

# *The Birth of the Museum*



history,  
theory,  
politics

T O N Y B E N N E T T



# THE BIRTH OF THE MUSEUM

What is the cultural function of the museum? How did modern museums evolve? Tony Bennett's invigorating study enriches and challenges our understanding of the museum, placing it at the centre of modern relations of culture and government.

Bennett argues that the public museum should be understood not just as a place of instruction but as a reformatory of manners in which a wide range of regulated social routines and performances take place. Discussing the historical development of museums alongside that of the fair and the international exhibition, he sheds new light upon the relationship between modern forms of official and popular culture.

In a series of richly detailed case studies from Britain, Australia and North America, Bennett investigates how nineteenth- and twentieth-century museums, fairs and exhibitions have organised their collections, and their visitors. His use of Foucaultian perspectives and his consideration of museums in relation to other cultural institutions of display provides a distinctive perspective on contemporary museum policies and politics.

**Tony Bennett** is Professor of Cultural Studies and Foundation Director of the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies in the Faculty of Humanities at Griffith University, Australia. He is the author of *Formalism and Marxism, Outside Literature* and (with Janet Woollacott) *Bond and Beyond: The Political Career of a Popular Hero*.

## CULTURE: POLICIES AND POLITICS

What are the relations between cultural policies and cultural politics? Too often, none at all. In the history of cultural studies so far, there has been no shortage of discussion of cultural politics. Only rarely, however, have such discussions taken account of the policy instruments through which cultural activities and institutions are funded and regulated in the mundane politics of bureaucratic and corporate life. *Culture: Policies and Politics* will address this imbalance. The books in this series will interrogate the role of culture in the organization of social relations of power, including those of class, nation, ethnicity and gender. They will also explore the ways in which political agendas in these areas are related to, and shaped by, policy processes and outcomes. In its commitment to the need for a fuller and clearer policy calculus in the cultural sphere, *Culture: Policies and Politics* will help to promote a significant transformation in the political ambit and orientation of cultural studies and related fields.



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# THE BIRTH OF THE MUSEUM

History, theory, politics

*Tony Bennett*

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for liking fairs and tolerating museums

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# INTRODUCTION

In his essay 'Of other spaces', Michel Foucault defines heterotopias as places in which 'all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (Foucault 1986: 24). As such, he argues that the museum and the library – both 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time' – are peculiar to, and characteristic of, nineteenth-century Western culture:

the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organising in this a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity.

(Foucault 1986: 26)

Ranged against the museum and the library, Foucault argues, are those heterotopias which, far from being linked to the accumulation of time, are linked to time 'in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect, to time in the mode of the festival' (ibid.: 26). As his paradigm example of such spaces, Foucault cites 'the fairgrounds, these marvellous empty sites on the outskirts of cities that teem once or twice a year with stands, displays, heteroclite objects, wrestlers, snake-women, fortune-tellers, and so forth' (ibid.: 26).

The terms of the opposition are familiar. Indeed, they formed a part of the discursive co-ordinates through which the museum, in its nineteenth-century form, was thought into being via a process of double differentiation. For the process of fashioning a new space of representation for the modern public museum was, at the same time, one of constructing and defending that space of representation as a rational and scientific one, fully capable of bearing the didactic burden placed upon it, by differentiating it from the disorder that was imputed to competing exhibitionary institutions. This was, in part, a matter of distinguishing the museum from its predecessors. It was thus quite common, toward the end of the nineteenth century, for the museum's early historians – or, perhaps more accurately, its rhapsodists – to contrast its

achieved order and rationality with the jumbled incongruity which now seemed to characterize the cabinets of curiosity which, in its own lights, the museum had supplanted and surpassed. Those who would visit the local museums in Britain's smaller towns, Thomas Greenwood warned in 1888, should be prepared to find 'dust and disorder reigning supreme'. And worse:

The orderly soul of the Museum student will quake at the sight of a Chinese lady's boot encircled by a necklace made of sharks's teeth, or a helmet of one of Cromwell's soldiers grouped with some Roman remains. Another corner may reveal an Egyptian mummy placed in a mediaeval chest, and in more than one instance the curious visitor might be startled to find the cups won by a crack cricketer of the county in the collection, or even the stuffed relics of a pet pug dog.

(Greenwood 1888: 4)

By contrast, where new museums had been established under the Museums or Public Library Acts, Greenwood asserts that 'order and system is coming out of chaos' owing to the constraints placed on 'fossilism or foolish proceedings' by the democratic composition of the bodies responsible for governing those museums.

This attribution of a rationalizing effect to the democratic influence of a citizenry was, in truth, somewhat rare, especially in the British context.<sup>1</sup> For it was more usually science that was held responsible for having subjected museum displays to the influence of reason. Indeed, the story, as it was customarily told, of the museum's development from chaos to order was, simultaneously, that of science's progress from error to truth. Thus, for David Murray, the distinguishing features of the modern museum were the principles of 'specialisation and classification' (Murray 1904: 231): that is, the development of a range of specialist museum types (of geology, natural history, art, etc.) within each of which objects were arranged in a manner calculated to make intelligible a scientific view of the world. In comparison with this educational intent, Murray argued, pre-modern museums were more concerned to create surprise or provoke wonder. This entailed a focus on the rare and exceptional, an interest in objects for their singular qualities rather than for their typicality, and encouraged principles of display aimed at a sensational rather than a rational and pedagogic effect. For Murray, the moralized skeletons found in early anatomical collections thus achieved such a sensational effect only at the price of an incongruity which nullified their educational potential.

For example, the anatomical collection at Dresden was arranged like a pleasure garden. Skeletons were interwoven with branches of trees in the form of hedges so as to form vistas. Anatomical subjects were difficult to come by, and when they were got, the most was made of them. At Leyden they had the skeleton of an ass upon which sat a

woman that killed her daughter; the skeleton of a man, sitting upon an ox, executed for stealing cattle; a young thief hanged, being the Bridegroom whose Bride stood under the gallows. . .

(Murray 1904: 208)

Yet similar incongruities persisted into the present where, in commercial exhibitions of natural and artificial wonders, in travelling menageries and the circus and, above all, at the fair, they formed a part of the surrounding cultural environs from which the museum sought constantly to extricate itself. For the fair of which Foucault speaks did not merely relate to time in a different way from the museum. Nor did it simply occupy space differently, temporarily taking up residence on the city's outskirts rather than being permanently located in its centre. The fair also confronted – and affronted – the museum as a still extant embodiment of the 'irrational' and 'chaotic' disorder that had characterized the museum's precursors. It was, so to speak, the museum's own pre-history come to haunt it.

The anxiety exhibited by the National Museum of Victoria in the stress it placed, in its founding years (the 1850s), on its intention to display 'small and ugly creatures' as well as 'showy' ones – to display, that is, objects for their instructional rather than for their curiosity or ornamental value – thus related as much to the need to differentiate it from contemporary popular exhibitions as to that of demonstrating its historical surpassing of the cabinet of curiosities. The opening of the National Museum of Victoria coincided with Melbourne's acquisition of its first permanent menagerie, an establishment housed in a commercial amusement park which – just as much as the menagerie it contained – was given over to the principles of the fabulous and the amazing. Whereas the menagerie stressed the exotic qualities of animals, so the accent in the surrounding entertainments comprising the amusement park was on the marvellous and fantastic: 'Juan Fernandez, who nightly put his head into a lion's mouth, a Fat Boy, a Bearded Woman, some Ethiopians, Wizards, as well as Billiards, Shooting Galleries, Punch and Judy Shows and Bowling Saloons' (Goodman 1990: 28). If, then, as Goodman puts it, the National Museum of Victoria represented itself to its public as a 'classifying house', emphasizing its scientific and instructional qualities, this was as much a way of declaring that it was not a circus or a fair as it was a means of stressing its differences from earlier collections of curiosities.

Yet, however much the museum and the fair were thought of and functioned as contraries to one another, the opposition Foucault posits between the two is, perhaps, too starkly stated. It is also insufficiently historical. Of course, Foucault is fully alert to the historical novelty of those relations which, in the early nineteenth century, saw the museum and the fair emerge as contraries. Yet he is not equally attentive to the historical processes which have subsequently worked to undermine the terms of that opposition. The emergence, in the late nineteenth century, of another 'other space' – the

fixed-site amusement park – was especially significant in this respect in view of the degree to which the amusement park occupied a point somewhere between the opposing values Foucault attributes to the museum and the travelling fair.

The formative developments here were American. From the mid-1890s a succession of amusement parks at Coney Island served as the prototypes for this new 'heterotopia'. While retaining some elements of the travelling fair, the parks mixed and merged these with elements derived, indirectly, from the programme of the public museum. In their carnival aspects, amusement parks thus retained a commitment to 'time in the mode of the festival' in providing for the relaxation or inversion of normal standards of behaviour. However, while initially tolerant of traditional fairground side-shows – Foucault's wrestlers, snake-women and fortune-tellers – this tolerance was always selective and, as the form developed, more stringent as amusement parks, modelling their aspirations on those of the public parks movement, sought to dissociate themselves from anything which might detract from an atmosphere of wholesome family entertainment.

Moreover, such side-shows increasingly clashed with the amusement park's ethos of modernity and its commitment, like the museum, to an accumulating time, to the unstoppable momentum of progress which, in its characteristic forms of 'hailing' (accenting 'the new' and 'the latest') and entertainments (mechanical rides), the amusement park claimed both to represent and to harness to the cause of popular pleasure. Their positions within the evolutionary time of progress were, of course, different, as were the ways in which they provided their visitors with opportunities to enact this time by building it into the performative regimes which regulated their itineraries. However, by the end of the century, both the museum and the amusement park participated in elaborating and diffusing related (although rarely identical) conceptions of time. This was not without consequence for travelling fairs which came to feature the new mechanical rides alongside wrestlers, snake-women and fortune-tellers, thereby encompassing a clash of times rather than a singular, fleeting time that could be simply opposed to the accumulating time of modernity.

If, then, unlike the traditional travelling fair, fixed-site amusement parks gave a specific embodiment to modernity, they were also unlike their itinerant predecessors in the regulated and ordered manner of their functioning. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the fair had served as the very emblem for the disorderly forms of conduct associated with all sites of popular assembly. By contrast, early sociological assessments of the cultural significance of the amusement park judged that it had succeeded in pacifying the conduct of the crowd to a much greater degree than had the public or benevolent provision of improving or rational recreations.<sup>2</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, then, the emergence of the amusement park had weakened that sense of a rigorous duality between two heterotopias

– the museum and the fair – viewed as embodying antithetical orderings of time and space. However, this situation had been prepared for in the earlier history of international exhibitions which, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, provided for a zone of interaction between the museum and the fair which, while not undoing their separate identities, undermined their seemingly inherent contrariness in involving them, indirectly, in an incessant and multifaceted set of exchanges with one another. If the most immediate inspiration for Coney Island's amusement parks was thus the Midway (or popular fair zone) at Chicago's Columbian Exhibition in 1893, it is no less true that the Chicago Midway was profoundly influenced by museum practices.

The role accorded museum anthropology in harmonizing the representational horizons of the Midway with the ideological theme of progress was especially significant in this respect, albeit that, in the event, traditions of popular showmanship often eclipsed the scientific pretensions of anthropology's claims to rank civilizations in an evolutionary hierarchy. There were, however, many other ways in which (in spite of the efforts to keep them clearly separated) the activities of fairs, museums and exhibitions interacted with one another: the founding collections of many of today's major metropolitan museums were bequeathed by international exhibitions; techniques of crowd control developed in exhibitions influenced the design and layout of amusement parks; and nineteenth-century natural history museums throughout Europe and North America owed many of their specimens to the network of animal collecting agencies through which P.T. Barnum provided live species for his various circuses, menageries and dime museums.

The organizing focus for my concerns in this study is provided by the museum. Indeed, my purpose – or at least a good part of it – has been to provide a politically focused genealogy for the modern public museum. By 'genealogy', I mean an account of the museum's formation and early development that will help to illuminate the co-ordinates within which questions of museum policies and politics have been, and continue to be, posed. As such, this account is envisaged as contributing to a shared enterprise. For there are, now, a number of such histories which aspire to provide accounts of the museum's past that will prove more serviceable in relation to present-day museum debates and practices than those accounts – still dominant in the 1950s – cast in the whiggish mould of the museum's early chroniclers.<sup>3</sup> Where, however, the account offered here most obviously differs from other such endeavours is in its diacritical conception of the tasks a genealogy of the museum might usefully address. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, for example, proposes a genealogy of the museum which concerns itself mainly with transformations in those practices of classification and display – and of the associated changes in subject positions these implied – that are internal to the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1988). By contrast, I shall argue

that the museum's formation needs also to be viewed in relation to the development of a range of collateral cultural institutions, including apparently alien and disconnected ones.

The fair and the exhibition are not, of course, the only candidates for consideration in this respect. If the museum was conceived as distinct from and opposed to the fair, the same was true of the ways in which its relations to other places of popular assembly (and especially the public house) were envisaged. Equally, the museum has undoubtedly been influenced by its relations to cultural institutions which, like the museum itself and like the early international exhibitions, had a rational and improving orientation: libraries and public parks, for example. None the less, a number of characteristics set the museum, international exhibitions and modern fairs apart as a distinctive grouping. Each of these institutions is involved in the practice of 'showing and telling': that is, of exhibiting artefacts and/or persons in a manner calculated to embody and communicate specific cultural meanings and values. They are also institutions which, in being open to all-comers, have shown a similar concern to devise ways of regulating the conduct of their visitors, and to do so, ideally, in ways that are both unobtrusive and self-perpetuating. Finally, in their recognition of the fact that their visitors' experiences are realized via their physical movement through an exhibitionary space, all three institutions have shared a concern to regulate the performative aspects of their visitors' conduct. Overcoming mind/body dualities in treating their visitors as, essentially, 'minds on legs', each, in its different way, is a place for 'organized walking' in which an intended message is communicated in the form of a (more or less) directed itinerary.

None the less, for all their distinctiveness, the changes that can be traced within the practices of these exhibitionary institutions need also to be viewed in their relations to broader developments affecting related cultural institutions. In this regard, my account of the 'birth of the museum' is one in which the focus on the relations between museums, fairs and exhibitions is meant to serve as a device for a broader historical argument whose concern is a transformation in the arrangement of the cultural field over the course of the nineteenth century.

These are the issues engaged with in the chapters comprising Part I. Three questions stand to the fore here. The first concerns the respects in which the public museum exemplified the development of a new 'governmental' relation to culture in which works of high culture were treated as instruments that could be enlisted in new ways for new tasks of social management. This will involve a consideration of the manner in which the museum, in providing a new setting for works of culture, also functioned as a technological environment which allowed cultural artefacts to be refashioned in ways that would facilitate their deployment for new purposes as parts of governmental programmes aimed at reshaping general norms of social behaviour.

In being thus conceived as instruments capable of 'lifting' the cultural level

of the population, nineteenth-century museums were faced with a new problem: how to regulate the conduct of their visitors. Similar difficulties were faced by other nineteenth-century institutions whose function required that they freely admit an undifferentiated mass public: railways, exhibitions, and department stores, for example. The problems of behaviour management this posed drew forth a variety of architectural and technological solutions which, while having their origins in specific institutions, often then migrated to others. The second strand of analysis in Part I thus considers how techniques of behaviour management, developed in museums, exhibitions, and department stores, were later incorporated in amusement parks whose design aimed to transform the fair into a sphere of regulation.

The third set of questions focuses on the space of representation associated with the public museum and on the politics it generates. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault refers to the ambiguous role played by the 'empirico-transcendental doublet of man' in the human sciences: man functions as an *object* made visible by those sciences while also doubling as the *subject* of the knowledges they make available. Man, as Foucault puts it, 'appears in his ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and as a subject that knows; enslaved sovereign, observed spectator' (Foucault 1970: 312). The museum, it will be argued, also constructs man (and the gendered form is, as we shall see, historically appropriate) in a relation of both subject and object to the knowledge it organizes. Its space of representation, constituted in the relations between the disciplines which organize the display frameworks of different types of museum (geology, archaeology, anthropology, etc), posits man – the outcome of evolution – as the object of knowledge. At the same time, this mode of representation constructs for the visitor a position of achieved humanity, situated at the end of evolutionary development, from which man's development, and the subsidiary evolutionary series it subsumes, can be rendered intelligible. There is, however, a tension within this space of representation between the apparent universality of the subject and object of knowledge (man) which it constructs, and the always socially partial and particular ways in which this universality is realized and embodied in museum displays. This tension, it will be suggested, has supplied – and continues to supply – the discursive co-ordinates for the emergence of contemporary museum policies and politics oriented to securing parity of representation for different groups and cultures within the exhibitionary practices of the museum.

If this demand constitutes one of the distinctive aspects of modern political debates relating to the museum, a second consists in the now more or less normative requirement (although one more honoured in theory than in practice) that public museums should be equally accessible to all sections of the population. While this demand is partly inscribed in the conception of the modern museum as a *public* museum, its status has been, and remains, somewhat ambivalent. For it can be asserted in the form of an expectation

that the museum's benevolent and improving influence ought, in the interests of the state or society as a whole, to reach all sections of the population. Or it can be asserted as an inviolable cultural right which all citizens in a democracy are entitled to claim. Something of the tension between these two conceptions is visible in the history of museum visitor statistics. Crude visitor statistics were available from as early as the 1830s, but only in a form which allowed gross visitor numbers to be correlated with days of the week or times of the year. The earliest political use of these figures was to demonstrate the increased numbers visiting in the evenings, bank holidays and – when Sunday opening was permitted – Sundays. Reformers like Francis Place and, later, Thomas Greenwood seized on such figures as evidence of the museum's capacity to carry the improving force of culture to the working classes. This concern with measuring the civilizing influence of the museum is both related to and yet also distinct from a concern with improving access to museums on the grounds of cultural rights – an issue which did not emerge until much later when studies of the demographic profiles of museum visitors demonstrated socially differentiated patterns of use. More to the point, perhaps, if developments in adjacent fields are anything to go by, is that powerful ideological factors militated against the acquisition of information of this type. Edward Edwards, one of the major figures in the public library movement in Britain, thus sternly chastized local public libraries for obtaining information regarding the occupations of their users as being both unauthorized and irrelevant to their purpose.<sup>4</sup>

An adequate account of the history of museum visitor studies has yet to be written. It seems clear, however, that the development of clearly articulated demands for making museums accessible to all sections of the population has been closely related to the development of statistical surveys which have made visible the social composition of the visiting public. The provenance of such studies is, at the earliest, in the 1920s and, for the most part, belongs to the post-war period.<sup>5</sup> Be this as it may, cultural rights principles are now strongly enshrined in relation to public museums and, although dependent on external monitoring devices for their implementation, they have clearly also been fuelled by the internal dynamics of the museum form in its establishment of a public space in which rights are supposed to be universal and undifferentiated.

These, then, are the main issues reviewed in the first part of this study. While each of the three chapters grouped together here has something to say about each of these questions, they differ in their stress and emphasis as well as in their angle of theoretical approach. In the first chapter, 'The Formation of the Museum', the primary theoretical co-ordinates are supplied by Foucault's concept of liberal government. This is drawn on to outline the ways in which museums formed a part of new strategies of governing aimed at producing a citizenry which, rather than needing to be externally and coercively directed, would increasingly monitor and regulate its own conduct.

In the second chapter, 'The Exhibitionary Complex', the stress falls rather on Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power in its application to museums and on the ways in which the insights this generates might usefully be moderated by the perspectives on the rhetorical strategies of power suggested by Gramsci's theory of hegemony. The final chapter in Part I, 'The Political Rationality of the Museum', looks primarily to Foucault again, although to another aspect of his work. Here, Foucault's writings on the prison are treated as a model for an account of the respects in which many aspects of contemporary museum policies and politics have been generated out of the discursive co-ordinates which have governed the museum's formation.

There are, I have suggested, two distinctive political demands that have been generated in relation to the modern museum: the demand that there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within the collecting, exhibition and conservation activities of museums, and the demand that the members of all social groups should have equal practical as well theoretical rights of access to museums. More detailed and specific examples of the kinds of issues generated by these political demands form the subject matter of the second part of this study. If, in Part I, my concern is to trace the conditions which have allowed modern museum policies and politics to emerge and take the shape that they have, the focus in the second part moves to specific engagements with particular contemporary political and policy issues from within the perspectives of what I have called the museum's 'political rationality'.

There is, however, a broadening of focus in this part of the book in that my attention is no longer limited exclusively to public museums. In Chapter 4, 'Museums and "the People"', I consider the competing and contradictory ways in which 'the people' might be represented in the display practices of a broad variety of different types of museum. For the purpose of demonstrating some effective contrasts, my discussion here ranges across the romantic populism that is often associated with the open-air museum form to the social-democratic conceptions of 'the people' which govern many contemporary Australian museum installations. I also evaluate the more radical socialist and feminist conceptions of the forms in which 'the people' might most appropriately be represented by considering the example of Glasgow's peerless People's Palace.

The next chapter, 'Out of Which Past?', broadens the scope of the discussion. It considers the respects in which the demand for forms of representing the past that are appropriate to the interests and values of different groups in the community can be extended beyond the public museum. This demand can encompass heritage sites just as it can be applied to the picture of the past that emerges from the entire array of museums and heritage sites in a particular society. In the final chapter in Part II, however, the focus returns to the public museum, especially the public art gallery.

Drawing on the arguments of Pierre Bourdieu, 'Art and Theory: The Politics of the Invisible' explores the relationship between the display practices of art galleries and the patterns of their social usage. Art galleries, it is suggested, remain the least publicly accessible of all public collecting institutions. This is largely because of their continuing commitment to display principles which entail that the order subtending the art on display remains invisible and unintelligible to those not already equipped with the appropriate cultural skills. Such an entrenched position now seems increasingly wilful as notions of access and equity come to permeate all domains of culture and to legitimate public expenditure in such domains.

In the final part of the book, my attention returns to museums, fairs and exhibitions, and to the relations between them. These, however, are now broached from a different perspective. Here, I consider the different ways in which, in their late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century formation, museums, fairs and exhibitions functioned as technologies of progress. The notion is not a new one. Indeed, it was quite common at the time for museums and the like to be referred to as 'machines for progress'. Such metaphors, I shall argue, were by no means misplaced. Viewed as cultural technologies which achieve their effectiveness through the articulated combination of the representations, routines and regulations of which they are comprised, museums, fairs and exhibitions do indeed have a machine-like aspect to their conception and functioning. The elaboration of this argument, however, involves a shift of perspective. It requires that we consider not merely how progress is represented in each of these institutions – for this is fairly familiar ground – but also the different ways in which those representations were organized as performative resources which programmed visitors' behaviour as well as their cognitive horizons. This will involve viewing such representations of progress as props which the visitor might utilize for particular forms of self-development – evolutionary exercises of the self – rather than solely as parts of textual regimes whose influence is of a rhetorical or ideological nature.

Chapter 7, 'Museums and Progress: Narrative, Ideology, Performance' opens the argument in reviewing a variety of the different ways in which the layout of late nineteenth-century natural history, ethnology and anatomy collections was calculated so as to allow the visitor to retread the paths of evolutionary development which led from simple to more complex forms of life. This argument is exemplified by considering how the Pitt-Rivers typological system for the display of 'savage' peoples and their artefacts constituted a 'progressive machinery' which, in seeking to promote progress, sought also to limit and direct it. There then follows a consideration of the respects in which the evolutionary narratives and itineraries of nineteenth-century museums were gendered in their structure as well as in the performative possibilities to which they gave rise.

The next chapter, 'The Shaping of Things to Come: Expo '88', considers

how the form of the international exhibition has developed to provide an environment in which the visitor is invited to undertake an incessant updating or modernizing of the self. In applying this perspective to Brisbane's Expo '88, this chapter also considers the ways in which rhetorics of progress combined with those of the nation and of the city to provide a complexly organized environment that was open to – indeed, designed for – many different kinds of social performance. Finally, in Chapter 9, 'A Thousand and One Troubles: Blackpool Pleasure Beach', my attention turns to the ways in which rhetorics of progress can saturate the environment of a whole town, but paying special regard to Blackpool's fair – the Pleasure Beach – where progress is encoded into the pleasurable performances that the fairgoer is expected to undertake. However, this detailed case-study of a modern amusement park serves a further purpose in graphically illustrating the respects in which the modernization and streamlining of pleasure associated with the contemporary fair draw on the modernizing rhetorics and technologies of museums and exhibitions.

This final chapter also introduces a qualification which it might be useful to mention at the outset. My concern in this book is largely with museums, fairs and exhibitions as envisaged in the plans and projections of their advocates, designers, directors and managers. The degree to which such plans and projections were and are successful in organizing and framing the experience of the visitor or, to the contrary, the degree to which such planned effects are evaded, side-stepped or simply not noticed raises different questions which, important though they are, I have not addressed here.

I have already mentioned some of the theoretical sources I have drawn on in preparing this study. The work of Foucault, in its various forms and interpretations, has been important to me as has been that of Gramsci, although I have been aware – and have not sought to disguise – the often awkward and uneasy tension that exists between these. It is perhaps worth adding that, as it has developed, the tendency of my work in this area has inclined more towards the Foucaultian than the Gramscian paradigm.

Pierre Bourdieu's work has also been invaluable for the light it throws on the contradictory dynamics of the museum, and especially the art gallery. While the gallery is theoretically a public institution open to all, it has typically been appropriated by ruling elites as a key symbolic site for those performances of 'distinction' through which the *cognoscenti* differentiate themselves from 'the masses'. Jurgen Habermas's historical arguments regarding the formation of the bourgeois public sphere have been helpful, too, although I have been careful to extricate these from Habermas's dialectical expectation that such a public sphere anticipates a more ideal speech situation into which history has yet to deliver us. Equally important, if not more so, have been the significant feminist re-thinkings of the notion of the public sphere, and of the public-private divide more generally, offered by Joan Landes, Carole Pateman and Mary Ryan. Finally, Krzysztof Pomian's

work has been helpful in suggesting how collections might usefully be distinguished from one another in terms of the different kinds of contract they establish between the spheres of the visible and invisible.

My use of this fairly diverse set of theoretical resources has been largely pragmatic in orientation. While I have not sought to deny or repress important theoretical differences where these have been relevant to my concerns, resolving such questions has not been my purpose in this book. For the most part, I have simply drawn selectively on different aspects of these theoretical traditions as has seemed most appropriate in relation to the specific issues under discussion.

For all that this is an academic book motivated by a particular set of intellectual interests, I doubt that I should have finished it had I not had a fairly strong personal interest in its subject matter. While biographical factors are usually best left unsaid, there may be some point, in this case, in dwelling briefly on the personal interests and investments which have helped to sustain my interests in the issues this book explores. In *The Sacred Grove*, Dillon Ripley informs the reader that his philosophy of museums was established when, at the age of ten, he spent a winter in Paris:

One of the advantages of playing in the Tuileries Gardens as a child was that at any one moment one could be riding the carousel, hoping against hope to catch the ring. The next instant one might be off wandering the paths among the chestnuts and the plane trees, looking for the old woman who sold *gaufres*, those wonderful hot wafer-thin, wafflelike creations dusted over with powdered sugar. A third instant in time, and there was the Punch and Judy show, mirror of life, now comic, now sad. Another moment and one could wander into one of the galleries at the Louvre. . . . Then out to the garden again where there was a patch of sand in a corner to build sand castles. Then back to the Louvre to wander through the Grand Gallery.

(Ripley 1978: 140)

The philosophy Ripley derived from this experience was that there was, and should be, no essential differences between the learning environment of the museum and the world of fun and games; one should be able to move naturally between the two. For a bourgeois boy, such an effortless transition between the museum and a gentrified selection of fairground pleasures would, no doubt, have proved possible. My own experience – and I expect it is rather more typical – was different. For me, the fair came before the museum, and by a good many years. And the fair in all its forms: the travelling fairs that set up camp in Lancashire's towns during their wakes-weeks holidays; Manchester's permanent amusement park, Belle Vue, where my father taught me the white-knuckle art of riding the bone-shaking Bobs; and Blackpool's Pleasure Beach which I visited many times as a child and as a teenager before returning to it later in life as an object of study. When, in my early adulthood,

## INTRODUCTION

I began to explore the world of museums and art galleries, it was not with a sense of an effortless transition such as Ripley describes; it was, to the contrary, part of a cultural itinerary, travelled with some reluctance, which required a familiarity with a new *habitus* in order to feel in any way at home in such institutions. Equally, however, for the reasons I have already alluded to, going to fairs and visiting museums or exhibitions have always struck me as in some way related activities.

Writing this book, then, has served as a means of trying to account for the experience of 'different but similar' which I still have when visiting either fairs or museums. Its ambition, however, is to explain these similarities and differences in terms of historical processes of cultural formation rather than as than personal idiosyncracies.