

Thesis
3038

University of Stirling

Department of Marketing

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**Consumption and Cultural Commodification:
The Case of the Museum as Commodity**

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Ph.D.

October 1997

Abstract

Marketing theory has traditionally sought explanation of commodity consumption based upon psychological and economic assumptions of needs, utility and exchange value, a paradigm of understanding that is becoming increasingly problematic. An alternative perspective of commodity consumption is presented, drawing on contemporary social and cultural theory where the commodity form constitutes a cultural and social logic; a discourse of communication which consumers use to mediate and participate in daily life. Instead of defining commodities in terms of use value and economic value, the commodity is seen in terms of a specific subject-object relation experienced in late capitalism, manifest as sign value and sign exchange.

Taking the case of the museum, a context that it increasingly applying the terminology of the market, consumer and commodity; a qualitative research project is undertaken to assess the credibility of the cultural theoretical approach. It is proposed that the museum functions as a site of commodification, presenting history and culture as a set of commodities for visitors consumption. Whilst sign value is a useful concept in explaining commodity consumption, it is suggested a clear distinction between use value, exchange value and sign value is unworkable in practice and that utility and exchange value can be most accurately represented as cultural conditions rather than economic ones. The study suggests that consumption should be conceptualised as a constructive, active and productive process which involves the consumer in a continual exchange, use and manipulation of signs. The role of marketing is thus most appropriately thought of as a facilitative capacity rather as a provisional or directive force that mediates consumption behaviour.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge several people for their support and encouragement throughout the preparation of this thesis. I owe a great deal of thanks to Professor Mike Saren who acted as my doctoral supervisor. His willingness to entertain my often eccentric and confused propositions provided me with a great deal of confidence to continue with the project and see it to conclusion. I am also grateful to several other members of the marketing department at Stirling for tolerating and occasionally agreeing to participate in discussions about my research.. I wish also to acknowledge the staff of Glasgow Museums for their help and participation in the project, I am particularly indebted to Antonia Lovelace of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum for the time and interest she has shown.

I fear that the motivation to begin and complete this piece of work would have never have arisen without the continual friendship and support of my brother, David Fitchett. His knowledge of critical and cultural theory has been a permanent source of insight and revelation to my often limited social scientific way of seeing the world. Despite my ignorance's he has never turned down any of my numerous requests to revisit Barthes yet once more, or clarify Baudrillard's order of simulacra for the umpteenth time. Similarly, I wish to thank James Bott for his patient interest in the thesis and willingness to engage some of the concepts and ideas in alternative settings and contexts.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my family who have supplied unconditional financial and emotional support for my academic ambitions, especially my mum and grandmother. Few sons could hope for a more dedicated mum than mine for she has not only listened patiently to my naive teachings on consumer culture, but she was also content to read every word of the thesis to assist in its final preparation and submission.

One would assume that being lucky enough to draw upon such a noble group of aids and confidants as those mentioned above could result in nothing short of a masterpiece and if it were not for my input I am sure that it would be so. Obviously, they are in no way accountable for the scholarly content of what appears on these pages; any defects in the thesis are my responsibility alone.

*James A. Fitchett,
Stirling, 1997.*

Declaration

In accordance with article A7.2 of the University of Stirling's Calendar as summarised in "Regulations for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy", I, the author, hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and the work it embodies has been done by myself. The author declares that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree elsewhere or at any other time.

Signed:  Date: 31st March 1998

James A. Fitchett

Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services and material goods. This now constitutes a mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings but by objects. Their daily exchange is no longer with their fellows, but rather, with the acquisition and manipulation of goods.¹

Introduction to thesis

When the first consumer behaviour and marketing researchers began to build models of consumption, the process was generally considered to be confined to the exchange of consumer goods and services between organisations and individual consumers. The principles of exchange as posited in economic science seemed to provide all the necessary elements to explain consumption phenomena. The prevailing behavioural and cognitive psychological models of the time fitted well with economic assumptions concerning basic utilitarian human needs, accounting for rational economic exchange in the market place. The realm of consumption and markets was clearly confined to the shopping mall, the market place and the supermarket. Those areas that fell beyond these spaces: social welfare, the arts, education and so on, tended to only be given serious consideration by sociologists and cultural theorists rather than by economists and marketers.

Social and cultural change in the last half century or so has enabled the terminology and philosophy of the market place to become increasingly applied to activities and spaces from which it had been previously excluded. Consumption has gradually replaced production as the major discourse of contemporary society. It has come to occupy the social and cultural environment to such an extent that

increasingly no activity can avoid having to see its audience, clients and patrons as 'consumers'. The services and products being offered by these institutions are represented as consumable, marketable commodities. For doctors, the patient has earned consumer rights. Museum curators have had to direct some of their attention away from activities guided by the principles of historical preservation and education, to concentrate on the presentation of a tourist product for the pleasure of visitors' consumption. For an increasing number of social organisations (even entire nations), it has become worthwhile to develop carefully cultivated brand and corporate images which can be disseminated to potential consumers via elaborate advertising and public relations exercises.

Some quarters of the consumer research academy, such as the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) in North America, have responded to these changes by incorporating alternative models and theories of consumption into consumer research. Anthropology and cultural studies, for instance, have been drawn upon extensively as a source of different perspectives and explanations of everyday consumption phenomena. This has created somewhat of a crisis in the discipline between those who cling to tried and tested orthodox models and methods, and groups of 'radicals' who seek to abandon their economic heritage in favour of a host of alternative theoretical positions.

The scope for progressing the discipline in response to this '*commodification*' of culture is considerable. It is not only an opportunity for consumer researchers to embrace alternative methodologies and theories. Consumer research, and marketing more generally, has the opportunity to progress and expand its

academic scope and range of enquiry beyond (but not necessarily in place of) economics and psychology. In this '*Golden Age*' of consumption marketing has emerged as a contemporary multidisciplinary subject occupying a vantage point over all aspects of culture and society. To realise this opportunity, it is essential that consumer researchers become as familiar with cultural studies as they are with economic and psychological explanations of consumption. If we were to undertake a S.W.O.T analysis on the current state of the marketing discipline then the turn to culture should be included as an opportunity, not a threat - a strength rather than a weakness. To implement this strategy however, it is essential that the necessary skills are acquired and a new tool box assembled. It is not sufficient for consumer researchers to simply incorporate social theory into their studies, they must begin to write their own social theories of consumption. Marketing as a discourse of enquiry is in a better position than any other to comment on consumption and commodities but it can only realise this potential by addressing social and cultural theory in a comprehensive, critical manner.

This study is motivated by these aims and objectives. It seeks to move beyond the conventions of economic consumer behaviour and address the *culture* of consumption. To achieve this end the focus of the thesis is the 'commodity' - in all its guises, because a cultural understanding of the commodity form is crucial to a culturally orientated marketing and consumer research project. When we talk about the consumption of tourism or the consumption of healthcare, what we are really referring to is the commodification of tourism and the commodification of healthcare. This thesis sets out to understand those systems, those ideologies

within culture, that have enabled all that is experienced and all that is lived to exist as commodities for consumption.

The first chapter undertakes a review of the multiple disciplinary perspectives that address consumption and the place of the commodity within them to begin to develop a cultural understanding of commodity consumption. The second chapter develops a review of the theories relating to commodification in more critical detail. It begins with a review of Marxist political economy, progressing to Baudrillard's subsequent critique of Marx and a structural, semiotic theory of commodity exchange. Chapter three introduces the empirical study into museum consumption providing a review of existing theory concerning the museum as a 'consumable' commodity. Chapter four develops the interpretive research methodology used in the examination of museum consumption. Chapter five and chapter six present the findings of the interpretive study. Chapter seven concludes the thesis with a summary of the research findings and a discussion of the implications for further research.

PART I
**Review of Literature and Concepts
Concerning Commodities
and Consumption**

CHAPTER ONE

Commodities and Consumption

Only the Object is Seductive

And so the cruel story of the women to who a man has written a passionate letter and who asks him in return: "What part of me seduced you most?" To which he replies, "Your eyes," and receives by return mail, wrapped in a package, the eyes that seduced him.¹

1.0 Chapter summary

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the concepts 'commodity' and 'consumption', and their importance in market exchanges. Section 1.2 identifies from the literature, the main approaches to the study of consumption as Economic Man, Psychological Welfare, Social Display and Material Culture. Section 1.3 introduces a cultural interpretation of the commodity and commodity exchanges, drawing on Marcel Mauss' anthropological writing on gift exchange. Following Arjun Appadurai it is proposed in section 1.4 that rather than thinking of the commodity as a certain kind of 'thing', it is more useful to think of it as a stage or period in the life of an object. Section 1.6 concludes the chapter with an example that looks at the commodification of Albert Einstein, his life and his work.

1.1 Commodities and consumption in marketing exchanges

The logic of exchange, that central concept in marketing theory (Bagozzi, 1975), requires a recognition and understanding of two different concepts: a 'commodity', that article to be exchanged, and a 'consumer', that person who is able to engage in the exchange and acquisition of that commodity. If we were to take a walk through any town or city centre we could not fail to notice that commodities can

potentially be manifest in potentially infinite varieties and forms. They can consist of any type of material or substance and, in the case of service commodities, may have no physical form at all.

Marketing theory has traditionally been primarily occupied with understanding the consumer rather than the commodities that form marketing exchanges (Belk, 1995b). The title 'consumer behaviour' which is applied to the vast majority of marketing courses that are directly concerned with consumption is but the most obvious illustration of this direction of interest. Consumer behaviour research has traditionally been accused of having an interest in consumption for the purpose of providing tools that allow commerce and business to manipulate and exploit the consumer (Alvesson, 1994). This criticism has been levelled especially at the consumer motivation research conducted during the 1950's (Dichter, 1964) and remains a common perception of consumer behaviour research today (Belk, 1995b). While debates concerning why people consume, what it exactly means to be a consumer, how consumers and consumption should be studied and for what reasons continue (Holbrook, 1987), very little attention has focused upon the nature of commodities themselves. One possible reason for this apparent lack of critical attention toward the commodity form in marketing and consumer research is, as Marx (1976) remarks:

'A commodity appears, on first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood.'

A central argument to this thesis is that an understanding of the commodity, how it is formed, how it is exchanged and ultimately consumed, should be of primary

concern to marketing and consumer behaviour researchers. This is of even greater relevance in light of current trends in contemporary society in which the marketing and consumption of 'non traditional'² commodities is becoming a salient feature.

1.2 The garden of the forking paths: four perspectives to theorising consumption

Consumption is too large an issue to fall under the sole jurisdiction of any one academic discipline. The study of modern consumption is in itself a kind of sociology of the contemporary world. Investigating the economics of consumption will undoubtedly reveal something about the characteristics of the economy at large, a sociological study into consumption eludes to the structures of society itself. A startling feature of all the various discourses that approach the subject of consumption is that they are at once highly interrelated with one another yet also inextricably divided. The collected papers in the edited volume '*Acknowledging Consumption*' (Miller, 1995) show that consumer behaviour research is but one amongst many subjects that have made important contributions to the explication of modern consumption. For the context of this study the various approaches have been grouped together into four main camps that draw broadly on the disciplines of economics, psychology, sociology and anthropology³.

Consumer research has, over the last two decades or so, become far more eclectic in the range of approaches and disciplinary areas that it draws upon and incorporates into its study. Whilst it is true that consumer research maintains its strong heritage with economic and psychological principles, together with a supposed application to managerial and marketing practice, the dominance of this approach is lessening. Holbrook (1985) proposes that consumer research should

continue to move away from its conventional disciplinary allegiances, to a state where it is considered to be an interdisciplinary subject in its own right which serves to represent the numerous parties and perspectives for whom marketing and consumption are of concern. Fine & Leopold (1993) suggest that consumer research has become multidisciplinary rather than interdisciplinary and that on the whole, consumer research which claims to incorporate other perspectives often fails to do so critically and comprehensively⁴.

Although consumption has been split into four separate camps here, it is important to note that there are significant overlaps within and between all of these approaches. As will be seen, economic approaches in consumer behaviour are connected with specific psychological schools of thought, anthropological perspectives with economics and sociology.

1.2.1 Economic man and material welfare

Despite calls from Holbrook (1985) for consumer behaviour research to become an independent area of enquiry in its own right, the current state of the discipline remains as an appendage to marketing research which developed as a subject from early twentieth century classical and neo-classical economics (Belk, 1995b). Consequently, economic theories of consumption have traditionally had the most impact on the way consumer behaviour researchers views consumption and consumers. In economic terms, consumption is defined as the opposite of production. If production is taken as the constructive application of human labour, land and capital in a creative capacity, then consumption is the destruction of

those products. Strictly speaking, a consumer good is something that can only be used once (Sutton, 1995). Consumption is taken as the end use, the eating up, or the destruction of the commodity by the consumer. The economic commodity can be simply defined as a valuable thing where value is determined by utility and price.

Economic theories of consumption stem from utilitarian moral philosophy (Bentham, 1987), the rationale being that human beings have needs which they are motivated to satisfy through the consumption of commodities. Needs are considered to be innate or natural rather than socially constructed or culturally determined. Classical economic theory⁵ assumes that individuals behave rationally and seek to maximise utility through consumption. Engel et al. (1990) reflect the economic perspective to consumer behaviour when they state:

‘Consumer needs are real, and there is undeniable benefit from products or services that offer genuine utility’ (Engel et al., 1990, p14).

The economic consumer is understood to have unlimited needs and wants but limited resources which s/he can use to satisfy those needs (Stanlake, 1989). This being the case, the consumer will choose those commodities that will provide the most satisfaction. It therefore follows that those commodities that provide the most satisfaction will be considered to be of the highest value and be in greatest demand, where value is defined as the maximum amount that a person will pay for a good (Sutton, 1995). Consumer behaviour research has focused much of its attention on the way rational consumers discriminate and choose between different

commodities. The consumer is thought of as a decision maker choosing between the various alternative commodities that the market can offer.

'The whole marketing plan rests on assumptions about how consumers make choices. Therefore the concepts of value, cost, and satisfaction are crucial to the concept of marketing' (Kotler, 1991).

'Economic' consumer behaviour research has drawn on three main psychological schools of thought to describe consumer decision making behaviour: motivation research in the 1950's, behaviourism in the 1960's and cognitive psychology in the 1970's and 1980's. Although all three approaches to understanding the consumer differ, they all treat the consumer as a being who responds to various environmental stimuli in a drive to satisfy given needs and wants.

Campbell (1987) amongst others argues that economic assumptions about consumers having innate needs and make rational choices to satisfy those needs are problematic. Many aspects of consumption and consumer behaviour, if not most, are concerned with pleasure rather than needs. Consumption is a hedonistic and often irrational activity and cannot be explained by adhering to principles of utility alone.

1.2.2 Psychological welfare: desire and identity

Psychological perspectives on consumption and consumer behaviour draw upon two quite distinct psychological discourses, the most dominant being the relationship between economic man and psychological processes (Lunt, 1995) as

summarised above. The second application of psychology comes from the tradition of psychoanalysis. Since the early 1980's, some consumer researchers have turned to what can be termed *experiential* aspects of consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Rather than conceiving of the consumer as a rational decision maker motivated to satisfying innate material needs, the irrational, hedonistic aspects to consumption are stressed. Consumer behaviour is considered to be a manifestation of desires operating at an unconscious or sub-conscious level. From this perspective consumption is seen as central to the construction of personal identity, that is, the way consumers represent themselves to themselves and to others. Consumer goods are used as symbolic representations of the self (Belk, 1988) and consumer behaviour a process of constructing, communicating and maintaining one's sense of personal identity. Lunt (1995) suggests that recent research has moved away from the notion that commodities provide symbolic utility towards an exploration of the way that commodities provide opportunities for self expression and personal development. Psychological approaches thus focus on the consumer as an individual in a world of goods who interacts with commodities in various ways to achieve desired psychological states of being.

Psychoanalytical approaches look further into the human subject to explain the human drive to consume commodities. For Freud (1917/1977) the concept of 'desire' is rooted in biological, instinctual human drives that can be traced back to childhood development, for example:

'Freud's (1917) classic work on anal eroticism includes the claim that adults' relation to material possessions stems from early experiences, particularly toilet training. On the basis of clinical observations, Freud argues that individuals that display strong attachments to material possessions had childhood histories characterised by difficulties in toilet training and a strong interest in their own faeces, which they were reluctant to give up to others' (Ditmar, 1992, p32).

Some material possessions such as automobiles (Fromm, 1978; Solomon, 1992) are seen as having sexually symbolic meanings. Consumers seek to use and acquire commodities as substitutes for various psychological desires that are lacking. Lacan (1979) develops Freud's psychoanalysis to suggest that desire and the unconscious is not psychologically grounded but culturally, or more accurately, linguistically determined (Bowie, 1991). Lacan proposes that the pre-verbal child lives in a pre-symbolic world where the self has yet to be recognised as discrete from the outside world. As the human child enters into the linguistic world (a publicly shared world of representation through words and language), termed by Lacan as the *symbolic*, a split in the ego occurs and the child comes to define his or her identity against this other world of representation. Entry into the symbolic is connected with a recognition of absence or lack. The commodity can be described as that which is external to the human subject and consumption rooted in an unconscious desire to reconcile this 'other' into the self.

The importance of Lacan's writing is that desire for commodities, whilst unconscious, is nevertheless culturally determined. Others go on to argue that the culture of capitalism creates human beings as desiring machines (Deleuze and Guattari, 1977) to fit in with the commodities capitalist industries produce and need them to buy (Bocock, 1993). From this position we can conclude that human

beings have to learn to become consumers rather than it being the result of natural motivation for material welfare. Consumption is a psychological state which people have to be socialised into as part of their transition from childhood to adulthood (McNeal, 1992). The economic assertion of consumption as an innate response to the material requirements of life thus becomes highly problematic. Consumption and commodities have a *societal* context which needs to be acknowledged in this explanation of commodity consumption.

1.2.3 Consumer society, display, status and group identity

The transformation from an agricultural or pastoral society to an industrial society is significant in the development of consumer society. An increasing dependency on industry rather than agriculture resulted in major changes to the way the mass population worked and lived (McKendrick et al., 1982). As the traditional feudal structures of society gradually dissolved they gave way to a new system of social organisation and class structure. Veblen (1899) observed the rise of the new 'leisure class' of the *nouveaux riches* in the late nineteenth century for whom the 'conspicuous consumption' of clothing, personal adornments and expensive pleasurable pursuits became a central activity in the maintenance of status and social position (Simmel, 1971). Williams (1982) and Laermans (1993) show how the emergence of department stores in the major European and North American urban centres during the nineteenth century changed the whole social significance of commodity purchase, reflecting the broader social redefinition of leisure time and consumption.

‘The immense and rapid success of the early department stores not only resulted from their roles as leisure and ‘taste centres’ for middle-class women. The vast appetite for status symbols of the new middle class of professionals and employees was actually fostered by their particular conditions of living. A major portion of *the petite bourgeoisie* lived in steadily growing cities of the nineteenth centuries. The people living in these cities had to invent new ways of living, new habits, new forms of social interaction’ (Laermans, 1993, p98).

It should be noted that at this time the majority of people were unable to participate in the newly emerging society of consumption. They were either too poor or had little leisure time to spend outside the household (Bocock, 1993, p18).

It was not until the 1950’s that consumption became *mass consumption*, and the wider population, with higher disposable incomes together with an explosion in the amount and availability of mass produced commodities, were able to participate in consumer society. Members of society increasingly used consumption as the referent from which to judge quality of life. Systems of fashion and taste (Bourdieu, 1984) provide mechanisms to express relative social status and social standing. Whereas social position was traditionally determined by occupation, the onset of mass consumer society meant that social groups and class (market segments) could be more accurately represented in terms of lifestyle and consumption patterns.

From a sociological perspective consumption and commodities are analysed as consequences of specific social and historical conditions (Richards, 1990). Commodities carry socially significant meanings developed through systems of media, marketing and advertising. The type of commodity, together with the way that it is consumed, culminates as a form of social communication which members

of society use to express themselves and judge others (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Leiss et al., 1986). The sociological perspective thus recognises consumption and commodity use to be located in a specific social context which contrasts with classical economic theories of consumption⁶. Consumption is a social phenomenon that can be most accurately described as a kind of communicative discourse. The concept of the commodity can be extended to include goods that have little context of use but are valuable in social communication and display. Consumption and the commodity cannot be defined with reference to either a specific type of behaviour or a specific type of material. Any material and any social action can potentially become understood in terms of consumption and commodity relations since it is their social context, and not their internal characteristics, that define them as such.

1.2.4 Material culture and the 'world of goods'

Of the four positions discussed here, anthropological theory regarding consumption takes the most macro perspective towards consumption. Cultural approaches to consumption, and macro issues more generally, (Belk et al., 1996) have become increasingly common in consumer research and marketing to the extent that it would not be inaccurate to categorise consumer research in the 1990's as macro and culturally orientated. Some writers have even gone as far to suggest that marketing should be thought of as the 'anthropology of consumption' (Grafton-Small, 1987; Levy, 1978). Whilst it is becoming more common for consumer behaviour research to include some level of cultural analysis, terms such as 'culture' are generally defined in specific ways which can result in somewhat

restricted cultural theories of consumer behaviour. The continued dominance of the economic approach has resulted in a view of culture that is *economically* defined. For example, Schiffman & Kanuk (1987) state that '*culture exists to satisfy the needs of people in society*'. This view of culture, whilst highly compatible with existing economic paradigms of consumer behaviour does not reflect the complexity of anthropological theory regarding consumption.

The anthropological perspective seeks to understand the relationship between the structure of society and its material culture (Miller, 1987). All cultures, and not just consumer culture, have a material dimension where objects and material are credited with culturally significant or symbolic attributes. Anthropology and material culture studies are typically thought of as involving the analysis of 'other' cultures, showing how objects are central to cultural phenomena such as myth, magic, rituals and religion in which material objects are considered to have sacred, supernatural or highly symbolic meanings.

The material culture perspective contributes to a further understanding of the commodity and consumption in two ways: by identify traits of material consumption in non capitalist societies (For example Gell, 1986) and by applying anthropological constructs to an understanding of modern consumer culture⁷ (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996; Askergard & Firat Fuat, 1996; McCracken, 1986, 1988; Fox & Lears, 1983). Russell Belk, amongst others, has integrated both implications of material culture by demonstrating the magical (Belk, 1995a) and mysterious (Belk, 1991) characteristics of contemporary commodities. Miller (1993) for instance identifies Christmas as a modern social ritual. From an anthropological perspective, Christmas can be viewed

as a consumption religion complete with a deity figure, practices and activities which all centre around consumption and commodities (Belk, 1987). Consumption related material such as advertisements (Barthes, 1972, 1983; Hutcheon & Hutcheon, 1987), and films (for example, Holbrook & Grayson, 1986) can be interpreted as a form of modern mythology which express mythical ideals through the medium of consumption and goods.

The material culture perspective provides a generic framework for investigating the cultural dimension to material possessions and objects across historical and cultural boundaries. Whilst recognising that different cultures relate to material in alternative ways, they all nevertheless relate to material. This provides a level of consistency between different cultural forms, that is, all cultures can all be understood to have commonality in that they involve a material dimension.

‘Instead of supposing that goods are primarily needed for subsistence plus competitive display, let us assume that they are needed for making visible and stable categories of culture. It is standard ethnographic practice to assume that all material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural analysis upon their use as communicators. In every tribal study an account is given of the material parts of the culture. Like us members of a tribe have fixed equipment, houses, gardens, barns, and like us have durable and non durable things...But at the same time it is apparent that goods have another important use: they also make and maintain social relationships’ (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996, p38).

The approach taken toward consumption and commodities by anthropologists appears on the surface to contrast with an economic approach because goods are perceived as having a role far beyond the concerns of material welfare and subsistence. But on another level the two approaches are remarkably similar. The

economic perspective proposes that human requirements for goods are innate and natural and cannot be confined to specific cultural forms. The anthropological perspective, whilst rejecting the primacy of utility and functionality, supports the idea that all cultures (modern or pre modern, capitalistic or non capitalistic, western or non western) can be understood as having a material dimension. In this respect both approaches conclude that consumption and commodity exchange exist beyond any one particular form of social organisation.

The material culture perspective thus pre-empts political and historical readings of consumption that argue for consumption and consumer culture to be thought of as a singular cultural phenomenon located in the ideologies and social relations of capitalism. Miller (1995) argues that the assumption that consumption is intrinsically linked to capitalism, or that we are increasingly dominated by the world of goods which has diminished our humanity, is an inaccurate and essentially mythical construct that has little theoretical or empirical support. The popular intellectual notion that consumption has a negative effect on the human subject and the community at large (Gabraith, 1958; Marcuse, 1955; Riesman; 1950; Capek & Gilderbloom, 1992) is thus seen to be a highly problematic assumption. The consumption of commodities is a culturally 'natural' and socially legitimate expression of the material culture of the modern world.

1.2.5 Towards an integrative working definition of commodities and consumption

To summarise, commodities can be thought of as any conceivable '*thing*' external to the consuming human subject. Commodities are consumed for a diverse set of reasons including material substance, social display, to satisfy desire and at a macro level, to structure culture, cultural categories and cultural practices. Consumption or the act of consuming can be interpreted in many ways: as the using, acquisition, purchase or functional application of commodities for social display, maintenance and struggle for personal identity and the sense of self, as a form of social and cultural communication, or as a form of action and participation in cultural events and activities.

At this point in the discussion our understanding of consumption and the commodity form appears to be applicable to absolutely any thing, behaviour and action, in any social, cultural and historical context. Whilst this may add support for the assertion that these concepts require detailed consideration, it also presents the danger of making them unusable in practice. There is of course the underlying truth that consumer research has a vested interest in maintaining the importance of consumption for it further legitimises and justifies the discipline as a whole. When a concept takes on a totality of meaning, i.e. it can be applied to anything and everything, it also becomes inapplicable and meaningless. Because it is impossible to use a collective approach to define what consumption and the commodity *is not*, it is also becomes impossible to define what it *is*. The desire for clarity and definition however cannot be used to justify a limited view of consumption. It is simply not

feasible to think of commodities only as useful things such as branded goods and products which consumers consume for the satisfaction of some need or want. For instance, some commodities that are offered to the consumer via the market do not have any functional application or physical substance as such, they can be best described as nothing more than images, ideas or symbols (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992a). For marketing theory to retain relevance it is vital that an understanding is gained of all kinds of consumption related issues. It is necessary to establish and understand the processes which mean that an image can no longer be considered just an image, but a commodity image, a symbol a commodity symbol. To provide this perspective it will be necessary to move beyond the confines of purely economic explanations of the commodity and consumption and draw upon the extensive body of literature in anthropology, cultural studies and social theory regarding commodities and consumption. This work (for example, Burke, 1996) shows the origins of the commodity form to be implicated in the politics and ideologies of the modern world and the result of a complex set of social relations and cultural value systems.

The remainder of this chapter will seek to place parameters around the concepts of 'consumption' and 'commodity' so that they can be used constructively in the specific context of this study. This will undoubtedly mean that certain positions will have to be neglected and disregarded which will ultimately provide a point of contention and criticism from these ousted perspectives. This is an unavoidable consequence of looking at concepts with such a diverse application as these. But rather than seeking to reconcile this problem it will be more advantageous to

develop a critically substantial *view* of consumption and commodities, set within a set of specific academic discourses or paradigms.

To add definition to the concepts, consideration will now be given to a method for distinguishing the commodity by referring to that which it is not. To achieve this goal the following section presents a review of the literature on 'gift exchange' developed by the anthropologist Marcel Mauss.

1.3 Gift and commodity exchange

Societies organised in terms of gift exchange represent a totally different type of economic organisation to those organised by commodity exchange. The two systems of economic organisation produce distinct and separate forms of cultural relations between people and objects (Gregory, 1982). The principles of gift exchange, as initially defined in anthropological work of Marcel Mauss (1966), have been applied at a micro level to the understanding of modern gift rituals involving the giving and receiving of presents (Belk, 1979; Sherry, 1983; Otnes et al, 1993). However, the terms 'gift' and 'gift exchange' are applied here as a macro cultural dimension referring to a specific form of social organisation. The objective of this section is to show that commodities and the social relations of their consumption are culturally specific and can be located within certain economic and social frames of reference.

The discussion so far has introduced various approaches to consumption and commodities and has shown that there are both similarities and differences within and between them. Whilst the differences between them are clear, they all share a

commonality in that the commodity is taken to be an object, material or '*thing*' that is external to the consuming subject. In gift exchange a clear distinction between social relations (i.e. human beings) and the value of objects cannot be clearly isolated, they are inseparable components inherent to the significance and structure of the individual exchange taking place. Mauss (1966, p.11) provides the following example illustrating the gift exchange relationship. The extract is taken from a Maori informant who is describing the social relations governing the exchange and possession of objects in his cultural environment, which Mauss argues illustrates the dynamics of gift exchange:

Let us suppose that you possess a certain article (*taonga*) and that you give me this article. You give it to me without setting a price on it. We strike no bargain about it. Now, I give this article to a third person who, after a certain lapse of time, decides to give me something as payment in return (*utu*). He makes a present to me of something (*toanga*). Now this *toanga* that he gives me is the spirit (*hau*) of the *toanga* that I had received from you and that I had given to him. The *toanga* that I received for these *toanga* (which came from you) must be returned to you. It would not be fair (*tika*) on my part to keep these *toanga* for myself, whether they were desirable (*rawe*) or undesirable (*kino*). I must give them to you because they are a *hau* of the *toanga* that you gave me. If I kept this other *toanga* for myself, serious harm might befall me, even death.⁸

In this example the informant states that when he gives something away part of his 'spirit' (or *hau*) remains with the object and that when he receives something the 'spirit' of the giver (as well as the spirit of the giver to that giver), remains with the object received. This spirit is not simply an intangible appendage to the physical object but integral to its significance, the two facets of the exchange cannot be clearly separated. The social relations of the exchange incorporate the 'spirit' of the giver insofar as it is inappropriate to think of objects and social relations of exchange as distinct aspects.

Mauss proposes that in societies organised in terms of gift exchange, the cohesion of society is dependent upon building and maintaining reciprocal *debt* relations with others. Since everyone in society will give to, and receive resources from many other people, a social system of obligation based upon the 'accumulation' of social debts is established. The aspiration for social and economic autonomy cannot feature in societies organised in terms of gift exchange. One would not be obliged to, or have obligations from anyone else. These individuals would effectively be alienated from society and unable to participate in any aspect of social life, including exchange. In contrast to commodity economies, where the accumulation of personal resources and establishment of individual autonomy is a desired state of being, in gift economies the opposite is the case. The wealthiest people in gift economies are those that have the fewest accumulated resources but the most resources given to others as gifts. Although someone may give away his goods they are never alienated from the specific context of the initial exchange and those that receive these gifts are socially obliged to the gift-giver.

Many of the judgements that can be made about commodities, such as their relative value to one another, is not possible in gift economies. To illustrate this point an example will be considered that contrasts gift and commodity exchange:

Let us suppose that a consumer is seeking to acquire some commodity and that he can purchase his preferred choice from two different outlets. Both retailers are offering an identical product at exactly the same price and he makes a final decision on a trivial basis. After several months our consumer decides that he did

not like or require this product after all and decides to sell it. We will also assume that the person who purchases it from him underwent similar processes to those he himself underwent when he originally purchased it. The decision making process that our hypothetical consumer undertook seem perfectly reasonable and can be easily explained by consumer behaviour theory.

If a similar event were to take place in a society organised around the social relations of gift exchange several of the above processes could not take place. Our consumer would not be able to judge the various alternatives as comparable even though they may appear to be identical in every way. He would be unable to distinguish between the product, the current owner and the social relations of that specific exchange; nor would he be able to purchase the object outright and gain any absolute ownership over it, rather he would have to accept it as gift which would then oblige him to the giver. The product would always retain the identity of the original person offering it in exchange as well as gaining its significance from the specific exchange that took place. The future owner would not only have to accept the social relations of the current exchange as part of the product but also the exchange by which our consumer initially acquired it. The product that our consumer would have to pass on as a gift is essentially a different object to that which he acquired because the social relations that structure its exchange are different. His motives for disposing of the product would not be motivated monetarily but by the obligation the receiver would have toward him.

Let us suppose that he decides not to give the product to a third party but instead returns it to the person whom he originally received it from. This action would not

release him from debt and obligation because this second exchange would be perceived as being different to that by which he acquired it. If the gift was accepted he would simply be creating a reciprocal obligation from this person. The two debts would not cancel each other out since they are not equivalent to each other in any way, rather both parties would be in debt and obligation to one another.

Whilst Mauss' theory has been critiqued by numerous social theorists (e.g. Bourdieu, 1977) mainly on the grounds that it over emphasises the social context of exchange and disregards the personal motivation and strategy involved in such exchanges, it nevertheless establishes a crucial point; that commodity exchange is not the only form of object relations, and that commodity relations require certain cultural perceptions or beliefs to be in place on a socially wide scale concerning the relationship between subjects and objects. Commodity relations require materials to be perceived as being separate and discreet from the social conditions of their production, exchange and consumption. This establishes an equivalence between objects which enables different commodities to be considered comparable, despite the fact that the people that produced them and the reason why they were exchanged may be fundamentally different. These themes are crucial to an understanding of what a commodity is and how it is applied in marketing exchanges. In chapter two these commodity characteristics, as well as others, will be developed in more critical depth. In the next section the collected papers in Arjun Appadurai's (1986) edited volume '*The social life of things*' will be reviewed. Many of the contributions in this text can be seen as critiques of Mauss'

theory of gift exchange that further deconstruct and explicate the commodity form and consumption.

1.4 Commodities as a stage in the social life of things

Mauss's theory of gift exchange dislocates the commodity from the universal position it has in economics and places it in the context of specific social exchange relations. Appadurai (1986) goes beyond this understanding to show that the commodity is not only reliant upon specific social relations but that those social relations are themselves relative within any given cultural context. Appadurai shows that like other disciplines anthropological theory has developed within frameworks of binary opposition and difference of which the gift - commodity dichotomy is but one example. He does not dismiss the dichotomy but rejects the idea that any given society can only be organised in terms of one type of exchange relations. The major departure in Appadurai's introduction is the argument that within any given social context both forms of exchange relations can govern the significance of objects at different times and in different contexts of exchange, he states:

*'Let us approach commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterise many different kinds of thing, at different points in their social lives. This means looking at the commodity potential of all things rather than searching fruitlessly for the magic distinction between commodities and other sorts of things.. But how are we to define the commodity situation? I propose that *the commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past present or future) for some other thing is a socially relevant feature*' (Appadurai, 1986, p13).*

It thus becomes problematic to consider any given *thing* a commodity on the basis of its economic function or as the result of specific cultural or social infrastructures that are in place. Objects become commodities in certain exchange contexts and can either remain in that state or revert to some other discourse of significance governed by alternative exchange relations. It is therefore unnecessary to try and establish whether modern society has fundamentally different exchange relations to other societies since within in any given social context several expressions of exchange could potentially emerge alongside one another. It also counters criticism levelled at material culture approaches which tend to overstate the universality of the world of goods and disregard the specific phenomenon of consumer culture. Appadurai recognises that modern society is more inclined towards commodity exchange:

‘In modern capitalist societies, it can safely be said that more things are likely to experience a commodity phase in their own careers, more contexts to become legitimate commodity contexts and the standard of commodity candidacy to embrace a large part of the world of things than in non-capitalist societies’ (Appadurai, 1986, p15)

Kopytoff’s contribution to the text (Kopytoff, 1986) is relevant on two counts, firstly by relating Appadurai’s position to the activity of consumption and secondly by arguing that whilst commodity exchange can potentially emerge in various cultural contexts, the extent to which it is manifest in modern society requires specific attention:

'I assume commodities to be a universal cultural phenomenon. Their existence is a concomitant of the existence of transactions that involve the exchange of things (objects and services), exchange being a universal feature of human social life, and according to some theorists, are at the very core of it. Where societies differ is in the ways commoditization as a special expression of exchange is structured and related to the social system, in the factors that encourage or contain it, in the long term tendencies for it to stabilise and in the cultural and ideological premises that suffice its workings' (Kopytoff, 1986, p68).

Whilst accepting that the commodity form exists in many cultural contexts rather than being exclusive to modern capitalism, Kopytoff argues that analysis should focus on the way that the commodity form shapes and defines specific social systems within capitalism. The social implications of 'commoditization' differ depending on the nature of any given social system and it is this process that can be used to firstly demarcate contemporary commodities from commodities in general, and secondly to progress a detailed understanding of the commodity form in modern society.

The re-contextualisation of the commodity form requires the consumption function to be redefined. If the term 'commodity' represents a stage in the social life of an object, then consumption most accurately describes the behaviour and actions of people engaging objects that are currently defined as being in a commodity phase. If we take the commodity to be something that exists as a discreet unit appearing divorced from the social relations of its production and exchange, then consumption can be described as a process by which these discreet things are re-socialised or singularised back into relations between people. Put simply, if production *alienates* the object and defines it as a commodity, then consumption involves its de-alienation or *de-commoditization*. Gell's contribution puts forth a similar argument:

‘But consumption in general has nothing to do with the destruction of goods and wealth, but with their re-incorporation into the social system that produced them in some other guise. All goods from a sociological perspective are indestructible’ (Gell, 1986, p112).

Gell (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) propose an alternative to the classical economic understanding of commodity production and consumption. Consumption is taken to be a highly productive function (and production a consumptive one) which involves the continual re-cycling of resources by one group and then by another. Production processes (manufacture, assembly, service provision etc.) consume resources to produce an end product for exchange in the market (a commodity) and consumers acquire products that they subsequently exploit, use and absorb to produce or reproduce aspects of their own lives. Presumably some, if not most consumers are also involved in some kind of organised labour that is applied (consumed) in the production of other commodities which eventually end up in the marketplace for individuals to acquire. From this perspective consumption and production are simply terms that describe the transition of materials from one form and their conversion into another (pictorially represented in figure two).

If we take a food product such as a cereal product as an example, its ‘*production*’ involves the ‘*consumption*’, or application, of labour, capital and other resources that the end user (by eating the product) applies to (re)produce his or own body. For the cereal crop to be successful it will consume all kinds of resources including the skill and expertise of the farmer, the physical nutrients and constituents provided by the land, as well as financial and capital investments; the crop will of course consume many more resources before reaching the market as a complete commodity. Once

acquired from the market the commodity is eventually '*consumed*' as food which contributes to the sustenance (growth, '*production*') of the consumers body. In order for this good to become valued as a food product that can be consumed, it must first cease to be a commodity, that is, it must no longer be primarily valued in terms of its exchangeability. Consumers with different tastes, preferences, lifestyles and so will no doubt value the same product differently. Some may value the product as a food product for children, others might value it as a cooking ingredient. However the product is valued and for whatever reason it is eventually used, it is necessary that individual consumers take the commodity and singularise, or de-alienate it by providing it with some other value other than one dictated by terms of exchange.

The market provides a mechanism for producers (manufacturers, organisations etc.) to represent their products as *alienated* commodities to potential consumers and for consumers (individual human beings) to *de-alienate* or singularise those commodities back into any given social or personal context.

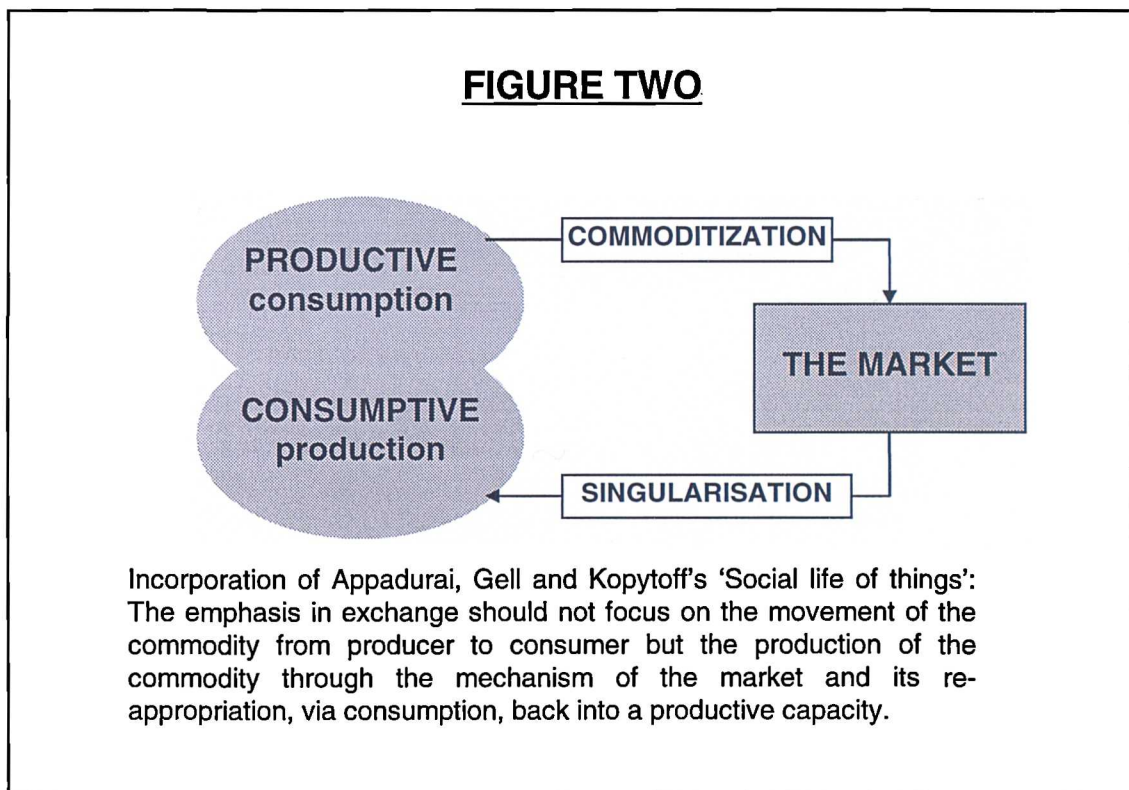
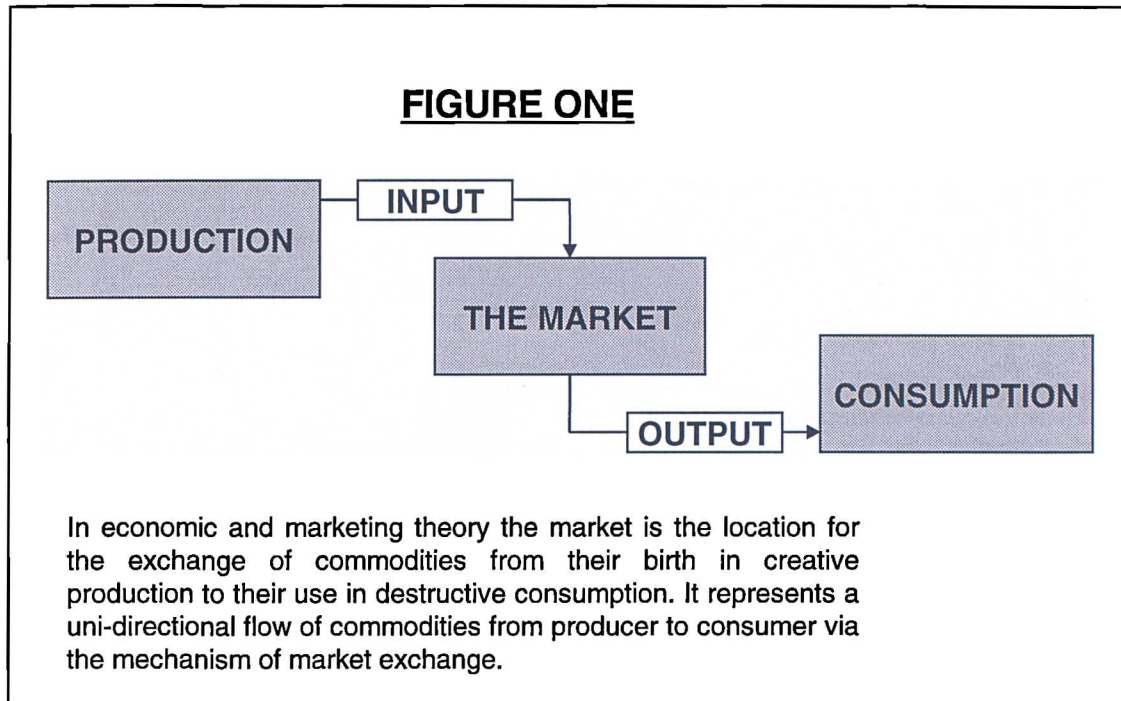
'Consumption in the universalistic sense of the term is simply a synthesis of entropic and negentropic processes; matter dissolving energy and maintaining or producing more complex and ordered forms of matter in an endless chain of destruction and construction' (Falk, 1994).

Distinction between the terms production and consumption can become meaningless in this understanding if continued to defined conventionally. The terms 'consumptive production' and 'productive consumption' (Gregory, 1982) capture the proposed conceptual framework more accurately

Consumptive production describes that process where resources are consumed in a productive process with the intention of being commoditized for market exchange. Productive consumption involves that process whereby commoditized material is de-commoditized and applied in a productive way by individuals. The distinction, though helpful to understand the proposed framework, is difficult to apply in practice if the role of consumer and producer are applied to specific people or groups. It is more relevant to think of consumption, production and commodities as a cyclical process which subjects and objects engage, and are engaged in, at various times in their social life.

One area of research relevant to this discussion can be found in the services marketing literature. The consumption and production of commodity services is not as clearly defined as it is in contexts involving the exchange of produced goods because production and consumption are inseparable and occur simultaneously (Cowell, 1992). In a service such as air travel for example, the provision, or production of the service (the flight) takes place at the same time as the customer 'consumes' it. This implies that in the case of services, production and consumption can most accurately be conceptualised as a process of concurrent provision and facilitation rather than as distinct and separate functions. Some writers have suggested that the consumption of services does in fact constitute a productive activity, that is, to consume the provision of some services the customer must co-produce them (Normann, 1984). This is termed by some as '*prosumption*'; whereby goods and services that were once exchanged in the market have become substituted by the activities of customers. For example, with do-it-yourself products, customers themselves perform roles that would have once

been undertaken by professional decorators and builders (Bhatti, 1993). In this sense, the terms '*prosumption*' and '*co-production*' relate directly to Gregory's (1982) definition of productive consumption.



1.5 Concluding remarks

This introductory chapter has served to begin our explication of the commodity and its relation to consumption. Several conceptual issues have emerged that will require further consideration in the following chapter. There is something about modern society that gives the commodity form a prime location. Although it is problematic to assume that commodity relations are only manifest in modern society, we need to acknowledge that they do retain an especially dominant position in a modern social context. Attention must therefore be given to the nature of modern society in an attempt to understand why the commodity form has attained this position and what the cultural and social consequences are as a result. It has also been shown that to understand the commodity form it is necessary to first understand the dialectic of subjects and objects and the manner in which they interrelate with one another. This is of course a detailed philosophical issue which cannot be gone into in depth but must be considered if only superficially. It has become apparent that the relations of exchange are fundamental to defining the commodity, as is the concept of *alienation*. But perhaps the most significant conclusion from this review is that the commodity must not be thought of as a *'thing'* (i.e. an object or material) but as a process or discourse that defines and shapes the object, Kopytoff (1986) referred to this process as *'commoditization'*.

Before proceeding with the next chapter. An example will be used to illustrate some of the issues introduced so far to help clarify and visualise what can often be seen as complex arguments and debates. The chosen example concerns the commodification of Albert Einstein.

1.6 An illustrative example: Consuming Einstein

The example of Albert Einstein has been chosen here for several reasons. The review of literature so far has demonstrated that the commodity form cannot be defined in terms of certain types of thing such as manufactured products and services but as a process that can potentially become applicable to any type of thing. This rather eccentric example intends to show how it is possible to apply the idea of commodification to an extreme case on the premise that if it can be credibly shown that Einstein's life and work have come to exist as a series of commodities then it is equally applicable to many other cases⁹.

Einstein is perhaps the most well known modern physicist of all time. His portrait would be accurately recognised by the vast majority of people. But why should this be the case? Why is it that a German Jew (at a time when German Jews were persecuted and discriminated against), whose work concerns highly complex theoretical physics which most people cannot really understand, become so famous? Although we believe that Einstein's contribution to science is very important, none of his work had any direct result on most peoples' life. Some would disagree with this statement on the grounds that Einstein was responsible for the creation of atomic energy and the nuclear bomb, but as White & Gribbin's (1993) biography shows, this is a common misconception which is due to media representation rather than any factual evidence. There is also a problem with using this as justification for Einstein's subsequent fame since the scientists actually responsible for developing the atomic bomb have not enjoyed the same degree of fame as Einstein, so it is problematic to conclude that this one incident could be responsible for Einstein's

current place in modern mythology. Minsser (1985) and Pais, (1982; 1988, 1994) both record how Einstein's popularity is due to the way the media represented his work and its significance to the general public. These systems effectively alienated 'Einstein' (not literally the man Einstein but his representation) into a public form that after a while took on all kinds of additional meaning and signification. But this does not provide sufficient support to conclude that Einstein has been commoditized, it would be more accurate to describe it a mythification or popularisation (Barthes, 1972). I will come to argue that both of these processes are linked with commodification in the next chapter, but before doing so I would like to consider some other aspects of the case of Einstein regarding his bodily remains. When he died in 1955 an autopsy was conducted. Whilst there is nothing unusual in this standard medical practice, what is important to note is that his brain and eyes were removed and preserved (quite literally alienated). Although the removal of his brain was undertaken on medical grounds, the premise being that analysing his brain may reveal something about scientific genius, it was not until 1994 that it was revealed that his eyes had also been preserved. Incidentally, nothing of significance was discovered from the analysis of his brain, it was no different physiologically to yours or mine. Whilst it can be said that these remains have objectified Einstein to a certain extent, this by itself, although very important, does not constitute commoditization since I have yet to present any evidence to suggest that a potential *exchange* is a salient feature of the value of these remains. However, when *'The Guardian'*¹⁰ ran an article on the pathologist responsible for removing Einstein's Eyes, it was revealed that he had kept them securely locked away in a New Jersey safe deposit box and was now attempting to sell them for a reported five million dollars.

It is not the objective of this example to argue that Einstein's eyes *are* a commodity. When they were secure within Einstein's skull they clearly were not, they were, quite simply, his eyes. But through various mechanisms of the media, objectification and mythification they became a commodity - and a very valuable one at that. Einstein's eyes, like his brain, are no different to yours or mine, they have no utilitarian value or functional application. But Einstein's eyes, and not yours or mine, are now a valuable commodity that can be bought, sold, exchanged and in some way consumed. It is not just Einstein's eyes that can be analysed as a commodity in this way but many other material things that have been alienated, objectified and commodified. Articles such as John Lennon's guitar, the boots that Neil Armstrong wore when he walked on the moon, rare birds' eggs, the gun that shot Kennedy (the list is quite literally endless) all started off as material with little value but at some point in their social lives became (or would be expected to become) commodities. This commodity status was not achieved through a manufacturing process in a factory somewhere, but in the cultural *mediascape* and through cultural (re)production. An economist might explain the Einstein phenomena through scarcity, showing that there is only one pair of Einstein Eyes which make them valuable, but this is more of a counter explanation, an attempt to squeeze an observed case into existing orthodox paradigms. A purely economic explanation cannot provide a credible explanation for this example since there is no context of need, utility or material basis to this case. A sociologist would argue that Einstein's eyes are useful in terms of social display and prestige, that who ever owns them would perhaps gain added reputation and status. The anthropologist may propose that Einstein's eyes are used to make stable categories of culture (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996), that they have a highly symbolic, mythological and almost

religious significance in the identity of western culture in the same way that the relics of saints were valuable in the past (Geary, 1986). It is difficult to imagine how a marketing manager or researcher would explain these phenomena but none of these explanations in themselves provide a totally adequate explanation for 'Consuming Einstein'. What is needed to provide this insight is an approach that can combine all these perspectives - an '*economic social anthropology*' of some kind.

This interdisciplinary perspective has been applied by several theorists. In the next chapter the works of two theorists that relate specifically to these concepts will be considered in detail. The first part of the chapter will give attention to the writings of Karl Marx, and the second part to the work of Jean Baudrillard. Many of the ideas and theoretical issues raised in this chapter stem from Marx's writing and the writings of the Frankfurt School of critical theorists that followed and developed his work. Jean Baudrillard has come to be recognised as one of the leading figures in contemporary social theory with regard to commodification and consumption. He is also closely associated with 'new French thought' and 'postmodernism' (Kellner, 1989). His early work had strong Marxist overtones which he later came to reject through a skilful combination of structuralism, psychoanalysis and political economy. Although these two writers are given specific attention here, their work should not be considered to be separate from the work of the theorists, anthropologists and sociologists considered in this chapter. Rather, the theory they develop is so central to contemporary understandings of the relationship between ideology and material culture that a comprehensive assessment of their ideas is essential.

CHAPTER TWO

Commodification

The fundamental codes of culture - those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices - establish for everyman, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.¹

2.0 Chapter summary

This chapter develops in more critical detail a review of theories relating to commodification. By way of an introduction, sections 2.1 & 2.2 undertake a discussion of 'commodification' in the context of modernity and capitalism, introducing various definitions of the term by eminent sociologists. Section 2.3 concentrates on modernist political economy theory and sociology with particular attention to the work of Karl Marx. Marx's critique of capital and the commodity, written in the late nineteenth century, is production orientated arguing that modern capitalist societies can only be understood in terms of the forces of production. Section 2.4 engages a discussion of contemporary cultural and social theory that has developed after Marx with particular attention on and around the work of Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard's writing on late capitalist, or post modern society is both a development and a critique of Marx. Baudrillard argues that the current organisation of contemporary capitalism can be legitimately examined by rejecting Marx's emphasis on production and observing society from the vantage point of consumption. Several aspects of Baudrillard's commodity will be considered including the progression of simulacra and the emergence of what is referred to as 'semiotic consumption', where the commodity form is seen to transcend the physical into a semiotic, or symbolic entity. The Chapter concludes with an outline of semiotic commodity consumption in section 2.5.

2.1 Commodification

Commodification describes that process by which potentially all aspects of everyday life can come to exist as commodities. This process is also referred to as 'commoditization' (Kopytoff, 1986; Hirschman, 1991) but also has a great deal in common with terms such as 'objectification', 'quantification' and

'industrialisation' as well as arguments regarding the 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer, 1993) and 'Coca-Colonisation' of society (Cinquin, 1987). The term 'commodification' is used here to describe a cultural and economic process that concerns the social relations between human beings and their material culture in contemporary capitalist society. Commodification is not only implicated in the economics of society but also involves an ideological and political dimension, all of which will be given consideration in this chapter. The prevalence of the commodity form is understood to have wide reaching effects on the cultural environment and cultural perception more generally, and does not simply concern the quantitative rise of consumer goods and services in modern society.

2.2 Commodification and Modern Capitalism

As the review in the last chapter demonstrated, there are disagreements between various disciplinary approaches as to whether commodities and the process of commodification can be historically located within the specific time and space of modern capitalism or, whether it is a cross cultural phenomena that extends far beyond this time period. This disagreement cannot be fully resolved here nor is the objective of thesis to focus specifically on this one issue. In an attempt to incorporate both perspectives, the arguments put forward here will follow Appadurai's (1986) lead by assuming that whilst capitalist commodity relations can exist beyond modern industrial conditions, the specific form of capitalism in modern society is unique and its historical origins can be located in the social and cultural changes that occurred in Europe over the last three or four centuries (see section 1.4). On this premise several issues require attention. It will be necessary

to consider the nature of modern capitalism and the social movements that led to its rise. This involves two levels of analysis, the first regarding capitalism, and the second concerning modernity or modernism. Each of these two subject areas is huge and have been the focus of several major academic movements and schools of thought which transcend the boundaries of any one academic discipline. The concept 'modernism' not only refers to a historically defined social or cultural period but to certain types of literature, artistic movements and styles of architecture. Although the philosophical underpinnings of all these expressions of modernism are related, this discussion will centre on those aspects of modernity that bear a relevance to an understanding of capitalism and commodities. This will require modernity to be thought of as an era, '*epoch*' (Marx, 1976) or '*episteme*' (Foucault, 1974) that relates to a period in the history of contemporary society. Viewed in this way, society is seen as a dynamic condition that has changed and is changing over time. We will avoid using terms such as 'progression' and 'development' since they imply a positive advancement of society whereas it can be argued from certain critical perspectives that terms such as 'regression' are equally appropriate. It also requires recognition of periods outside modernity, namely the pre-modern and presumably the post-modern.

2.2.1 The Ghost in the Machine: The philosophical routes of modernity

The origins of modernism are generally traced back the renaissance in Europe (Featherstone, 1992). During this period of 'enlightenment' a fracture in systems of belief redefined the fundamental assumptions about the nature of Mans

existence and his relation to the world. Pre-renaissance or middle age Europe was characterised by the dogmatic authority of religion and the authority of the state. Under these conditions the human subject could only be conceived of in relation to God. Those philosophers that proposed alternatives to the religious order of society were often discredited or deemed heretical for challenging the sacredness of theological doctrine. Philosophers at the time of the renaissance gave way to the 'age of reason' and the seeking of knowledge and truth independently of the church. Spinoza (1994) and Descartes (1970), two important enlightenment philosophers, both argued that Man was free to think and apply reason to understanding his beliefs and the world around him (Hollis, 1985). Enlightenment philosophy positions Man rather than God as the creative force of society and history. This in turn led to the birth of natural philosophy and then science as the legitimate path to truth and understanding (Seidman, 1994). Philosophers such as Locke, Hume and Kant (The 'Empiricists') argued against the doctrine of the church and the traditional feudal orders that supported it (Bowie et al., 1988). Locke opposed the divine right of kings and clergy to rule, proposing that all Men are equal. When the church argued against Locke's thesis, Hume and Kant defended it on the grounds that nothing is certain and that it is impossible to ascertain the existence of God through reason alone. Every intent (be it theological or scientific) to define reality is nothing other than pure hypothesis (Rius, 1994).

Descartes famous sceptical meditation '*I think therefore I am*' is the most cited philosophical thesis that argues for the primacy of the human subject as the origin of truth and knowledge about the world. Descartes argued that we can doubt the existence of everything we perceive and know including the existence of God and

even the world that we see and sense around us. The only way that we can be sure that we exist is because we can think and be aware of our thinking it. Through this philosophical thesis the subject - object dualism arises (often referred to as Cartesian dualism) whereby the world is conceptually reduced to two fundamentally different sorts of thing - the human conscious subject and spirit, and the physical world of material and objects. This dualism, '*the ghost in the machine*' (Ryle, 1970), is central to enlightenment philosophy because it brings into question the place of God in seeking knowledge and understanding about human existence and nature, proposing that this can only be achieved by the human subject himself. Instead of perceiving himself in relation to god, Man was conceived in relation to the material world. Later, the Cartesian dualism came to define the opposition in modern philosophy between idealist philosophy; where the essence of reality is thought of as spiritual or mental, and materialist philosophy; where reality is thought to reside in the material or object world. The major drawback with this enlightenment philosophy is that it is predominantly metaphysical. Whilst it brings into doubt the existence of god, the material world is nevertheless seen as a static and consistent realm beyond the human subject. The emphasis thus turns away from interpreting theological orders to understanding the universal laws and forces that govern the material world. In metaphysics things are unchanging over time, they do not progress or develop, this applies not only to natural orders, laws and forces but also to society. Nature and society is viewed as an eternal machine with the objective of philosophy and science being to understand how this machine operates and works. For this reason, enlightenment philosophers such as Descartes are often referred to as 'mechanists'.

Whilst these fundamental philosophical questions shape the entire modernist project, it is not immediately apparent where the commodity form and consumption fit in relation to this philosophical debate. Metaphysics cannot be used to describe the modern capitalist project for, as it has been argued here, capitalism is historically determined and has developed as a consequence of certain social and economic conditions. G.F.W Hegel (1770-1833) was the first philosopher to incorporate this dualism to describe the development and progression of Man. Hegel is considered to be an idealist philosopher but he combined idealism with another philosophical practice - *dialectics* (Hegel, 1977). The dialectical method assumes that there are no eternal 'metaphysical' laws to society and history but that Man progresses over time by overcoming the contradictions between themselves as subjects and the objects they produce. Miller (1987) provides the following summary of the Hegelian dialectic:

'The Hegelian subject at each stage is carried forward by a sequence of processes in which it first extends itself through creation and then becomes aware of that created 'something' which appears as outside itself. This continues until the consciousness of the external becomes a dissatisfaction with the state of separation from that which is properly part of the subject. This dissatisfaction, however is the motor force which allows for the recognition and then the reincorporation of the external into the subject; now at one with that part of itself which it had externalised as its creation, and the subject is transformed by virtue of the incorporation into itself' (Miller, 1987, 21).

Hegel's phenomenology thus marks the basis for a dialectical view of mankind which progresses through time. Central to Hegel's thesis is the notion of 'objectification', that is, the recognition by the human subject of something outside himself. Despite the fact that this 'object' originated from the subject, there comes a point where it is no longer perceived to lie in the subjective realm

any longer and is given autonomous definition separate and distinct to the creative subject. But Hegel did not relate dialectics to the material conditions of man and the world, hence he is termed an *idealist* philosopher, stating that the essence of reality is not material but spiritual. Whilst there is nothing eternal about the human 'spirit' or subject, Hegel denied that nature and society developed in a similar dialectical fashion.

After Hegel, Karl Marx (1818-1883) applied dialectics to materialist philosophy to describe and locate modern capitalism. Marx's philosophy is thus termed 'dialectical materialism' or 'historical materialism'.

'Historical materialism sees in the development of material goods necessary to human existence the primary force which determines all social life and which conditions the transition from one kind of social order to another' (Rius, 1994).

Marx accepted Hegel's thesis that mankind progressed through history but rejected the idea that this only applied to the spirit and not the material world. He argued that modern capitalism could be understood as a certain stage in the subject-object dialectic in which the commodity was the manifestation of the external object to Man's (subject) labour. The philosophical arguments that Marx put forward in his critique of capital and the application of Hegel's dialectic more generally, provided the foundations of modern sociology. In fact modern sociology could only emerge with the advent of dialectics for it puts in place the fundamental principle that societies change and develop over time. Marx's contribution to this review is not only philosophical, he also provided one of the

most extensive critiques of modern capitalism and the commodity form. This will be considered in more depth in section 2.3.

2.2.2 Simmel and Weber and the sociology of modernity

Sociological ideas about modernity place emphasis on the industrial revolution and the demise of 'traditional' or pastoral ways of life as having significance in the origins of modern society. Max Weber (1864-1920) and George Simmel (1858 - 1918) are typically cited as being the first sociologists to give attention to the relation between modern society and capitalism (Frisby, 1985). Weber (1930) took a rather pessimistic view towards modern society and culture. He saw the rise of capitalism as being synonymous with the growth of interpersonal relations and the dominance and disenchantment of the world by the '*iron cage*' of science and bureaucratic rationalism (Schroder, 1992). Weber proposed that 'spirit' of modern capitalism emerged as a consequence of the religious morality of the Protestant church. He charts the rise of capitalism specifically in the Protestant work ethic which stressed the importance of hard work and the accumulation of capital. The religious doctrine that gave way to the emergence of the spirit of capitalism, once firmly established, became an independent social order that embraced its own dynamic of cultural change. Weber's sociology is dialectic in the sense that it proposes that modern capitalist society has emerged or developed as a consequence of certain conditions, namely religious doctrine. It implies that social conditions differ depending on the specific organisations, prevailing moralities and beliefs and other systems in society.

Georg Simmel characterises modern capitalism with the same historically determined development. Like Weber, he demarcates modernity with the dissolution of traditional systems of order and the increased industrialisation of society:

'If sociology wished to capture in a formula the contrast between the modern era and the middle ages, it could try the following. In the middle ages a person was a member bound to a community or an estate, to a feudal association or a guild. His personality was merged with real or local interest groups, and the latter in turn drew their character from the people who directly supported them. This uniformity was destroyed by modernity. On the one hand, *it left the person to itself and gave it an incomparable mental and physical freedom of movement*. On the other hand, it conferred an *unrivalled objectivity* on the practical content of life. Through technology, in organisations of all kinds, in factories and in the professions, the inherent laws are becoming increasingly dominant and are being freed from any coloration by individual personalities' (Simmel, 1991, my italics).

Simmel (1990) provides an explicit account of the sheer quantitative increase of material goods in modernity and its effects on society, with clear implications in terms of the role of consumption. Simmel's thesis of modernity focuses on the emergence of the money economy (Simmel, 1990, 1991) which imposes a perfectly objective and inherently qualityless presence between the person and any particular object. Weber, but in particular Simmel, conceives modern society in terms of a rejection of clearly marked and ordered forms of social relations and the sense of community in favour of the independent human subject but also the independent object². As a consequence, modernity is also characterised by the emergence of systems such as the money economy that acts to mediate between the now divorced human subject and the objects of his or her production. This sociological theory bears a great deal in common with the gift/commodity

dichotomy as discussed section 1.3 where the principle distinction between the two forms of economic and sociological organisation is the form of relation between the subject and the object. In gift or 'middle age' society there is no clear definition between these two entities, a definition that only becomes apparent in modern, commodity economies. The liberation of personal freedom that comes with the later form of society also imposes an increasingly rational order creating a less 'colourful', less *social* style of life which becomes dominated by an increasingly abstract economy, bureaucracy and formalism.

The emergence of modernity gave rise to the conditions of capitalism and the commodity form. It separated the human subject into two distinct roles of practice, humans as productive workers and desiring consumers, both conditions being mediated by the flow and circulation of commodities. Central to both Simmel's and Weber's arguments is the idea that modern capitalism is highly related to industrialisation, and in the case of Simmel, to quantification. Whilst the work of both sociologists clearly bears relevance to explicating the emergence of capitalism and its relation to the emergence of the status of objects as commodities, Marx states this relation in far more explicit terms. For Marx the commodity encapsulates the very essence of capitalism and modernity and it is to his work that this discussion will turn

2.3 Marx's Commodity

Karl Marx's writings do not appear to be totally appropriate in the context of marketing and a theory of consumption. Marxism, as a philosophical tradition in western thought, has for most of us connotations of communism, socialism and other such concepts which would seem to oppose the ethos of marketing itself which, as a business function and practice, is founded in the spirit of capitalism and competition. Were Marx to be alive today it is unlikely that he would have chosen to be a marketing academic. It is far more probable that he would have looked upon marketing and mass consumption less than favourably, seeing it as an extension of capitalist exploitation and oppression. However, to refer to Marx does not automatically mean that one must adopt a critical or sceptical position towards markets and marketing. Marx's work, particularly his writings on political economy and capital, provides a unique insight into commodities and the implications of commodity exchange on culture and society.

'The first thing to remember is that Marx was an economic critic and philosopher, not a prophet. He gave no blueprint for "socialism" or "communism". What he has principally and essentially left us is a critical analysis of capitalism. 'Marxism' is, and should be, nothing else but the means of criticism' (Appignanessi, 1994).

It is important to note that Marx was not primarily concerned with consumption or consumers but with the forces or relations of production. Marx wrote about the economy and society of Europe in the mid to late nineteenth century which differed significantly to the society of the mid to late twentieth century. Marx's writings must therefore be read historically. They concern a time before mass production, mass communication and advertising and mass consumption. It is

inaccurate to suggest that Marx is critical of modern day marketing practices in his work since he could never have conceived of them. Marx was one of the first writers to analyse the relationship between the way economics and politics shape or determine cultural and social conditions. Although many of Marx's arguments that developed from this analysis can and have been discredited throughout the social sciences (for example, Baudrillard, 1975), the critical legacy they leave behind provides a useful position from which to begin this analysis.

In the previous section it was shown that Marx rejected metaphysical assertions about Man, society and history, instead applying the unique combination of dialectic materialism. He rejects that there can be any universal law of economics and concentrates on identifying specific economic laws that structure specific social systems. Yet this by itself presents the first problem with Marx for whilst no economic systems are universal, he nevertheless states that Man is fundamentally a social animal and must produce things that he needs through the application of his labour. In Marxism the satisfaction of needs via production are taken as universal conditions of humanity. Where Societies differ is the manner in which labour is organised, that is, by the specific relations or *modes* of production (Mandel, 1983). Marx identifies five epochs, each reflecting a different mode of production; primitive community, slave state, feudalism, capitalism and finally communism.

The mode of production in each of these five periods of history provides the *substructure* for that society on which its religions, ethics, politics and laws (the *superstructure*) are built. Marx acknowledges that the super and sub structures are

interactive, but argues that first and foremost, the base of any society is its mode of production (Hunt & Sherman, 1981). This is perhaps one of the most important contributions of Marxist economics for it puts forward the premise that cultural institutions and social action are ultimately determined by economic conditions.

Whilst, as has been noted, Marx is not primarily concerned with consumption, it is clear how the influence of Marx is highly relevant to definitions of Consumer Culture. The term 'Consumer Culture' has multiple meanings (Featherstone, 1992) but all of these understandings require a belief that economic factors (namely consumption) can and have become important in the shaping of contemporary culture.

Marx is so central to this thesis because he defines modern capitalism with direct reference to the commodity form. In fact the commodity is the defining feature of the capitalist mode of production in Marxist economics. The first paragraph of *Das Kapital*³ reads:

'The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails, presents itself as "an immense accumulation of commodities", its unit being a single commodity. Our investigation must therefore begin with the analysis of the commodity' (Marx, 1976).

For this reason Marxist economics is central to any theory of the commodity as a cultural or social entity because Marx states quite clearly: the superstructure of society is defined by the mode of production, and the current mode of production (capitalism) is characterised and represented by the commodity.

2.3.1 The value dichotomy: use value and exchange value

From the outset, Marx states: “Every commodity has a two fold aspect - *use value* and *exchange value*”. In terms of this basic dichotomy, Marxist economics does not differ greatly from the other economic schools of thought. At the heart of all three major schools of economic thought, classical, neoclassical and Marxist, is a theory of value (Whynes, 1983) which attempts to explain how these two expressions of value are determined, and more importantly, how they relate to one another. From a naïve position, the problem of value appears somewhat overstated. If we assume that Man has certain needs or wants (we do not necessarily have to confine this to material needs but can include social needs, psychological needs and even cultural or symbolic needs), then it logically follows that those things that most adequately satisfy needs will be considered to be the most valuable and will therefore command a higher exchange or monetary value, whereas those things that do not satisfy needs to the same degree will be deemed less valuable. This piece of logical deduction is problematic, albeit for different reasons, by all three schools of economic thought. Adam Smith (1910) exposed this fallacy of value. He questioned why is it that water, a substance essential to human existence commanded a low value whilst diamonds, with a no apparent utility or capacity for need satisfaction, commanded a very high value.

The first important contribution of classical economics was to counter the mercantilist fallacy of regarding only precious metals as valuable by showing that wealth also consisted of useful goods (Desai, 1979). But as Adam Smith had shown, not all useful things were valuable. In classical economic value theory, the

best way to determine why one commodity should command a higher exchange value than another was to measure the amount of *labour* and capital that was expended in its *production*. Those commodities that required large inputs of labour and capital would command a greater value to those that required less input. But this Classical economic labour theory of value does not resolve Adam Smith's dilemma. Neoclassical theory sees value as a subjective concept rather than an objective amount fixed by the costs of production. The value of any one commodity is determined by two measures; its potential utility and its relative price or exchange value, which is simply a representation of the existing demand for any given commodity against the available supply. From this perspective, value is nothing more than a measure of relative scarcity and marginal demand.

Marxist economics begins with this same use/exchange value dichotomy. The fracture between (neo)classical and Marxist economics lies in the extent to which these values can be thought to transcend any one particular set of social relations. For the former school, both use value and exchange value are understood to emerge as universal mechanisms of all economies, regardless of the structure and organisation of society. Marxist economics on the other hand introduced a degree of relativity by proposing that the emergence of exchange value was restricted to a specific mode of production, namely capitalism.

2.3.2 Marx's use value

For Marx, any commodity must have a utility but not all useful things need be commodities. He excluded use value from the field of investigation of political economy on the grounds that it does not directly embody a social relation (Sweezy, 1976). Wheat has the use of satisfying hunger in any social context, be it feudal, capitalist or otherwise. All social members have needs and apply useful things to satisfy them, this for Marx is a matter of history, the matter for economics is to establish the social mechanisms that enable (or prevent) those needs being met. Marx's commodity could be most accurately distinguished from useful things in alternative modes of production by the unique expression of exchange value under capitalism.

'From the taste of wheat it is not possible to tell who produced it, a Russian serf, a French peasant or an English capitalist. Although use-values serve social needs and therefore exist within the social framework, they do not express the social relations of production' (Marx, 1970, p23).

The use value of any given commodity refers to its *qualitative* constituency. There is no level of quantitative comparison between the use value of gold, coal and cloth for instance, they are different types of thing that relate to the satisfaction of different needs. Marx states:

'A use-value has value only in use, and is realised only in the process of consumption. One and the same use value can be used in various ways. But the extent of its possible applications is limited by its existence as an object with distinct properties' (Marx, 1970, p27).

The use value of any given commodity is independent of human labour and therefore independent of the social relations that organise labour, be it feudal, capitalist or whatever. Despite Marx's dialectical method, he not only held that the mode of production transcended historical epochs (that is, whilst different societies have different modes of production, they nevertheless can all be understood as having *a* mode of production), but also that the utility of things remained the same regardless of the mode of production. For Marx, utility and the needs of Man are almost metaphysical constructs just as they are classical economics.

2.3.3 Marx's exchange value

Marx held that exchange value was the unique expression of capitalism and the commodity form. Marx states that exchange value seems at first to be nothing other than a *quantitative* relation, that is, the proportion in which use values are exchanged for another. But he goes on to argue that the determinant and origin of exchange value is not utility but labour:

'The exchange-value of a palace can be expressed in a definite number of tins of boot polish. London manufacturers have expressed the exchange-value of their numerous tins of boot polish in terms of palaces. Quite irrespective therefore of their natural existence, and without regard to the specific needs they satisfy as use values, commodities in definite quantities are congruent, they take on one another's place in the exchange process, are regarded as equivalents, and despite their motley appearance have a common denominator' (Marx, 1970, p28).

Exchange value, as a general law of *equivalence* eliminates the differences between commodities in terms of use value. Two commodities, whilst having different use values, can become equivalent in quantity to one another (for example, one ounce of gold, one ton of iron, one quarter of wheat). This equivalence represents an equal amount of the same kind of labour. It does not matter whether the labour was expended in the mining of gold, the farming of wheat or the forging of iron. In terms of exchange value, all this labour (be it in a relative quantity) is equal and equivalent. So rather than thinking of exchange value as a relative measure of the use-value of any given commodity, it is more accurate to describe it as a relative measure of the amount of labour time expended in its production. Under the capitalist mode of production different labour activities, (mining, farming, forging) are thus reduced to one comparable form which Marx calls simple labour. When reduced to a purely quantitative relation, labour itself becomes a commodity that can be bought or sold like any other.

‘The two marks which [the capitalist] buys two pounds of sugar are the price of the two pounds of sugar. The two marks with which he buys twelve hours’ use of labour power are the price of twelve hours’ labour. Labour, therefore, is a commodity, neither more or less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by the scales’ (Marx, 1976).

In summary, for Marx exchange value is *the* expression of commodities under the capitalist mode of production and unlike use value which is timeless, exchange value cannot exist beyond the social relations of capitalism. It is therefore a concept that is relative and which imposes or expresses the very essence of capitalism as a stage in the historical evolution of society. The commodity form,

as an expression of a general law of equivalence, applies not only to qualitatively different types of object (use-value) but qualitatively different types of labour. The predominance of exchange value over use value that Marx identifies provides the basis for Adorno's critique of contemporary capitalism. Adorno argues that commodities are primarily produced not for their potential use or functional application but to be sold at a profit. Use value, for Adorno, has become but a distant memory in consumer society (Gabriel & Lang, 1995, p47) which is characterised by the total occupation of exchange value as the reason to produce, exchange and consume commodities.

2.3.4 Phantom objectivity: the alienated commodity

'A commodity is, in the first place, an object outside us' (Marx, 1976).

A consistently re-occurring theme throughout the review conducted so far has been that a defining feature of the commodity is its objective 'otherness', which can be dialectically opposed to the human subject or 'spirit'. It has been proposed that consumption can be thought of as a process of de-alienation whereby the human subject reappropriates the commodity form from its status as an autonomous object, reincorporating it back into a subjective context from whence it originated. The concept of alienation is central to Marx's critique of capital and as with the concept of exchange value, is principally concerned with the specific fractured relationship between human labour and the objects produced under the capitalist mode of production.

In a pre capitalist mode of production, part, if not all, of the fruits of one's labour are used in satisfying the needs of oneself and one's family. A person may apply his or her labour in the growing of food he needs to live, making the clothing he needs for protection and so on. Under the capitalist mode of production, every producer applies his or her labour to produce products that are not for his own use but for circulation and exchange in the market. Consequently, the only real connections among individual producers are brought about by comparing the relative value of goods and exchanging them. Rubin (1972) explains that on the market, commodity producers do not appear as personalities with a determined place in the production process, but as proprietors and owners of exchangeable things - of commodities. The alienated commodity producer is thus unable to reflect himself through that he produces. The measure of value is totally dependent upon a quantitative and relative measure of the commodity itself in relation to other equivalents. Every commodity producer influences the market only to the extent that he supplies goods or takes goods from it. The interaction and mutual impact of the working activity of individual commodity producers take place exclusively through things rather than between the producers of things.

Marx, like Simmel who followed him, argued that as exchange value becomes the sole feature governing the value of any given thing, the power of money grows to, that is, the exchange relationship establishes itself as a force externally opposed to producers, and independent of them.

‘What was originally a means to the furtherance of production becomes a relationship alien to the producers. The more producers become dependent on exchange, the more exchange seems to be independent of them and; the gap between the product as a product and the product as an exchange value widens’ (McLellan, 1973).

The labourer/producer cannot resist this alienation under the capitalist mode of production because the possessor of any use value that takes the form of a commodity can only realise its exchange value by selling it, that is, by exchanging it for its money or commodity equivalent. Thus in exchange one is alienated from the commodity one possesses to acquire another. But the alienation that is characteristic of capitalist production not only affects the status of the commodities produced, it also has the effect of alienating the producer's labour from him or herself. Labour power is a commodity, it is a use value possessed by the labourer, which in its commodity form (labour power), has an exchange value. The labourer can only realise its exchange value only by selling it, by divesting himself of it or by alienating it. (Desai, 1979)

To acquire those things needed to live via exchange, the labourer is forced into a position where he must exchange the only resource he has - his own labour. But it is not slavery, the labourer must personally choose to sell his labour power, and to alienate himself from it. It is the labourer himself who must decide to realise the use-value of his labour power which can only be done through the process of production and exchange.

Marx's critique of the commodity thus provides an explanation of alienation through the specific social relations of production and the organisation of labour under the capitalist mode of production. The primacy of exchange value furnishes

the commodity with an independence from the conditions of its production (labour) thus enabling it to take on an objective character, detached and separate from the subjective conditions of its production. Furthermore, the productive subject is reduced to the status of an object. Lukacs refers to this phenomenon as 'Reification'⁴.

'The essence of commodity-structure has often been pointed out. Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people' (Lukacs, 1971).

Lukacs furthers Marx's conception of the commodity form and its impact on perception and status of the human subject under capitalism. Lukacs argues that the commodity form can only be truly understood as a universal category of society as a whole. As capitalism becomes more and more entrenched in the very organisation of society, the reification produced by commodity relations assume decisive importance for the evolution of society. Only then, Lukacs states, does the commodity become crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness to the forms where this reification finds expression (Lukacs, 1971, p86).

Lukacs' reification thesis is crucial because it introduces the commodity as a cultural form that shapes the perceptions, beliefs and actions of social members. Those living under the capitalist mode of production come to see the commodity form as a universal and natural category of life that appears at once normal and without alternative. The force that chains and exploits the consciousness of the worker to the commodity form is masked. This concealment is further entrenched

because the commodity emerges as the sole salvation and opportunity for social members to prosper. Those that are exploited by the commodity also desire to acquire more commodities, thus further perpetuating the commodity form as the universal mechanism in society. This desire for commodities is referred to as fetishism. For radical Marxist's such as the situationist movement (Debord, 1977), the struggle against capitalism thus becomes a cultural crusade that requires these cultural beliefs to be overthrown and not just the economic structures that are in place which support and maintain commodity relations.

2.3.5 The enigmatic commodity: Commodity Fetishism

The 'deification' and desire for commodities, for Marx, is not dependent upon the use value that any one commodity can offer. We do not have a fetishistic desire for the commodity form because it offers the potential to satisfy some need or other. To fetishize of the commodity form is to endow it with a supernatural independence that is foreign to human nature and to seek to re integrate and acquire that form into ourselves as subjects. As this review has shown, Marx's commodity is defined by its appearance of independence and separation from the labour power of its production. The productive subject is separated from that which he invests his life in. As the commodity form comes to occupy social life and becomes the only set of relations through which Men can acquire those things needed to live, rather than resenting the commodity form for divorcing him from that which he expends his labour to produce, he instead devotes himself to the commodity, seeing prosperity and happiness only in its form.

Under the capitalist mode of production, commodities are produced primarily for exchange and not with their end use in mind. The human subject who applies his labour to the production of commodities does so as an individual, he is segregated from the social use of things. When the producers of things and the consumers of things are conceived as individual and independent of one another, so to do the fruits of their labour appear independent. The commodity appears outside him. The social relation between men thus assumes in their eyes the fantastic form of a religion between things (Marx, 1976):

‘In order therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the productions of men’s hands. This I call Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities. This Fetishism of commodities has its origin in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them’ (Marx, 1976).

Marx’s thesis on commodity fetishism thus (albeit implicitly) provides the foundations for a theory of commodity consumption. The human subject as productive labour must also have the drive to synthesise that which is alien to him, which he does through consumption. Under the capitalist mode of production the psychological desire for commodities completes and further reifies the commodity as the sole form through which daily life is mediated. The most obvious example of this phenomenon in a contemporary context is what has been termed by many as ‘consumption dreaming’ (Fournier & Guiry, 1993). In consumer culture there is a desire and belief in seeking happiness and contentment through the acquisition

of commodities and consumer goods insofar as aspirations come to be perceived in terms of commodities. This has long been recognised in consumer behaviour literature and included in the consumption decision process as pre purchase.

2.3.6 Concluding Remarks

The review conducted so far has charted the rise of capitalism in the philosophical and social conditions of modernity, and drawing on Marx, as well as other sociologists, has demonstrated how the commodity form can be seen to operate as a defining feature of society itself. The commodity imposes certain social conditions upon the world and the ways we perceive ourselves in that world. Under capitalism the commodity provides a complete, self-perpetuating, self-reifying system that mediates daily life. It leads us to believe that the products of our labour are separate from us and so establishes a desire in the human subject to de-alienate the commodity and to deify this very process. Marx's 'grand narrative' of history, which sees society as progressing from one mode of production to another eventually leads to a reorganisation of society in terms of an alternative mode of production - namely communism. In communism the commodity form must disappear and society must come to recognise that labour is in fact a relation between subjects and not a relation to objects. Communism will come about when the worker eventually revolts against his dissatisfaction with that which has become external to him. It is but one stage in the dialectical development of Man as initially posited by Hegel, (See Miller, 1987, p21, quoted earlier in section 2.2.1).

Marx's prophesy has not yet come about despite the attempts of political movements such as those in China and The Soviet Bloc to embrace the communist manifesto (Bauman, 1992b). As we observe the structures of contemporary society eleven decades after Marx's death, capitalism and the commodity form have, if anything, become more ingrained in the cultural environment to an extent that Marx could never have conceived of. But it would seem that Marx's dialectical materialism was correct in that society and culture do progress and change although not in the way that Marx suggested. Contemporary or 'late' capitalism is a different form of capitalism to that critiqued by Marx, Simmel and Weber. But rather than the effects of the commodity diminishing, the commodity form seems to have acquired a much stronger position in dictating the relations within culture. Lukacs prophesy seems more appropriate to the extent that the commodity has come to totally occupy daily life.

2.4 Baudrillard's commodity

Jean Baudrillard's social theory is highly controversial. His most recent work refuses to comply with conventional styles of sociological writing and research. It is often provocative and highly critical of established academic conventions and has earned him the title 'Pope of postmodernism'. But his early sociological works including *Les Systeme des Objets*⁵ and *La Societe de Cconsommation*⁶ provide one of the most thorough contemporary accounts of the relationship between ideology and material, consumer culture. Baudrillard is part of a general movement in radical Marxist circles in the post-war era that emphasises the role of culture in the formation of capitalist ideology, as opposed to the primacy given to economic

factors by orthodox Marxism (Sim, 1995). From the mid 1970's onwards however Baudrillard shifts way from his earlier political radicalism by providing one of the most influential Marxist critiques to date, *The Mirror of Production*⁷ (1975). For Baudrillard, the commodity form has come to reflect the cultural ideology of capitalist consumer culture which has transcended the principles of Marxist political economy theory. A review of Baudrillard's work thus enables this review to progress beyond Marxist political economy theory in defining and locating contemporary commodity consumption (Kellner, 1983).

Before considering the shortfalls of Marxist commodity theory it is important to note that Marx was a nineteenth century modernist writer. This means that he not only wrote about social conditions that differ to those observed and experienced today, but that he did so with modernist understandings and assumptions. Critiques of Marx gravitate around two main positions. The first calls for Marxism to be treated as an historical account of capitalism. The late nineteenth century capitalist society that Marx commented upon differed significantly to the capitalism of the late twentieth century in several ways. To have a critique of contemporary capitalism it is therefore necessary to revise and update political economy theory so that it retains its relevance to current cultural institutions and society. A second level of criticism comes from the critique of Marx's theory of capitalism and commodities itself. Some theorists, including Baudrillard, have come to argue that many aspects of Marxism are problematic and suggest alternative ways of understanding capitalism and contemporary society.

Marx has had a tremendous influence on the economic, cultural and social thought of the twentieth century. Marx's work is not simply a modernist account of society - its influence goes far beyond this. Marx's work can be read as coming to represent the basis of modern thought and philosophy as we read it today. It therefore follows that a critique or reappraisal of Marx will ultimately form a critique and reappraisal of modernity and modern ideas concerning the relationship between economics, capitalism and society. As a consequence many of the theorists who have attempted to move beyond Marx have to a certain extent moved beyond modern ways of thought which have become defined by some as post-modern. Rather than referring to the work of Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson as postmodern, a term that lacks definition and clarity, it is more appropriate to refer to their work as post-Marxist, because it is largely based on an updating, or critical rejection, of Marxist theory.

This section is split into several parts, each being concerned with a particular aspect of Baudrillard's social theory relating to contemporary ideas regarding the position of consumption and commodities in contemporary society. The first part addresses Baudrillard's critique of Marxist commodity theory which argues for a cultural, rather than an economic explanation of the emergence and dominance of the commodity form. The second part gives specific attention to the related theories and ideas surrounding postmodernism. In the third part Baudrillard's social theory relating to the 'The political economy of the sign' is reviewed which shows the commodity form as having progressed from the realm of economics and equivalence in terms of exchange value, to one where sign value and sign exchange dominates. The fourth part discusses the commodity as sign, where

commodity consumption is able to transcend potentially all areas, spaces and aspects of culture. The final part of this section and chapter concludes by considering the possibilities of using a semiotic theory of consumption in consumer research.

2.4.1 Baudrillard's critique of Marx

Marxist political economy theory shows the emergence of the commodity form to be totally dependent on the social conditions of capitalism, which represents a specific type of cultural organisation in the historical development of human society. The economic superstructure provides the blueprint for every aspect of modern society. The discussion in the last section showed how for Marx, the fundamental basis of society is represented in the mode of *production* and the organisation of *labour*. The essence of Marx's commodity is exchangeability and equivalence. Mankind under all modes of production is motivated by need and by the satisfaction of those needs via the utilitarian qualities in the resources that lay around him. Under capitalism the utility of any given substance is overshadowed by its economic exchange value in the market.

Baudrillard's critique challenges each and every one of these basic tenets of Marx's theory of commodities and capitalism. For Baudrillard, Marx did not go far enough in relating the specific economic conditions of society to any one given form of cultural organisation. Whereas Marx held that utility (expressed as use value) exists beyond any one mode of production and that only exchange value is specific to the capitalist mode, Baudrillard argues that this distinction is

inaccurate. For Baudrillard, use value and utility are as culturally specific to capitalism as is exchange value. He disregards anthropological assumptions concerning the universal utility of things, instead arguing that the emergence of use value is a direct result of the ideological premises of the culture of capitalism.

Baudrillard (1981) argues that once any given thing is assigned a use value, albeit culturally or linguistically, it is abstracted from itself in much the same way as exchange value creates abstraction. Rather than being defined by what it is or is not, it comes to be defined by how it can and cannot be used and, in being defined in this way, becomes comparable or equivalent to all other things assigned with such a use. Deciding that one commodity is more or less useful than another is no different to making a judgement as to whether one commodity is more or less economically valuable than any other. Both forms of value - use and exchange - reify commodity relations. Reification is not confined only to the process of exchange equivalence. Baudrillard states:

'Contrary to the anthropological illusion that claims to exhaust the idea of utility as the simple relation of human need to useful property of the object, use value is very much a social relation. Just as, in terms of exchange value, the producer does not appear as a creator, but as abstract labour power, so in the system of use value, the consumer appears as social need power. The abstract social producer is a man conceived in terms of exchange value. The abstract social individual is (the person with "needs") is man thought of in terms of use value' (Baudrillard, 1981, p132)

If we accept, as does Baudrillard (1975), that Marx undermined classical economic assumptions concerning the application of economic exchange beyond the sphere of capitalist production, to show that exchange value is culturally

dependent, then Baudrillard progresses this thesis to its logical conclusion. Baudrillard extends the cultural implication of capitalism to include all aspects of the commodity form, showing that all facets of commodity production, exchange and consumption are culturally fixed to the ideological basis of capitalism. Rather than conceiving of capitalism simply as a mode of production that promotes equivalence in terms of economic worth, Baudrillard exposes capitalism as a cultural ideology that spans the entire structure of social action. Capitalism not only provides a specific set of social relations that allow human subjects to satisfy needs, but also creates the human subject as 'needing' beings. Capitalism, as a cultural ideology, thus creates the producer as abstract labour but also the mechanism necessary to allow this function to operate - the abstract consumer.

Baudrillard is therefore unconcerned with the arguments put forward by many Marxist theorists regarding the primacy of exchange value over use value under capitalism (see section 2.3.3). As far as he is concerned this debate is irrelevant since both manifestations of value are born from the same capitalist social relations. Indeed Baudrillard goes further to argue that debates such as these actually serve to further mask and perpetuate the ideology of capitalism by seeking emancipation through a return to a form of social relations that recognises the primacy of use-value over exchange.

Although clearly critical of Marx, Baudrillard (1975) goes some way to excuse Marx's oversight. He suggests that the prevailing economics at the time of Marx's writing, together with the fact that the capitalism of the nineteenth century was less developed and less entrenched in the cultural structures at that time, meant

that explicating use value as well as exchange value as dependent on the social relations of capitalism would have been somewhat difficult. By locating the rise of capitalism solely in the forces of production and the organisation of labour, Marx could not apply an equivalent critique to the forces of capitalist consumption, that is, the relations imposed on the individual as a user of commodities.

Baudrillard, unlike Marx, places a critical light on use value and in doing so also draws critical attention to the anthropological assumptions regarding needs. For just as utility is a figment of capitalist mythology, so to is 'need' an ideological construct. Economics, and following it marketing, assumes needs to be an almost innate, natural requirement of the human subject. Baudrillard however is unwilling to accept this classical economic and Marxist premise. Marx's dialectical materialism is founded on the subject - object division which under the capitalist mode of production separates and alienates the fruits of one's labour from oneself, providing the commodity with a phantom objectivity and autonomous independence. For Baudrillard the concept of needs emerges as a direct consequence of this dualism. He states:

'What speaks in terms of need is magical thinking. The subject and the object having been posited as autonomous and separated entities - as specular and distinct myths - it then becomes necessary to establish their relation. This is accomplished, of course, with the concept of need' (Baudrillard, 1981, p70)⁸.

For Baudrillard 'need' is no less the product of ideology than exchange value and use value. There are needs only because the system of capitalism needs them (Baudrillard, 1981, p82). Alienation of the object from the human subject masks

the reality that they are both parts of the same manner of existence. The perception of the human subject as lacking that which he needs is simply the reverse of the subject being alienated from that which is produced through the application of his or her labour. This position paves the way for Baudrillard's most sophisticated level of the Marxist critique - what he terms the *mirror of production* (1975).

Baudrillard's critique eventually comes to focus on Marx's sole concern with production as the shaping force in social relations. Marxism like all modern discourses is haunted by the 'spectre of production'. Just as Marx posits the universal nature of use and need, so to is the mode of production historically concrete. But Baudrillard is unwilling to accept that production is free from the 'cunning' of capitalist ideology. Capitalism does not only establish the human subject as productive labour that is bought and sold, it establishes the very concept of production (Baudrillard, 1975, p31). For Baudrillard, Marxist critical theory of the *mode* of production does not touch the *principle* of production and as a consequence fails to explicate the system that underpins this concept.

Baudrillard goes beyond the mode of production as the fundamental premise of capitalism to focus analysis on the system of which the organisation of labour and the investment of capital is but one part. In doing so the function of consumption is shown to be equally important in the system of capitalist ideology as the other 'hidden' side of Marx's production. Baudrillard comes to argue that consumption is simply another manifestation of labour that makes the system of capitalism complete, a system that requires both sides to exist in collaboration with one

another. Without consumption, the forces of labour production have no purpose and no function, Baudrillard states:

‘And the needs invested by the individual consumer today are just as essential to the order of production as capital invested by the entrepreneur and the labour power invested by the wage labourer. It is *all* capital. Just as there is a need to sell one's labour power, there is a compulsion to need and a compulsion to consume. To be sure, this systematic constraint is has been placed under the sign of choice and ‘liberty’...In fact the liberty to consume is of the same order as the freedom offered by the labour market...exactly as the capitalist system frees the labourer to sell, at last, his labour power’ (Baudrillard, 1981, p83).

In summary, Baudrillard’s critique of Marx has two components that bear central relevance to this review. It completes the transition from a classical economic to a cultural explanation of capitalism initiated, but not fully developed by Marx. Marx sets out to reject a theory of political economy based on assumptions regarding eternal economic laws, by describing specific economic laws in specific social systems. He fails to acknowledge however, that production, need and use are constructed by the same ideology that gives primacy to exchange value and the conditions of alienated labour power. All aspects of capitalism are culturally determined and have no referent external to capitalism itself.

Baudrillard’s critique also turns the sole focus of attention away from the forces of *production* and calls for the forces of *consumption* to be considered on equal terms. Not only is it erroneous to give more analytical attention to production but also to distinguish the two functions as being separate. Labour power and the production of commodities are dependent on the ideological premise that

commodities are needed and consumed; neither process can operate without the operation of the other.

2.4.2 The 'postmodern' turn

The social theories implicated with postmodernism have limited exposure in the marketing and consumer research literature but are gradually receiving more attention. In 1993 and 1994 special issues of the *International Journal of Research in Marketing* were dedicated to postmodernism although the main body of research which discusses postmodern ideas remains restricted to a small number of academics. Firat Fuat and Alladi Venkatesh are largely responsible for introducing and popularising postmodern concepts in consumer research (Firat, 1991; Venkatesh, 1992; Firat & Venkatesh, 1993; Firat et al., 1994; 1995) as well as Bouchet (1993) and Brown (1995).

A major difficulty in approaching this area is that postmodern theory rejects many of tenets of conventional theoretical conceptualisation. It is problematic to attempt to define postmodernism since certain strands of postmodern theory problematise the very process of definition and categorisation. Featherstone (1992) makes the following remark:

'Any reference to the term 'postmodernism' immediately exposes one to the risk of being accused of jumping on a bandwagon, of perpetuating a rather shallow and meaningless intellectual fad. One of the problems is that the term is at once fashionable yet irritatingly difficult to define' (Featherstone, 1992, p1).

In some respects postmodern theory pre-empts its own critique and therefore becomes an increasingly vague construct that can be applied in almost any context. Any theoretical discourse that openly embraces contradiction and lack of definition is destined to be greeted with a certain degree of scepticism. Whilst some postmodern texts are thorough others appear frivolous and playful (such as some of Baudrillard's more recent texts). Some postmodern writing contains complex and detailed arguments whereas others seem to reject linear rationality and argued logic as the most appropriate discourse to present a body of ideas. Rather than attempting to incorporate the entire postmodern project into this review, it will be far more constructive to consider selected aspects of postmodern theory that have relevance to understanding commodities and consumption.

The theories presented by different postmodern writers is far from homogenous insofar as it would seem erroneous to group it together in one collective body of thought. For Lyotard (1984) postmodernism concerns the decline of 'grand narrative' explanations of social development including the historical materialism of Marx. The great modern discourses of modernity such as scientific truth and reality, from a Lyotardian postmodern perspective, simply represent constructed narratives or stories which dominate social perception. Such grand narratives impose conformity to singular ways of perceiving reality which produce the 'effect of truth' (Foucault, 1980) but through postmodern deconstruction (Derrida, 1974) can be shown to have deep political and ideological origins which oppress certain sections of the community (women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals) and serve to legitimise the dominant position of other groups (White, Anglo-Saxon middle class males).

The prefix 'post' suggests that postmodernity is an epochal concept describing a form of social organisation that comes after or beyond modernism. Postmodernism is concerned with the changes in society from one defined by industrialisation and the forces of production, to one defined as a post-industrial consumer society. Capitalism has undergone an historical transition from early capitalism to late capitalism where different technologies, political and economic systems, and forms of society and culture have emerged. Although Baudrillard is often cited as a principle protagonist of postmodernism, he does not use this term himself, nor does he accept the title of postmodernist as such (Baudrillard, 1990a). For the purposes of this review, and following Baudrillard (1996a; 1988), Jameson (1984a), Featherstone (1992), Bauman (1992a) and Knights & Morgan (1993) amongst others; postmodernism is taken to represent a constellation of contemporary social theories which focus on consumption in late capitalism and emphasise consumption as the principle determinant in culture and society⁹. Firat & Venkatesh (1993) refer to this aspect of postmodernism as the reversal of production and consumption.

Prior to the rise of mass consumerism in 1950's North America, the predominant force driving an individual's identity and social position was his or her role as a productive worker. Work, as Weber (1930) had shown, structured morality and social/cultural beliefs and aspirations. But as capitalism embraced new forms of technology and communication, the emphasis on production diminished and gradually consumption came to adopt a central place in the structure of cultural and social organisation. Bauman states:

Having won the struggle for control over production, and made its ascendancy in that sphere secure, capitalism can now afford the free reign of the pleasure principle in the realm of consumption' (Bauman, 1991, p50).

As production focused modernity gave way to postmodern consumer society, the extent to which consumption became involved in more and more aspects of cultural perception and social action also increased. As a consequence, the turn to consumption and the motivation to consume, created new types of social communication such as advertising (Liess et al., 1986) that proliferated consumption symbolism, mythology and ideology throughout the cultural environment. Whereas individuals had once perceived the world (and their identity within it) in terms of productive work, the emergence of consumer culture resulted in this perception and identity being mediated via consumption.

The postmodern turn thus presents consumption as a cultural ideology of late capitalism (Jameson, 1984b) rather than an appendage to the economic forces of production. By occupying a cultural location, the circumstances that can come to potentially involve some dimension of consumption are greatly increased and consequently the status and role of commodity is also revised. As consumption becomes a cultural condition the commodity also mutates into a cultural, rather than an economic unit and explicating the commodity a matter for cultural theory as opposed to economic theory (Kellner, 1983). Bourdieu (1984) for example identifies consumption as being principally concerned with maintaining social difference, motivated by the acquisition and exchange of multiple forms of capital. As well as economic capital, Bourdieu identifies forms of cultural capital and social capital which through consumption serve to maintain or improve social

position and identity. Whereas economic capital is acquired monetarily, cultural capital is acquired symbolically (Bourdieu, 1987). Just as an individual's ability to engage in economic exchange is dependent upon his or her economic position (that is, some people are more able to engage in economic exchange on account of them having more money), some individuals are more able to engage in the exchange of cultural capital on the grounds that they have more education, taste etc.

Definitions of commodities as economic productions becomes increasingly constraining when considering the phenomena of consumption in its contemporary postmodern form. This is largely due to these understandings being based on economic, production orientated theory which has been shown to be inadequate in a contemporary analysis of consumption. To understand the commodity form as it exists in consumer culture it is necessary to apply alternative theoretical paradigms from cultural and social theory, which Baudrillard develops through the application of semiotics and structuralism.

2.4.3 The political economy of the sign

Whereas Marx traces the rise of capitalism in terms of economic, productive forces, Baudrillard's (1981) *'For a critique of the political economy of the sign'*¹⁰ sets out to provide a cultural theoretical account of capitalist progression from early modern enlightenment to modern industrial society and finally to late capitalist postmodernity. For Baudrillard it is not the relations of production but the relation of the sign that mutates in these progressive eras, which effects the

different states of capitalist development. Running concurrently with these three eras (pre modern, industrial modern and postmodern) are three *laws of value* and three '*orders of simulacra*'. Each successive period is identified by alternative sign relations (Baudrillard, 1993).

Baudrillard's semiotic theory of political economy is grounded in the cultural theory of structuralism (Levi-Strauss, 1963) which argues that culture consists of deep underlying structures that exist beyond the level of everyday consciousness. These cultural structures consist of signs in binary opposition to one another and through difference produce cultural meaning. Structuralism has its origins in Saussurian linguistics¹¹ (Saussure, 1974) where words are taken as signs and language as a semiotic structure. The sign consists of two parts, the signified and the signifier, where the signified operates as a referent (a concept) and the signifier as a representation of the signified (a word). For structuralists such as Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes, the semiotic model of language can be applied to a model of culture. Consequently, semiotic or structuralist accounts of culture treat culture as a text or narrative. There is a growing body of consumer research that applies a semiotic reading of consumption and consumer culture (Mick, 1986; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992a). Objects, goods or materials are conceived of as signifieds or referents and the meanings associated with these objects as signifiers. Not surprisingly, much of the attention to semiotics in business related fields of enquiry can be found in advertising research (for example, Berger, 1987). From a semiotic perspective, advertising is a process that attaches signifiers (meanings) to objects and consumer goods in exactly the same way that language attaches words to concepts. The linguistic metaphor can be extended even further to the point

where consumption is conceptualised as a form of language, where individual commodities operate as units (words) in this communication (Baudrillard, 1996a; Noth, 1988). Applying this perspective, Lurie (1981) speaks of the 'language of clothes'¹² and Arnoff (1985) of the 'language of the automobile'. The car one drives and the combination of clothes one chooses to wear, constitutes a system of communicable meanings and messages by the consumer to himself/herself and to others.

In Saussurian semiotic linguistics, the relationship between the signified and the signifier is arbitrary, there is no a-priori reason why any given signified (referent or concept) should be signified by any given word. Whilst the concept 'male' has signifiers or words such as 'man', 'masculine', and the concept 'female' has signifiers such as 'woman', 'feminine' and so on, these relationships have evolved arbitrarily and it is quite conceivable that the concept 'male' could have another set of signifiers. Put simply, there is no physical relationship between a word and the concept it represents. A word only comes to be related to a concept as a matter of cultural representation. From a semiotic perspective of consumer culture, the signified meanings of commodities are also arbitrary. The associated significations given to say Rolls Royce and Porsche motor cars is not a consequence of their physical manufacture or constitution but the manner in which they have been endowed with cultural meaning.

Baudrillard departs from Saussure, stating that prior to the renaissance the relationship between the sign and signifier was, for all intents and purposes, fixed. If we use the example of clothing, during this period the clothing one could wear

was related to one's class and position in the social hierarchy. Deviating from this order was socially unacceptable and would be severely punished. A member of the peasant class could not dress as a yeoman, only as a peasant and correspondingly a member of the yeoman class could not dress as a baron (Baudrillard, 1993)¹². If we were to observe a man wearing clothing of the gentry (signifying that he was of this class) then it would be possible to deduce that this person was a member of the gentry. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is thus fixed:

'There is no fashion in a caste society, nor in a society based on rank, since assignation is absolute and there is no class mobility. Signs are protected by a prohibition which ensures their total clarity and confers an unequivocal status on each' (Baudrillard, 1993, p50)

Signs exist in an obligatory and authentic signifier-signified relationship which denotes a reality, a natural, a real. The sign has real signification (Baudrillard, 1993, p52). This period is characterised by the 'natural law of value' where the signifying value of any given object directly corresponds to its signified qualities. This period in the order of simulacra is characterised by the *counterfeit* or the copy where the distinction between the authentic sign and the counterfeit sign is clear. The counterfeit is a copy of the real and therefore requires the original as its referent.

In the modern industrial era that followed the enlightenment, the '*market law of value*' emerges together with the second order of simulacra - the '*industrial simulacrum*'. In this period new types of signs emerge which have no tradition and no restrictions. There is a split between the signifier and signified in which the signifier appears to take on a life of its own, detached and separate from any

reality as such. This stage in the political economy of the sign corresponds to Marx's capitalist mode of production and the emergence of the commodity and exchange value. The industrial simulacrum is unlike the counterfeit in that the original is no different to the simulation. In a manufacturing process for example, all the products manufactured are identical in every way to the original and it no longer clear which product is the real product and which is copied from it:

'The very possibility of two or 'n' identical objects, no relation (to a real), no longer any original and counterfeit, only industrial simulacra. The general extinction of the original reference alone facilitates the general law of equivalencies, that is, the possibility of production (to produce equivalents). It is no longer related to a natural order but to an alternative order, this order is the industrial simulacrum...The second order simulacrum creates a reality without images of the real, without a mirror and without comparison' (Baudrillard, 1993, p54).

The market law of value comes about as a consequence of this breaking away from tradition and reality. Signs can no longer be valued in terms of what they really are by a natural law of value since this referent has disappeared, but although the modern sign was dislocated from any natural referent it nevertheless had a referent in the emerging modern reality of production. In the 'postmodern' period, this referent of reality disintegrates completely. Baudrillard identifies the third order of simulacra as '*simulation*' corresponding to the '*structural law of value*'.

To distinguish the third order of simulacra (simulation) from the second (industrial production) Baudrillard uses the metaphor of DNA. In postmodernity there is no longer any physical referent of reality whatsoever, the structure of signs is based entirely on the logic of a code - a hyperreality of hypersignification

(Baudrillard, 1983). In genetic (re)production there is no original from which the subsequent simulations gain a referent of reality, it is not the same as a manufacturing process with an original and endless identical copies. Genetic reproduction is structured by the code of DNA which itself has no form or physical constitution. The products of genetic reproduction (human beings) have no original as such, their only referent is their DNA - a code. For Baudrillard (1993) the postmodern sign is (re)produced from a cultural code. The sign has effectively dissolved the signified to the point where only the signifier remains, free floating from any fixed point of reality. These free floating signifiers refer only to other signifiers which in turn refer to other signifiers. Their value thus mutates into a structural value where the structural relationship between different signifiers is the only referent for value.

Baudrillard's vision of a simulated postmodernity and a simulated consumer society disregards functional or utilitarian explanations of consumption, replacing it with a continual play of signifiers against other signifiers:

'Consumption is neither a material practice, nor a phenomenology of "affluence". It is not defined by the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the car we drive.. consumption in so far as it is meaningful is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs'(Baudrillard, 1988).

Everything in postmodern consumer society is reduced to pure signifier, without material referent or context of reality. Baudrillard (1993) exclaims "The real is dead, long live the realistic sign'. Hyperreality is, for Baudrillard, an all encompassing and self reifying ideology where all cultural objects, ideas and concepts exist as signs. It thus becomes irrelevant to ask whether a commodity is

consumed for its function or its exchange value for both, according to Baudrillard, are now nothing more than signifiers structurally equivalent to all others (Baudrillard, 1990b). Embracing Baudrillard's political economy of the sign requires the conceptualisation of commodity consumption to be reconsidered. A cultural theory of consumption must reject the motivation of use value and exchange value instead incorporating the notion of *sign value*, where the commodity is conceived of as a signifier and its value semiotic.

2.4.4 Commodity signs

Under the third order of simulacra and the reign of the structural law of value, the commodity form is transformed. No longer confined to the sphere of economic production but emancipated in the realms of cultural reproduction, as a semiotic entity the commodity becomes entrenched in cultural and social life. A political economy of sign value emerges when commodities are joined to signs, when commodities become produced as signs and signs become produced as commodities (Goldman, 1994). If we understand meaning as signs and commodities in postmodernity as semiotic, then the commodity comes to emerge as a basic unit of cultural meaning and communication to the extent that culture is commodified (Gottdiener, 1994):

'Consumption is a collective and active behaviour, a constraint, a morality and an institution. It is a complete system of values' (Baudrillard, 1988).

Baudrillard argues that the commodity form has developed to such an extent that sign value has come to supersede use value and exchange value, redefining the

commodity primarily as a symbol to be consumed and displayed. He claims that the semiotic system inscribed at the heart of the entire system of commodities takes on an autonomy of its own, that political economy and the era of production are finished, and that a new dematerialised society of signs, images and codes has emerged (Best, 1994). For many postmodern writers, late capitalism is characterised by the saturation of society by signs upon signs upon signs (Featherstone, 1992) and as consumers we are continually bombarded with a milieu of images. Goldman and Papson (1994,1996) suggest that organisations are increasingly coming to compete against one another not in terms of the functional benefits of the products they have to offer or by manipulating the price of their commodities. They suggest that the differences between competitors' products in terms of product attributes and price are becoming less marked and more homogeneous where the only remaining method of differentiation is semiotic differentiation. Organisations are becoming involved in continual 'sign wars' against one another in an attempt to attract the gaze of the consumer in the cluttered mediascape of signs. This perpetual reproduction of signs has resulted in an age of 'hypersignification' where marketing and advertising efforts have come to take control over culture:

'Advertising has entered a stage based on hypersignification, a stage in which semiotics gets increasingly annexed by advertising and marketing industries. Signification practices themselves become the currency with which advertisers negotiate a market cluttered by simulated reproductions' (Goldman & Papson, 1994).

Debord (1977) describes late capitalist society as the '*society of the spectacle*' where everything that was once directly lived or experienced has moved into the realm of representation - into a series of spectacles. Debord's spectacle is not

simply a collection of images but a specific type of social relations that is mediated by the *commodity* image:

‘The spectacle is the moment when the commodity has attained the total occupation of social life. Not only is the relation to the commodity visible but it is all one sees; the world one sees is its world’ (Debord, 1977, 42).

The society of the spectacle, or the society of signs, presents itself as the very basis of society and social action and consequently consumption arises as necessary to all social behaviours and spheres. The object of consumption is no longer the physical product or an economic exchange which offers utilitarian benefits and monetary worth but a semiotic endeavour; it is the sign that is consumed. The value structuring consumption encounters is also semiotic; the commodity is valued in terms of sign value.

2.5 Conclusion: The semiotics of consumption

This review has followed the commodity from its initial conception in modern classical and Marxist economics to its existence as a cultural sign in post modern, late capitalist society. In the process we have moved beyond the sphere of conventional marketing and consumer behaviour models of consumption and commodities that rely upon conventions of economic exchange and the satisfaction of functional needs. From the cultural perspective developed here, consumption is primarily a semiotic activity involving the continual (re)production exchange of signs. Rather than referring to use, consumption is a process of re-appropriation or singularisation whereby that which is alienated from

the subjective sphere as a commodity-sign or object-sign, is reintegrated back into that sphere, only to be alienated or commodified once again in a continual cycle of (re)production and (re)consumption.

But where does this leave the status of the consumer in marketing theory? A semiotic theory of consumption seems to encompass all, in which anything, any environment and anybody once *represented* has the potential to constitute a commodity for consumption. Semiotic readings of consumption can be interpreted as a return to an idealist philosophy of a sort where the material or physical basis of society and culture is rejected in favour of a world constructed of symbolism and imagery (Gottdiener, 1995). In this respect the review has gone full circle from Hegel's idealist dialectic to Marx's materialist production and finally to Baudrillard's commodity sign.

But does such a theory provide any opportunity to further an understanding modern marketing and consumption processes? Whilst the theoretical arguments may seem convincing, they leave us with a consumption that does not necessarily involve any purchase, any material acquisition or any exchange. The commodities of consumption are without tangible form and can exist without any functional or utilitarian use. If semiotic theories of consumption were to become more widely accepted in the discipline of marketing and consumer behaviour research, then many of the basic principles currently held would need significant revision.

As Miller (1995) amongst others points out, the study of consumption can no longer be confined to the exchange of branded products and services. Marketing

as a discipline must come to terms with a range of commodities and their consumption that do not conform to the conventions of existing theory. Clearly many products and services managed and marketed by organisations today such as health care, the arts, education, present significant differences to the marketing of fast moving consumer goods and other conventional commodities. Rather than trying to squeeze these emerging commodities into existing models that were originally conceived of to describe individual consumer decision making for conventional products and services, it is perhaps more appropriate to reconsider the nature of consumption activities by drawing on alternative theoretical traditions such as those presented here. A theory of semiotic consumption offers, hypothetically at least, a set of theoretical concepts that could be used to explain, understand and describe consumer behaviour in those situations where none of the traditional prerequisites of consumption exchanges exist. It thus has the potential to bring into mainstream marketing theory, the consumption of a vast array of 'new' commodities such as those mentioned above.

The cultural theories presented in this review are seductive and maybe even exciting. They provide a set of theoretical arguments that enable the concept of consumption to be expanded and extended beyond the limitations of conventional theoretical assumptions. They provide a view of commodity consumption so radically different to the orthodoxy of marketing thought that it is difficult not to be intrigued and interested in the conceptualisations they provide. But this does not excuse a semiotic theory of consumption from closer scrutiny. There is always the danger that an alternative set of concepts, that seem to offer insight and explanation of an otherwise perplexing and complex phenomenon, will be

embraced without the critical reflection and appraisal usually required of all theories. It is important to recognise that much of the theory attended to in this review has little or no empirical evidence to support it - for the logical empiricist it is therefore nothing more than hypothecation. The following section of this thesis comprises of an empirical study designed to appraise the credibility of a theory of semiotic consumption.

In designing the research project one of the main concerns was to select a situation that is not conventionally considered to involve consumption as such, but, in light of changes in political and social conditions is increasingly having to reconsider its role as one involving marketable, consumable commodities. Ideally evidence of existing consumption related conditions should be absent, this means choosing a setting that has no explicit context of exchange value or acquisition. There should be no apparent utility or function associated with product or 'commodity' offered which would permit a needs based model to be applied. Such a setting that lacks these conditions can be used to thoroughly and comprehensively test the credibility of a semiotic theory of consumption.

Viewing the commodity as a cultural axiom means that the possible sites for researching contemporary consumption are vast. An investigation such as this need not be restricted by any one particular view of consumption and consuming, although there is no reason why this theoretical approach could not be applied in contexts which are already widely understood as sites of consumption and commodity exchange. A semiotic theory of consumption, in one sense, liberates the commodity form from any one intellectual tradition or any particular

disciplinary domain. The challenge of a semiotic reading of commodity relations must, however, surely be to relate the conditions of consumption to areas of culture that have traditionally been omitted from marketing investigation, or present certain difficulties when considered through the lens of the market. The purpose of this study is to examine a consumption context in which sign exchange, or semiotic consumption can be considered empirically.

There are some fascinating examples of research that have examined commodification in all manner of settings and contexts. Smith (1983), for instance, describes the emergence of 'commodity scientism' and the methods employed by the US government to 'Sell the Moon' to the American public and justify the billions of dollars invested into the Apollo Programme. In another interesting example, Houlton & Short (1995) discuss the commodification of the rural community. The image (or sign) of rural life, sanitised and aesthetised through modern media portrayals, produces the English countryside as a consumable commodity, and gives rise to a multitude of goods and tourist experiences. Glass (1994) examines the commodification of human reproduction and the possibilities created by advances in medical science for parents to select the characteristics of their children. Glass (1994) describes surrogate motherhood as a production process in which infertile parents 'commission' a child as one might commission a piece of art work or some other commodity. One area that is being given increased attention is the tourist and leisure industry, and the production of the 'tourist commodity' (Butsch, 1984; Kelly, 1986; Wearing & Wearing, 1992; Watson & Kopachevsky, 1994). These studies focus upon the

field of cultural production and the representation of tourist sites as consumable experiences.

These examples demonstrate that all kinds of situations and instances can be considered in terms of a market - as commodity exchange. The specific location chosen for this investigation is in one sense secondary to the task of examining the theoretical propositions developed in the previous two chapters. Having considered several possibilities and locations for conducting this enquiry into sign consumption, the museum has been selected as an appropriate and interesting case for investigation.

Museums were traditionally operated without commercial and marketing interests being given significant consideration. As will be shown in the following chapter, most of the first modern museums were commissioned for the purposes of education and cultural prestige by wealthy Victorian philanthropic collectors. Terminology such as 'consumer', 'commodity' and 'market' do not appear immediately compatible with the purpose and function of museums. Museum visitors do not seem to have the same intentions as shoppers and a trip to a museum differs in many respects to a trip to a mall, supermarket or high street. Despite the apparent differences between conventional consumption encounters and museum visiting, museum professionals have gradually incorporated marketing related terminology and practice into curatorship. Chapter three discusses these changes and suggests that a recognition of the visitor as a consumer and the museum as a consumable experience can be interpreted as evidence of the 'commodification of culture' thesis put forward in this chapter.

The museum provides a useful site for this investigation into contemporary consumption and an evaluation of Baudrillard's ideas because many of the prerequisites traditionally expected of consumer encounters are lacking. Descriptions of the museum visit do not fit easily with models of consumption based on utility, economic exchange, material acquisition or need satisfaction and so perhaps the semiotic theory of consumption can provide an appropriate explanation. The following chapter considers the case of the museum in depth and discusses some of the reasons why this site offers a useful location from which to undertake some empirical work that can assist in evaluating the theoretical position developed in the previous two chapters. A review of the conceptual issues in current museum theory, referred to as museology and museum visitor studies, is conducted. These two areas of enquiry have grown significantly over the past decade or so, suggesting that concerns over the purpose of museums and the role of the visitor are of greater concern to museum professionals than they may have been previously.

Chapter four concentrates on methodological issues that bear relevance to conducting a study of this kind. Through consideration of the various methodological approaches available to consumer researchers, chapter four develops the research design and presents the chosen method of data collection and analysis. Chapter five and chapter six report and discuss the findings of the research project.

PART II
**An Empirical Investigation into
Commodification &
Museum Consumption**

CHAPTER THREE

Introduction to the study: Museums, malls and modernity

3.0 Chapter summary

This chapter introduces the empirical investigation into a semiotic interpretation of museum consumption. Section 3.1 introduces the general aims and objectives of the study. Section 3.2 provides some preliminary definitions of 'museum', 'museum consumption' and the 'museum commodity', summarising the main reasons why the museum offers a useful site for this investigation. Section 3.3 traces the historical development of the museum in relation to the three epochs of renaissance enlightenment, industrial modernity and postmodern consumer culture. Museums have had to become more marketing orientated, viewing the visitor as a consumer. This raises questions as to what it means to be a museum consumer and what form the commodities of museum consumption take.

3.1 Aims and Objectives: The problem of museum consumption

The museum profession, like many other 'culture industries', has had to respond to a changing environment. The structure of public funding together with the limitations placed on national and regional government expenditure, has meant that many museums have been forced to reconsider their priorities and strategies for continued survival. In response to the changing environment, museum professionals have become increasingly aware of marketing issues, seeking to develop coherent marketing strategies, corporate plans and mission statements. These methods are becoming necessary to secure the future of existing collections as well as obtaining increasingly scarce resources for the acquisition and

development of new presentations. As a consequence, the role of the visitor has undergone somewhat of a metamorphosis. As museums become organised like businesses, visitors become increasingly redefined as consumers. The problem however, which is central to this investigation, is what exactly constitutes the museum commodity? If museum visitors are consumers, then what do they consume? The museum, as a site of consumption, presents several problems in terms of existing theories of consumer behaviour, namely the lack of any economic exchange, material acquisition or functional utility relating to 'needs'. The primary objective of this empirical investigation is to examine whether a semiotic, cultural theory of consumption can be applied to understand museum consumption.

3.2 Some preliminary definitions of museum consumption

The museum has been chosen as a site from which to evaluate a semiotic theory of consumption because of the difficulty of integrating museum visiting into conventional models of consumer behaviour. Before considering this premise in more depth through the empirical investigation, this introduction will begin with some preliminary definitions of the 'museum', the 'consumer' and the 'commodity' in relation to museum consumption.

3.2.1 Museums

There are many definitions of 'museum'. Yorke & Jones (1987) state that there is no internationally agreed definition and that the term has different meanings

depending on who or which organisation is providing the definition and for what purpose. The International Council on Museums (ICOM) define a museum as:

‘A permanent establishment administered in the public interest with a view to conserve, study exploit and exhibit for the pleasure and education of the public, objects of cultural value.’

This definition is interesting in that it stresses the importance of objects that have ‘cultural value’. Whilst the term cultural value is vague, it nevertheless suggests that the objects displayed in museums must be valuable in some way to the public, and that this value is expressed in relation to pleasure. This emphasis on pleasure and value would suggest that there are commonalities between museums and other consumer pursuits. The second definition provided by Yorke & Jones (1987) is taken from the Museums Association of the United Kingdom (MA):

‘An institution where objects relating to the arts, sciences and human history are collected, adequately recorded, displayed, stored and conserved and are made available for research and the instruction and interest of the public.’

This definition focuses less on the visitors’ interests and more on the role of the museum in conservation and categorisation. This definition is in one sense very broad. Museums are not the only institutions that are concerned with the display, and storage of objects for the benefit of the public. The definition is equally applicable to institutions other than museums such as department stores and shopping malls. Yorke and Jones (1987) find both definitions problematic in certain respects and provide their own improvement:

An area where things of artistic, scientific, historical or cultural interest have been brought together for conservation, recording, storage, study and above all display and use for the enjoyment and education of people of all ages, either in a single building, a collection of buildings, a collection of related buildings or within the community which the museum serves.

This definition is not particularly useful in the sense that it suggests that any institution, building or collection of institutions and buildings which displays any kind of thing¹, for the enjoyment of anybody, can be defined as a museum. Using this definition, any type of retail establishment, library, art gallery or collection could be classified as a museum. The interesting point about this definition is that it emphasises the *use* of things by people for enjoyment and education. In doing so it suggests that patrons to museums use the 'things' on display for certain purposes, providing an almost functionalist interpretation for the existence of museums. For the purposes of this study, museums have several important characteristics:

- (i) *Museums display objects*: The review conducted in previous chapters stressed the importance of the object in the construction of the commodity form, where 'object' is defined as that which has (the appearance of) an autonomy independent of the subjective forces and labour of their reproduction. The purpose of museums is closely linked to the preservation, presentation and display of objects. The question to be considered in this investigation, is whether the museum object is a commodity, or more accurately, whether the format of the museum presentation enables the objects on display to be consumed as commodities.

(ii) *People make a personal choice to visit museums:* Deciding to visit a museum is a free choice, there is no obligation to attend. Since people choose to visit museums, it can be assumed that those that do visit believe that there is some advantage or benefit involved, otherwise they would not make the visit in the first place. In making a choice to visit the museum visitors must presumably decide between various alternative ways of spending their time and decide that visiting the museum offers more advantages than those alternatives on that particular occasion.

(iii) *Visitors' desire to visit museums and view artefacts is not implicated with utility:* Although museum artefacts may have had or may still have a function or use, visitors are not primarily concerned with this aspect of the displays. Although Yorke & Jones (1987) definition cited above proposes that museums are designed for visitors' *use* in enjoyment and education, this is not achieved through the functional exploitation of artefacts. An understanding of museum consumption and the value of museum artefacts cannot therefore be attributed to a utilitarian discourse or use-value since the artefacts themselves cannot be used.

(iv) *People do not visit museums with the intention of purchasing or acquiring the objects on display:* Whatever value visitors gain from attending museums, it does not depend upon an economic exchange² and cannot be explained using an existing model of market exchange. The purpose and motivation behind museum visiting does not depend upon visitors purchasing, buying or acquiring the materials displayed and consequently

museum objects are not valued in terms of these characteristics. The value of museum visiting therefore requires an alternative theory to explain the benefits of visiting that does not rely on the concepts of economic or monetary value or material acquisition.

Because of these 'defining' features, museum consumption is an appropriate conceptualisation, provides an ideal site from which to investigate a theory of commodity consumption that does not involve any material acquisition and economic or monetary exchange related to human needs and functionality. The purpose of this investigation is to consider the credibility of a semiotic theory to describe and explain museum consumption, on the premise that since the museum scenario lacks dimensions of economic and use value, a theory of sign value may provide an appropriate alternative.

3.2.2 Museum consumers

The consumer in museum consumption are those members of the general public who willingly choose to spend some of their free time visiting museums. Anyone can be a museum consumer providing they have sufficient free time to spend on the museum visit. Museums that require a donation or entrance fee to be paid may exclude those members of the public who are unable or unwilling to spend money on visiting museums. Attendance at a museum is the only pre requisite for someone to be termed a museum consumer; it is not necessary to specify the activities that constitute museum consumption. One visitor may choose to study particular displays in-depth whilst another may show only superficial interest.

Some visitors may spend many hours in the museum, others a short time. All visitors are taken as consumers. One of the objectives of this study is to examine and describe museum consumption, what it entails and how it is expressed.

3.2.3 Museum commodities

The museum commodity or 'product' which visitors consume is not immediately apparent and it is one of the objectives of this study to explicate. It may be that the museum itself is the commodity or it may be the individual displays. Alternatively it might be shown that applying the commodity concept in the context of the museum is inappropriate. For the museum, or aspects of it, to be seen as a commodity, it is necessary to identify evidence of 'commodity conditions' which were described in the discussion conducted in the preceding two chapters.

3.3 History of the museum: From spectacle to education to consumption

The historical development of museums in Western culture and the social significance of collecting can be located within the general social epochs referred to in earlier chapters, beginning with renaissance and enlightenment, moving on to industrial modernity and finally to postmodern consumer culture. The purpose and social function of artefact collections has been subject to continual revisions over the several hundred years of their existence. It is debatable whether all cultures and societies collect things (Elsner & Cardinal, 1994). However, it is perhaps more valid to consider the importance and cultural significance of collections and

collecting (Belk, 1996; Pearce, 1995). As Vergo (1985) points out, museums have emerged as a consequence of certain economic, political and social conditions that are particular to modern (western) societies. The museum as an institution is not a neutral medium but one that imposes a certain 'world view' on the value of historical and cultural material, reflecting the ideologies of those societies that collect, classify and display museum presentations:

'The very act of collecting has a political and ideological dimension which cannot be overlooked.. When our museums acquire (or refuse to give back) objects or artefacts specific to cultures other than our own, how does the 'value' we place on such objects differ from that assigned to them by culture, the people or the tribe from whom they have been taken, and for whom they may have a quite specific religious or ritual or even therapeutic connotation? In the acquisition of material, of whatever kind, let alone putting that material on public display or making it publicly accessible, museums make certain choices determined by judgements as to value, significance or monetary worth, judgements which may derive in part from the systems of values peculiar to the institution itself, but which in a more profound sense are also rooted in our education, our upbringing, our prejudices' (Vergo, 1985).

The significance and form of museum collections today has emerged over several hundred years of collecting and displaying artefacts. To assist in an understanding of the contemporary museum form, it will be useful to consider how collecting - as we know it today - began, and how it has responded to reflect the changing cultural beliefs in society as a whole.

3.3.1 Renaissance and cabinets of curiosity

The European tradition of collecting is typically traced back to the renaissance. The collections of art and other objects during this period were closely linked to

patronage and the church (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994). The first European collections that resemble anything like museums as they are understood today were the curio cabinets of the rich and powerful during the early colonial period (Shelton, 1994). Throughout the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries traders and explorers from Europe accumulated large quantities of anthropological and archaeological artefacts from all over the world.

‘By the end of the sixteenth century collecting had become fairly commonplace in Europe. Although these were fairly different in practice, all had a single objective, that of producing a ‘cabinet’, a model of ‘universal nature made private.’ (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994).

Early collections were mainly concerned with the wonderful, strange and spectacular. Owners of such collections were more concerned with the social prestige such displays would bring rather than for scientific or educational purposes, and consequently curiosity cabinets rarely had any unified order or categorisation. The visitors or viewers of these cabinets of curiosity were a privileged few.

3.3.2 Modernity and the ‘museum age’.

The emergence of the museum as it is popularly understood today is closely linked to the entire ‘modern’ project. The social conditions and philosophical beliefs that underpin modernism define and give purpose and meaning to the very notion of an institution designed for the sole purpose of collecting, classifying and displaying artefacts and objects (Fyfe, 1996). 1753 saw the opening of the British Museum, the first example of what would be recognised as a museum today. Over the 150

years that followed more and more museums were built in the major cities around the world as sites of colonial prestige and centres of knowledge and learning. By 1850 there were over sixty museums in Britain. During the '*museum age*' (1850 - 1914) almost 300 museums were opened throughout Europe (Hewison, 1987). By the mid to late nineteenth century, the ethos of the museum differed from that governing the curio cabinet, reflecting the emerging Victorian morality of learning about, and classifying the world into finite categories and sub-categories. By this time, museums had become public institutions open to a much larger group of viewers. Visitors were privileged guests in these new cathedrals of learning, grateful and passive receivers of knowledge supplied and directed by the expertise of archaeologists and curators (King, 1994). The views and opinions of visitors were secondary to the integrity and accuracy of the displays. Placed in a wider social context, the quantitative rise in the number of museums occurs alongside the other great modern projects undertaken at this time:

'These were the years when great temples and palaces were built to house the new orchestras, libraries, museums, they were often grouped together in great squares or Plaza's near the city centre. These enterprises were non commercial in their objectives, but they continued to be popular in objective: their goal was public enlightenment, the same goal proclaimed by earlier founders of cultural institutions' (Harris, 1991).

The growth of modern urban centres reformed the museum as a public arena where culture and commodity could sit side by side. This period also saw an expansion in the number of public art galleries and other such venues that bore characteristics of both the museum and the department store, both displaying

cultural material for the purpose of consumption and economic exchange (Zukin, 1982; 1988). The interface between cultural artefacts and the marketplace is most clearly illustrated by the popularity of world exhibitions (or expositions) characteristic of this period. These events were the grand festivals of modernity, bringing together, in spectacular displays, the finest artistic and cultural objects with the latest modern technological inventions (Harris, 1991). Many such expositions were designed to raise funds for the establishment of new museums. The barriers between 'art/culture' and consumer goods were no longer upheld at these events which allow all productions to be considered by the same commodity criteria (Hinsley, 1991).

3.3.3 Museums in postmodern consumer culture

With the 'demise' of modernity and imperialism seen over the last half century or so, the ethos of the museum has changed yet again. Hewison (1987) argues that the social conditions of post-industrial Britain have given rise to a massive growth in the 'heritage industry' in an attempt to dispel this climate of decline by exploiting the economic potential of culture. As well as the quantitative increase in the number of museums, the importance of the heritage industry in terms of general economic prosperity has reformed the museum as a commercial tourist venture.

As a consequence, the role of the Museum professional/curator has had to adapt to this trend, whereby the opinions and requirements of visitors must be given consideration in the design and presentation of artefact displays.

‘A museum’s users are its customers. In the case of national and local authority museums the public are also its *owners*, whilst for independent museums, the paying public are the means of survival. So, museums exist to serve the public’(Museums and Galleries Commission, 1992)

The move to a more visitor focused orientation has come under criticism from the museum establishment on the grounds that historical and anthropological accuracy has had to be sacrificed in favour of displays that are appealing to visitors (King, 1994). The visitor, like the viewers of the curio cabinets of old, has a preference for spectacular and unusual, displays and is less concerned with the historical or educational project of the museum (Terrell, 1991; Blattenberg & Broderick, 1991). However, some writers have suggested that the application of marketing techniques to the museum does not necessarily result in poorer or less legitimate displays. The treatment of museums as sites of consumption is simply a reflection of modern social structures which have redefined the role and purpose of many institutions, including the museum, so that they are compatible with contemporary expectations and the requirements of the public:

‘Based on the classic marketing approach of identifying customers and their needs, [English Heritage] has shown that treating a heritage property as a product to be ‘sold’ can be achieved without any loss of the property’s dignity or integrity. It can be undertaken in a manner which stimulates both on the part of the existing market and those for whom a visit to a heritage property offers the prospect of a new and rewarding experience’ (Eastaugh & Weiss, 1989).

Commercialisation of the museum and the treatment of visitors as ‘customers’ has changed the role of the curator to one which includes obtaining feedback from visitors in the form of visitor surveys and visitor research (Bicknell & Farmelo, 1993; Jansen-Verbeke & van Rekom, 1996; Beeho & Prentice, 1995). This

research is used to create more popular displays with the intention of attracting more visitors and hopefully encouraging them to repeat their visit. The museum is increasingly seen as an organisation like any other whose cultural 'product' must be marketed (Yorke & Jones, 1987; McLean, 1997, 1995; White, 1987; Milne, 1987).

'It was only a relatively few years ago that museums began to consider who their main audiences were and what they wanted to see. And it was even more recently that museums actively began to appeal to the wider, non museum visiting audiences from the lower socio-economic groups. Today all museums endeavour to provide a service to their communities. They have to inform, educate, entertain, even amuse. But now it goes far beyond that. Now we have to entice our audiences..' (Blackall & Meek, 1992)

Although museum professionals are increasingly seeing the merits of co-ordinated marketing strategies and other marketing efforts, little attention has focused on the nature and substance of the museum commodity that is consumed by the precious visiting public. Much of the literature regarding museums as sites of consumption provide prescriptive advice on how to initiate a more business like approach towards curatorship and museum management (e.g. Beeho & Prentice, 1995; Yorke & Jones, 1987). Falk & Dierkings' (1992) description of the 'museum experience' as an interactive activity which combines social, physical and personal contexts goes some way to examine the way visitors use museums, but this account does not treat the visit as a consumption experience as such. Other approaches (Fine & Ross, 1984) treat the museum experience as one involving the communication of 'symbolic' meanings but as with Falk & Dierkings' thesis, does not make the link with the structure of the museum commodity or its

consumption. Hewison however does make this link between the museum experience and the commodity experience:

‘Museums sanction the creation of commodities that have immaterial rather than material values. The objects that hold these values are a source of aesthetic pleasure, emotional response, historical knowledge, but above all cultural meaning’ (Hewison, 1987).

MacDonald (1995) proposes that the metaphor of shopping is perhaps more appropriate than one based totally on experiential assumptions about the museum visit. The museum visit is described as involving audiences and visitors who appropriate and acquire ‘media products’ rather than one based on notions of learning and education. Bagnall’s (1996) study provides a useful description of the museum visit as a consumption experience. She proposes that museum visiting involves the ‘*consumption of the past*’, whereby visitors derive genuine pleasure from the emotionally provocative and imaginatively stimulating experience of heritage sites.

The objective of this investigation is therefore to build on these approaches not only evaluate the characteristics of the museum experience but also to give consideration to how the museum commodity is consumed. The following three chapters report the methodology and research findings of the empirical study. Chapter four considers some of the conceptual issues involved in designing a research project of this kind and presents the qualitative research methodology used in this. The chapter also gives attention to issues concerning the analysis of qualitative data, presenting the analytical method of thick description. Chapters five and six present and discuss the findings of the study. Chapter five gives

consideration to issues surrounding the commodification of the museum and chapter six applies a semiotic approach to describe the types of value that structure museum consumption.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodological considerations

4.0 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter is to develop and justify a methodological approach for the investigation into museum consumption. Section 4.1 begins with a brief outline of the research objectives developed in the discussion of literature conducted previously. Section 4.2 considers some of the conceptual issues relevant to methodological design and provides a summary of the significant philosophical and paradigmatic positions in consumer and marketing research. Application of an interpretive approach is proposed using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Section 4.3 reviews methods of qualitative data collection and presents the methodological design for this study in section 4.4. Section 4.5 considers methods of qualitative data analysis and section 4.6 presents the descriptive analytical method.

4.1 Statement of research objectives

The research programme is designed to enable examination and discussion of consumption as a cultural practice involving both a semiotic and material component. The arguments put forward in the previous chapters propose that consumption takes place in a diverse range of social activities and not just those which involve the monetary exchange and acquisition of goods and services. The constitution of contemporary society and the social relations of (late) capitalism provides the foundations for potentially all social activities to become governed and organised in terms of a commodity code. As society becomes increasingly represented as a series of commodities, consumption takes on a primary function

in the perceptions and activities of the members of the social world. In this context, the role of 'consumer' is used more and more frequently in an ever increasing range of social activities such as museum visiting. The research programme was designed with the objective of building a detailed picture of museum visiting and to represent the visiting experience with as much 'thickness' and depth as possible; the intention being to apply this picture to an examination of the concepts of commodification, value, and consumption in relation to the museum visiting experience.

4.2 Conceptual and philosophical issues in methodological practice

The research objectives raise several methodological issues that need to be explored before the programme of research could be undertaken. The most important issue concerns the problem of representation and how a detailed picture of museum visiting can be obtained. Different research methodologies not only produce different types of data, they also operate on different assumptions about the social world and how it can and should be represented. Research conventions in consumer research have become increasingly eclectic over the last decade or so (Hirschman, 1986; Belk, 1986) and this eclecticism has resulted in several conflicting positions regarding how consumer experiences can be most legitimately represented. Whilst certain methodological practices, namely those derived from scientific empiricism, retain a dominance in consumer research and marketing research more generally, this has not eliminated the prospects of applying alternative methodological practices and assumptions concerning the nature, scope and purpose of research:

There can be little doubt that, at this stage in the development of consumer research, methodological pluralism is desirable. Although we believe, that traditional scientific empirical research on consumer behavior has made progress, it would clearly be difficult to argue that it has enjoyed sufficient success to pre-empt other approaches. (Calder & Tybout, 1989, p199)

Although there are many approaches that can be applied to achieve a representation of the consumer and his or her beliefs, they are typically classified into two distinct camps of research practice: quantitative or positivist research, and qualitative or interpretive research (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988; Hudson & Ozanne, 1989; Belk, 1995b). Both traditions have their own set of conventions, philosophical origins and practices and consequently produce very different understandings about consumers and the role of consumption in society.

As is often the case in academic enquiry, there is a tendency to conceptualise and structure problems and theory in terms of oppositions, alas it would seem that this is unavoidable. Several such oppositions have already been used to structure this review including gift/commodity, subject/object, use value/ exchange value, modern/postmodern, and now added to this is the dichotomy of positivism/ interpretivism. As with all such oppositions, the interpretivist /positivist dualism is, on closer critical inspection, conceptually and methodologically problematic. There are numerous well documented illustrations that describe the difference between the two approaches (see for example, Silverman, 1993). But there are also equally significant differences within the positivist and interpretivist methodological paradigms.

There are some fundamental disagreements and incompatibilities between, for example, critical theory methodologies and those based on social constructivism but both are typically termed 'interpretivist' or 'qualitative' (Anderson, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The intention of this section is not to suggest that interpretivism offers a more legitimate and constructive methodology than positivism since both approaches have strengths and weaknesses that require different philosophical assumptions. In this respect the two methodologies are not comparable. The distinction, albeit arbitrary to a large extent, does provide a mechanism to begin to discuss issues relevant to the design and implementation of a research methodology for this study. The discussion that follows sets out to argue that in the context of this study, interpretivist, or a certain type of interpretivism, provides the most appropriate methodology to investigate the research objectives outlined above. To achieve this end, the discussion will describe some of the relevant differences between interpretivist and positivist methodologies but will concentrate more specifically on the opportunities offered by different interpretivist or qualitative methodologies. The question that this section seeks to address is not whether positivism is in some way inferior to qualitative styles of research but rather, which of the various qualitative techniques is most suitable for examining the case of museum consumption and commodification.

Whatever the differences between conflicting research methodologies, they are all to a lesser or greater degree empirical. Whilst accepting that different research traditions do have differing ideas about the nature of the social world and how it is experienced by individuals, most research methodologies whether they be

qualitative or quantitative, are based on the assumption that knowledge can be gained by experiencing the social world in various ways and through application of various specialised techniques. A carefully controlled laboratory experiment and phenomenological participant observation share the common trait that they both assume that something of interest and relevance can be gained by looking at the way people interact and experience the world. If this were not considered to be of interest then there would be little point conducting research in 'the field' and theoretical, hypothetical explanations would suffice.

Evaluation and selection of an appropriate research methodology is highly dependent upon the preconceptions held about the nature of consumers' actions, behaviours and experiences, and more importantly, how these experiences can be best represented. The debates over styles of methodology do not simply concern how data should be collected and analysed but reflect other, more deep rooted concerns about the purpose and nature of social science. Debates that consider whether marketing and consumer research are scientific endeavours (Peter & Olson, 1983; Anderson, 1983) that seek to establish a factual body of knowledge, or whether they should be aligned to the humanities and the arts are closely linked to methodological practice and design.

4.2.1 The *science* of society

The dominant paradigm of research practice in consumer research and museum visitor studies is that of positivism which employs the principles and philosophy of scientific practice. Positivism has gradations of severity but in its most extreme form assumes that the world and society exists externally to human beings and

human thought. Its origins can be traced back to natural and materialist philosophy which states that the world consists of two types of things, objects and subjects (see section 2.2). The purpose of research practice is concerned with understanding the objective reality of the world and discovering its truths. The naïve realism of conventional positivist thought has largely been replaced by logical or post positivism (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Popper (1959) argues that subjects (human beings, researchers, scientists) can never have direct access to the objective reality of the world but are confined to experiencing it through their own subjective interpretation. Whilst it is not possible to prove that something is true (because of the impossibility of having direct access to objective reality), it is possible to show through careful experimentation that certain hypotheses are false and by deduction implicate the counter proposition as being true. The hypothetico-deductive method prescribes a set of conventions that enable truths to be established in this way. In positivistic studies, the role of the researcher is as a reporter and recorder of phenomena, s/he is not permitted to input any subjective influence of that being observed, the assumption being that any two researchers could observe the same phenomenon and report identical results. Collected data is typically represented quantitatively and interpreted through the application of statistical tests and measures. Some consumer researchers continue to advocate the use of falsification and scientific positivism as the only methodology that offers the possibility of progress in the discipline (Calder & Tybout, 1987, Hunt, 1989). Others in the academy have become increasingly critical of this position (Cooper, 1988; Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988; Anderson, 1988) and have turned to alternative methodologies and research paradigms (termed by many as 'Interpretive').

The positivist paradigm has come under criticism on several levels. Society and social action cannot be researched in the same way as physical or natural phenomena. Researchers cannot be objective in their analysis of society because they are part of that society and can therefore never look upon it objectively or externally. The model of 'scientific progress' that Calder and Tybout (1987) argue for may be appropriate in the context of natural science but is incompatible in social science. Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, (1988) state:

'As a social science rather than a natural science, consumer research needs an interpretive perspective' (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1988).

The interpretive argument comes down to a belief that all research practice involves an interpretation at some level and that methods other than scientific or positivistic ones are more suitable for dealing with this position. Hermeneutics and phenomenology for instance implicitly accept the interpretive function (Arnold & Fischer, 1994) and therefore provide an alternative to positivistic research which seeks to minimise, if not remove entirely, the subjective interpretation in research practice.

The only research questions that are valid for positivist researchers are those that can be tested and falsified. Whilst it may be interesting to ask why consumers behave in the way that they do, or what visitors really think whilst walking around a museum, because the phenomena cannot be observed objectively and are not statistically testable or falsifiable, they cannot be considered valid hypothesis for

research. Consequently much of conventional consumer research and museum visitor studies have focused on those aspects which can be experimentally observed and statistically tested. Visitor research has tended to focus on the number and type of visitors that attend, which exhibits and displays are popular and how the museum can be re-organised and re-designed to increase this attendance (Museum of Transport, 1995). Cicourel (1964) is critical of the primacy given to method and techniques, arguing the context of research should be considered more important. He suggests that field research should be theoretically driven rather than determined by technical considerations of what can be measured and what can be sampled (Silverman, 1993, p29).

The philosophical basis for positivist methodology has also be criticised by those supporting a socially constructed reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966) or phenomenology because it is reliant upon an understanding that phenomena actually exist in an objective reality. Others have argued that many of the principles of positivist research such as falsification and objectivity in data collection and analysis, are not upheld in actual research practice (Latour,1992; Kuhn,1966).

Despite these criticisms positivist methodology remains the dominant paradigm in both museum visitor studies and consumer research. Positivist styles of research, albeit conceptually problematic for some researchers, do offer some distinct pragmatic advantages. As funding for museums becomes increasingly dependent on visitor numbers, policy makers will undoubtedly turn to research techniques that provide them with '(f)actual' information that can be used to secure existing

funding or increase visitor numbers. The same is true with certain types of consumer and marketing research which is intended to have specific commercial application. Museum policy makers and marketing managers may be less willing to make decisions based upon an 'interpretation' than they would on data that makes claims to be objective and factual. Considering the differing requirements and expectations of research, there would seem to be little reason to advocate that 'scientific' research is useless since in some contexts it is highly appropriate and desired (Gordon & Langmaid, 1988). The point of issue here is to decide if this style of research practice is appropriate to the specific objectives of this research programme or whether alternative methods are more suitable.

The nature of this research project means that positivist quantitative techniques are not appropriate. The selected methodology must enable collection of visitors' opinions and views in such a way that allows the theoretical assumptions raised earlier to be considered in a rigorous manner. This requires 'deep' or 'thick' descriptive data rather than data which can be used to affirm or reject factual hypothesis. The concepts involved here cannot be directly observed or manipulated, nor can they be statistically tested. It would be farcical to suggest that the presence of a commodity code can be measured either in the museum or anywhere else. The main objective here is not to search for proof or fact but to generate an in-depth description of museum visiting, which will enable the arguments and concepts relating to commodification and consumption to be explored and discussed. Quantitative techniques are not particularly useful for ascertaining experiential or descriptive accounts of phenomena because of the restrictions imposed on how data can be collected and what data is considered

reliable and valid. More importantly, the theoretical positions underpinning this research reject many of the principles of positivism as unworkable and conceptually problematic. The ideas used to structure this thesis have not been derived from scientific experimentation but from theoretical debate and argument, applying the techniques of literary criticism, critical and social theory and anthropology and can therefore be most credibly examined through qualitative or interpretive methodological design (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). The objectives of this empirical investigation are rooted in a different paradigm of knowledge and understanding to that offered by scientific thought. The research methodology employed in this study must acknowledge the academic discourse in which the study is grounded, adopting a style of research which enables the relevant issues to be critically assessed and commented upon.

4.2.2 The interpretive turn

The increasing attention being paid to interpretive styles of research can be seen as a reflection of the changing understandings of what consumer behaviour research should focus upon as its area of enquiry. Traditionally consumer research has directed its attention to explaining the consumer and his or her actions through psychological and economic theory (Leong, 1989). These disciplines and the scientific methods they advocate have produced a normative and rational understanding of the consumer in the belief that this knowledge can be used by marketing management to improve and make more effective its marketing practice (Belk, 1995b). This remains the dominant paradigm in consumer research although this vision has often been questioned throughout the brief history of

consumer research (Jacoby, 1975; Jacoby, 1978; Belk, 1986). The last decade or so has seen increased academic interest in consumption and marketing activities, attracting researchers from an increasingly diverse range of academic backgrounds who have brought with them alternative methodologies that oppose this dominant position.

This is most clearly reflected in the presentations and publications of the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) and *Journal of Consumer Research* (JCR) in which can be found examples of almost every possible philosophical, disciplinary and methodological position including anthropology and ethnography (Belk et al, 1989), critical relativism (Anderson, 1988), literary criticism (Stern, 1989), social constructionism and hermeneutics (Arnold & Fischer, 1994) to name but a few. This has resulted in some to claim that consumer research should no longer be affiliated solely with marketing but should be thought of as a discipline in its own right with many different disciplinary allegiances (Holbrook, 1985).

On a simplistic level, quantitative techniques are concerned with representing the world numerically and establishing truths via the collection and testing of numerical data (Hammersley, 1992). Qualitative techniques on the other hand are concerned with literary or textual representations of the world, with the main thrust of analysis being the *interpretation* of these texts using various textual analytical techniques (For example, Mick, 1986; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992a, 1992b). For this reason, qualitative methodology is highly compatible with the theoretical ideas that structure the research objectives of this project. In section 2.4. the theory reviewed proposed that culture and consumption can be understood

using a linguistic or semiotic metaphor. It would therefore seem appropriate to apply a methodology which is grounded on the same assumptions concerning culture as a linguistic entity rather one that reduces the world to numerical, testable hypotheses.

Since the main methodological task is an interpretive exercise, qualitative techniques reject the idea of objective representation, instead accepting that all methodological practice is a highly subjective enterprise. The analysis of any data set can never be definitive or objective but always remains the interpretation of the researcher or researchers conducting that analysis. Rather than attempting to embrace the fatal strategy of objective representation, it is suggested that researchers recognise their own subjective input into interpretations of data and use it to enhance the quality and relevance of the research that is conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The boldest claim of qualitative research is that it allows the collection of naturalistic data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By collecting data in natural settings (rather than experimental ones) it is argued that a more accurate and in-depth description of any given phenomenon is possible. Qualitative research is said to allow a fidelity to the phenomena under study through sensitivity to conditions and is based on cultural description of meanings (Silverman, 1993). This is perhaps the most obvious paradox in some approaches to qualitative research. Qualitative research is founded on a critique of positivism and the claims made to truth about given phenomena. If the alternatives suggested for qualitative research propose a more legitimate, authentic and naturalistic representation then they are

arguably guilty of the same claim. As supporters of the scientific method are eager to point out, positivism does not claim to discover truth or reality, indeed they propose that this cannot be achieved via any method of enquiry (Popper, 1959). A further problem with the 'naturalistic' claims of qualitative research is the definition of what constitutes a 'natural' and an 'artificial' setting, a polarity which Silverman (1993, p29) argues is spurious. The museum visit can be considered highly artificial and constructed setting but also as a natural one. The terms 'reality', 'natural' etc. are only of interest when they are used in the context of the phenomena being examined. In the case of museum visiting the question should not be whether museum visitors behave in a natural or artificial manner but whether they believe are doing so and why.

The idea of qualitative research used in this study is concerned with the meaning and function of social action (Hammersley, 1990) and understanding these actions and meanings in their social context (Bryman, 1988). The objective is to develop a research design that delivers an in-depth and thick descriptive account of museum visiting rather than one which is based upon a testable proposition or claims of truth. The validity of the design should be measured by the extent to which it provides a useful and credible account of museum visitors' opinions, where the terms credible and useful refer only to the descriptive depth of the data collected and the extent to which it can be used to consider the theoretical positions identified in the literature.

4.3 Methods for qualitative data collection

‘Once the researcher has a question, a site, a participant or a number of participants, and a reasonable time period to undertake the study, he or she needs to decide on the most appropriate data collection strategy suited to the study. The selection of these strategies is intimately connected to how the researcher views the purpose of the work, that is, how to understand the social setting under study’ (Janesick, 1994).

The methodology for collecting data varies depending on the type of philosophical paradigm applied, the nature and location of the phenomena being examined and the objectives of analysis. The philosophical paradigm running through this piece of research can be labelled critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Carspecken & Apple, 1992). In terms of methodology it pre-supposes the following arguments (see section 2.4). Knowledge consists of a series of structural insights that transform as time passes. Phenomena may appear natural but on closer inspection can be shown to be attributable to political and ideological factors which shape cultural and social beliefs. The objective of research is to examine what may appear to be mundane and ordinary, to explain what these political and ideological factors are and how they influence cultural perceptions and social action. Carspecken & Apple (1992) argue that one of the primary tenets of critical theoretical research is to think *relationally* by looking for the connections between what goes on in institutions and the ideological or political relations that reproduce, transform and mediate daily life. In this research project the institution under investigation is the museum, the connections to be identified and discussed are the relations of capitalism, commodification and consumption and how they can be seen to reproduce and mediate the museum visit as a meaningful and

valuable experience. The method of data collection should allow these relational connections to be made by producing data that can be discussed in context to the theoretical positions developed so far. There are generally four main techniques for collecting qualitative data: focus groups, interviews, observation, and collection of existing sources and materials.

4.3.1 Existing sources and materials and document analysis

This category of data is the most general and can incorporate any material or source including material products and objects, film, pictures and songs, texts such as popular media (newspapers, comics), and other literary texts such as novels, manuals and catalogues. The collection of this type of material resembles an almost archaeological method of research (Hodder, 1994; Pearce, 1994) whereby objects are collected and interpreted. From a critical theory perspective, all these productions must be viewed in light of the systems and organisations of their production, exchange, consumption and use. There are numerous examples of research which are based on this type of data, some notable examples (not necessarily taking a critical theory perspective) include Barthes (1983) structural semiology of women's fashion magazines, Belk's (1987) analysis of consumption symbolism in comic books, Baudrillard's (1996a) semiology and Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton's (1981) analysis of domestic consumption, which look at the way furniture and other domestic items are purchased, consumed and displayed. Holbrook & Grayson's (1986) analysis '*Out of Africa*' Hirschman's (1991) analysis of '*Fatal Attraction*', '*Blue Velvet*', and '*Nine & 1/2 Weeks*', and Holbrook's (1986) use of '*Gremlins*' as a metaphor for

materialism, are examples of using of cinematic 'texts' in consumer research. Texts such as Homer's *'Odyssey'*, (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1992a) and pulp fiction (Brown, 1991) have also been applied to the understanding of consumer culture and consumption symbolism. Critical deconstructions of advertisements and other commercial texts have also been widely undertaken (Stern, 1989). This research goes on the premise that all forms of production are part of material culture and that by paying attention to the way this material culture is produced and consumed, it is possible to discern something about culture and social action.

This method of data collection could have been used in this study by collecting photographic data of museums and museum collections, collecting promotional materials such as press releases and advertisements, or reviewing design plans and display layouts. The major drawback of this type of data collection if used in isolation is that it does not enable the views, experiences and opinions of consumers and visitors to be represented. In some situations this is a distinct advantage, when what people say is contradictory and secondary to what they actually do, or where understanding of the collected material would not be expected to be enhanced by asking those concerned with its production and use. In the case of archaeological research, for example, the researcher is restricted to his or her own interpretation of cultural artefacts because the people responsible for their original production cannot be interviewed. For instance, Baer (1991) examined the contents of household rubbish and the manner in which people disposed of their waste as means of studying food consumption patterns, on the premise that if contemporary waste disposal behaviour could be understood, it may be possible to understand the archaeological remains of societies now extinct.

This technique (termed 'garbology') can reveal a great deal of information about consumption patterns without having to interview or observe individual consumers.

4.3.2 Observation

Observation and participant observation is a technique derived from anthropology and ethnography (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Data is typically collected by a researcher making detailed field notes or diaries based on the observations made. Observation does not have to rely solely on a written account of the phenomenon being observed. Photographic, video and pictorial information can be collected as additional sources of data that can add depth to recorded observation data. (Collier et al., 1986; Harper, 1994). A distinct advantage of observation is that because it is unobtrusive it enables access to scenarios that may be inaccessible with other methods of data collection (Adler & Adler, 1994). Because direct participation and personal interaction are not required observation can be conducted inconspicuously (Webb et al., 1966). The role of the researcher as interpreter of the phenomena observed is central to this technique and no attempt is made to record 'objective' observations. With participant observation, the researcher records observations from the position of an active member in the phenomena being examined. Although observation techniques allow inconspicuous data collection this should not be confused with 'natural' observation. The observer can have a considerable effect upon those being observed particularly if those being observed are aware that their actions and behaviours are being scrutinised (Kidder, 1981). In this study observation techniques could be used to examine the

types of behaviour and actions visitors display as they undertake their visit. It could be used to establish how they move around the museum, the length of time given to viewing different exhibits, the type of clothing visitors wear (formal/informal), their age and whether visitors attend by themselves or in groups. Observations do not necessarily require the researcher to take on the role of a passive watcher, as a participant observer the researcher could record his or her own experiences as a visitor to the museum, recording the way attendants, curators and other visitors interact with one another and him or herself. This technique is called the personal experience method (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994)

Observation, like the method described in the previous section, does not generally permit the collection of respondents (consumers, visitors) opinions and beliefs about the phenomenon being investigated, unless they can be brought up in normal conversation. The method can therefore be useful if the purpose of the research is not to find out what people say, but to observe what they actually do. Observation raises certain ethical questions regarding the rights of those being observed (Punch, 1994). In some situations people may object to having their behaviours, comments and activities secretly recorded without their knowing. This is of minor concern in museum observations since the museum is a public space and therefore visitors do not expect a significant level of privacy.

4.3.2 Focus Groups

The two methods for collecting data described above do not require respondents to take an active and conscious role in the research process. In some instances this may be necessary if the comments and views of a certain group are required. Focus groups are one method of collecting this type of data. A focus group typically consists of a prearranged group coming together at a specified time and location to participate in a group discussion. The session is led by a researcher who can introduce various stimuli in the form of questions and statements for discussion or methods such as projective techniques and role play. The benefit of focus groups over other forms of researcher-respondent interaction is that it allows a dynamic dimension to be introduced into the data being collected (Gordon & Lanmaid, 1988), allowing phenomena that would normally take place in a group setting to be examined. Focus groups also enable ideas to develop from group discussion and argument that might not emerge in a one to one interview scenario. Participants may be willing to discuss issues with one another that they would be unwilling to raise in another situation. But focus groups also present many problems. Before conducting a focus group the researcher must be aware of the reasons why the members of that group have chosen to participate and the expectations they have of the session. Although focus groups are 'artificial' scenarios they are still structured by accepted conventions of interpersonal interaction. It is necessary to be aware of the social psychology of group processes (Brown, 1988) including factors such as conformity, leadership, status and prejudice. Knowledge of the existing relationships between group members may be a highly significant in the types of responses given. If the members of the group

are unknown to one another then the types of responses given must be interpreted in light of this.

4.3.4 Interviewing

Together with the focus group, interviewing is perhaps the most popular form of qualitative data collection and has widespread application in consumer research (McCracken, 1988). Interviewing typically involves dialogue between an interviewer and one interviewee. The interview is not necessarily a qualitative data collection method, depending on the type of interview and the stimuli used to structure the interaction. For example, a recent visitor survey conducted by museum assistants at the Glasgow Museum of Transport (1995), consisted of multi-choice questions and Likert scales and can be considered to constitute an interview of a sort. However it does not offer any qualitative potential if the questionnaire responses are the only data used in analysis.

Interviews, like focus groups, must be recognised as specific forms of social interaction (Silverman, 1993) where the two parties involved take specific roles and will respond according to their prescribed understandings of what that role should entail. For instance, the interviewer is obliged to listen attentively to the responses given during the interview and the interviewee is similarly obliged to answer the questions or perform the exercises asked of him or her. Gordon & Lanmaid (1988) suggest that in an interview there is an implicit social contract between the two parties. This is not typical of most everyday social interaction where no formal question-answer may prevail (Silverman, 1993).

The interview must be designed with various stages in mind. If the interviewer and interviewee are unknown to one another then a rapport, together with a certain level of trust and mutual understanding must be established. The interview may begin with simple questions and gradually building up to more sophisticated and complex ideas being presented for discussion. Depending on the objectives of the research, the stimuli may be designed that prevents misleading questions being put forward or questions that prompt a respondent to give certain answers. However, the notion that it is possible to ask a non leading question is itself a misnomer since the fundamental motive of asking a question is to gain an answer of some kind. Any question will undoubtedly restrict and frame the types of answers that can be provided. Rather than trying to remove this *bias*, it is perhaps more constructive to recognise the specific discourse in which a question is located allowing an understanding not just of what was said but why and how (Silverman, 1993). In some cases leading questions maybe highly useful devices to lead a respondent into discussing a specific topic or issue. Interviewing and focus groups have many potential applications in this study. They can be used in a variety of contexts to gain the views and opinions of visitors, curators, museum assistants, and other groups that have an interest in the museum.

4.3.5 Combinatory methods of qualitative data collection

So far these methods of data collection have been considered in isolation. However, the shortfalls of individual approaches can often be overcome by triangulating or using several methods in conjunction with one another. It is also

possible to use a number of these methods together, enabling different types of data to be collected. Adler & Adler (1994) note that observation data can often be enhanced by a programme of interviews with key informants or persons previously observed. Rather than interpreting some observed behaviour, it can be useful to get those observed to explain their own behaviour. This technique has been used by Heisley and Levy (1991) which they term 'autodriving'. It involves recording behaviour photographically or on film and then asking those displaying the behaviour to explain their actions. A similar technique is being applied commercially by J. Walter Thompson (Salri, 1997) to further understand product selection in supermarkets. Shoppers were filmed selecting washing powder from supermarket shelves and later shown the recording and asked to describe the decision making process that they had gone through. Approaches such as these allow researchers to establish the differences between what people actually do, and what they might say they do, in an interview or focus group scenario. But more importantly for this study, a combination of methods allows a more thorough and in-depth description of the museum visiting experience than that provided by any one method alone.

4.4 Project research design part one: Data collection

Having reviewed the major qualitative data collection techniques, attention will now be given to selecting and supporting the specific method of data collection used in this study. Consideration will first be given to the location for data collection and secondly, to the specific data collection techniques and research stimuli used. Due to practical and financial considerations, a decision was taken to

focus on museums in Scotland. This did not limit the scope of the study; Scotland has many museums which are both publicly and privately funded. They display a diverse range of materials and artefacts and attract large numbers of domestic and foreign visitors. Scottish Museums operate in similar economic and social environments to museums in other parts of the United Kingdom with pressures in terms of funding and are subject to the conditions outlined in chapter three.

4.4.1 Preliminary interviews

Curators at most of the Museums in Scotland were contacted and asked to participate in an interview at their place of work. The following museums were contacted: The National Museum of Scotland and the Museum of Historical Instruments in Edinburgh; The Anthropological Museum at Marischal College in Aberdeen; Callander House and Falkirk Industrial Museum; and The People's Palace, The Burrell Collection, The Museum of Transport and The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. Curators at all the above museums agreed to an interview except at The National Museum of Scotland, and the Burrell collection and the Peoples Palace in Glasgow. The preliminary interviews were used as a mechanism to begin to discuss some of the issues relevant to the research project and to develop contacts for the continuation of the project. The interviews were unstructured with no predefined agenda of questions.

Selection of the museums that would be used in the next stage of the study depended on practical considerations such as location and the type and number of visitors that typically attended. The programme of research would involve

numerous repeat visits to the museums selected and would involve interviewing curators, assistants as well as visitors over a period of several months. A decision was taken to reject the Falkirk Industrial Museum as a site since it was generally visited by pre arranged parties such as school groups and not the general public, and had limited opening times. The anthropological museum in Aberdeen presented problems in terms of distance and was generally attended by anthropology students and staff at the adjoining University of Aberdeen. The Museum of Historical Musical Instruments in Edinburgh was not open full time and attracted a specific type of visitor, namely students of music and musical instrument makers. Many of the visitors to the museum were examining the instruments for the purposes of reproduction and the curator expressed concerns that some visitors may be hostile to interruptions. This museum was a fascinating site but far too specialised for the purposes of this study. The visitors were not 'typical', in fact they were not really visitors as such but used the museum as one might use a library or other resource. The People's Palace and The Burrell Collection in Glasgow were unwilling to sanction a research project of this type. Both museums were conducting their own visitor surveys and were concerned that another visitor study might prevent the public from enjoying their visit. Curators at the Museum of Transport and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum welcomed the project and were willing to sanction the research programme. They were selected as the two main sites for the investigation into museum consumption.

4.4.2 Museum of Transport

From 1964 - 1987 the Museum of Transport was situated at the former Glasgow Corporation Tramways Works (Smith, 1988). In 1988 the transport collections were relocated in the current site at Kelvinhall. The museum uses both traditional and modern methods of display. Displays include the simulated Kelvinway reproduction of a Glasgow street and the presentation of mass produced private cars presented in the setting in an 'authentic' motorcar showroom, as well as Bicycle, model ship, tram, bus and steam train collections. Interestingly for this study, the Museum of Transport Guidebook concludes, *'The museum is continually adding to its collections.. if you have anything old, or even not so old, we would be interested to hear from you. The products of today are tomorrow's museum displays'*.

4.4.3 Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

The history of Glasgow Museums dates back to 1845 when Archibald McLellan bequeathed a collection of paintings and a building to house it, to the city of Glasgow (Glasgow Museums, 1994). In 1870 the Glasgow Corporation acquired a small mansion, built in 1783 called Kelvingrove House. In 1876 a wing was added to house technological items but it was later decided to build a larger building on the Kelvingrove site to bring Glasgow's art and museum collections under one roof. The 1888 exhibition on the site was held to raise funds for the new building which was completed in 1901 amid a second exhibition. The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was officially opened to the public in 1902. The ornate red

brick museum is typical of the Victorian museums that were built in major cities around Britain during the latter part of the nineteenth century (see section 3.2.2). It now houses a diverse collection on two floors. The second floor is taken up almost entirely with art collections, the first floor housing ethnography, natural history, archaeology, arms and armour, and geology collections.

4.4.4 Additional considerations concerning the proposed sites for data collection

The two museums chosen offer several distinct prospects for the collection of descriptive data. The collections of the Museum of Transport are very different to those in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and this contrast will prove a useful device in providing the required depth to this description of museum visiting. The majority of visitors would be expected to be highly familiar with certain aspects of the displays in the Museum of Transport and may even have personal contact with the artefacts prior to their present exhibition. Conversely, visitors to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum cannot not have this degree of personal empathy with the objects on display. This difference provides contrast and opposition which can be utilised in the descriptive analysis.

Unlike many public museums in other British cities, all of the museums in Glasgow have considerable public support. Visitor studies conducted at other museums and heritage sites have shown that visitor groups tend to be mainly middle class and from *A, B, or C1* socio-economic groups (Merriman, 1992). Up to a third of the population exclude themselves from visiting museums because of

their unwelcoming image and their associations with 'high' culture (Bourdieu, 1974; Crane, 1992). Although there is as yet no published data that specifically addresses the class characteristics of Glasgow museum visitors, many of the curators and assistants who were consulted as part of this project, expressed a belief that Glasgow museums (unlike many other museums) attracted visitors from all social groups. One of the curators at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum suggested that this was due to a greater sense of civic pride in the city, although she was unable to specify what was meant by this comment or why this should create increased interest in museum visiting.

Although visitors in Glasgow are reported to have a greater civic pride towards their museums, this in itself is not sufficient evidence to hold that their museum experiences are fundamentally different to that of visitors to other museums. Whilst Glasgow visitors may hold their museums in high regard, the types of beliefs that they have towards objects and the significance they attribute to artefact presentations may not be atypical. It is therefore important to maintain a distinction between attitudes and preferences in favour of Glasgow museums generally, and the beliefs and values attributed to artefact collections¹.

Glasgow Museums operate a policy of free entrance that covers the two museums used for this study. This is important considering the research objectives to examine consumption involving non monetary exchange. If the museums studied operated an entrance fee, the discussion of exchange value would become complicated by this payment. Museums that do charge an entrance fee can be easily incorporated into existing accounts of tourist consumption where the initial

payment is considered to be the context of economic exchange for an expected product or service (see section 3.2).

4.4.5 Problems with data collection via focus groups

As the objective of the research design is to provide an in-depth account of visitors' experiences during their visit to a museum, it was decided that observational techniques alone would not be sufficient and some formal communication with visitors was required. The first design attempted to set up a series of focus group sessions with visitors during their visit. A room was organised in the museum with the assistance of curators and equipped with video and audio equipment for conducting the focus groups. A series of general statements and questions were designed that would form the topics of discussion. Visitors were approached whilst in the museum and asked a few simple questions about their reasons for attending. At the end of this brief interview visitors were invited to attend a group discussion to continue to discuss the topics in more depth.

The majority of visitors approached were willing to answer a series of preliminary questions. Some were even prepared to spend up to five minutes or so recounting various stories, opinions and ideas regarding the museum and its displays. The vast majority of visitors did not express any interest in attending a focus group session. Many were attending with families or friends and felt that attending a session of this type would be inconvenient. It is also important to note that some visitors only stay in the museum for a short time and were unwilling to extend the

time they have allotted for their visit to include participation in a focus group. The short interviews allowed visitors to express their views as they wished without the pressure of an expected contribution. Focus groups on the other hand are more formal in structure. Visitors are less able to withdraw their participation and have less control over the interview process. Visitors seemed willing make a contribution to the research as long as their input was informal and did not require them to deviate considerably from their planned visit.

One possible way of getting over this lack of participation would be to use pre-arranged groups of people, a technique used by many museum visitor studies. Local community groups are invited to come and visit the museum with the knowledge that they will be asked to discuss their views and opinions once their visit is complete. The group members typically know one another prior to the group session and may therefore feel more comfortable in voicing their opinions than if the other group members were unknown to them. This approach was rejected because those attending the group discussion would not be representative of most museum visitors. Most visitors do not come to the museum in a large social group with the pre meditated expectation of discussing their experiences. Such an approach it was felt would deny the 'phenomenological' presence of museum visiting. The group discussions would not really involve museum visitors as such, rather respondents who were willing to engage in a discussion of museum collections.

Because of the practical and conceptual problems with focus groups it was decided that this method of data collection was inappropriate. Long in-depth

interviews were also rejected for the same reasons. The lessons learnt from attempting to conduct focus group discussions revealed some important points that needed to be considered in any final research design of data collection. The interaction with visitors needed to take place as they were undertaking their visit. It is only in this setting that people are engaged in museum consumption. A thick description of museum consumption should represent the visitors' views as this consumption is taking place rather than as a post assessment and reflection. Communication with visitors must be restricted to, at most, five minutes. An interview schedule that requires a greater commitment will restrict the types of visitors that are willing to participate. The description of museum visiting should not be based entirely on those few visitors who are prepared to engage in lengthy discussion for this could potentially misrepresent the nature and experience of the museum visit. At the same time the interview must not exclude talkative visitors from saying everything they feel is relevant, or restrict visitors from giving the types of answers they perceive as appropriate be it long, in-depth, brief or superficial. The collection technique must enable visitors themselves to dictate the level of input and contribution they can make. With these considerations in mind, a programme of short interviews was designed.

4.4.6 The short interview

The statements originally designed for focus group discussion were reconsidered and reduced into five short questions. The questions were designed to quickly lead respondents onto the topic of interest to this study. The main focus of the study is to examine the perceived value of the museum and the exhibits contained within and to use visitor descriptions to generate an understanding of the museum

experience. These descriptions could then be applied to consider museum consumption in the broader context of commodification. A totally unstructured method of interviewing was rejected because visitors would not be able to quickly establish what was expected of them and give responses that would be of use in this study. It was felt that an unstructured interview would produce brief and largely irrelevant discussions that would not yield much in the way of appropriate feedback for considering the research questions in this study.

A limit of five questions was set allowing for the time restrictions placed on each interview. The questions were deliberately designed to be provocative, giving the respondents a clear and directed understanding of the areas for discussion. From a discourse analytical perspective, this technique can be termed 'framing', whereby the conversation is pre-determined to a certain extent before the intercourse takes place. But the questions were also designed and delivered in such a way that allowed visitors to progress and develop the interview discussion as they saw fit whilst remaining in the broad objectives of the research programme. Because the structure of each question was so crucial several pilot trials were conducted in the two museums (see appendix one). Where necessary questions were removed or rephrased to enhance the types and range of responses that could be given.

To allow a certain degree of comparison between different respondents, visitors were approached at one collection in each of the museums. Visitors were approached at the ethnography gallery in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, and the tram and bus display in the Museum of Transport. Two derivatives of the interview schedule were produced for each of these museum

collections. It should be noted that although the questions directed respondents to comment upon the immediate display, they were able to discuss any aspect of the museum they wished and were not asked explicitly to discuss one of the two displays selected. The final interview schedules contained the following questions:

The first question was included as a point of introduction. The interviewer approached a visitor, or group of visitors, informing them that he was conducting a visitor study and would like to ask for their participation. It was made clear that the interview would only take a few minutes. Visitors' consent to the interview being tape recorded was obtained and confidentiality of the recordings guaranteed. When conducting an interview of this kind the respondents immediate response is to seek to understand his or her expected role in the interview as well as the role of the interviewer. The first question allowed this to be achieved. At the beginning of the interview no reference was made to the status or position of the researcher or the objectives of the research programme.

The second question was deliberately designed with several contentious positions. First it assumes that the artefacts/ vehicles are old, that the visitor likes viewing them, and that something can be got from this viewing. The question provides several points of discussion and disagreement that the visitor can appropriate and apply in considering and delivering a response. The question implicitly requires the visitor to justify his or her reasons for attending and to think about the positive aspects of viewing a display of this kind.

<p align="center"><u>Question outline: Ethnography Collection, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum</u></p>	<p align="center"><u>Question Outline: Tram and Bus Collection, Museum of Transport.</u></p>
<p><i>Is this your first visit to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum?</i></p>	<p><i>Is this your first visit to the Museum of Transport?</i></p>
<p><i>What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?</i></p>	<p><i>What do you like about coming to look at these old trams. What do you get out of a display like this one?</i></p>
<p><i>Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real artefacts and objects here but only pictures and photographs of artefacts?</i></p>	<p><i>Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real trams here but only pictures and photographs of trams?</i></p>
<p><i>By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these artefacts were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static relics in the cases here?</i></p>	<p><i>By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these trams were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static vehicles that are lifeless?</i></p>
<p><i>Do you think that it is a good thing or a bad thing that these artefacts are preserved and saved in the museum?</i></p>	<p><i>Do you think that it is a good or a bad thing that these trams are preserved and saved in the museum?</i></p>

The third question takes the interview directly to the main focus of the research objectives. The structure of the question provides several areas of discussion. It raises the idea of a good and a bad museum experience (translated into a valuable or invaluable one); perceptions about the value of the displays themselves and how they could be made more or less valuable. The answer to this question is largely irrelevant since it is almost certainly going to be 'no'. However, it provides the context for considering the next and most important question in the interview.

The fourth question is deliberately provocative. It contradicts the common-sense answer to question three, forcing respondents to consider why he or she holds this

belief and whether it is, on further consideration, still appropriate. At this stage in the interview respondents have become familiar with the procedures and conventions of the particular interaction and are aware that it is acceptable to argue and justify their opinions if they should wish to do so. This style of approach produces the much needed depth and descriptive dimension to the collected data.

The final question was designed to be very broad. It can be answered in so many ways that it allows visitors to make comments that were perhaps inappropriate in previous questions. At this point the discussion typically became much less structured with the interviewer and interviewee conversing on a range of issues that the short interview had raised. Knowing that this would be the last question, yet feeling confident in their delivery, some visitors became highly articulate and open about their impressions of the museum and the value of viewing the exhibits.

Although the interview was carefully planned and executed, it required the interviewer would deviate from the schedule and ask questions specific to the conversation taking place at that time. If a visitor asked for the interviewer's opinions or position on certain issues then an honest and frank answer was given. In this respect some of the interviews were fairly informal despite the structured design of the questions. The validity of the data was not judged by its lack of bias or objectiveness but by the depth and descriptive quality of the responses given (Hammersley, 1994; Altheide & Johnson, 1994). The answers to the questions were, to a certain degree, secondary to the discussion they prompted and the extent of the contribution made by participants. Further details of the number of

interviews conducted, characteristics of the interviewee group, and the subject selection procedures can be found in appendix one.

4.4.7 Additional methods of data collection

Interviews formed the central focus of the data collection. As well as the verbal communications visitors gave, gestures and movements were also recorded in field notes. In addition to this, photographs of the displays that respondents referred to and used to structure their conversation were also collected. Attempts were made to photograph displays from the position and perspective that the visitor had been in when viewing the display. Additional data that was collected included the researchers own observations and personal experience of the museum visit and interviews with curators, assistants and members of the 'Glasgow Art Galleries and Museums Association (GAGMA)'. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed in full and were included together with photographs where collected.

4.5 Interpreting qualitative data

Having developed the data collection method, attention will now be given to methods of qualitative analysis. The collected data consisted of a series of transcribed interview transcripts taken directly from the tape recorded interviews conducted in the two museums. The analysis will therefore use a textual interpretive method. There are several such methods which will be considered in this section. Before considering individual textual analytical procedures in depth,

attention will first be given to some of the conceptual issues involved with interpretive analysis.

4.5.1 Analysis of *Qualitative Data* or *Qualitative Data Analysis*?

In the previous section it was argued that grouping all qualitative methods together under one collective heading can simplify and neglect the differences between various techniques. One of the most important differences within alternative qualitative approaches is the techniques and objectives of conducting analysis. It is erroneous to assume that all qualitative research methodologies are interpretive. Whilst the two terms are often used in conjunction with one another it is possible to undertake a programme of qualitative research which does not incorporate an interpretive element.

The goal of the interpretive approach is an understanding of behavior in terms of how consumers themselves interpret and give meaning to their own behavior. Data are considered to be self reflexive. They supply their own meaning. Researchers attempt to articulate how consumer explicitly or implicitly view themselves on the assumption that these views will shape subsequent behavior. (Calder and Tybout, 1989, p199)

This methodology has presented data collection and data analysis as distinct and separate activities but whilst this distinction may be useful to structure this discussion, it does not necessarily represent the process of interpretive research accurately. The separation of collection and analysis comes from scientific styles of research, the collected data is considered to be a discreet material which can be scrutinised using various analytical techniques. Some styles of qualitative research

adhere to this principle of analysis. Under this qualitative research approach the qualitative component of the analysis rests in the type of data that is collected. Some forms of data such as interviews, texts, observations are considered as inherently qualitative in nature as opposed to quantitative data that takes the form of numerical information. I have called this approach 'analysis of *qualitative data*'.

This first type of approach to qualitative data does not necessarily involve an interpretive component, it can be a highly objective scientific process. Analysis can even be 'quantitative' in nature if *chi square* tests or content frequencies are applied (Maxwell, 1961; Haberman, 1978). For example, if one were take the collected transcripts and undertake a content analysis, recording frequencies of key words or phrases, this would not, strictly speaking, constitute an interpretive approach. It is even possible to begin the research process with a set of hypothesis (e.g. visitors will show preference for displays they are familiar with), confirming or rejecting the hypothesis on the basis of the frequency that certain terms occur (e.g. 78% of visitors used phrases such as 'This is my favourite display' or 'I like this display better than the others' when referring to familiar displays). In this approach 'qualitative research' simply refers to the method of data collection.

An alternative to this understanding of qualitative research is the idea that it is not the data itself that is qualitative but the process of the entire research methodology. Data is analysed using qualitative techniques, emphasising that it is the process of analysis that is the qualitative element in the research process rather than the characteristics of the collected data. I have called this approach

'Qualitative data analysis.' The data itself is not considered to be qualitative or anything else for that matter, it is just data. The methods used to interpret this data, such as grounded theory, semiotics, and discourse analysis, provide the qualitative element. The distinction between data collection and analysis is not relevant in this context, the two processes are interrelated and combined as part of the interpretive function.

In this second approach to research methodology quantitative styles of analysis are not appropriate. The emphasis is on interpretation rather than 'analysis' as such. The distinction taken here is not concerned primarily with quantitative or qualitative styles of research but with interpretive versus scientific approaches, or put another way, between objective and subjective styles of interpretation. In this piece of qualitative research, the second approach is adopted. The qualitative component of the research process refers to the interpretive approach taken to the analysis of the data set.

This section is not therefore concerned with the *analysis* of data as such, but with developing a methodology for *interpreting* data. The following methodology begins with a discussion of the issues involved with interpreting and (re)presenting data. This will be followed by a summary of some of the established methods used to interpret data together with the advantages and limitations of these designs. Section 4.6 gives details of the method of interpretation used in this project in part two of the research design.

4.5.2 The representation of data

In positivist styles of research, representing or analysing data is concerned with establishing truth and fact by deduction. If collected correctly, data can be objectively analysed to verify or reject certain hypothesis as being either false or true. The interpretive agenda is not concerned with these principles. From an interpretivist perspective data can be represented in many different ways, all of which have validity in certain paradigmatic contexts. Scientific styles of analysis are seen as one form of representation, equivalent rather than superior to any other form of representation. There is no truth or meaning in a set of data, rather meaning is read into that data as part of the process of interpretation. Two researchers may take an identical data set and interpret its significance differently, one may read meaning into a certain phrase or comment whereas the other may pass it by as insignificant. The approach taken by interpretivists owes much of its philosophical basis to postmodern or poststructural ways of thinking (Charmaz, 1995). Notions of absolute truths or 'grand narratives' (Lyotard, 1984) to explain phenomena are rejected in favour of multiple contexts of truths and meanings depending on the particular perspective of the viewer or interpreter and the context in which that interpretation is taking place. From a feminist perspective, for example, a phenomena may be interpreted from the position of gender and exploitation (for example, see Stern, 1989; Brodribb, 1992), a post colonial position might read issues relating to racial prejudice into a data set and a Marxist reading might structure an interpretation in terms of class struggle, ideology and hegemony. None of these positions are exclusive and are often combined to reflect the motives of the specific research context. Equally, neither approach can be

considered to have any *a priori* truth over and above the others. The validity of the interpretation and the method of representation can only be understood in the paradigm of knowledge in which it is grounded.

This ties in with hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1962) which requires consideration to be given not only to the form of representation but to the form of representing that representation. Rather than simply being concerned with representing the subject (the consumer, the museum visitor etc.) it is also necessary to engage the 'hermeneutic circle' and reflect upon those making that representation. Thompson (1991, p67) states:

'By fully embracing the interpretive nature of understanding, a hermeneutic orientation cannot promise to consumer researchers absolute certainty or an aperspectival "truth". It can provide, however, a means for understanding what is perhaps the most basic and intriguing of all human phenomena: how one human being can come to understand the world of another.'

The interpretation of this data set can only be understood in the context of the philosophical and conceptual issues which have been embraced as part of this thesis. To repeat the methodological objectives of this research once more, the point of enquiry is not to discover whether museums are in 'reality' commodified arenas of consumption, but to collect data that reflects, in an in-depth manner, the experience of the museum visit and to describe this experience in the relation to the themes of the commodity and consumption.

4.3 Methods of interpretation or representation

Any interpretation will impose certain boundaries on data. An interpretation or an analysis is a process of formalisation which reduces the data into a meaningful and coherent set of concepts that can be related to one another to produce an understanding of some sort (some would term this a 'theory'). Whilst recognising this point, some techniques require a higher degree of formalisation and reduction than others. Since it is the intention of this methodology to provide a varied and descriptively rich account of museum visiting, the method of interpretation applied in the analysis of the collected transcripts should try to avoid an overly formalised interpretation that would narrow the scope of the findings and oversimplify what could otherwise be seen as a complex set of issues.

Attention will now be given to the alternative procedures suggested in the literature, for interpreting the collected transcript data. Since this data is textual, the techniques considered can all be applied in a textual or literary analysis. Consideration will be given to content analysis, structuralism and reductionism, concept/category builders, discourse/conversation analysis and finally to thick descriptive methods.

4.3.1 Content analysis

Content analysis treats linguistic parts of the text as discrete and defined units of analysis. (Kracauer, 1993). The analysis requires a text to be scrutinised in terms of the frequency certain phrases or individual words occur within any given text

on the premise that the more times a term is repeated, the more significant it is said to be. Content analysis does not make any attempt to retain the holistic integrity of the text under analysis. The context in which a word or phrase appears in the text is ignored. In two different texts for example, the same phrase or term may appear in equal frequencies and can thus be compared as similar in this respect. But the manner, context and meaning these utterances may have had when spoken could be quite different. Any conclusions based upon a content analysis of this type could potentially over generalise the similarities between two texts (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994). The interpretive role in content analysis is largely marginalised by the rigid and structured form of analysis. Content analysis does not require the analyst to be creative in the reading of any one text but to accurately dissect that text into its constituent parts, which it is assumed, have some context of independent significance.

4.3.2 Structuralism and reductionism

The basic principles of structuralism have been discussed in preceding chapters. Structuralist methodology assumes that the meaning of a text is attributable to deep underlying structures of signification that provide the text with its meaning. The emphasis in structural analysis is to 'dig' into the text and 'discover' these deep underlying structures. This form of interpretation is reductionist because it implies that different texts can be reduced down to the same set of structures. For example, in his analysis of the folk tale, Propp (1968) takes several hundred folk stories and reduces them down in thirty two distinct themes. His analysis then describes in detail the orders these different themes recur throughout the narratives

concluding that the sequence of these themes is always identical. Other structural approaches reduce the meaning of the text into a finite series of binary oppositions, for example Levi-Strauss', (1970) analysis of mythology. Narratives are seen as being constructed out of series of signs which by opposing one another effect meaning within that text. Structuralist interpretations, including semiotic analysis (Manning, 1987; Kaushik & Sen, 1990), offer formalised procedures of reduction. Texts that may appear dissimilar are able to be reduced to similar generic forms. The individuality of the text is considered to be only a surface appearance produced by much more general structures of signification beyond an explicit level of consciousness. The underlying assumptions of structuralist textual analysis have come under criticism from the post structuralist movement (e.g. Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1976). Any text can have multiple readings and contexts of meaning, rejecting the notion that within a text there is a deep underlying truth which can be uncovered through formalised reduction (Wyman, 1985).

4.3.3 Concept/category builders

This group of analytical procedures is very broad and in some forms may be applied in structuralist methods of interpretation. It includes grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the numerous analytical methods suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984). It also includes the emerging computer based qualitative analysis tools (Weitzman & Miles, 1995; Kelle, 1995) such as NUD*IST (Richards & Richards, 1991), which enable large and diverse data sets to be analysed in a formal manner. Collected data is taken as a raw material that needs to be reduced in some way in order for it to be useful in building a theory or

model. The process of analysis involves some form of coding or classification, in some cases several levels of coding. Elements of the text are located with a series of concepts which at later stages of analysis are grouped or linked together producing a coherent understanding of the text being interpreted. Grounded theory does not assume that the concepts and categories drawn from a text have any basis of objective truth or external reality as is the case with most forms of structural formalism (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It accepts that these categories are read into the text by the interpreter as a way of providing understanding and meaning. In this respect, grounded theory is able to incorporate various, even contradictory, interpretations depending of the specific readings of the interpreter.

The major draw back with techniques that prescribe formal methods of classification and categorisation is that attention is gradually diverted away from the data itself and directed toward the operational steps provided by the methodological procedure (Glaser, 1992; Robrecht, 1995). Rigid systems of classification, particularly those that rely upon computer manipulation, restrict the scope of interpretation to formal and explicit understandings over intuitive knowledge that emerges during fieldwork experiences (Wall, 1995). Rather than allowing categories to emerge or be discovered from the data itself, the preconceptions of the classifier, whether recognised or implicitly generated, result in the data being manipulated into a set of pre determined schemas of classification. As a consequence, the complexity and depth of the data can become *misrepresented* through a set of concepts that do not necessarily bear relevance to original phenomenon under consideration. This returns us to the point made earlier about the nature of (re)presenting collected texts and narratives and

reporting the findings of field based observations and interactions. Ultimately all texts are confined by an order of classification since language is itself a form of classifying the lived experience of the world. But the merits of imposing rigid systems of coded classifications onto data sets are problematic because it cannot hope to capture the subtle complexity of phenomena. Some phenomena may not fit easily into this category or that, or may be equally appropriate in several different categories. Having attempted to apply the principles of grounded theory coding to this data set it was concluded that the procedures set out by this technique produce a simplistic and reduced understanding of museum visiting that did not capture the depth and complexity of the experience. A more appropriate form of interpretation for this data would be one that sacrifices the formalism and rigidity of these forms of analysis for the required descriptive depth.

4.3.4 Discourse/conversation analysis

Discourse analysis describes a range of analytical techniques, including conversation analysis, based on the analysis of recorded talk (Silverman, 1993). Since the data collected for this research project consists mainly of a series of spoken interactions, it would seem that it could have some potential application in this analysis. Discourse analysis is not so much concerned with what people say but why and how utterances are used to convey different levels of meaning. Unlike the analytical methods considered so far, words and phrases (the constituent parts of communication) are not considered meaningful or significant as isolated units but as elements in an interaction between people. Conversations are complex social interactions involving many different levels of protocol and norms

depending on who is communicating with who and in what context the dialogue is taking place. The responses given by museum visitors should not be understood as a reflection of what they really think or what they actually do but responses to stimuli presented in the form of a series of questions. In recorded communications, many underlying factors can be identified which explain the type of responses given. For instance, the degree of formality between interviewer and interviewee, and the perceived expectations of both parties engaged in the discussion is likely to have a considerable effect on the type of answers given.

Discourse analysis requires the interpreter to become highly sensitive to the fine details of spoken interaction (Potter & Wetherell, 1994). It is not only the interviewee's spoken word that is of importance but the interviewer's also. By paying attention to the use of metaphor, rhetoric and other linguistic devices, it is possible to understand how the elements of spoken interaction, such as developing an argument, or presenting a statement are constructed and made credible in the context of the specific communication taking place.

But discourse analysis is not totally appropriate as an interpretive tool in this study. It does not really provide a method of achieving the objective of this research project which is to provide a descriptive picture of the museum visiting experience. Discourse analysis would be a useful tool if the investigation were concerned with the way museum visitors and curators communicate with one another, or the way groups of visitors talk to one another throughout their visit. It could also be useful to understand the interviewee-interviewer interaction. All of

these explanations, whilst relevant to a certain degree in this study, do not capture the essence of the museum visiting experience.

4.3.5 Interpretation and Description

‘..there are three characteristics of ethnographic description: it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting consists of trying to rescue the “said” of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms’ Geertz, 1973, p20).

To develop a credible set of interpretive practices, it is necessary to return to anthropology and ethnography, where the representation of culture and cultural action is of central concern. A reading of the history of anthropological and ethnographic methods shows a lineage of every significant paradigmatic position in the social sciences. Anthropology has embraced and rejected functionalism, behaviourism and positive scientism, as well as many other positions regarding the subject of inquiry (Marcus & Fischer, 1986). In line with many other disciplines of social or cultural enquiry, contemporary anthropological practice reflects the crisis of representation that has come to haunt methodological procedures, and solutions have been sought from literary criticism and social theory. The dilemma faced in this analysis is very similar to that presented to the anthropologist. What is being sought is a method that will enable the complexity of cultural action to be represented in the most descriptive way possible. In interpretive practice we must abandon all notions of truth and objective representation, implicit in many forms of qualitative analysis. The most appropriate way to proceed in the development of this interpretation is to follow

Geertz (1973), whose 'thick descriptive' approach has become highly influential in contemporary anthropological thought (Tyson. 1988).

Geertz's concept of culture is semiotic, but unlike some forms of semiotic analysis which fall back on structural formalism, Geertz proposes that analysis is not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

He states:

'Analysis then, is sorting out the structures of signification - what Ryle called established codes, a somewhat misleading expression, for it makes the enterprise sound too much like that of the cipher clerk when it is much more like that of a literary critic- and determining their social ground and import.

The point is only that ethnography is thick description, What the ethnographer is in fact faced with - except (when as he must do) he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection - is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must first grasp and then render'(Geertz. 1973, p9).

The strength of a 'thick description' can only be measured in terms of the 'power of the scientific imagination to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers' (Geertz, 1973, p16). The interpreter should set himself the task of providing as much detail and depth as is possible from the data collected, rather than seeking to substantiate the interpretation through a pre-established system of classification or procedure. The art of interpretation cannot therefore be learnt as a series of practices but must rely upon the interpreter developing the skills to view the world as a complex and perhaps even an inaccessible realm. Thick description can only be understood through the process of actually conducting the interpretation, to

absorb ones self in the data and the phenomena under study, and attempt to make sense of it.

Returning to Geertz once more:

'One cannot write a 'General Theory of Cultural Interpretation.' Or, rather there would be little profit in it, because the essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make a thick description possible, not to generalise across cases but to generalise within them' (Geertz, 1973, p26).

Thick description is at the same time liberating and daunting. Unlike other methods of qualitative analysis it does not place a barrier of techniques and procedures between the interpreter and the data being interpreted. One is free to remain in direct contact with both data and theory and from it build up the interpretive description. There is no need to be concerned with external or formalised methods of reliability or objectivity in the interpretation which could potentially stifle the depth and range of the findings. But whilst formalised methods can impose restrictions, they also provide an explicit code of analytical action for researchers to follow. Without these guidelines the interpreter can no longer be under any illusions about the subjective and creative exercise that is interpretation. Geertz makes it quite clear that the interpreter is the sole actor in the reporting of phenomena under investigation and is deluding himself should he think otherwise.

'In finished anthropological writings, that which we call our data are really our own constructions of other peoples constructions of what they are up to of what they and their compatriots are up to...There is nothing particularly wrong with this, and any case it is inevitable' (Geertz, 1973, p9).

Thick Description should not be used as a mechanism to justify a return to romantic or relativistic interpretations and reflections but at the same time, any interpretation must be recognised for what it is - a fiction. The constructed nature of any interpretation does not automatically infer that it cannot have a permanence of validity nor that it can be critically appraised, rather that the conventional practices for assessing validity may not be appropriate.

‘You either grasp an interpretation or you do not, see the point of it or you do not, accept it or you do not. Imprisoned in the immediacy of its own detail, it is presented as self-validating, or, worse, as validated by the supposed sensitivities of the person who presents it.

There is no reason why the conceptual structure of a cultural interpretation should be any less formulable, and thus less susceptible to explicit canons of appraisal, than of say a biological observation of a physical experiment - no reason except that the terms in which such formulations are cast are, if not wholly non-existent, very nearly so’ (Geertz, 1973, p24).

Although thick description advocates a perception of culture as a complex web of signification, its methodological premise is more akin to Ethnomethodological, Hermeneutic or Phenomenological approaches (Holstein & Gubrium, 1994), which focus on the lived experience of a phenomena and concentrate on the microcosmic level of daily practice and perception. To overcome criticisms that thick description is relativistic and that the interpretations generated cannot be used to make generalisations, some researchers have attempted to ‘triangulate’ or combine hermeneutic thick description with other methods of qualitative analysis such as grounded theory (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). Although the

epistemological positions of different analytical methods may be in conflict to one another, in practice they can be combined to strengthen the weaknesses inherent in different approaches. The advantage of an interpretive position like thick description is that it is not exclusive or prescriptive and is limited only by the ability and willingness of the interpreter to consider a phenomenon in depth. It fulfils the criteria set out for the interpretive exercise in this study which is to provide an in-depth description of museum visiting with the intention of assessing the credibility of the concepts and theoretical positions developed in the previous sections.

4.6 Project research design part two: Interpretation of data

Having considered the various analytical techniques suggested in the literature, a thick descriptive style of interpretation was applied to the transcript data. Initially each transcript was taken as a whole unit for analysis. In the preliminary stages of analysis the comparative themes between transcripts was not taken into consideration. As discussed above, the comments given by museum visitors during the interviews can only be understood in the context of the specific interview taking place. To understand any one phrase in a thick descriptive manner requires the discussion preceding and following any one utterance to be taken into account. The thick descriptive interpretation was conducted as an evolving dialogue in which I, as the interpreter, engaged each transcript in a debate. As each transcript was read and re-read I continually asked myself, what is this respondent saying and why? What do the comments made imply about the beliefs and opinions held about the museum and the experience of the visit, and

how do the issues raised relate to the theoretical issues raised in the literature review. As well as these questions, I also tried to consider why I was reading a certain transcript in this way, and in doing so I revealed some of the preconceptions that I, as an interpreter, held about the museum visit and the experience of object collections. The thick descriptions for each transcript were recorded and written up in a series of memoranda.

To assist in the descriptive exercise, I also spoke to several other interested parties, including museum curators, museum assistants and members of the Friends association for Glasgow Museums. In some instances, these people were asked to read over some of the transcripts and give their own interpretations of what was meant by the comments made (see appendix one). The interpretations given by these groups were used to structure further discussions and conversations about the museum visiting experience. These secondary interpretations were not intended to justify the interpretations I had already made or to give them a level of external credibility and authority, rather it is more constructive to think of these sessions as a further stage in the research objectives to build up a complex and descriptive picture of the museum visit. The interpretation of this data is ultimately my own, even when that interpretation is a representation of someone else's interpretation.

This interpretive exercise took place over a period of several months and incorporated observational data and interview conversations with these other groups. It produced detailed and comprehensive descriptive accounts of the museum visit.

Before the interpretation could be presented it was necessary to clarify and further edit the descriptive memoranda into a presentable form. This involved the identification of recurring themes and issues that emerged during the analysis. Based on these emergent themes, a structure for presenting the interpretation was reached and used to structure the following findings and discussion chapters.

4.7 Limitations and critical reflection

Any methodological process will dictate the types of findings possible and prevent alternative perspectives emerging. From a positivist-empiricist perspective the findings and practices applied in this methodology cannot facilitate any factual or objectively reliable knowledge. Arguably another researcher could embark on the same project, conduct different interpretations and come up with quite different findings on museum consumption. This inevitable outcome is not a significant problem for interpretive styles of research in which a subjective component is recognised as a positive and constructive element in the research process. But it does raise certain questions regarding the extent to which these findings can be used to lead to a generalised 'theory' of consumption. However, the counter argument to this criticism is simply that generalisation from any type of data is a problematic concept. The specifics of any one situation or consumption scenario are likely to have individual elements that make it different to all other such situations. An interpretive approach implicitly accepts this as characteristic of all research investigation and rather than simplifying the description of any given phenomenon to the point where it becomes equivalent and comparable with other

phenomena, the emphasis comes to rest upon the identification and in-depth description of individual research encounters.

The final collection method applied was highly restricted by the nature of the topic of study. The findings would have been greatly enhanced if more time could have been spent with visitors discussing relevant issues in more depth. Only a limited amount of information can be obtained from such a brief encounter which required the focus of the research to be highly specific. There were many more questions that could have been introduced to allow further exploration of relevant themes. Some of these questions only emerged once the data had been collected and if the study were to be repeated, an attempt to include these positions could be made. To enable the issue of exchange to be further examined it would have been advantageous to ask visitors if they would have been prepared to visit the museum were they required to pay an entrance fee or similar charge. But such a question could have had a dramatic influence on respondents contribution to the study. They may have suspected that the study was simply a cover for gaining support for the introduction of such a fee, perhaps making them sceptical about their involvement.

A final limitation to be considered here is the role of the researcher, not only in the collection of the data, but also in the interpretation and analysis. Qualitative data analysis is a learnt skill that requires as much rigour and commitment as any other form of analysis but it is not one which can be learnt from texts and manuals. It is a skill which can only be developed intuitively through practice and application. On reflection there are many aspects of the research process which I would seek to

change if conducting the study again. My abilities at comprehensive observation, interpretation and analysis continually developed throughout the research programme and one cannot help but recognise that if the knowledge and skills I now have as a consequence of conducting the study, could have been applied from the out set, the quality and depth of the findings would have been all the greater.

Discussion of findings

Outline of discussion

The discussion provides a descriptive account of the museum as a consumption arena. The analysis takes a visitor perspective on the museum experience by reporting the perceptions that visitors expressed during the interviews. The discussion is split into two chapters. Chapter five concentrates on the commodification of the museum experience and chapter six evaluates the museum visiting experience as a form of consumption.

Notes on the presentation of transcript data

The analysis uses the transcript data collected from the interviews to structure the discussion. Data from the interviews are incorporated through the presentation of relevant excerpts. The excerpts are presented in smaller, single spaced text with the discussion in standard sized text. In the majority of cases interviews took place between the interviewer and one respondent. When reporting elements of these interviews the interviewer's remarks and questions are presented in indented, italicised text and cased in squared brackets, for example:

[Do you think that it is a good thing or a bad thing that these artefacts are preserved and saved in the museum?]

Visitors' responses are presented in normal text, for example:

I think who ever gets the stuff should preserve it, definitely. That is really, really important. *[Why is it so important?]* Because our past is what makes us what we are today and if you live in the present you lose an awful lot.

When visitors made gestures, movements or actions that are important to the understanding of the comments being made, they are referred to by italicised text placed in brackets, for example:

{walks over to the spot where his friend would have been looking}

he'd be sixteen or seventeen at the time. And there's a boy on a bicycle, a butcher . boy on a bike and he's in the middle of the tracks, he's keeping up with the tram you see. And he's just looking up at this friend of mine you know. So unknown to him, he's at the back of the tram, he's about there, you know

{demonstrates the distance the bike would have been from the tram by directing it with his hands, about five feet}

In a small number of cases, interviews involved more than one respondent. Some visitors decided to participate in the interview as a family or as a group of friends. When reporting these interviews respondents text is prefixed with the number of the visitor in bold type, and if relevant, the relationship that the visitor has with other respondents, for example:

Visitor one (daughter): .. you told me that if you didn't have the tram cars, you used to walk everywhere.

Visitor two (mother): That right, but you must remember that when you walked on your own in them days there was no fear of a pensioner getting mugged..

As well as recording the spoken word of the respondents, photographic material was also collected during the interviews. If a visitor referred explicitly to a particular display, or part of a display, then this was recorded photographically and included in the transcript. When collecting photographs, care was taken to try and capture the view as the visitor was seeing it at the time of the interview taking place. When photographs are included in the discussion they are titled with a brief description of the contents of the picture together with the museum in which it is displayed, for example:

[What do you like about coming to look at old trams. What do you get out of visiting a display like this one.]

I like the trains really, and I like the old street.



Picture 2. Kelvinway, Museum of Transport

CHAPTER FIVE

The museum commodity

If the world is to be perfect, it will first have to be made. And if the human being wishes to attain this kind of immortality, he must produce himself as artefact also, expel himself from himself into an artificial orbit in which he will circle for ever.¹

5.0 Chapter summary

This chapter presents selected parts of the transcript data that bear relevance to a discussion of museum commodification. The objective of this discussion is to examine whether (or not) the museum visiting experience can be considered to be organised in terms of a commodity code, that is, whether interaction with the museum and the artefacts on display can be considered a commodity interaction. Where relevant, the transcript data is linked with the themes developed in part one of the thesis. One of the most consistent findings from the study was visitors' description of the museum experience as being more real, more authentic and legitimate than comparable experiences. Sections 5.1.1 to 5.1.4 discuss this finding, suggesting that this can be interpreted as evidence of a commodity code. Section 5.1.5 discusses the evidence of object and commodity fetishism in the museum visiting experience. Section 5.1.6 further describes the primary value given to objects by visitors in narrating and explaining the past. This is interpreted as evidence of the commodification of history, in which the past is considered to be nothing more than a collection of artefacts and materials. Section 5.1.7 further examines the dynamics of the commodity code, suggesting that museum artefacts exist as alienated, discreet entities. Section 5.2 concludes the chapter with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of the museum commodity.

5.1 Introduction: In search of the museum commodity

One of the main arguments put forward in this thesis is that a comprehensive understanding of consumption and consumer behaviour is reliant on an understanding of the cultural conditions that enable certain experiences,

phenomena and materials to exist as commodities. Since consumption has been described as type of behaviour that we engage in when interacting with commodities, it is necessary to establish the constitution of the museum commodity before the issue of museum consumption can be approached. The purpose of this chapter is to consider whether the types of experiences that people have when visiting museums can be related to the theoretical arguments that theorists such as Marx and Baudrillard have described as commodification.

Much of the terminology used in previous chapters wouldn't generally be considered everyday language. Terms such as alienation, commodification and fetishism for instance, have been defined in relation to specific theories and in some cases have been attributed to an author or groups of authors. As a consequence it is unlikely that visitors would explicitly refer to, or use this kind of terminology when describing their experiences, unless they had some prior experience or knowledge of the theoretical justification for the research project. In order to conduct this interpretive analysis in accordance with the objectives set out in chapter three, it will therefore be necessary to determine the significance of comments made by visitors using a degree of inference and interpretation. This analytical procedure has been given detailed consideration in section 4.3.5. The following findings report and interpret the visitors' comments with the specific intention of evaluating the proposition that museums exist as commodified spaces.

5.1.1 The 'reality' of museum artefacts

One of the most consistent themes running throughout the transcripts was reference to the 'reality' of museum displays. Many of the visitors interviewed referred to the reality of exhibits and used it as a positive discriminating factor when comparing museum presentations with other types of display.

The real macoy - that is what you want. You can see the knowledge that was actually used, it's the real things. It's not something intangible like you get with a film.

When visitors used the term 'real' to describe museum presentations, they clearly were not referring to a strict dictionary definition but to a range of different associated meanings. References to the 'reality' of museum displays are implicated with issues such as authenticity, legitimacy, tangibility and truth. Visitors often referred to museum presentations not simply as being 'real' but '*more real*'. By describing the museum presentation as more 'real', other forms of presentation were considered (as if by default) 'less real'. This might suggest that some visitors used references to reality as a relative measure or judgement that distinguishes genuine displays from fakes, simulations and fantasies.

Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real artefacts and objects here but only pictures and photographs of artefacts.

No, you wouldn't get the same vibes. Not the same 'realness'. It is much more real when you have got the real thing in front of you. It's a sort of capturing time isn't it in the museum? You can imagine things more can't you when you see them in from of you.

Since the concept of 'reality' is such a salient feature of visitors' descriptions, the way in which the 'reality' of displays is determined and the context in which the term 'real' is applied requires further investigation. Whilst the reality of certain

displays can be brought into question, the importance here is to identify what it is that visitors mean by the term and how their perceptions of reality effect their perceptions and experiences of the museum. Many critical theorists, museologists, and anthropologists have for some time questioned the reality of museum displays (Swiecinski, 1989). As far back as the turn of the century the eminent anthropologist Francis Boas considered the effect of representing cultures through museum displays, concluding that despite attempts to place objects in cultural contexts, museological presentations would always diminish the cultural reality and original significance of artefacts (Boas, 1916). This has remained a consistently recurring theme is museological criticism (e.g. Negrin, 1993; Shoemaker, 1994). But this debate does not reflect visitors' own perceptions of the museum. For visitors the museum experience can be judged in terms of it allowing a more real experience. The point of issue here then is to consider whether the primacy visitors give to objects alludes to a commodity code.

It is difficult to establish exactly what reasons visitors use when making reality judgements about museum pieces and consequently, whether such a code can be said to be present, because in the majority of the interviews respondents did not provide any justification for their opinions. Many visitors were unable to provide a justification for their belief in the reality of presentations even when asked explicitly to do so. Whilst this means that it is difficult to say with any certainty what the basis for these reality judgements are, it does provide a certain amount of evidence to suggest that this perception is not necessarily a personal belief or opinion held by individual visitors themselves but is accepted as an almost common-sense or

everyday belief. Visitors may have therefore felt that providing additional justification in the interview was unnecessary.

As with the excerpt above, some visitors commented that the reality of museum artefacts was related to the physical presence of the displays. If judgements concerning the reality of museum presentations are linked in some way to the fact that museum artefacts occupy physical space (i.e., they are '*objects*') then it becomes plausible to suggest that some of themes relating to commodification may be relevant. The fact that the experience of artefact collections is considered more 'real' (and that this assertion remains relatively unjustified) would suggest that that the object form has a special significance. The supremacy and legitimacy afforded to objects has become a naturalised cultural perception but, as Barthes (1972) showed in his semiotic account of mythology, everyday common-sense beliefs such as these serve to obscure deeper ideological codes. In the case of the museum visit the commodity code, whilst concealed, furnishes displays with a primacy over all other forms of presentation (Bennett, 1988; Porter, 1988).

In a small number of cases visitors did choose to develop a reason or justification for the belief that the museum artefact was a more real and authentic form of presentation and were willing and able to articulate this during the interview. One justification given for believing the museum object to be real was that it could be touched and its physical presence felt: .

If you see it in a book it is just flat or whatever. But when you see it here it has got dimensions, it 's got size. You can get some idea what it would be like to hold the damn thing, how intimidating it would be as well. You get a feel for it that you don't get out of pictures - it's real... Here it is something - it is real, you can see it and you can touch it, well almost touch it.

Justifications such as this support the above proposition that the materiality of objects is responsible for visitors' preference for artefact presentations. However, Baudrillard's (1993) assertion that reality is 'dead' and that the referents of 'reality' have all but faded away would seem to be problematic in light of this finding because visitors seem to be using the material artefacts as such a referent. Baudrillard overcomes this apparent contradiction by arguing that reality referents have not just disappeared but have transgressed into a semiotic form existing as signs (see section 2.4.4). Visitors' judgements of reality can therefore be said to be based on the fact that artefact collections signify their own reality; that is, visitors believe artefacts are more real because they signify that they are real. For this to be the case, it is necessary to show examples where visitors maintain a belief in the reality of displays that are clearly not real.

In the case of the above excerpt, this visitor's justification cannot be taken literally since the vast majority of museum artefact presented in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum cannot be touched due to the fact that they are presented in glass display cases. Visitors can no more touch the museum artefacts than they can touch an object presented on a television screen. Despite this, many visitors claim that the reality of the museum object is based on the fact that it can be touched. Since visitors cannot actually touch the objects in the museum, then perhaps they mean that the museum object can be 'hypothetically' touched, (or semiotically touched). That is, the object could be held and felt if the glass case were opened and access to the artefact authorised. If this is the basis for holding that the museum artefact is real, it becomes increasingly difficult to justify why the

distinction between the artefact presentation in the museum differs at all from that of a televisual presentation. Arguably an artefact shown as part of a televisual presentation or in a picture could also be 'hypothetically' touched in exactly the same way as the museological presentation, it would simply be a matter of finding the object of the picture and engaging in a tactile manner. It is therefore unlikely that this explanation is sufficient to describe this reality phenomenon. Museum displays and other forms of televisual and pictorial presentations share the common characteristic of placing a barrier between visitor/viewer and object. The attribution of 'reality' to museum displays is dependent upon the visitor perceiving this barrier to be less restrictive than with other media (Forgan, 1994).

5.1.2 The 'unreality' of museum artefacts

Some of the displays in the Museum of Transport and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum are clearly not '*real*' in the sense that are not original or authentic objects produced by another culture in previous periods of history. For instance, it is difficult to hold that the model dinosaurs displayed in the museum are in any way real. These displays do not contain any fossils of dinosaurs but are simply miniature scale models. One visitor interviewed voiced a specific interest in the dinosaur displays and when asked to explain why this was, he used the justification that the display was more real:

I like looking round and seeing the things, it's nice.. I liked the dinosaurs over there. It tells you stuff about them and what happened... Its better seeing them. It's just better because its more real, you can see the real dinosaurs not just pictures.



Picture 5.1. Dinosaurs, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

For this visitor, the 'reality' of museum artefacts does not necessarily require the object to be authentic in the sense that it does not have to be an actual specimen or production from a period of culture or history. Reality, for the visitor, can be quite explicitly and clearly a fake or simulation. Judgements of reality are, first and foremost, based on whether the artefact has a physical, object form. This would seem to imply that visitors judge the object form as real because it is an object. In some cases, visitors are clearly aware that the authenticity and credibility of certain museum artefacts is dubious. Many' visitors acknowledge the constructed and artificial nature of many of the displays whilst continuing to describe them as real. During one interview the visitor expressed an interest in the natural history

collections, again describing them as more real although the display consisted of stuffed animals presented in glass display cases.

One thing Donald and I do is quite a lot of bird watching and when you come round here you can see the birds exactly. I don't think it is as good an impression from pictures and television and things like that. I think it is nicer to see the real thing even though it is stuffed.... You can see an animal on video maybe close up but it is not the same as going and looking at the lamb. I live in a country of sheep and lambs and you can't mistake the little lamb. But they tend to look pretty on television, like animated toys. That's the difference.

Despite visitors' recognition that the reality of some of the displays in the museum is questionable, it does not seem to affect the overall impression that viewing artefacts in the museum is more real than viewing the same object through alternative media, even though the museum display itself may be blatantly artificial and constructed. The clearest example of this is the Kelvinway display in the Museum of Transport. This display consists of a reproduction of a 'typical' Glasgow street from some period in the mid twentieth century, although the actual street on which the display is based, or the time which it supposed to represent, is not specified. Since the interviews at the Museum of Transport focused on the tram display, the Kelvinway display only entered discussion when visitors specifically chose to refer to it. Visitors that referred to the Kelvinway display in the museum of transport still chose to describe this display as real despite the obvious problems with this assertion. Nothing the visitors said suggests that the Kelvinway is anything but authentic, insofar as it would appear that for these visitors, walking down Kelvinway is akin to walking back in time.

[What do you like about coming to look at old trams. What do you get out of visiting a display like this one]

I like the trains really, and I like the old street.



Picture 5.2 & Picture 5.3. 'Kelvinway', Museum of Transport

[What do you like about the old street]

Well it's just.. like dark and it feels like you are going back in time.

There are however several aspects to the Kelvinway presentation that bring into question the authenticity of the display as a 'real' representation of older day Glasgow. Firstly there are no people in the street and as a result there is no activity. Nobody is doing anything. It is like a ghost town, a street deserted. But this problem does not bring into question the authenticity of the display for the visitor. This purely material display is sufficient to convey the necessary historical signification of what Glasgow's streets in the past were like. The past is presented here through a

purely object discourse although these objects are also able to signify the subjective activity that is otherwise lacking. Secondly, the street is in pristine condition: there is no rubbish in the street, all the cars are in perfect showroom condition and all the shop fronts are well maintained. There is no smog, no filth and no noise. This past, from which the visitor gets a feeling of reality of history, is sanitised and cleaned up and it is therefore unlikely that any such street ever existed in Glasgow during this period or any other. This would not be a problem if the visitor recognised this aspect of the display, but there is no evidence from the transcript to suggest that the visitors have such an understanding. The visitor is instead content to hold that it is a fabulous display because it is real and enables the past to be directly accessed. Visitors prefer to see the objects of the past at the expense of the subjective and lifestyle elements that could only be represented through a non object and non material format. What is more, visitors are prepared to accept that the objects alone are sufficient to represent the past in its entirety. In this respect, museum artefacts and artefacts alone, are able to signify the subjective components which originally led to their production and were implicated in their daily use.

It would be great if you could actually get inside them. If you look at the interior there, you could never imagine that on a video or pictures. But when you actually look in you get a feel of it. Sometimes you can actually feel people sitting in there.

This remark demonstrates this point. The visitor states that despite the lack of any subjective component to the displays, the artefact can by itself provide an insight into the lifestyles and peoples that would have once used the tram as part of their daily lives. There is a reversal of the object-subject relation in the case of museum

displays. Whereas originally it was the object's signification that was the product of human endeavour, manifest in the manner it was used, produced etc. In the museum the signification of the object is self reliant, no longer requiring users or producers to provide the contexts of meaning. Furthermore, the artefacts signification is able to signify those subjective components that are now lacking. In effect, the museum artefact is an alienated form which, as has been shown repeatedly in this review, is a defining characteristic of the commodity form (this is considered in more depth in section 5.1.7)

In some cases, visitors did show a dissatisfaction with the lack of credibility in museum presentations, but the solutions offered by visitors to make the displays more enjoyable and more authentic, involved making the objects themselves more 'real' by showing them in operation and working order. These comments were almost entirely exclusive to the Museum of Transport where visitors expressed a desire to see trams in operation and steam engines in working order. Visitors showed little interest in measures that would demonstrate how the trams were used or produced, or the lifestyles of the people that would have once used the trams when they were operating in Glasgow. The suggested improvements by visitors only relate to making objects more functionally interesting, rather than to enhancing the historical accuracy of the presentation as a whole.

You have got to have these things [steam trains] otherwise there is no point in visiting the museum. If you want a criticism, I want them moving, I want to see them outside. I can remember the steam trains running and it would be great to have the stuff out and running...This is second best. It is better than nothing but I would like to see them out and moving. And I would like to see the steam trains back out in real life again.

The improvements suggested by visitors centre on the condition and presentation of the object, it does not rely upon the object presentation being incorporated into some kind of social context or lifestyle. The value of the museum experience would appear, at this point at least, to centre on objects. The museum promotes an 'object discourse' which suggests that it is also compatible with a commodity code (see section 2.3.4).

5.1.3 The '*value*' of proximity

Visitors perceive artefacts as being more real than any other form of presentation not because they accurately depict and represent a period of history but because they themselves are able to get close to artefacts. The basis for the perception of reality is simply that visitors perceive that being in close proximity (but nevertheless denied access) to the physical object makes the experience of that object more authentic and more actual. Bagnall's (1996) findings from her study into the visitor experience at two museums in the North West of England reach similar conclusions. Bagnall states that the physical presence of artefacts furnish visitors with a sense of reality and authenticity which makes the visit seem genuine and legitimate. Visitors would appear to get the feeling of reality from simply being near to physical material.

It is interesting to see how people lived, and I think it interesting to be so close to things that existed so long ago, I think so anyway.

If you see it in a book its just flat and whatever. But when you see it here its got dimensions its got size. You can get some idea of what it would be like to hold the damn thing, how intimidating it would be as well. You get a feel for it that you don't get out of pictures - its real.

The tag of reality ascribed to museum artefacts by visitors is not so much a characteristic of the artefact itself, rather it is a consequence of the visitors' perception of that artefact. It is of little relevance then whether an artefact is or is not real in the sense that it may or not be historically representative. Visitors perceive the experience of viewing museum artefacts as being real and thus it is the interface between visitor (the subject) and the object or artefact that has the effect of creating this reality. Reality, as referred to by museum visitors, is an *experiential* reality (Falk & Dierking, 1992) but also an object reality devoid of subjective context other than that signified by the object itself.

The reality principle is a compromise. On one level a video presentation offers greater potential in terms of an accurate depiction of history because it can show far more than the objects alone. It can depict the artefact in use, it can show how the object was integrated into everyday social life and thus represent history more authentically. However, the level of abstraction such a presentation imposes is considered by visitors to be limiting and verging on simulation. It adds a further barrier between the visitor and the already vague and disappearing past. Since close proximity to objects is of principle concern to museum visitors, the video, film or picture media loses its authenticity because of the distance it imposes between artefact and the object desiring visitor. The object display, as seen in the museum, allows this disadvantage to be overcome - but at a price. A past dictated by objects (by commodities) alone removes the subjective context and life from the display, hence the desire on the part of visitor to see the objects moving and working. Seeing a moving tram or a working engine means that some of the benefits of the video media can be incorporated into the object presentation. So it ultimately comes down

to a choice; a theoretically more substantial display such as a film, versus a more limited presentation but one that can be directly experienced as an object. The visitors' choice is unanimous. The object discourse is given principle value and the visitor is prepared to ignore and even fail to recognise, the obvious disadvantages. The visitor is reconciled with a past dictated solely through objects and has to be content with the signification that personal viewing provides for any subjective input. This adds to the argument developing here that the object/commodity form is a privileged form not only in the museum but also in a wider societal context, it is evidence of a subtle object fetishism (Sherman, 1994). It also paves the way for the domination of the commodity form, because a discourse dominated by objects can be easily quantified and defined as a set of distinct units, that can be compared and valued in terms of their own merit and consistency. The past of the museum is a commodity past and an object past.

5.1.4 Authenticity and truth

Artefacts displayed in the museum not only have the capacity to signify cultural meaning to visitors, they also have the capacity to signify their own authenticity as part of this process. During the interviews visitors often referred to museum exhibits as being 'authentic' and consequently could be considered real. It was not only the artefacts themselves that were considered authentic but the medium of presentation was also believed to be more truthful. On only one occasion did a visitor question the authenticity of museum artefacts.

And you know we have probably seen it on film and on television before. But to see these authentic costumes here, I presume they are authentic? Well it really just brings it all to life.

Apart from this one occasion visitors had an unquestioning faith in the authenticity of museum displays. The fact that an object is displayed in a museum provides visitors with sufficient justification that the object must be historically significant and authentic. This reveals the symbiotic relationship between the museum and the artefacts it displays. The importance of a museum is ultimately reliant upon the importance and significance of the objects it displays, but at the same time the principle method of judging whether an artefact is significant and authentic is whether or not it is displayed in the museum. Museum objects gain their historical significance from being displayed in a museum in the first place and the significance of the museum as an institution is reliant upon it displaying significant objects. In this respect no museum artefact can be considered inherently significant, rather its significance is tautologically reified by the codes underpinning the ideology of the museum itself (Valentine, 1982).

Seeing artefacts in museums was generally considered to be a more healthy and constructive experience than watching a television documentary or video presentation about that object, as if these other forms of artefact presentation in some way had a corrupting influence of those who were unfortunately exposed to a viewing.

I think they like it better because kids do like to touch things and see real things, ours do anyway. It's much more stimulating for them here than sitting getting square eyes and watching people shoot each other.

I would prefer to see it eye to eye and read off the notes here than watch T.V which I don't think is very healthy anyway. You can walk around and select what you want to see and think to yourself about the displays rather than just sitting in front of a T.V screen and let someone else tell you about it.

The media through which the object is engaged thus has a considerable effect on the way in which that object is perceived and attributed significance (and value). Furthermore, certain media or discourses are perceived more favourably than others. In this instance it is the object discourse that is privileged over an image based discourse.

Visitors' belief in the primacy of the object discourse further illustrates the presence of a commodity code. As the object discourse is given primacy over all other discourses of presentation the object form itself takes on a value and credibility above all other comparable forms.

Well in the picture you can see many things that are not always true but that is not really it. I don't think people would come and be here for only a picture. These things can make an interesting place for all people not just from here but from abroad as well. For me I have seen many films about Britain and Scotland but I feel more knowledge about your country after being here and other museums.

Whereas an image or picture is perceived as being manufactured and produced, and therefore authored; the artefact is considered to be objective and free from subjective bias or the motives of an author. The legitimacy and truth of the object becomes indisputable whilst the legitimacy and truth of the image is open to question and dispute; the image is considered fantasy and fiction whereas the object remains the

ultimate referent of reality. These characteristics represent the manifestation of the commodity code in the museum since it is the object form that is most compatible with the commodity form itself. Once primary significance is attached to objects, this significance comes to reside in a form that can be exclusively and discreetly owned, it is a form that can be bought and sold and exchanged. Commodification occurs as a self reifying process in which the object form comes to signify its own legitimacy and authenticity and in doing so negates the credibility of other comparable and equivalent discourses. As part of this self reification, the supremacy of the object becomes naturalised and depoliticised appearing *objective* and true.

5.1.5 Commodity Fetishism

Visitors seemed to have difficulty in rationally justifying their belief in the reality of museum artefacts but nevertheless were adamant in this belief, despite attempts in the interview to provoke visitors to question this assumption. The generally positive attitude visitors have towards the museum and its displays, together with the belief that museum artefacts provide a more authentic, real and truthful experience, belies an object fetishism of a sort. Visitors' comments suggest that the interface with museum objects creates a powerful sensation or realisation within them. Whatever this sensation is, or however it is termed, it is exclusive to object interaction and cannot be experienced through any other media. Visitors also express themselves in a way that would suggest that this object sensation is a highly desirable state. These visitors describe the sensation as a unique 'vibe' that can only be gained from interaction with the artefact.

[Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real artefacts and objects here but only pictures and photographs of artefacts]

No, you wouldn't get the same vibes, the same 'realness'. It is much more real when you have got the real thing in front of you. It is sort of capturing time isn't it in the museum? you can imagine things more can't you when you see them in front of you.

No, it wouldn't have been no. It's not as plastic as say a film or a picture, you know it is the real thing, you can't get the same vibes from T.V that you can get from seeing the real thing.

Other visitors described the effect of their artefact interaction as a certain kind of 'feeling'.

You can actually see what they had to wear in those days, with pictures you just wouldn't get the same thing, you don't get the same details or the same, well the same - the same feeling of the thing.

There is no reason why seeing an artefact can furnish the visitor with information about 'what they had to wear in those days' better than an alternative source. Arguably the opposite is the case because the museum display (in this instance a clothing display) does not tell or show the visitor how the garments were worn, who it was worn by and so on. A televisual reconstruction could however conceivably provide this detail that is lacking in the museum display. The only factor than can account for this visitor getting 'that certain feeling' from one presentation and not the other is that one is an object display whilst the other is not (Bagnall, 1996, reports a similar finding). The feeling or vibe referred to by these visitors is a consequence of seeing and coming close to objects. Visitors visit the museum to come into close proximity with objects for in doing so the visitor is able to feel the unique sensation that only objects can provide, a sensation that is desirable and fulfilling.

I went to a museum once where you were actually allowed to handle the stuff. I mean of course you were allowed to touch. But it was amazing that you could touch some of it. It was really, really good and gave you a real feeling for the thing just because you were allowed to handle the things with your hands. I think that was the best museum I have ever been to. It was the museum in Orkney, they allowed you to touch stone axes and things, just handle the tools. And you know, you get different pictures in your mind.

Ideally visitors would like to get even closer to museum artifacts, to absorb the objects into themselves, for supposedly this would achieve a heightened sensation and an ultimate satisfaction. The museum prevents this desire being fulfilled by denying the visitor physical contact with the objects on display, it allows the visitor to get close, tantalizingly close to objects, but the object always remains elusive and just out of hands reach.

Here is something, it is real, you can see it and you can touch it - well, almost touch it, and it just has that little bit of extra magic to it.

Visitors not only consider the experience of viewing museum artifacts to be more authentic and real, they also consider it to be singularly capable of facilitating a desirable sensation that can be obtained from no other form of object presentation. The sensation created from museum artifact viewing cannot be explained by the types of information or detail that artifact interaction of this kind provides. It can only be explained by an intrinsic desire of the part of the visitor to get close to objects, since this is the only factor that separates museum viewing from other forms of object viewing. One (male) visitor articulated the experience of viewing objects as being akin to a sexual experience. This comment can be directly equated with Freudian notions of commodification and fetishism as reviewed in section 1.2.2. The human desire to overcome his alienation and synthesize himself with the 'other' provides the desire and drive for both sexual and economic activity. From a psycho

analytical perspective these drives operate not at a conscious but a subconscious level. From the perspective of political economy and Marx, this reaction to objects is the product of the conditions and social relations of capital, operating at a 'deep' ideological or hegemonic level.

You have actually got to have these things themselves, It is like going to the movies, it is a bit different if you actually see the thing. You must agree that there is a certain difference between looking at a women in the movies and actually having one.

The desire to be with museum objects and to come into close proximity with the displays cannot be attributed to the significance or meaning of any one artifact or set of artifacts. Rarely did the visitors interviewed express particular interest in one artifact or set of artifacts. The motivation to come to the museum is based in a desire to be with objects as a general category. The primary attraction of the museum is that it provides an interface between visitor and objects. What any one artifact or group of artifacts may or may not signify is tertiary to the principle drive to see objects.

I have always come down to the museum, I have been coming to the museum for so long. It's just coming to museum itself that's pleasurable. I don't just come to look at this one section, I like to tour the whole place.

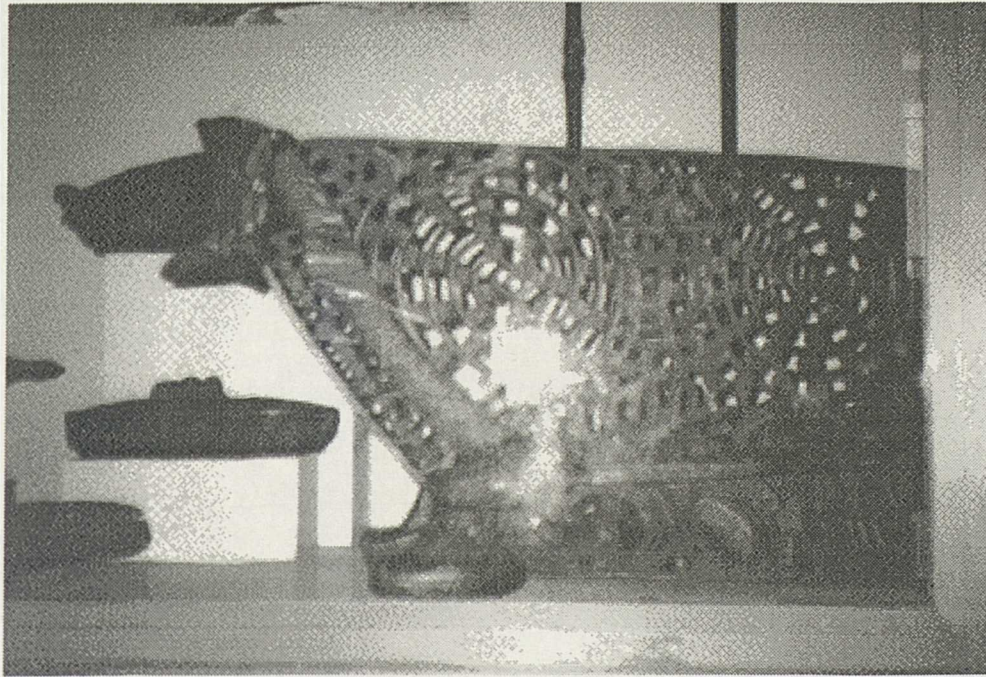
I just like the atmosphere of this whole place. I like the smell of it - It's the vibes, just interesting.

I just like looking round and seeing the things, it's nice

In some instances visitors openly admitted that they had little interest in what any one object was, or where it was from, but the fact that they were able to get close to objects provided necessary enjoyment in itself.

Well my friend here hasn't got her reading glasses and she can't make out the things. No but I find it quite intriguing, truthfully I do. It's fascinating. There's a lot of things you see, like this thing there, what is it?

[I don't know what it is]



Picture 5.4 Unlabelled woodcarving, Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

It's not a seat, it's not boat, is it just decoration?

[I am not sure]

So what are you saying? if there was a video it would tell you what it is?

[I suppose it could do]

[By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these artifacts were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static relics in the cases here]

Oh no, I would have to have that, the real thing there

[even though you don't know what it is?]

Well it's a talking point isn't it. We are talking about it aren't we and we don't know what it is, well you might know but I don't. You have got to use your imagination with a lot of things.

Visitors value the object simply because it is an object. Comments such as these begin to question the usefulness of curators' attempts to inform the visiting public of the historical significance of the objects on display for it would seem that in many cases visitors have little concern for this information. The particular archaeological or anthropological significance of any one collection would seem secondary to visitors' primary desire to be in close proximity to objects of the past. This has serious implications for museological practice for it implies that the museum visitor is really interested in experiencing the spectacle of the museum rather than its pedagogical significance (Blattenberg & Broderick, 1991). The spectacle of the museum is a commodity spectacle, in which visitors come to be amazed and excited by the rare, the unusual - the spectacular.

The primary importance given to museum artifacts is not only evident in visitors' descriptions of what it is like for them to encounter objects, it can also be seen in the importance visitors ascribe to the continued preservation of the artifacts and potential horror at the prospect of their destruction. All of the visitors interviewed were certain that it was very important to save museum artifacts in the future and that a failure to do so would be catastrophic and tragic.

5.1.6 Material referents of history

One expression of the superiority of the object discourse is evident in the manner the visitors interviewed, commented upon the role of artifacts in matters of history and historical knowledge. Many visitors commented upon the importance of the

museum as a source of information about history. Although the same visitors recognized other types of information such as written accounts, photographs and film footage to be useful sources of historical knowledge, they rarely accepted that these sources were equally valid. Museum displays are considered to be the most important type of historical evidence, insofar as objects are not simply perceived as being representative of historical events, but the objects are themselves considered to be the constituents of history itself.

It's an important thing that we protect these things, it's the history isn't it.
Without this there would be no record of history would there?

Other sources of information, such as those mentioned above, are thought of as being *about* history whereas the museum objects are understood to *actually be* history. 'The past' is perceived as being materially based - a set of objects. Consequently the loss or destruction of museum objects would constitute a loss of history itself - artifacts provide the ultimate referent of history.

I think it is a good thing. What would we do if we didn't preserve these things, where would we be. You have got to have a place like this, naturally I would say to preserve these antiques because they are awful interesting. They are part of history, well I suppose they are history of others places and other peoples way of life.

For museum visitors, the past exists as a vast collection of objects and the museum a depository of history in an object form. For this reason many museum visitors justified the continued support for the museum because a failure to do so would result in the '*loss of history*'. These remarks imply that visitors perceive history and the past to be a set of material artifacts which act as the ultimate referent of history.

[So you support the idea of preservation?]

Oh yes definitely, I think that it would a great loss to the country and a great loss to world if places like this didn't exist. Once they are gone there is no way of getting them back again is there, and then our history would be lost so I think it is good.

In cultures structured by codes of social relations other than capitalism and the commodity form, this type of perception would be inconceivable. In an oral culture, history and the past exist not as sets of objects but as narratives and stories. Whilst certain relics may be important, their importance is completely reliant upon the historical narratives to which they are part (Cruikshank, 1992). The reverse is the case in the museum and in contemporary society, organised in terms of commodity codes, because the narratives of the past become reliant on the material remains of past generations. Several implications arise from a cultural belief that museum artifacts - and these objects alone - constitute historical reference about the past. Most importantly it means that 'the past' can be owned and therefore exchanged (Hewison, 1987). Through the museum, history is commodified. The owner of an African Sword for instance does not simply own a relic that represents a part of cultural history, rather this owner owns this history and is free to do with this history whatever he or she wishes. It can be preserved and retained, sold, or given away, depending on the wishes of its owner. The museum artifact becomes valued because of its historical significance but it is a significance that can be owned. This raises several political debates over who, and which institutions, should be morally entitled to own parts of history in the form of artifacts (Trigger, 1985). One respondent made the following remark:

[Do you think that it is a good or a bad thing that these artifacts are preserved and saved in the museum?]

That's a difficult one. I think basically, if the people who they belong to. If the countries from which they are taken want them back then they should be given back and that would be the end of that. After all that is their right. I read this wee little thing about the Indian shirt over there and that the Lakotas would like to have it back. It is from the Battle of Wounded Knee and if they want it back they should have it because it is theirs - tough.

But I think who ever gets the stuff should preserve it, definitely. That is really, really important.

[Why is it so important?]

Because our past is what makes us what we are today and if you live in the present you lose an awful lot.

As part of the legacy of European colonialism and imperialism, European states presently 'own' a great deal of the world's history, which under current post colonial debates have been questioned. The very notion that one cultural form can own another's historical heritage is a peculiar phenomenon which can only emerge when the relations of capitalism are imposed upon an historical discourse, for it is only under these conditions that 'history' is implanted upon material remains that then become the sole signification of a cultural past (Mulvany, 1985). Under the commodity code of capital, history exists as a portfolio of commodities which function and behave like any other commodity. The museum is equivalent to any other institution that displays commodities, the only difference being that the museum is in the business of displaying historical or cultural commodities instead of fast moving consumer goods (Harris, 1991).

Some visitors describe the museum artifact as a 'container' of history itself. As one visitor put it, the artifacts displayed '*capture time*'. The commodity code imposes a quantification discourse upon systems of signification in that signs become located

within a quantified and specific form. The museum artifact is perceived as 'catching time', as if the past could be sliced up and placed or fixed inside specific objects on display. The artifact no longer simply represents or signifies periods of history as such, the artifact exists as history materialised. The code of the commodity imposes a specific discourse onto the museum and the artifacts displayed within and consequently the museum becomes akin to a department store of history and the past. Yet this highly specific commodity code is not perceived as being but one form of historical presentation amongst many others, it is seen as an almost natural discourse, as if there could be no other way of representing the past truthfully, other than through an object/commodity discourse.

When history is subsumed to a commodity discourse, the continued preservation of museum artifacts takes on a greater importance than it would in other historical discourses. This accounts for the vast increase in the number of museums and preserved artifacts as well as the diversity of the subject matters which these institutions choose to display. Interestingly, some of the visitors interviewed argued that artifact preservation was all the more important nowadays because 'there is not much of the past left so what there is should be preserved', although the justification for this belief is difficult to find. Arguably, modern society preserve more artifacts than at any other period in history. If anything, there is more 'past' and more 'history' now than ever before and the amount of past on display is increasing ever year (Hewison, 1987). Growth in the number of industrial or technological museums, such as the Museum of Transport, and social historical museums such as the People's Palace in Glasgow, inflate the number of historical artifacts in existence dramatically because their displays are not limited to specific categories of

objects as in the case of more conventional museum formats. The industrialisation characteristic of modernity has had the effect of producing massive quantities and diversities of material productions which have gradually lost their usefulness caused by continued technological innovation, changes in taste and fashion etc. As a consequence, these useless material productions of the past are either discarded as waste or redefined and re-signified as material remains of the past to be displayed in museums. In this respect, the sheer volume of museum artifacts now preserved, reflects the boarder social conditions of materialism that are characteristic of modernity (Simmel, 1991).

These comments also reveal the implicit commodity code visitors apply to their perception of the past and history. In order for it to be possible to have more or less history, there first needs to a discourse in operation that enables this understanding to have any context of meaning. Through a commodity discourse, the past is conceived as having gradients of quantity rather than existing in an indefinable permanence. Under this discourse it becomes possible to have more past or less past, depending on the efforts of institutions such as museums. The past no longer exists as a period relative and equivalent to the present and the future, but as some form that is collectable and quantifiable (Belk, 1996).

5.1.7 Alienated artifacts

Throughout the interviews, visitors were able to describe and discuss the uses, meanings and rituals to which the objects were believed to be involved with originally. Simply by gazing upon the displays, visitors willingly described and

considered aspects of the lifestyles of the peoples thought to have once produced the objects, despite having no information other than the artifacts and the artifacts alone. As is common in Victorian museums, the Ethnography collections in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum contain very little in the way of descriptions or information about the societies and cultures that were responsible for the creation of the artifact other than the artifact itself. The same lack of written or narrated material to accompany the material displays is also characteristic of the Museum of Transport.

The museum display is able to provide visitors with all kinds of knowledge about lifestyles and social conditions now no longer in existence through a purely object focused discourse, confirming Hewison's (1987) statement, "Whilst saving objects of the past no attempt is made to preserve the lifestyles that went with them." Although there is no attempt to retain or even represent this aspect of the past in the museum, visitors are able to read this through contact with the object alone. The artifacts are no longer reliant upon being used (either culturally, socially or physically) or exchanged to have a context of value or meaning. Instead, the artifact's meaning or signification is self referential and self contained. The museum object is capable of not only signifying its own meaning but also that of the society from whence it originally came.

In this respect, the artifacts displayed in the museum are alienated from the sources and conditions of their production and as a consequence of this alienation, any context of meaning that was originally ascribed to the object by those responsible for its initial production is lost (Durrens, 1988). The museum visitor can never be

sure that the meaning of the museum artifact as he or she perceives it, bears any resemblance to that ascribed by those who produced the artifact in the first place.

And the other thing that intrigued me was how they stitched the leather embroidery. Where did they get the needles for the embroidery for some of the leather, the Indian leather? I know I shouldn't be asking you the questions, you should be asking me but that's the kind of thing you could find out here it will be around here somewhere. I mean on the plains they didn't have any metal, well they didn't have any wood even. It was all skin and bones that they used I mean it's almost living like an animal don't you think, just having bones and skin. I am glad we are in Scotland anyway, I couldn't go around in all that with only bones and skin.

For example, this visitor makes several remarks about the social and physical conditions that the Canadian Indians had to live under, and how their lifestyle must have been very basic. She assumes that because their clothing was manufactured from 'skin and bones', their lifestyle must have been very basic and almost animal like. Whilst this visitor is prepared to make these assumptions about Canadian Indian society from a momentary viewing of the museum artifacts, there is no way of confirming if these assumptions are valid or accurate, since there is no information illustrating Canadian Indian social conditions. There are no Canadian Indians to tell this visitor about their lifestyle and ways of living, nor is there any information provided to explain how such garments were produced, who they were worn by and for what purpose. Despite the lack of 'subjective' information, the visitor is content to base her social judgments of the Canadian Indians solely upon her preliminary observations of the objects displayed. We can speculate that these garments were once produced for a purpose and a function and hence the significance of the garments was intrinsically linked to the context and reasons of their use and application. If it is the social conditions of the society from which the

object originated that provides the object with its value and meaning then this meaning is now obsolete because this cultural form no longer exists. Just as the social conditions of its production disappeared, so to did its use and its original significance. Although the social conditions that gave rise to the object are dead and gone, the object remains in existence retaining significance and meaning. The code of the commodity form enables objects to be meaningful despite the fact the reasons for their production are unknown. This code provides a discourse through which the object is first *de-signed*, that is alienated or detached from the social structures of its production and referents of meaning, and then *re-assigned* with signification as an individual object. Once in the museum, the artifact does not rely upon being part of a social lifestyle to retain meaning, if anything it relies on other objects for this signification (Shanks & Tilley, 1987). Nevertheless, the museum artifact retains its signifying qualities as an isolated, enclosed and materialised object form.

For to Baudrillard (1988) this alienation is characteristic of contemporary capitalist consumer society operating not only in relation to museum artifacts but to all human - object relations. Objects are reliant not upon subjective use for meaning but on relations to other objects:

'Few objects today are offered alone, without a context of objects to speak for them. And the relation of the consumer to the object has consequently changed: the object is no longer referred to in relation to specific utility, but as a collection of objects in their total meaning'(Baudrillard, 1988).

Under social conditions contrary to commodity economies, such as societies organised in terms of gift economy (see section 1.3), the museum object would have no function or context of meaning other than that gained from the contexts in which it was used, produced and exchanged. The object cannot exist as a meaningful entity once divorced from the social conditions of its use and application. The existence of museums and the meaning of the artifacts it displays are thus reliant upon the cultural structures of commodity relations which provide what was termed earlier as a phantom objectivity (Lukacs, 1971, in section 2.3.4).

5.2 Concluding remarks: The museum commodity?

The findings presented in this chapter have been used to demonstrate that the museum visit can be considered to be organised in terms of a commodity code. Visitors' descriptions of the museum experience have many commodity characteristics as described in the review conducted previously, such as fetishism and alienation. The commodification of the museum as described in this chapter requires the commodity form to be recognised as a cultural, structural system that operates beyond the realm of economic value and utility. The commodity 'code' rests not in the economic exchangeability of objects but on the cultural perceptions of the viewer, in this case the museum visitor.

The case of the museum would thus appear to fit well with a theory of cultural commodification as presented in section 2.4. In some respects however, Baudrillard's cultural theory of commodification does not fit comfortably with certain aspects of the findings presented here. Existence of a cultural commodity

code would appear to provide an explanation of visitors' descriptions in some respects but cannot explain how visitors judge the reality of artefacts. Visitors are not just concerned with the '*sign*' in their museum experience. In some cases, visitors disregarded the signification of individual artefacts and are more concerned with the presence of the object itself. It would seem that for the visitor, the museum's most valuable asset is the material referent of the objects it displays. Visitors enjoy 'real' things i.e., physical objects, that occupy space. They use objects as referents of cultural and historical meaning, making Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption difficult to integrate into an explanation of museum consumption. But this still leaves the central question unanswered: even if we accept that the museum is a commodified area, it does not provide any indication as to what form this commodity takes or, more importantly, how it is consumed. The next chapter specifically considers this issue.

CHAPTER SIX

Value and museum consumption

6.0 Chapter summary

This chapter considers the way in which the museum commodity is valued and consumed. Section 6.1 focuses specifically on issues relating to the value of the museum commodity as experienced by visitors. In Sections 6.1.1 to 6.1.3 attention is given to the three forms of value that emerged from the literature review; exchange, use and sign value. It is proposed that none of these value systems can either be rejected or accepted as providing a total explanation of the value of the museum visit. Sections 6.1.4 to 6.1.7 propose that all three forms of value are involved in combination with one another. Section 6.2 focuses on the experience of museum consumption suggesting that museum visitors' consumption activity is primarily concerned with personal involvement and engagement with museum artefacts. Section 6.2.1 rejects any attempt to provide a generic understanding of visitors' motives and wants, proposing that visitors have complex and diverse reasons for attending. Section 6.2.2 argues that the museum visit involves a political element concerning who is responsible and has authority to dictate what is seen and how it is interpreted. The visitor experience is greatly enhanced when individuals are able to consume and represent the displays as they see fit, rather than having to accept the interpretations provided by curators and museum producers. Section 6.2.3 gives attention to explicating the museum exchange, suggesting that the commodification of the museum(discussed in previous chapters) has resulted in visitors being valued only in terms of a quantitative relation, that is, how many visitors attend rather than the quality of the experience gained. Section 6.3 involves a speculative discussion about the issues covered in the discussion of findings. 6.3.1 seeks to describe the museum consumption experience and section 6.3.2 develops this description into a working theoretical explanation. Section 6.3.3 draws some conclusions from the study by proposing some hypothetical characteristics of the 'perfect' museum commodity. The final section of the chapter links the study back to the theoretical issues reviewed in previous chapters, suggesting that a modified semiotic theory of consumption offers potential insights into consumption behaviours. The section suggests that museum consumption can be understood in terms of singularisation or appropriation.

6.1 Valuing museum commodities

In order for the museum visit to be considered a consumption experience it is necessary to identify what is consumed from the visit, how it is valued and how this consumption takes place. It is not immediately evident how visiting a museum and viewing museum artefacts can be equated with other, more conventional forms of consumption. There is no product to acquire, no apparent monetary exchange and no real identifiable need that must be satisfied. If museum visiting can be shown to be a consumption experience then it will enable the concept of consumption to be redefined somewhat as an activity that does not necessarily involve any of the processes that are conventionally ascribed to it by marketing and consumer behaviour theory.

The analysis so far has shown that the conditions of the museum and the context in which the visit takes place can be linked to notions of the commodity and commodification. The museum display gives a primacy to what has been termed an 'object discourse' in the presentation of history and culture. Displays are largely, if not totally, divorced or alienated from the subjective conditions of their original production and social use. Consequently the meaning and significance of the artefacts displayed is located in a purely object or material referent, devoid of any subject based interpretation of history (Morton, 1988). The primacy of an object centred world view can be seen in visitors' explicit discrimination favouring artefact presentations over any other method of presenting the past. Visitors claim that experience of artefact presentations is more real and more authentic than other media, describing these other forms of presentation as less

than real. This primacy of the object form suggests evidence of a commodity code operating in the museum, producing a perception of the past and history constituted of discrete material units. The conditions of the commodity (or the commodity code) structure and support the museum experience as worthwhile and valuable for without this code the objects displayed could have no discrete meaning. It is only under the relations of commodity exchange that objects are given a life of their own and can exist as meaningful things despite the lack of any subjective context they may have once relied upon for this signification. Before accepting that the commodity code operates and structures the museum visit it is necessary to show how this code is manifest during the museum experience. This part of the analysis will therefore now focus specifically on a description of the commodities of museum consumption and how these commodities are valued and consumed by visitors.

As the literature review discussed, a commodity is defined first and foremost by the regimes of value which govern its significance (see section 2.3.1). According to Marxist economic theory a commodity has two constituent values; use and exchange. For Baudrillard and postmodern cultural theory the commodity form is no longer defined by this dichotomy but by sign value (see section 2.4.4). The objective of this investigation is to first establish whether the museum experience is a commodity experience governed by these values, and secondly to consider whether Baudrillard's theory of sign value can be used to explain the consumption of those commodities that lack economic and utilitarian dimensions.

In order to evaluate the credibility of considering the museum experience as one that involves commodity consumption, it is necessary to establish what, if any, types of value create the museum experience as being a 'valuable' and rewarding one. The lack of any economic exchange or use value in the museum experience is not sufficient grounds to reject the thesis that the museum experience is governed in terms of commodity exchange. To justify this thesis and confirm a cultural theory of consumption, it is necessary to first show that the museum visitors interviewed were not motivated to attend the museum with the intention of engaging in economic exchange and do not value the artefacts in terms of potential utility. This being established, it is then necessary to show evidence that visitors' valuation of the museum commodity can be explained in terms of semiotic or sign value.

6.1.1 Economic exchange value

According to Marxist commodity theory an object becomes a commodity when it can be valued quantitatively and equivalent to other commodities. Exchange value enables any one commodity to be exchanged against any another in an equivalent and reciprocal exchange. Although exchange value can be expressed in many ways the most typical form of exchange value is economic or monetary exchange value. When an object is valued in terms of a monetary value it can be bought, exchanged and sold for any other monetary commodity regardless of the qualitative differences between the two commodities being exchanged.

The issue of exchange and monetary value is far from straight forward in the case of artefacts and the museum. A visit to the museum involves no material or monetary exchange and no acquisition or purchase, suggesting that the code of economic exchange value does not structure the museum visit. But museum artefacts clearly have some dimension of economic value. Some of the artefacts displayed in museums undoubtedly have an economical value, however, the majority of pieces are likely to have relatively low economic worth. Some objects displayed may have once had an economic value prior to their museumification. Artefacts displayed in the Museum of Transport, for instance, such as the trams, trains automobiles and other vehicles were presumably once produced, bought and sold as commodities and were given monetary value which dictated their exchange. However, the economic value that these objects now have is determined by alternative factors to those originally in place at the time of the objects initial production. These objects are no longer economically valued primarily as vehicles of transport but as museum artefacts and this redefinition has re-contextualised the economical value of the objects.

Some museum artefacts may never have had an economic value prior to their collection, preservation and display. It would be ridiculous to maintain that a stone age relic was produced as an economically valuable commodity for exchange if capitalist production is considered to be culturally located within modernity. If commodity relations (and exchange value) are specific to modern society, then all objects produced externally to modern society cannot be said to have had an original economic value. Museum objects produced externally to modernity and capitalism only take on an economic value once they become redefined as

museum pieces, rarities or antiques. So whilst it would seem plausible to conclude that museum artefacts have no economic value, it would also seem that the opposite is also the case. Some objects only become economically valuable once they become 'museumified'.

The museum consolidates the economic value of museum artefacts into one comparable form. Objects that may have had varying degrees and forms of economic value (some may have had none) previously are subsumed under one form of economic value in the museum. This form of economic value is akin to the economic value of the antique or the rare specimen and it is defined by very different perimeters to an economic value based upon functionality. The economic value of museum artefacts is dependent upon conditions such as rarity and scarcity, that is, the fewer examples of any one type of object, the more economically valuable individual examples become. Taken to the extreme, the unique artefact may become highly economically valuable, in some cases such objects may be termed *priceless*. Value may also be dependent upon the age of an artefact in that the older the object is, the more valuable it potentially becomes (Bann, 1988). These two factors often work in conjunction with one another as older objects also tend to be rarer. Other factors also define the economic value of the artefact such as historical or cultural significance.

The issue of exchange value does not seem to have concerned visitors in this study. During the interviews, none of the visitors commented upon the economic or monetary value of the museum displays as a reason for their continued preservation. Whilst museum artefacts may be valued economically by curators,

insurers, buyers and maybe the antiques market; from the visitor's perspective it would appear that monetary value of the artefacts was of minor importance in their valuation.

This finding is not particularly surprising since the main motivation behind museum visiting is not purchase, acquisition and ownership of the artefacts on display. Visitors do not go to museums with the same intentions as a supermarket shopper in this respect. Although visitors often expressed a desire to get close to and to touch museum artefacts, they did not express any real desire to take the artefacts away with them. It was more common for visitors to argue that the artefacts should continue to remain available for public viewing and that private ownership of the artefacts would have a detrimental effect upon the museum experience. Private ownership would restrict the number of people who had access to the displays and would also lead to a fragmentation of the display which would prevent the collection being seen in its current entirety. Visitors commented that public ownership and support for the museum was important not only for current visitors but for visitors in the future.

I prefer to see them [The trams and trains] here and looked after, it's for the good of everybody. People like me can come and remember working with these things and a lot of people in Glasgow will tell you a similar thing, and of course the kiddies can come and see the history of Glasgow and where we came from. We need to keep them all together so everybody can come and take a look. I have brought my grandchildren and my children here to show them the trams and to show them what I used to do when I was a young man just so they could see, so I think we need to look after the old things aye.

The visitor considers it preferential, and in the best interests of society as a whole, to maintain the continued public ownership of museum artefacts. The museum

visit does not appear to involve a regime of economic exchange value. For this analysis to progress it will be necessary to broaden out the concept of exchange value from the conventional confines of economic value and to discuss other manifestations of exchange value that operate within the museum.

6.1.2 Use value

The strongest argument against the commodification thesis being developed here is that the museum, or more specifically the museum artefact, has no use value whatsoever and as such cannot be considered to be a commodity according to Marxist commodity theory. The museum artefact does not have a use value in the conventional sense of the term. Although some museum artefacts could potentially be applied to some function, the state of existence as a museum artefact prevents any form of utility being realised. Museum artefacts are divorced of functional utility and cannot be used to satisfy any conventional need as such, they are essentially *useless* objects. In some cases it would seem that an object must first become useless in order for it to be included in a museum display. Artefacts such as the trams in the Museum of Transport, for example, only became part of a museum display once their use value and functionality was superseded by alternative forms of transport. If these museum artefacts still had a use and a functional application they would not be in the museum but, by very definition, in use. In this respect, the fact that an object is displayed in the museum indicates that it has no functional use value.

However, some artefacts in the museum may still be theoretically useful and thus can conceivably have a use value. For instance, the Indian clothing in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum could presumably still be worn, the African sword collection would probably be as lethal in combat today as they ever were previously and many of the motor cars displayed in the Museum of Transport would serve as perfectly useful means of transport. Indeed, many of the models displayed can still be found in everyday use. Whilst some objects that are displayed in the museum may be potentially useful in terms of their original functional purpose, visitors do not value artefacts because of their usefulness and do not come to the museum with the intention of using them. The conventional format of the museum denies and prohibits the functional use value of artefacts. This is not to say that museum artefacts do not have value, museum artefacts clearly do have a value, a very high and unique value in some cases, but this value is not dependent upon functional utility.

The case of museum artefacts shows that objects are valued in many ways other than in terms of functional application. There exists a category of objects that are highly valuable solely because they have no functional utility whatsoever and it is this lack of functionality that is the source of this value. This category of non functional but highly valuable objects is not confined to the museum but also works of art and in some cases antiques. Bourdieu (1984) follows Veblen (1899) to argue that the acquisition of non functional objects can operate as an important signifier of social status and wealth, or cultural capital (see section 2.4.3). To be able to spend time and wealth on goods that have no function signifies that the purchaser is powerful and rich enough to be no longer concerned only with

meeting the material needs of existence. The same parallel can be drawn from anthropological literature on potlatch rituals (Maliowski, 1922) in which the rich and powerful expend resources on the destruction of useful and valuable things to demonstrate and signify their power and supremacy over social rivals. Museums and art galleries can be interpreted as performing a similar function as the potlatch ritual but in a modern context. For a society to be able to expend considerable resources on the collection and preservation of useless things signifies that the society is no longer only concerned with the provision of resources for material existence. Museums, it can and has been argued, thus function as signifiers of great national prestige. Museum artefacts, whilst lacking a functional basis for valuation, are valued as signifiers of uselessness. The use value of museum artefacts is that they have no use (Baudrillard, 1990b).

However, since visitors do not themselves gain any ownership over the artefacts displayed they cannot use them as signifiers of their own status. Visitors are never in a position to use the artefact collections to signify anything about themselves since they never personally possess or own them. There is no evidence in the transcripts that would suggest that visitors value museum artefacts solely because they are useless in terms of functionality. Although these regimes of value may exist at a broadly cultural or national level, it would not appear that visitors themselves engage in this particular value discourse during their visit. When visitors did make comments regarding the national importance of museums and artefact preservation it was typically set in a context of historical identity rather than personal signification.

Its an important thing that we protect these things, it's the history isn't it. without these things there would no record of history would there?

Visitors stated that museums were important nationally because they enabled access to the nation's history and past which was considered important. Rather than value being determined from signification of non functionality, visitors valued objects because they were historically valuable. If a term is required to capture this form of valuation by visitors, this value can be called historical (signification) value, that is, objects are valuable because they operate as signifiers of an aspect of history (see section 5.1.6 - 'Material Referents of History'). This would suggest that visitors use the signifying qualities of artefacts and the museum as a whole to establish their value, and that the value of the museum and the artefacts displayed is a signified value. Visitors perceive museum artefacts to be valuable partly because they are historically *significant* and not because they are functionally applicable either in terms of their material qualities or as markers of status. Whatever the value of museum artefacts, for the museum to be considered a site of consumption it is also necessary to identify the value and the signification gained from the visit by the visitors themselves and the way visitors themselves can be said to use artefacts. This may be quite different from the regimes of value imposed on the museum culturally (that is as a society as a whole) or nationally.

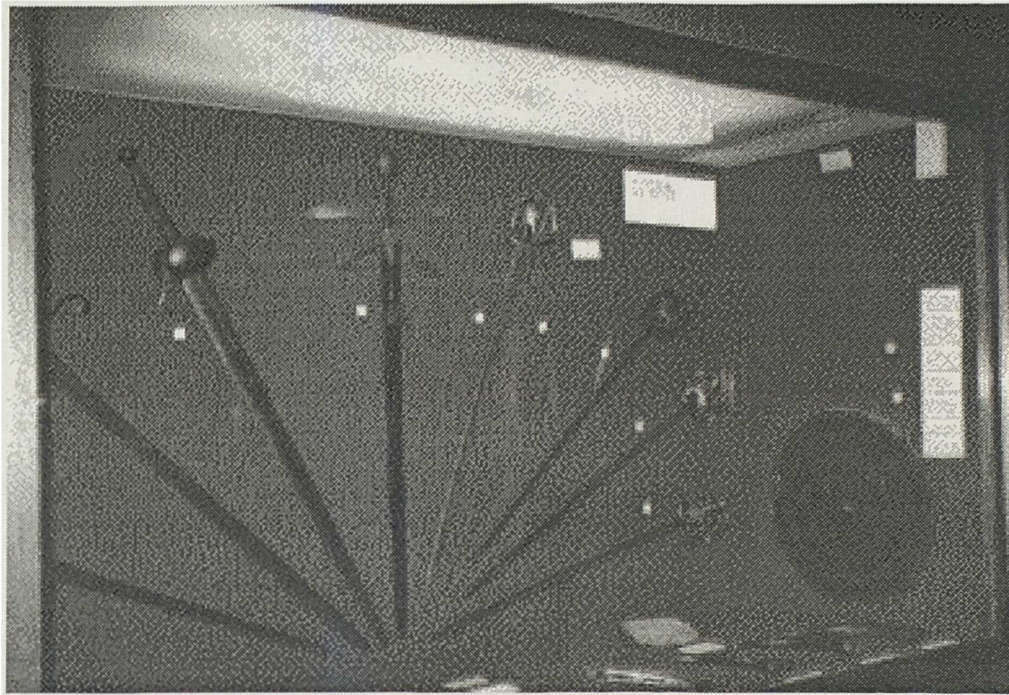
The museum commodity cannot be ascertained by the existence of use value or exchange value. The visit does not involve either of these systems of valuation. As developed in chapter two (section 2.4.4), Baudrillard's (1975) critique of Marxist theory leads the way to alternative understandings of commodity value.

Baudrillard argues that in the current stage of late capitalism (or postmodernity), it is sign value rather than exchange value and use value that forms the basis for the valuation of the commodity form. Since monetary exchange and use are inadequate to explain museum visitors' consumption experiences, the progression of this analysis will address whether sign value can provide an understanding of the value that structures museum consumption.

6.1.3 Sign Value

Whilst museum artefacts have little or no context of use or exchange value they are semiotically valuable. A lump of rock from an archaeological dig is both useless and economically worthless to the visitor but because it is semiotically valuable, that is it signifies different historical meanings, it can exist as a valuable semiotic commodity because of the forum provided by the museum (Valentine, 1982). This provides an explanation for some visitors' positive valuations of museum artefacts, for example in the following excerpt the visitor values the display because it signifies something about the abilities and skills of the ancient culture being displayed:

The armour over there do you see? You can get a dimension of the thing just by coming here and you would never get that from the film,. And its the same with the other armour over the back there, when you see that you think, "My god, these men must have been massive" and strong to carry all that weight. The swords too, I mean I could never lift some of these.



Picture 6.1. Swords. Swords and Armour Collection, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

This excerpt would seem to support a theory of sign value to explain museum visiting as a type of consumption. During the visit museum visitors 'consume' the wealth of historical and cultural signification that radiates from the objects on display. However, the comments made by the first visitor towards the end of this excerpt suggests that this explanation is far from complete. If historical and cultural information was the principal regime of value determining museum consumption, then visitors would not differentiate between museum displays and comparable sources of signification such as documentary and pictorial representations, both are able to signify culture and history. However, these visitors mark a distinction between object presentations like those in the museum and other forms of media such as a video or pictures. In some cases, visitors expressed interest in object displays that they had little or no idea about what the object was, where it was from or who produced it.

I think who ever gets the stuff should preserve it, definitely. That is really, really important.

[Why is it so important?]

Because our past is what makes us what we are today and if you live in the present you lose an awful lot. Because - look at that for example,



Picture 6.2. Indo-Persian Powder Flask, Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

[You are talking about the powder flask there?]

I don't care what it is, if it's a powder flask or whatever. Just to see it is gorgeous, it's an object apart. And I don't even think if people would be able to reproduce something like that today because there is a special skill that was used to make it that is now forgotten. And to lose something like that would be tragic I think.

This visitor cannot be said to be consuming the museum artefact for its cultural and historical signification since she is unaware and disinterested in the historical or cultural period where the object supposedly originated. The sign value of the artefact for this visitor could only be described as an aesthetic appreciation. This visitor values the display simply because it is an object above anything it may signify either culturally or historically. The notion of consuming museum displays through sign exchange cannot account for this context of valuation. The sign is

secondary to the material referent in the form of the object itself, contrary to Baudrillard's argument which gives primacy to the sign and considers material referents of commodities to be 'dead'.

6.1.4 The problem with value

The problem faced here is that museum visiting cannot be explained by any one understanding of commodity relations. The Marxist dichotomy of use and exchange value is inadequate since there is no use or exchange in the conventional definition of the term. But like traditional material commodities, museum artefacts are valuable because they are objects. Like commodity signs, museum objects are valuable despite lacking any economic or functional referent of value and can be consumed without being touched, owned or exchanged. However, unlike sign commodities museum objects are valuable because of their material reference and presence. Visitors do not wish to experience only signs, or even real signs, if they did the museum could do away with the objects and artefacts in favour of purely semiotic displays. Visitors to the museum want to see 'real' objects although they do not wish to exchange, purchase and acquire them, or use them. Museum consumption and the museum commodity cannot therefore be understood by this three tiered system of value. The transcript data suggests that visitors' museum consumption can be understood as involving all these values in varying degrees but none of them exclusively.

6.1.5 Signifying use: use-sign value

Visitors' principle method of discriminating between artefacts of value and objects of little worth was whether or not the object was believed to have once been used. The fact that an object is perceived to have once been used is important in visitors' valuation of museum artefacts. This explains why visitors were unwilling to accept that an exact simulation could replace the original museum artefact without detriment to the value of the visit. An exact copy of an authentic museum artefact may be identical materially to the original but because the copy was not once used, it cannot be as highly valued as the original museum artefact. As discussed in the previous chapter, visitors discriminated in favour of real, authentic and true museum artefacts and against copies, fakes and simulations. Visitors do refer to use as a measure of value but these references do not rely upon a functional referent of use, but rather on the artefact signifying that it was once used.

First visitor: But I don't think I would like to get rid of these things all together and just have the film, together would be good.

Second visitor: I don't think it would be the same if it was all just videos and pictures because I think you want to see the actual things you know like that, the things they actually used, the things they had to wear.

First visitor: It gives you all the information you really want as well, how things worked and how they were used and why they were used. You can learn more from these things rather than the film.

And:

[What can you get from the displays that you can't get from pictures.]

Well you can see something, see the likes of these and you can see that they have actually been handled, they have been used and some one has possessed them. Whereas looking at pictures, well your just

looking at a picture that somebody has painted, that kind of interests me to see the actual relics, I would say so.

This finding begs the question, 'how do visitors establish whether a museum artefact was once used?' Although some museum objects may have once been used by people in the past or in other cultures, it is not the case for all of the artefacts on display. Many of the artefacts displayed in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum were never used in the sense that they were never produced to have a functional utility. Many of the artefacts displayed in museums are ceremonial artefacts produced first and foremost for display and hence had no functional utility as such. The authentic use of other artefacts is also questionable. For instance, some museum pieces were manufactured specifically for the purpose of being sold to European Traders, providing a system by which indigenous peoples could acquire European currency in exchange for what were otherwise useless productions. Wade (1985) investigated the origins of North American Indian basket weaving and mat productions that are now displayed in museums throughout the western world. She found that the native Indian producers quickly learnt that Europeans provided a potentially large market for these products. Furthermore, the Indian producers soon realised that certain styles and designs of mats and other craftware were more popular with Europeans than others and so these designs were produced in larger quantities. Wade (1985) demonstrates that the belief in the authenticity and utility of museum artefacts as shown by visitors may be overly simplistic and naive, although the visitor is not necessarily totally to blame for holding a belief that museum artefacts were once used. The museum as an institution also needs to take responsibility for the construction of this discourse and consequently the construction of this aspect of artefacts' value. Archaeological literature also provides a point to critique and doubt the credibility

of the assumption that museum artefacts once had utility. For example Statski & Sutro (1991) argue that the majority of artefacts that museums currently possess from old and ancient cultures are unlikely to have ever been used by the very fact that they still exist. Objects that are used in everyday life do not survive over long periods of time because they become worn out and damaged as a consequence of this use. It is only artefacts that are discarded as rubbish or highly preserved (such as sacred or ceremonial pieces) that get preserved over long periods of time and eventually turn up in museum collections.

This literature requires the analysis to recognise that visitors' belief in the signified utility of museum artefacts is not necessarily a belief based on actuality. To a certain extent however it is irrelevant whether or not artefacts in the museum were or were not once used or how this use was undertaken. What is of primary importance is that visitors overwhelmingly believe this to be the case and base some of their value judgements on this belief. In other words, whether or not museum objects actually were used is secondary to the fact that they signify to the visitor that they were used in some way. The signification of use, termed here use-sign value, is not dependent upon any referent of functional utility however. It is therefore inaccurate to argue that utility and use value does not operate in visitors' valuation of museum artefacts. The use value of goods, the principle indicators of their commodity value, can exist beyond the functional life of an artefact. Even when the functional utility of an object is no longer able to sustain its status as a commodity, the signification of the utility is able to maintain this status. Use value is not intrinsic to the museum commodity itself, rather the use value of any object is dependent upon this use being signified through discourse.

This analysis provides one of most significant findings of this research as it opens up understanding of value not just in museum consumption but in all commodity consumption scenarios. All regimes of value governing commodity relations must be signified to consumers in order for this value to exist and since value is a signifying property it cannot be intrinsically located within the commodity but exists externally to it (Simmel, 1990). Useful objects are not only produced materially but are culturally produced to be useful and have functional signification. Whatever the discourse applied, the important point to note is that value is never a natural or inherent feature of an object but is assigned (i.e. given a sign value) through various discourses. The museum artefact can only be valued in terms of signified use because of its location in a commodity discourse. For the visitor there is no difference between the use value of functional commodities and the use value of museum artefacts, in that both rely upon a notion of utility for this valuation. In this respect, the use sign value of museum artefacts is no less or more real than the use value of functional objects. Just as Baudrillard (1993) states that “the real is dead, long live the realistic sign”, it is also the case, at least for museum artefacts, that use is dead, long live the useful sign.

6.1.6 Using signs: sign-use value

There is a second dimension to use value in the case of museum artefacts that is relevant to understanding museum consumption. The actual utility or functional use of museum artefacts may no longer be the principal context for which they are valued (if it ever was) but objects take on additional use as museum artefacts. Visitors use museum artefacts as signifiers in narrative construction and it is this

sign - use that most accurately defines the manner in which visitors use museum artefacts during their visit.

When visitors come into contact with museum artefacts, they use this experience to make stories about the past. In some cases this narrative construction was highly personal, relating to aspects of the visitors own past. This was particularly evident in the Museum of Transport with visitors who could remember the exhibits when they functioned as vehicles of public transport. In producing these stories about the past, visitors used the artefacts to structure their narratives, as if by being close to objects, the memories and stories about the past were more visual and more real and therefore more useful for visitors when constructing their own narratives. The following excerpt from a transcript conducted in the Museum of Transport demonstrates how one visitor uses the exhibit in the construction of a narrative.

I'll tell you a wee interesting story. do you want me to tell you a story?
A friend of mine was sitting up there right, on the back of a tram one
day in the afternoon

*{points up to the back of a tramcar to show me where his friend would
have sat}*



**Picture 6.3. 'Up on the back of the tramcar', Museum of
Transport**

..and he's looking down there

{walks over to the spot where his friend would have been looking}

he'd be sixteen or seventeen at the time. And there's a boy on a bicycle,
a butcher boy on a bike and he's in the middle of the tracks, he's
keeping up with the tram you see. And he's just looking up at this
friend of mine you know. So unknown to him, he's at the back of the
tram, he's about there, you know

*{demonstrates the distance the bike would have been from the tram by
directing it with his hands, about five feet}*

Unknown to him, workmen had taken up these courses

*{crouches down and points at the trams tracks. Note that a 'course' is
the name for the steel track on which the trams run}.*

They had taken up these course; because they could do that to work on
the road and that from time to time, and the trams could still run along
the groove without the course.

[The trams could still run without the courses tram track could they?]

Oh aye, yes they could, the workmen would take em up from time to time to work on em. And the tram could still go on because the wheels on em went right down you know

{demonstrates how the wheel of the tram would have fitted into the groove when the course had been removed}.

And anyway you can imagine what would have happened here. He's looking out of the back.

{Pointing to where his friend would have been, pointing up at the back of the tram with his walking stick}

And the boy on the bike is coming up here

{points his stick down at the track directly behind the tram}

Of course he just disappears down here,

{ pointing at the track. The boy on the bike must have cycled into the groove left by the absent course. The man laughs loudly}

He was all right like, he was O. K you know. Anyway it was just one of those funny wee incidents that you remember when you see one of these things.

This visitor uses the tram display to direct and communicate his story. The narrative is centred around the exhibit itself and the telling of the story involves continual reference in the form of pointing at, and touching the tram. The story would have had been very difficult to understand if the visitor had not made continual reference to the tramcar display and therefore the object presentation is an essential component of this specific type of narrative construction. The exhibit is used by the visitor to visualise and make stable his story. Furthermore, he clearly enjoys constructing the story and communicating it to the interviewer suggesting that it is a pleasurable activity.

The museum artefact has a use value in the sense that it can be used in this kind of story telling/ narrative construction. Some visitors made remarks that imply that the narratives that can be created and accessed in the museum are dependent upon

the object display being present and that an absence of the object display from the museum visit would inhibit this activity. For many visitors the object displays facilitated their imaginations in a way that could not be achieved from looking and experiencing other forms of presentation

I do not think they should replace the real thing you see in here, I don't think so. I mean I used to come here as a kid, and I used to love watching and looking at all these things, your imagination just runs wild. And maybe that's the problem with the young ones today, they don't use their own imagination you see but let the television do the imagining for them and I think that's a pity. But you see the kids in here running around and looking at things and their using their own imagination.

And:

Apart from that you use your imagination to think what they would do with these things if you saw it in a film it's just a film, do you know what I mean. Lets say the likes of that (The Polynesian Carving. See picture 6.6) if you saw it in a film that would be it, but here you're saying what is that, what did they use it for so you have to go and look to see what it is. Whereas if it was just a film and you saw them using it would be out of your mind.

Museum artefacts have a unique use value for visitors in the sense that no other form of presentation can provide this insight into the past or provide the components for this type of narrative construction. Whilst the use value of the tramcar as a museum exhibit is quite different to the use value of the tramcar as a vehicle of transport, both functions are equally 'useful'. Objects can be de-signed of their original use value and re-signed with alternative signification through the process or discourse of 'museumification' (Crang, 1994; Alpers, 1991).

The discourse of the museum presentation changes the usefulness of the object enabling it take on an alternative function to the one it had prior to display. The

use of museum artefacts in this way can be described as a kind of archaeological value. Visitors use the artefacts to build up narratives about the past in the same way that an archaeologist would use an artefact or set of artefacts to construct an understanding about a past civilisation or culture.

Whatever use value an artefact may have had in ancient times, for the archaeologist this use is no longer the main reason for valuing the object. The archaeological relic becomes valuable because of its historical signification and usefulness from the point of view that it can provide information about the daily lives and activities of an ancient cultural form of organisation. Visitors use museum objects for the same purpose even though their skills at accurate interpretation and analysis may not be as extensive as an anthropologists or an archaeologists. Throughout the visit, visitors engage in a semiotic reading of artefacts to produce an understanding of the lifestyles and beliefs that they perceive to have once surrounded the artefact, drawing on their own knowledge, mythologies and perhaps curators' interpretations of the object to build up their narrative. In some cases visitors drew on their own experiences and memories to provide this detail. For the visitor, the museum artefact is *useful* as a signifier which can be integrated into the narratives they choose to construct. Museum artefacts are not only valued because they signify that they were once used, they are also valuable because they can be used as signifiers.

Visitors did not only construct stories around objects they had personal experience of but also with objects from periods beyond their own life time or from other cultural spaces. In the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, visitors used the

objects on display in exactly the same way as did visitors to the Museum of Transport. In both cases visitors communicated narratives that centred around the artefacts on display. The stories visitors communicated in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum were typically more generic than those in the Museum of Transport, which tended to be more personalised reflections. This was to be expected since some visitors to the Museum of Transport had personal recollections and memories of some of the artefacts on display whereas they did not have this personal connection with the ethnographic displays in the Kelvingrove.

Visitors to the Kelvingrove typically integrated the artefacts into a personal narrative by imagining what it might have been like in these otherwise alien societies.

First visitor: They [Children today] don't know what went on, they're just stuck in front of the blooming video games and things but they have to see for themselves. The likes of St. Kilda, how hard it was for people to get things. They just get things put in their laps, they don't have to work for anything today. Well that's the way I see it anyway. They have got to see how other people lived

I mean in those days there was no social security, people had to make nature help them if you know what I mean.

Second visitor: You are talking about St.Kilda there.

First visitor: Aye about St.Kilda. They couldn't just go to the government and get their pension and hand outs and things like that, they had to live life as it was in that set area where they lived and utilise whatever was there.

You see you are talking about doing away with the museum, how are the kids going to see for themselves the likes of St.Kilda, do you know what I mean as he says there was no social security in these days, if you didn't do something to feed your self you died and that was it; there was no hand outs. And I think the kids today get it too easy

The stories constructed through the use of artefacts as signifiers can be best understood as mythological narratives. It is not first but second order signification (Barthes, 1972) that constitutes the value of museum artefacts in visitors' consumption of the displays. In the narratives constructed by visitors, the objects no longer simply signify their function but a host of additional signification that operate through a mythical discourse. For instance:

First visitor: That's right, but you must remember that when you walked on your own in them days there was no fear of a pensioner getting mugged, there was no fear of children being raped, everybody respected everybody else. I know you have got to go with the times but what area could you say that you could go out at eleven O' Clock at night and you would feel safe - no area.

Second visitor: That's why it's so important to save these things because maybe if we paid more attention to things from history, not just trams but everything, then we could maybe solve some of the bad things that have come about.

First visitor: Even in the war, we used to walk around in the blackout without fear of being mugged, in them days you only had one fear, of Gerry coming over and dropping a bomb on you, mind you saying that these trams could be deadly in the blackout, you had to keep your ears open for one of these rattling along because they didn't have any proper light then you see because of the black out, I can remember it now, clank, clank, clank, oh yes they used to run in the war.

Second visitor: Not only that - these are more environmentally friendly than the buses and that's why they are bringing them all back but it will cost them a fortune, a tidy sum I bet. They should have never done away with them in the first place.

First visitor: Well you can still see the old tracks, We used to live down towards the power station and down there was the terminus for the number 32 tram.

Second visitor : So it shouldn't cost that much to get them back again. You have got a lot of folks unemployed so that would one thing they could do to help the community, digging up the lines so the old trams could run again.

First visitor: That would get rid of some of there surplus energy wouldn't it so they wouldn't go around causing trouble all the time.

This visitor is able to use the museum display to make an essentially political or moral statement regarding the social fibre of older day Glasgow. The tramcar is

used to develop this narrative in which past social conditions are heralded as being more wholesome than modern society. The nostalgic signification that the tramcar exhibit now holds for this visitor only exists because of the mythical discourse that operates in the confines of the museum. It is unlikely that users of the trams, when they operated as vehicles of transport, held these types of beliefs towards the vehicles and in this respect this type of signification is produced solely through the object being displayed in the museum. The museum discourse is like a mythical discourse because by being displayed in the museum the artefact comes to take on another set of signification (this is what is meant by second order) that it did not have as a functional object. As a consequence of the museum objects existing as alienated artefacts (see section 5.1.7), the content of this second order mythical signification is not fixed but can be brought to the object by individual visitors themselves.

The signification of any one museum artefact can vary dramatically depending on the opinions and beliefs of individual visitors. The same museum artefact can have contradictory meaning and value depending on which visitor is engaging the object and how they go about this engagement. The following two comments illustrate this point.

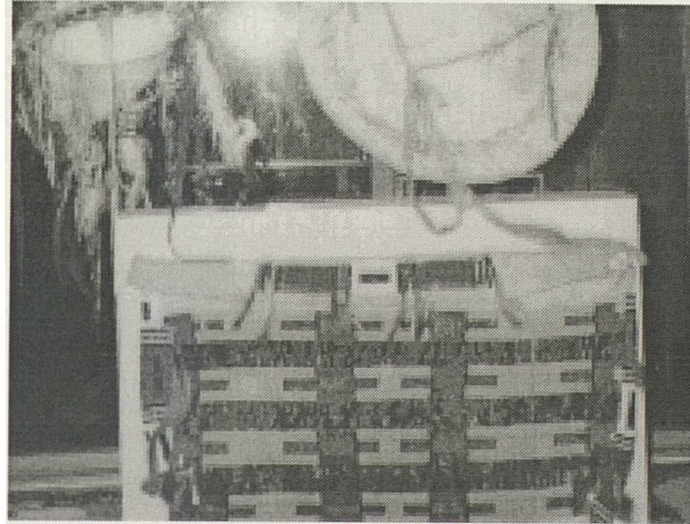
Where did they [The Indians] get the needles for the embroidery for some of the leather, the Indian leather? I know I shouldn't be asking you the questions -you should be asking me but that's the kind of thing you could find out here it will be around here somewhere. I mean on the plains they didn't have any metal, well they didn't have any wood even. It was all skin and bones that they used. I mean it's almost living like an animal don't you think? Just having bones and skin. I am glad we are in Scotland anyway, I couldn't go around in all that with only bones and skin.



**Picture 6.4. Indian Clothing and artefacts,
Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**

This visitor uses the display to make a statement regarding the level of sophistication of Indian culture, putting forward the argument that this society was primitive and uncivilised. In terms of use value, the visitor is using the display to reify a mythical discourse about the relative sophistication of modern society. Let us now consider the following excerpt:

I am not just interested in looking at these things for themselves as it were, I am interested in design and design not just of modern things but all things. You see when I look here I do not just see them as belonging to the Indians, I am looking at the particular design that they have implied. Sometimes I am looking at a design being repeated from one tribe to another.



**Picture 6.5. Plains Indian hide bag, Ethnography
Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**

[What can you learn about design from the objects displayed here?]

Well in some of the things I am looking for particular design traits like colour. You see you can learn an awful lot about modern design from the past. It's often brought from the past to the future but the future has its own characteristics as well. In fact you often see that the origin [of a design] can be traced back to something further back. The materials and the forms are most interesting in terms of design.

This visitor uses the same set of displays to construct another quite different narrative concerning the intricacy and sophistication of skills and aptitudes Indian society would have possessed. On the contrary to the above mythical narrative in which modern society is considered superior to Indian culture, the narrative this visitor constructs shows it to be as artistically advanced as modern artistic skills.

In some interviews, visitors stated a belief that 'old cultures' may have had skills and technologies that modern society either has lost or does not have. This type of narrative shows modern society as naïve and in some sense less developed than the ancient societies represented through the artefacts in the museum.

[Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real artefacts and objects here but only pictures and photographs of artefacts.]

First visitor: No, No. (*Why*) Because,

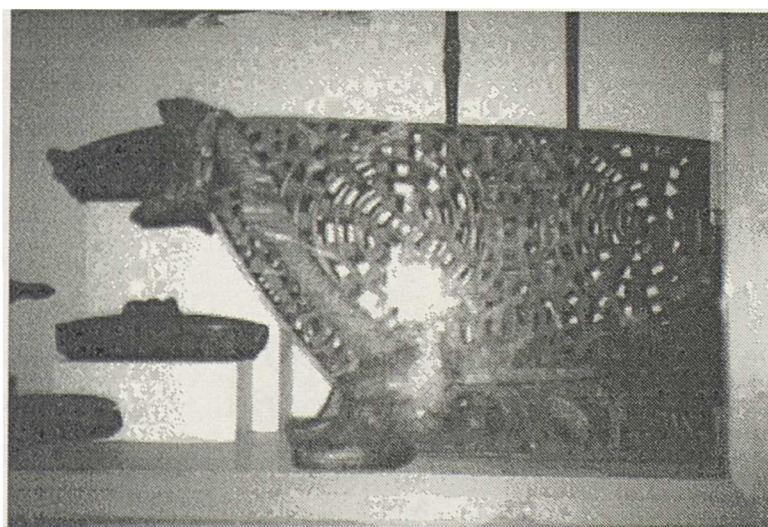
Second visitor: I think it's more interesting,

First visitor: someone in their day handled and used these things

Second visitor: And made it

First visitor: And made it, aye. I mean the craftsmanship that's in some of these things is phenomenal

Second visitor: I mean look at this:



Picture 6.6. Unlabelled Woodcarving, Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

First visitor: You couldn't make it today

Second visitor: Aye because they are all machine made nowadays- these were all hand made

First visitor: I mean all the machinery and time saving devices and everything that we have got today couldn't handle things like that. I

mean the skills we have lost over the centuries is phenomenal. I mean can you imagine today, somebody sitting down to try and make that - how long it would take them? Making it in the same way that these people made it. Could you imagine that? Just having the skills to do it. And that's only one item. If you look at jewellery and the craftsmanship with the swords and things at the top end their as well, it's phenomenal how they got the shapes and the curves and angles.

The meaning of any one museum artefact is highly variable depending on the input of the visitor and the manner in which the object is integrated into individual visitors own mythical narratives about the past. Just as the meaning of individual artefacts is variable so too is the use value derived from it, the usefulness of the displays is ultimately dependent upon the narratives these visitors wish to construct. In some narratives an object may be useful in one way whilst in others its use may be quite different. Indeed in some narratives the same object may not be useful at all and may be omitted from the visitors narrative completely. In many ways, the museum artefact is far more useful than when (and if) it was ever applied to a functional task in which case the object would have had a limited number of uses. As a museum artefact it can be used in numerous ways. The tramcar, for example, is no longer used only as a vehicle of transport but can be used to construct and make visible political, moral or personal narratives; the same is also the case in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum.

6.1.7 Sign exchange - the general law of equivalence

If economic exchange value is not part of the museum visitors experience, it either implies that from the perspective of the visitor the museum cannot be understood in terms of commodity relations, or that economic value is not the only manifestation of exchange value. The discussion developed so far would suggest that commodity relations are evident in the organisation of the museum and in the

perceptions of visitors during their museum experience. For this thesis to remain credible it is necessary to describe the manner in which exchange value is manifest in the context of the museum visit.

Just as use value can have many contexts so too can exchange value. Whilst economic or monetary value may be a significant and common manifestation of exchange value, it does not follow that all objects that do not have economic value cannot exist as commodified entities. For an object to operate as a commodity it must be entered into an exchangeable form, that is, it must be equivalent in some way to other objects; be it economically equivalent, or equivalent in another respect. The code of the commodity provides a discourse through which qualitatively different things become equal or comparable - but not necessarily economically comparable.

The structure and organisation of museums and their displays have an implicit code of equivalence. In the museum, cultures and time periods that are distinct and quite separate, take on an equivalence with each other so that the visitor can compare and equate one cultural form with an other. For instance, the display of North American Indian Clothing and the display of Japanese ceremonial armour originate in cultural conditions that are very different from one another. They come from completely different periods of time, from different geographical locations and were produced by peoples which we assume had very different cultural values and social lifestyles. In this respect the two cultures in this example are not equivalent with one another but are distinct and incomparable. However, when these two cultural forms are represented in the museum through collections

of artefacts, an equivalence emerges between these otherwise unique representations. Within the museum different displays sit side by side as part of the same ethnographic collection and can be compared with one another in many ways. The visitor can make relative judgements about these cultural forms; this one may be more advanced, this one more savage, this one more artistic, this one more natural, and so on. In the perception of visitors, the different cultural and historical representations in the museum gallery are not judged independently from one another but collectively.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

I just like the atmosphere of this whole place, I like the smell of it - Its the vibes, just interesting. It interesting to see what they had to use at the time and what they made the best of.

This respondent uses the term 'they' to refer not to a specific display or cultural representation but to all of the representations in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum collectively. Visitors rarely expressed specific interest in any one display or any particular interest in the unique contents of each collection. The fact that one object was from Japan and another from Africa, or that one object was a ceremonial piece and another was not, seemed to be of little concern to visitors. In essence, the interest in museum pieces was not dependent on the actual make up of the display but in the perceived cultural and historical significance of all the objects in general.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

No, I can't say what it is really. I have always come down to the museum, I have been coming to the museum for so long. It's just coming to the museum itself that pleasurable. I don't just come in and look at this one section, I usually tour the whole place. I am interested in the blades from different areas of the world.

Visitors do not treat the various cultural representations as being fundamentally different and individual. This visitor is able to equate all of the weapons and swords together despite the fact the different blades and swords displayed may have come from very different periods of culture and history. Visitors view museum objects collectively, referring to an interest in 'culture', 'heritage', 'history' or other similar generic terms.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

It's difficult to say really, we find it so interesting that you can go so far back in time and see just how things have progressed up to the present. You can really see the history of things here.

These terms impose an equivalence on objects, a basis on which they can be considered equal and comparable. The museum discourse thus reduces all of its displays to a single and equivalent form expressed in these generic terms. When an object becomes part of a museum display, it not only represents a specific cultural period or a particular lifestyle characteristics, but it comes to represent part of 'history' or 'heritage' and it is from these generic terms of equivalence that the object gains its significance.

Recognition that exchange value can operate above and beyond economic value shows that the commodity form is not an economic form but a cultural form. Commodification does not rely upon objects taking on a monetary equivalence, just an equivalence. The equivalence of artefacts can reside at the level of

discourse, that is, fundamentally different things are perceived, and can be spoken about in a similar and comparable fashion.

Just as the use value of an object can be de-signed and re-signed and is in this respect arbitrary, the logic underpinning any equivalence is also arbitrary. The exchange value of any commodity can vary against the exchange value of any other and the same is also evident in the equivalence of museum artefacts. Some visitors draw an equivalence between one set of artefacts whereas others will equate quite different sets of artefacts together. The most common level of equivalence drawn by visitors was not between different cultural displays (between Indian and African culture for example) although this was apparent in some cases, but between modern society and 'other' non modern societies. The term 'other' applies to societies that are perceived as being culturally different to modernity, as well as societies that are perceived as being historically different to modern society. Visitors use themselves as a reference from which they can equate and frame the 'other'. In this manifestation of equivalence, visitors use the museum display to compare themselves and their understanding of their own social space with that of other cultures and societies as represented through the museum exhibit.

[What do you look about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

They are not really about past cultures, well I don't think so anyway, I think it is more about the way cultures are now, the way cultures are different. And that's why I like this particular area anyhow - and, that basically it.

...Maybe that's why it is good you know because we do see ourselves here in a funny kind of way. Also if you studied the cultures and you

asked to look at the cultures, coming along and looking at stuff like this can concrete and reaffirm ideas you are trying to establish.

The museum visit is primarily concerned with this type of comparison. The value of the museum visit relies upon the opportunity to compare differences and similarities within the unified category of culture or history. In order to do this the presence of equivalence is absolutely necessary for without it no such comparison could be made. Although visitors do not engage the museum visit in terms of economic exchange value, they do engage it in terms of semiotic exchange value and it is in this manifestation of exchange value that museum artefacts are entered into a commodity discourse. This discussion provides further support for a cultural theory of the commodity as opposed to a purely economic explanation. Although the code of the commodity is often manifest as an economic expression through economic exchange value, this is only one possible expression of the commodity form. A commodity code can operate externally to economic conditions, at the level of signification, and in this respect the commodity form is first and foremost a cultural ideology that frames the meaning of objects and artefacts, and our perceptions of them.

6.1.8 Concluding remarks: Value and the museum commodity

The issue of value in the museum experience has thus been shown to be more complex than either Marxist or cultural theory would suggest. Baudrillard's critique of Marx would seem to have some relevance in the context of this investigation in that use and economic exchange value are inadequate constructs to fully explain the value of museum commodity. But a theory of sign value,

which disregards exchange and use value is also problematic. Rather than considering each of these three values to be discrete and separate, representing epochal periods of modernity, it is more constructive to consider each of these forms of value as existing in combination. This understanding requires the concepts of exchange and use value to be broadened somewhat allowing use value to refer not only to the functional benefits of any given commodity but also to use as a signifier. Sign value also needs to be recognised, in the context of the museum commodity at least, as a form of use value in that semiotically valuable commodities gain their value from the extent to which they signify use. Exchange value needs to be considered as a culturally determined code rather than one based totally on economic valuation or monetary worth. Commodities can be considered to have an exchange value in the sense that they are semiotically equivalent or exchangeable. Commodities can also signify that they have economic worth and monetary value without actually being available for exchange.

6.2 Consuming the museum

Having given consideration to the issue of value, attention will now focus on the consumption of museum commodities. The previous section suggested that the value of the museum artefact lies in the capacity to which it can be incorporated into personal narratives about the past. This essentially describes the activity of museum consumption. In this section the visitors' consumption experience in the museum will be considered in more detail.

6.2.1 A diversity of motives and a complexity of intentions

Different visitors have different reasons and motives for visiting museums. Reducing the museum visit to a set of specific perimeters is likely to lead to a poor explanation of museum consumption which fails to recognise the complexities and diversities of the visiting experience. Visitors have various, almost individual motives for viewing museum collections. Some visitors choose to view (consume) one set of objects whilst ignoring others, other visitors may have come to see particular displays or maybe one display only. This supports Macdonald's (1996) criticism of some museological theories which, she argues, have tended to maintain a view of visitors as a unitary and passive public and thus failed to acknowledge the 'interpretive agency' of visitors. When asked to comment about the tram displays in the Museum of Transport one visitor stated that he had not come to see this set of exhibits but was more interested in the steam trains. Others had come with the intention to see the display of model ships, or the cars and motorbikes and had little to say about the trams. Other visitors expressed no specific interest in any one display but in the collection more generally.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

I just like the whole set up; the whole thing, I think that it is magnificent place. I suppose I like just walking around looking the displays....Oh aye I think its great, I really do, I think its great seeing all this stuff from way back.

Two visitors might consume different experiences and meanings from the same object or set of artefacts depending on their own interests and prior involvement with the exhibits, and the cultural and historical significance perceived to surround

them. One visitor was interested in the trams and buses because he was a bus driver himself and had travelled to school on a trolley bus like the one in the museum as a child. Another couple described how they used to travel on the trams before they were married. These examples show how the value of museum objects remains largely dependent upon the way that it is viewed and by whom, supporting Simmel's remark:

'In whatever empirical or transcendental sense the difference between objects and subjects is conceived, value is never a 'quality' of the objects but a judgement upon them that remains inherent in the subject' (Simmel, 1990).

Visitors do not necessarily embark on a visit to the museum to view the artefacts and collections. Throughout the interviews some visitors' explanations of their motives for attending the museum had nothing to do with the artefact displays.

[What do you look about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

Well we came along for the singing, they have got a sing-a-long session today and that's why we came. If the singing wasn't here we probably would not have come. Because years ago we used to visit but not now.

Another group were tourists in Glasgow, travelling up to the city from their home city in Yorkshire with their darts team. They often travelled around cities the U.K. with the team and always combined a visit to local museum as part of their trip away. Regardless of the contents of the museum, a trip to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum formed a sort of ritual component of their short holidays.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one?]

Well do you really want this on your tape,

[Please go ahead]

We belong to a darts team, we are from North Yorkshire. And every year, once a year we all go away for the weekend. We have been to Paris, London, Edinburgh, Dublin and now this year its Glasgow.

[I see so you have just come up to Glasgow for a visit, can I ask why you chose to include a trip to this museum as part of your weekend]

Well we like looking round museums, we always go to the museums when go away, well the three of us do don't we? We just like to come round and see different things in all the places we go.

Although the interviews revealed a range of different reasons why visitors chose to come to the museum, the comments of this visitor indicate that the data collection method in the form of the short interview may have prohibited some respondents from giving certain types of explanations. Respondents could have been under the impression that what they considered to be trivial reasons for attending constituted inappropriate responses. In an interview of this kind, respondents may have been inclined to give answers that were considered to be more acceptable even if they did not accurately communicate the real reasons underpinning their visit. The analysis must also acknowledge that some visitors may not have a specific reason for coming, at least not one they could think of and articulate. However, during the interviews, some visitors were quite frank about their motivations to attend despite the fact that these responses might not fit into the standard answers they perceived were expected of them.

Some visitors seemed to describe their decision to visit the museum as being reached almost by default. They came in to get out of the rain, they came in because it gave them something to do instead of sitting in at home watching television and getting bored. This simple observation adds further problems to describing visitors as consumers using conventional definitions of the term. Although visitors do not engage in any form of material or economic exchange, one conceptual interpretation could be that visitors are exchanging their time which it is assumed is a valuable and scarce commodity. But some visitors' remarks suggest that the time taken to visit the museum is not all that valuable to them. It would seem that the opposite is the case, with some visitors at least. Their leisure time is not a valuable and scarce commodity but a space that they wish to fill with activities other than the mundane and ordinary. Free time is something visitors have plenty of, it is the resources required to use that time in a favourable manner which visitors are lacking. Since the museums chosen for this study do not operate an entrance fee, they provide an activity that is cheap to participate in and which offers the visitor more interest than other alternatives.

Many of the visitors interviewed were present with their families. One visitor had come with his grandson because of a school project on the Jacobites, although he had to ask whether there was any Jacobite objects on display. If Jacobean interest and his grandson's school project was this visitor's principal concern, it is difficult to reason why he chose to visit the museum rather than choosing another source of more reliable information such as a local library. It is more likely that bringing one's grandchildren to the museum fulfilled another purpose that was more to do with being a good grandparent and spending time with one's family in a

'constructive' and responsible way. Bagnall (1996) reports a similar interpretation from a study conducted in the two museums in the North West of England, suggesting that certain museums are believed to be suitable places for fathers to bring their children. The museum visit, for some groups of visitors, provides a forum to enact and fulfil their social relationships with one another.

One family, both parents history teachers, had come with their son and were using the St. Kilda display to press upon their son the hardships of life in times gone by.

First visitor (parent/husband): A lot of kids that come to museums they just think it's boring but he [*Second visitor (son)*] loves it down here, the St. Kilda and the Armour, he thought it was great.

[To Second visitor (son), What do you like about the museum then, what an interesting place for you?]

Second visitor (son): I just like to see all the stuff, and it is better than the television which can sometimes make the history seem boring. Why do you think it is better. From the T.V you can't see the details close up.

Third visitor (parent/wife): The teenagers today don't know half the things there are in Glasgow. These are things they should come and see for themselves, see the way people used to live and what they had to put up with,

First visitor (parent/husband): They think they are hard done to nowadays if you look back in the history you see how hard done to they were.

Other family groups included sons and daughters bringing their elderly parents out for the day to reminisce about the days when the trams were in operation on the streets of Glasgow. Their use of the display in narrative construction and interest expressed was highly personalised.

Visitor one (daughter): .. you told me that if you didn't have the tram cars, you used to walk everywhere.

Visitor two (mother): That right, but you must remember that when you walked on your own in them days there was no fear of a pensioner getting mugged.. everybody respected everybody else. I no you have got to go with the times but what area could you say that you could go out at eleven O' Clock at night and you would feel safe..

Visitor one (daughter): That's why it's so important to save these things because maybe if we paid more attention to things from history, not just trams but everything, then we could maybe solve some of the bad things that have come about.

Visitor two (mother): Even in the war, we used to walk around in the blackout without fear of being mugged, in them days you only had one fear, of Gerry coming over and dropping a bomb on you, mind you saying that these trams could be deadly in the blackout, you had to keep your ears open for one of these rattling along because they didn't have any proper light then you see because of the black out, I can remember it now, clank, clank, clank, oh yes they used to run in the war.

There is no equivalence to be drawn between these visitors' reasons for deciding on a museum visit and little worth in imposing an equivalence for the sake of theoretical clarity. The consumption of the museum is not one type of experience but many, depending on the visitors engaging the display, the social context in which the visit is set and their reasons for doing so (Falk & Dierking, 1992).

Rarely, if at all, did visitors claim that they had come to the museum with the specific intention of learning about something cultural or historical. When they did give this as a reason, it is debatable whether this was the real reason behind their visit or whether it was the answer they believed was expected of them. As with the example of the grandfather and grandson visitors, this reason can be interpreted as nothing more than an acceptable justification for other motives. In the context of the interview situation, respondents may have felt that claiming an interest in armour or Indian design was more acceptable than stating that they had

come to the museum for more benign reasons such as boredom or a lack of anything else to do with one's leisure time. The generalised nature of visitors' responses would seem to suggest that visitors are more concerned with the activity of museum visiting, as something to *do*, as opposed as being primarily concerned with seeing and learning anything in particular. None of the visitors interviewed stated that they had come to the museum to brush up on ancient Egypt or Glasgow trams or any other specific interest. Some visitors may come with this intention in mind and for these visitors it is this interest that provides their motivation for attending, but it is certainly not the case for all visitors.

The museum is, and has always been, a space in which the visitor directs his or her own experience of the displays on offer. The interpretations of curators and the high morality of educating the general public in matters of cultural diversity, used by the collector and philanthropist alike to justify their museological activities, do not seem to feature in visitors' experiences. In this respect the museum is very much a consumer orientated activity where the visitor is happy to disregard and even ignore the values and meanings the producers of the displays intend to communicate to their public. There are potentially many reasons why someone would choose to come to the museum and therefore many consumer (visitor) 'needs' and 'wants' which can be satisfied through such a visit. But the visitor rarely requires the input of the museum professional to satisfy whatever objective led him or her to the museum in the first place, at least not directly. Whilst curators have a role in the design and presentation of the museum, the visitor chooses what he or she wants to do (if anything) with this material and does so independently.

6.2.2 The consumer and the politics of what one sees

One of the most prevailing themes in visitors' responses during the interviews was the desire to maintain control over their own museum visit and the signification they read from the displays. The last section identified the multiple uses and readings any one display can have, depending on the visitors inputs to that reading. Visitors objected to the idea of other groups restricting and taking control of the type of readings that could be given to any one object or set of objects. Video, televisual or pictorial presentations as replacements to the artefact displays were objected to on the grounds that the visitors' role in the construction on an objects' significance would be devolved to another group.

[By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these artefacts were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static relics in the cases here]

Yes that's true, but that also takes away your own imagination. I would prefer to see it eye to eye and read of the notes here than watch T.V which I don't think is very healthy anyway. You can walk around and select what you want to see and think to yourself about the displays rather than just sitting in front of a T.V screen and let someone else tell you about it. When you see things here in a museum it makes you think about how these things were used and what it must have been like in the past and you can't get that from a T.V programme. You can see what it was like from a picture but you can't get the feel of what it must have been like. I don't know, its just interesting.

Visitors did not perceive museum displays to be designed in such a way that told them what to think or how to interpret the objects. For museum visitors the value of the visit lay in the active participation they themselves could take in the reading and interpretation of artefacts - what Macdonald (1996) refers to as '*Interpretive Agency*'. The museum display allows the visitor to take a central role in the viewing and reading of cultural and historical knowledge whereas other forms of

media force the visitor into a passive role as a viewer; an absorber of information rather than a designer and interpreter.

[Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real trams here but only pictures and photographs of trams?]

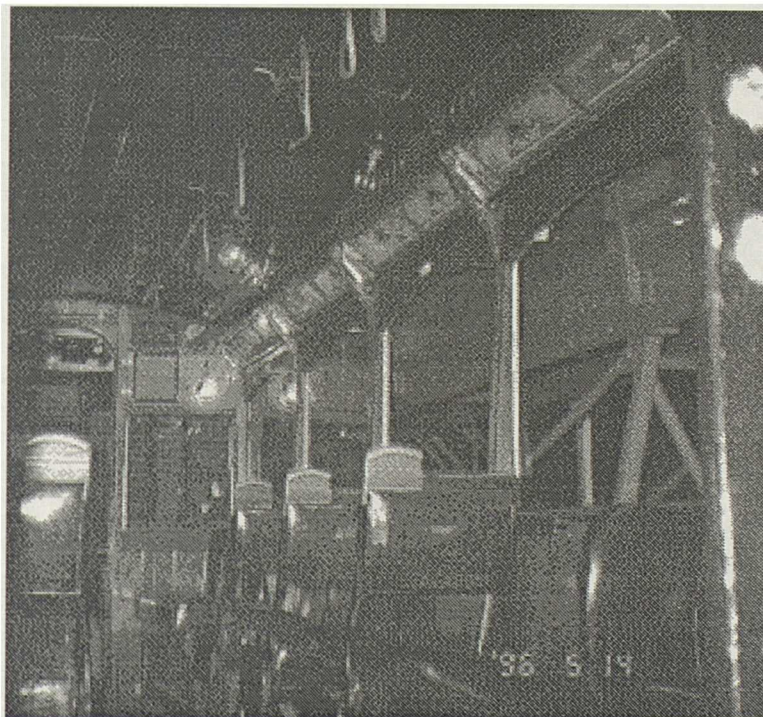
First visitor: No, if you have videos and pictures, they just all flash by, this you can take your time and examine it thoroughly. You can see inside as well as outside, whereas to me videos are not as good.

Second visitor: With the video you just sit there, you can videos and television in your own home, you don't need to leave or do anything.

First visitor: You get more history

Second visitor: and you get more nostalgia as well and you can actually get to see things here. See that there *[points in at the interior of one of the tramcars]* you would never get that in a video

First visitor: And the workman ship.



Picture 6.7. Interior of tramcar, Museum of Transport

First visitor: You just can't get that from the video, here we can peer in from the rails and take as long as we like. We can take a long look at the way they were built.

Second visitor: We need to have these things and come and look at them to see this craftsman ship. Lots of these skills have been lost in history because they haven't been passed on from generation to

generation. When you see the actual thing and you can actually get kids to look at the things.

First visitor: The other thing is that if you are sitting watching videos all the time you are not using your brain and that's what god gave you a brain for, to use it. Because if your brain is working then the rest of your body is working as well. This place makes you use your brain and think so I think it's a healthy place you bring the kids because it hasn't got full of videos. Not only that, kids don't appreciate the things they see on the telly. There is a lot of craftsmanship that has been lost because all the tram works are away. You don't see that kind of skill nowadays.

The visitor can choose to interpret the object however he or she wishes, it can be an in-depth, or superficial reading, or they can choose to not to interpret the object at all and ignore it. Visitors can themselves choose which parts of the display they wish to take an interest in and how they wish to structure this interest. Other forms of presentation were thought to dissolve this right to choose. In a video presentation for example the director and producer might concentrate the presentation on one aspect of the display whilst ignoring others, taking away the visitors' role in this selection.

[Would your trip to the museum have been as good if there were no real trams here but only pictures and photographs of trams?]

Absolutely not, no. (*why*) Because pictures are only two dimensional. Partly it is just looking at things that other folk wouldn't want to show you in a picture, who would maybe think that it is not important to show you. Like the insides, the interiors. There are quite a few of the cars that I actually remember. And you look at various details that are maybe only significant for you and you wouldn't get that detail in a picture. For example, you see this car here, I remember on the first time I was with my, now husband. It would have been one of our first meetings I suppose and we sat on a car just like this one, right down at the front. Now that I see the actual car, well I can remember it as if it was last week, it just brings it all back. I was just telling my son. you know - the memories of the things."



Picture 6.8. Glasgow Tramcar, Museum of Transport

[By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these trams were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static vehicles that are lifeless]

Yes but there is a get deal of difference between watching a film or reading a book and this. When you see a film you are very much a bystander, with a book you can get in amongst the characters, walking around here you can have your own memories. And I think that is actually far more valid.

Visitors do not want the presentation to be imposed upon them, they do not want to be spoon fed and directed, confined to the role of a watcher of historical presentations, they want to be integral to the production of that historical presentation. The museum allows the visitor to take on the role of the archaeologist and semiotician who reads and constructs the meaning of the display.

In some cases, especially in the Museum of Transport, visitors objected to the idea than any one else or any other group could inform them about the objects on display. They considered themselves to be experts on the displays on account of the fact that they had once used, built and worked on the artefacts prior to them becoming part of the museum display.

First visitor: I travelled on these things you know. And I used to go and watch the steam trains as a child on holiday so it's all nostalgia.

Second visitor: It's nice to look back and remember.

First visitor: Almost, but not all, almost every vehicle in here I have been in as a passenger or a driver so it's all nostalgia.

[Could you get that nostalgia from a film or a picture]

First visitor: No no, definitely not. When you look at a film it's something that is out of your reach it's out of your touch it's a vision or a site. This stuff here.. well I know you can't really touch it etc. but its real it's here, it's part of you, everything is there it's in front of you. I poked my head in one of the old car windows down there and it just immediately brought it all back for me. Because nearly all the old cars had leather upholstery, that smell never goes away - it never goes away. If you just put your head in there for a brief second you could back twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years, not that I'm as old as that mind you, I am only 53.

Second visitor: You can get the smell of the old leather from the tram seats

[By using videos and pictures we could recreate how these trams were used and this would be far more educational and fun to see than these static vehicles that are lifeless]

First visitor: Yes, but that doesn't apply to us for the reasons we have said. You know, we have been passengers on these things or drivers, well I have anyway. So the pictures wouldn't affect me in that way. I don't need somebody to show me what it was like to travel on a tram in Glasgow. I know what it was like because we were there. We could tell other people about it, they can't really tell us anything we don't already know, not that we want to know anyway. Even some of the boats, we used to go out and sail on them.

Second visitor: Lots of time we have been on and off old tram cars.

First visitor: The thing that is missing is the motion and the noise. When these things used to get their speed up especially on the road out to Airdrie which was a private track, I don't know if you knew that, it was a private tramway track. It's a dual carriage way now. It's still the same width today but then one half was for normal particular traffic

and the other was the private tramway track. It used to hammer like hell up and down there. There was nothing to impede them, no traffic in front apart from other trams. Of course going through the town and the old cobbled streets, you had buses, cars, bikes motorbikes. Pedestrians were often the most dangerous. Yes so it's all nostalgia.

The rhetoric of labelling visitors as consumers is in one sense highly problematic but not for the reasons conventionally discussed. The visitor to the museum is a consumer in certain definitions of the term, but he or she must also be considered the producer in these terms because it is the visitors themselves that are responsible for the construction and representation of their own museum experience. The museum visit can be more accurately described as involving consumptive production (or productive consumption, see section 1.4) in that both processes seem to operate simultaneously to the point that there is no longer any real differentiation between the two functions. The most attractive type of consumption for this type of consumer is when that consumption can also involve the production of the experience being consumed. Consumption experiences in museums are, in one respect, similar to many other service exchanges. The value in museum consumption is largely dependent on the consumer investing his or her own efforts in a productive capacity, and contributing to service productivity and service quality as part of the overall consumption experience (Goodwin, 1988).

Comments regarding the reality and authenticity of the displays may not necessarily reflect a genuine concern for legitimacy in historical presentations. It reflects the visitors' preference for forms of presentation in which they can maintain a certain degree of personal control. Presentation forms that subordinate the visitor to a peripheral role as passive viewer are considered inferior because the experience of that presentation is not as rewarding or valuable. The act of

museum consumption can be interpreted as a political expression of personal action. The discourse of the commodity imposes or produces the subject and consumer in certain frames of reference. Commodification has the effect of reducing the subject (in our case, the museum visitor) to a role of non-participant. For example, the consumption of television, cinema, theatre, tourism and other such recreation products require the consumer to be a passive receiver of the product on offer. The museum is valuable because of the active participation it allows to the consuming visitor (Bean, 1994; Silverman, 1995). The emerging theme of the museum visitors' consumption experience would seem to support Baudrillard's (1988) remark that consumption is an active and collective behaviour.

The museum display contains relatively little explicit direction of how the product can be consumed or what can be consumed from that product, requiring visitors to make that input themselves and it would seem from this study that this is a rewarding and valuable consumption experience for the visitors involved. The act of museum visiting confirms Barthes (1977) argument of the death of the author, not just of literary texts but of all forms of presentation. With museum visiting there is a direct conflict between what the visitor wants and what the museum as an establishment thinks it should provide for those visitors. This can be attributed to a lack of understanding on the part of museum professionals as to the wants of their consuming public, or if not a lack of understanding, an unwillingness to be swayed by the whims of the visiting public any more than is absolutely necessary. Visitors want to have as much active participation in the display as is possible, this means being able to handle and touch objects, and in the case of the vehicles

displayed in the Museum of Transport, to be able to experience the trams, trains and cars in operation. Visitors want to see the vehicles moving and working again and to be able to travel on them for in doing so visitors believe that they would be able to get a more genuine experience of these displays.

What they should have, which I think is going to open up outside the Forth road bridge is a moving museum where you have actually got buses on the go, Daimlers and that: you can actually jump on and have a go. What they should never have done is take away the garden festival when they had the trams working that line. If they had thought more about it they could have had the transport area down at that site, built into it and that way it would have encouraged people even more to come to the museum. Not only would you have had the fun fair and the park or whatever, you would have also have had the kids involved and it would have shown them exactly just what history was, with trams and buses, you would get a feel what it would have been like. You would be able to find out just what it was like to actually sit on one and get shuffled about from one end to another and feel the roars of the wheels underneath on the rails. I feel that a lot of that missed. I would have liked my daughter to be able to get involved in that.

Another interviewee's remark has a similar connotation:

You have got to have these here otherwise there is no point visiting the museum. If you want a criticism, I want them moving, I want to see them outside. I can remember the steam engines running and it would be great to have the stuff out and running. The one museum we really like is Beamish where you can actually get out and travel in things. This is second best. It is better than nothing but I would really like to see them out and moving. And I would like to see the steam engines back out - in real life again.

But this type of exhibit can be considered to ultimately lead to a 'disneyfication'¹ of the museum experience (King, 1994) where the provision of an attractive and popular set of presentations is given priority over concerns for historical and anthropological accuracy Lowenthal (1989) draws attention to the potential negative consequences of increased attention to commercial interests:

‘Those who follow us should not expect to inherit these things unaffected by ourselves. They have a right, though, to see us as stewards, not as final owners, of that heritage. Neither zealous salesmanship, nor self righteous exclusion, simplistic interpretation, mass visitation or self-conscious admiration, should be permitted to vitiate the substance of that heritage or wholly subvert its meaning’ (Lowenthal, 1989).

The historical and cultural significance of objects becomes secondary to what it can do and how it can be used by visitors. It contravenes the modernist ethos of the museum establishment which is primarily concerned with the preservation and accurate presentation and documentation of history and culture through the medium of objects (see section 3.3.2). If the curator pays too much attention to the visitors’ requirements this agenda would suffer. Certain displays and certain cultural representations would have to be sacrificed for more spectacular and popular displays which visitors could personally relate to and experience. In an interview with a curator of anthropology at the Kelvingrove it became apparent that the displays on Egypt and weaponry were more popular than some of the British archaeological displays. This was attributed to the fact that the Egyptian remains were far more visually exciting and that visitors had a curiosity and interest in ancient Egypt because of the mystique and mythology that surrounds it. The British archaeology on the other hand was not in any way as mysterious or as visually spectacular and as a consequence failed to hold the visitors’ attention. From an archaeological and museological perspective however, both displays must be considered as potentially equally valid and significant.

In one sense the curators, academics and historians are the only ‘consumers’ of this ‘archaeological’ type of approach to museum collections. Displays are

produced to reflect the ideas and agendas of the curator and the academic. This provides an explanation for the general hostility expressed by curators to move toward a more visitor orientated approach to museum display because by doing so, curators are forced to compromise these ideals. The philosophy dictating the way museum displays are produced by museum professionals and the desires of the visiting public can therefore be in conflict, both parties believe that they are the best judge of what they see and how they see it, Merriman (1992) states:

‘The content of museum presentations is important, as subjective observation of visitors’ reactions to them confirm. What must be accepted, though, is that visitors will not necessarily interpret the displays in the way intended by the curator. This, too, has extremely widespread ramifications for the way we conceive the role of the museum’ (Merriman, 1992).

The commodification of the museum has strengthened the position of the visitor at the expense of the dictatorship and authorship (both in terms of authoring and authorising) of museum professionals (Terrell, 1991; Blattenberg & Broderick, 1991). The consumption of the museum by both visitors, and museum professionals, is thus a political issue about controlling what one sees and the way one sees it.

6.2.3 The visitor in museum exchanges

The museum visiting experience relies upon continual semiotic exchange to compare and make equivalent the objects on display, but this is not the sole context of exchange value that is of relevance in considering museum consumption. As the review of both Marx and Baudrillard’s commodity demonstrated, under the social relations or cultural code of capitalism it is not

only the object that takes on commodity characteristics but also the subjects who engage the exchange. Just as the museum commodifies cultural material, the museum visit commodifies the visitor.

The museum exchange involves two separate parties, visitors and museum professionals, and both parties consider the other to have something of value and which they wish to gain access to. As has been shown, the visitors' requirements and expectations from the museum experience are varied and complex. But the 'producers' of the museum experience (that is museum professionals) do not have to undertake any specific provision for visitors' expectations to be fulfilled. Museum visitors are able to use the museum as a resource to produce their own experience in whatever way they wish and do not seek an active input from the museum professional in order to make this experience worthwhile. Put simply, the museum establishment only exchanges the *facility* of the museum which visitors can access or experience in their own desired way (Walsh, 1992). The commodity offered to the visitor is the space of the museum itself and the signifying resources contained within its walls.

The museum establishment provides this resource to the visitor requiring only one thing in return - the visitors' presence. As the success and continued financial backing for museums becomes increasingly dependent upon popularity with visitors, the museum requires only that people visit the museum in sufficient number, for in doing so provides justification for the museums continued funding and support. The success of the museum is therefore largely reliant upon the *quantity* of visitors that attend (Hooper-Greenhill, 1988). The more visitors that

attend the museum and the more times they repeat their visit, the more successful the museum is perceived to be. What visitors actually do when they get inside the museum is largely peripheral to the operation of the museum exchange. It is only of relevance when the quality of the experience received is likely to influence future numbers of visitors and the frequency to which they will repeat visit. The role of the visitor in the museum exchange can be expressed as a purely quantitative relation, they become commodified units of which must be 'accumulated' for the museum to function successfully. Although one visitor may find the museum experience very rewarding whilst another finds it of little interest, both visitors are equally valuable in the museum exchange since it is their presence that is of value to the museum and not the quality of the experience received.

Just as the use value of conventional commodities may be qualitatively different and incomparable but through an exchange value become equivalent to one another, the same is the case with museum visitor exchange. Visitors may have a multiplicity of intentions and reasons for coming to the museum and take away a range of different and contradictory experiences from that visit but in terms of exchange all visitors can be considered equivalent on account of actual attendance. The currency of the museum exchange can be seen to be the visitors themselves in which the visitor is a commodity that is exchanged against the commodity of the museum and the artefacts it displays.

6.3 Speculations

The discussion conducted above allows some conclusions to be drawn about the museum commodity and its consumption by visitors. In addition, the following two sections present some speculative propositions as possible interpretations of museum commodity consumption. Section 6.3.1 provides a description of museum consumption, suggesting that the museum itself, as an institution and building constitutes a commodity of a kind and section 6.3.2 develops this description with a theoretical explanation of artefact consumption. Section 6.3.3 attempts to apply the findings of this study to suggest what shape the 'perfect' commodity might take.

6.3.1 A description of the museum institution as a consumable commodity

It is not sufficient to say only that visitors consume signs and signification in the museum. Whilst this is true, it will be useful to identify the form and discourse through which this semiology is manifest as a consumable, manageable and marketable product.

A visit to the Kelvingrove begins with a walk up to the main building, passing through a wide open plaza, the building with its cathedral spires and towers dominate the sky line. As one enters the museum through a heavy wooden revolving door, the hustle and bustle of the street outside is replaced by a calm tranquillity surrounding the visitor with the signification of an institution designed

for some higher and more noble cause. The building signifies its own greatness by contrast with the everyday normality outside. Having entered the museum building, visitors pass uniform clad museum attendants looking like doormen at expensive hotels. These attendants serve a dual purpose, making the visitor feel like a respected and welcomed guest whilst impressing upon them the dignity and importance of the establishment. Once inside the visitor finds him/herself in a wide open lobby with high decorative ceilings and tall classical arches leading off into the various galleries and display rooms. At the far end of this lobby, opposite to the entrance, stands a majestic looking organ reaching into the ceiling of the building. Together with the tall arched windows and the stone pillars, the first impression of this museum is that of a religious building and monument. Your feet tap quietly on the decorative stone floor and your voice echoes around the walls of the chamber. The feeling provided by the *panoply* of the museum is a humbling, almost wondrous experience.

The Museum of Transport provides the visitor with an altogether different experience. The museum is set in another massive building and is approached by a similar stone stairway placing the museum well above you as you enter, giving the visitor the feeling that he or she is walking up to, and entering something great. The Museum of Transport is not set in a building of Victorian splendour but in one of functional modernity which itself signifies the type of displays to be found within. The inside of the Museum of Transport is equally as spectacular as the Kelvingrove although the spectacle takes a very different form. Rather than antiquarianism, it is industrialism that is the subject of the spectacle. The wide expanse of the main hall with its high ceiling provides a different panoramic view.

Row upon row of brightly polished and mint condition vehicles of every description from steam trains and trams, to cars and bicycles. Every one with perfect livery from its period with not a scratch or a mark to blemish their perfect condition. It inspires a child like, toy shop fetishism, but one that is superior because these trams are full size rather than scale replicas.

This is the museum as a commodity sign, an experience that can be consumed as image. It is an aesthetic commodity because its value is totally visual (Haug, 1986). The viewing of old ethnographic and anthropological relics in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum would not seem as legitimate or authentic if they were presented in alternative forms of display, surrounded by multi-media interactives and modern presentations. Such presentation forms would create a contradiction within the semiotic discourses that structure their consumption. These types of technological additions would certainly seem more at home in the Museum of Transport. Indeed, one gallery is set up as an old cinema equipped with a foyer and Hammond organ, and old cinema footage on trams and trains can be viewed in the small auditorium. But viewing these films is never just about watching a documentary, it is about watching a documentary through the experience of being in an old cinema. The context of the viewing is as valuable as the theme of the presentation and is as much the commodity as the footage being watched. A cinema screen or a pictorial representation can never quite capture the visual and experiential signification of the museum setting and it is for this reason that visitors express doubts about replacing or substituting objects for other forms of presentation. Such a move would devalue and degrade the museum commodity making it less consumable than the current semiotic product on offer.

The museum is not simply a forum for consumption in the same way as a shopping mall or a supermarket provides a forum for the consumption of certain types of goods and services. The museum is a commodity itself. As stated earlier in the analysis, visitors do not only visit museums to see and view objects, they do so for the reason of visiting the museum. At the risk of sounding tautological, I will expand on this point. One context in which the museum is a commodity in itself in the building and style of museological presentation it adopts. Visiting museums, especially museums like the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, is considered to be a valuable and rewarding experience. The museum is a monument and is 'consumed' just as one would 'consume' a stately home or mansion. It is located in a grand setting which inspires and provides pleasure for the visitor.

[What do you like about coming to look at these old relics and remains of past cultures. What do you get out of a display like this one]

Oh, well I thought it was awful nice coming into that marvellous building just as you come in through the door, that's the first thing that struck me.



Picture 6.9. Entrance Hall, Kelvingrove art Gallery and Museum

For some visitors at least, the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum is a relic itself, visitors do not want to see the style of display replaced by more modern forms. The 'dusty old wooden display cases' provide the visit with an almost antiquarian aura which some visitors enjoy being surrounded by.

I think the video might be able to bring a bit of context but I wouldn't like to go without them. Otherwise you could just go a cinema and see films and things like that. I like this museum because it is old fashioned. I like the atmosphere. I like wandering through and seeing these cases just for the sake of being in a museum. I think it could be made more interesting if you could bring the other medium in as well, but I like this style. Ideally you would have both but to start - lets have the objects O.K.



Picture 6.10. Ethnography Gallery, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum

6.3.2 A theoretical explanation of artefact consumption

The museum is consumed in its semiotic entirety at a macro level, but it could not be consumed in this way if it were not for the displays it holds within. The value relationship between the museum and the collections it displays is symbiotic, both elements requiring the other in order to sustain their respective value. There is no real distinction between the site of consumption and the product of consumption in the case of museum visiting. The site is the product and the product the site. For some visitors, perhaps the majority, the museum and the artefacts it displays are 'consumed' as one semiotic commodity. Visitors do not go to museums to consume the signification of individual objects because as individual relics,

artefacts have no semiotic value. It is only the system of objects as a collection, in the context of the museum setting, that enable individual items to have any significance. The consumption of museum artefacts must therefore be located in the broader discourse of signification that structures the museum institution.

The museum display is organised on this principle of collectively in which the significance of any one object is subsumed under the significance of its role in a category or collection. Rarely are objects displayed individually, it is much more common to display artefacts in sets or groups determined by various methods of classification. The classification scheme dictates how visitors ascribe and consume the significance of the artefacts on display. These systems of classification provide a structure by which visitors can construct and extract signification from the displays. Museum consumption is best described as a form of reading or interpretation of objects through a pre designated order or *agency* of classification (Fyfe, 1996). The format and style of classification provides a syntactic structure or to use Saussure's (1974) term, its *synchronic* dimension, which visitors access during their experiential gaze. The act of visiting however does not explicitly refer to the synchronic structure but to its diachronic dimension. To explain these terms, consider the following example. The game of chess has a set order which must be adhered to for the game to have any meaning (its synchronic structure), but chess players can apply the rules in many different ways, the playing of the game, the formulation of strategies, the experiences of playing chess etc., can be described at its diachronic component. The synchronic dimension is necessary for structure, without it the diachronic dimension could not be active. All of the readings visitors construct through the consumption of

displays rely upon the synchronic structure of the museum being in place but their individual readings and interpretations are diachronic.

The synchronic dimension to museums is its order of classification which whilst varied is nevertheless fixed to a certain extent. In the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum objects are split into several groups, the main distinction being art and furniture, which are displayed in the upper gallery, and the lower galleries containing ethnography, anthropology, weaponry and natural history. Just as the lower gallery has these sub classifications so too does the upper gallery which is split into modern, renaissance art etc. The ethnography galleries are further classified by cultural category such as 'Plains Indian', 'African', 'Japanese' and so on. The Museum of Transport has the same structural organisation with objects being mainly classified by vehicle type such as 'trams and buses', 'cars' and 'model ships'. This synchronic structure orders the museum experience and provides the visitor with a 'template' of meaning on which he can build his or her own experience as desired. It dictates an implicit code of interpretation. For instance the African display (part of ethnographic gallery) contains various weapons and swords but these are classified by cultural category and are separated both in terms of distance and system of classification from the main weapons and armour display. They could arguably be displayed as part of either display, and potentially by many other systems of classification. But it is as 'African objects', rather than as 'weapons' that they gain their signification. The curator and the archaeologist are concerned with this synchronic dimension of the museum display. Critical and social theory informs us that orders of classification are not given or natural but express the ideologies of the classifiers (Foucault, 1974;

Uzzell, 1989). Museum visitors however do not appear to be consciously aware of this dimension during their consumption of the displays, they seem to accept this structure and order of classification as given. Their consumption experience does not involve the reading of objects *per se*, but the reading of objects through this synchronic dimension.

The consumption of the museum display by the visitor, as a diachronic function, is thus a highly creative and playful process dependent upon the direction and the interpretation of visitors themselves. *But whilst the order of classification* certainly influences the types of readings possible, visitors' apparent disinterest in locating their readings of displays in terms of those intended by curators would suggest that the synchronic dimension to the presentation and the direction it imposes on possible interpretations is perhaps over emphasised. This is not an extraordinary finding if we bear in mind the fact that almost all of the literature on museum presentations and their interpretation is written by curators and academics and not the visitors themselves. The consumption of museum artefacts is perhaps most accurately described as a blatant disregard on the part of the visitor of the intended meaning implicitly directed by the museum professional. The efforts of the producers of museum displays to convey an intended message or interpretation to its consuming public seems almost futile in the context of this study. The curator is demoted from the position of directing interpretations of the museum display to one of simply facilitating and supporting the visitor's own interpretive agendas, whether they be superficial, in depth, ironic or otherwise. Consider the following excerpts taken from the transcripts:

Well there is nothing of great interest here for my generation because we will never go to the places. But for the younger generation, they can go to these places - within hours, and see all these cultures but we will never see them in reality. So I think it will broaden the younger folks minds because they might think "well, we'll go there in two or three years time for our holiday and see this culture after seeing all this stuff". My generation, we've had it because we will never see it in real, I don't want to go and see it in real. I mean see this case here? In a hot country how can where clothing like that?



**Picture 6.11. Traditionally made outfit, Amman, Jordan
Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**

How can you wear clothing like that? And the other thing that intrigued me was how they stitched the leather embroidery. Where did they get the needles for the embroidery for some of the leather, the Indian leather? I know I shouldn't be asking you the questions, you should be asking me but that's the kind of thing you could find out here it will be around here somewhere. I mean on the plains they didn't have any metal, well they didn't have any wood even. It was all skin and bones that they used I mean it's almost living like an animal don't you think, just having bones and skin. I am glad we are in Scotland anyway, I couldn't go around in all that with only bones and skin.



**Picture 6.12. Indian Clothing and artefacts,
Ethnography, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum**

In this excerpt the visitor undertakes an interpretive reading, or ‘consumption’ of these clothing displays is a highly individualised way. She is happy to disregard the cultural significance or educational and historical value of these presentations in favour of a ‘superficial’ interpretation concerning the discomfort and perceived low level of quality of life that societies in which these objects feature have to bear. Her reading contains an almost colonial superiority in which life in other, non industrialised/ westernised societies is considered to be close to an animal like existence full of hardship. We can speculate that it is highly unlikely that the ethnographers and curators responsible for designing these displays did so with these readings in mind. But whatever philanthropic or informative message the producers of this display intended pales to insignificance when it is consumed by the visitor. The transcript data reveals an underlying problem with production orientated understandings of this consumption context. A detailed description of

museum consumption must therefore abandon the conventional notions that museum artefacts are consumed for their historical, cultural or educational significance for whilst museologists perhaps find this understanding comforting for various reasons and motives, it does not adequately describe the complexities of visitors' consumption experiences in the museum. There can be no one explanation of how and why individual museum artefacts are consumed by visitors, only that they use them in a multiplicity of ways and for many reasons.

6.3.3 The '*perfect*' museum commodity

Although the case of the museum was selected primarily as a site for investigating a semiotic, cultural theoretical approach to consumption, the research project has raised several issues that relate to museum management. There is of course an on going debate between museum professionals as to whether further commodification of the museum and redefinition of visitors as consumers are beneficial and positive developments. For those that perceive commodification and the rhetoric market as either constructive (e.g. Westwood, 1989; Eastaugh & Weiss, 1989) or inevitable (e.g. Hewison, 1987), it is possible to draw upon these research findings to create a picture of how the ideal museum commodity might be conceptualised. This section is not meant as a set of prescriptive measures for museum professionals to follow and implement, rather it should be read as a vision of museums and museum visiting were the concerns of consumers and commodities to become widely accepted and embraced. The hypothetical description that follows is the author's attempt to visualise the museum were it

governed solely by the terms of the consumer, where any trace of Victorian philanthropy is but an extinct memory in the history of the museum.

The museum commodity is neither the institution nor the objects and artefacts displayed but both. The ideal museum commodity would be designed with this consideration in mind whereby the setting of the museum and the artefacts displayed complement one another symbiotically. This enables the maximum potential signification and value of the museum experience to be realised. The primary objective of the museum institution should be to provide an interface between visitors and artefacts and to achieve this, as many of the barriers that separate the viewing subject from the artefact presentation should be removed. The museum commodity can be best exchanged and consumed when the visitor is able to become part of the display and the display part of the visitor. Museum design should therefore be geared towards dissolving conventional notions of an active viewing subject and a passive and dormant object display as discrete and distinct entities, replacing them with a more unified and linked understanding of the subject-object interaction.

Museums should strive to display a varied and extensive range of objects and artefacts that can facilitate a multiplicity of potential readings and experiences by visitors with different backgrounds, levels of prior knowledge, interests and expectations. This may require the museum to consider alternatives to conventional formats of display that limit the types of possible readings or those that restrict the types of visitors that can experience presentation in a valuable and meaningful way (Stevens, 1989).

The displays must first and foremost be designed in such a way that authenticates and legitimises their reality and truthfulness to the visitor (Swiecimski, 1989). Presentations that fail to signify this reality and truth will have effect of devaluing the museum experience. The question that the designers of museum presentations must ask themselves is not whether the presentation is anthropologically or archaeologically realistic but whether it will appear realistic and legitimate to the visitor (Bagnall, 1996). The findings of this analysis suggest that the most plausible way of ensuring that displays meet these criteria is to design the exhibit in such a way that makes the artefacts signify that they were once used in the cultural or historical context from where they are said to originate. The most valuable museum commodities are those that communicate this dimension of use-sign value to the visitor.

Displays should have the potential for many contexts of sign-use value. That is, they should have the capacity to be integrated into the numerous narratives visitors may wish to construct. The objects chosen for presentation should be rich in this signifying potential. Perhaps the museum display could be enhanced by being designed not as a presentation of objects, but as a material text that can be read by the visitor. Objects that can be easily incorporated into mythical narratives, or are particularly rich in mythical signification, are the most valuable artefacts for the museum commodity. For those objects that lack such mythical value it may be necessary for the curators to mythologise the objects in some way providing them with this dimension of value.

A return to the ethos of the early curio cabinets would enhance the value of the museum commodity. Displays that are spectacular and different from that experienced in everyday life would be expected to be particularly valuable to the visitor. Artefacts that have an element of oddity or 'otherness' could stimulate visitors narrative building activities making the experience of the museum all the more valuable. The unusually large (or small), the rare and the revolting, the amazing and the awe inspiring characterise the valuable museum commodity (Stewart, 1993,1994).

The findings suggest that museum professionals should refrain from providing set interpretive structures for the artefacts displayed. The labels, explanations, and directions often seen to accompany museum displays only serve to further separate the visitor from the artefact presentation, imposing upon the visitor the role of viewer and receiver of meaning rather than its constructor and creator. As Roger Silverman remarks:

'What becomes interesting (and important) for research in [the case of the museum] is the matching of curatorial intention and visitor response, and of the assessment of the visitor's own rhetorical reconstruction of the exhibition as he or she (or they) make sense of it from the structures and figures which are on display' (Silverman, 1989).

The museum commodity is not dictated by the explicit directions of museum curators that state how displays should and can be read, if the visitor is allowed to explore and construct the meanings connected to objects then the value of the museum commodity is all the greater. When additional information is provided it should not be designed in such a way that explains the meaning of the presentation

to the visitor but should provide the visitor with more 'tools' to build up and locate the presentation in the narratives they choose to construct. The incorporation of interactive methods of presentation can only be beneficial if it is the object that is the focus of this interaction. The findings suggest that video, pictorial and televisual forms of presentation are not likely to add significant value to the museum commodity. In fact they could devalue the experience if they are perceived to alienate the visitor from experiencing the object in its material reality. Classification methods employed in the museum should reflect the visitor's gaze rather than the archaeologists. Presentations should be arranged to allow visitors to make continual comparisons with and between different presentations thus facilitating increased sign exchange and sign-use. The perfect museum commodity would allow visitors to juxtapose any one artefact or display with any other for in doing so, the possible mythologies and narratives that can be constructed would be greatly increased. The greater the opportunities for equivalence, the greater the value of the museum commodity.

Museums should not be overly concerned with the types of visitors it should or should not attract to its displays. It is not possible to design displays to be valuable for particular audiences or categories of visitors since all visitors produce their own museum commodity and do so in their own way. The visitor will make whatever he or she wishes from the museum and artefact presentations so any effort to design certain displays for certain audiences would be expected to be of little success. The museum institution should only be concerned with attracting more visitors and encouraging those that do attend to repeat their visit. This could be achieved by designing the museum in such a way that provides visitors with an

active and central role in the museum experience even if this has the effect of reducing the archaeological credibility of the presentations.

The role of the museum professional in the museum commodity is one of facilitator rather than producer or provider and they should therefore try to avoid 'forcing' interpretations on visitors (Stevens, 1989). Curators can only influence the visitor experience as a synchronic level, that is, at the level of categorisation and presentation and therefore should concentrate on delivering this provision rather than dictating how an interpretation should (or should not) be conducted:

'In marketing terms, the theme for interpretation is its packaging: it has to hold together a manageable amount of the product (the interpretation) and make clear and attractive to the potential consumer what is inside' (Robinson, 1989).

Museum professionals that recognise increasing definitions of visitors as consumers need to recognise that this does not automatically locate themselves in the role of producer. In many ways the museum professional is the most important consumer of the museum commodity as well as its producer.

6.4. Concluding remarks: Museum consumption as singularisation

The explanations by visitors of what makes the museum experience valuable and rewarding fit well with the theoretical model presented in section 1.4, in which it is suggested that consumption can be described as a process of singularising or de-alienating the commodity form. Museum consumption clearly cannot be

understood in terms of 'using up' the commodities on offer, rather museum consumption is an active, productive activity. Visitor's museum consumption involves the appropriation or singularisation of objects and artefacts and placing them into the context of narratives and stories about the past and about other cultures. The museum commodity is valuable only in the sense that it is semiotically valuable and can be used in the construction of these narratives.

The museum, as an institution, is a child of modern capitalism. Whilst other cultures in other time periods may have once collected and displayed treasures, arts and objects, the significance and purpose of such collections in modernity is quite singular. The museum should be understood not only as a site of commodity consumption but as a commodifying discourse in the sense that it reproduces the significance and meaning of objects as commodities - as alienated 'things'. Curators, archaeologists and anthropologists undoubtedly undertake many activities and roles but they all are involved in the commoditization of culture, they contribute to the museum establishment by (re)producing the artefacts of the past in a form that is compatible both with the expectations and requirements of modern, capitalist ideology. The museum visitor completes the cycle by engaging this cultural (re)production and singularising the commodity form back into a meaningful, subjective context.

The explanation of museum consumption provided in this analysis does not only have implications in terms of how museums plan and manage the product they offer. It allows the concept of consumption to be applied in many contexts that do not necessarily confirm to established theories of consumption and consumer

behaviour. The most important implication of this study has been to show that in order to consider any context, environment or situation as involving consumption it is first necessary to identify the commodities that are consumed and how these consumer objects become commodities in the first place. In contemporary capitalism, be it modern or postmodern, anything can become a commodity. Commodification is a cultural condition - a way of perceiving, ordering and structuring the world and anything that is part of culture can therefore fall under the governance of the commodity form.

This proposal of course raises many important questions regarding the nature of contemporary consumption behaviour. The study has allowed a cultural theoretical explanation of consumption to be considered and has shown that whilst some aspects of cultural theory seem to have practical, empirical credibility, others aspects perhaps need to be reconsidered and revised somewhat. The final chapter of this thesis will consider the implications of understanding consumption in this way.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions, implications and possibilities for further research

7.0 Chapter Summary

The discussion of the findings from this study raises several implications for consumer research and marketing research more generally. The conclusions drawn in the following sections are both theoretical and practical, and both set of implications will be considered here. The objective of this thesis is not restricted to explicating only museum consumption but to consider a cultural, semiotic theory of consumption in a wider context. This chapter will therefore offer some possible implications of this research project in other marketing contexts. Section 7.1 provides a summary of the main findings of the study. Section 7.2 considers some of the theoretical implications of the project and section 7.3 offers some possible practical implications. Section 7.4 considers the possibilities for further research that emerge from the study.

7.1 Summary of main findings

The study has effectively enabled a cultural semiotic theory of consumption to be considered. Museum consumption can be most accurately described as a process of singularisation or appropriation; a (re)productive behaviour in which individuals actively engage materials semiotically to (re)create not only a sense of the past and the other but also a sense of one's self. The study has also enabled Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption to be considered. Museum consumption clearly incorporates a semiotic dimension, that is, the activity of consumption

involves the use and exchange of signs. But as this study has shown, museum consumption requires more than just the sign. Museum visitors are not concerned only with a semiotic experience but with a '*real*' experience involving real, actual things. This finding raises certain philosophical questions about the nature of reality and how individuals make judgements about what is real and what is not (e.g. Russell, 1912). But such a debate will only serve to distance the discussion from the findings presented in the study. Visitors' judgements of reality would appear to correspond to a physical definition of the real. Visitors perceive the museum experience to be real because they are actively involved in that experience. Coming into close physical contact with material objects that can be (almost) touched furnishes the visitor with a sense of reality that is lacking in televisual or pictorial representations. So the act of consumption does not only involve sign manipulation, it is not only concerned with the image and the symbolic but with actual physical things. Even in consumption situations where these 'things', these commodities; cannot be bought, exchanged acquired or used, the consumer still valued the presence of the object. Museum consumption is valuable because it allows *being there* and not just *seeing there*. No matter how artificial or constructed the museum display appears to be from a curatorial or anthropological perspective, for the visitor the experience of coming into contact with artefacts is a legitimate and *real* sensation.

7.2 Theoretical Implications

Perhaps the most important contribution made by this project is that it provides an alternative way of conceptualising the consumer and consumption. Rather than

understanding consumption as the end process in an economic chain of production and exchange, it is more appropriate to consider consumption a constructive and active process that is part of an on going economic and cultural cycle. It also raises questions regarding the marketing function which has emerged as a facilitative, mediating function through which alienated commodities are re-contextualised and appropriated into the consumers own realm. The marketing process is thus most accurately described as an essentially cultural function rather than one that can be explained using purely economic assumptions. The project has also accomplished one of the objectives raised in part I, that being an understanding of the contemporary commodity. A commodity is neither a material thing with an economic value and a functional use or a purely semiotic entity, it consists of both of these elements. But the commodity is, first and foremost, the product of culture. Its form relies upon specific cultural values and ideologies to be in place. As a cultural phenomenon, the commodity can be most accurately described as a discourse in that it provides a mechanism of cultural communication. Sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.3 will consider the theoretical implications of the study firstly with regards to consumption, secondly concerning marketing and thirdly concerning commodities.

7.2.1 Re-thinking consumption

Rather than searching for the magic distinction between those activities that involve consumption and those that do not, let us instead accept that consumption can take place in potentially any context, by any person or persons and for many reasons. Consumption is not defined by the exchange, acquisition or purchase of

goods and services, nor is it implicated in the using up or destruction of materials. Whilst consumption can, and often does involve one or more of these activities it need not and there are other consumption situations, such as the museum, where none of these characteristics are evident. As Baudrillard (1996a) remarks:

‘We must clearly state that material goods are not the objects of consumption: they are merely the objects of need and satisfaction. We have all at times purchased, possessed, enjoyed, and spent, and yet not “consumed”. And if we are justified in using this term for contemporary society, it is not because we are better fed, or that we assimilate more images and messages, or that we have more appliances at our disposal. Neither the quantity of goods, nor the satisfaction of needs is sufficient define the concept of consumption: they are merely its preconditions’ (Baudrillard, 1996a)

Consumption is, for the purposes of definition, a form of interaction between subjects and objects which under the conditions of capitalism have become divorced from one another, existing as distinct and separate entities. Consumption is a social activity which enables the synthesis of these two elements.

Conceptualising consumption in this way means that a generic description of those activities that constitute ‘consumption activities’ becomes difficult. Using an object, for instance, can and usually is interpreted as an act of consumption but it is important to accept that there are other times and situations when use is nothing more than use. That is, we can all ‘use’ things without consuming them. Undertaking monetary exchange for the acquisition of some good or another often constitutes a consumption exchange but there are times when exchange is simply exchange. Equally, gazing upon, or looking at something may rarely involve consumption as such, but there are circumstances when the ‘gaze’ is very much an act of consumption (Urry, 1990). Any activity including use, exchange, looking,

reading, gazing, eating, wearing and so on, can *potentially* come to reside in the realm of the consumer but at the same time, there are occasions when all of these activities involve no consumption whatsoever.

Consumption is an active and constructive process - it is *productive*. It requires individuals to engage the object and give it a personal expression. Furthermore, individual consumers consume objects in different ways. An object might be consumed for the purposes of sustenance but the same object may be consumed as a gift or as decoration. This is because individuals undertake consumption - that is the appropriation of objects - in a *singular* way for many different reasons, motives and intentions (See figure 2, p32).

So are we to go with Marx or Baudrillard when seeking to explicate contemporary consumption? Marx provides us with an explanation based on economic exchange and use, Baudrillard instead chooses sign exchange and sign consumption. The answer must surely be that neither account is by itself totally adequate. Contemporary consumer society is not contained only within the social relations of needs and economics but nor is it the case that the contemporary consumer has become totally divorced from these concerns in favour of a hyperreality of signs and signification. Rather than forcing the debate into two opposing positions requiring one perspective to be favoured and the other dismissed, a more comprehensive approach would be to accept that economic and functional concerns are, for the consumer, a real and valuable thing. But at the same time, needs and reality are culturally determined, that is, they are signified through various discourses one of which being consumption. In a few cases consumption

involves no material component, it is an experience based totally on the gaze, the image, the symbol or the sign. In other circumstances consumption involves real things, with substance and 'real' meaning. Most of the time however, any one given consumption is likely to involve both semiotic and material components. The real thing and the real experience will derive its meaning from its semiotic potential and the sign will find expression through the object. Without the sign the object is without *significance* and without the object the sign is without form.

A theory of consumption can be most comprehensively developed by incorporating several different perspectives covered in the literature review. Economic theories of consumption (section 1.2.1) are perhaps the most difficult to integrate into a cultural theory of consumption because of the emphasis placed on needs and utility and the understanding of consumption as the end process in production and exchange (See figure 1, section 1.4). If the concepts of need, use and consumption are taken as culturally located and socially determined conditions then economic theories can clearly provide some important insights into consumption behaviour. Sociological and psychological theories of consumption (sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3) are highly appropriate to the perspective taken towards consumption here. Participating in consumption (that is, the singularisation of the commodity form) is an essential social process that enables individuals to actively participate in society. Psychologically, consumption is an activity that has to be learnt. Capitalism shapes perception and beliefs, provides a frame of reference for the individual's actions in society (Rose, 1989). Singularisation is perhaps more of a psychological process rather than one which

is socially or economically structured, a process involving individuals integrating material culture into the context of their own lives, beliefs and desires.

The understanding of consumption presented here is clearly most compatible with an anthropological or material culture perspective (section 1.2.4). Continuing with Baudrillard (1996a):

‘From the outset, we must clearly state that the consumption is an active mode of relations (not only to objects, but to the collectively and to the world), a systematic mode activity and a global response on which our whole cultural system is founded’ (Baudrillard, 1996a).

The material culture of contemporary society and the methods employed in its interaction lies at the very core of a theory of consumption (Miller, 1987). The commodity form not only provides a mechanism for individuals to achieve social, economic and psychological desires, it also provides the ideological framework that enables these requirements to be achieved through commodity consumption.

7.2.2 Marketing and consumption

Understanding consumption in this way has several implications for marketing both in terms of an area of research, an academic discipline and a business or management function. If consumption is conceived of as singularisation then the scope of marketing must be expanded to include a much broader range of activities and phenomena. The rapid expansion in the number and type of organisations that are seeking to apply marketing principles to secure their

continued success and survival does not reflect a change in the types of experiences, products or services offered to individual consumers, but rather the changing relations that govern society and culture as a whole. The commodification of the museum experience has not come about because of a change in the fundamental characteristics of museum visiting, this has remained relatively constant over the tens of decades of the museums' existence. What has changed, enabling marketing to be applied, are the cultural relations that govern the museum visit, and this cultural relation is expressed most clearly by consumption.

As the commodity code becomes more prevalent in contemporary society, the marketing function can expect to enjoy greater application in a wider number of settings and contexts. The segregation of the object and subject that occurs as a consequence of commodification, produces a need for systems within culture that enable these two entities to be reunited. Marketing is one such system that bridges the gap between the producer and the consumer enabling this synthesis to take place. This does not necessarily contradict established marketing theory where marketing is defined as a process that facilitates exchange relationships (Kotler, 1991). The departure comes from the reasons why such relationships are significant. It is not economic necessity that motivates the consumer to engage in consumption but the social relations of the commodity form.

The advantages offered by a cultural rather than an economic theory of marketing and consumption is that it provides the necessary elements for a much broader marketing concept that can be used to explain many more consumption situations

than would normally fit into an economic interpretation. This is because a cultural theory of marketing focuses on the social conditions that provide marketing with a discourse of practice rather than on specific types of products and exchanges. Marketing as a social process undertaken by organisations as a mechanism to bring those offering commodities and those that seek them together, mirrors the relations of contemporary commodity consumer culture. Marketing can therefore be most accurately defined and understood as a modern anthropological phenomenon (Grafton-Small, 1987; Levy, 1978) that characterises the contemporary social reality of capitalism.

This raises the question; should marketing *science* be concerned with consumption? At present the majority of marketing research and marketing practice is primarily concerned with understanding the exchange and purchase of consumer goods and services which has been shown to represent only a fraction of consumption related activities. A decision needs to be made as to whether consumption in all its various manifestations is really of interest to the marketing academy and profession. It would appear that at present academics and practitioners alike are content to believe that marketing is inextricably linked to consumption whilst paying attention only to a limited number of consumption scenarios, namely those that relate to commercial opportunities for exploiting consumer demand.

There are only two possible avenues that can be taken. The first calls for marketing to detach itself from consumption as such and concentrate its attention on a small number of consumption related activities, namely purchase, buying,

and economic exchange. Whilst this prospect is somewhat disappointing for those wishing to research areas that fall beyond this limited view, it does provide marketing science with a legitimate form of expression. Firat *et al* (1987) summarise this position well:

The establishment of an applied discipline, such as marketing, requires practical utility for at least one segment of society. For marketing this has been the managerial segment. Of course this reasoning is especially true in a market system where success is measured and established in terms of utility that sells. Practicality in a market system is judged in terms of who can pay for this utility the most. And marketing as a discipline is a corner stone supporting the logic of practicality of the market system.

Inquiring minds have the right, however, to question such a logic, even if it is so smugly circular and widely accepted. But can such questioning voices be heard? What practical utility do these voices have for those with effective demand and organization in the market as well as the ability to pay? Do such critical approaches to marketing have any practical utility for any segment of society?' (Firat *et al.*, 1987)

Those wishing to re-establish marketing in these terms could argue that the wider implications of consumption are not of central concern to the marketing academy and should remain under the jurisdiction of sociologists, anthropologists and ethnographers. It would seek to quash the growing trend towards plurality in the discipline in favour of a well-defined focus of enquiry. The point of this argument is that marketing should not automatically consider consumption to be its main focus of study. In the past it has not done so in practice. But such a conservative approach will prevent what can be seen as a great opportunity to develop and progress the discipline and furnish it with a wider mandate and academic credibility. Marketing, and consumer research more specifically, is better positioned than sociology or anthropology to pass comment on the nature of

consumption in contemporary society. But in order to exploit this potential, traditionalists and critics alike must learn to embrace and acknowledge eclecticism as a positive and constructive aspect of the discipline. A diverse and wide ranging discipline that seeks to connect practical and theoretical principles can only emerge once individual schools of thought within the academy cease to be critical of other approaches in an attempt to establish one world view of what marketing should and should not concern itself with.

The solution is not to create consumer research as an autonomous interdisciplinary subject that is only partially related to marketing as proposed by Holbrook (1985). This would be damaging both to marketing and consumer research, confirming at once the scepticism of other social sciences towards the credibility of marketing as an academic enquiry as well as making consumer research nothing more than a highly specialised branch of cultural studies. The constructive way forward would be for traditionalists to accept that marketing enquiry can encompass more than a limited economic focus and for consumer researchers to accept and incorporate a level of practicality into their work so that it retains relevance in wider academic circles as well as society as a whole. In short, the marketing academy can benefit greatly from adopting an eclecticism and respect for alternative paradigms of understanding.

7.2.3 Re-thinking the commodity

The decision as to whether any given object is a commodity cannot be determined by its physical or material constitution. There is no reason why one object can

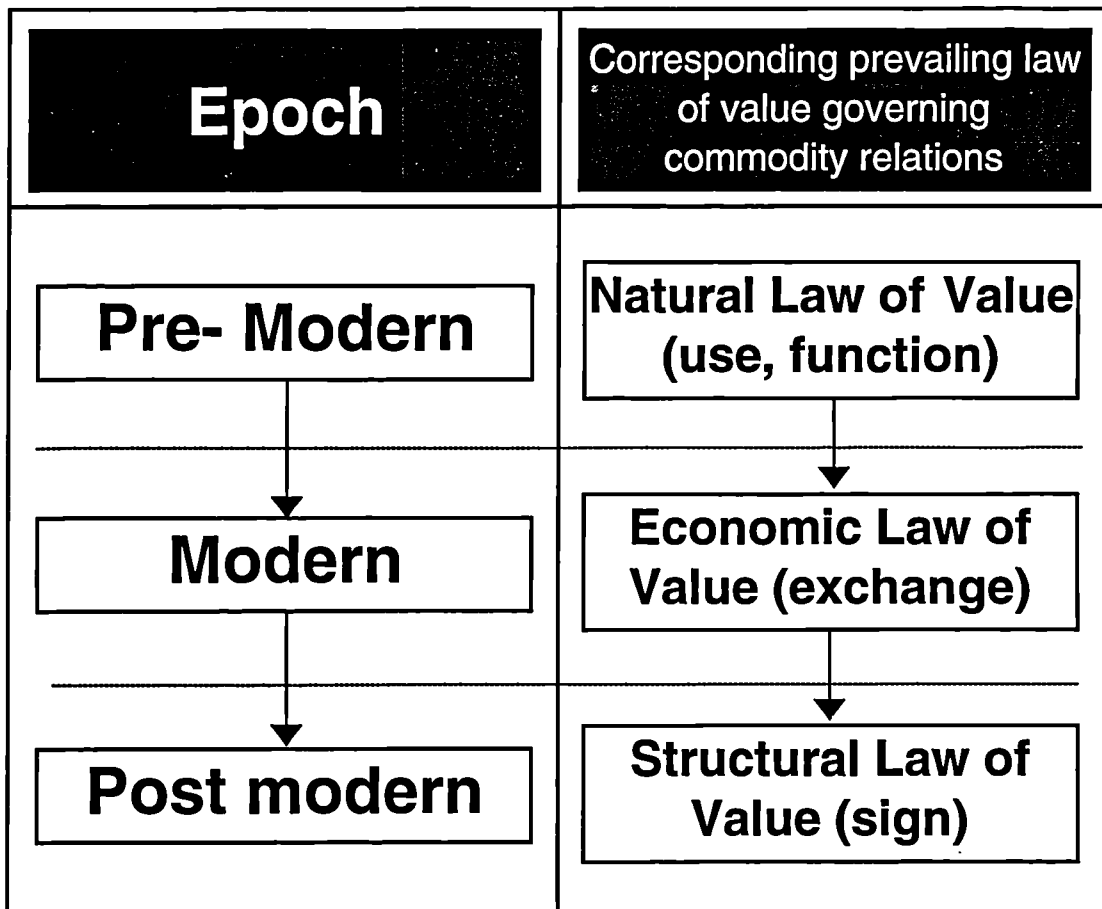
become a commodity and another not. All objects and all aspects of culture have the potential to experience a commodity 'phase' at some period in their social life (Appadurai, 1986) -there are no 'natural' commodities. For any object to become a commodity it must be culturally defined as such. The commodity is, first and foremost, a discourse. It is a way of talking or defining the significance and value of an object. In contemporary culture it has become one of the most common and significant ways of engaging the object form to the extent that it is gradually taking a total occupation of social activity (Lukacs, 1971). The reason why gold is a commodity cannot be determined by its physical structure but only by the way that it is spoken about and considered significant. Indeed there are occasions where gold is not a commodity but simply gold. In the case of wedding ring that rests upon ones finger for instance, this object does not constitute a commodity despite the fact that it consists of gold. The meaning of the ring - its significance - is determined by relations other than those that structure commodity relations. Equally, a Glasgow tramcar or a Polynesian woodcarving cannot be considered to be commodities because of their function or because of their economic value - they have become commodities as a consequence of being displayed, presented and communicated via a commodity discourse.

The debate in marketing circles as to whether it is physical materials or symbolic imagery that constitute the commodity form, when viewed in light of these findings, would seem to be unnecessary. It reflects the deeper philosophical debates of modernity concerning idealism versus materialism. (see section 2.2.1). The commodity discourse utilises many forms of value: use, exchange and sign. It

is therefore pointless to argue that any one of these forms of value exclusively constitutes the value of commodities.

It is also highly problematic to locate these three forms of value in relation to specific epochs where use or function (the natural law of value: Baudrillard, 1993) is associated with pre and early modernity, exchange value with modernity and sign value with postmodernity or late capitalism (as represented pictorially in fig 3 below).

FIGURE 3
The commodity in transition



The commodity form in contemporary society is most accurately represented as an amalgamation of all these values into one commodified form that can be consumed and exchanged via the mechanism of the market. In certain commodity encounters, certain values may be more apparent than others. In the case of the museum it was shown that 'sign-use value' and 'use-sign value' were particularly prevalent whereas in traditional FMCG markets it would be expected that economic exchange value would be expected to characterise commodity consumption.

The important issue in terms of consumer research is that the commodity form, as a cultural code, can and does encompass a multitude of value forms and can do so without contradiction or incongruity.

7.3 Implications for marketing management

Having proposed that critical, conceptual research should seek to incorporate a level of wider practical application beyond purely academic concerns, attention will now be given to the implications of this research project in terms of marketing practice.

In light of this view of commodity consumption, marketing management emerges as a practice of (re)production. Marketing does not simply involve the presentation of products in the market place but constitutes a system of by which objects are culturally produced as commodified, consumable things (as commodities). As well as the other elements that make up marketing management such as the

identification of consumer segments and consumer wants, marketing management clearly involves the management, manipulation and application of the commodification process. It involves the conversion of 'objects', people, places and ideas into consumable commodities. This is achieved not through any system of physical production, but by culturally (re)producing them (representing them) through a commodity discourse.

This research has shown that consumption is for the consumer a productive and constructive process. Consumers do not need to be directed and instructed in how they should consume. The attraction of consumption for consumers is that they can direct their own consumption experiences and take an active part in how, why and when they consume.

The findings of this research would suggest that marketing practitioners could benefit greatly from organising marketing activities with the primary objective of *facilitating* consumers' singularisation behaviour, providing all the materials, information and facilities that consumers require to make consumption experiences rewarding and valuable. Consumers do not require instruction on how products can and should benefit them, how they can and should be used and the potential benefits they offer, consumers are more than capable of making these decisions and even find the experience valuable and rewarding. This requires those involved with the direction and planning of marketing activities to recognise the consumer as an active participant rather than a passive recipient. The consumer is better placed than anyone in the consumption experience to decide how any given consumption situation should proceed. It is consumers themselves

who give meaning to the commodities they seek to experience, the marketing function does not produce this meaning for an impressionable receptive public. Consequently there would seem little benefit in designing marketing activities in a directive, prescriptive manner. Consumers will ultimately singularise commodities in their own way, with their own agenda's and motives. It would therefore seem appropriate to conceptualise marketing management as a facilitative service offered by organisations who wish to attract consumers to singularise their products and services.

This study has shown that the terminology of the market can be applied successfully in many and varied contexts but only if the beliefs held about the nature of marketing is expanded and diversified to incorporate less conventional commodities that do not necessary conform to established psychological and economic truths. If these alternative opportunities are taken seriously, the possibilities for marketing practice to increase its involvement in more and more aspects of social life are considerable. As the commodity discourse becomes applicable in an increasing number of cultural contexts, the opportunities for marketing practitioners to become involved in the management of these new commodities will no doubt become increasingly evident. In order to take advantage of these prospects it is essential that the commodity form as a cultural entity is understood and this may require many of the prevailing assumptions about what exactly constitutes a marketing exchange to be somewhat revised.

7.4 Possibilities for further research

The research project deliberately concentrated on a non-conventional consumption environment with the objective of explicating consumer behaviour at a cultural semiotic level. The findings lend themselves most clearly to further research into other non-conventional consumption situations which it has been suggested are set to increase in number as the discourse of the commodity becomes implicated in more aspects of culture and society. Organisations that offer services that are not dependent upon economic material exchange or utilitarian need satisfaction such as tourism and entertainment, could be integrated into the cultural theory presented here. As public sector organisations become increasingly concerned with marketing to secure funding and continued survival such as charities, educational institutions and health provision, the conceptual framework provided here could be applied in an assessment of the commodity that they offer and how the users of that service seek to singularise the commodity offered.

However, the credibility of a cultural theory of consumption cannot be sustained by considering these types of organisations alone. For this approach to gain holistic application it is necessary to show how a cultural understanding of consumption can be used to further explain more conventional scenarios. Future research could possibly consider applying a semiotic model of singularisation to the consumption of fast moving consumer goods and other consumer commodities. A cultural theory of consumption is not restricted to cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries but potentially to all commodity

consumption situations, including those that would seem to fit well within economic and psychological models of understanding.

The research has proposed that marketing and consumption is primarily concerned with the processes of commodification (see figure one, section 1.4) and singularisation, mediated by a commodity discourse. This proposition needs further investigation, considering how the process of commodification takes place, is implemented and managed. This can be best achieved by concentrating on organisational activities, applying the cultural model presented here to explain and define those processes that occur within organisational practices that constitute this commodification. The manufacture of objects and production of services for consumption does not by itself constitute a system of commodification. For these products to become commodities they must first be commodified via a commodity discourse.

Further research could therefore focus on two aspects of the process presented here. One possible direction would be to concentrate on the system of singularisation, investigating how consumers singularise and appropriate alienated commodities into the contexts of their own lives. This should ultimately lead to a better understanding of the consumer's actions and motivations. In many cases this does not necessary depart from existing theory in the discipline, all that is required is that conventional understandings are viewed from a different perspective and from alternative paradigmatic assumptions concerning the nature and structure of both marketing processes and consumption activity. This research could also be developed further by seeking to explicate the processes within

culture that enable those 'materials' at a pre-commodified stage to make the subsequent transition to commodity status. From the perspective developed here, this process would seem to embody the fundamental challenge for marketing management in a society where the commodity form, and those that control its discourse, are set to gain an ever greater presence in the conduct of daily life.

Notes

Introduction

1. Baudrillard, J. (1988), *Consumer Society*, In M. Poster (ed.), *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, Polity Press.

Chapter one

1. Jean Baudrillard (1990c), 'The absolute commodity', *Fatal Strategies*, New York, Semiotext(e).
2. Commodity (from *commerce*): is typically defined as a useful product or raw material that can be bought or sold.
3. It is standard to split the field into these four areas of focus. Consumer behaviour textbooks tend to centre on economic and psychological aspects of consumers' behaviour although it has become standard practice to include sociological, or more accurately, social psychological aspects as well. Contemporary texts including Solomon (1992) and Engel, Blackwell and Miniard (1995) now incorporate extensive sections considering the cultural dimensions to consumption.
4. Leong's (1989) Citation analysis of the *Journal of Consumer Research* indicates that consumer research is linked most closely with psychology & marketing, although there is a rising trend of citations to its own literature base. Increasingly consumer researchers draw on diverse literature, although seemingly in agreement with Fine & Leopold (1993), much of it is seldom used. Murray, Evers & Janda (1995) take a more optimistic position proposing that interdisciplinary 'theory Borrowing' has enriched marketing theory' although they go on to propose that researchers should be disciplined and thorough when they do apply theory from other areas.
5. Classical and neo-classical economics is also called bourgeois economics as opposed to Marxist economics (Napoleoni, 1975). Bourgeois economics assumes that economic conditions are a-historical relating to the physical or natural conditions of Man whereas Marxist economics assumes that economic conditions are historically determined. This distinction is considered in more depth in chapter two.
6. Although Marxist economics informs us that economic factors have a considerable influence on the shaping of social conditions, this logic becomes tautological since social conditions themselves are largely responsible for economic ones.
7. Since the term 'cultural material' can potentially refer to any type of human production or simulation, the number of articles in consumer research alone that could be said to examine consumption related materials from a cultural perspective is huge and it would be inappropriate to refer to all such work here. For an overview of material cultural themes and topics, see chapter 16 in Solomon (1992) and Droge et al. (1993).
8. Mauss draws the dialogue from the transcript of a Maori informant, Tamati Ranaipiri, in 'Elsdon Best, *Forest Lore*', Transactions of the New Zealand Institute, vol 1 p.431, transl. p.439.

9. For a more detailed analysis of the commodification of Einstein see Fitchett et al. (1996) and Fitchett and Saren (1997).

10. 'The Man With Einstein's Eyes', *The Guardian*, December 17th, 1994

Chapter two

1. Michel Foucault (1974), Preface to *The Order of Things*, xxi, London, Routledge.
2. The community/commodity dichotomy is fundamental to modern sociology and is still applied in contemporary sociological research, see for example, Capek & Gilderbloom, (1992). The basic thesis put forward by both Simmel and Weber that modern industrial capitalism stands opposed to societies organised in terms of pastoral community is reflected not only in sociology but also in modernist literature.
3. Karl Marx (1818-1883). Two of Marx's texts are used in this section. *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production* (here 1976) originally published in German as 'Das Kapital' (1867), and *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (here 1970), originally published in German as 'Zur Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie'(1859).
4. The definition of 'reify' and 'reification' in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is: Convert (a person, abstraction etc.) into a thing: To materialise.
5. All of Baudrillard's works were originally published in French. The majority of his work has now been translated in English, in some cases more than once. The dates given throughout the text refer to the English translation used. Translation of Baudrillard's work is not chronological. His earlier works are some of the latest to be translated. Since the dates of the English translations are being used in the text it is not clear which order the works were written. Baudrillard's critique of Marx (1975) for example was published in English before his early Marxist studies. These notes are intended to provide the reader with a chronological guide to Baudrillard's work. *Les System des Objets*, originally published, 1968, Paris Gallimard. Selected parts of the text were translated and published in English as 'The System of Objects', 1988, by Mark Poster (Poster, 1988) and by Foss & Pefanis (1990). A full English translation was published in 1996. A table showing a selected chronology of Baudrillard's work used in this review as published in French and English is given below. For a complete bibliography of Baudrillard's work see Gane (1993).

Title and date of Original French Publication	Title and date of English Translation (* denotes a partial translation)
1968: <i>Les System des Objets</i>	1988*, 1996: <i>The System of Objects</i>
1970: <i>La Societe de Consummation</i>	1988*: <i>Consumer Society</i>
1972: <i>Pour une critique de l'economie due signe</i>	1981: <i>For a critique of the political economy of the sign</i>
1973: <i>Le miroir de la production</i>	1975: <i>The mirror of Production</i>
1976: <i>L'Echange symbolique et la mort</i>	1993: <i>Symbolic exchange and death</i>
1981: <i>Simulations</i>	1983: <i>Simulations</i>
1983: <i>Les Strategies Fatales</i>	1990: <i>Fatal Strategies</i>

6. (See note 5 above) *La Societe de Consummation*, originally published 1970 (Paris, Gallimard). The whole text is yet to be translated into English in Full. The only translated excerpt to date is by Mark Poster as 'Consumer Society' (Poster, 1988).
7. (See note 5 above) *Le miroir de la production*, originally published 1973 (Tournail, Casterman). Translated into English as *The mirror of production* (1975).
8. According to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, the term 'specular' refers to a type of mirror, a type of reflection, or that which has the nature of reflection. Although I cannot say with any certainty what Baudrillard's intended meaning is here, I would speculate that he uses the term to describe the subject and object as coming to exist like an object and its reflection in a mirror. The subject and object have an *appearance* of difference from one another but this split (like a reflection) is simply a *representation* of difference rather than one of substance. One could take a single image or a single beam of light and through reflection and refraction split it into infinite images or frequencies thus giving the appearance of difference. In this passage I think that Baudrillard is stating simply that under capitalism the nature of reality is posited as two different types of thing (subject and object) and the concept of 'need' thus emerges to provide their, albeit artificial, synthesis.
9. Baudrillard (1988, 1994) gives considerable attention to the emergence of the shopping mall and hypermarket and with it the hypercommodity. These are postmodern cathedrals to consumption, Baudrillard (1994) remarks, 'From thirty kilometres all around, the arrows point you toward these large triage centres that are the hypermarkets, towards this hyperspace of the commodity where in many regards a whole new sociality is elaborated. It remains to be seen how the hypermarket centralises and redistributes a whole region and population, how it concentrates and rationalises time, trajectories, practices.'
10. (See note 5 above) *Pour une critique de l'economie due signe* 1972 (Paris, Gallimard). Translated into English as 'For a critique of the political economy of the sign (1981).
11. Modern semiotic theory was developed at about the same time but quite separately by Charles Sanders Peirce in North America and Saussure in Europe. There are differences between Saussure's *semiologie* and Peirce's *semiotic*, the most significant being that Peirce uses a triadic model whereas Saussure's is dyadic. North American and European theorists tend to refer to their respective semioticians, Saussure in Europe, Peirce in North America, Baudrillard and Barthes, both French, for instance refer exclusively to Saussurian semiotics. For a review of both approaches see Gottdiener (1995) and Hirschman & Holbrook (1992a) although the reader should note that both these texts are written by North Americans and therefore have a bias for Peirce.
12. (See note 5 above) *L'Echange symbolique et la mort* 1976 (Paris, Gallimard) Translated into English as *Symbolic exchange and death* (1993).
13. Roland Barthes (1983) provides a detailed semiotic structuralist analysis of fashion in French Magazines, to show that fashion not only acts as a form of interpersonal communication but also serves to perpetuate the ideology of capitalism and consumer society, a theme developed by many theorists since such as Baudrillard (1993) and Kaiser et al, (1987).

Chapter three

1. It is difficult to think of any thing or any object that is not of historic, cultural, scientific or artistic interest to someone or some group. Yorke & Jones' (1987) definition may as well just state that a museum is an area where potentially anything is displayed.
2. Visitors may undertake some kind of economic exchange during the museum visit in the form of entrance fees/ donations or at gift shops, cafes and restaurants. However, none of these activities constitute museum consumption but consumption of other types of thing (food, gifts, postcards, etc.). The issue of entrance payment has the potential to complicate this investigation by providing a dimension of monetary exchange so the museums selected for this study are free to visit.

Chapter four

1. There are several other issues that would suggest that the comments given during the interviews conducted here are not themselves unique or unusual. The first point to note is that similar studies conducted at other museums report similar types of findings to those gained from this project. Bagnall's (1996) study, conducted at the Wigan Pier Museum and the Science Museum in Manchester for instance, found similar themes to those found here. Issues of authenticity, reality and proximity (or physicality, as Bagnall labels it) were common to both museum contexts and cannot therefore be attributed to one specific geographical or civic location. The second important point to note is that whilst the majority of interviewees who contributed to the project were residents of Glasgow, a minority were from outside the area. One of the visitors interviewed at the Museum of Transport for example was from the Netherlands, another to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum was from Australia. Some of the other visitors interviewed were from other parts of Scotland and in some cases, had travelled up from England. Despite these differences, the types of responses given did not appear dependent upon where the visitor resided. It would be inaccurate to say that visitors from Glasgow held the same types of attitudes towards the collections as those respondents from elsewhere, but rather that similarities and differences in respondents' comments could not be attributed to where they lived. In the case of the Museum of Transport, respondents who were from Glasgow often gave highly personal responses about some of the exhibits, especially the tram displays, whereas (as would be expected), those visitors who did not share this common history did, and could not. However, one would expect to find this in any museum that displayed artefacts that have a certain significance to the local community and is not a characteristic solely of museums in Glasgow or their visitors.

Chapter five

1. Baudrillard, J. (1996b), *The Perfect Crime*, Blackwell, Verso.

Chapter Six

1. The term 'disneyfication' refers to the way in which an institution (originally the Disney organisation) structures and authorises forms of presentation as to appeal to specific popular and commercial interests. The cultural signification of such presentations stems, in part, from their unique form of representation. On the other hand, that signification is also created and maintained within a media apparatus that uses dazzling technology, sound effects, and consumable imagery to filter the past and

to erase complex issues, cultural differences, & social struggles by creating a commercially saturated & politically reactionary rendering of the ideological and political contours of any given presentation. See: "*Disneyland: A Utopian Space*", in Gottdiener, (1995); Baudrillard, (1983); Giroux, (1994); and Warren, (1994).

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Appendix One

i.) Number of Interviews Conducted

Sixteen pilot interviews were conducted (eight in the Museum of Transport and eight in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum) to establish what form the interview schedule would take and how respondents would be selected. Once the interview schedule and selection procedure was defined, 19 interviews were conducted in the Museum of Transport and 22 interviews were conducted in the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. The interviews were conducted between February and May 1997. All of the interviews took place at weekends or on public bank holidays. Piloting had shown that both of the museums used for this study (as with most museums) had the highest number and range of visitor types during these times. During mid week, both museums attracted a low volume of visitors and used this time for other services to the local community such as school trips, art schools and other events.

Unlike some quantitative styles of research, the reliability and validity of a qualitative data set is not dependent upon gaining representative or large sample groups. Since statistical inferences were not being determined from the data, the actual number of interviews conducted was secondary to the quality and depth of each interview. It is however, clearly important to gather as wide a range of respondents views so that a detailed and in-depth picture of museum visiting can be ascertained. Qualitative research techniques of the kind used here (a similar technique is also used in Bagnall's (1996) study into museum visiting), must balance the need for individual interviews to be in-depth and the need to collect a sufficient number of interviews that will allow a range of different responses. Gummerson (1993) uses 'saturation' to determine when a sufficient number of interviews have been conducted. Once a number of interviews have been conducted, the type and range of responses that interviewees give becomes apparent and further interviews produce similar types of responses to those already collected. At this point the additional contribution made by further interviews diminishes (Patton, 1990). Since additional interviews are unlikely to provide significant new insights there is little justification in conducting further interviews when the only purpose of additional data is to confirm the findings already collected. To reiterate Geertz's (1973) argument, the purpose of thick description is not to make generalisations across cases but within them. The actual number of interviews conducted cannot therefore be used as a measure of validity for an interpretation. The only measure that is appropriate is to consider the extent to which any interpretation provides an in-depth, thick descriptive account of the phenomena being observed.

iii) Selection of interviewees

Visitors do not necessarily spend time viewing all the displays. Indeed some museum visitors may not be concerned with the displays as such but with other services provided in the museum. Since the purpose of this study was to examine

the interaction that takes place between visitors and object collections, i.e. to consider the types of values, exchanges and meanings visitors experience whilst viewing artefacts, only those visitors that had been observed viewing the selected collections for more than two or three minutes were approached and asked to participate in the research interviews. The interviewer approached visitors whilst they were viewing the collection and asked them if they had four or five minutes to answer a few questions about their impressions of the museum presentations. The interviewer asked for consent to the interview being tape recorded and assured the confidentiality of the recording. No attempt was made to sample the participants in order to represent different groups equally (males to females, age groups, ethnic groups etc.) because:

- a) The number of visitors that satisfied the selection criteria was small and any further screen or quota system would have severely limited the number of eligible interviewees.
- b) The purpose of the study was not designed with the intention of attributing differences in visitors opinions to these variables (i.e. the study was not seeking to establish whether men had different visitor experiences to women for example.)
- c) The purpose was to develop an in-depth description of individual visiting experiences and therefore interpret a small number of cases in detail rather than a large number superficially. Consequently, any attempt to generalise in terms of additional variables would be conceptually problematic (i.e. even if the research design had ensured that the sample was split equally in terms of gender for instance, the number of respondents in each group would not have been significant enough to make any substantial inferences about these groups as a whole.)

The forty one interviewees, however, were not a homogeneous group in terms of gender, place of residence, country of origin or age. Whilst no formal attempt was made to ensure that different groups were equally represented for the reasons outlined above, the depth of the data was of course reliant upon gaining different view points from people who had different expectations of the museums, and different backgrounds and beliefs about Glasgow. Although forty one interviews were conducted, in some interviews more than one respondent participated. The interviewee group consisted of: 27 males and 24 females; 3 of the interviewees were children (accompanied by at least one adult); The majority of visitors were residents of Glasgow or other towns in central Scotland although one visitor (single male, aged 35-45) was from the Netherlands, one married couple (aged 55-65) were from North Yorkshire, and a group of three females (aged 50 - 60) were from Newcastle. No demographic data was collected concerning the age of respondents although the interviewer estimated the age on each interviewee, recording it with each transcript. Three of the interviewees were children (aged 16 or under), eleven of the interviewees were young adults (aged approximately 18 - 30), eighteen of the interviewees were middle aged (approximately 30 - 50), and 22 of the interviewees were over the age of 50.

iii) Selection of additional respondents

One curator at each of the museums was used as a key contact and consulted with at all stages of the research programme. This enabled authorisation for the research to be granted and additional interviews with other curators and museum assistants to be arranged. In order to gain access to members of the museum association (GAGMA), I was invited by the secretary to make a short presentation at one of the GAGMA meetings and ask for members participation. Sixteen GAGMA members agreed to participate in the research and interview dates were arranged. In all but one case the interviews were conducted at the home of the respondent. The one interview not conducted in this way was conducted at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. Interviews were scheduled to last for approximately forty five minutes although most of the interviews lasting for over an hour. The interviews were tape recorded with the consent of the interviewees. The interviews with GAGMA members were conducted after the visitor research had been completed and fully transcribed. Each member agreeing to participate in an interview was sent four or five transcripts from the visitor study three weeks prior to the interview taking place, and asked to comment on what they considered to be the most important aspects to the transcripts. This research stimulus served several purposes:

- a) It involved someone other than myself conducting an interpretation of the data, thus enabling issues that I may have been unaware of to be discussed. Silverman (1993) proposes that this technique can be used as a method of validating interpretive research and overcoming the problems inherent with subjective interpretations.
- b) It provided each interviewee with a clearer idea about the purpose of the research and the types of issues that were relevant, thus enhancing the quality of the interviews and limiting the amount of time wasted on non-relevant issues.
- c) It allowed me the opportunity to discuss my own interpretations of the data with a group of people who had a knowledge and interest in the museums studied. In many instances this led to a reappraisal of my initial interpretations and the development of more comprehensive descriptions of museum visiting.

Interviews and discussions were arranged with curators and museum assistants throughout the course of the project, with each informant being involved in several such discussions. Some were formal interviews with clear agendas and were tape recorded, others were informal discussions that were logged in field note form. Four museum curators (three at the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum and one at the Museum of Transport) and two museum assistants (one at each museum) were interviewed whilst the visitor research was being conducted, as well as after the visitor data has been transcribed. These concurrent interviews served several purposes. They enabled further refinement and definition of the visitor study, provided different perspectives on the issues under investigation and aided in the interpretation of the transcripts.