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Archaeological Autopsy: Objectifying Time and Cultural Governance

Tony Bennett

Abstract

The increased interest in contemporary relations of culture and governance that has been prompted by the post-Foucauldian literature on governmentality has paid insufficient attention to the need to redefine the concept of culture, and to rethink its relation to the social, that such work requires. This paper contributes to such an endeavour by arguing the need to eschew the view that culture works by some general mechanism (of ideology or representation) in order to focus on the ways in which specific cultural knowledges are translated into distinctive technical and operational forms in the context of particular institutions and programmes of governance. In doing so, it draws on the perspectives of science studies and actor network theory and applies these to examine how the fabrication of the prehistoric past that resulted from the endeavours of the nineteenth century historical sciences was translated into distinctive technical forms in the context of typological museum displays. These developments are related to the changing objectives of liberal government and the emergence of an archaeologized structure of the self.

The current state of relations between the concepts of culture and governmentality is largely unsatisfactory. I say this, first, because it is clear that the conceptual inheritance that is put into play whenever the concept of culture is invoked needs to be carefully sifted if the concerns of earlier approaches to cultural governance are to be reframed in ways that are compatible with the perspective of governmentality; and second, because it is equally clear that this has not yet happened. The question is not one that concerned Foucault, and while governmentality theorists like Mitchell Dean and Nikolas Rose constantly stress the importance of culture within the new forms of self-rule associated with contemporary forms of neo-liberalism, their accounts depend on off-the-peg sociological versions of culture as a set of norms, beliefs and values which sit ill at ease in their new theoretical surroundings.¹ There is, as a result, little attempt to work through how the perspective of governmentality and the assumptions on which it rests – its understanding of the relations between the activity of government and the organization of the social, for example – might enjoin the need for rethinking the concept of culture and the role that it has played in social thought. This means that there is, in turn, little sense of the distinctive place which an

¹ See, for example, the role that culture plays in the accounts of neo-liberalism offered in Dean (1999) and Rose (1999).

appropriately refashioned account of culture might play within the concerns of governmentality theory more generally.

I have argued elsewhere (Bennett 2002a) that progress on these questions requires that at least two conditions be met. The first is that the analytical issues that are posed in relation to the concept of culture should be disconnected from the endeavor – which has characterized much of cultural studies and a good deal of sociology – to provide a general account of the relations between two separate realms: culture and society. It does not matter how these relations are finally construed: as ones of the determination of culture by society, as ones of the reciprocal intermediation of culture and the social, or – and we find this in some formulations of the ‘cultural turn’ – as ones in which social relations are constituted in the relationships between the identities produced by cultural or discursive practices. It is, I believe, the very enterprise itself that is mistaken and, from the point of view of the concerns of governmentality theory, unproductive in detracting from the respects in which the social – when understood as the result of specific governmental problematizations of conduct – can have no general form of the kind that such sociological accounts require as a condition of their intelligibility. The second condition is that, as a response to this difficulty, what is meant by culture within the perspective of governmentality needs to be more circumscribed, limited to the operations of those institutions comprising the ‘culture complex’ within which particular kinds of knowledge and expertise translate and organize cultural resources into ways of acting on the social – in the sense that I have given above – with a view to bringing about particular changes, or stabilities, of conduct. Art galleries, libraries, museums, and heritage sites are examples of what I have in mind here. These are all similar in bringing specific forms of knowledge to bear on the classification, arrangement, exhibition and distribution of cultural resources and materials arising from other practices.²

But there is a third condition, too: that of being able to account for the ways in which the distinctive forms of knowledge and expertise which characterize the ‘culture complex’ translate the resources with which they work into technical forms that make particular governmental programs practical and operable. Eschewing the logic that culture works by some general mechanism (of ideology, representation or hegemony) means that attention must be paid to the varying ways in which different kinds of cultural knowledge are translated into the varying technical forms through which new realities are produced and sustained, and brought to bear on the regulation of conduct. Yet it is here that the Foucauldian legacy is limited. It has long been clear within science studies that Foucault was better at theorizing the outcomes of particular *savoirs* than he was at accounting for how these were translated into particular technical forms in particular institutional settings in and through the working practices of scientists.³ The contributions of actor network theory to these concerns have, on the whole, been more influential. It is, then, to actor network theory that I shall look,

² The distinction proposed here is not a watertight one: the activities of the ‘culture complex’ also have significant consequences for how those cultural practices on whose products they work are themselves conducted. Phillip Fisher’s account of the respects in which the modern art gallery organizes contemporary artistic production is a case in point: see Fisher (1991).

³ I draw here, for this assessment, on the perspectives developed in Golinski (1998).

in what follows, for both theoretical and methodological guidance in seeking to identify how particular cultural knowledges are translated into particular technical forms in the context of specific programs of government. I do this by examining the role played by what Alan Schnapp calls ‘archaeological “autopsy” ’ (Schnapp 1996: 181) – that is, techniques for reading material artefacts as evidence of prehistory – within the governmental programs of late-nineteenth century museums of ethnology and natural history.

The ancients and moderns revisited

Suzanne Marchand provides a useful point of entry into these questions in suggesting that it is to the changing practices of nineteenth-century museums that we should look for the final chapter in the debate between the ancients and moderns. The context she has mind is Germany where, initially in local museums and then later, toward the end of the century, in the major national collections, museums served as the incubators for new forms of knowledge that were to prove crucial in the eventual victory of an anthropological view of culture over an older, more aristocratic view. Marchand characterizes these new knowledges (her list is historical geography, ethnology, art history, folklore studies, prehistory, archaeology, and palaeontology) as ‘the ethnological sciences’ on the grounds that they ‘all aspired, in one way or another, to convert material evidence into historical narratives, and usually expended their energies on the study of more or less exotic societies and eras with little in the way of written records’ (Marchand 2000: 181). Her contention, in brief, is that the increasing prominence of the artefact-based ethnological sciences contributed to a relative decline in the cultural authority of the text-based humanities. Acting like a Trojan horse, these sciences undermined the principles of classification that had underlain museums centered on the classics owing to the stress that they placed on the typical – that is, on traits shared by large numbers of artefacts – over the beautiful, or the uniquely distinguishing qualities of singular aesthetic objects. As a consequence, the older notion of culture as ‘acquired refinements’ gave way before the ascending influence of the anthropological view of ‘culture as a complex of traits and styles’ (181).

Broadly similar processes were at work in British museums over the same period. Here, too, the closing decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of new museums – most of them provincial or local – focused on geology, prehistoric archaeology or ethnology. And here, too, there were signs, by the end of the century, that the major national institutions – the British Museum, for example – were, however grudgingly, rearranging aspects of their collections to accord more significance to the typological principles of display that had been developed in the fields of prehistoric archaeology and ethnology.⁴ But it is also clear that, in Britain, this chapter in the struggle between the ancients and the moderns did not solely

⁴ See, for example, the account offered by Ian Jenkins (1992) of the extent to which aesthetic conceptions were eventually obliged to yield some quarter to the increasing influence of archaeological conceptions of the typical in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum. See also Caygill and Cherry (1997) for a detailed account of the faltering progress made in rearranging the British Museum’s collections in accordance with the principles of the typological method during the period of A. W. Franks’ influence.

concern a change in the relative influence of two different understandings of culture. For this has itself to be seen as part of a contest between two different programs of cultural governance reflecting fundamentally different conceptions of the kinds of cultural resources that would prove most relevant in the context of the newly developing forms of mass public instruction that characterized the period, and of the ways in which those resources might best be deployed to foster new forms of self – governance. However, it will be necessary, in developing this argument, to qualify Marchand’s thesis to take account of two respects in which the configurations of the intellectual field in Britain at this time differed from those in Germany.

The first has to do with the distinctive, albeit short-lived, fusion of concerns and methods that characterized the relations between the sciences that Marchand describes as ethnological and developments in natural history in the post-Darwinian development of evolutionary theory.⁵ This means that, at the very least, developments relating to natural history museums have to form a part of the picture in view of the very close associations – in personnel, intellectual orientations and political dispositions – that existed between these and museums based on ethnological, palaeontological or prehistoric archaeological collections. The second qualification is more substantial. It concerns the adequacy of the label ‘ethnological’ as a way of describing the distinctive concerns and orientations of this group of sciences. For this occludes the respects in which natural history, geology, palaeontology, ethnology and prehistoric archaeology saw themselves not just as object-based rather than text-based sciences, but also as practicing a distinctive kind of historical reasoning in view of their shared concern to reconstruct pasts (whether of the history of the earth, of life on earth, or of primitive civilizations) stretching back beyond the reach of written records.⁶

The nub of the matter at issue here concerns the relations between this group of sciences and the eighteenth-century paradigm of conjectural history. So called because it relied on retrospective speculation rather than experience or eyewitness accounts, conjectural history (a term coined by Dugald Stewart in 1790) was essentially concerned, in Mary Poovey’s formulation, with ‘how “rude” societies became “civilized” ’ (Poovey 1998: 215). This was a project which necessarily relied on conjecture given that, as Poovey again puts it, ‘one could not see, or read accounts of anyone who had seen, the transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural society’ (221). At odds with the forms of authority that had been constructed for the experimental sciences with their reliance on verification by authoritative witnesses,⁷ conjectural history fell out of favour in the early nineteenth century. It was, however, revived in the latter part of the century, mainly, as Russell McGregor notes, owing to

⁵ Huxley was an important figure here, especially in crossing the boundaries between natural history and ethnology– serving, for a while, as President of the Ethnological Society (see Edwards 2001: 134).

⁶ Huxley’s definition of ethnology as an umbrella term for the study of the physical characters, languages, civilizations and religions of imperial subjects also indicates that, in the British context, the term was not defined as a specific methodology of the kind that Marchand identifies in Germany. See Edwards (2001: 134-5).

⁷ See Shapin and Schaffer (1985), Shapin (1994) and Eamon (1994).

the influence of evolutionary theory (McGregor 1998: 21). This was, however, not simply a revival. The conjectural paradigm, in its late-nineteenth century form, operated in a much broader intellectual context as a set of procedures that was applied across the human and natural sciences to account not merely for the transition from rude to civilized societies but also for the history of the earth and of life on earth.⁸ One consequence of this was that questions concerning the origins of society were relocated by being placed in the contexts of these longer histories. The conjectural paradigm was also able to claim a new authority that was closer, in some respects, to that which had earlier been claimed for the experimental sciences. For when viewed in the light of the equation of distance from Europe with the prehistoric past that characterized evolutionary thought, the rock formations, flora and fauna, and human inhabitants of colonized territories – and their cultures – seemed to embody the possibility that the prerecorded past might be reconstructed not just conjecturally but with the added credibility of eye-witness accounts of its continuing presence within the present.

It is, however, not just for the sake of contextual accuracy that I think it preferable to describe this group of knowledges, in their British formation, as ‘the historical sciences’. An appreciation of their distinctive mode of historical reasoning is also crucial for understanding their role in organizing a new logic of culture and governance. For this depended on replacing the splittings of the self associated with aesthetic culture and the kinds of work on the self that these encouraged with a historical splitting of the self into its archaic and modern components, and the new kinds of developmental work on the self that this division made possible. There are, however, a couple of intermediate stages in the argument that need to be filled in before this contention can be sustained. I turn first to the ways in which the historical sciences organized a new network of relations between human and non-human actors in the process of making the prehistoric past.

Making prehistory

In his discussion of Louis Pasteur’s memoir on lactic acid fermentation, Bruno Latour is keen to distance his account of how science produces new objects from the relativist implications of those accounts of social construction which imply that fabricated entities are in some way artificial, not ‘really real’. This is true, for example, of those versions of the ‘cultural turn’ which view society or the social as being constructed by and through the linguistically derived relations of meaning which necessarily imbue all forms of social relation and interaction. For, in such formulations, the autonomy of society or the social is reduced to the degree that, the more culturally constructed it is, the more it seems to be indistinguishable from the cultural representations within and by which it is constructed. Latour seeks to distinguish his concerns from accounts of this kind by comparing the process through which Pasteur fabricates lactic acid fermentation – making it visible and articulable

⁸ A key line of transmission for these concerns is from Cuvier, who, in his conception of himself as ‘a new antiquarian’ (see Rudwick 1997: 183), explicitly drew on the vocabulary of conjectural history in describing his famed reconstructions of past forms of life, to Huxley who viewed the methods of natural history as a version of conjectural history (see Huxley 1882).

with other human and non-human actors – to that of ‘designing an actor’ (Latour 1999: 122). In doing so, he contends that, with each test that Pasteur sets it, the strength of lactic acid fermentation as an actor is enhanced. This leads him to the general conclusion that the autonomy of the entities produced by science and their force as actors increases in proportion to the work that goes into their fabrication. How might similar perspectives be applied to the concerns of the historical sciences and their relations to the prehistoric past that was shaped into being through their labors? It is here, I think, that Alain Schnapp’s notion of ‘archaeological “autopsy”’ is suggestive, for it calls attention to the respects in which the reality and autonomy of prehistory and its constituent actors were increased in proportion to the degree of success with which new archaeological modes of reading challenged literary based methods of historical interpretation. Relying more on sight and touch than on the principles of philological analysis, the methods of ‘archaeological “autopsy”’ comprised a series of moves through which the signs comprised by visible marks on the buried remains of earlier civilizations were read as material evidence for pasts beyond writing. Although seventeenth-century antiquarians had developed a rhetoric in praise of the primacy of the object, seeing in coins and inscriptions on archaeological finds more enduring, less corruptible and more direct forms of evidence than literary ones, it was not until the early eighteenth century that the rudiments of a systematic method for reading the past on the basis of the physical qualities of its artefactual remains were developed. These comprised early versions of what would later be called the typological or comparative method which allowed objects to be assigned to particular territorial cultures on the basis of common design traits, while also providing for their arrangement in historical sequences – from the simple to the complex – through the development of techniques designed to detect the progress of design traits through time.

The work of Christian Jürgensen Thomsen was especially important here. By using techniques for relative dating (seriation) that were specific to archaeological material and interpreting similar technologies as evidence of societies exhibiting comparable levels of cultural development, Thomsen’s work resulted in the ‘creation of a controlled chronology that did not rely on written records’ (Trigger 1989: 73). His three-age system (the stone, iron and bronze ages) translated this into a mechanism for classifying, managing and exhibiting artefacts. The contribution, in France, of Boucher de Perthes was to provide, in 1847, a means of integrating the sequential ordering of human technologies with the techniques of stratigraphical analysis developed in the sphere of palaeontology, thereby connecting human time with geological time and the time of natural history. This proved important in the establishment of human antiquity – finally achieved through the discovery of human remains at Brixham Cave a little more than a decade later – in providing a common chronology for flora, fauna and human artefacts which, by equating depth with age, overcame the objections that had earlier prevented human remains found in the same strata as extinct species from serving as proofs of human antiquity.⁹ Schnapp indicates how, once human prehistory had been fabricated in these ways, the principles of ‘archaeological “autopsy”’ which had made this possible continued to be developed, in the second half of the nineteenth century, in a manner which related

⁹ See, for the most detailed accounts of these developments, Grayson (1983), van Ripper (1993) and Rupke (1983).

these developments in archaeology to collateral developments in other historical sciences:

The scholars of the second half of the nineteenth century were staggered by the discovery of the great antiquity of man. Attracted by the progress made in the natural sciences, they wished to lay the foundations of a scientific archaeology free from the burden of antiquarian traditions. Typology freed archaeology from the tutelage of text; technology liberated it from the nature/culture dilemma; and stratigraphy from the local/universal paradox. Typology places the object in an identifiable time-frame and renders it useful as historical evidence. Attention to technological features, by establishing the 'natural' and 'cultural' components of each product, allows each object to be assigned its particular function. Stratigraphy adds another dimension: the object was buried by the action of depositional phenomena at the same time local and universal. Every object and every monument is destined to find its place in a general process of stratification which is linked to the history of the planet. (321)

This, then, is an abbreviated account of the processes through which— like Pasteur's lactic acid fermentation — new entities were fabricated through the procedures of the historical sciences. These gave rise to a whole series of new relationships between humans (primitives, moderns, ancestors rather than ancients) and non-humans (fossils, relics, missing links) which, through what Latour calls the mechanism of delegation, made it possible for the actions, long past, of dead actors to become active in the present. And this, in turn, made it possible for institutions in the present to 'mobilize forces set into motion hundreds or millions of years ago in faraway places' (Latour 1999: 189).

Latour's contention in an earlier study that each science works through 'a cycle of accumulation that allows a point to become a *center* by acting at a distance on many other points' (Latour 1987: 222) will help to amplify this point while also connecting it to my more specific concern with the relationships between the entities fabricated by the historical sciences and the practices of museums. This aspect of Latour's work has informed recent approaches to early-nineteenth century natural history museums in which the objects of natural history, increasingly disconnected from the collecting practices of gentlemen virtuoso, were reassembled in new and more systematic configurations as parts of colonial networks of science and government.¹⁰ The accumulation, in metropolitan centers (London, Paris, Berlin, New York), of flora and fauna from a variety of distant places and their assembly in new contexts and combinations permitted the development of abstract and totalizing frameworks of knowledge. This made it possible for those metropolitan institutions to function as 'centers of calculation', acting at a distance on a variety of peripheral locations by providing the intellectual frameworks within which the activities of agents in those locations could be organized. The paradox here (and it is one writ large in the history

¹⁰ See, for example, Gascoigne (1994) and a number of the essays collected in Miller and Reill (1996).

of geology, too)¹¹ is that centers of calculation devalue the knowledge that is located at sites of collection – that is, the places from whence objects are taken – in making a knowledge of objects dependent on an appreciation of their place within abstract systems of relationships which are only visible from those centers. George Cuvier’s elevation of the sedentary naturalist over the field naturalist offers an early and influential example of the logic at work here. The field naturalist, he wrote in 1807, may observe objects and living things ‘in their natural surroundings, in relationship to their environment, and in the full vigour of life and activity’, but he lacks the means of drawing comparisons between them, with the result that his observations are ‘broken and fleeting’ (Cuvier, cit. Outram 1996: 259-60). The sedentary naturalist, by contrast, may labor under the disadvantage that his knowledge of ‘living beings from distant countries’ is a secondary and mediated one so that a ‘thousand little things escape him . . . which would have struck him if he had been on the spot’ (260). But there are compensating advantages:

If the sedentary naturalist does not see nature in action, he can yet survey all her products spread before him. He can compare them with each other as often as is necessary to reach reliable conclusions He can bring together the relevant facts from anywhere he needs to. The traveller can only travel one road; it is only really in one’s study (*cabinet*) that one can roam freely throughout the universe . . . (261–2)

The Muséum National d’Histoire Naturelle, under Cuvier’s direction, performed an analogous function for the public: it provided for the public witnessing of nature’s order by bringing together ‘in one place the whole range of the natural order, which, in the ‘real world’, would never be found together in one space’ (Outram 1996: 256). However, this also meant, Outram adds, ‘that the visitor to the Muséum could see not only the denizens of many different parts of the earth’s surface together in one spot, but also the products of many different *eras* of the earth’s history’(256). This anticipated a significant aspect of the later development of evolutionary museums. It is true of all museums that what Frederick Bohrer calls ‘the presentness of the artefact’ (Bohrer 1994: 199) strives to overcome both temporal and spatial distance, rendering present that which is absent because it occurred long ago or is located far away. In the ‘strategies of presence’ which organized the exhibition practices of late nineteenth-century ethnological and natural history museums, however, the ‘long ago’ and the ‘far away’ were superimposed on one another through the network of assumptions which equated what was distant from Europe with its prehistory. This maneuver, whose operations in anthropological discourse have been traced by Johannes Fabian (1983), also applied to geology and natural history in the expectation, for example, that the maritime exploration of the Pacific would allow Europeans to overcome both space and time in bringing back the past – the living past of forms of life that were extinct in Europe – from far away. The most famous example of how the colonial structure of natural and human times overlapped in this

¹¹ David Oldroyd has applied Latour’s perspectives to the social relations of nineteenth-century geology, showing how the British Geological Survey functioned as a center of calculation in allowing successive generations of geologists to visit distant collecting sites with a better knowledge of regional geological formations than local residents because of the accumulating information system produced by the Survey. See Oldroyd (1990: 340-52).

respect is John Lubbock's contention that 'the Van Diemaner and South African are to the antiquary, what the opossum and the sloth are to the geologist' (Lubbock 1865: 336). However, we can also see this structure at work in the system of equivalencies that was established between the fossils found lying on the surface in the 'far away' of Australia with those excavated, through coal mining, from the deep past of Europe (Desmond 1982: 14-5, 148-9).

It is, however, the lamination on top of one another of the temporal-spatial coordinates produced by the different historical sciences that I am most interested in here. At a later point in *Science in Action*, Latour suggests that to suppose 'that it is possible to draw together in a synthesis the times of astronomy, geology, biology, primatology and anthropology has about as much meaning as making a synthesis between the pipes or cables of water, gas, electricity, telephone and television' (229). From the perspective of contemporary science, this is no doubt so. However, the closing decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by precisely such a synthesis in which these historical sciences – whose development had hitherto proceeded along more separate lines – were compacted, temporarily, into a close and cohesive unity. The result, as Henry Pitt Rivers put it, was 'a band of union between the physical and cultural sciences which can never be broken' in which 'history is but another term for evolution' (cit. Thompson 1977: 40). It was in this context that the typological method inherited from Scandinavian archaeology, but interpreted more expansively, played a key role in stabilizing, managing and administering the relationships between the pasts that had been produced by the coordinated labors of these sciences.

Administering the past

The two main defining principles of actor-network theory, John Law has argued, are those of *relational materiality* and *performativity*. The first, as he elaborates it, applies the semiotic principle of the relationality of entities to all materials rather than only to those that are linguistic. If this principle entails that entities acquire their reality from the relations within which they are located, this also means that 'they are *performed* in, by, and through those relations' with the consequence that 'everything is uncertain and reversible, at least in principle . . . never given in the order of things' (Law 1999: 4). The principle of *performativity*, accordingly, is concerned with how, in practice 'things get performed (and perform themselves) into relations that are relatively stable and stay in place' (4).

Latour attributes a key role to institutions in the processes through which entities are stabilized (albeit without ever becoming permanent), since, as he defines the term, 'institutions provide all the mediations necessary for an actor to maintain a durable and sustainable substance' (Latour 1999: 307). While there have been several attempts to apply the principles of actor-network theory to museums,¹² David Jenkins' discussion of the relations between fieldwork, classification and labeling comes closest to describing the role played by museum practices in fabricating, stabilizing and administering new entities. The labeling of objects at the site of

¹² See, for example, Hetherington (1999).

collection, effecting their archival inscription from the outset; the translation of objects into a two-dimensional visual grammar through the drawings that are made of them as they are accessioned; and their translation into a classified inventory recording the provenance of each object: these processes, Jenkins contends, have two main consequences. The first consists in a 'a reduction of the empirical world to new, more easily manageable objects that are, in Latour's phrase, "mobile . . . immutable, presentable, readable and combinable with one another"' (Jenkins 1994: 254). And the second arises from the relations between these different stages in the processing of the museum object. 'Each step – field collection, proper labelling, archival systematization, and museum display – was', Jenkins argues, 'apparently linked to the prior step, ensuring the authenticity and stabilizing the meanings of ethnographic collections' (255). The case he has in mind are the systems developed for the processing and systematization of ethnographic artefacts developed in the late nineteenth century, paying particular attention to the typological method which, Jenkins argues, allowed those artefacts to be arranged in terms of criteria that were simultaneously evolutionary and bureaucratic. Under the influence of Henry Pitt Rivers and, subsequently, Otis Mason at the Smithsonian Institution, the typological method – which arranged all artefacts sequentially along a linear axis of development from the simple to the complex – had been developed from its Scandinavian origins into a universal means for the evolutionary calibration of all cultures. It provided, as Edward Tylor summarized it, 'a set of object lessons in the development of culture' (Tylor, cit. Rudler 1897: 57). This is not to suggest that it was the only method for arranging evolutionary displays: Mary Bouquet (2000) has drawn attention to the continuing influence of genealogical trees in providing a point of connection between earlier biblical genealogies and evolutionary thought. The significance of the typological method, however, was precisely that it provided a means of breaking with scriptural or, more generally, text-based histories to the degree that it was conceived as functioning analogously to the taxonomies governing natural history displays.¹³ It played a crucial role in this respect in translating new forms of intellectual authority based on experimentation, observation and verification into technical mechanisms capable of challenging the sway that text-based forms of knowledge had previously exercised over the organization and interpretation of the artefactual field. And it was through this, its technical form, that the typological method provided a new set of principles for administering the relationships between objects and, thereby, rendering those relationships relatively stable and durable.

The administrative or, in Jenkins' terms, bureaucratic virtues of the typological method derived from the transformation it brought about in the status of the museum object. For it was no longer, as it had been in traditional museum disciplines, the object's singularity or uniqueness that counted but its substitutability – that is, its ability to stand for other objects of the same type representing a stage within a developmental sequence. To the degree that it was now both moveable and repeatable, the museum object was able to take on a new role as part of an expanded network of museums in which otherwise dissimilar objects were – in Law's terms – so performed that they were able to perform the same function of representing equivalent stages of development. By according objects, no matter what their cultural

¹³ See, for a discussion of this understanding of the typological method in the work of both Pitt Rivers and Henry Balfour, Coombes (1994: 118-19).

provenance, the role of representing stages within universal evolutionary sequences, the typological method established a system of equivalencies between otherwise dissimilar objects which allowed them to circulate between collections and, by filling in the gaps in order to make up complete evolutionary series, to make good the deficiencies that would otherwise occur.¹⁴

The typological method thus introduced into the cultural field principles of repeatability and substitutability that had previously been associated exclusively with natural history and geology museums.¹⁵ It functioned, in this respect, as the museum equivalent of the invention of movable type. Henry Balfour realized this when comparing the relative advantages and disadvantages of geographical versus typological principles of display for ethnological collections. While the former might serve best for large museums with extensive collections relating to particular localities, Balfour was in no doubt concerning the value of the typological method for smaller collections. By allowing objects not regionally connected to be placed in the same sequence to illustrate evolution, it allowed museums to draw on objects from unrelated collections in order to assemble the prehistoric past and illustrate its evolutionary momentum. Nor was he in any doubt as to the virtues of the typological method from the point of view of the development of a national museum system. It provided new principles of exchange to govern the circulation of objects between museums to the degree that one museum might buy or borrow objects from another to fill up gaps in its evolutionary sequences, just as another museum might be willing to part with such objects to the degree that it already possessed a surfeit of objects which (however dissimilar they might be in other respects) were, typologically speaking, substitutable. His reasoning was, in these respects, tellingly similar to that deployed by museum geologists in their concern to reform local collections so that they might provide educational series whose gaps would be filled by drawing on central repositories (see Knell 1996).

The typological method thus served to so arrange objects that they could perform their function of making the new pasts of prehistory, and their direction, visible realities. It did so, moreover, in a way that made it possible for those pasts to be duplicated and multiplied to fuel the rapid proliferation of new museums of ethnology and natural history that characterized the closing decades of the nineteenth century owing to the importance that was attached to them as machineries of popular instruction intended

¹⁴ By the same token, however, this procedure made the individuality of specific cultures invisible. This was the nub of Franz Boas's objection to the effects of the typological method as deployed in Otis Mason's displays at the Smithsonian Institution: see Stocking Jr (1999: 171-2).

¹⁵ But not, it has to be said, with notable long-term success. It is, Carla Yanni notes, precisely because museums based on cultural artefacts tend to stress the singularity and uniqueness of their collections that they occupy a more important position within tourists' itineraries than do natural history collections. Visitors to Cairo go to the

Egyptian Museum to see the mask King Tut, she observes, or to Rome to see the Sistine Chapel 'but few out-of-town visitors in Cairo or Rome wander into the museums to look at stuffed sparrows' (Yanni 1999: 10).

to carry the messages of the historical sciences to the masses.¹⁶ The Horniman Museum offers a good example of how the functioning of objects was transformed as a result of a scientific rationalization of the museum environment. Originally established as a private museum, the Horniman Museum's collection was initially arranged as an assemblage of national and colonial curios reflecting the personal interests and obsessions of its owner, the tea merchant Frederick Horniman (see Levell 1997). Once the Museum passed into the ownership of London County Council in 1901, however, it was subjected to a rigorous and extended program of rationalization in order to transform its collections into evolutionary displays with both an ethnological and a natural history focus (see Coombes 1994: 115). The description, in the 1908 *Annual Report*, of the rearrangement of the relations between the Museum's departments gives a clear idea of the principles underlying this rationalization:

The most important change in this department during the year has been the removal of the Egyptian collection from its former position in the Natural History Hall. The mummies are now conveniently placed in the South Corridor, and most of the other Egyptian antiquities are in the section of Magic and Religion, to which they properly belong. The space left vacant by the Egyptian collection is being filled up with the specimens upon which the future section of Physical Anthropology will in part be based. In this section it is proposed to illustrate the zoological affinities of man by means of specimens and preparations of allied animals (apes and monkeys), and to give the outlines of the more important external and skeletal differences that exist between the various races of man. (6)

The rearrangement described here made possible a programmatic approach to acquisitions and exhibition planning of a kind that had not previously been possible. And it did so precisely because the commitment to arranging evolutionary series allowed gaps to be identified where, in an earlier collection philosophy that stressed the singularity of the object, none had previously existed. Equally, though, those gaps could then be filled by judicious acquisitions in which it was not the individuality of the object that mattered but its ability to be fitted in the place prepared for it. This aspect of the typological method is made especially clear in a report prepared by Henry Balfour in 1890 in which he advised, in connection with his work on the Pitt Rivers collection, that 'it has been and would be in the future possible to greatly improve the existing series by filling up gaps in their continuity, or to add a new series, and so to advance greatly the educational value of this unique collection' (Balfour 1890: iii). Lee Rust Brown notes the operation of a similar principle in the late-eighteenth century arrangement of the *Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle* in which Enlightenment classification allowed a space to be reserved for everything as yet awaiting discovery to complete its microcosmic assembly of the world. 'The Museum', as he puts it, 'could afford to welcome all new facts precisely because it was sure that every new fact would disappear into one *lacune* or another, and bring its

¹⁶ David van Keuren has estimated that, of the 71 new museum collections established in Britain in the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s, 28 were natural history collections and five ethnological collections – a figure which compared with three such collections established in the whole of the preceding part of the century (van Keuren 1982: 155).

encyclopedic representation of the world a step closer to perfection' (Brown 1997: 103). The typological method operated with a different set of relations between objects and spaces in which the latter were to be filled by the former only to the degree that they could connect two points in a line of evolutionary development. But the principle remained the same – with the significant difference that the typological method applied this principle to the field of cultural artefacts as well as that of natural and geological specimens.

Evolutionary showmen, culture and time management

These, then, are among the procedures through which the new entities of prescriptural pasts were fabricated, brought into relation with one another, stabilized and – in museums – organized into networks of human and nonhuman actors. There was, however, another key stage in this process. In his discussion of Pasteur, Latour notes how, toward the end of his experimental scenography, Pasteur autonomizes the lactic acid fermentation that his experimental labors have produced by presenting this as an entity that has now simply to be observed ('we have before our eyes a clearly characterized lactic fermentation'). 'The director', as Latour glosses this passage, 'withdraws from the scene, and the reader, merging her eyes with those of the stage manager, *sees* a fermentation that takes form at centre stage *independently* of any work or construction' (Latour 1999: 132). In a similar way, the new entities fabricated by the historical sciences were, in being translated into museum displays, ushered forth in their own right, set free from the labor of their construction. In his proposals for the contexts in which natural history specimens would best be displayed, Thomas Huxley envisages an equivalent act of withdrawal on the part of the curator:

The cases in which these specimens are exhibited must present a transparent but hermetically closed face, one side accessible to the public, while on the opposite side they are as constantly accessible to the Curator by means of doors opening into a portion of the Museum to which the public has no access. (Huxley 1896: 128)

On the one side of a hermetically-sealed glass divide, the curator lays out his specimens in accordance with the principles of evolutionary science, giving them a reality of their own by remaining wholly back-stage; on the other side, the public, denied access to the back-stage area in which the curator organizes the *mis-en-scène* for his specimens and determines what roles – of narrative and representation – to accord them, observes what has been placed clearly before its eyes (see Figure 1).¹⁷

¹⁷ For a discussion of the background to this aspect of Huxley's proposal, see Yanni (1999: 144ff).

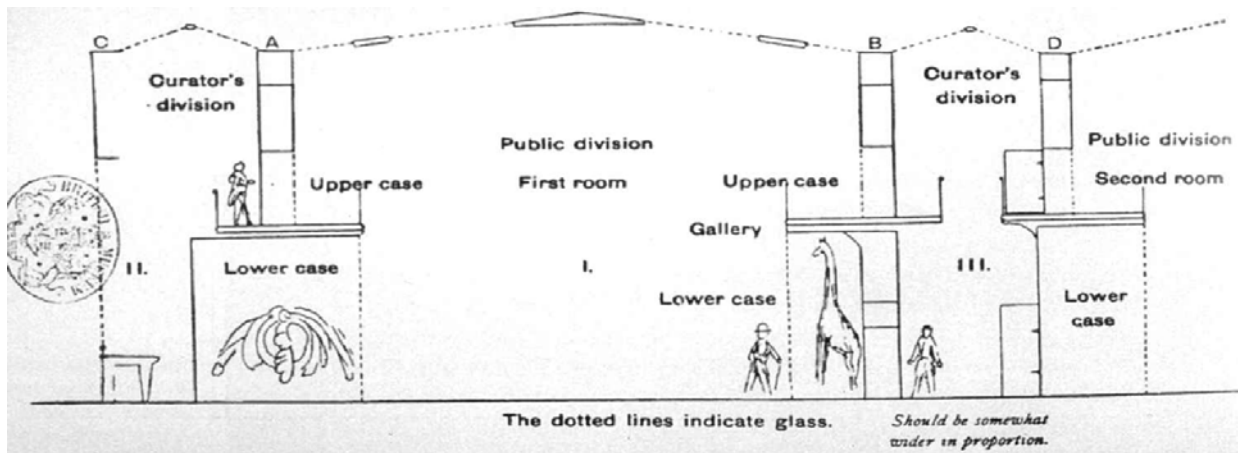


Figure 1. Object Ventriloquism

It was through practices of this kind that the public was installed in its place to absorb the lessons of the evolutionary sequencing of a series of newly fabricated pasts as objects that had hitherto served different functions (fossils, human and animal remains, tools, weapons, etc.) were now performed as new entities in which, to borrow a term from Norbert Elias, they served as key markers of a new 'temporal conscience'. Elias coins this term to describe how 'the external compulsion coming from the social institution of time' is converted 'into a pattern of self-constraint embracing the whole of life of an individual' (Elias 1987: 11). This is precisely what E. P. Thompson (1967) was concerned with in his classic essay on the emergence of time-work discipline in the clocked time of the factory and whose central insights Graeme Davison extends in his perception that the 'the clock on the wall or in the waistcoat pocket is but the metronome for a soul already singing to the music of modernity' (Davison 1987: 6). There is, however, another aspect to the temporal conscience that was fashioned under the influence of late nineteenth-century modernizing discourses, one that operated through the partitioning of the modern self into a division between its newly discovered archaic and primitive components and – given the threat of degeneration – the fragility of its progressive and modernizing components. And it was in their attempts to convert this division into a site for a progressive working of the self on self that the historical sciences aimed to convert the new realities they had fabricated into instruments for new forms of self – governance consistent with the principles of liberalism, that could – recalling my earlier theme of the struggle between the ancients and moderns – challenge the claims of aesthetic education in these regards.

These claims were initially developed, Poovey suggests, in the context of the collapse of absolutism which gave rise to a need for new ways of rendering individuals 'thinkable as governable subjects' (Poovey 1998: 147). In place of strategies aimed at rendering the population knowable through abstract and impersonal forms of calculation monopolized by the sovereign authority, and in place of government by decree and a reliance on coercive means of securing obedience, the emerging forms of liberal government operating in the relations of the market and civil society depended increasingly on new forms of self-rule.

The discourses of aesthetics – crystallizing into an identifiably distinctive formation

in the course of the eighteenth century – played a significant role in relation to these new forms of self-government in laying out the self in the form of a set of divisions between its cultivated and uncultivated components which allowed new forms of internal action of self on self to emerge. While originally forming a part of a renovated culture of civic humanism and, as such, restricted to the cultivation of virtue on the part of the landed and mercantile classes, this aesthetic technology of a multiply-divided self was subsequently grafted on to forms of self-governance with – at least in aspiration – a broader social reach and circulation. It was an active component in the eighteenth-century culture of taste which provided for a work of self on self through its influence on the organization of practices of consumption, just it was later to prove influential, in its Romantic version, in providing the moral vectors for programs of popular schooling.¹⁸ And it was also, of course, caught up in the history of the art museum, providing, the discursive ground on which – in its nineteenth-century conception – the public art museum was to discharge its obligations as a reformatory of public morals and manners.¹⁹

By the late nineteenth century, however, the labors of the historical sciences had supplied the conditions for the development of a different organization of the self. This provided the vectors for an alternative program of self-governance in the division it established between the self's primitive and archaic components on the one hand and the progressive momentum it derived from the impetus of earlier phases of social development on the other.²⁰ We are perhaps more familiar with this architecture of the self from its subsequent history in the context of Freud's work and its translation, there, into a set of psychoanalytic techniques of self-management (see Otis 1994). There is, however, little doubt that the emergence of this 'archaeological structure of the self' was first associated with the historical sciences and their attempts to marshal this, in the context of both popular schooling and museums, as a part of programs of liberal government that would serve as an aid to social progress by producing and managing the tension between the self's archaic and progressive components in favour of a dialectic of development in which the latter would gain sway over the former.²¹

A brief discussion of the role played by culture in Huxley's understanding of the architecture of the self will help to make my point here. For Huxley, in *Evolution and Ethics*, the self is governed by a vertiginous division between two layers in which 'the innate aggressive impulses of the ancestor' are moderated by 'the acquired social restraint of the cultured being' (Huxley 1893: 20). It is only by putting the accumulated results of culture into play within the self, and thereby equipping it in each generation with the means of advancing rapidly to the highest levels of civilization, that social development – as a process with an ongoing and incremental logic – is made possible. As is the case with Matthew Arnold, these formulations

¹⁸ See, on the first of these questions, Brewer (1995), and, on the second, Hunter (1988).

¹⁹ I have discussed this elsewhere; see Bennett (1995).

²⁰ For a good example of the case that was made for the role that the historical sciences had to play in liberal education – and for an advocacy of their virtues *vis-a-vis* those of the classics and aesthetic education – see Huxley (1868).

²¹ I have explored these issues more fully elsewhere: see Bennett (2001 and 2002).

stress the place that culture should play in mediating the relations between the separate components of a divided self. The difference, however, is that the Huxleyan self is divided by the temporal coordinates constituted by the historical sciences rather than by the a-temporal structure of the aesthetic relations that mark the division between Arnold's better and lesser selves. Both conceptions, it is true, provide a justification for state action in the cultural sphere as the means by which the struggle that takes place within the self might be reconciled in favor of its civilized, and civilizing, components.

Nonetheless, the coordinates within which this struggle is set are different to the degree that relations of historical time are not centrally implicated in the organization of the Arnoldian self or the kind of work of self on self that it enables. Relations of time are, however, central to the coordinates within which the Huxleyan self is formed as they are also to the role that culture plays in mediating the relations between its divided components. The logic of this divided self, and of its inscription in the programs of 'evolutionary self-management' that characterized Darwinian liberalism, is, in these ways, a by-product of the fabrication of prehistory that had resulted from the work of the historical sciences.

Some conclusions

If the main drift of my argument in the foregoing holds true, there are good reasons for doubting that simply adding and mixing available sociological accounts of culture to the perspective of governmentality will yield either a properly theorized account of the relationships of culture and governance which characterize 'modern societies' or a satisfactory means of engaging empirically with the analysis of those relationships. At the same time that it disqualifies the logic of earlier sociological problematics in which culture and society are presented as two separate-but-connected realms whose separation/connection requires some general theoretical specification, the perspective of governmentality opens up the field of changing governmental problematizations of the social as an alternative theoretical setting for the concerns of cultural analysis. It does not itself, however, provide the means of rethinking how those concerns should be pursued within such a setting or of translating them into new and distinctive programs of inquiry.

In proposing a corrective to this, I have suggested, first, that an analytical engagement with changing governmental problematizations of the social requires a theoretical focus centered on the activities of the 'culture complex' consisting of those institutions in which specific forms of knowledge and expertise are invoked in attempts to organize cultural resources in ways that will allow them to be brought to bear on the regulation of conduct with specific ends in view. I have also suggested that the methods that have been developed within actor network theory for studying how entities are fabricated offers a useful model for examining how the application of specific forms of knowledge and expertise to the cultural field produces new entities and renders these into technical forms that allow them to function as key cultural operators in governmental programs which aim to work on the social through the regulation of the self. Bringing these two perspectives together in this way has the additional advantage of moving the ground of cultural analysis clearly away from the

logic of separation/connection characterizing those sociological approaches to culture/society relations in which – whether by symbolizing or legitimating them – culture’s role is seen as supplementary in relation to processes and forms of power deriving primarily from the dynamics of society. For in both actor network theory and the perspective of governmentality – and in the intrication of their concerns that I have proposed here – power is theorized as being immanent to the processes and relations in which it is produced and exercised.

That said, it is important to place limits on what might be expected from the intermixing of these two perspectives. For what I have proposed does not amount to a totalizing account of culture that can substitute for or displace the full range of issues that might be addressed under the headings of the sociology of culture or cultural studies. Its remit is the more limited one of providing a means of engaging with the specific issues that are posed when cultural resources of particular kinds become tangled up with particular kinds of knowledge and expertise in the context of specific governmental programs. It is with this in mind, as well as the similarity of the moves that I have proposed to those that have characterized the history of science studies, that this specific nexus of concerns might best be explored under the heading of culture studies. This, however, is an argument whose fuller development will have to await another occasion.

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