends against external demands’,17 confounding museum pedagogy, in its exclusion of wider viewing audiences. This conflict is principally experienced in exhibition contexts where the curatorial perspective endorses demands that art be apprehended in itself and for itself, as form, and not

as function. The ‘naive’ spectator cannot therefore attain a specific grasp of works of art which only have meaning - or value - in relation to the specific history of an artistic tradition. Bourdieu concludes therefore, that the aesthetic disposition demanded by the products of a highly autonomous field of production is inseparable from a specific cultural competence.¹⁸

To the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts, and within each of them, of genres, schools and periods, there exists a social hierarchy for the consumers. Whereas the ideology of charisma (i.e., essentially antipopular and, like the pure gaze, implies a break with the ordinary attitude towards the world which, as such, is a social break)¹⁹ regards taste in legitimate culture as a gift of nature, scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education. Surveys establish that cultural practices such as all museum visits, concert-going, and preferences in literature, painting or music, are all closely linked to educational levels as measured by qualifications or length of schooling and secondarily to social origin or class.²⁰ The relative weight of social class and formal education (the effectiveness and duration of which are closely dependent on social origin) vary according to the extent to which the different cultural practices are recognised and taught by the educational system.²¹

The aesthetic disposition.

Bourdieu argues that it becomes possible to establish whether the aesthetic disposition and competency are gifts of nature, as the charismatic ideology of the relation to the work of art would have it, or products of learning, and to bring to light the hidden conditions of the unequal class distribution of the capacity for inspired encounters with works of art and high culture in general. In the art museum he considers that the aesthetic disposition becomes an institution.²² As a museum educator, Bourdieu makes it clear to me that museum pedagogy

needs to counter and transcend the demands of a purely aesthetic disposition which is
objectified in the art museum, so that receptiveness to art, on the part of wider audiences, is
encouraged and ensured.

John Frow’s useful critique of the methodology Bourdieu uses in Distinction suggests it is
inappropriate to assess aesthetic practices through a social science framework that assess socio-
cultural aspects of class. It is not, Frow argues, a question of the truism that different classes
adopt different lifestyles, but more critically it is a question of exploring the process by which
differences in cultural preference become socially functional. Frow’s point is of interest here.
In Frow it is not class differences in themselves but the ability of the dominant class to impose
the value given to these differences. I argue that the modernist museum has been complicit in
brokering and imposing a distinction between the art educated and the non-art educated and the
experiences they have of the institution as communities of users and non-users.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, art museum exhibition techniques perpetuate art as an
autonomous field. This is done in the way it juxtaposes art works, without interpretative
frameworks which mediate resonant meanings through labels, or text panels, thus divorcing art
from its original social or cultural function. What is required, for example, is that we are
careful not to homogenise and present to the public as examples of a single class of objects say
a sixteenth-century portrait first made and used as an instrument of statecraft with a twentieth-
century colour field painting conceived in the very hope that it might someday be hung in a
museum. For Bourdieu, to treat these as somehow alike - both consisting of painted marks
on a flat rectangular surface, and both susceptible to a common standard of evaluation - would,
in almost every sense be truly remarkable. Yet, the art museum does it all the time. Though
originally subordinated to quite different or even incompatible functions, these juxtaposed art
works tacitly demand attention to form rather than function, technique rather than theme.

23 John Frow, (1987) Accounting for Tastes: Some Problems in Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture,
60.
60.

Chapter three - Modernism and its impact on museum pedagogy 53
So, as I observe, meaning is most frequently in the art museum not stated, but assumed or implied without being explained and, often what mediation there is relates to the formal qualities of the work, very rarely to its social function, or in the case of the example of juxtaposing a crucifix, a still life and a Pieta, a curatorial theme or organising principle which would provide a hook onto which the ‘naïve’ visitor might make links and connections with the repertoire of their own everyday experiences. The frequent absence of curatorial context or interpretative frames which enable access or prompts to the meaning of art works exclude audiences without art training and knowledge of the codes that facilitate a visual or aesthetic literacy. The aesthetic disposition, understood as the aptitude for perceiving and deciphering specifically stylistic characteristics, thus becomes inseparable from artistic competence. The later may be acquired by explicit learning or simply by regular contact with works of art, especially those assembled in museums and galleries, where the diversity of their original functions is neutralised by their being displayed in a place consecrated to art, so that they invite pure interest in form by those ‘in the know’. Bourdieu’s research is useful and significant for an analysis of the educational function of the art museum for it helps explain the conflicted role of education in the art museum while also helping to define pedagogic strategies for greater audience access.

_Habitus_, a central concept to Bourdieu’s research, is rich in connotations. It is defined by the author as the custom of ‘habit’ but it goes further. It is a sort of total cultural baggage, varying across class stratum, which is socially valued or devalued by comparison with the _habitus_ of others. It is developed in large part by individuals on the basis of their cultural capital. Beyond economic capital (wealth), social capital (connections and networks), and cultural capital (knowledge), individuals have different levels, or kinds of ability, to manipulate these assets. Bourdieu demonstrates the false assumptions that these capacities are natural and inherent for if taste is innate, or the result of a gift of grace, he argues, there is not much one can do to develop it. The myth, he argues, helps maintain hierarchical distinctions among different social categories. Following on from this, because art museums have come to stand for the idea of excellence in a highly valued form of culture, to the extent that they fail to share their cultural capital in an understandable way to visitors who lack the _habitus_ of the regular public, they

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help to perpetuate distinctions and maintain the status quo. Exploration of the issues raised in my previous chapter through an analysis of Bourdieu’s work is very useful and critical to mapping possible new directions for the intersection of education, art history, and curatorial practice toward establishing an effective pedagogy in the art museum.

Drawing on the arguments of Bourdieu, Tony Bennett explores the relationship of the display practices of the art museum and the pattern of their social usage. Art museums remain the least publicly accessible of all public collecting institutions which is largely because, Bennett suggests, of their continuing commitment to display principles which mean that the order subtending the art on display remains invisible and unintelligible to those not already equipped with the appropriate cultural skills. Bennett, considers such an entrenched position taken by art museums as wilful in an age when notions of access and equity are permeating all domains of culture and are used to legitimise public expenditure.

The highly educated, according to Bourdieu and Darbel, came to art museums already knowledgeable about the works on display. They were likely to have planned their visit to focus on specific works; and they were more familiar with more artists, schools of art, and styles, than any of the other groups. They felt at ease, remained longer than other visitors, preferred being far from the crowds, and tended to visit alone or with a competent friend. On the whole they avoided interpreters, and museum handouts and pamphlets, relying on their own prior reading of scholarly works. The next largest category of visitors came from middle-class occupational backgrounds. They shared a high level of intellectual aspiration and were eager to grasp what they could by reading guidebooks, and absorbing information, even if it was not at as a sophisticated level as that of their better-educated counter-parts.

The least educated found the art museum experience unsettling. Poorly educated blue-colour

29 Vera L. Zolberg, (1994) "An elite Experience for Everyone": Art Museums, the Public and Cultural Literacy in Museum Culture Histories Discourses Spectacles, eds. Daniel Sherman and Irit Rogoff, University of Minneapolis, p.56.


workers and rural dwellers were most ill at ease, felt intimidated by the solemnity they attributed to the surroundings and were unprepared for the esoteric qualities of the work. They were unable to understand marked directions, inadequate labels and seemingly hostile guards. The least educated were more comfortable surrounded by family members and friends. So even as each art museum presented a uniform format for its visitors, the predominant subjective quality of reception differed sharply for each segment of the public.\textsuperscript{33} Thereby calling into question the relevance and validity of the format and forcing curators to ask whose interests do existing formats serve?

In Anthony Shelton’s application of Bourdieu’s work to his critique of museums, he considers that museums should be seen as part of the world of the educational establishment which acts not only as the mode of transmission of official culture but as the institutionalisation of that culture which prescribes competence in its attainment, regulates access to ownership of knowledge, and encourages the constant renewal of its central core by their teleological referral to a series of object phenomena which it claims are constituted outside, and are independent of it.\textsuperscript{34}

The upshot of Bourdieu’s viewpoint as it has been discussed here, is that art museums need to function with clearer conceptions of the covert nature of what art is, of how and why it should be displayed in a particular form and at whom it should be directed? One of the recommendations of, \textit{Art Galleries: Who Goes?}, (1991)\textsuperscript{35} the first publicly available study of art museum visitors in Australia looked at these issues. Undertaken by cultural theorists, Tony Bennett and John Frow, for the Australia Council - their findings suggest more effort should be made to put art in context. For example the site of display itself in the art museum is taken for granted, of say, a painting, is invisible to analysis, while the style of the setting, the display

\textsuperscript{33} Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel, (1969), \textit{The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their public}, p. 36.
\textsuperscript{35} Tony Bennett and John Frow, (1991) \textit{Art Galleries: Who Goes?}, Chapter three - Modernism and its impact on museum pedagogy
technology used, and the code of design are all influential in the construction of meaning. A commanding majority of visitors (77%) participating in the research agreed that art museums should provide more information on the art they show, while sizeable majority (66%) agreed that art museums should display art in its social and historical context. Most visitors clearly wanted more information on exhibits. Bennett and Frow concluded their research by pointing out that there are limits to what art museums can accomplish without government assistance to attract new audiences. But the degree to which levels of education influence not only attendance patterns but aesthetic preferences too, implies that attracting new audiences, including those with less ‘cultural capital’, will depend on new partnerships with educational institutions and processes. For example, research and training partnerships with education and museum studies faculties in universities, research and advocacy for art education within primary and secondary education curriculum authorities.

Bennett and Frow’s findings are highly relevant for art museums and educators. The implications of their study are that art museums need to operate with more diversified conceptions of what art is, of why and how it should be displayed, of how it should be contextualised, and at whom it should be directed. If they can fulfil these requirements then they may draw wider audiences who, in turn, will benefit from more educational guidance in ‘reading’ an exhibition.

This viewpoint is reiterated by Donald Horne in the opening address of the 1989 Extending the Parameters Forum. Horne took issue with the curatorial assumption - still dominant in many art museums - that the work of art speaks for itself and so should be shown ‘in itself and for its own sake’, uncontextualised by any supporting information, except (usually) for the artist’s name and the date of the work concerned. Horne’s objection to such display practices was that apart from a narrow circle of those who are already ‘in the know’ it acts as a barrier to the visitor’s intellectual access to art. Art museums arrange their displays in certain ways for certain reasons, he argues, and the failure to make clear the reasons is equivalent to throwing

away the key through which the visitor, who is not already a trained art historian, can make sense of the work displayed, thereby halving the pleasure and curiosity. We know from surveys, Horne concludes, that one of the ‘functions’ or objective consequences, of art museums has also been to put ‘ordinary people’ i.e. the masses, in their place - to make them realise their inferiority in matters artistic.40

Further to this, Hooper-Greenhill 41 comments on the differentiated spaces of the museum, what she defines as ‘knowledge production spaces’ and ‘public spaces’.42 As her reference implies knowledge production space is where art works are housed, research and curatorial work is conducted. Endorsing Horne’s critique Hooper-Greenhill argues that part of making the resources of the art museum more intellectually accessible to wider audiences involves bridging these spaces. The invisible subtexts of the curatorial process need to be made evident and shared. Throughout the development period of an exhibition, which can be very long, much research is undertaken, much knowledge is produced. Extending the availability of this knowledge, beyond the catalogue purchasing audience, by repackaging it into different ‘products’ with pedagogic aims does not involve ‘dumbing down’ ‘scholarship. As Eileen Hooper-Greenhill has said, at the present time, art museums serve a small well-informed audience that is relatively satisfied with what is on offer. This audience need not be compromised by making additional provision for new audiences that need more information, more introductory frameworks and more reasons for becoming involved with art.43 It means a collaborative exhibition development team (exhibition directors, curators and educators) seamlessly shaping the knowledge to meet the learning needs of audiences that sit between the exhibition catalogue and school curricula focused activities.

In examining more closely Bourdieu’s research and its implications for learning in the art museum, he maintains,

a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is the code into which it is encoded. A beholder who lacks the specific

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code feels lost in the chaos of colours and lines... Thus the encounter with a
work of art is not 'love at first sight' as is generally supposed, and the act of empathy,
Einfühlung, which is the art lover's pleasure, but presupposes an act of cognition, a
decoding operation, which implies the implementation of a cognitive
acquirement, a cultural code.  

For Bourdieu, the experience of a work of art as being immediately endowed with meaning and value is the result of the accord between the two mutually founded aspects of the same historical institution: the cultural habitus and the artistic field. He points out that this is only possible to the extent that the aesthete 'himself' is a product of a long exposure to artwork. Bourdieu's conclusions are that education in this environment is a pointless exercise for cultural competence is either present or not before the museum visitor steps over the threshold. It can't be taught - a position Bourdieu rejects.

Tony Bennett, in his commentary on the museum, suggests that the museum has functioned as an influential cultural technology in shaping the cultural attributes of modern citizenries. It has, he contends, embodied a new conception of the relations between state and people in functioning as an educative cultural apparatus intended to raise the moral and intellectual level of the general population. He calls for museums to be equally accessible to all sections of the population, a requirement which, because of the way museums are presently arranged, impossible to meet. The museum, he goes on, is characterised by a contradictory political rationality - a term he borrows from Foucault, who wrote that modern forms of government are traced in the emergence of new technologies which aim at regulating the conduct of individuals and populations including the prison, the hospital, and the asylum. Bennett adds the museum to this list of these technologies. Foucault was concerned to identify the mismatch between the rhetorics of these technologies and the forms of political rationality embedded in the actual modes of their functioning, arguing that it is the tension between the two which accounts for the endless discourse of reform that surrounds them.

The museum too has been constantly subjected to calls for reform - calls which are partly self-


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sustaining in the sense that they are produced by the contradictory constitution of the institution itself. Governed on the one hand by a democratic rhetoric which seeks to address a general and undifferentiated public, on the other, Bennett claims, they have operated as a powerful instrument of social differentiation and to preserve the status quo of cultural elitism.47

**The new visual culture.**
Hooper-Greenhill refers to ‘visual culture’ as a new concept and an emerging field of study. It is defined as an encounter between sociology and fine art - the application of theories from social and cultural studies to those artifacts and practices that would conventionally be included within art history, such as painting, sculpture and architecture. The concept of ‘visual culture’ allows the examination of all those signifying practices, representations and mediations that pertain to looking and seeing, and it allows an analysis that is not shaped in advance by the values of high culture. ‘Visual culture’ as a concept and methodology refuses to make a distinction between high and mass culture. This concept is useful in the problematisation of culture, pedagogy, and knowledge even though the idea of varying interpretations constructed by different gazes has not been seriously accepted until fairly recently.48As a new field of study visual culture raises important questions about the social practices of looking and seeing, which, in addition, are related to processes of learning and knowing.

Visual cultural theory enables a fresh opportunity for art museum pedagogy. It moves the pedagogic potential forward a long way from the constraints of modernism, which I contend, has functioned in a way comparable to Bourdieu’s analysis, that the experience of any work of art as being immediately endowed with meaning and value is a result of the accord between the two mutually founded aspects of the same historical institution; the cultural habitus and the artistic field. Given that the work of art exists as such, (namely as a symbolic object endowed with meaning and value) only if it is apprehended by spectators possessing the deposition and the aesthetic competence which are tacitly assumed, one could conclude that it is the aesthete’s eye, or modernist ideology, which constitutes a work of art as a work of art. But this is possible only to the extent that the aesthete is the product of a long exposure to artwork and, or for my argument, familiar with the tenets of modernism.

In, their now classic study, *The Love of Art*, Bourdieu and Darbel argue that working-class visitors typically responded most positively to the provision of guidebooks or directions as to the best route to take through an art museum. It may well be, Bourdieu and Darbel argue, that such clarifications are not always able to ‘give “the eye” to those who do not “see”’. None the less, their presence in a gallery is symbolically important, just as is the demand for them by working-class visitors in that both testify to the possibility that the gap between the visible and the invisible may be bridged by means of appropriate visual aids and clues to meanings.

If, by contrast, as evidence suggests, the cultivated classes are the most hostile to (guide books) such attempts to make *art* more accessible, Bourdieu and Darbel argue that this is because such pedagogic props detract from the charismatic ideology which makes:

> an encounter with a work of art the occasion of a descent of grace (charisma), provides the privileged with the most ‘indisputable’ justification for their cultural privilege, enabling them to ignore or even deny while making them forget that the perception of the work of art is necessarily informed and therefore learnt.

Bourdieu argues that the characteristics of the artistic field, and thus of the specific competencies that individuals need to acquire in order to perceive its invisible significance, are products of the relations between the practices of art galleries, the discursive categories that are made available by art theory, the means by which these are circulated, and the forms of art training and familiarisation available in educational institutions. Working class visitors are well placed to appreciate that the love of art is not love at first sight but is born of long familiarity.

Bourdieu’s analysis of the art museum as a site perpetuating cultural inequalities is useful in establishing a framework for investigating and assessing the broader teaching function and potential, of the art museum, i.e., its educational program. Since Bourdieu’s work was undertaken in the late 1960’s interpretative frameworks for understanding art have moved beyond the purely aesthetic to include new pedagogic approaches and interpretative

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frameworks for visual art, including also learning strategies based on experiential, reader-response and constructivist learning, engaging the visitors' prior knowledge and experiences to bridge life and art world experience, in making meaning of visual images. For example, in association with the exhibition *Mirror with a Memory: Photographic Portraiture in Australia* (2000), the National Portrait Gallery published a learning resource complementary to both the exhibits and the catalogue essay, entitled, *Photographic Portraiture and Technology*. Based on an understanding that ‘reading’ photographic images requires a level of awareness regarding the materials and technical processes that have produced them, this publication tracked the pivotal technological changes impacting on photographic image making from the 1840’s to the present. It contextualised photographic portraits with the technical development of the camera and processes involved in their production, so that the images could be understood and read from a range of histories.

**Tenets of modernist art practice.**
I want now to turn to the role of pedagogy in the modernist art museum. My purpose here is to suggest that the charge of intellectual inaccessibility waged against the art museum is a by-product of modernist museological practice, dominant for most of the twentieth century. I suggest that the aesthetic disposition and the ideology of charisma, which regards taste as a gift of nature, as defined by Bourdieu, is an attendant of the modernist paradigm. As such it contributes to the anti-democracy of the art museum.

The impact of modernism as an interpretative instrument in the art museum has had an enduring influence on both curatorial and educational functions. It has predominated for most of the twentieth century and has shaped ways of seeing and knowing mediated by the art museum. I draw on the work of Michael Parsons and Gene Blocker in the following discussion of modernism. Art educator, Parsons, and philosopher, Blocker, argue that the dominance of a

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modernist theory, with its universalising aspirations in the visual arts, with aims to transcend regional and local arts, has in fact contributed to the dislocation of art from its broader social context. Modernism’s emphasis on the organisation of visual elements of works of art, the formal surface qualities, regardless of labels and autonomous of social associations, implies a particular and well developed visual literacy for reading meaning - a literacy limited to particular social groups. How museums respond to the challenge of modernism to achieve greater cultural democracy is a central concern of my study.

Part of the work of modernist critics and theorists was to articulate the direction of the artistic tradition and to identify the point that current work had reached. There are many variations in this journey, presented as the history of art, but there have been two major ones. One was the account according to which art moved toward increasingly naturalistic representations of the world. This ‘story’ is told, for instance, by Ernst Gombrich in *Art and Illusion*..

According to Gombrich the development of naturalism in our tradition had two beginnings, one with the ancient Greeks, and the other with the Renaissance. From Giotto di Bondone (1266-1337) in the Italian Renaissance onward, the story of Western art seemingly unfolded as a gradual movement toward greater naturalism, according to Parsons and Blocker. The other ‘story’ has to do with the development of abstract art. It tells of a movement toward greater purity with respect to the use of the medium, in which artists gradually refined their sense of the essence of the medium. In painting, for example, they progressively abandoned such things as the appeal of narrative, illustration, reference to the real world, the illusion of depth, the rectangular picture frame, and in their place revealing and exploiting more purely the character of the medium itself. This, argue Parsons and Blocker, is modernism as defined by Clement Greenberg. Greenberg states:

> From Giotto to Courbet, the painter’s first task has been to hollow out an illusion of three-dimensional space on a flat surface. One looked through this surface as through a prosценium into a stage. Modernism has rendered this stage shallower and shallower

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until now its backdrop has become the same as its curtain, which has now become all
that the painter has left to work with. ... Pictorial space has lost its “inside” and become
all “outside”.61

Universality and the art museum.
Parsons and Blocker argue that one of the most exclusive aspects of modernism has been its
assumption that, in spite of all the variation in art and taste, it is possible in principle for us to
reach agreement in our interpretations and judgments of artwork. We may not actually reach
this agreement in particular cases because it may not be worth the extended discussion that
agreement would require. But in principle and in important cases we could reach agreement.
This is because modernism contends, according to Parsons and Blocker, that some of the
reasons we give each other for our interpretations and judgments are relevant and others are
not. The relevant reasons focus on the artwork itself and especially on its visual appearance,
including its expressive qualities. Because we can be clear about the agreed nature of these
reasons, we have a kind of objectivity in our arguments and in our observations and inquiries
that lie behind them. If we care enough about a particular work, we can continue to look at and
respond to it and to tell each other what we see. We will in the end presumably come to see the
same things because they are the things that are objectively there to be seen - on the surface.
This suggests the possibility of the universal, cross-cultural kind of rationality that will solve
aesthetic disputes among individuals, groups and cultures.62 However, behind this picture of
rational discussion and possible agreement in art lie a number of assumptions. It assumes that
our common human nature provides a solid foundation for a potentially common response to
art. This assumption, I contend, has been implicit in much curatorial practice in the modernist
art museum and has left many visitors ‘out of the picture’ and is underpinned by the eighteenth
and nineteenth-century search to articulate a universal aesthetic dimension to the human psyche.
This view relied on the thought that we all respond similarly to the visual elements of art - to
particular hues and shades, to lines and shapes and volumes, and to particular arrangements
and combinations of these. To the extent to which these kind of elements determine or heavily
influence our aesthetic response, to that extent we can say that there is a common foundation
that art builds on and that enables us to discuss art across different backgrounds and cultures.

61 Herschel B. Chipp, ed. (1968) *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book for Artists and
It is this aspect of the research of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson,\(^6\) which differentiates between the structure and content of the aesthetic encounter, that is so usefully applied to learning in the art museum.

The notion of the ‘ideal viewer’ has played an important role in modernist discussions. Certainly the ideal viewer has an awareness of the artistic conventions involved. The idea of a possible universal agreement would include the recognition of the need for an educated knowledge and response to a particular work or works within its own socio-cultural milieu. In this case, a claim about ‘universality’ really amounts to a claim that agreement about artwork is possible within the group of people who know enough about the culture of origin to make sense of the artwork in its own right. Once these artistic conventions have been learned they become “internalised” and largely unconscious.\(^6\) It is this aspect of modernism that parallels Bourdieu’s social critique of the judgement of taste, primarily the myth of the pure gaze, in its exclusiveness.

A corollary to this barrier to inclusion is that there is a group of widely acclaimed artwork in the tradition. There is a highly selective list of great works or ‘masterpieces’ - a word that is characteristic of modernism. These are the works that have been most influential in shaping our social norms and values and have determined the direction of art history. Together they form a ‘canon’ that is familiar to all educated modernists.\(^6\)

**The Autonomy of the Artwork.**

Parsons and Blocker argue that the assumption that interpretations can be objective is linked to an assumption that the object or picture remains “the same” regardless of who is looking at it. This implies that even though interpretations of the work vary with different viewers, the work itself does not. The notion of the objectivity of interpretations assumes that we have a benchmark for judging the adequacy of different interpretations by comparing them with the work itself. If the interpretation apparently fits the artwork, it must be adequate, relevant and truthful. If, on the other hand, it attributes to the work some qualities that it does not appear

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\(^6\) Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson, (1990) *The Art of Seeing; An Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter.*


possess, it must be somehow inadequate.\textsuperscript{66} The assumption here is obviously that we each see precisely the same things in the work and it is supported by the common sense idea that an artwork is after all basically a physical object. Of course artwork can age, be lost or destroyed, but these are circumstantial. Apart from these accidents, modernists assume that the same artwork is available to different people, different groups, even different cultures. So, it seems, that changing the context of an artwork will not change what the artwork is. The work can be approached in itself, of itself and on its own terms, regardless of context. An adequate aesthetic response will take account only of it and not of other things. In short, what is aesthetically relevant about the work is determined by the work itself and not by the context.\textsuperscript{67} For example, the period immediately following the invention of photography naturally had an immediate and telling effect on painters and painting. The greatest use of photography in the first years of its development was for documentation, which included portraiture. The reactions of the artists and their establishment of a 'post-photographic' style are important in the development of portraiture which takes on a more flexible view of documenting the sitter. The contemporary historical period, I argue, strongly influences what is aesthetically relevant, and further I suggest, that the aesthetic concerns of both painted and photographic portraiture of this time need to be 'read' in a plurality of historical context.

\textbf{A Plurality of Art Histories.}

Post modernism denies that we can make good sense of art history by attributing a single direction to it.\textsuperscript{68} It argues instead that there are many kinds and traditions of art, each existing within its own cultural context. Each has its own history to tell and so the idea that there is \textit{one} art history is misleading. Moreover, these many different kinds of art can exist side by side in the same society, especially in a society as complex as ours.\textsuperscript{69} The question which is more important and relevant to the future is not one that makes much sense, since, post-modernists insist, there is no reason to prefer one art history over another. They are all more or less equal. This means, Parsons and Blocker contend, that distinctions of value between kinds of art also make little sense. In particular, the distinction between 'high' or mainstream art, popular

\textsuperscript{66} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.53.
\textsuperscript{67} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.53.
\textsuperscript{68} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.54.
\textsuperscript{69} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.54.
culture, and folk art is to be mistrusted. Post modernism substitutes plurality for linear direction in art history and places the viewer within a socio-cultural context, and in doing so, empowers the individual view of the viewer.\textsuperscript{70}

Furthermore, a dominant or mainstream account of art history supports the beliefs and upholds the social values of the dominant social group and this dominance is usually achieved at the expense of other social groups. Our standard dominant Eurocentric art history supports the group that has dominated the art world - wealthy white males - and suppresses the interests of other groups. The narrative it tells also flatters and upholds the traditions of the dominant group. It assumes a theory of inevitable progress in general, the idea that things have become ‘better’ with each generation. The supposed direction of art history derives from this supposed direction of our civilisation itself, and both stories help to preserve the privileges of the rich and powerful who go on to collect what they believe to be worthy art in the traditional sense.\textsuperscript{71}

Post modernism is an attempt at crossing the conceptual boundaries we have used to keep art separate from other aspects of society including economics, politics, religion, and social class.\textsuperscript{72} The earliest aim of the modernists was to be able to interpret the artwork \textit{in itself} without regard to content or history. However, recent discussions of art have increasingly insisted on the importance of context and history and so have gradually enlarged the scope of the context in which art can be interpreted or judged.

**Formalism.**

Formalism, as defined by Clive Bell, became important as an interpretative tool in early twentieth century art. It was originally motivated by the desire of its proponents to focus on the artwork itself and not on aspects of it that were considered aesthetically irrelevant. It asserted the independence of the artwork from all such relations and sought to focus only on what could be seen in it. The formalists were preoccupied with the quest to clearly identify what was aesthetic in art and in the enjoyment of it and with the insistence that everything else should be disregarded as irrelevant. ‘Form’ was (in the beginning) their name for what is aesthetically valuable in art. The formalists argue that this is the ‘purest’ way to approach art since it values

\textsuperscript{70} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.55.
\textsuperscript{71} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.53.
\textsuperscript{72} Michael J. Parsons and H. Gene Blocker, (1993) \textit{Aesthetics and Education}, p.54.
the artwork alone and doesn’t confuse the aesthetic pleasure of art itself with other, nonaesthetic, pleasures. In fact it often appears, according to Parsons and Blocker, that the most important non-aesthetic consideration that formalists, such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry, are concerned to guard against is subject matter.73

Roger Fry, art critic and painter, expresses the formalist position of art quite strongly, although differently from Bell.

Now I venture to say that no one who has a real understanding of the art of painting attaches any importance to what we call the subject of a picture - what is represented.74

Clive Bell supports this formalist position in his contention that:

the representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man’s activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interest; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life.75

It is clear that formalism in art is seen as being quite unconnected with the ordinary world and having little to do with the concerns of ordinary life. This view has been reflected in the exclusive atmosphere of museums in the first half of the twentieth century. Formalism becomes a barrier to access when it asserts itself as an exclusive theory of aesthetic value.

In this chapter I have argued that the central assumptions of art in 1909 and 1912, when Fry and Bell were writing, and its attendant formalism, as outlined above, function as barriers to meaning for non-art trained audiences. In a comparable way it has functioned as Bourdieu’s habitus. I suggest that the tenets of modernism operated as similar barriers to access that Bourdieu and Darbel critique in For the Love of Art and Distinction - and that these barriers have had far-reaching consequences for the concept and function of art museums as they

74 Clive Bell, (1913) reprinted, Art, Capricorn Books, pp. 7-8.

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evolved in the first half of the twentieth-century. I argue that, when curators and educators understand and critique the paradigms informing museums practices, and their resulting impact on visitors, then they are in a stronger position to question and change the museum’s role and broaden its appeal. Art museums, I argue, like art movements, should be fluid.
Chapter four. An evolving agenda for education: Australia 1940s and 1970s.

I think that any art museum that depends largely on public money for its survival should be required to explain to the funding authorities what methods it is adopting to assist intellectual access among its visitors. I am not suggesting that the autonomy of decision-making among museum people should be limited but that they have at least an intellectual accountability: they should let us know what their methods are so that citizens who want to do so can join in the discussion.


In the previous chapter my discussion has focussed on the central assumptions of modernism, which, I argue, function as a barrier to meaning for non-art trained audiences. The above quote by Donald Horne challenges the art museum to show its methods in making provision for new audiences to become involved with art and insists that it is a responsibility of publicly funded institutions to be inclusive.

Art museums have a responsibility to help visitors acquire skills which are particular to their museological practices, skills of perception, feeling and imagination, as well as analysis, critical evaluation and communication, in response to original, natural and cultural resources. Most people need help in learning how to think scientifically, historically and aesthetically when using such material. These skills are required to get the most from a museum visit, and we need them in everyday life. We are born with a capacity for this kind of learning, but these skills will only develop if art museums, as the experts in this field, actively help children and adults to acquire them.

In this chapter I want to examine an historical case study of the development of public learning within the context of an Australian art museum. This case study provides an historical context for an Australian art museum and the influence of modernism on museological practices. I explore the Art Gallery of New South Wales as a useful example of a site for the investigation of a public learning program in the field of art. I have chosen the Art Gallery of New South
Wales as site for investigation because it was the first art museum to present a comprehensive program of public art education in Australia. It established a benchmark of educational practice and represented an inspired pedagogy which aimed to enhance understanding, appreciation and pleasure of art in the wider regional communities of New South Wales.

A public education program, entitled the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was initiated at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1944. This public education program is an opportunity to raise in an Australian context, the issues that I have discussed in the earlier chapters. I will examine the overall purpose of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme, who was its target group, what were its learning aims and objectives, what educational and curatorial assumptions did it make, what was its outcomes and how did its audience respond? The Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme is well documented and as an immediate post second World War educational initiative it provides insights into the role ascribed to art and some of its polarities in an Australian context.

The role of education might well be reflected in the overall organisational commitment or mission of art museums. There are, however, implicit and unintended aspects of modernism, evident in museological practices, which have inhibited the capacity of the art museum to embrace an audience with little understanding of art. I argue that art museums, in the Australian context, have been slow, if not reluctant, to shed the mantle of modernist museum practice. While the aspirations of museum education could be advanced by the new pluralities of visual cultural studies, in general terms educators and curators have belatedly harnessed these opportunities.

The Carnegie Report.

The only national survey of Australian museums before the 1975 Inquiry on Museums and National Collections, was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Published in 1933 by the Museums Association, London, and conducted by museologists, S.F. Markham and H.C. Richards, the report painted a negative picture of the state of Australia art museums. Entitled, *Museums and Galleries of Australia and New Zealand*, this report is interesting in that it assesses Australian art museums in a wider international context of the time and suggests a benchmark for education. Bernard Smith, who was responsible for the
organisation and administration of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme from 1944-45, stresses that the Carnegie Corporation was magnificently supportive of cultural tolerance and educational advancement in Australia in the years between the wars. Carnegie funds were used to pay lecturers, such as Margaret Preston, Eleonore Lange and Frank Medworth, during the war years, partly to encourage a more tolerant outlook and greater knowledge of the visual arts.\(^1\) The report argued, poorly funded in comparison with its European, American and New Zealand counterparts, that the growth of art museums in Australia had been haphazard, driven more by interstate rivalries than any consideration of the need for a national museum service. Commenting on the state of Australian museum services in general, the report noted that:

Generally the staff of the larger Australian museums have a distinct bias toward research work as contrasted with exhibition work.
In most art galleries it is considered sufficient to give merely the title of the picture and the name of the artist, and the public are left to appreciate art with their perceptions unhindered by any relevant facts. Most of the Australian art galleries have collections of china, bronzes, and marble statuary, and again the label gives one furiously to wonder. The majority of labels on exhibits of china seem to be of the following order
Ming. Plate
Derby. Blue and gold.
In only one instance did we find in an art gallery any explanation as to what the term “Sung”, “Minton” or ‘Derby’ meant, and only occasional indication as to why any of the exhibits were considered worthy of exhibition, or of notice by the public... It may, in fact, be said, that there is not at the moment that cordial effective co-operation between the education authorities that would ensure the maximum educational uses being made of any institution. Possibly if museums and art galleries were keener to impress the educational value of their activities on the public mind, a far better appreciation of cultural institutions would be noticed throughout Australia.\(^2\)

In the report Australian art museums were seen as failing to fulfil an educational role consistent with the perceived expectations of its authors, and by implication, contemporary British industry benchmarks. According to the Carnegie Report, in Australia in the first half of the twentieth-century the educational function of art museums was under developed. The Carnegie Report records,

art galleries are loathe to publish anything - beyond a formal catalogue - that may indicate to the public what to look for in a gallery or how to develop an appreciation of art. One brilliant exception that came to our notice is the publication entitled ‘Art Gallery Pictures’, published by the National Gallery of Sydney (until 1958). Whilst at Melbourne there is no comparable publication dealing with the contents of the Art Gallery. To the average Englishman, American or Australian art is ‘bunk’ and culture a synonym for intellectual swank... Although school students make visits to museums and galleries to a large extent these visits were unorganised, and the burden of interpreting the art gallery to children too often falls upon the teacher, who is supposed by the children, and indeed often their parents, to know everything under the sun.3

This reporting demonstrates a low level of instructive material in most Australian art museums at the time, to enhance a viewer’s knowledge of what they were viewing. The one exception, the publication of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, is sighted as innovative in its effort to assist the visiting public to orientate themselves to the space of the museum, its policies and collections, and was available for subsequent reference after the visit.4 The report indicated the absence of a structured education program for visiting school students and a perceived anti-intellectual attitude towards art. The Carnegie Report provides a backdrop against which to examine the development of a new public education program namely the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme which came into effect eleven years after the Carnegie Report.

**Modernism in art museum practices: Australia.**

I suggest that the failure to fulfil the educational potential of the art museum, in the later part of the twentieth-century is a paradox of modernisms’ own unresolved pedagogy. Modernisms’ adherence to the separation of art and life, the everyday and the recognisable, further excluded, and unintentionally shored up the barriers to meaning in art, for an audience without an understanding of art. The simultaneity of the modernist project and the rhetoric of the public educational role of the art museum, were in pedagogic conflict, particularly in the Australian context in the 1940s through to the 1970s. I have in Chapter Three discussed implicit aspects of modernism which made art in the museum environment difficult to access for the viewer without an art understanding.

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Alfred Barr - Museum of Modern Art and the modernist paradigm.

The vast and complex phenomenon of modernism covers many tendencies and takes different shapes in different forms. Broadly speaking, however, we can say that modernism contains a set of central assumptions about art. An outline of these assumptions, which I have outlined in detail in Chapter Three, include the following: art history as progress; the role of art in social progress; a traditional canon; objectivity and universality; and the autonomy of the work of art.

The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which opened in 1929, increasingly became the site of major exhibitions of twentieth-century art. It was characteristic of the conception of modern art propagated by Alfred Barr, its first Director, and disseminated by the Modern in the decades when that institution largely defined the presentation of contemporary art in American museums and strongly influenced policies around the world as well, including, I argue, the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

The Museum of Modern Art, through its foundation, program, organisation, administration, departmental structure, as well as its institutional practices such as acquisitions, exhibitions, publications and education, contributed to the redefinition of the concept of modernism. When Barr was director of the Museum of Modern Art (1929-1943), its patrons established the Museum of Modern Art in 1929, the mid-nineteenth-century principle of hanging by School gave way to a principle of hanging by movement. The Museum of Modern Art, largely because of its exemplary early twentieth-century collection, the strength of its exhibition program and the economic power of America, became the model for museums of modern art across the world. Barr's innovations in many ways set the terms in which modern art has been viewed, both as regards the physical display of works of art, its interpretation and the invention of the scholarly exhibition catalogue.\(^5\) Well into the 1980s museums were continuing to build collections which aimed for complete representation of major art movements in chronological sequence, though with less breadth of vision than the early Barr.\(^6\) Barr is one of the art historical scholars most closely associated with the acceptance of modern art as part of the Western artistic tradition, especially in the United States, which had a central role to play in the

future of the movement.\textsuperscript{7} It may be that the demands made by the mounting of exhibitions caused him to stress the discrete character of the movements which made up modern art. However, Barr gave us the means of organising the body of styles and the ways in which they reacted to one another in a form which is now a standard requirement of art historical exposition: the chart, a diagram drawn by Alfred H. Barr (1902-1979) encapsulating interrelationships, influences and sequences characteristic of contemporary art, originally published by the Museum of Modern Art in 1936.\textsuperscript{8}

Barr’s 1936 chart illustrates his attitude towards the subject. First, is the belief that works of art can all be classified into one or other school or style. Second, is the number and variety of such categories, the chart showing no fewer than 23 styles, or the names of artists representing styles in the 45 years between 1890 and 1945. Third, is Barr’s belief that the character of each of these movements can be summed up in a single name and their origins in an arrow. This combination of large numbers of movements with the belief that they can be represented as a sequence is one of the defining characteristics of art historical analysis in the twentieth century. Finally, there is the sense that abstraction is the dominant art form of modernism. Alongside the claim of newness which the unprecedented variety suggested, Barr also wished to present modern art as part of the great tradition. This he illustrates in another chart drawn to accompany an exhibition of fifteenth to eighteenth-century Italian art held at the Museum of Modern Art in 1939.\textsuperscript{9}

In the 1940’s Barr’s influence extended to Australia. His catalogue essay \textit{What is Modern Painting?}, written in association with an exhibition of reproductions of the same title, travelled in regional areas of New South Wales as part of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme. The essay was published under the auspices of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in 1945-46.\textsuperscript{10} It indicated a commitment to educating people about modern art. Barr’s objective in this essay was to ‘inform’ an unknowing audience about modern painting. In its shifts from realism, analysis of form and space, cubism and abstraction and surrealism are discussed. He addresses

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the perceived complexity of modern painting while using accessible language and analogy to make concepts of modernism understandable to a non literate art audience. Barr’s pamphlet about modern painting was available for sixpence (6d) at the exhibition. He demonstrated a commitment to enhancing the public’s understanding of art. He began, however, with a disclaimer that words, in a catalogue essay or on labels, were not really the medium for understanding art. Alfred Barr writes,

The best words can do is to give you some information, point out a few things you might overlook... But in the end you must look at these works of art with your own eyes and heart and head... The art of painting, though it has little to do with words, is like a language which you have to learn to read. Some pictures are easy, like a primer, and some are hard with long words and complex ideas; and some are prose and others are poetry, and others still are like algebra and geometry. But one thing is easy, there are no foreign languages in painting as there are in speech; there are only local dialects which can be understood internationally, for painting is a kind of visual Esperanto.11

In this catalogue text Barr exemplifies attendant intellectual characteristics and presentation modes of modernist curatorial practice. In particular, Barr asserts a perception of art as a universal language. Most significantly it demonstrates the indisposition of modernist curatorial practice to facilitate access to meaning in art through the use of words in extended captions and text labels, or any other interpretative tool. Despite Barr’s attempts to explain What is Modern Painting? his methods remain obscure. For a viewing audience with no understanding of the art historical methodology of Barr’s ‘chart’ informing both the display principles and the encoded relationships of movements which the linear narrative of modernism tracks, this practice remains, as a major barrier to intellectual access. Barr’s modernist paradigm, reflected in his catalogue essay, offers insights into how art museum professional practice has polarised educators and curators, positioning the educator as the advocate of the audience and the curator is the advocate for the art work.

The absence of interpretation in displays of modern art in museums which defined curatorial practice from the third decade of the twentieth-century, amplifies Barr’s insistence on the works themselves as the communicative mode - an implicit component of the modernist program. This also profoundly influenced approaches to learning in the art museum at this


Chapter four - An evolving agenda for education: Australia 1940s and 1970s
time. In the 50s, 60s and 70s art museum educators were in the main recruited from schools and so adopted a range of ‘teaching’ approaches, some probably highly didactic (particularly for school children) that would have been contrary to the ‘let art speak for itself’ approach of curators working within the modernist art historical paradigm. On the other hand implicit modernist formalist tenets would have inhibited educators from contextualising art within social history, materials and techniques of production, artist biography, or the viewers own life experiences. Thus, we can conclude that it is likely that all the hooks that might have helped the non-educated engage with art were contrary to an informed modernist pedagogy. I suggest that tension between curatorial and educational practices in the art museum, which Bernice Murphy’s reform agenda at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1970s, which I discuss below, aimed to eliminate, are traceable to this period when these practices and discourses were at cross purposes. A further influence of the programmatic approach of Alfred Barr and the Museum of Modern Art can be seen in the 1949 publication, *Present Day Art In Australia*, edited and published by Sydney Ure Smith, who, Bernard Smith points out, was the driving force behind the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme. The cover illustration of, *Present Day Art In Australia*, derived from Barr’s chart, depicts a schematic tree with growth directional branches sprouting, as leaves, the names of contemporary Australian artists. The introductory text of this title is a confident statement about the need to familiarise the rest of world with the work of contemporary Australian artists. It anticipates the move by Commonwealth Government to ultimately establish a collection for a National Art Gallery in Canberra which would integrate Australian contemporary art into the international context.

While a complete historical analysis of the educational dimension of the Art Gallery of New South Wales is beyond the scope of this thesis, two periods of this institution’s public education service; the 1940s and the 1970s, stand out as significant and therefore worth commenting upon. Both periods represent significant developments in art museum education in Australia. It has been noted above in the literature on art museum education that innovative work is often the result of the visionary leadership and energy of individual people, rather than the result of a clear institutional policy direction or commitment to education.

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I would argue that in the 1940s the driving force behind the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was coming from outside the institutional structure on the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and further that it was not a program backed by an institution that saw education as one of its core responsibilities. Rather the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme could be seen as inspired by notions of moral rehabilitation after the experience of the second World War, and motivated by belief in the power of art to humanise and to engender, through aesthetic education, a sense of the transcendent in art. Hal Missingham states in the *Studio of Realist Art Publication*, 1945:

The position of the artist in the Post War period is a matter for immediate attention. The average Australian deserves that plans for the future should incorporate all the beauty of form, design and colour the artist is capable of, our people are worthy of having their history, their lives and hopes, expressed in visual form for them to see and enjoy. . . . The psychological effect, the development of the people’s awareness of beauty and expression, and the consequent raising of cultural standards makes such matters desirable indeed.14

As I discuss below, education and public programming at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the period 1944–45, under the co-ordination of Bernard Smith, (perhaps the first dedicated art museum educator in Australia,) sets a national standard. The central aim of this program was to facilitate greater engagement with, and appreciation of, art, for the the wider community. Smith argues:

In order to understand why the scheme was established at all one must appreciate the wave of euphoria and hope for a better world that swept Australia toward the end of the war. One aspect of this heady optimism insisted on the need to bring arts to a much wider section of the populace than had been the case between the wars.15

By contrast, in the 1970s, the education service at the Art Gallery of New South Wales lobbied for and implemented, important internal structural changes that repositioned and expanded the Gallery’s perspectives and role of education. I focus on this second period in the the history of the Art Gallery’s education service below, because, like the first period, it too represents leadership and a pioneering venture in the field. In both cases this leadership was expressed through awareness of, and a commitment to, building the pedagogic power base in the

museum.

**Art Gallery of New South Wales - 1940s.**

A formal pedagogic program commenced under the auspices of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1944 when the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme began. This program, coordinated by Bernard Smith, was idealistic, energetic and far reaching in its influence. Its principal aim was the enhancement of knowledge and appreciation of art across the wider community of regional New South Wales. Its strategic process employed a range of communicative modes including exhibitions, public lectures, student programs, artists' talks, radio broadcasts and publications. Its impetus was shaped and informed by several forces while its curatorial themes had an educational focus.

Catalogues giving biographical information concerning each artist represented in a collection were provided for most of the exhibitions assembled. In the case of exhibitions of a special nature, such as historically arranged materials, a brief introduction to the exhibition as a whole was included. This differed from previous modes of display, according to the Carnegie Report, where there was almost no contextual information to assist audiences interpret what was viewed.

For the thirty-nine exhibitions, which took place in the financial year 1944-45, a total attendance of 57,144 was recorded. After the official opening, the guide lecturer gave an informal talk on the pictures in the exhibition. It took the form of a conducted tour. The lecturer endeavoured to reveal the aims and purposes of the artists, commenting on their working methods, emphasising the importance of a tolerant approach to modernist art, and inviting discussion.

Seven exhibitions were assembled and circulated between 1944-45 in thirty-nine New South

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Wales country towns. Among exhibitions shown were, 'One Hundred and Fifty Years of Australian Painting, Since Conrad Martens', 'Copies of Famous Paintings by Mortimer Mempes', 'Some Recent Australian Painting', 'A Group of Australian Painters', and 'Twenty-One Australian Painters'. These exhibitions were designed to provide enjoyment and at the same time inculcate a sound understanding and appreciation of art. A central feature of the exhibitions was the desire to attract audiences of school children, particularly those who may not have been exposed to art previously. In a 1945 radio broadcast in Grafton, Smith states:

Country children have little or no opportunity of seeing really good works of art. Painting and art is a closed book to them.  

In this the exhibitions were successful with a total attendance of approximately 28,000 children.

The establishment of art galleries in country New South Wales towns was a major aim of the scheme.

In 1944, the War Art Council, the Encouragement of Art Movement, and the Department of Education together drafted a Plan for the Organisation of Travelling Art Exhibitions in N S W. The plan, discussed by the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales who were sharply divided in their response to the proposal. One side, influenced by the views of Sir Lionel Lindsay, was deeply suspicious of the Gallery engaging in any kind of educational activity. Sir Lionel Lindsay and his allies viewed their trusteeship as a kind of private connoisseurs club, the sole work of which was to acquire work of high quality for the 'national' collection. That meant excluding almost all forms of contemporary art. They saw the proposal for the Gallery to undertake educational activities as an indirect way of eroding their opposition to contemporary art. In this they were right. What weakened their position was that they had already accepted a considerable amount of money from the Carnegie Corporation (of New York) for educational purposes. The director, Will Ashton (1937-44), had travelled to the United States, at the

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19 Bernard Smith Papers, National Library of Australia, Box1. MS. 8680.

20 Bernard Smith Papers, National Library of Australia, Box1. MS. 8680.

expense of the Carnegie Foundation, and had come back a strong advocate of gallery educational programs, so Lindsay and his supporters were forced to concede.\textsuperscript{22}

An education program for the Gallery and the support of contemporary art were closely linked issues. The conservative element of the Board of Trustees considered that contemporary art was degenerate and should not be purchased for the ‘national’ collection.\textsuperscript{23} By contrast, the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was also part of the strategy to get contemporary art accepted into the collection, and also to establish art galleries in country towns. This desire was reiterated at the opening in Wagga Wagga (1944) of the first exhibition, \textit{One hundred and fifty years of painting in Australia}, by the Premier, McKell, who made direct referral to the importance of an educational platform in galleries and museums.

One of our post war aims in education will be to develop interest in art by the average citizen. I believe that the post war period will bring adjustments to our education system, and in these changes art will become an important subject. It is vital that growing children in country towns have the advantages of an art gallery. \textsuperscript{24}

Bringing art to the country subsequently became a plank in the New South Wales Labor Party platform, with William McKell’s support for its success. From the beginning of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme it was considered desirable to provide an artist or a lecturer to give talks on the paintings included in each exhibition. It was found that lectures were well received.\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, the success of the exhibitions depended greatly on the ability of the lecturer to present the exhibition both to adults and children of the district. The lecturer visited the town in most cases for a period of three days, usually at the beginning of the exhibition when they assisted with the supervision of the hanging of the works. The labour for this purpose was provided voluntarily by members of the local art committee. The first talk on the exhibition was normally given by the lecturer immediately after the opening, followed by a second talk given the next day. Sessions were arranged to enable school children to attend the exhibition. In some centres

\textsuperscript{22} Bernard Smith, (1988) Taking Art to the Country: How it Began, p. 38. Smith stresses that the Carnegie Corporation performed magnificently for cultural tolerance and advancement in Australia in the years between the wars, as it did in many other countries. Carnegie funds were used to pay lecturers, such as Margaret Preston, Eleonore Lange, and Frank Medworth, during the war years, partly to encourage more tolerant outlook and greater knowledge of the visual arts.


local artists, art teachers, or interested and informed lay people would continue the lectures. An important aspect of the program was to galvanise the interest and support of regional committees in presenting the exhibition.

The above model put in place by the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme, which provided lecturers to present interpretative programs designed to be of direct educational benefit to both children and adults, became the one adopted by state galleries. Through the 1950s, education programs for school students were becoming the norm. For example, the National Gallery of Victoria initiated an education program for schools influenced by the Art Gallery of New South Wales model in 1950.

The educational philosophy underpinning the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was articulated in the 1946 Art Gallery of New South Wales Trustees report on the program entitled *We Need Art*. It stated that:

> Before we learn to read and write we draw. We don’t have to be taught. We just draw. Everyone draws at sometime or another in their lives. And why do we draw? Because we want to; because in some way our drawing expresses something we want to say about life, about our family, or the people we know, or the things we dream about and hope for. By drawing we express ourselves and expression is the beginning of art. But unfortunately for so many of us, our ability to express ourselves becomes weaker as we grow up. Yet expression is one of the most important things in living. To be able to make fine things with our hands, to speak well, to be able to choose between things that are well made and things that are badly made, between beauty and ugliness, to be able to sing, to act, to build, to write, to be able to do any of these things well is to be an artist. For they all arise from the desire and need for expression. And because expression is natural, art is natural and normal. Some people have lost the art of expression.

The social component of the museum, its responsibility toward educating the public which was part of its nineteenth-century genesis, and the perception of art as significant in human

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development, is strongly advocated in this Art Gallery of New South Wales Trustees report. It reflects a commitment to an “expressionist” theory of art, popular in art education at the time, the idea that art works express the mind of the artist. The report reflects progressive ideas in the way it places art in the broader context, as one of several languages available for creative human thought and essential to the well being of humans. Underscoring this report is an understanding that art is important in society and it indicates the role and responsibility of the art museum as reaching beyond its own physical space. By comparison with the previous decade, under the directorship of Will Ashton, it represents a new awareness of the role of art in museums.

With the appointment of Hal Missingham as director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (1945-1971), full support was given to the educational role of the institution. Missingham’s directorial style, as discussed below, can be seen in this period as very different from the ‘connoisseurship’ model that Ashton represented. Missingham saw education as the audience’s advocate, and the museum as a social institution in the service of human appreciation. Missingham introduced enlightened policies for collecting Australian art and the international exhibitions organised by him made an outstanding contribution to contemporary Australian art and its subsequent growth.²⁹

The establishment of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was part of the general hopeful mood for a better world that swept Australia at the end of the Second World War. An aspect of this new and heady optimism insisted on the need to bring the arts to a much wider section of the populace than had been the case between the wars.³⁰ Bernard Smith’s and Hal Missingham’s position in relation to art education was in part influenced by their activities with the Studio of Realist Art, which began in Sydney in 1945, many of whose members as communists had a broader vision of social inclusiveness. The movement became active in Sydney, led by Herbert McClintock, James Cant, Roderick Shaw, Hal Missingham, Roy Dalgarno and Dora Chapman. The Studio called for a closer contact with the people by artists and a greater participation in the ‘life of the community’, both as citizens and through their work as artists.³¹ There was in Australia, throughout the period immediately following the

second World War, an increased interest in art. A more conducive cultural, social and economic context for art and its production was being advocated, particularly by members of the Studio of Realist Art. If artists were to have a reasonable chance of living professionally from their work, if art was to be more appreciated by wider groups of the community, a massive education program had to be undertaken in the schools, colleges, universities and public art museums. This is the context in which the New South Wales country art scheme emerged between 1944 and 1948 and its platform was overtly party political as well as artistically so.32

A contributory piece by Hal Missingham to SORA-Studio of Realist Art Publication, (1945) entitled The Function of a National Art Gallery demonstrates an institutional-wide commitment to education, deeply grounded in a humanistic socialism at this time:

Australians are increasingly aware of the world-wide interest in the arts, and of their importance in the development of the people towards a more complete way of life. A National Art Gallery should be a spear-point in our education, serving not merely for the accumulation of fine works of art, but also in encouraging the work of our artists, and the education and enjoyment of the people. The true sphere of a National Gallery should be to keep us in constant touch with the growth and development of art as an integral part of culture and civilisation. It should foster the arts of our own time, and also contact with the best of traditional work for study and stimulus... the gallery should use all available means to enliven and educate public taste and appreciation. Travelling exhibitions, both of originals and prints, should be increasingly employed progressively covering the whole country, and these exhibitions arranged so that the influence of the arts is clearly shown as a related development in the general purpose of living a fuller and more enjoyable life. 33

The implications of this report for art education and the community are remarkable. It articulates the educational responsibility of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in broad progressive humanistic terms, positioning it, at least of equal status to collection development, and as bridging formal education sectors, contemporary artists, industry, the publics and regional New South Wales.

32 Bernard Smith, (1988) Taking Art to the Country: How it Began, p.36. The Art Gallery of New South Wales travelling art scheme may, in part, have been influenced by the model adopted in the United Kingdom during the second World War, the aim of which was to decentralise art works from single sites to ensure safety during air raids.
33 Hal Missingham, (1945) SORA -Studio of Realist Art Publication, p.4.
Australian state art museums, Melbourne (1873), Sydney (1876), and Adelaide (1879), were, like the American art museum at its founding — a nineteenth-century copy of an eighteenth-century original — the European art museum. Like American art museums they evolved in Australia from a goal of communal education and were intended from the start to be fundamentally pedagogic in nature.\textsuperscript{34} During the nineteenth century, education had been the prime function of the museum. The ideal museum was “the advanced school of self-instruction”, the place where teachers would “naturally go for assistance”.\textsuperscript{35} Although many museums and galleries were unable to achieve this ideal, this was a firmly held view. But by the 1920s this conviction,\textsuperscript{36} held so strongly by nineteenth-century thinkers in so many areas of intellectual and political life, was under attack. Internationally, a new generation of curators was less interested in the public use of museums, and more interested in the accumulation of collections.\textsuperscript{37} In Australia, this is a manifestation of the tension that has historically existed between museum education and curatorial functions and it serves to reiterate the progressivism of Hal Missingham’s advocacy for public education in Australia in the 1940s. An interview on the radio at the time has Bernard Smith, the Exhibition Director, trying to dispel popular misconceptions about the value of country exhibitions. Smith is as severe in his criticism of those who claim ignorance about art almost as a badge of pride, while at the same time strongly supporting the franchising of art to everyone. The broadcast interview entitled, \textit{What is the Use of Art? Taking Art To the People}, was between Mrs John Moore, wife of the painter J. D. Moore, and Bernard Smith.

\textbf{Q.} Do you think that art can be taken to the people through these country exhibitions?  
\textbf{A.} In Australia, Mrs Moore, there are two kinds of snobbery. There is the snobbery of the informed and snobbery of the ignorant. There are still influential people in our midst who will proclaim that a National Art Gallery should not engage in educational activities. They forget that when Governments were first being asked to establish and finance national collections of art that it was, “the improvement of standards of public taste”, that became the chief argument for their establishment. There are still Jeremiah’s among us who complain about the unhappy modern practice of forcing culture down people’s throats. This is the same attitude that hindered the extension of the franchise

\textsuperscript{34} Stephen Weil,(1995) \textit{A Cabinet of Curiosities: Inquiries Into Museums and their Prospects}, p. 85.  
\textsuperscript{36} Perhaps the greater interest in collections and shift away from education as the prime function of the museum, evident by the 1920s, reflects a reversion to the art museums origins in royal and aristocratic collections, that the nineteenth century commitment to public education was an instrument of the ideology of the nation state.  
and obstructed universal education. All that we are doing is providing a service of art exhibitions and people are using that service.

Q. You mentioned, Mr Smith, the snobbery of the ignorant.

A. The ignorant snob is created by the informed snob. The informed snob has created the impression that art is a peculiar occupation for peculiar people; that it can only be appreciated, practised and talked about by people with heaven sent gifts or large bank accounts. The ignorant snob opens a conversation with, “Of course I know nothing about art but...” and proceeds to laugh at everything he does not like. I have found them among mayors of cities, members of parliament, inspectors of schools, and ministers of religion. All over the country people produce, “I don’t know anything about art “, as a kind of certificate proving that they are sane normal people. For about 20,000 years man has expressed the finest parts of his nature in art. I wonder, Mrs Moore, how long we, as Australians are going to go about boldly boasting our ignorance of it. 38

This interview reveals a critical perspective of the role Bernard Smith believed art had in Australian society at the time. It also provides an assessment of the scale and approach of the educative task required to advance the aesthetic education of Australians in view of the general ignorance and apathy. Smith attacks what he perceives as lack of intellectual leadership from people in positions of power in the Australian community. He takes the position that the art museum has a social responsibility to educate. In this interview, and on behalf of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, he anticipates the democratic, audience-focused tenets of The New Museology with his declaration ‘All we are doing is providing a service of art exhibitions and people are using that service’ 39

In an article, entitled ‘Encouragement of Art’, published in Australian New Writing, 1945, Smith criticises the closeting of art in specialist cliques closed off from ordinary life.

A country in which art is an activity that goes on in the artists’ quarter, whether the quarter be Chelsea, Greenwich Village or Paddington, is an unhealthy condition. Countries in which works of art form no part of the mental horizon of the normal citizen but are strange objects gathered into one or two galleries in the most populous cities are also in a most unhealthy condition. Yet this has been the condition of art in most countries of the advanced world for over a century. Yet it should be said in their

38 Transcript of radio broadcast, (1945) 2 BL 3.20., 14 April, What is the Use of Art, Bernard Smith Papers, National Library of Australia, Box 1. MS. 8680.

39 Transcript of radio broadcast, (1945) 2 BL 3.20., 14 April, What is the Use of Art, Bernard Smith Papers, National Library of Australia, Box1. MS. 8680.
defence that the artists are hardly to blame if they have been the Ishmael's of society, huddling in groups, founding 'movements' searching frantically for some technique or some expression that would squeeze out the last atom of expression.  

Smith is passionate in his call for greater recognition of the artist and art in the post-war period. The educational reach of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the period 1944-48 was driven by social and political forces external to the institution - as exemplified by people like Smith at the vanguard of the desire to make art accessible to wider more diverse groups of people.

In contrast, the development of the educational dimension in the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the mid-1970s implied an internal challenge to received understandings of curatorial and educational roles and dichotomies. In the 1970s changes were proposed with the aim of enhancing the educational potential of the the Art Gallery of New South Wales through internal structural change, which can be seen as a courageous attempt to break down the separate discourses of curatorial and educational practices and to extend the education emphasis from school-based learning to embrace adult life-long learning. In general underlying the period of the 1970s was the impetus to develop and improve the educational possibilities of the institution's collections and exhibitions.

**Art Gallery New South Wales - 1970s.**

In 1975, Bernice Murphy, in her capacity as Senior Education Officer at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, presented an analysis and proposal to the director, Peter Laverty which anticipated later developments in education in art museums in the wider Australian context. Murphy’s analysis called for a structural integration of the curatorial and educational functions between curators and educators. Her proposed model indicated a move toward a management structure that facilitated collaboration between educators and curators. Murphy believed that the art museum’s role was primarily about communicating knowledge and that its function was to help many different audiences make sense and meaning of their experiences with the medium. Murphy addressed issues relating to staff training and professional development. For example, she included in her proposal greater expectations in regard to the professional backgrounds of personnel responsible for the development of learning programs associated with the museum’s

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40 Bernard Smith Papers, National Library of Australia, Box 1. MS. 8680.
collections and exhibitions. She wanted staff who were not only knowledgeable about art, but who could also communicate their knowledge through education of the public.

An important aspect, I argue, of Murphy’s view was her belief in the waste of learning opportunity that resulted from the structural hierarchy, which positioned education low, and in a secondary after the fact role. Her proposal indicated an enlightened awareness of the educational potential of museums to teach and inform audiences. Murphy’s strategy represented a new view of the structural changes required within the organisation to unite curators and educators in better communicating knowledge about art and evoking responses from the public. Highlighting the importance of educators, Murphy writes:

Education officers could be playing a much more positive professional role - as fully extended Art Educators - than they have done in Australian galleries in the past. That is they should aspire to embrace all the special aspects of art education (art history, criticism, publications, artists and art teacher training, film making in and on art) as well as acquiring a sound basic grasp of museum curatorship and conservation. Education officers in Australian galleries have been generally relegated to a role comparable to nursing aides in public hospitals. They have not been sufficiently encouraged to produce work born of professionalism, intelligence and imagination! 41

Murphy’s analysis of issues about the training, discipline base and professional background of educational staff in Australian art museums was an important turning point in the development of art museum education in Australia. Murphy’s understanding of art education shows vision, and expectation of higher professional standards. She demands broader experience in the field of art other than the more common art production background of the majority secondary art teachers, which in the main, was usually the professional profile of museum education staff. Murphy argued that:

Education officers are not being used according to the professional training and qualities which should be expected of them for appointment to the professional staff of the Gallery - if they are merely duplicating the services which might be offered by any competent general art teacher familiar with our collections - for example giving brief talks on request, on an ad hoc series of topics conducted frequently at a low level of hastily culled generalisations; or just as unproductive giving brief talks repeatedly on the same topic. Continually repeated at a merely introductory level of information and

41 Bernice Murphy, (1975) Analysis and Proposals Re. Education Services, Art Gallery New South Wales, Meeting January, Archives Art Gallery New South Wales.
In the above Murphy advocates a higher standard of education practice in the art museum; demanding that educators intellectually engage with collections. Murphy, in this report, anticipates the conclusions of the 1987 report, *The Uncertain Profession: Educators in American Art Museums*, undertaken by Eisner and Dobbs, which I discuss in Chapter Two. Eisner and Dobbs conclude that museum education as a discipline was still in the process of being born, indicating that a long list of conditions will have to be met before adequate professional preparation and practice is instituted. My understanding and interpretation of Murphy’s report and her contribution to the development of the public learning dimension of the art museum in Australia, is that she called for, exhibitions and viewer experiences which engage broader democratic audiences, as well as a reconstruction of the curatorial and educational relationship and its power base. In retrospect these ideas anticipate some of the main tenets of *The New Museology*.

Museum education has championed the right of the general public, to both physical and intellectual access to museum collections through a wide range of public learning programs including on-site, on-line and via outreach connections, as well as through the layering of exhibition interpretative approaches and materials. Museum educators have sought to alter the museum’s scholarly image by making it appeal to a broader range of people in its approaches. In the last decade alone, diversity, informality and interdisciplinary considerations have been important in shaping both the philosophy and practice of art museum learning, as have internal staff structures giving educators a greater power base, along with change in professional qualifications and experience of education staff.

However, there is, often lack of genuine co-operation and joint-planning among professional staff which has prevented the museum’s full educational potential from being realised. It is to

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44 Murphy undertook research into the art educational processes of formal education sector in New South Wales, making comparative studies with Victoria and concluded the need for art education reform in New South Wales. She clearly saw that the Art Gallery of New South Wales was an important, and to that date, unrealised agent in an agenda for art education reform.
this problem of institutional practice that Murphy drew attention in her 1975 report.\textsuperscript{45} Her call for the need to foster team approaches to exhibition development and the integration of education into all aspects of the art museum operations, held the promise of a time when art museums could indeed become centres for public learning.\textsuperscript{46}

There remains, in Australia a dearth of home-grown literature critiquing the art museum, and even less its pedagogy, a situation which needs to be addressed through the development of an academic, research-base and publication program focussing on the theory and practice of museology. Art museums still have not fulfilled the intentions of their nineteenth century founders.\textsuperscript{47} Despite several national Museums Australia conferences throughout the nineteen-nineties including Pathways to Partnerships: Linking Collections with Educators, Curators, Guides and the Community (1993) Communicating Cultures (1995) Power and Empowerment (1996), art museum professionals in Australia have been conspicuously absent when key issues raised by contributors to \textit{The New Museology} have been canvassed.

\textbf{Experience and interpretation.}

Currently, the engagement of the visitor with the experience of the museum is an agent in establishing the museums success. Museums are asked to become places of public discourse, whether they are art, history or science museums - they are places set aside to address issues of immediate and tangible relevance to the public. Museums are now seen as contributors to civic discourse and as agents of social change.

Nicholas Serota, Director of the Tate Gallery in Britain, addresses the issue implicit in the question raised by the title of his published lecture, \textit{Experience or Interpretation.}\textsuperscript{48} In it he asks what do we expect from museums of modern art at the end of the twentieth century? We may agree that the encyclopaedic and dictionary definitions of the museum are neither achievable nor even desirable. There is less general agreement now on how to balance the

\textsuperscript{45} Bernice Murphy, (1975) \textit{Analysis and Proposals Re. Education Services}, Art Gallery New South Wales, Meeting January. Archives Art Gallery New South Wales.


\textsuperscript{48} Nicholas Serota, (1996) \textit{Experience and Interpretation: The Dilemma of Museums of Modern Art}. Chapter four - An evolving agenda for education: Australia 1940s and 1970s
interests of the artist, the curator and the visitor. The most stimulating developments have occurred in smaller museums where the sense of institutional responsibility towards conventional expectations is less pressing, an opportunity, I suggest, which is creatively experienced by the Australian National Portrait Gallery.

The best practice museums of the future will, as Schafflehausen, Insel Hombroich and Frankfurt, seek to promote different modes and levels of ‘interpretation’ by subtle juxtaposition of ‘experience’. Some rooms and works will be fixed, the pole star around which others will revolve and evolve. In this way we can expect to create a matrix of changing relationships to be explored by visitors according to their particular interests and sensibilities.49

Part of the work of modernist critics and theorists, such as Clive Bell, Roger Fry, and Alfred Barr, was to articulate the direction of the artistic tradition and to identify the point that current work had supposedly reached.50 This modernist understanding of art, postulated by these theorists, and its development, has not been instructively represented in its exhibitionary context, thereby excluding audiences without art education from the experience of engaging with the meaning of art.

Art museums have tended to display their collections in one of three ways: chronologically, by national school, or according to historical movements or styles.51 In the new museology, curators and visitors alike will have to become more willing to chart their own path, redrawing the map of modern art, rather than following a single path laid down by a received modernist curatorial practice. Although many major European art museums still follow the modernist model, we have come a long way from Sir Charles Eastlake’s 1858 (Director, National Gallery, London, 1855-1865) chronological hang by school, but the educational and aesthetic purpose is no less significant. Our aim must be to create a condition in which visitors can experience a sense of discovery in looking at particular paintings, sculptures or installations in a particular room at a particular moment, rather than finding themselves stranded on the conveyer belt of history. By contrast, the newly created Tate Modern is hung using four main

themes, Still life/Object/Real life; Landscape/Matter/Environment; Nude/Action/Body and History/Memory/Society.\textsuperscript{52}

In this chapter I have looked at two key periods in the development of the educational dimension of a public art museum in Australia. I have focussed on aspects of public programming, in particular the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme, to explore the expanding pedagogic role of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1940s. Under the visionary leadership of Bernard Smith, the principal aim of the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was to facilitate greater engagement with, and appreciation of, art, for the wider community. Inspired by notions of moral rehabilitation after the experience of the the second World War the Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was motivated by a belief in the power of art to humanise. Underpinning the Scheme was a strong educational philosophy which considered art as significant in human development. The Travelling Art Exhibition Scheme was pioneering in its demonstration of the role and responsibility of the art museum to reach out to wider audiences, to help visitors beyond its own physical space to acquire skills, and its commitment to a public educational purpose.

Bernice Murphy’s agenda for reform, at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in the 1970s, is the other key period in the development of education in an Australian art museum which I have focussed on in this chapter. Murphy’s agenda aimed to build bridges between educational and curatorial practices in order to maximise, and, to raise standards, of the educational potential of the art museum. Murphy’s strategy was to implement important internal structural changes, that repositioned and expanded the Gallery’s perspectives and role of education. The leadership of Smith in the 1940s, and Murphy in the 1970s, was expressed through an awareness of, and commitment to, building the pedagogic power base in the art museum. Both contributed to new ways, distinct from Alfred Barr, of displaying art and informing audiences about art.

This chapter considered how modernism influenced display practices and educational practices in the art museum during the twentieth century. These practices have excluded audiences, provided no hooks to assist non-art educated audiences understand what they are looking at. The next chapter looks at how the democratising project of \textit{The New Museology}, the

accessibility of portraiture, postmodernism, and constructivist learning theories, intersect to offer new pedagogic opportunities in the art museum.
Chapter five. Toward a new pedagogy for the art museum.

A portrait gallery makes tangible the ephemeral, makes visible the imagined, and offers a powerful space for pedagogy.


This chapter draws the themes of my thesis together. In the previous four chapters I have investigated the art museum in relation to the democratising project of *The New Museology*, suggested new possibilities arising from the intersection of pedagogy, art history and curatorial practices. I have interrogated modernist mythologies and presented a case-study of important programs and periods at the Art Gallery of New South Wales that expanded the pedagogic dimension of this institution. The discussion then turned to an investigation that raises questions about the relevance and effectiveness of contemporary and future pedagogic practice in the art museum. To this end I have chosen to investigate portrait galleries because in several ways the discourses and practices of a national portrait gallery provide a pertinent site for investigation of the concerns of this thesis.¹ I also work in a national portrait gallery.

Modernist art history, discussed in Chapter Two, has described the portrait so that it sits both inside and outside the modernist museum. Yet the democratising project of *The New Museology*, and the accessibility of portraiture to broad audience groups along with post-modernism, all offer new pedagogic opportunities for exploring portrait art as a keystone to interdisciplinary study. I have argued in previous chapters that the last decade or so has seen the borders of disciplinary practices in the art museum shift ground to let in what, I perceive as, new possibilities for an art museum pedagogy. The domain of portraiture, sitting as it does across several disciplines of knowledge, provides a particularly rich base for contemporary frameworks of interpretation, approaches to learning and meaning making, and by its nature, audience access. Douglas Worts points out that in producing an art work, the artist carries the creative process halfway - it is the responsibility of the viewer to complete the process.² The

visitor-centred half of the creative process is based on the personalising of symbolic objects. By providing interpretative strategies based on this understanding of reader response to images museums can support viewers as they personalise their experiences of works. For example, a public program designed by Worts at the Art Gallery of Ontario, over a period of nine months, provided ‘Share your Reaction‘ cards on which visitors recorded personal and reflective comments in response to particular works of art. The comments on these cards provide a glimpse into a powerful area of creative meaning-making that is part of the potential of every visitor, which can potentially lead the art museum to a new pedagogic relationship with its audiences.

Portrait Galleries are useful for looking at the modern museum, based as it is on the nineteenth-twentieth century European model, and conceived to play a public role as part of the nation-state. The modernist museum is the embodiment of the twentieth-century ideal museum model and it still exists now, even at the gateway to the twenty-first-century. However, museum concepts are being redefined and some of their characteristics and problems are becoming clearer. As discussed in Chapter One, what Hooper Greenhill has referred to as the ‘post-museum’ will obviously retain some of the characteristics of former models, but it will shape them to its own ends, according to changing conditions and cultural environments. Rather than upholding the values of objectivity, rationality, order and distance, the post-museum will encourage greater awareness and responsiveness in and to its public, encourage mutually beneficial partnerships between communities, and celebrate diversity.

Australia’s National Portrait Gallery makes a useful case for analysis coming after The New Museology and being representative of an institutional lineage that links its type to concepts of nineteenth-century museology, in particular that defined by the London National Portrait Gallery. Also, my role as education curator at the National Portrait Gallery gives me insights into the close workings and organisation of this particular institution, while providing opportunities to develop an effective art museum pedagogy.

Portraits make particularly powerful visual statements. Images of people form part of the everyday world. In the West, images of those important to us are familiar parts of our lives. They encode memories and emotions and thus are held dear to us. Portraits are less frequently sold by their owners than other kinds of art works for they embody ancestral links and are passed from generation to generation to ensure continuity of history, power and social status.\(^7\) At the state level, we are surrounded by images of those who govern and manage us while the carrying of symbolic images is one element of the display of protest, grief, or aggression. Portraits are a familiar reminder of our human connectedness.\(^8\)

**About portrait galleries.**

I want first to look at an example of a 'national portrait gallery' in mid-nineteenth century Britain, namely, the National Portrait Gallery in London. Then I want to move on to consider the role of my own museum, the late twentieth-century, Australian National Portrait Gallery in Canberra. A comparative analysis of these two institutions enables me to apply the main concerns of this thesis, namely pedagogy in the art museum, new interpretative frameworks for visual culture, theoretical developments in art history, and museology, to a museum in practice. It also provides, through practical examples, insights into the paradigm shift that has occurred in museums in the later part of the twentieth-century which is evolving to shape a new kind of museum and offering new possibilities for educational programs. The idea of a portrait gallery is no longer a monolithic concept, but illustrates different modes of interpretation and different nuances in the ways in which portrait galleries confront their public and their history.\(^9\) For the purpose of this thesis my analysis of national portrait galleries focusses on the domain of portraiture and the implementation of interpretative strategies for accessing its meanings.

**Discourse of the 'National Portrait Gallery' - international.**

The discourse of the 'national portrait gallery' was in part to use portraiture to bridge the gap between the complexity of modern society and the experience of individual identity.\(^10\)

According to Andrew Sayers the notion 'national portrait gallery' had already been introduced

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in the nineteenth century through certain publications in both Britain and Australia and bound
collections of prints, which were issued periodically. Engraved portraits of famous persons
date back to the early sixteenth-century; in the nineteenth century they proliferated. Collections
of such images were often sold under the label ‘National Portrait Galleries’ usually with a
summary of the achievements of the person depicted rather like a visual ‘Who’s Who’. In
nineteenth-century Britain portraiture was drawn into the emerging forms of public
communication produced by urban commercial society as well as being a component of the
Royal Family. The London National Portrait Gallery was founded by an Act of Parliament in
1856 as a ‘Gallery of the Portraits of the most eminent persons in British History’. From the
outset this was a Victorian establishment, and it appeared to have at its very core a very
Victorian morality.

Without portraiture, British art is almost unimaginable. Next to landscape, it is a domain in
which British painters have excelled. From Elizabethan miniaturists to contemporary practice,
portraiture has flourished with hardly a break. In the past, portraiture was the chief art practice
of most foreign artists who worked in Britain. It dominated eighteenth-century art.

The establishment of a National Portrait Gallery in London owes itself partly to Thomas
Carlyle (1795-1881). As the intellectual father of the National Portrait Gallery Carlyle stated
his conviction of the value of portraits for understanding the past. He wrote,

Any representation made by a faithful human creature, of that Face or Figure, which he
saw with his own eyes ... is now valuable to me ... often I have found a portrait
superior in real instruction to half a dozen written ‘Biographies’, ... or let me say I
have found that the portrait was a small lighted ‘candle’ by which Biographies could
for the first time be read.

National Portrait Gallery, Canberra.
portraiture; in Portraiture: Facing the Subject, ed. Joanna Woodall, Manchester University Press,
Manchester and New York, p. 221.
13 Richard Shone, (1988 ) Head First: Portraits from the Arts Council Collection, The Arts Council of
England, pp. 7-8.
At the heart of this comment is a belief in the power of authenticity, the making of a portrait from life. The London National Portrait Gallery was established in 1856, at a time when the boundaries of the British Empire were so extensive that they encompassed one in every five inhabitants of the world.\textsuperscript{16}

Hooper-Greenhill writes,

Objects were flowing into Britain from these extremities at an ever increasing rate. As these objects found their way into collections and began to illustrate, map, and plot out corners of the Empire, so it became important to map the heart of this empire. One of the projects of the modern period has been the collecting together of a vast archive, to document, to control, and to place the peoples of the world in relationships of domination and subservience. As the establishment of museums slowly got under way in nineteenth-century Britain, a collection emerged that would act as the public face of the managers of this collected world. The National Portrait Gallery enabled the achievement of that peculiarly masculine aspect of English culture, the representation of the self to the self. This was pictured as the nation.\textsuperscript{17}

In this nineteenth-century context a national portrait gallery functions as a technology of national identity, an instrument of the nation state. The idea of a national portrait gallery, however, is no longer a monolithic concept functioning as an instrument of the ideology of nation hood. From 1989, in part through the democratising project of The New Museology, museums, including national portrait galleries, have been redefined. In the later part of the twentieth-century museums have taken conscious responsibility for questions of identity. That is, community identity, as opposed to nineteenth-century notions of national identity. The contemporary museum is expected to become a place not previously expected of it. Museums are now places of public discourse, which address issues of relevance to the public, in contrast to nineteenth-century notions of improvement of citizens by the liberal elite. Interpretative frameworks, approaches to learning, audience access, and social responsibilities, aim, in the late twentieth-century museum, to engage audiences in dialogue.

One of the main functions of the National Portrait Gallery, in common with other contemporary museums both in Britain and in Europe, was education. In 1856 Palmerston, the Prime

Minister of England outlined the educational role of the proposed institution:

There cannot I feel convinced, be a greater incentive to mental exertion, to noble actions, to good conduct on the part of the living than for them to see before them the features of those who have done things which are worthy of our admiration and whose example we are more inclined to imitate when they are brought before us in the visible and tangible shape of portraits. 18

The Gallery was intended to encourage and enable 'mental exertion', 'noble actions', and 'good conduct'. The major function of the British National Portrait Gallery in the mid-nineteenth century is disciplinary and political. Its role was to reflect moral and social values. It can also be said that its function was to reflect on Britain’s power and to show visitors who their 'betters' were.

In Britain, there is a tendency to think of the National Portrait Gallery as being associated with the formation of the mid-Victorian nation state and to be part of the growth of public institutions for historical recording during the 1850’s, which is certainly not the case in Australia. As Charles Saumarez Smith, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London and contributor to The New Museology, 19 writes,

It has therefore been interesting to watch from the other side of the world the formation of a national portrait gallery in the very different circumstances of Australia in the 1990’s, part, perhaps, of a debate about the nature of Australia as a state, its special characteristics and its desire for some form of effective public historical record during a period of possible transition from constitutional dependence on the monarchy to a republic.

and, by contrast:

.... I may have confirmed your expectations of the National Portrait Gallery in London as an institution bent upon the reification of the elite, a kind of Pommy graveyard. This is certainly the impression which is given out in some of the literature associated with the recent reopening of the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra, contrasting the democracy and eclecticism of the new world National Portrait Gallery with the stiffness and elitism of the old. 20

18 Hansard 6 June 1856, :1119.
The possibilities of a National Portrait Gallery.

Australia’s National Portrait Gallery, founded in 1994 as a program of the National Library of Australia, was inaugurated in March 1999 and situated in its permanent home of three gallery spaces incorporating the former library of Old Parliament House, Canberra. The notion of a national portrait gallery had been on the back burner of Australia’s museum agenda for decades. The fact that it was finally given the go-ahead from the Prime Minister, John Howard, is due largely to the lobbying efforts of Melbourne art patrons, Marilyn and Gordon Darling.

The National Portrait Gallery is a unique institution in Australia investigating Australia’s identity and history through portraiture. The gallery has a permanent multi-disciplinary staff including Director and officers for Education, Registration, Marketing, Curatorial, Archives and On-Line services. The National Portrait Gallery is part of the Federal Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and operates three gallery spaces in Old Parliament House. The Gallery’s core functions are to develop a nationally significant collection, exhibition, educational and public program in pursuit of its objective to increase the understanding and knowledge of portraiture and of Australian history and culture.21

One aspect of what makes founding a National Portrait Gallery timely now, is recent developments in visual cultural theory which have relocated portraiture as a site for investigation. Positioning it in an interpretative frame as a rich resource of cultural information. Also the creative potential in establishing a new version of an old idea is now particularly fertile as developments in museums, discussed above, take place. Art critic, Bruce James writes,

Like drafting a constitutional preamble, creating a national portrait gallery, ground up, demands the deepest consideration of a people’s character. A product of contradictions, and a contradiction itself in some ways, it calls upon degrees of sentiment that would be inadmissible in the charters of other cultural institutions, yet it cannot be undertaken in any but a spirit of cold self scrutiny. A cause to celebrate the achievements of a citizenry it probably is. A call to arms it certainly is not. An alarm to the conscience it may be.22

22 Bruce James, Time to Take Ourselves at Face Value, Spectrum, Sydney Morning Herald, 6 March, 1999.
Bruce James refers to both the uniqueness and complexities of a national portrait gallery. He expresses a need for caution and mindful attention to its possible ambiguities while calling for consciousness and clarity in charting its direction. On the other hand, Charles Saumarez Smith confidently sites the intersection of three notions which define a national portrait gallery - the necessity of commemorating individual achievement, awareness of history in a democracy, and effectiveness of art as the medium to achieve this end. Saumarez Smith writes,

What the foundation of the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra demonstrates is the way in which the idea of a National Portrait Gallery is defined by three vectors: the belief in the necessity of the commemoration of individual achievement; the idea that there is a need for a public awareness of history in a democracy; and that the best and most effective way of achieving these things is through the medium of art.23

When Britain’s National Portrait Gallery was established in 1856, there would have been a common understanding of the word ‘portraiture’ and consensus about the role of such an institution and what sort of work constituted a portrait.24 However, this received understanding of the meaning of portraiture in the nineteenth-century is today challenged by post-modernist art practices and contemporary visual cultural theory. However, as Eileen Hooper-Greenhill comments: Visual culture within the museum is a technology of power. This power can be used to further democratise possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary ones.25

The Australian National Portrait Gallery is new and it is small. According to Sayers, it is managed by a small team, and therefore the problem of the power of inertia, characteristic of larger organisations, is not a barrier between executive will and execution.26 It has the opportunity of engaging with all the ideas of contemporary museology without the encumbrance of old practices. Being a late twentieth-century initiative it has an opportunity to look at the production of knowledge from an interdisciplinary perspective. The nature of portraiture itself and late twentieth-century critical theory invite a pluralistic interpretative approach. While portraiture is essentially an artistic practice, it documents and links a range of

histories; it intersects between art, history and biography. Recent critical theory around the nature of portraiture offers new possibilities for education and public programs at the National Portrait Gallery. Portraiture, as an art form, has some peculiarities that make it a most relevant case study for analysis within the context of modernism and aesthetic experience.

The Australian National Portrait Gallery defines portraiture in a broad framework whose aim is to provide an enjoyable, educative and engaging experience for visitors. Its exhibition and interpretative programs encourage innovative ways of looking at portraits, while raising questions about how we see ourselves as individuals, as communities and as a nation. By an interdisciplinary approach to the construction of knowledge, through exhibitions and public programs, links are established between the visual arts, history and cultural life. While portraiture is essentially an artistic practice, it documents and connects a range of histories - linking social, political, and cultural histories, some more covert than others. Portraits are primarily about people but they are, like all visual culture, also a repository of many other types of information and knowledge - overt and covert. Portraiture sits both inside and outside traditional art historical frames and the ideology of the modernist museum.

**Modernism and portraiture.**

Portraiture occupies a central position in the history of western art. Portraits form part of the collection of almost every art gallery in the western world. It has been the most popular genre of painting and lies at the heart of the naturalist project. It has been crucial to the articulation and formulation of ‘individualism’. Yet its status as a work of art remains uncertain and there is a dearth of critical history of the subject.

As the twentieth century has progressed it has become increasingly difficult to square the demands of portraiture with those of being a consciously ‘modern’ artist. Most of the leading movements of modernism have been stylistically inimical to the vivid realisation of human beings. Portraiture became a problem for modernist artists because modernism is incompatible with what Carlyle himself called the ‘fundamental condition of portraiture, that it

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However the Victorian conception of the authentic portrait already contains the seeds of the modernist fragmentation of identity. Despite the early twentieth-century rejection of figurative imagery, or that the widely held notion that portraiture was dead, had been laid to rest at about the same time as Sargent in 1925, this has not doomed it. In the twentieth century, the status of naturalistic portraiture as a progressive form of an elite art has been seriously undermined. Commissioned portraiture, long discussed as a source of artistic subservience, has become widely regarded as detrimental to creativity. More fundamentally, the early twentieth-century rejection of figurative imagery challenged the belief that visual resemblance to a living or once-living model is necessary or even appropriate to to the representation of identity (whether such identity is attributed to the sitter or the artist). Yet naturalistic portraiture has never entirely disappeared from the ‘progressive’ arena. In the context of the art museum portraiture is not made obscure, to the public, by modernist mythologies. Portraiture stands both inside and outside the modernist paradigm and the modernist museum.

In his catalogue essay Portraits from a Pluralist Century, for Painting the Century: 101 Portrait Masterpieces 1900-2000, currently on show at the London National Portrait Gallery, Norbert Lynton writes,

To see such contradictory works together is to understand better what the Modernists were contending with, and how proper their impatience was. It also helps us to empathise with the traditionalists’ horror at Modernism and the general public’s rejection of it. When they wanted to paint portraits, the first Modernists had to ask their family, friends or professional associates to sit; Matisse painted his wife and Derain; Derain painted Matisse; Picasso painted his girlfriends Madeleine and Fernando, and numerous others including his important new patron Gertrude Stein and his dealers. Kokoschka painted his friends, the actress Else Kupfer, the architect Adolf Loos, and the artist William Wauer. Serious commissions did not come to the Modernists until the second decade, and then to the less radical ones and to these only

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Portraits depicting friends and families of artists had existed at least since the fifteenth-century, but in the late nineteenth-century 'avant-garde' portraiture was markedly confined to uncommissioned images of these categories of sitter. Consistent with the radical shifts in society as well as in the social status and function of the artist that modernism represents, this enhanced authority of the artist, held as a worthiness to be portrayed, depended on one's relationship to the artist. It implies a lived intimacy between the painter and the sitter, imaginatively reproduced in the viewer's relationship to the painting. Portraiture, being essentially involved with concepts of identification, that is, a portrait is a likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of a the person depicted. If this is the case then the history of portraiture is closely connected with changes in beliefs about the nature of personal identity, and in ideas about what aspects of identity are appropriate or susceptible to portrayal. In this way portraiture has been inside the modernist paradigm.

The non-art literate viewer and access to art.

Portraits are not quite like other works of art for which standards of aesthetic validation might apply. Portraits are always intentionally tied to the representation of actual persons in some potentially discernible way. Therefore, the notion of 'correctness' when applied to portraits becomes irrelevant. The very fact of the portrait's allusion to an individual human being actually existing outside the work, in the world, constitutes its cause for coming into being. This vital relationship between the portrait and its object of representation, directly reflects the social dimension of human life as a field of action among persons, with its own repertoire of signals and messages. It is therefore freed from art historical constraints to enable more accessible reading. As viewers in the art museum we have a firmer base for judging and understanding portraiture at its most basic level. Most of the family photographs which stand on mantelpieces all over the world are portraits made in a very direct way. All of us have 'played' the part of sitter, artist, or critic.

37 Elizabeth Deighton, ed. (1985) Looking into Paintings, Faber and Faber, London, p.84.
Portraits are primarily about sitters. Faces fascinate us. Faces and bodies are an important agent of human communication while faces tell us great deal about people and what it means to be human/ or inhuman. In this way portraits are an accessible art form. They are also the repository of many other types of information - the things society finds novel, or exotic, or beautiful; the activities or events it wishes to record and the way it reflects gender, class, culture, or age, as historical documentation. Portraits offer opportunities for us to learn about art, history and society. The Australian National Portrait Gallery regards portraiture as an intersection of art, history and biography - so in its communicative technologies, it is more than just a modernist art museum model. It moves beyond this model by engaging portrait subjects and viewers in a dialogue that draws on their familiar or shared experiences of being human and/or part of a community.

Consider, for example, *Portrait of a Man*, painted by Titian, c 1508, in the collection of the National Gallery, London. In perceiving this and judging the portrait as ‘marvellous’ we are exercising no specialist knowledge. We apply to the painting the only critical habits that we have formed elsewhere, in our own daily life. Titian’s sitter has been described variously as ‘a dandy’, ‘an extroverted, open personality’, ‘probably a bit shy’. These judgements are based on the personal experience of the observers and they serve to demonstrate the ease with which we project our own feelings onto a portrait. We are liable to do this with portraits more than with any other kind of art, simply because we are used to making judgements about people in everyday life - judgements at least partially based on experience. Portraiture is a potent form of communication.

The social communication function of portraiture was exemplified by its use at the time of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Photographs of her at all ages and in all moods, were showered across newspapers and magazines, flashed on television, displayed in shop windows, fastened onto railings and made the centre of improvised, candlelit alters. While not being art historians of portraits nevertheless we are all able to pass judgement on

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40 Elizabeth Deighton, ed. (1985) *Looking into Paintings*, p.84.
contemporary portraits, and those of other eras, applying to them what often amounts to a personal psychology.

Beyond the modernist project what is the space between the audience and the object? The idealised space of the modernist museum was positivistic, objective, rational, evaluative, distanced, and set aside from the real world. The museum viewer was accorded the status of the neutral observer walking in an ordered fashion through galleries that were in themselves well-lit, and laid out for the acquisition of knowledge - the knowledge that could be construed from the objects, that, once properly arranged in the neutral space, would speak for themselves.\textsuperscript{42} Outside and inside the art museum portraits exist at the interface between art and social life and the pressure to conform to social norms enters into their composition because both artist and subject are enmeshed in the value systems of their society. The oscillation between the art object and the human subject, represented so personally, is what gives portraits their extraordinary grasp on our imagination.\textsuperscript{43}

There are opportune intersections at this time between the accessibility of portraits and theoretical insights provided by ‘constructivist’ ideas of learning. The application of a constructivist learning approach to the field of portraiture is one of the concerns of this chapter. As with all cultural objects, works of art can reveal different levels of meanings according to the interpretative and hermeneutic frameworks applied to them. Portraiture itself, has in the last decade, undergone historical, artistic and theoretical developments making it a rich site for investigation.

At this moment in time, for education in the art museum, there is perhaps a gateway for examining visual culture in alternative ways - to provide an interesting take on ‘looking’, freed from some of the historical constraint that has informed it. In my work at the National Portrait Gallery I approach portraiture as a gate through which to open up the curatorial and educational spaces of the art museum, to give access to new interpretative frameworks, enabling a powerful democratised art museum pedagogy.

\textbf{The Constructivist museum.}


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For many people ‘education’ means the accumulation of facts and information. This is a narrow view and is not appropriate for museums. Alternative meanings of ‘education’ stress the process of learning rather than its outcomes, and must include affective as well as cognitive elements, those responses and feelings which give rise to attitudes, values and perceptions and which under-pin the acquisition of knowledge. Motivation and the desire to know more about a subject or situation inspire learning.44

The last three decades have seen a shift in both the definition of education and its relative importance within museums and within the museum profession. The current state of education in museums is at the cross-roads of change. In the art museum well articulated and well-founded educational principles will be required to identify ways forward. The interpretation of visual culture must surely be considered from three points of view: that of the curator, or the museum, that of the educator, and that of the visitor. Curators exhibit objects in groups along with associated text panels and labels, and thereby produce interpretations for visitors. Meanwhile visitors employ their own interpretative strategies and repertoires to make sense of the exhibited objects, the exhibitions and the experience of the museum as a whole. Museum pedagogy is structured through the themes and narrative embedded in exhibitions.45 Narratives such as the impact on the visual language of photographic portraiture in response to pivotal technical developments, in an exhibition surveying the history of photographic portraiture.

The curatorial meanings of objects in museums are produced through complex and multi-layered museological processes where museum objectives, collecting policies, classification methods, exhibition design and style, artwork groupings, labels and text panels all come together in an articulated narrative. The meanings made by visitors from exhibitions are products of both individual and social interpretative processes and are complex and unpredictable. Art works in the museum are subject to curatorial procedures of registration, documentation, and classification, which have, in the main, resulted in their allocation to a fixed physical and conceptual position within the collection, which in turn has tended to generate a fixed meaning. This single fixed meaning, relating to academic discipline of art history has seemed the correct and only way, in the art museum, in which the object should be

interpreted. However recently the contingent character of meaning has begun to be admitted and new ways of thinking about how objects could be exhibited and how they might be spoken about are emerging.46

The possibilities of a new pedagogy for the art museum are explored in the research referred to above, undertaken by Worts at the Art Gallery of Ontario, which forges new partnerships of learning with the public.47 In 1988, a team of educators, curators and designers formed a partnership that was dedicated to improving exhibition techniques, based on visitor experience of exhibits. This collaborative team wanted to improve the interpretative systems of the Art Gallery of Ontario - one of the leading areas for exploration being how personal meanings related to viewing an art work. This curatorial and educational collaboration provides a model for new forms of partnership which art museums need to make with their publics - where many ways of meaning-making are encouraged, supported and respected.48 This professional collaboration (1988) correctly predicted that museums would become places that more effectively present information which interacts with visitor imagination and emotional responses, and which in turn blend with social dynamics. The result being that museums will function more as places of living culture. In reporting this research Worts concludes:

If the museum is truly the place of the muses, then museum professionals must realise that the physical and intellectual aspects of our current operations must function more symbolically as triggers that support visitors in activating the muses within us all. It is this inner space that, in my view, is the real museum.49

Wort's work is significant because it positions art museum pedagogy at the interface of a dynamic and embracing partnership between the museum's exhibitionary culture and its communities while acknowledging that its effectiveness is dependent on engaging their experience, prior knowledge and personal responses to art works. I have indicated in Chapter One that over the last twenty years museum professionals have become increasingly aware of the educational role of the museum and have begun to reevaluate the relationship between museums and their visitors. Throughout this time there has been a shift in the definition of

education and its relative importance within museums. Learning is now seen as an active partnership between museum and visitor, and learner with environment. Although the writings and teaching of Comenius (1592-1670), the philosophy of John Dewey (1859-1952), and the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget (1896-1980) all recognise the significance of learning from experience, Australian society has yet to accept this principle fully.\textsuperscript{50}

The object lesson, a major feature of nineteenth-century schooling and its philosophical context is firmly set within some of the principles of these educators. The purpose of object-learning was to develop all the child’s faculties in the acquisition of knowledge, not to impart facts of information, per se. Some of the principles of object learning looked forward to child-centred progressive theories, later to be crystallised by much of the most valuable educational work in schools, particularly primary schools, during the twentieth-century. Comenius wrote that learning and teaching with objects would start from sense perceptions and from the use of all five senses - so as to accumulate as much data as possible about the object(s) under analysis. This data was then discussed, related to previous information and experience, and compared with the perceptions of others. A synthesis of material demands the input of further information, and may promote research on the part of the teacher, the learner or both together. Hypothesis and deductions as to use and meaning of things is not limited to one interpretation only. All objects ought to lead learning into curious and unpredictable paths which reveal the arbitrariness both of subject boundaries in the school and of collection classification schemes in the museum. The object lesson at its best was, and is, intended to enable many different approaches to the learning of skills, including the training of the senses, the development of thinking, and the development of language. While it underpins much museum education today it has not been central to learning in the art museum. The art museum’s interpretative framework, for much of the twentieth-century was a modernist framework marked by concepts of the autonomy and universality of the artwork, which confounded the possibility of multiple interpretative meanings.\textsuperscript{51} The object lesson has very strong pedagogic links with aspects of contemporary museology and constructivist learning theory. Its application to learning in the art museum allows the play of the imagination and memory through enabling people to make personal links, which enable the intellect to operate in its preferred way through offering a range of ways of accessing information, thus broadening the numbers and types of people that


can enjoy art museums. The educational theory of Comenius is very similar to the interpretative approach outlined in Taborsky’s *The Discursive Object*.

The analytic frame which determined the nature of museums for many years has been based on a belief in the uniqueness of the individual and the object, and on their separation from each other in time and space. This analysis decided that meaning is a separate unit, a message, which moves, intact, between spatio-temporal sites. Therefore, it rested in the object and was meant to move intact to the observer in the museum. Recent analysis of cognitive action is saying that this is not how meaning arises, by a straight path from site to site. The meaning of the object only becomes clear in an interaction between observer and object. This is particularly potent in the case of portraiture where there is meta-referential knowledge or experience of the subject held by the viewer.

The transmission of traditional canons of knowledge approach to education is known to be ineffective in schools and universities, and teachers are encouraged to use pedagogic methods that accommodate individual learning styles, resulting from different experiences and ways of knowing and that take account of the active and interactive nature of learning. Constructivist educational theory focuses on understanding how to enable individual learners to construct meaning and relevance and do so in optimal learning conditions.

In the model of experiential art appreciation the process of art interpretation is understood as a series of events where the viewers’ past and present experiences are the bases on which to build new knowledge. Educator George Hein argues that to pursue an educational role successfully and efficiently, museums need to have a conscious educational policy. In order to have a theory of education, a theory of knowledge, a theory of learning and a theory of teaching processes are required. A theory of education requires a theory of knowledge; e.g. what do we think knowledge is and how is it acquired? Also, it is not possible to develop a

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coherent educational policy without a fairly clear notion of how best people learn - a theory of learning. If we believe that people, particularly adults, learn in particular way/s, what does that imply for the staging of our exhibitions and programs? What pedagogic approaches will lead to the greatest awareness for the greatest number of public visitors? Constructivist educational theory focuses on understanding how best to enable individual learners to find meaning and relevance in learning, whether they are children or adults.

A new pedagogy for the art museum.

Where are the examples which engender dynamic, creative and engaging learning in viewers? Saumarez Smith cites the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra as being on the right track. He comments:

My sense of the first catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery ... under the title The Possibilities of Portraiture is that it has begun to walk [the] tightrope between commemoration and documentation, between art and history, with intelligence and originality. It has shown itself to be open to the powers of photographic imagery in the commemoration of fame, aware of different ways that human lives are preserved in images, complex, sometimes necessarily ironic, as well as celebratory.57

The learning dimension of the National Portrait Gallery has been formed and shaped by a fusion of curatorial, pedagogic and museological practices. Portraits are an accessible and rich form of social and cultural information and the National Portrait Gallery's approach to the interpretation of portraiture aims to establish the connections between social history, fine art and cultural identity. Portraits are contextualised with a range of artistic, biographical and historical material to enable audiences to explore meaning in and make sense of, this genre. Using an inquiry-based and constructivist learning strategy, students are encouraged to actively engage with portraits to develop both visual literacy and critical thinking skills, to augment their understanding of historical and artistic concepts, as well as the nature of art and history as a form of knowledge.

The Getty Center for Education in the Arts -sponsored study The Uncertain Profession, discussed in Chapter Two, focuses on unresolved questions about how to best organise and

conduct the enterprise of museum education. It asks - What theories and research may be cited to provide a solid foundation upon which to design educational services? It contends that the field of museum education has a problematic character and there is a widespread perception that it lacks a map of its terrain and direction.\textsuperscript{58} In this study, both museum directors and education department heads are united about the educational mission of the art museum. Everyone agrees that education is important, but there is still considerable confusion over the specific role of museum education within the larger institutional framework - why? Throughout this thesis I have argued that for much of the twentieth century the paradigm of modernism which informed art museum practices inhibited the development of confident and effective art museum pedagogy. In this chapter I have explored the possibilities of portraiture in proposing a new pedagogy for the art museum.

The assumption that vision is autonomous, and that objects are unmediated, is challenged here. Vision should be aligned with interpretation rather than perception. What is seen depends on who is looking, their prior experience and knowledge, at what, in which site. The ‘gaze’ is caught up in endless reciprocity. It is directed at what is visible, but in order to know what to observe, elements or factors must be recognised. But to recognise something it is necessary to have prior knowledge of it - thus observation depends on already knowing that for which one is searching. This complex and contradictory situation is at the heart of the modernist museum experience. Much interpretation of visual culture has presupposed an essential viewer, to whom a single interpretation of an object has been presented, and its meaning assumed. This interpretation has generally been given in relation to the meaning of the object within specific intellectual or disciplinary fields; for example, the history of art. Portraiture, traditionally low on the hierarchy of art history, has, ironically, been free from some of the complexities associated with the pedagogy of the modernist museum.

Visual culture within the art museum is a technology of power which can be used to further democratic possibilities or misused to uphold exclusionary values.\textsuperscript{59} The challenge for the Australian National Portrait Gallery is to further democratise art museum pedagogy, to move beyond the nineteenth-century concept of a national portrait gallery which employed portraiture

as an instrument to uphold exclusionary values. The opportunities for a new pedagogy in the art museum arise from a meshing of contemporary theoretical developments in visual culture, learning and museology. When art museums are seen as a normal part of the lives of ordinary people then the audience will consist of more than the elite. By nature of its collection area the National Portrait Gallery is well positioned to become a normal part of the lives of ordinary people.

Conclusion. Making connections between art museum practices.

Museums find their voice through their educational work. They are at the beginning of a process of fundamental change into centres for public learning that could take them, together with other cultural institutions, to the centre of public policy. The choice is theirs.


Presenting the 1997 Qantas Birthday lecture Dr Brian Kennedy, Director of the National Gallery of Australia, comments in response to the debate began in the 1970’s about whether the art museum was a temple or a forum,

The notion of the temple has been breaking down in the past twenty years, although it makes occasional residual soundings. It is the spirit of cultural democracy that has been the predominant philosophy among art museum directors. While respecting the work of art as the raison d’etre of the art museum, cultural democracy aims to embrace the art institution as primarily educational, a transformative zone that is value-free, neutral and egalitarian, open to all.

but, Kennedy continues,

the more traditional view of the art institution as purveyor of values is making a comeback.¹

Kennedy, however, comes down strongly on the side of greater cultural democracy in his call that the National Gallery of Australia must be a call to the assertion of meaning, an active agent for the vital role of the visual arts in society.² In the context of Kennedy’s advocacy for the vital role of the visual arts in society and the agency of the art museum to this end, now is a significant time in its history, for both the wider institution as a whole, and its educators.

In the international arena educators are at the forefront of change that is taking place in museums and they stand to play an important part in adapting the institution to this change. The emergence of educators in Britain and the United States as a forceful presence in museums poses a challenge to longstanding values, structures and practices, that can transform the art museum in terms that have implications for what it means to educate. However, I have argued, that in the Australian context art museum educators have been slow to rise to these challenges. They have been conspicuously absent from the debate which challenges the art museum to reform pedagogic practice.

As outlined earlier, this thesis has been inspired by two questions which are central to the concerns of The New Museology: I have asked: are there impediments to the attraction of broad democratic audience to art museums? If so, what are these impediments?

I have argued that an effective pedagogy in the art museum has been encumbered by internal institutional aspects of its own practice, such as the disparate discourses of education and curation, alongside social forces and intellectual frames, such as cultural elites and modernism, that have informed its historical development and shaped museological practice. A consequence of this has been that the public art museum has tended to consist of a body of visitors and members who enter of their own volition, and, until recently, with little active effort by the institution itself, to seek audience groups beyond the self-selected core.

In this thesis I have identified and examined issues relating to an effective art museum pedagogy in the context of larger debates about cultural literacy, equality of opportunity, new perspectives in the interpretation of visual culture, and contemporary research into learning. These issues I have investigated in order to gain insights into the role the museum plays in the provision of public learning, in the domain of art. And, in a sense, I have been inspired in this study to find a theoretical base on which the complexities of a pedagogy in the art museum might be founded. However I am mindful of Jonathan Culler’s idea, that,

theory should be understood not as a prescription of methods of interpretation but as the discourse that results when conceptions of the nature of meaning of texts and their relations to other discourses, social practices and human subjects become the object of
Culler’s maxim represents a move away from ideological constraints, outlined in my study, consequential of much twentieth-century art museum practice, and a move toward new possibilities for weaving together the seemingly disparate threads of art museum discourses into a single fabric, a fabric into which a new pedagogic practice might be integrated.

The arguments of my study have been made to elucidate the problems and issues in art museum education, to resolve practical issues, and to identify tensions of conflicting institutional missions. My objective in this has been to open a gateway for an effective pedagogic practice in the art museum. By this I mean to enable a more effective and intelligent pedagogy that is inclusive of wider and more diverse audience groups and which engenders an understanding of, and pleasure in, art. For this, both theory and research must be provided. It is by interpreting works and developing an appropriate aesthetic discourse and meaning for its publics, old and new, that the art museum may help to create a meaningful experience for everyone. There is need for research into how art is understood so that the creative intuition of effective museum professionals can be systematised and disseminated to other museums.

I have reviewed the key concepts of *The New Museology*, which focus on the purpose of the museum, and more recent literature in the field, to position my argument in a contemporary context. I have drawn on the (still relevant) work of Pierre Bourdieu in raising questions about how art museums best increase access to their resources for the educationally and socio-economically disadvantaged people who are under-represented among its visitors. I argue that it is important to place art museum education in the context of the aspirations for public learning generally, that the art museum could lead development in public learning, soliciting and enabling intellectual access for new audiences.

In the first chapter of my study I argued that the main tenets of *The New Museology*, with its democratic, audience focussed concerns, makes a seminal contribution to the field of inquiry into the educational practices of the art museum. In *The New Museology* writers have raised important questions - such questions:

Who are museums for? Who Visits them? Whose knowledge is acquired, stored,

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preserved and presented in them? How is this knowledge organised? How do visitors respond to exhibits? What is being communicated overtly and covertly by objects, interpretation, building, space, education programs etc? Are there impediments to the attraction of broad democratic audience to museums? If so, what are these impediments?

I have indicated that analysis of, and inquiry into museological practices is informed and enhanced by the interdisciplinary work of cultural theorists like Tony Bennett, John Frow and Robert Connell. The work of cultural theorists enrich and challenge received understandings of museological practices by positioning the museum in a wider context, placing it at the centre of cultural policy and government. Bennett, Frow, and Connell contextualised the art museum within the theory, history and practice of culture.

In Chapter Two I argued that the historical tensions surrounding the art museums’ educational function, that is the critiqued conflict between the aesthetic position - that art speaks for itself - and a rationalist one - that museums are places for the transmission of knowledge - have to some degree been superseded by post modern tendencies to deconstruct and de-centre knowledge. In the current intersection of opportunities that are created by new interpretative frameworks reshaping curatorial practice, and new theories of learning, art educators need to undertake research studies to democratise and enhance the aesthetic experience; the single most recognised learning experience valued by art museum professionals and researchers.

The third chapter of my study highlighted the constraints of the modernist museum, which remained the idea of what a museum is for most of the twentieth -century, and is still today at the dawn of the twenty-first, what springs to mind when the word ‘museum’ is used. I argued that modernism operated as a formalist aesthetic validated by elitism creating a conflicted arena in the art museum in which pedagogic and curatorial practices have, for much of the twentieth-century, sabotaged each other. I argued that the idea of the art educator as the advocate of the visitor, while the curator is the advocate of the artwork, does not bode well for the educational enterprise of the art museum. Nor does the hierarchic internal structure, still evident in Australian art museums, in particular the National Gallery of Victoria, which

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organisationally positions educators as outclassed by curators. This implies that democratisation has a long way to go.

In Chapter Four I considered more specifically an historical case study of the development of public learning within the context of an Australian art museum. I explore the Art Gallery of New South Wales as a useful example of a site for investigation of a public learning program in the field of art. Isolating two periods of this institution’s public education service, the 1940s and the 1970s, I argue that these periods represent pioneering leadership in the domain of public education in the Australian context, through an awareness of, and commitment to, building the pedagogic base in the art museum.

Finally, in the last chapter of my thesis I examined how a new and more effective pedagogy for the art museum can be achieved. This led to my focus on national portrait galleries and new interpretative frameworks for visual art, which introduce the history of images rather than the history of art, thus representing a move away from the modernist paradigm of art as a record of the creation of aesthetic masterpieces, towards a broader understanding of the cultural significance for the historical circumstances in which artwork is produced, as well as their potential meaning within the context of our own historical situation and human experience. Drawing the main themes of my study together I have explored constructivist educational theory and argued for its value in application to the art museum in enabling individual learners to construct meaning and relevance based on their prior knowledge and experience. A constructivist learning environment is underpinned by the position that knowledge is relative, influenced by culture, needs to be explained and interpreted, depending on purpose, use and situation. Constructivist learning theory has useful intersections in the art museum with current theories of visual culture thus opening the way forward for new pedagogic practices.

The art museums’ pedagogic vocation.

This study has reviewed debate about the educational aim of the art museum and its access in terms of cultural democracy. I have established the key issues for this debate. This provides a basis for further discussion on future directions for public learning in the art museum. Means need to be devised which will give museum educators confidence in the educational value of their respective processes and programs. They need to know what they are accomplishing and
how they might follow up on successful approaches so as to reap even better results. Failure to ascertain the adequacy of their methods leaves art museum educators ill-prepared to build a base of scholarship that the field must have to establish its own intellectual foundations. Research and evaluation are tools and processes designed to enhance the achievement of goals in museum education, including the attainment of its own maturity. Implicit in future directions for learning in the art museum is the need for educators to undertake evaluation of their pedagogic practice.

I argue that one or more Australian higher education institutions should establish a centre or centres for museum education, to encourage and enable research, teaching and development in the field. The field of art museum education in the Australian context has great potential. Museum professionals working in the field need to foster dialogue and bring about initiatives for building the field. I conclude that current knowledge is insufficient to provide a theoretical basis for a thoroughly informed pedagogic practice in the art museum. It is imperative that further research is undertaken in the Australian context to resolve the questions raised in this study.

It is not that the field of museum education knows nothing about museum visitors and museum visitor learning. A growing body of research provides insights into who visitors are and what they do in museums. However, very little of this research is undertaken in the art museum, and, we have no proof that anything educational happens in the art museum. This subject is the theme of the Scholar Year 2001 - 2002 at the Getty Research Institute. This research project is devoted to exploration of attempts, past and present, to understand how art is framed by perception, experience, and judgement. The outcomes of the project may have valuable implications for both education and curatorial practice in the art museum.

My contribution to the debate on public learning and the art museum positions educational

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theory and practices in an historical and contemporary context, in Australia and internationally. In this thesis I have established a frame for critical analysis of past and present practice. I critically review the impact of modernism on the interpretation of art, and, on the facilitation of dialogue between art and visitors. Embracing contemporary theories of learning and visual cultural theory I propose new possibilities and directions for art pedagogy in the context of the museum.
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