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Simulating the past

During the 1970s and 1980s there was a remarkable expansion in sites which purported to be representations of the past. This might be termed the 'heritage boom'. For our purposes the 'heritage boom' includes open-air museums, heritage centres which often employed new technologies to produce multi-media experiences, and certain established museums which decided to adopt some of the representational techniques developed by heritage attractions. This chapter will consider some examples of such representations, as well as their origins.

A key characteristic of many of these developments was the trend towards the promotion of heritage 'experiences', experiences produced through an often inspiring combination of sight, sound, and smell media. These media were of course expensive to develop and maintain. This expense thus gave rise to the concomitant trend towards automatic and sometimes excessive admission charges. Combined, these developments, along with restricted public finance for museums and the arts in general, led to the development of corporate images, and extensive advertisement campaigns. Such corporate images are epitomized by the Imperial War Museum's logo – the 'M' constructed by search lights, which won a prize for its originality – and the Museum of London's logo – Dick Whittington and his cat. These are all trends which characterize the placing of 'the past' in the market, and the need to make its representation more exciting if the past is to make money. It should not be forgotten, however, that many of these developments were prompted by a wider realization that many museum displays were in fact quite dull and uninformative.

The developments of the 1970s and 1980s should be seen in their historical contexts. Many of the new representations have progenitors with origins in the nineteenth century. The more recent expansion of such representations should be considered as another part of the intensification of the (post-)modern experience.

Early forms of heritage representation

Criticisms that are levelled at so-called heritage representations should not be taken as implying that museums are beyond criticism. The concern here is with certain forms of representation which some have considered to be a welcome departure from the orthodox museum, whilst others have been highly critical of most, if not all, forms of such heritage representation.

Robert Hewison, in his book *The Heritage Industry, Britain in a Climate of Decline*, concentrated on what some refer to as open-air museums (Hewison 1987). Such museums include Iron Bridge, Beamish, Wigan Pier, the various folk-life museums, and in the US, places such as Colonial Williamsburg and Greenfield Village. Although Hewison was correct to show how the expansion of heritage occurred in Britain within a climate of economic decline, there were in fact a number of other factors which influenced the expansion of heritage during the 1980s.

The folk-life and open-air museums, which are the obvious predecessors of many heritage attractions, have existed, as a form, for over one hundred years. A folk-life museum can be defined as a museum which is concerned to represent the everyday life of working people, and more often than not, rural people. In many cases such museums developed in open-air sites, and successfully catered for the growing demand for rural and historical 'experiences'. Folk-life collections have not been entirely presented in open-air museums. As traditional, indoor museums became aware of their success, they too moved towards re-creations of historic environments. The main difference between the indoor and outdoor types of re-creation, is that the open-air museums became notable for their use of 'living-history' methods of interpretation.

Proto-heritage: folk-life museums

The open-air, folk-life museums first developed in Scandinavia, as a response to the perceived threat of the Industrial Revolution, and its impact on traditional rural lifestyles. The first open-air museums were originally conceived during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The first museum of this genre had its roots in the Museum of Scandinavian Folklore, opened by Artur Hazelius in 1873. As his collection expanded he managed to acquire a 75-acre site, and the outdoor museum opened in 1891. As with the more recent outdoor museums such as Beamish (Co. Durham, England), the collections included buildings from different places and different periods.

Hazelius' desire was 'to use the idea of heritage and understanding of the

past as a steadying influence in the face of violent changes of modern life' (Alexander 1979: 85). The trend towards folk-life museums continued in Scandinavia, one example being the Danish National Museum which opened in 1901. This again consisted of a collection of rural buildings in a 90-acre park.

The folk-life genre took hold overseas also, especially in the United States. Colonial Williamsburg was founded in 1926 as an attempt 'to bring the colonial capital back to life' (ibid.: 91). The first outdoor museum in the US to be based on the Scandinavian model was the Greenfield Village at Dearborn, Michigan. This site, created by Henry Ford, contained

a traditional New England green with church, town hall, courthouse, post office, and general store; the Scotch Settlement schoolhouse Ford attended as a boy; the Plymouth, Michigan, carding mill to which Ford's father took wool; Noah Webster's house; William Holmes McGuffey's Pennsylvania log-cabin birthplace; a 500-ton stone Cotswold Cottage; and the Sir John Bennet jewellery shop from Cheapside, London, with its clock graced by statues of Gog and Magog.

(ibid.: 92-3)

This list reveals a certain magpie proclivity, and indeed, this manifest bricolage, the creation of a mythical place based on the whims and dreams of the world's greatest capitalist, could be viewed in retrospect as a prophecy of post-modern heritage.

Sponsorship of open-air museums by successful entrepreneurs was not unusual in the US. As well as Ford's Greenfield, Colonial Williamsburg was sponsored by John D. Rockefeller. The Wells brothers, of the American Optical Company, sponsored Old Sturbridge Village (Leon and Piatt 1989: 65). It should not be surprising then that such establishments may not be inclined to be critical of the socio-economic system which established them.

Rockefeller alone contributed 79 million dollars for the development of Colonial Williamsburg, a development which included the destruction of more than 700 post-1790 buildings in order to fabricate the late eighteenth-century ambience. From its very beginnings, Colonial Williamsburg, along with Greenfield, was constructed as an artificial place: 'Williamsburg helped enshrine the colonial era as one especially appropriate to museum restoration projects' (ibid.: 67).

There is no doubt that such places do act as 'breathing spaces' in the (post-)modern world, which for many makes increasing demands on their

stamina. In many open-air museums there is an emphasis on vernacular forms of industry. As discussed in chapters one and four, modern economic systems have increasingly removed people from the processes of production. More so now, in an age of information technology, than ever before, there is 'something comforting and appealing in seeing a broom, chair, blanket, or iron created by the skilled hands of the patient crafts-person. To many visitors, such demonstrations symbolized what was lost in the transition to the modern urban-industrial world and infused living-history museums with a nostalgic atmosphere' (ibid.: 67).

The earlier success of many open-air museums acted, in part, as the prompt for Walt Disney's first theme park development. There is no doubt that the development of many heritage attractions owes a great deal to Disney, both in terms of the media employed, and the style and systems of organization developed in the Disney parks. Many heritage attractions are often considered as striving to attain the 'Disney effect' – sites of fantastic spectacle, with an emphasis on titillation, rather than education. In fact, in terms of the genealogy of these different media, Disneyland could be considered as the younger cousin of the open-air museum, and the auntie of the modern-day heritage centre. However, a clear chronological account of heritage is difficult.

Disneyland was opened in 1955, and contained a number of 'history-flavoured entertainments' (Wallace 1989: 159). Disney may have been influenced by the successes of the early open-air museums, such as Greenfield and Williamsburg. As with the open-air museums discussed previously, a theme that is peddled by the heritage attraction, and was in Disneyland, is the trip back in time.

One of the main attractions at Disneyland is Main Street, which, 'ostensibly, is grounded in historic reality. It was fashioned we are told, out of Disney's recollections of his turn-of-the-century boyhood in Marceline, Missouri' (ibid.: 161). The official Disney historians have actually confessed that the recreated Main Street, 'was quite unlike the Main Streets of yester-year' (Disney official history, quoted in Wallace 1989: 161).

Both Disneyland and the vast majority of open-air museums produce representations of life-styles that are devoid of conflict and antisocial behaviour, and exist within a calming rural landscape. Leon and Piatt argue that the cost of developing an industrial open-air museum means that pre-industrial agrarian bias will dominate this genre (Leon and Piatt 1989: 72). However, in Britain, attempts have been made to represent industrial society through the form of the open-air museum. The most obvious example is Beamish; even here, however, the bucolic spirit is in no way dispensed with. In fact the site is advertised as being set within

'200 acres of woodland and rolling countryside' (Beamish Museum 1990a). The rural idyll arbitrates in an historical representation, which should, at least in part, be concerned with squalor and a degree of adversity in life at which most of us today would balk.

Beamish is a collection of buildings and objects from all over the north-east of England. The 'town' comprises six late Georgian houses from Gateshead, the Victorian park is from another part of Gateshead, the Co-operative shop is from Anfield Plain to the east of Consett, the Sun Inn public house is from Bishop Auckland. In fact, the various buildings have come from an area of about 400 square miles, and some of the farm buildings have their provenance even further afield.

It is claimed that open-air museums are in fact a radical departure from more orthodox museums. It is often declared that they 'bring the past to life'. There is no doubt that as entertainments, as sites of spectacle consumption, many such tourist-spaces can be considered as successful, especially if crude marketing criteria are applied.

A common complaint made of museums is that they are imposing, and that they articulate power through the imposition of varying forms of private, or excluded, space. The cabinet is enclosed and removed from the visitor and certain areas of the museum are off-limits to the public. Open-air museums, it is claimed, have changed all this. This is not so. One of the most confusing characteristics of Beamish is not knowing where one can, and can not look. Some signs around Beamish are 'heritage signs'—signs from the past, which constitute a part of the display. Other signs are modern, in that they convey information which is necessary for the organization and control of the museum. Buildings which appear to be part of the museum turn out to be locked and 'No Admittance' notices turn out to be 'real'. This is certainly the case with the Heapstead building at the colliery. The entire site is replete with contextless objects without labelling. Of course, in order for the place to be promoted as 'the real thing', labelling would itself be incongruous to this end. However, if the visit is to be a learning experience, and no guides are available, the visitor is left to admire the 'thinginess' of the object for itself. To understand, or appreciate the site, a certain amount of cultural competence is required. The museum relies heavily on the promotion of selective memory or nostalgia.

The site is successful because the visitor is placed in an environment of nostalgia-arousal: 'The past went that-a-way. When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavour of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future' (McLuhan, Fiore and

Agel 1967: 74–5). Most of the buildings, objects, advertisements etc. were extant long after the period in which the museum is supposedly set. The visitor participates and promotes the nostalgia effect: 'that's just like the iron we used to have!', or, 'this living room looks exactly the same as Grandma's!'. There are of course multiple contexts of reception. Each exhibit, or re-creation, is reinterpreted in different ways by different people. Those visitors who have worked in mines will doubtless remember the less representable aspects of industrial life – the danger, the unemployment, and the fact that their village was not set in idyllic, rolling rural surroundings between two farms. Such representations are occasions of partial recall. The most dangerous consequence of this type of museum is its effect on those who can not remember. For them, their nostalgia is often second-hand. Their parents or grandparents can pass on their own nostalgia, and before long, a generation will exist whose heritage lies with the heritage industry. The consequence of this form of mediation through an emphasis on historical surfaces, set within the eulogized, and almost universally desired, rural idyll, 'is that the story of industrial development in the north-east, rather than being told as one of ruptures, conflicts, and transformations, emerges as a process that is essentially continuous with the deeper and longer history of the countryside in which the power of the bourgeoisie has become naturalized' (Bennett 1988: 69).

The exploration of nostalgia is not necessarily a bad thing; people's emotional attachment to that which they remember is of paramount importance. This natural interest in the past should however be used as a kind of preface to a more critical engagement with the past and its links with, or contingency on, the present.

This idea of historical processes directly affecting the present is something which will be negated, or perhaps even lost once Beamish concentrates on one specific year: 1913. For most of its existence the Beamish buildings represented a period from the 1790s to the 1930s, and the interpretation concentrates on the period from about 1890 through to the 1930s. Beamish does not, however, attempt explicitly to impose the idea that the created place is in fact a unified place. Each different area of the museum represents a different aspect of the 'regional heritage': the middle-class town, the working mine and cottages, and the rural economy. In a way, Beamish is meant to be a microcosm of the north-east, rather than a specific place. Also, it does actually make an attempt to represent historical process in some form, most obviously in the miners' cottages. Each cottage is representative of a different decade, ranging from the 1890s to the late 1930s. However, this is about to change (1990/1); a decision has been made to place the entire site in the year 1913, the most productive year in the history of north-east England's industry, and the year of greatest coal production nationally. It might be asked, why was the year of the

General Strike, 1926, not chosen? It is as if the directors feel that Beamish has become accepted as an artificial place, and that any representation of historical process is no longer necessary. Thus the creation of an artificial and isolated place, removed from the everyday experience of process through time and space, is now acceptable to the visitor. More so than ever before, Beamish will exist as a fantasy island, taking 'time out' from history.

By the end of the 1980s there were nearly 500 museums which contained industrial material; about a third of these had been established since 1970. The presentation of industrial heritage has become a celebration of an escaped and completed past. The industrial 'experience' as served up at Beamish and Ironbridge serves not only to beautify an often terrifying past, but also to promote its relegation into a more distant past. This relegation is cultivated through the removal of the industrial heritage from real places and its re-placement into those which are artificial.

Perhaps more disconcerting than many of the open-air museums are attractions like Littlecote, 'The Land that's Trapped in Time', which opened in 1986 and closed in 1990, reportedly to be replaced by a golf course and a 90-bed hotel with conference facilities.

Such attractions fall into an almost undefinable category; they are not theme parks, in the Disneyland or Alton Towers mould, neither can they be considered didactic experiences. Littlecote was bricolage at its most extreme. The public were offered a Roman villa and mosaic where they could 'imagine the life led by these 4th century colonists' (Littlecote publicity leaflet). We might question the use of the word 'colonists'. At Littlecote the visitor was also invited to experience, 'lusty knights do combat with lance, sword and mace. And when stillness falls, magnificent falcons soar high in the skies to swoop at man's command'. Following this the visitor was then invited to go on to witness 'The Splendour of the Tudors' at Littlecote mansion. After this, they could move on to the Civil War, and witness the waxwork protagonists 'held in time'. Meanwhile, life goes on at Littlecote as 'craftsmen ply their trades in the village street - selling their wares to passers-by' (ibid.). The penultimate potential time-trip was then a visit to Fort Littlecote, where the struggle between red-coated soldiers and Red Indians is 'echoed'. Finally, 'from the romantic age of steam, the Trans-Littlecote Steam Railway crosses the length of the land' (ibid.). Littlecote was little more than a series of representations of sets from *Dr Who*, or the *Time Tunnel*. However, such sites should be taken seriously, as for some people they may have been the nearest they get to learning about the past. This should especially be the case, as in 1987 Littlecote won the British Tourist Authority's prize for the best commercial tourist attraction.

Empathy and first-person interpretation

The heritage spectacle, which is responsible for the numbing of our historical sensibilities, does so through a combination of different media. Common to many heritage representations is the idea of empathy, a promotion of the idea that we can travel back to the past.

The early open-air museums tended to opt for third-person interpretation, where there was no pretence, and history was interpreted as those traces of past societies which exist in the present only. But, 'Over time, a different interpretive style, first-person interpretation, developed. Its roots were partly in the theatre, but it also emerged naturally, and sometimes unwittingly, from the conversations staff members had with visitors, especially in craft shops' (Leon and Piatt 1989: 86). The quest for accuracy, and thus true empathy, reached its probable limits at the Plymouth Plantation, where the actor-interpreters were trained to speak, not only in the first-person, but also in the dialects which existed in the early seventeenth century. The staff were now considered as informants, and the visitors, interpreters. For many visitors this method of presentation proved daunting: the actors' use of strange speech and their refusal to acknowledge anything after 1627 was also disconcerting (ibid.: 88).

Part of the revision at Beamish open-air museum will also include a move from third-person to first-person interpretation. First-person interpretation is no new thing in Britain, and some places go to extreme lengths to produce the 'authentic' experience. At Kentwell Hall, Suffolk, each year, the owners recruit some 200 volunteers to dress up and pretend to be Tudor folk. The owner of Kentwell claimed that he wished 'to know everything about the daily lives of people of all stations of life'. He also asserted that it is possible to illustrate daily life to all of the senses: 'You can see and touch clothes as they were in XVIth century, you can eat Tudor food, you can listen to Tudor speech patterns, songs and music, use Tudor tools, walk around Tudor buildings, smell Tudor herbs'. Luckily for the author he happens to live at Kentwell. He tells us that he is surrounded by open countryside 'and nothing from the 20th century obtrudes' (Phillips 1984: 10).

The re-creation takes place in some of the buildings around the manor. The 200 volunteers take on jobs that would have been going on, in and around the area. 'We strive for authenticity in all we do and to eliminate anachronisms'. The re-creation is aimed at school-children. Phillips tells us that, 'Few boys between, say, 12 and 16 have no interest in seeing, say, armour being made or a plumber making lead. Most girls are sufficiently interested in cooking, baking, spinning, sewing etc. to want to see how it was done previously without modern aids' (ibid.: 10).

This type of re-creation is clearly very popular with the 20,000 school-children visiting per season. But, popularity is not an acceptable criterion alone for judging such a representation. When considering such an attempt at empathetic re-creation, we need to consider the degree to which any kind of empathy is possible. In fact it is quite clear that this kind of unquestioning empathy can be dangerous. As noted above, the director of the Kentwell project seemed to have no qualms over the presentation and promotion of sexual stereotypes. The whole approach falls short of competent history, which should be concerned with the contrasting of the past with the present. It should surely look for links that are common to different historical periods, and reveal and throw into sharp relief the injustices that once existed, and those which may be still there, but in a different form. The inequity of a patriarchal society is one of these links or themes.

At a fundamental level, the desire to escape the present, and the experiences of modernity and post-modernity, should not surprise us. But it is the promotion of empathy, and its concomitant denial that the past, and places, exist in the present, which is in part responsible for the destruction of a sense of place. The promotion of the idea that we can travel back in time implies that the 'expert', or providers of heritage, 'know' the past, and therefore, belies the fact that all our pasts are constructed in the present. Even if a time traveller could witness events in history first hand, they would not know, or understand the past – it would be merely one person's perception of that event. A member of Tsar Nicholas II's family would quite likely perceive the events in Russia in 1917 differently from a member of Lenin's family, if they were to both travel back to that time and space. (For an extensive discussion of the idea of history, empathy, and time travel, see Lowenthal 1985: chapter one.)

Another form of empathetic re-creation is the mock battle, or historical re-enactment. Such events have been staged for many years, but, as with the heritage industry, the last decade or so has seen an increase in demand for their services.

Each summer, English Heritage organizes an extensive programme of special events. In 1989 49 per cent of events were military. These events were a mixture of Medieval combat, 155 mm howitzer salutes, Fort Cumberland guard displays and American Civil War living-history garisons, and many more.

The Chief Executive of English Heritage has argued that these events are a 'taster', and that they invite people to investigate further these aspects of English history. In fact it may be considered that these events are nothing but mere titillation, meaningless amateur dramatics promoting

the post-modern simulacrum, a hazy image of a manipulated and trivialized past. The most ridiculous was the American Civil War garrison at Fort Brockhurst, Hampshire. This along with the 'Napoleonic battle spectacular' with music by Hautbois, is what some would ascribe as the quintessential post-modern ferment. History is decontextualized and mixed with non-history in a promotion of pastiche. English Heritage has argued that because these so-called re-creations are popular, that makes them acceptable. Popularity is hardly any guarantee of its own quality, as any inspection of newspaper sales will testify.

Discussion

Common to these forms of heritage representation is a certain form of artificiality – not just an artificiality caused by the fact that some of them do not, or can not employ real buildings or artefacts in their 'real' locations, but one that is based on the construction of 'unreal' places. What Disneyland and many contemporary heritage attractions do, is to use images from the past to create a spectacle, an environment that is different, but to a certain extent remains familiar and safe. Such attractions vary enormously in their emphasis on the education/entertainment ratio. There are the Disneylands, the Alton Towers, the Camelots and the American Adventures, which, like post-modern architecture, are concerned with imagineering [sic] projects in their most basic form – the development of an environment constructed through historical surfaces, a context of superficial spectacle-consumption and entertainment. These in their own way contribute to our historical amnesia through a quotation, or rather, a misquotation, of historical styles, and the creation of artificial places, and they therefore merely compound the historical mélange established by the conservation bodies and post-modern architectures considered in the previous chapter.

The heritage site is often a spurious simulacrum; Beamish, Greenfield Village, and, to a certain extent, Colonial Williamsburg, are artificial places, in that they are constituted by buildings and artefacts from a number of different places and different times. Unlike real places these heritage environments are not historic environments which have developed 'naturally' over time as the town, village or city has developed. Heritage sites are constructed as 'time capsules' severed from history, islands of mediated image, sites of out-of-town heritage shopping. These life-sized 'time capsules' need to be considered carefully. In many ways they represent a form of historical bricolage, a melting pot for historical memories. So many places and so many times represented in a contrived place, may in fact contribute to a sense of historical amnesia, rather than the desired aim of maintaining a sense of the past, or tradition.

This trend towards the creation of artificial heritage space is well represented at Beamish, and has been discussed frequently (Bennett 1988; Shanks and Tilley 1987: 83–6). Such places are literally on a road to nowhere. Part of the display at Beamish includes old road signs which point to places in the north-east, but the signs point in the wrong direction, and obviously, display the incorrect distance; thus Beamish is located in a mythological map of the mind, and exists only in a form of hyperspace – abstract space which is unmapable. This contrivance encourages a universal sigh of relief from those who witnessed these processes of industrial capital. And for those of us who were not there, we can say, ‘well, it wasn’t that bad was it?’ We can then return to lives in the service sector, and happily forget that the processes of industrial capital have been moved to the Third World. The relegation of heavy industry into a dim and distant heritage-past is an element of the wider attempt to dislocate us from historical processes and de-politicize the past.

Artifice and the denial of the contingency of the past on real places is also promoted by those sites which attempt empathetic representations. Empathy or first-person interpretation denies the existence of history as process, which moves from the past through the present and into the future. It promotes synchronous pasts, where all our pasts exist as assets to be stripped and exploited purely for their surfaces. First-person interpretation often prevents the interpreter from considering historical and archaeological explanations which post-date the period which they are supposed to be acting within. This mechanism permits the heritage marketers to stave off the more radical and investigative debates that have taken place in more recent years. In short, the idea of time travel, or empathy, is one of the most dangerous and anti-critical modes of representation available, and if used at all, it should only be employed as one technique amongst many.

The recreated event also achieves a similar effect. Many such events may contribute to the destruction of place. More often than not the events will not depict occurrences from the past of the locality being used, but there will be, perhaps, a set piece, an imaginary battle that moves from one locality to another each weekend. As mentioned above, an example which symbolizes this problem is the appearance of the American Civil War garrison at Fort Brockhurst, near Portsmouth, Hampshire, England. The historical identity of such a place is eroded by the placeless mock battles and re-creations that occur all over the country. Such ‘re-creations’ of history are acted out in places that have little or no connection with the events depicted, and sometimes the re-creations are in fact completely spurious. Such living-history events do nothing but promote a sense of schizophrenic place.

A place will have its ‘true’ identity based upon its perceived historical position, constructed through the perceptions and understandings of people who live in and know that place. But today places are subjected to the whims of marketing directors, who have little or no real knowledge of them. Visitors will come from miles around to witness the destruction of place, through the acting out of events that have had no part in its construction.

In many cases of post-modern heritage, the emphasis has been on recreation through technical artifice. Many such representations have repressed a sense of place, as much as they have encouraged a nostalgia for a less frenetic world.

Heritage centres

As well as the increased demand for the outdoor historical spectacle, there has also been a burgeoning of the indoor heritage attraction. Such attractions should not be considered as a dramatic departure from more traditional museums. The heritage centre usually attempts to represent some part of a place’s past through more ‘post-modern’ media: sound, light, smell, and even heat. A heritage centre may in fact employ didactic methods which are quite similar to those found in many museums; there is an emphasis on the use of objects, or replicas of objects. This is usually combined with some form of narrative, either written, or played over a sound system of some sort. However, most heritage centres tend to concentrate on one specific theme of a place’s past, often a theme which is in part mythological, or a theme which can at best be described as pseudo-historic. Also, the heritage attraction tends to emphasize its medium of representation, or the spectacle that it has to offer. Often this seems to be more eminent than the historical event or message. The medium of representation has become all important in a marketing niche where entertainment has often drowned out the educational aspects of the representation. This trend has been such an important one that many museums, in order to compete with such attractions, have felt that they too should adopt similar representational strategies.

The emphasis on spectacle, rather than education, is not a new phenomenon. There has always been a fundamental problem in knowing when the entertainment stops, and the education starts. That is not to say that the two are necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather, that there is a clear problem with the medium of representation ‘drowning out’ the intended educational information, where the medium becomes the *massage* [sic]. The heritage centre’s emphasis on the spectacle is not a new departure;

the 'heritage', or chronology, of (post-)modern heritage is not straight forward, and goes back much further than Disney.

Charles Wilson Peale, the creator of the Philadelphia Museum in the early nineteenth century, attempted to place objects in their contexts by locating them in front of painted backgrounds, representations of the natural settings of the animal or object. 'For a time, he employed "Moving Pictures" (or "Perspective Views with Changeable Effects"), experiments in light, sound, and clockwork motion, offering his visitors views of nature, technology, naval battle, and scenes from Milton's *Paradise Lost*' (Kulik 1989: 5).

A lesson for modern museums lies in the fact that after Peale's death in 1827, the museum failed to raise public funds, and 'was incorporated as a joint stock company' (ibid.: 5). Profit, now a prerequisite for the museum's survival, led to live animal shows, 'to Siamese twins, to the "Virginia Dwarfs," to the "Big Children" (two large unfortunate girls from Poughkeepsie), to the "Belgian giant" and the "Automation Musical Lady"' (ibid.: 5). The museum became the property of P. T. Barnum in 1850. Barnum 'blurred the boundaries between museums and carnival sideshows, between the theatre and the circus, between the real and the contrived' (ibid.: 5). Also, a Panorama Craze developed towards the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries in both Europe and America. The diorama was developed in 1823 by Louis J. M. Daguerre and Charles Marie Bouton. This type of diorama consisted of a painted gauze and moving lights; these combined could change scenes and give the impression of movement. According to Alexander, 'No more spectacular panorama ever existed than Colonel Jean-Charles Langlois's *Battle of Navarino*, shown in the Champs Elysées Rotunda in 1830' (Alexander 1979: 82). This spectacle included wax representations of dying sailors and sound effects. We must question the assumption that the society of the post-modern spectacle developed after World War II.

The heritage centre developments of the late twentieth century were not radically new developments, but as with many post-modern phenomena, they represented an intensification and expansion of a medium.

An example of a heritage venture which combined the use of the ultra modern technological experience with the promotion of a 'traditional' heritage was Royal Britain, a heritage centre adjacent to the Barbican centre in London.

The message of Royal Britain was undoubtedly patriotic. The 'story' was concerned to highlight 'The colourful personalities and exploits of Britain's Kings and Queens' (Royal Britain 1989: 1). The media employed

included life-size reconstructions of building interiors, music, recorded voices, lighting effects, projectors and life-size manikins of the Royals. According to the owners, the exhibition used 'the most up to date technological magic to bring to life the "feel" of each period' (ibid.: 1). However, this attraction was one of the few notable heritage failures, and was closed in 1990.

In many ways Royal Britain gave much of the information that many visitors would have demanded. This included the genealogy of the various royal families, their most famous exploits, who was doing what to whom, and how they were doing it, and what were their little quirks. For example we were told that William I's favourite punishment was to have his enemies' hands and feet chopped off. Such facets of certain Royal's characters were represented through 'witty' cartoons. The murder of Edward the Martyr (975-9) by Elfrida his stepmother, was one such cartoon. We are told how Henry I snored loudly, and that Stephen (1135-54) had piles. It is good to know they were human, but no such tales were told of the current incumbents.

Royal Britain was essentially an uncritical multi-media experience. Uncritical because it failed to ask questions; it never challenged the actions of some of the more dubious rulers. There was some problem solving: the visitor was asked to vote on the innocence or guilt of Richard III (1483-5), and to declare 'true or false' as to the fate of each of Henry VIII's (1509-47) wives. Were they divorced, or beheaded, did they die young or survive him? Royal Britain represented the royal past as characterized by continuous success and glory, 'Warrior, saint, diplomat, law-giver, crusader, statesman [sic], peace-maker and symbol of unity. Over the last thousand years the British sovereign has been all of these and more' (ibid.: 53); the 'more' might have been considered with greater reflection!

Possibly the reason for the failure of Royal Britain was that it was a post-modern media representation of something which could be experienced for 'real' at Westminster Abbey. Also, such a crass commercialization of what is undoubtedly a much-respected and revered institution was perhaps not what visitors wanted.

Another heritage centre which is concerned to represent the history of another 'safe' and revered institution is situated in Oxford, England. The Oxford Story, produced by Heritage Projects Limited, most famous for the Jorvik Viking centre in York, purports to 'present the history of Oxford University. Seated at a moving desk the visitor is taken on a circuit, through a series of exhibits which contain life-size manikins of teachers and students at work and play throughout the history of the University. The great historic smells of this austere institution are also

an important element of this representation. The Oxford Story is a trip through time; 'Space travel is an invention of our century, time travel is always possible because human beings have an imagination' (Oxford Story narration). At least here there is an emphasis on the imagination, but the emphasis is still on the possibility of 'knowing the past' through empathy.

The admiration of the University as a venerable institution is the dominant message of The Oxford Story. The University is described as 'a place where our most able young men and women come for the training of their minds' (ibid.). It concerns itself with informing the general public that such an institution has a monopoly on producing the good and the great from Roger Bacon to Margaret Thatcher. The University is treated in isolation, a temple of excellence removed from the rest of the world. Oxford in the eighteenth century was 'a peaceful backwater', and this period was, 'a time of relaxation' (ibid.). Entire historical periods are summed up in throwaway epithets, such as, the medieval period being 'an energetic but violent age... due to too much beer' (ibid.). Again, there is a denial that place is constructed through time, and under the influences of other places. The most worrying aspect of The Oxford Story is that the representation even denies the existence of the surrounding city. The most notable exception to this is the recalling of St Scholastica's Day: in 1355, a riot took place, a consequence of 'friction' between the town and the University. The friendly voice of our narrator, Sir Alec Guinness, informs the time traveller, that as a punishment for this, the citizens had to pay a fine every year for five centuries. It does not mention that 63 people were killed. We are not really told who was to blame for the riot, but the narration implies that the University was wronged, and thus, the town's people were justly fined.

The treatment of places in isolation is typical of much heritage. The Oxford Story would seem to be one of the most extreme, as it concentrates on a very particular aspect of a city. The University is thus set in some kind of dimensionless place; in a way it is promoted as an almost fabulous, or legendary place, with the strength to exist outside of the real world. This surreal image is reiterated through the declared connection with Lewis Carroll, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the Rabbit and Alice often appearing on publicity for The Oxford Story.

The ability to concentrate on isolated, and sometimes, historically unsubstantiated phenomena, is an important characteristic of much heritage. The Oxford Story is but one example; the Canterbury Tales, located in that city, is another. In Nottingham, this form of pseudo-history is represented by The Tales of Robin Hood. Here, the legitimization of an undoubtedly attractive myth, and its mediation into a well-packaged

quasi-historical narrative, coupled with the emphasis on the always seductive heroic (male) individual, obviates any requirement of discussion of 'real' history – what life was really like in Norman Nottingham. Here, history is almost twice removed, a distant second cousin of the heritage representation. Not only is the subject of representation treated in isolation from the place of Nottingham, the emphasis on a mythological character removes the entire spectacle from the usual contexts of time and space.

The heritage industry has often been discussed with reference to a few well-known and spectacular examples. This trend belies the fact that the heritage representation has successfully expanded into many places, employing greatly varying levels of media sophistication. An example of a more mundane experience is Bygones, a Victorian experience in Torquay, Devon, which opened in 1987. 'When you walk into *Bygones* you are transported back in time about 100 years to the reign of Queen Victoria' (Bygones 1987: 1). The first experience at Bygones is a Victorian street scene, which is very similar to those that were established in a number of British museums earlier this century; the most famous is 'Kirkgate' in York Museum. The main difference with Bygones is the sounds and smells.

The rest of this heritage centre concentrates on the interiors of middle-class Victorian homes. The rooms include the bedroom, the bathroom, the kitchen, and the parlour. The final part of this heritage centre is the most bemusing. It is called 'Fantasyland', and consists of a model fairytale town and a train set. 'Fantasyland' includes a model of Buckingham Palace which is adjacent to what looks like a model of the Taj Mahal. The rest of the town includes models of buildings, or rather styles of buildings from all over the world, and quite clearly also, from someone's vivid imagination. Behind 'Fantasyland' is a display of *real* military memorabilia, including medals and photographs.

The Spectacle in the Museum

What has been described as the heritage spectacle did not suddenly develop during the 1970s and 1980s. As was illustrated earlier, the reconstructed historic scene has been with us for at least a century, and probably a lot longer. As the differences between the heritage spectacle and the museum exhibition have to a certain extent always been indistinguishable, during the later twentieth century there has been a growing lack of distinction between the heritage experience and some museum displays. During the 1980s and the early 1990s some museums reacted to the success of heritage, and the need to survive in the market-place, by mimicking

the heritage spectacle, rather than attempting to provide a service that sets the museum apart from the all too common multi-media experience.

An early reaction to the success of the open-air museum manifested itself as the reconstructed street scene, especially the Victorian variety. In fact its current format in Bygones and the recently opened Waterfront museum in Poole, Dorset, owes its existence to earlier museum reactions to the open-air, or, folk-life, movement which developed earlier this century. The Waterfront museum at Poole has as its first exhibition a reconstructed Victorian street, complete with smells.

John Kirk's 'Kirkgate', a reconstructed street exhibition, opened on St George's Day 1938. This street was reconstructed with façades from a number of different places, including York, Bath, and Stamford. The buildings were also from a number of different periods – the fifteenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. This again begs the question, have the characteristics of post-modernity been with us for a lot longer than seems to be currently accepted?

Brears and Davies believe that, 'To a public accustomed to traditional glass-cased museums, *Kirkgate* proved to be a magical experience: the feel of the cobbles underfoot, the soft glow of the lamps, the sparrows on the window ledges and the daffodils in the window boxes all uniting to give the impression that visitors really had "stepped back in time" to an early Victorian town' (Brears and Davies 1989: 76). A number of other museum streets opened in the north of England during the post-war period. In Leeds, Abbey Fold opened in 1954, and in 1964 the new Doncaster museum opened, which also boasted a series of period shops.

In the same way that the museum sector reacted to the folk-life movement, through a not unsuccessful attempt to mimic it, museums in more recent years are reacting to the heritage industry in similar ways. The problem is that often they are merely aping the heritage industry, and in some cases, are not producing anything which is radically different. There are notable exceptions, which will be considered in chapter eight. In many cases the spectacle is used by the museum to attract customers who will hopefully move on to the more didactic experiences once the spectacle has been consumed. There is though a danger that the titillating spectacle will engulf the visitor's perception of a museum and consequently negate the potential impact of the didactic presentation.

A major British national museum which completed its redisplay in 1990, with no doubt, the thought of competing with the heritage industry in mind, was the Imperial War Museum, London. Most of the displays are still the orthodox object and text displays, as well as plenty of audio-

visual media. The centre pieces of the new Imperial War Museum are the two 'experiences': the 'Blitz Experience', and the World War I 'Trench Experience'. The first opened in 1989, and the second in 1990.

Probably the most telling point about the 'Blitz Experience' is that I voluntarily went through it twice. I do not believe that I would have rushed to London in 1940 to experience some bombing! The two experiences include both sight, sound, and smell sensations, and in the case of the Blitz, earth-moving experiences. The visitor sits in an air-raid shelter and listens to ex-soap star, Anita Dobson, whose voice is immediately recognized by schoolchildren, who in turn tend to giggle all the way through this experience. The chirpy cockney tells us how they are not worried by the bombs; the fortitude of the beleaguered, but loyal and patriotic English working class, is an important theme. After the raid is over, the visitor is taken into a smoke-filled room, which is supposed to be a devastated East End. In the distance, the lights flicker around a model of St Paul's, supposedly representing the flames threatening this national monument. Here, an ability to suspend disbelief is a prerequisite.

It has been said of the 'Trench Experience' that, 'The installation invites the public to relive a moment of history. . . . Once inside each visitor feels the full impact of the battlefield with gun flashes, smoke, sound re-enactment and authentic smells' (*Museums Journal* 1990: 21).

At the opening of the 'Trench Experience', one veteran from the Great War is reported to have commented, 'Much safer than any trench I've ever been in' (Colonel William Taylor, reported in Kennedy 1990). 'It's very well done, but we were always soaking wet, and always lousy' (Brigadier Harry Hopthrow, reported in Kennedy 1990). However, 'The Trench Experience' is different from the Blitz in one fundamental way. In 'The Trench Experience', the visitor is not forced through in a limited time; it is possible to look at the reconstructed scenes, and listen to the recorded voices of actor/soldiers describing life in the trenches, a number of times. With a little imagination, it is possible to stop and think, and perhaps understand a little more. But this is of course reliant on the individual. Many schoolchildren seem to see the experiences as a bit of fun, a spectacle which *has* to be seen. It is unlikely that they do actually learn something about the horror of war, a horror which appeared all too absent at the time of the Gulf War.

Discussion

The heritage spectacle, including open-air museums, and the heritage centre time trips, have been described by Eco in his *Travels in Hyperreality*

in the United States (Eco 1986). In part, such representations are a genuine attempt to recreate the 'real thing'. But the emphasis is on an authenticity of form, rather than an authenticity of experience. The dimensions of the trenches and the air-raid shelter, or the houses, are exact, and the accuracy of the uniforms and clothing is unquestionable, but the reality ends here. The smells can not be real, neither can the sounds, and as for the experience of day-to-day life in such contexts, thankfully this can never be a reality. Maybe such representations *should* only be seen as a marketing gimmick designed to attract visitors. This would be fine if only the rest of the representation were of educational value as well. There is a danger that the marketing gimmicks will dominate the entire museum. The Imperial War Museum also has a flight simulator which allows the visitor to go on a World War II bombing raid over Germany. This experience is somewhat ironic when during the spring of 1991, people are talking about high-tech, 'video-arcade' air attacks on Baghdad.

The attempts to re-create reality were probably best symbolized during the 1980s by the trend towards the provision of heritage smells. The company which provides most of Britain's great smells will 'visit for a survey, to advise personally on which smells may be appropriate and then provide a batch of sample oils to try' (Heritage Interpretation 1985a: 5). The system works by vaporizing some specially formulated oil in one of the company's Vortex machines. Smells produced so far include meat smells, old pub smells, coal fire and woodsmoke, fresh apples, leather, coffee, mown grass, a farmyard smell, bacon, an ironmongers and old factories. We might ask why some heritage centres don't use the real thing. There seems to be a desire to manufacture the synthetic for the sake of it, artifice for artifice's sake. Of course, the interpreters might argue that they employ these bogus smells for convenience. What we must ask is, should such a spurious form of representation be used at all if an effort can not be made to use the real when possible? Smells as signifiers might potentially possess an infinite number of meanings or signifieds. It is possible that the ambiguities initiated by smell are the most profuse and confusing: smell is an extremely acute sense, which although underdeveloped in humans, is not understood fully in terms of the ways in which it contributes to memory. There is no doubt that because it is triggered by chemical reaction, it can induce memories that are often very personal, vivid and even poignant. The decontextualizing of smells from an historical period and placement in a twentieth-century tourist attraction seems highly dubious as each person visiting the centre will have a different perception or attitude towards a smell and it is quite likely that it will be very different from those held by the people who originally produced and lived with the smells. The problem is compounded by the fact that one begins to wonder if Victorian streets, Medieval universities, Viking villages and World War II London, were

all steeped in the same obviously artificial chemical-odour version of wet cats. Again, it is the homogeneity of form which contributes to the denial of difference in the past.

Smell is not the ultimate experience for the heritage sensation seeker. In June 1985, the 'Wheels' display at the National Motor Museum, Beaulieu, opened. This display has been described as 'a production typifying the "showman's" approach of many of today's commercially minded independent museums' (Heritage Interpretation 1985b). The display is concerned with the history of the motor car. The slogan of 'Wheels' is, 'Live the legend of the motor car'. Time cars take the visitor round some 20 display scenes. The displays employ sight, sound, smell, and *temperature* to 'heighten the sensations'. One display that is possibly planned for Beaulieu, would involve 'a facility representing the internal combustion engine in which visitors would be asked to imagine they are the fuel and travel around the workings of a giant engine' (Tait 1989: 41). At the other end of the heritage temperature trail is a possible trip into Scott's antarctic, which will be recreated in a deep-freeze store in Dundee.

Before long some heritage centres, and museums, may be filled with gimmicks, media of spectacle which will engulf the educational message. 'Everything looks real, and therefore it is real; in any case the fact that it seems real is real, and the thing is real even if, like Alice in Wonderland, it never existed' (Eco 1986: 16). If that which is represented is not a fake, we admire it for its antiquity and aura, while the fake or the recreation, if recognized as such, is admired as a technical achievement, a testimony to the advance of instrumental rationality and progress, and our ability to recreate that which is more real than the real thing (ibid.: 43-8). This artificial image, in my mind, is best symbolized by the use of the hologram. The holographic image of an Anglo-Saxon helmet at York is the post-modern condition at its most dire. The object is an unreal projection, a product of ultra-modern technology, fascinating to most people not because it is an Anglo-Saxon helmet, or rather the image of one, but because it is a hologram. In fact for a while some people could not even see the hologram, as the lasers were set in such a way that many small children could not distinguish the image. For some people even the gimmicky signifier didn't exist, let alone the referent itself.

All of this illustrates how interpretation centres might be seen as merely attempting to titillate the senses and develop the simulacrum. Thus the dialectic between reality and fantasy is threatened by the post-modern representation; the post-modern past is one where anything is possible, where fantasy is potentially as real as history because history as heritage dulls our ability to appreciate the development of people and places through time. Ultimately, we may be sentenced to life in fantasy space,

a post-modern past, which is already articulated in the medium of 'Dungeons and Dragons', a game that cuts and mixes a science-fiction fantasy future with the characteristics of a misplaced and unknown past. Recent research in the Department of Archaeology, University of Leicester, has revealed that 15–16 per cent of UCCA candidates applying to read archaeology in this department indicated that they have an interest in Dungeons and Dragons (Lomas, pers. comm.). This is especially worrying if people who have an academic interest in archaeology are supporting and perpetuating a phenomenon which promotes the perversion of history. This is clearly the commodification of something out of nothing, the logic of the free market taken to its extreme. Reality is discarded, and the mystical Arthurian pseudo-history endorsed.

The previous chapter was concerned with the contention that heritage conservation emphasized the preservation of shallow images of the nation's 'organic' tradition, and was therefore a necessarily political or hegemonic strategy. This chapter, in contrast, has endeavoured to illustrate the development of heritage representations which have concentrated on the depiction of the past through spectacular multi-media presentations with an emphasis on image rather than historical or archaeological information, let alone historical critique.

Such representations are also an important hegemonic tool: to be bland and uncritical *is* to take a political position. An uncritical depiction of the *status quo* is undoubtedly a tacit endorsement of current political strategies. Royal Britain was, and Royalty and Empire at Windsor and The Oxford Story, are, examples of such representations.

It would appear that the imperative to shop, now recognized as the most popular leisure activity in the country, is one that has always been with us. This is hardly the case. The emphasis on reconstructed streets, especially shops, merely goes to show how perceptions of the present constitute certain groups' perceptions of the past. The representation of shopping in our past merely serves to reinforce the (post-)modern emphasis on consumption today. As Corner and Harvey observe, 'the spirit of heritage offers reassurance of continuity with a shared past' (Corner and Harvey 1991: 72). These two writers also believe that together, the spirit of heritage and enterprise during the 1980s were 'inter-connected' as related elements of Thatcherite reconstruction' (ibid.: 1). The heritage served to legitimate certain ideas of organic continuity, ideas which were necessary during a period of radical economic and political restructuring. The visitor to the reconstructed shop is intended to depart feeling that they are maintaining a great historical tradition, that of going out to the shops, and contributing to the enterprise culture.

This confusion is exacerbated by the development of post-modern shopping precincts or malls. Here our actual daily consumption occurs within yet another reconstructed environment, which is also articulated through the quotation of contextless historical styles; the world is a heritage centre, and we are all shoppers within it. In Disneyland's Main Street, 'the façades are presented to us as toy houses and invite us to enter them, but the interior is always a disguised supermarket, where you buy obsessively, believing that you are still playing' (Eco 1986: 43). The heritage representation, more so than the orthodox museum display, condones the feeling that we can 'stand back' from the past and observe it. It is heritage presentations, such as Jorvik and Beamish, which attempt to promote an idea of the past as 'another country', somewhere to travel to and from, a place which is distinct and separate from the present. The *processes* of history are relegated or even forgotten. This effect is intensified in Jorvik where the archaeologist as scientist, the white-coated expert, is considered to give scientific legitimation to the recreation: it must be the 'real thing', we've measured it (Shanks and Tilley 1987: 86–90). This should be seen in the context of twelve years of Thatcherism, with its emphasis on doers rather than thinkers (see chapter three). The exact reproduction of the material surfaces of the past has become more important than the interpretation, discussion and understanding of human societies. The public's ability to differentiate between truth and falsity, or even conservative truths, must be questioned, as the role of the expert, or intellectual, is marginalized under Neo-Conservative regimes. The public are not assumed to be stupid, but they are 'being invited to relinquish the right in the verifiability of public truths per se' (Hebdige 1989: 51).