

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/22522> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

**Author:** Weiss, Martin Paul Michael

**Title:** The masses and the muses : a history of Teylers Museum in the Nineteenth Century

**Issue Date:** 2013-11-27

# Chapter VI: Conclusions

---

## 1. Summary

Before addressing the main points that have transpired from this study of the history of Teylers Museum from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, briefly recalling some of the most important dates in the history of the museum is probably helpful.

Its history begins in 1778, with the death of Pieter Teyler van der Hulst. Largely upon the initiative of Martinus van Marum, the Oval Room was completed in 1784. The first chapter of this study highlighted how the Oval Room had sprung from the relative ambiguity of Pieter Teyler's last will and testament and how Teylers Museum was just one of many institutions – alongside Teylers Learned Societies and an almshouse – financed by the Teyler Foundation and its five trustees.

Van Marum was appointed director of Teylers Museum – although, rather importantly, a caretaker (*kastelein*) was simultaneously in charge of the Foundation's collection of fine art, which was also stored at the museum. Van Marum remained in this position throughout his long life, until his death in 1837. He famously experimented with the world's largest electrostatic generator at the museum in the 1780s. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century however, van Marum had fallen out with the trustees, and essentially reduced his activities at the museum to a minimum.

When his successor, Jacob Gijsbert Samuel van Breda, arrived in Haarlem in 1839, he not only took the important decision to preserve scientific instruments that were deemed to be of historical value (because of van Marum's inactivity the collection had been mellowing for almost three decades), but also found that a new annex to the museum had been completed, the sole purpose of which was an aesthetically pleasing display of the Foundation's growing collection of paintings by contemporary Dutch artists.

The completion of this annex heralded Teylers Museum's gradual transition from an 18<sup>th</sup> century repository conceived as an aid to two learned societies and as a nodal point in the republic of letters, to a public art museum with a scientific laboratory attached to it. The gradual removal of scientific research activities from the museum premises began with the construction of a separate chemical laboratory for van Marum in 1790, but this separation became ever more pronounced once "science" became the exclusive reserve of professionally trained experts. In chapter 4 it was illustrated how these developments were reflected in Volkert Simon Maarten van der Willigen's professional biography and his activities at Teylers between 1865 and 1878.

During this same period, museums were being accorded a new public role. They were increasingly seen as fulfilling an educational task. Most importantly, they were not just supposed to provide visitors with the opportunity to learn more about the collections stored by every museum, but they were also supposed to fulfil a “civilising” role. They became purveyors of public mores, and simultaneously emerged as places to “see and be seen”. This went hand in hand with the idea that museums should attract as many visitors as possible.

The origins of these developments can be traced back well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century and are closely connected with the changing concept of a citizen’s role within society. The French Revolution acted as a catalyst in this respect, with many public, national museums being founded in the wake of Napoleon’s domination of Europe. But it was the South Kensington Museum in London, which was officially opened to the public in 1857, that came to epitomise the changing status of museums within society and their general recognition as public, educational, “civilising” institutions.

By the 1870s the cultural ideals epitomised by the South Kensington Museum were being emulated in the Netherlands, a development which – certainly to some extent – is reflected by the major new annex to Teylers Museum that was completed in 1885. Significantly, a new and inviting entrance to the museum was constructed as part of this new annex. This, in turn, can be seen as a clear embrace of the museum’s public role (in principle, it had been accessible to all ever since 1784, but in early years practical restrictions had been manifold). What’s more, the entire new section of the museum building was almost stereotypical in its design and, as a result, the entire institution was now clearly recognisable as a museum.

As was shown in chapter 5, the expectations this raised with visitors had a profound impact on the way in which the museum’s scientific collections in particular were handled. As far as the scientific instrument collection was concerned, its history was emphasised more than ever before, which meant that by the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Teylers Museum had partially become a museum of the history of science.

At the same time, the trustees of the Teyler Foundation had not stopped supporting scientific research. On the contrary, as the appointment of the Nobel Prize laureate Hendrik Antoon Lorentz in 1909 as curator of the Foundation’s laboratory and scientific instrument collection clearly shows, they took great pride and spared few costs in facilitating scientific research. But by the time Lorentz passed away in 1928, changes in the world’s financial system and the changing nature of scientific research meant the Foundation’s laboratory was no longer competitive, a crisis that even began to affect the entire museum, as items from other collections had to be sold off.

Nevertheless, the Foundation, all of the institutions it funded, and most of Teylers Museum’s collections survived the ensuing dire years, and with state support were all infused with new life in the 1980s.

## 2. You Say Musaeum, I Say Museum

This brief summary in itself already gives an impression of how multi-layered and complex the history of Teylers Museum is. Just a few examples can already serve to illustrate this: its collections range from the fine arts to the natural sciences, yet are not – and never tried to be – encyclopaedic; it was referred to as a “museum” – or “musaeum” – from the very beginning on, yet it only acquired a predominantly public and educational role towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; it was a very local affair, financed by a Foundation that was run by five trustees who practically always lived in Haarlem and many of whom were direct ancestors of close relations of Pieter Teyler’s, yet the museum immediately acquired an international reputation and, reciprocally, was clearly influenced by international developments; the Teyler Foundation was firmly embedded within Haarlem’s Mennonite community, yet this had very little impact on the day-to-day running of the museum; the museum itself spawned a laboratory which gradually turned into an institution in its own right.

This list can be extended almost at will. But with regard to all of these apparently puzzling aspects to the history of Teylers Museum, there is one important point to keep in mind when studying any aspect of its history – regardless of whether it concerns the museum itself, any of its collections, the life and work of a specific curator, or even a famous visitor. This is that the history of Teylers Museum is best pictured as having unfolded in a force field which is essentially shaped by two gravitational poles.

One of these is formed by the museum’s 18<sup>th</sup> century origins. As was shown, its roots lie in a fairly liberal interpretation of Pieter Teyler’s last will and testament. Teylers Museum was born from Pieter Teyler’s stipulation that his private collections should serve as a repository to the two learned societies that were to be set up in his name, and that these collections were allowed to be expanded. Pieter Teyler had not said anything about a museum, yet a magnificent museum was set up in his name and with his bequeathal and, therefore, always had to be administered in accordance with Pieter Teyler’s last will and testament. Because of this, the museum’s 18<sup>th</sup> century origins continued to shape its identity until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bearing in mind the circumstances under which the institution was founded, as well as the fact that the trustees of the Foundation always felt bound by the stipulations Pieter Teyler had set out in his last will and testament in 1756, therefore helps explain many of its idiosyncrasies. Just one obvious example is the museum’s wide range of collections: Pieter Teyler had stipulated that his legacy was to help stimulate the arts and sciences, which was accordingly reflected in the museum’s broad range of acquisitions.

The second gravitational pole is formed by the changing connotations of the term “museum”. As was already mentioned above but can hardly be stressed enough, the definition of what constituted a “museum” changed profoundly over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. More to the point, over the years museums acquired an educational role and began to offer visitors the possibility of shoring up their credentials as members of the bourgeoisie. Anything that was labelled a “museum” was increasingly expected to have been designed to attract and accommodate large amounts of visitors. These changing ideas as to what constituted a

“museum” and its public role are clearly reflected in the history of Teylers Museum. The new annex that was completed in 1885 has already been mentioned as a prominent example. Another is the way in which Teylers Museum’s collection of fine art – the core of which was formed by the collection of drawings formerly belonging to Christina of Sweden which was acquired as early as 1790 – increasingly took centre stage. This was certainly the case after the 1820s, when the decision had been taken to acquire paintings by contemporary Dutch artists.

In summary one can say that, on the one hand, those in charge of Teylers Museum were bound by – and adhered to – Pieter Teyler’s last will and testament and the 18<sup>th</sup> century ideals that had shaped it, while, on the other hand and at the same time, they were in no way immune to the new concept of what constituted a museum that began to emerge as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed.

### **3. The Changing Status of the Scientific Instrument Collection**

Key to understanding any aspect of the history of Teylers Museum is therefore to take into account its 18<sup>th</sup> century roots and the fact that the term “museum” has a history of its own, and cannot be treated as some sort of universal, timeless category which carried the same connotations towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as it did a century later. It also helps to realise that the history of the term “museum” does not necessarily coincide with the history of the institutions or collections that had adopted this label by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

By keeping all this in mind, this study was able to show how the status of the scientific instrument collection changed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It clearly transpired how the collection was increasingly appreciated for its historical significance. In a nutshell, it evolved from a working collection that was acquired solely for the purposes of research and the demonstration of scientific principles at public lectures, into a museum of the history of science which vividly illustrated to the general public the experimental research that had been performed under the auspices of the Teyler Foundation.

A combination of local contingencies and larger, international developments brought about this change. One example of a local contingency, for instance, is that there is no indication that it was anything other than a coincidence that the talented and ambitious van Marum was starting to build a second career in Haarlem after having been passed over for a professorship in Groningen, precisely at the time a huge amount of money which had been earmarked for the arts and sciences became available after Pieter Teyler’s death. The fact that van Marum subsequently had access to the vast resources of the Teyler Foundation as director of Teylers Museum in turn enabled him to acquire instruments of the very highest quality for the newly founded institution. Most importantly, this enabled him to have the world’s largest electrostatic generator built, which in turn ensured Teylers Museum did not go unnoticed throughout the world.

As a result, van Marum's instrument collection played an integral part in forging the newly established Teyler Foundation's identity. Crucially, this meant the electrostatic generator was never a candidate for disposal in later years, when it inevitably began to lose its value as a research tool.

Alongside the identity-forming role of the instrument collection, its sheer value also prevented it from being disposed of easily. One remarkable piece of information that came to light as a result of the archival research which was undertaken as part of this study was the fact that as early as 1804 and 1806, two previously unknown visitors to the museum – August Hermann Niemeyer and Kaspar Heinrich Sierstorpf – had already exclaimed literally and separately from each other that the scientific instruments on display at Teylers would someday serve merely as testimony of past science, because they were too valuable either to be used for research or to be disposed of.

And finally, as was already mentioned above, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the collection was also able to mellow because van Marum found himself at odds with the trustees of the Teyler Foundation and reduced his activities at Teylers Museum to a minimum for the better part of almost four decades.

By the time van Marum's successor van Breda started actively using the collection again, it had become significant that Teylers Museum had been referred to as a museum from the very beginning of its existence onward. (The very first time the new institution was referred to as a "musaeum" in writing was on December 10<sup>th</sup> 1779, in the minutes of a meeting of Teylers Second Society, i.e. the learned society for the arts and sciences sponsored by the Teyler Foundation.) When museums generally started to acquire the image of public educational institutions and began to be seen as places of "high culture", they were at first associated primarily with the fine arts. Gradually, however, attempts to showcase science and technology at museums in the new sense of the word began to gather momentum. The Special Loan Collection in South Kensington in 1876 was a milestone in this respect, and the proliferation of museums of science and technology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century can be seen as the culmination of these efforts. Crucially, however, Teylers Museum not only housed a collection that was increasingly deemed to be "museum-worthy" – as proven by the fact that items from the instrument collection were sought after by the organisers of international fairs such as the Special Loan Collection or the Paris Electrical Exhibition in 1881 – but this collection already was in an institution that was referred to as a museum. More to the point, the name "Teylers Museum" had begun to define the institution itself and particularly its public role.

This in turn had a profound impact on the way the instrument collection was perceived and handled. As visitor numbers to Teylers Museum increased, the instruments it housed began to be presented as cultural artefacts; their historical value began to be emphasised in an attempt to make the collection understandable to a lay audience.

In addition to this, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed an increasingly clear line of separation was drawn between the publicly accessible museum premises and the adjacent laboratory – which the instrument collection was actually maintained for and which the curators were far more interested in. So on the one hand, the laboratory and the instrument collection housed in the

museum formed an organisational unit which was distinct from the museum's other collections; but on the other hand, as far as visitors were concerned, these other collections and the scientific instrument collection would increasingly have been perceived as belonging to one common unit which was distinct from the laboratory, namely the publicly accessible Teylers Museum.

By the 1930s, when both science museums and museums of the history of science had proliferated, Teylers Museum had become one museum of the history of science amongst many. But just how unique and also inspiring its status had been just a few decades before, transpires clearly from the fact that in 1905 it was the topic of the keynote speech at an early – and one can therefore say crucial – fundraising event for what was to become the prototype modern science museum, the *Deutsches Museum* in Munich. The keynote speaker, the Dutch Nobel Prize laureate Jacobus van 't Hoff, chose Teylers Museum as a vantage point from which to discuss “the significance of historical collections for science and technology”.

#### **4. Teylers Museum: Typically Dutch?**

Finally, it is worth reflecting a little upon what the history of Teylers Museum reveals about the overall history of Dutch collections and museums.

There are a number of reasons why Teylers Museum provides a particularly interesting case study through which more can be learnt about the history of the Dutch museums in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its age alone justifies including it in any account of their history. After all, the Oval Room was the first building in the Netherlands that had been both purpose-built to house a collection and which was referred to as a “museum” or “musaeum” from the very beginning onwards. Furthermore it enjoyed a certain prominence until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bolstered by the Teyler Foundation's financial muscle. The wide range of collections housed at the Museum is noteworthy as well.

But above all, the way Teylers Museum developed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is of particular interest because it was privately funded, i.e. maintained by the Teyler Foundation. What's more, as the episode surrounding the possible classification of the Foundation's almshouse as a “charity” in the early 1850s shows, the Foundation could be adamant that it did not want to be associated with what would today be referred to as the “public sector”.

Before addressing the private ownership of Teylers Museum in more detail and taking a closer look at the implications this had, it is helpful to recall two more general points that transpired over the course of this study.

The first of these is that the concept of a museum as a purveyor of bourgeois values and public mores as well as its potential to convey a sense of national pride did not go unnoticed in the Netherlands, even around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Dutch government only

started to adopt the idea that museums could fulfil such a public role in the 1870s, but that does not mean this idea was not circulated and taken very seriously by others in the Netherlands before. Examples underscoring this include Johannes Bosscha sr.'s speech held before the members of the *Hollandsche Maatschappij voor Fraaie Kunsten en Wetenschappen* in 1840, or the plans for a national museum – referred to as *Museum Willem I* – that were devised in 1863 but never materialised. What's more, Victor de Stuers, who was pivotal in ensuring the Dutch government became actively involved in the preservation of its nation's heritage as from the 1870s, was clearly deeply impressed by what he experienced at the South Kensington Museum. That museum, in turn, can be seen as the epitome of the cultural values espoused by Prince Albert and Henry Cole.

The second point is that such cultural values clearly affected and helped shape Teylers Museum. Certainly by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century their impact is clearly discernible at this privately owned institution. Whether this was the result of conscious efforts or more the outcome of a series of chance developments is difficult to tell on the basis of the available source material – ultimately, however, that is actually of secondary importance. What is far more important is that by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Teylers Museum had assumed the mantle of a publicly accessible place of “high culture”, where visitors were required to behave adequately and which had also – this is the crucial point – been designed to attract as many visitors as possible. This last point is so important because it is above all in this respect that Teylers Museum as it was at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, differed profoundly from Teylers Museum as it was at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. More specifically, the public role it was assigned had changed: an aura of “high culture” had already surrounded Teylers Museum during van Marum's times and visitors had also been expected to behave appropriately during this period of the Museum's history; but during these times visitors could only obtain a ticket to the Museum if either van Marum or one of the trustees of the Teyler Foundation obtained the impression that they could be trusted to behave adequately upon entering the premises. By 1885 however, everyone could gain admission to the Museum, without following some sort of rigorous prior screening process – only the inebriated would probably have been stopped at the door. And even though visitors would in all likelihood have known what was expected from them beforehand, it was only after these visitors had entered the museum premises that they were actually given to understand that they were to be on their best behaviour. If necessary, this point was driven home by the guards who were now “policing” the premises. In this sense, too, a visit to Teylers Museum became educational.

The two points that have now been reiterated are so important because they are closely connected to one of the fundamental questions that was at the heart of many of the formative discussions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – whether these discussions revolved around cultural, political or economic matters: this is the question of how “public” was defined. What was “public” and what was “private”? What was “the public”? Very often, this boiled down to the question of what moral framework should be used to determine the rules of engagement in public. Put differently, the question was what constituted good or appropriate behaviour in public and who had the authority to define just that.

The increasing inadequacy and final dissolution of many early-modern structures that had shaped society, such as the feudal system or the guild system, simply necessitated a redefinition of every individual's role within society as a whole. The French Revolution or the democratic and nationalist uprisings of 1848 are just two prominent examples of the volatility of social order at the dawn of modernity. Then, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the “civilised, bourgeois citizen” emerged as an ideal type that acquired a kind of role model function as to how every individual was to behave in society – this of course also set the standards as to how every individual was to behave in public. At the same time, citizenship itself was increasingly defined as membership of a nation state.

Returning to Haarlem, what is striking is that the inherently private Teyler Foundation, rooted in Haarlem's Mennonite community, helped to engrain this ideal type of the “civilised, bourgeois citizen” within Dutch society through its very own Teylers Museum. This is particularly noteworthy because in most other cases in which museums assumed such a role the government or some other type of public institution – e.g. a monarch claiming to act on the behalf of his people – was intimately involved. In the Teyler Foundation's case however, the five trustees of the Teyler Foundation had absolute authority and their only restriction with regard to the museum was that their decisions must never violate the terms of Pieter Teyler's last will and testament. So the only way in which they had to justify the policies they laid out for Teylers Museum was that these policies should reflect the spirit of Pieter Teyler's will. In this sense at least, Teylers Museum was therefore a very private affair.

The relevant question is in how far there is something typically Dutch about the way the inherently private Teyler Foundation exerted considerable influence (in relative terms) over public life until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The long tradition of de-centralised governance so typical of the Netherlands was repeatedly referred to throughout this study. It also became clear how liberal ideas determined all Dutch governments' cultural policy up until the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Clearly, “the state” was accorded a slightly different role in the Netherlands than it was in other, neighbouring countries, and there was some sort of consensus that the cultural realm should be built upon private initiative. So, in this sense at least Teylers Museum or, more specifically, the fact that it was an inherently private affair was not as idiosyncratic as it might at first seem.

But while the realisation that there was a long tradition of relying on private initiative and de-centralised governance in the Netherlands helps one come to terms with some of the apparently unique features of Teylers Museum (particularly that it was privately owned), reverting to these traditions ultimately only provides a partially satisfying explanation. The real challenge is to go one step further and scrutinise these traditions themselves, i.e. to trace their origins and explain why so much more importance was attached to them in the Netherlands than in other countries.

This, in turn, leads back to the more general question of how public life – or rather the rules of engagement in public – was defined. What, exactly, was the consensus as to every individual's role in Dutch society and how did this change as the 19<sup>th</sup> century unfolded? How and why was this different in other countries? And, quite specifically, how did this affect and

was reflected in the public role of collections and museums in the Netherlands? Can an answer to these questions perhaps even contribute to a more nuanced explanation as to why public, state-funded museums only emerged in the Netherlands so much later than they did in neighbouring countries?

So as not to raise expectations: within the confines of this study, an exhaustive treatment of these fundamental and far-reaching questions was not possible. Neither could the existing literature concerning them be included in its entirety.<sup>1</sup> Ultimately, the analysis of just one museum also provides too narrow a perspective on history than that it could provide the basis for cast iron conclusions about all other contemporary museums from the same region.

Nevertheless, what did transpire over the course of this study is that it can be highly revealing not to take the term “public” at face value – i.e. as some sort of ahistorical category – but rather to “deconstruct” it, in Clifford Geertz’ sense of the word. Clarifying how “public life” was defined in the Netherlands can help come to terms with many of the unique features of Dutch 19<sup>th</sup> century history – such as, for example, the curiously late appearance of large educational museums.

In other words, the term “public” should be questioned in a similarly fundamental manner as the term “museum” was throughout this study, or as the term “science” has been deconstructed by historians of science over the past decades.

A good starting point for such a fundamental “deconstruction” of this particular term can be found in the work of sociologists Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett.<sup>2</sup> Habermas’ book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, first published in 1962, in particular is generally considered to be part of the canon of literature cultural historians work with. However, the analysis he presents in this book is all too often reduced to the somewhat simplistic idea that after 1800 a “public sphere” had emerged, and that this is somehow equatable with the premise that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the term “public” was used in much the same way as it might be in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, this does not only ignore the subtleties and the complexity of Habermas’ analysis (“public sphere” is in no way equitable with “public” for instance), but also avoids confronting the ways in which public life changed over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. avoids an actual “deconstruction” of the term.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Sennett’s work, particularly his book *The Fall of Public Man* which was first published in 1976, is less frequently referred to. As far as literature on the history of science is concerned, it is virtually absent. Yet it is Richard Sennett’s analysis of the ways in which public life was restructured after 1800 that seems to provide a particularly good framework

---

<sup>1</sup> A good starting point is: J.J. Kloek and W. W. Mijndhardt, *1800: Blueprints for a National Community* (Assen; London: Royal Van Gorcum; Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); or, from the perspective of a historian of science: Ad Maas, “Civil Scientists: Dutch Scientists Between 1750 and 1875,” *History of Science* 48 (2010): 75–103.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990); Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> On some of the problems of misinterpreting Habermas’ work see for instance: Harold Mah, “Phantasies of the Public Sphere: Rethinking the Habermas of Historians,” *The Journal of Modern History* 72, no. 1 (2000): 153–182; Hanco Jürgens, “Habermas for Historians: Four Approaches to His Work,” vol. 5, *Forschungsberichte Aus Dem Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam, 2009), 158–170.

within which to analyse Dutch modern history and understand some of its unique features. Admittedly, Sennett's claims have been discussed critically and must be deemed controversial – but in essence the pivotal claims he makes have not been refuted or disproven.<sup>4</sup>

Sennett identifies three forces that led to a fundamental recalibration of what was deemed “public” and sees these as the root causes of “modernity”. The first of these forces lies in the traumatic effects of 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism: distraught by the ruthlessness of market forces, people began to seek refuge in private – i.e. family – life. This inevitably meant that people retreated from public life, which in turn meant that public life became less important for each individual's formation of his own personality. In addition to this, people's behaviour in public was increasingly judged in terms of morals that had previously been restricted to the private realm. The second force identified by Sennett is that of secularism: he defines this very generally, not just as the diminishing role of religion in society, but rather as the way in which the immanent became more important than the transcendent in people's search for meaning. Sennett links this to the increasing importance of the material realm and the emergence of “commodity fetishism”, to use the term coined by Marx. This resulted in every person taking a completely different stance with regard to the world that surrounded them. Thirdly, Sennett points out that the two previous forces had the potential to uproot society and foster revolutions, but that this did not happen because the social order that had emerged in the cities of the Enlightenment remained in place. This created the impression of a certain continuity: the distinction between the public and the private realm, as it had emerged in cities before 1800, seemed to remain in place, but the balance between the two was completely disrupted, and the public sphere in particular was “hollowed out” and changed fundamentally.

With regard to the definition of public life in the Netherlands and – by extension – the public role of collections and museums, the decisive point is that all three forces identified by Sennett had far less of an impact on Dutch society than they did on other societies (such as those of France or the Anglo-Saxon regions, which Sennett focuses on). As far as the first point is concerned, it is only a slight caricature to say that capitalism was invented in the Netherlands. As a trading nation and with their history as Europe's economic powerhouse during the Golden Age, the onset of 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalism would have been far less traumatic for the Dutch than it was for other nations. Secondly, the Netherlands had a long tradition of religious tolerance. The term “Christian Enlightenment” had even been used to describe developments during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> Increasing secularisation and its undermining of religion would therefore have constituted less of a break with the past than it did in other countries. Thirdly and finally, during the Golden Age the Netherlands had become one of the most densely populated and urbanised regions of the world. One can therefore assume that the social structures as they had emerged in the cities of the Enlightenment were engrained in Dutch society to a far higher degree than in other regions.

All this can help explain the relative continuity between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century that characterises Dutch history. Put differently, almost until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch

---

<sup>4</sup> For a summary of some arguments against Sennett's analysis see for instance: Hans van der Loo and Willem van Rijen, *Paradoxen van Modernisering* (Bussum: Coutinho, 1997), 213–214.

<sup>5</sup> H. H. Zwager, *Nederland en de Verlichting* (Haarlem: Fibula-Van Dishoeck, 1980), 11–12.

society displayed a range of characteristics that, in other regions, would have been associated far more with the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

This, in turn, makes it understandable that museums – in the sense of public institutions – only emerged a lot later in the Netherlands than they did in other countries. The point is that these museums were essentially symptoms of a new social order, based on and perpetuating a new concept of every individual's role within society – a concept which can be seen as having been effected by forces such as those identified by Sennett. To use Tony Bennett's phrase, public museums were constructed to provide an "exercise in civics".<sup>7</sup> These "exercises" only became necessary in the Netherlands a lot later than in other regions.

Finally, it is the relative continuity between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century – particularly with regard to "public life" – that can help explain why an institution such as Teylers Museum – privately owned, but fulfilling a public role – continued to thrive throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, despite its 18<sup>th</sup> century roots. Teylers Museum is in fact typically Dutch in that, almost until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Museum was intended to fulfil a public role which, to visitors from other countries, would have been reminiscent of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. "Museums" and "musaeums" – for that matter all collections in history – always performed some kind of public role; but it is important to realise that the "public role" they fulfilled at any particular point in history was always determined as much by the way in which "public" was defined at that particular time, as it was by the aims of collectors and the physical restrictions imposed by the materiality of the collections themselves and the places where these collections were or could be housed and presented.

Most importantly, it is the uniquely Dutch definition of "public life" that gave Teylers Museum such a hybrid appearance. Even when Teylers Museum had clearly been subjected to the 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural ideals according to which a public museum was to fulfil an educational function (as epitomised by the construction of the annex that was completed in 1885), it simultaneously managed to stay true to its 18<sup>th</sup> century roots. Remarkably, rather than place an untenable stress on the Museum, the apparently ambiguous concept of its public role even served to enhance its role, producing something of a novelty, i.e. a museum of the history of science.

It is perhaps only consistent that by the 1920s, when the state had taken on ever more responsibilities and had acquired the authority to raise taxes and support scientific research by helping to finance large-scale research facilities such as those at the University of Leiden, the Teyler Foundation's public role was diminished. What can be of help in understanding what was going on here is the analogy that was introduced above, of the Museum developing in a force field that was shaped by two gravitational poles, the Museum's 18<sup>th</sup> century roots on the one hand and the changing definition of what constituted a museum and its public role on the other hand. Seen this way, both poles were exerting such a strong pull on the Museum and in opposite directions, that it remained frozen in space or, perhaps more accurately, in time. And it was perhaps also only consistent that it was freed from the "sleeping beauty state" it entered

---

<sup>6</sup> It needs to be stressed that this is not the same as saying that Dutch society was lagging behind.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 102.

into when the state took on the responsibility of running and preserving the Museum, together with the Teyler Foundation, in the 1980s. Although not at odds with Pieter Teyler's last will and testament, this move is symbolic of the way in which "the state" had become synonymous with "the public" – which was something Pieter Teyler would in all probability have found unfathomable.

Ultimately, by the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, because of its 18<sup>th</sup> century roots and the fact that these could be and were conscientiously upheld for so long by the trustees of the Teyler Foundation, Teylers Museum itself – not just the collections it housed – began to be considered part of Dutch cultural heritage. Put differently, by the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Museum itself became "museum-worthy", and a museum of museum history.

