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OUT OF WHICH PAST?

PERSPECTIVES ON THE PAST

The past as text

In *Labyrinths*, Jorge Luis Borges imagines a modern writer, Pierre Menard, who sets out to write a few pages which would coincide – word for word and line for line – with some passages from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Assessing the results of this imaginary endeavour, Borges insists that while the two texts – Menard's and Cervantes' – may be verbally identical, their meanings are not the same. Although the same words are assembled in the same order, they could not help but convey different meanings by virtue of the different circumstances in which they were written and thus the different cultural horizons – those of twentieth-century France and seventeenth-century Spain – through which their significance would be inflected. Above all, Borges argues, Menard's text would be richer than Cervantes' – richer because more ambiguous, and more ambiguous because of its status as a facsimile (Borges 1970: 69).

A fanciful case, no doubt, and one whose bearing on questions of museum and heritage policy may not immediately be apparent. Yet what else do practices of historical restoration aspire to but the production of a site – a building, say, or a township – which will coincide as closely as possible, brick for brick and paling for paling, with an earlier model? And how can the outcomes of such projects avoid meaning differently from the originals to which they aspire by virtue of both the different histories which organize them and the ambiguity of their status as facsimiles? Take the post-war reconstruction of the medieval centre of Warsaw. No matter how close its resemblance to the original, the restored city centre inevitably connotes new meanings in serving as a symbol of a political and national will to efface the signs of the city's Nazi occupation (Lowenthal 1985: 291). Or, to take a case closer to home, consider the criticisms levelled against the restoration of Port Arthur. Jim Allen has argued that the reconstruction of the buildings and layout of the convict period tends towards 'the creation of moods of "relaxation and

tranquility"' (Allen 1976: 104–5). Not only does this travesty the original significance of the penal colony, it further serves, Allen suggests, to occlude the lessons which might otherwise have been drawn from the site had its deterioration been allowed to continue so that, precisely in its ruination, it would have provided an eloquent testimony to the failure of the convict system.

It might be thought that such examples echo too closely the nineteenth-century debates of 'scrape versus anti-scrape'.¹ Yet the situation is the same even where heritage policy aims at preserving historic sites in their current form, retaining the marks which attest to their age and usage rather than removing these to restore a site to its presumed original conditions. For the simple act of extracting a site from a continuing history of use and development means that a frame is put around it, separating that site from what it was prior to the moment of its preservation. Dedicated to a new use as, precisely, a historic site, it becomes a facsimile of what it once was by virtue of the frame – which may be as simple as a notice or as elaborate as a piece of legislation – which encloses it and separates it off from the present. Not a thing may have been removed or rearranged. None the less, the meaning is decisively altered. Much the same is true of objects placed in history museums. Although, materially, these remain as they were, they become, on the plane of meaning, facsimiles of themselves. They announce a distance between what they are and what they were through their very function, once placed in a museum, of representing their own pastness and, thereby, a set of past social relations.²

All of this is to say no more than that the past, as it is materially embodied in museums and heritage sites, is inescapably a product of the present which organizes it. A truism, perhaps, but one whose implications are significant. Consideration of an analogous case may help identify these. In a recent essay, Stephen Greenblatt notes that the entrance to Yosemite National Park in California is marked by a sign which establishes its status as a wilderness zone. Moreover, there are a number of provisions within the Park itself – climbing ladders, viewing points, even photographs of points of interest – designed to make the Park more accessible to the visitor, as well as notices specifying prohibited forms of conduct. Greenblatt's purpose in these observations is to draw attention to the paradoxical nature of the Park's status as a wilderness. For if the Park, as wilderness, seems to be an instance of Nature, pure and undefiled, this is only because it is *publicly demarcated* as such. It exists as Nature (and thus in a relationship of implied opposition to culture and civilization) only because it is *represented* as such. The paradox here is that such representation is inevitably a product of culture. As Greenblatt puts it:

The wilderness is at once secured and obliterated by the official gestures that establish its boundaries: the natural is set over against the artificial through means that render such an opposition meaningless.

(Greenblatt 1987: 11)

The wilderness, in being represented and marked off as the site of an unspoilt Nature, is irretrievably marked by the signs of culture through the very processes by means of which its existence as wilderness is secured. No matter how strong the illusion to the contrary, therefore, what is encountered in such publicly demarcated wilderness zones is not Nature in its pristine purity or as the radical, untouched opposite of culture, but the wilderness as a *text*. Nor do such zones bear the marks of culture merely in the signs and facilities that are installed *in situ*. They are affected by culture in a host of more indirect ways ranging from the legislative frameworks and administrative procedures necessary to establish and maintain their boundaries to the literature – such as tourist brochures and heritage publications – which organizes the frames of reference and expectations of their visitors.

Similarly, the past, as embodied in historic sites and museums, while existing in a frame which separates it from the present, is entirely the product of the present practices which organize and maintain that frame. Its existence as 'the past' is, accordingly, similarly paradoxical. For that existence is secured only through the forms in which 'the past' is *publicly demarcated* and *represented* as such, with the obvious consequence that it inevitably bears the cultural marks of the present from which it is purportedly distinguished. Just as the visitor to a National Park encounters the wilderness as a culturally organized text, so the visitor to a museum or historic site is confronted with a set of textually organized meanings whose determinations must be sought in the present.

My concern in this chapter is to examine some of the textual properties informing the organization of the Australian past as it is embodied, in ways at once material and symbolic, in museums and historic sites. In doing so, I want also to argue the relevance of such considerations to the terms in which policy options are posed, resolved and implemented. Indeed, I shall argue that many of the central objectives of current museum and heritage policy – particularly those concerning questions of access and participation – cannot be cogently formulated or pursued unless such considerations are taken into account. Nor can the forms in which such policies are implemented be appropriately assessed without considering the textual properties of museum and heritage sites in relation to the varying historical cultures of different social groups.

Before coming to such specific policy concerns, however, it will be necessary to flesh out the terms of the foregoing argument more fully and outline its relevance to policy considerations in a more general way. A brief review of the history of Australian museum and heritage policy formation will then be offered in order to place current policy concerns in an appropriate context.

Reading the past: questions of theory and policy

The textual properties of museums and historic sites are many and various, and complex in their interactions. Here, by way of offering a preliminary

indication of the scope of the discussion, just a few might be mentioned. In the case of museums, apart from the obvious significance attaching to the nature of the artefacts selected for display, there arises a further set of questions relating to the principles governing the ways in which such artefacts are related to one another within particular display contexts. Are such artefacts classified and arranged by type or by period? Are they arranged as part of a narrative, telling a story of the relations between past and present? If so, how are such narratives organized? Do they imply a continuity between past and present? Or are past and present represented as radically dissimilar? Similar questions arise, in the case of historic sites, with regard to the choice of the period to which a site is restored or, in the case of preservation projects, at which its continued development is arrested. Take the case of the homes of prominent early settler families – Vacluse House in Sydney, say, or Newstead House in Brisbane. Are buildings and furnishings restored to the founding years of those families' fortunes, or to the period of their most significant political and cultural influence? Then there is the question as to how the artefacts within such households should be arranged. What implications do different arrangements have for the ways in which the stories of the upstairs and downstairs members of such households are represented? And how are these different micro-narratives related to different ways of conceiving the broader political and cultural concerns of the period?

If such considerations relate to the textual properties evident in the artefactual structure of museums and historic sites, further questions are prompted by the more obviously textual forms which accompany such exhibits or which, in a more general sense, organize and demarcate the cultural frame in which they are located. This refers us not merely to the captions, videos and tape-slide shows through which artefacts are explained and contextualized; it also concerns the functions of guidebooks and souvenirs. How do these organize the visitor's expectations and/or memory of his or her tour? What conceptions of the public and of its values are suggested by the language and imagery of such publications?³ Similar questions might be asked of the 'buffer zones' of historic sites – that is, those zones which regulate the visitor's entry to and exit from the demarcated space of the past. Finally, account has also to be taken of the broader range of cultural texts which, while not impinging directly on any particular museum or historic site, none the less significantly influence the framework of expectations and presuppositions governing the ways in which different sections of the public relate to such institutions. These range from the official publications of the Australian Heritage Commission through the activities of historical and genealogical societies to the kinds of historical representations put into general social circulation by the media in such forms as television mini-series.

In 'reading the past' as it is currently shaped and organized in the relations between these different practices, my purpose is to illustrate their consequences for the ways in which the socially demarcated zone of 'the past'

is experienced and interpreted. This does not mean, in the case of particular museum displays or historic sites, calling them to task for their failure to accurately portray the past 'as it really was'. This is not to minimize the importance of the curatorial concern to regulate historical displays by ensuring the authenticity of the materials exhibited. Rather, it is merely to note that, when such work is done, there unavoidably remains a host of detailed and separate questions regarding the *representational effects* of the considerations outlined above.

In an examination of similar issues in the British context, Michael Bommes and Patrick Wright have proposed the useful term 'public historical sphere' to refer to those institutions – from museums through national heritage sites to television historical dramas and documentaries – involved in producing and circulating meanings about the past. The practices of such institutions, they argue, need to be considered in their role in enacting 'a publicly instituted structuring of consciousness' (Bommes and Wright 1982: 266). Elaborating this argument in a subsequent study, Wright, considering the effects of different ways of representing the past, contends that 'the historiographic question of their truth or falsity is often peripheral to their practical appropriation in everyday life' (Wright 1985: 188). Similarly, the position adopted here is not that the effects of such practices of representation might be adjudicated by referring them to 'the truth of the past'. Rather, understanding *what* and *how* museums and historic sites *mean* depends on assessing their relations to, and placement within, a whole repertoire of textual conventions through which the socially demarcated zone of the past is made to connect with contemporary social, cultural and political preoccupations.

There can be few moments more timely than the present in which to raise such issues. Compared with earlier and prolonged periods of relative neglect, the period since the early 1970s has witnessed a flood of inquiries and policy initiatives in the museum and heritage areas. As a consequence, the Australian past, or public historical sphere, has expanded dramatically in quantitative terms while, at the same time, its signifying contours, or textual properties, have been significantly reshaped. Yet, except for the consideration given to questions concerning the appropriate representational contexts for the display of Aboriginal materials, most of the major governmental documents bearing on the recent development of museum and heritage policies have paid scant attention to the question of representational contexts and principles appropriate to the realization of specified policy objectives. Unsurprisingly, governmental attention has rather focused on the development of administrative arrangements appropriate to the development and management of an extended public historical sphere. Where questions concerning the nature of the past to be constructed within museums and historic sites have arisen, these have largely taken the form of a concern with content – that is, with what should be preserved and exhibited. The same is true of most submissions to the policy-making process and, with notable

exceptions (Allen 1976; Bickford 1982, 1985), of critical commentaries on new museum and heritage sites – which have been relatively few and far between anyway. While such considerations are obviously important – indeed, the *sine qua non* of policy formation – it is not the case, once such matters have been decided, that questions of representation can be left to fend for themselves. Since museum and heritage policies have as their eventual aim and outcome a regulated set of encounters between visitors (with different cultural backgrounds and orientations) and textually organized museum displays or historic sites, it is appropriate that policy should be guided by an awareness of the factors which influence and regulate the nature of the meanings transacted in those encounters.

Thoughts out of season

In addition to arguing the policy relevance of such considerations, however, I want also to offer a critical perspective on some of the predominant tendencies discernible in the recent formation of an expanded Australian public historical sphere. Apart from enlarging the past in the sense of significantly increasing the number of sites which are publicly demarcated as historical, this process has exhibited, in the main, three closely related textual characteristics. First, the Australian past has become more autonomous and self-referring; in brief, more Australianized as events in Australian history tend increasingly to be referred to one another rather than, as had previously been the case, finding their points of reference in earlier or contemporary moments in European, and especially British, history. In this respect, the Australian past has, so to speak, been cut off from its prehistory and set off on its own, self-supporting course. Second, this newly autonomized past has been considerably elongated, pushed further and further back into deeper indigenous times (as distinct from times derived from European history) so as to suggest a sense of long continuity for the history of the nation. Finally, this past has tended to become ever more inclusive in its orientation, enfolding into its own history the histories of groups and communities which had previously received little recognition in officially sanctioned versions of Australian history. Thus, the histories of Australian women, of Greek, Italian and Asian communities, and of course of Aborigines: all of these are now represented in the materialized pasts embodied in historic sites and museum displays.

So far as one can tell, these tendencies have been broadly supported by most groups within the community. There have, it is true, been signs of an old-guard resistance at the Australian War Memorial, and proposals for the preservation of specific historical sites have often incurred the opposition of property developers. Questions concerning the administration of Aboriginal sites and artefacts also remain intractably contentious. When all that is said, though, the claim made by Lord Chartis of Amisfield in the British

context – that the preservation of national heritage is a relatively non-contentious issue because all parties and publics support it – is largely true in Australia too (Chartis 1984: 326).

Certainly, I have no wish to introduce a note of contention into this relatively acquiescent climate just for the sake of it. Viewed abstractly, many of the tendencies I have identified are to be welcomed. The development of a more broad-ranging and inclusive scope for the Australian past – as realized in the focus on the everyday working lives and cultures of different classes, genders and ethnic communities at Hyde Park Barracks, for example – is unquestionably a change for the better. The positive consequences of such developments for the members of hitherto marginalized groups – the positive sense of self-recognition, of *being there*, accorded a place within the national past – should not be underestimated. Yet it's the contradictory aspects of these tendencies I want to dwell on here, for what sounds fine in principle often turns out to be more problematic when translated into a concrete representational context.

Roughly a hundred years ago, Friedrich Nietzsche, perhaps one of the most acerbic critics of nineteenth-century historical consciousness, and particularly of the tendency to monumentalize national histories in public statuary, recognized that his resistance to history was 'out of season'. 'These thoughts', he wrote in his essay *The Use and Abuse of History*, 'are "out of season," because I am trying to represent something of which the age is rightly proud – its historical culture – as a fault and a defect in our time, believing as I do that we are all suffering from a malignant historical fever and should at least recognise the fact' (Nietzsche 1974: 4). While not going so far as Nietzsche in his intransigent opposition to virtually any kind of historicization of social life, these reflections on Australian museum and heritage policy are similarly 'out of season' in querying the effects of the ways in which the publicly demarcated space of the Australian past is currently being reshaped. They are offered, however, in the conviction that that past is still malleable enough to be responsive to debates concerning its present contours and future trajectory.

This possibility is not given to the same degree where such pasts have a longer history and, thus, more accumulated weight behind them. In Britain, where protective legislation now covers some half a million historic structures, accounting for 4 per cent of the nation's housing stock, the past is often felt as a petrified, frozen and immobile zone which functions as a counterweight to the possibility of imagining new paths of national development except those – like Mrs Thatcher's fondness for the virtues of the Victorian period – which embody a return to the cherished values of the past. 'In its stately connection,' Patrick Wright writes of the past embodied in England's stately homes, 'history becomes "timeless" when it has been frozen solid, closed down and limited to what can be exhibited as a fully accomplished "historical past" which demands only appreciation and protection' (Wright 1985: 78). While in Australia the past is not – nor does

it yet pretend to be – stately, it is accumulating at an unprecedented rate. Unless many of the tendencies which define this past are checked, there are enough signs that it, too, will come to close in on itself, and on us, in inviting only passive contemplation rather than – as it is my purpose to suggest would be more appropriate – serving as a critical resource to prompt active participation in public debate concerning future paths of national development. First, though, a little history is in order.

THE FORMATION OF AN AUSTRALIAN PAST: CONTOURS OF A HISTORY

The national past as a vacuum

In 1933, the Museums Association of London published *A Report on the Museums and Art Galleries of Australia*. Commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and prepared by two British museologists, S.F. Markham and H.C. Richards, the report painted a fairly damning picture of the state of Australian museums. Poorly funded in comparison with their European, American and even New Zealand counterparts, their growth, it was argued, had been mostly haphazard, driven more by inter-state rivalries than by any consideration of providing a national museum service. So far as the contents of museum collections were concerned, Markham and Richards expressed surprise at the almost total lack of interest in either collecting or exhibiting historical materials. Apart from the Australian War Memorial (then merely a collection of artefacts which had yet to find a permanent home), only two museums were devoted to historical exhibits: Vacluse House in Sydney and the historical collections housed in the Parliament Buildings at Canberra. Outside of these, the only period room in the whole of Australia was the exhibition of nineteenth-century furniture at the Melbourne Art Gallery. If this general neglect was cause for surprise, Markham and Richards found even more remarkable the lack of any developed concern with materials relating to the post-settlement period. They thus noted that 'in no museum are there reproductions of the buildings occupied by the earlier settlers', regarding this as 'one of the most notable gaps in the whole of the existing museum collections' (Markham and Richards 1933: 441).

Why should this have been so? In part, no doubt, because museum curators had been recruited mainly from the disciplines of geology and biology (and, in the twentieth century, occasionally from anthropology) and did not include a single historian. Yet this is merely to re-state the problem: for why should Australian museums have displayed this particular bias? After all, as Sally Kohlstedt has shown, by the late nineteenth century Australia had developed a range of museums which, in their disciplinary ambit, paralleled their European and American counterparts in all but this one respect (Kohlstedt 1983). If geology, biology, anthropology, science and technology and, in the

Macleay Museum at the University of Sydney, archaeology had all contributed significantly to the collecting interests of Australian museums, why not history? The models were there, for the use of museums as a means of representing and embodying national histories had been known in Europe from as early as the mid-eighteenth century and became increasingly prominent after the French Revolution.⁴ Why were they not used?

The question has a more general reference, for the absence of a developed interest in the history of the post-settlement period was not limited to the museum world. It was thus not until after the First World War that Australia could lay claim to even a rudimentarily developed public historical sphere. One of the more important components in the public historical spheres of European societies consisted in the development of public statuary. Whereas, in the eighteenth century, sculptural memorials had tended to be limited to the private chapels or homes and gardens of the aristocracy, the early nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of such memorials into objects, as Mace puts it, of 'public display, often financed by the Government, with a direct didactic purpose' (Mace 1976: 49). The construction of the Napoleon column in the Place Vendôme and of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square – mirrored, throughout Europe's towns and cities, in the construction of memorials commemorating the deeds of military heroes and statesmen, of kings and queens – thus constituted a use of public space for a new representational purpose: that of materially embodying a sense of national history. Yet this tendency – which, in France, was to assume the proportions of what Hobsbawm has dubbed a tide of 'statuomania' – had relatively few echoes in Australia (Hobsbawm 1983). As K.S. Inglis has noted, campaigns to erect public monuments commemorating the achievements of prominent Australians were few and far between, often failing to recruit government support or sufficient private patronage to be viable or, where they were successful in this, enlisting little popular enthusiasm when built (Inglis 1974: Ch. 15).

And so one could go on. By the late nineteenth century, in most European societies and in the United States, influential preservationist lobbies had produced rudimentary forms of heritage legislation and provided the basis for heritage organizations capable of co-ordinating campaigns for the preservation of historic sites, and of administering those sites, at a national level.⁵ In Australia, such developments belong to the period after the Second World War – and, even then, they came later rather than sooner. Whereas, in Britain, the National Trust was established in 1895, a similar national organization did not exist here until the establishment of the Australian Council of National Trusts in 1965.

How are these patterns of Australian exceptionalism to be accounted for? While there has been no shortage of explanations, few go to the roots of the matter. It was common, in the 1880s and 1890s, for social commentators to argue that there was little or no history in Australia worthy of preserving or commemorating. In this account, the failure to develop a set of institutions

in which conceptions of a national past might be materially embodied and represented is attributed to the shortcomings inherent within the real stuff of history. Australian history is, so to speak, indicted for its failure to supply an appropriate set of raw materials – events, characters and movements – out of which a national past might have been fashioned.

The inadequacy of such accounts is clear. For it is precisely those raw materials, overlooked at the time, which have since come to supply the mainstay of the forms in which the Australian past is stylized and represented. 'Why, for example,' Isabel McBryde asks, 'does Australia now have a well-publicised convict past, yet a century ago found this past too sensitive for popular appeal?' (McBryde 1985: 8–9). The considerations such questions point us to concern not the real nature of historical events but their relations to the forms that are available for their representation. In the case of late-nineteenth-century Australia, they refer us to what was clearly perceived as a lack of fit between the raw materials of post-settlement history and the rhetorics governing the forms in which national pasts could fittingly be represented. What was lacking, in other words, was not real historical events but a mould through which such events might be cast into representations that would be consistent with the largely Eurocentric lexicons of nationalism and history which governed public perceptions of such matters.

Had developments in Scandinavian or even American museum and heritage policy been more influential the story might have been different, for both Scandinavia (by the end of the nineteenth century) and America (by the 1920s) had developed preservationist philosophies in which folk culture materials were accorded a historical significance. It was, however, the British past which, for the greater part, supplied the model, stated or implied, in relation to which the representational possibilities of Australian history were judged and, usually, found wanting. Perhaps the most important factor in this respect consisted in the fact that the British past was largely shaped through the commemoration of the military exploits of Empire, a tendency that was equally strong in France. This was perhaps the greatest impediment to the formation of an Australian past. The fact, as it was often expressed at the time, that the Australian nation had not been forged in war – that it had not played any major role in the theatres of 'real history' – meant that it could not lay claim to a past which might be represented on the same footing as the pasts of other nations within the militarized modes of national commemoration which were dominant at the time. It was mainly for this reason that the post-settlement period, when viewed from the comparative perspective of European national pasts, was regarded as a vacuum – or, if not as a vacuum, as a period whose events and figures often proved difficult to use in the construction of an autonomized national past owing to their prior association with the longer history of the British state. Thus, as Inglis suggests, proposals to erect commemorative statues to the maritime explorers or to the colonies' early statesmen often came to nought because such figures

were too strongly associated with either Australia's prehistory or the continuing history of Britain. As a consequence of these two pressures, such tendencies as there were to organize a space of national-historical representations were caught in something of a double bind: the events and figures of the post-settlement period either lacked sufficient representational weight to support an Australian past which might take its place among other national pasts or, if weighty enough, were not able to be represented as sufficiently or uniquely Australian.

Viewed in this light, the significance of Gallipoli 'as a symbol of the nation's entrance into Real History' (Ross 1985: 15) consisted in its functioning as a marker of a set of historical events which could be fashioned into a national past in the terms of the then current lexicon of nationalism. While the primary site of this fashioning was the Australian War Memorial, it would be mistaken to view the Memorial's development as an isolated phenomenon. First mooted in 1917 and finally opened in 1941, the period of the Memorial's construction coincided with a more widespread renovation and restructuring of the Australian public historical sphere. As the first specifically cultural institution planned for the federal capital, the Memorial was both conceived and came to function as a central, co-ordinating point of reference for the countless memorials – statues, public baths, mausoleums – to the war-dead that were erected throughout the length and breadth of Australia over the same period.⁶ These shrines, however local the impetus behind them may originally have been, were irretrievably nationalized once the Memorial was opened. They could not help but point to Canberra – rather than to the state capitals – as the apex of the nation's self-memorialization. In this respect, the War Memorial functioned as a crucial instrument of federation, embodying a national past conceived on a macro-scale which not merely superseded the micro-pasts of the different regions and states but provided a point of articulation to which those pasts could be connected. While the details of the Memorial's history testify to the delicacy with which the prior and frequently stronger state-based loyalties and identities were negotiated,⁷ there is little doubt that the Memorial eventually succeeded in effecting a national overdetermination of the meaning of local and state memorials and war shrines.

In commemorating the deeds of the AIF and other services, the War Memorial thus fashioned a national past that could jostle for elbow room within the representational space produced by other national pasts, that could compete with them on the same terrain. Yet the discursive shaping of the past embodied in the Memorial was by no means merely derivative. On the contrary, the Memorial significantly transformed the lexicon of public modes of commemoration and remembrance in celebrating the heroism of the ordinary soldier rather than, as Bazin shows was the case in nineteenth-century Europe (except for revolutionary France), focusing exclusively on the exploits of military leaders (Bazin 1967). In truth, this innovation was

not so distinctively Australian as is often suggested. Similar tendencies were evident in Europe as the need to recruit the support of a democratic citizenry prompted the development of more demotic modes of public remembrance. Moreover, many of the themes Bean claimed as original had been publicly aired within the British museum profession in the course of the war.⁸ None the less, the War Memorial genuinely did go further than its European counterparts in the respect that a demotic rhetoric provides the governing principle of its displays rather than being present merely interstitially. It is there in the dioramas; in the listing of names alphabetically, without distinction of rank, in the Roll of Honour; and, of course, in the celebration of the heroism of the digger and the display of the incidental aspects of daily life in the trenches – the improvised cricket bats and bookmakers' plates through which life was normalized and made bearable.

It is, moreover, the centrality accorded this demotic rhetoric that accounts for the War Memorial's ideological potency. For if, on the one hand, the focus on war enabled a fledgling Australian past to be both connected to and to vie with the deeper, more developed pasts of Europe, the fact that the Memorial's commemoration centred on the ordinary soldier allowed more popular and democratic conceptions of the Australian character to be grafted on to the inherited Eurocentric modes of stylizing and representing national pasts. The key development here, of course, consisted in the transformation of the signifying currency of the digger as the characteristics of self-reliance and anti-authoritarianism were shorn of their late-nineteenth-century radical nationalist associations and connected to a highly conservative set of values and ideologies under Bean's presiding genius.⁹ This is especially clear in the Hall of Memory, where the qualities of the digger, shorn of any specific class associations, are represented as a set of trans-class, ahistorical and essentialist national virtues: comradeship, chivalry, loyalty, independence, coolness, and so on.

If, then, the War Memorial must be assessed as the first significant attempt to materialize an Australian past, this was at the price of a highly conservative – although, to its founders' credit, not militaristic – conception of the nation. Nor, viewed from more recent perspectives, are these the only limitations of the Memorial. Its conception of the past is excessively masculinist: women hardly figure at all (the stained glass windows in the Hall of Memory include one woman – a nurse – among fourteen men) and, when they do, it is usually in their capacity as auxiliaries to what is portrayed as the essentially male business of war.¹⁰ Yet gender-bias is not the only point at issue here. There are, after all, many museums of war in which, where significance is accorded to struggles on the home front, representations of women figure significantly. Indeed, there is now a small corner of the Memorial devoted to the home front, but this is really quite gestural compared, for example, with the significance accorded this theme in the Imperial War Museum. In this respect, the relative absence of women points to another, and arguably more central

contradiction in the Memorial's discourse: the fact that, although rightly regarded as the first museum of Australian history, Australia itself is virtually entirely absent. For a founding national institution, the nation is curiously de-centred in the Memorial in the sense that its major references are constantly to Australia's participation in a history taking place elsewhere – in Europe and the Middle East. These are still, in the Memorial's conception, the places of 'real history' while – except in so far as they relate to Australia's participation in this wider history – references to contemporary events within Australia are almost entirely lacking. Thus, if the forms and terms in which women have been mobilized in support of Australia's war efforts are paid scant attention, the same is true of the role played by men outside the armed forces. This predominance of an externally oriented frame of reference, allied with the Memorial's gender bias, accounts for the most obvious limitation in its demotic rhetoric: the people and the soldiery are, in effect, equated.

The point I most want to stress, however, is the degree to which, in the Memorial, Australia remains evacuated of any historical significance of its own. The nation, so to speak, is historicized only by proxy, only to the degree that it takes a part in and joins the longer and deeper histories of Europe. In these respects, the discourse of the Memorial is still colonial or only proto-nationalist. The past which it embodies and figures forth lacks any decisive autonomy. Rather, it is a past which refers itself to, and seeks anchorage and support in, the deeper pasts of Europe. This colonial discourse is evident in the Memorial in many ways: in the references to European traditions in the Hall of Memory;¹¹ in the references to Europe in the Memorial's second centre of solemnity – the room housing William Longstaff's *Menin Gate at Midnight* (a memorial to soldiers of Britain and the Empire killed at Ypres) and *The Immortal Shrine* (the Cenotaph in London);¹² and the Empire-centred conception of the world governing the entry court which, naming all the places in the world where Australian troops have fought, just manages to squeeze in Australia between Java and the Coral Sea. And, above all perhaps, it is evident in the bitter struggle that was waged to obtain the Shellal Mosaic so that Australia might claim its own piece of imperialist plunder and root itself in deep time by boasting possession of a piece of antiquity.¹³ In these respects, the visitor to the Memorial is caught up in a discourse which constantly refers him/her elsewhere, to experience a national history which is always hitched on to another, wider history on which it is dependent for its validation.

In these ways, the Memorial inscribes the visitor within a conception of the nation which remains subjected to the dominating look of the metropolitan powers. Bean was always quite clear that, apart from showing the nation to itself, the Memorial was intended to exhibit Australia to the world – that is, to Europe. 'We planned', as he put it, 'that, just as one had to go to Florence or Dresden to see the finest picture-galleries, so people would have to come to Australia to see the finest war memorial' (cited in Inglis 1985: 101). In thus soliciting the gaze of Europe, the Memorial remains partly within the colonial

conceptions which framed the first call, in 1828, for the establishment of an Australian museum to

show that Australia is not occupied by a handful of felons or a few poor needy adventurers, anxious only for the accumulation of wealth, but that the seeds of a great Nation are sown and are even now beginning to fructify – that a national feeling is springing up – that a fifth continent is gradually but rapidly advancing to the lists as a competitor in the race for honour and for fame . . .

(Anon 1828: 62)

Autonomizing the Australian past

The modern state, Nicos Poulantzas has argued, establishes a unique relationship between time and space, between history and territory, in organizing the unity of the nation in the form of a '*historicity of a territory and territorialisation of a history*' (Poulantzas 1980: 114). Benedict Anderson makes a similar point when he contrasts the spatio-temporal matrices of the modern nation-state with those of dynastic realms or religious communities (Anderson 1983: 31). For the unifying traditions which characterize the latter, Anderson argues, are neither bound to a particular territory nor especially historical to the degree that they evoke a world of eternal permanences. The unity of a nation, by contrast, is always conceived as more limited in scope, the unity of a people who share the same space and time, the occupants of a territory which has been historicized and the subjects of a history which has been territorialized. But of a history which is made rather than given, which is the result of an active process of organization through which other histories – other possible frameworks for organizing events into sequences and interpreting their significance – are either eliminated or annexed to and inscribed within the unfolding unity of the nation's development.

The state, Poulantzas suggests, plays a critical role in this process of nationing history while simultaneously historicizing the nation. It does so by concentrating within itself the unity of those moments which constitute the nation's history, specifying the direction of their sequence and prophesying their future trajectory.

The State realises a movement of individualisation and unification; constitutes the people-nation in the further sense of representing its historical orientation; and assigns a goal to it, marking out what becomes a path. In this oriented historicity without a fixed limit, the State represents an eternity that it produces by self-generation. It organises the forward course of the nation and thus tends to monopolise the national tradition by making it the moment of a becoming designated by itself, and by storing up the memory of the people-nation.

(Poulantzas 1980: 113)

These perspectives throw a useful light on the development of post-war museum and heritage policies. For there are few areas of policy formation in which the state can play so direct and leading a role in organizing the time-space co-ordinates of the nation. And there are few institutions, correspondingly, which can rival the authority invested in those constructions of the nation's past and projections of its future destiny which are embodied in museums and national heritage sites. It is not surprising, therefore, that these should have been perceived as potentially powerful cultural technologies of nationing in the context of the broader post-war political and cultural initiatives to produce a post-colonial national culture and identity. Compared with the relatively *ad hoc* development of museums and related institutions over the preceding century, the last three decades have witnessed the emergence of museum and heritage questions as objects of major governmental attention, especially at the federal level. In consequence of a rush of governmental inquiries and a flurry of legislative initiatives, the size and scope of the national past have been vastly extended while its discursive properties have been significantly reorganized.

The single most important development, in this latter respect, has consisted in the production of a more clearly and more completely autonomous national past. This has entailed the organization of a new discursive space for the time-space co-ordinates of the nation, ones which sever its dependency on those of Europe and allow it to emerge as a free-standing entity rooted in its own past. Moreover, this has been accomplished by precisely the means both Poulantzas and Anderson suggest. The historicization of a territory and the territorialization of history; the subjection of other histories (of Aborigines, of immigrant communities, of Australia's European pre-history) into the story of the nation's unfolding unity; the back-projection of the nation's history into the deeper history of the land and of nature so that it seems to 'loom out of an immemorial past' (Anderson 1983: 19) – these are among the dominant tropes of the national past as it is currently being fashioned.

The political impetus for these developments derived from the Whitlam governments of 1972–4 and 1974–5.¹⁴ Shortly after its election in December 1972 the first Whitlam government appointed the Hope Committee to inquire into the establishment of a National Estate. Although the Hope Committee submitted its report in the midst of the 1974 election, the government committed itself to its findings and, in its second term, appointed an Interim Committee on the National Estate (May, 1975) to prepare a National Heritage Policy to be administered by a permanent Heritage Commission. The Australian Heritage Bill was passed a year later, vesting the Department of Urban and Regional Development and the Department of the Environment with joint responsibility for administering the National Estate. It also established the Heritage Commission to serve in a permanent advisory capacity to these departments and charged it with the responsibility for

drawing up a Register of the National Estate. Although the Fraser government subsequently reduced the scope of the Heritage Bill and cut the funding available to the National Estate, this work continued and, in 1977, the first Register of the National Estate was published. In the interim, the Pigott Committee had been established in 1974 to inquire into museums and national collections. On reporting, in 1975, the Committee recommended the establishment of a Museum of Australia suggesting that a Gallery of Aboriginal Australia be incorporated within the Museum as one of its three main galleries.¹⁵

These two inquiries constituted a distinct turning point in the development of federal policy in signalling a clear commitment to the production of a more centrally co-ordinated national past.¹⁶ Yet they should not be viewed in isolation from the more widespread initiatives to which, in part, they were a response and which, in turn, they prompted and encouraged. The Pigott Committee, while chastizing the major museums for their continuing lack of interest in Australian history ('only five institutions across the continent', it noted, 'have curators for whom the title "of history" is appropriate') (*Museums in Australia* 1975: para.4.27), sung the praises of the local museum movement:

In the last fifteen years hundreds of small museums have been founded as a result of the quickening interest in Australian history. This has been primarily a grass-roots movement, one of the most unexpected and vigorous cultural movements in Australia in this century.

(*Museums in Australia* 1975: para.5.8)

The 1960s also witnessed an increase in the membership of conservation societies and historical societies – a trend which continued in the 1970s – as well as the emergence of national organizations, most notably the Australian Council of National Trusts in 1965.¹⁷ Rather more important, at least in terms of political symbolism, were the green bans and related campaigns of the early 1970s (Nittim 1980). In demonstrating the degree to which the preservation of both the natural and historic environment had recruited broadly based popular support, these allowed the issue of preservation to be connected to the 'new nationalism' of the Whitlam administrations which were thus able to present their environmental policies as representing the expressed wishes of the people against the self-interested actions of local business élites, multinational corporations and, where appropriate, state governments. This rhetoric of 'the people versus the developers' was most effectively voiced by Tom Uren, the Minister for Urban and Regional Development. When tabling the report of the Hope Committee before the House of Representatives, Uren noted with approval the Committee's diagnosis that 'uncontrolled development, economic growth and "progress", and the encouragement of private as against public interest' had been responsible for the degradation of the National Estate. He then went on to state:

A pleasing feature of the report is its rejection of the widely held notion that conservation and preservation of the environment are a middle-class issue. The Committee affirms this is just not true and that preserving the National Estate concerns us all. It shatters once and for all the illusion that the national estate is the preserve of the better-off members of the community. The forces which threaten our National Estate often bear most heavily on the less privileged. Poorer people suffer more intensely from the loss of parkland, familiar city and country scapes, and even dwellings. Deprived community groups have not the same access as the wealthy to other sources of personal enjoyment and fulfilment. That is why it is often the less affluent who are most active in working to protect the best features of our heritage. That is why the trade union movement has been active in trying to protect and enhance our National Estate.¹⁸

The results of this marked increase in governmental concern with museums – and specifically with historical museums – and the preservation of historic sites are, by now, readily apparent. The Australian public historical sphere has been significantly augmented owing to the enormous increase in the number and range of institutions which have been extracted from the flow of the present and grouped together within an officially demarcated zone of the past which, in its turn, has been more strongly nationalized. Most obviously, the development of the Register of the National Estate has served as the instrument *par excellence* for both extending and deepening the past while simultaneously organizing that past under the sign of the nation. By 1981, 6,707 sites had been listed in the Register and, of these, 5,417 were classified as historic places (*Australia's National Estate* 1985: 27, 31). Many of these sites are – or, more accurately, were – of a purely local significance and value. The official policy documents make much of this:

The National Estate is only a convenient generalisation for a great wealth of individual, well-loved buildings, precincts, areas, gardens, parks and bushlands. The value of the National Estate lies in each individual item and especially in its local and immediate setting.

(*Australia's National Estate* 1985: 19)

Yet this argument is, in some respects, disingenuous. For the mere fact of placing a site within the National Estate means the local values invested in it are, to some degree, overdetermined by national ones. It becomes, willy-nilly, linked to thousands of similar sites elsewhere and serves as a common point of reference for visitors from other states and regions with the consequence that parochial histories are irretrievably reorganized in being dovetailed to other parochial histories as parts of a wider, nationalized whole.

Similar tendencies have been evident in the development of museums. The interest in local and municipal museums noted by the Pigott Committee has

continued unabated, leading towards the innovation of many new museum types – as at Sovereign Hill and Timbertown. Equally, however, the development of major state and national institutions has subjected these often dispersed initiatives to a strongly unifying centripetal tendency. The respects in which locally and regionally dispersed developments are accompanied by unifying ones at both the state and national levels was especially clear as the logic of the Bicentennial celebrations unfolded. The innumerable local museum and heritage projects sponsored by the Australian Bicentennial Authority – from the Bicentennial Historical Museum at Landsborough through the Cooee Park Bicentennial Local History Museum at Gilgandra to the Historic Village at Rosny Park – were thus complemented by the opening of major state institutions (the new Power House museum in Sydney, the Stockman's Hall of Fame at Longreach) which, in turn, were co-ordinated and 'capped', at the national level, by the opening of the National Maritime Museum and the travelling Australian Bicentennial Exhibition.

In brief, when, in 2001, it eventually materializes, the projected Museum of Australia will clearly serve, as did the War Memorial in its day, as the culmination of an extended process in which the national past has been thoroughly renovated while also providing the multiple local and state-based initiatives with a central and co-ordinating point of reference. Yet it is not merely in a quantitative sense that the past has been significantly transformed, although this itself has been important in altering the very texture of the past, increasing its density and, accordingly its presence within the present. The past has also been discursively reshaped in being subjected to the organizing influence of new rhetorics. More to the point, perhaps, these rhetorics have taken, as their primary raw materials, precisely those aspects of post-settlement history which, in earlier periods, were overlooked as a detritus devoid of historical significance. The lives of convicts and pioneers, of settlers and mining communities, of different immigrant groups and, in some contexts, of Aborigines: these are the materials out of which, in its most distinctively contemporary forms, the past is being remade.

However, only a knee-jerk populism would accord these demotic and multicultural impulses unqualified approval. For, ultimately, the raw materials out of which a national past is made count for less than the rhetorics which shape their discursive fashioning. Viewed from this perspective, the properties of the newly emerging national past are more ambiguous and contradictory than a one-eyed focus on the extended range of its raw materials would suggest. On the one hand, particularly where new museum initiatives have resulted in a curatorial input from social historians – in itself an important new development¹⁹ – the result has often been critically interrogative museum displays which allow the visitor to reflect on the relations between the past and the present. This is true, to a degree, of Hyde Park Barracks, and even more so of The Story of Victoria Exhibition at the Museum of Victoria and the Migration and Settlement Museum in Adelaide.

Yet these are minority instances. Viewed in its broader aspects, the past has been shaped by different pressures, in response to different constituencies, and moulded by different discourses from those which seemed most actively influential in the Whitlam years. The active involvement of working-class communities has not been maintained, partly because questions of museum and heritage policy have since become centrally linked to the promotion of tourism. So much so that, whereas it had initially been envisaged that the past was to be preserved *from* development, it is now typically preserved *for* it, often with the result that long-term cultural considerations are forced to take second place to short-term, and often exceedingly hazardous, economic calculations.²⁰

To place such issues in their context, however, a consideration of the discursive pressures active in reshaping the Australian past is called for. It will be helpful, in so doing, to relate my opening theoretical remarks to these concerns.

THE SHAPE OF THE PAST

The past in the present

In elaborating the educational advantages of museums, the Pigott Committee stressed their ability to 'dispense with those layers of interpretation which, in most media, separate an object or evidence from the audience', suggesting that 'a gold nugget found at Ballarat in 1860 or a "Tasmanian Tiger" trapped in 1900 will be lacquered less with layers of interpretation in a museum hall than in a film, history book, television documentary, photographs or song' (*Museums in Australia* 1975: para.74.17). Kimberley Webber strikes a similar note when, in criticizing the aura of sanctity attached to the exhibits in the Australian War Memorial, she suggests that the cultivation of a serious sense of Australia's past 'must rest upon a clear distinction between the rhetoric of the relic and the reality of the artefact' (Webber 1987: 170).

While occasionally challenged, the 'culture of the artefact' which underlies both positions continues to provide the primary terms of reference governing debate within the museum world. Yet the distinction on which it rests is a false one. For the artefact, once placed in a museum, itself becomes, inherently and irretrievably, a rhetorical object. As such, it is just as thickly lacquered with layers of interpretation as any book or film. More to the point, it is often lacquered with *the same* layers of interpretation. For it is often precisely the presuppositions derived from other media that determine both which artefacts are selected for display in museums and how their arrangement is conceived and organized. No matter how strong the illusion to the contrary, the museum visitor is never in a relation of direct, unmediated contact with the 'reality of the artefact' and, hence, with the 'real stuff' of the past. Indeed, this illusion, this fetishism of the past, is itself an effect of

discourse. For the seeming concreteness of the museum artefact derives from its *verisimilitude*; that is, from the familiarity which results from its being placed in an interpretative context in which it is conformed to a tradition and thus made to resonate with representations of the past which enjoy a broader social circulation.²¹ As educative institutions, museums function largely as repositories of the *already known*. They are places for telling, and telling again, the stories of our time, ones which have become a *doxa* through their endless repetition. If the meaning of the museum artefact seems to go without saying, this is only because it has already been said so many times. A truly double-dealing rascal, the museum artefact seems capable of lending such self-evident truths its own material testimony only because it is already imprinted with the sedimented weight of those truths from the outset.

The authenticity of the artefact, then, does not vouchsafe its meaning. Rather, this derives from its nature and functioning, once placed in a museum, as a sign – or, more accurately, a sign vehicle or signifier. The consequences of this are far reaching. All of the developed theories of language available to us are in agreement that, apart from a few special classes, individual signifiers have no intrinsic or inherent meaning. Rather, they derive their meaning from their relations to the other signifiers with which they are combined, in particular circumstances, to form an utterance. This has the obvious consequence that the same signifiers may give rise to different meanings depending on the modes of their combination and the contexts of their use.

That this is true of museum artefacts is amply confirmed by those instances in which changes in the systems of classification governing museum displays have led to a radical transformation in the signifying function of identical artefacts. One of the best known examples concerns Franz Boas's breach with the typological system for the display of ethnographic materials. In this system, developed by Pitt Rivers, tools and weapons were extracted from their specific ethnographic origins and arranged into evolutionary series, leading from the simple to the complex, in order to demonstrate the universal laws of progress. Boas, by contrast, insisted that ethnographic objects should be viewed in the context of the specific cultures of which they formed a part and promoted tribally-based displays with a view to demonstrating 'the fact that civilisation is not something absolute, but that it is relative, and that our ideas and conceptions are true only so far as our civilisation goes' (cited in Jacknis 1985: 83).

Given this, it is clear that the significance of particular history museum displays or heritage sites is not a function of their fidelity or otherwise to the past 'as it really was'. Rather, it depends on their position within and relations to the presently existing field of historical discourses and their associated social and ideological affiliations – on what Patrick Wright has called their past-present alignments (Wright 1984: 512). To consider the shape of the Australian past from this perspective requires that the past-present alignments

embodied in its new and extended forms be considered in their relations to the political ideologies to which, in the main, they have been articulated. While a detailed study of this type cannot be attempted here, a brief consideration of some of the more distinctive past-present alignments currently characterizing the national past will suffice to highlight the ambivalent yield of its recent formation.

The never-ending story

We have noted that, for Anderson, nations seem always to loom out of an immemorial past. He goes on to add, however, that they seem also to 'glide into a limitless future' (Anderson 1983: 19). In so far as they are 'imagined communities' – ways of conceiving the occupants of a particular territory as essentially unified by an underlying commonality of tradition and purpose – nations exist through, and represent themselves in the form of, long continuous narratives. As ways of imagining, and so organizing, bonds of solidarity and community, nations take the form of never-ending stories which mark out the trajectory of the people-nation whose origins, rarely precisely specified, are anchored in deep time just as its path seems destined endlessly to unfold itself into a boundless future. Eric Hobsbawm makes a similar point when he notes, apropos the development of national traditions in late nineteenth-century Europe, that the continuity such traditions evoked was 'largely fictitious', stretching the imaginary continuity of nations back beyond the period of their establishment as identifiably distinct cultural and political entities (Hobsbawm 1983).

This process of stretching the national past so as to stitch it into a history rooted in deep time is particularly evident in the case of new nations where, however, it also gives rise to peculiar difficulties. In the case of settler societies which have achieved a newly autonomized post-colonial status, this process has to find some way of negotiating – of leaping over – their only too clearly identifiable and often multiple beginnings: 1788 and 1901, for example. The formation of the National Estate has been of especial significance in this respect. Its role in ironing out the ruptures of Australia's multiple beginnings to produce a national past which flows uninterruptedly from the present back to 1788 is especially clear. This is accomplished, in the main, by two means. First, the classification of cultural artefacts from the period prior to 1901 as parts of the National Estate serves to wrench those artefacts from the histories to which they were earlier connected – those of Empire, for example – and thus to back-project the national past beyond the point of its effective continuity. Equally important, the very concept of the National Estate entails that all particular histories are deprived of their autonomy as their relics – private homes, disused factories, explorers' tracks, marked trees – are dovetailed into the putative unity of the national past. It would, in this respect, be mistaken to conclude from the demotic structure of the National

Estate – that is, its all-embracing inclusiveness, encompassing the histories of subordinate as well as of élite groups – that it is democratic also. The very concept of a national heritage is, of necessity, demotic; its *raison d'être* is to enfold diverse histories into one, often with the consequence that the histories of specific social groups are depoliticized as their relics come to serve as symbols of the essential unity of the nation, or to highlight its recently achieved unity, by standing for a divisiveness which is past.²² Whether or not the results of these processes can be described as democratic depends less on what is included within a national heritage than on the discourses which organize the relations between those artefacts.

Yet the Australian National Estate consists not merely of artefacts relating to the period of European settlement. Its other main classifications are the natural environment and Aboriginal sites. David Lowenthal, writing shortly after the publication of the first Register of the National Estate, notes the consequences of this precisely:

The Australian heritage incorporates not only the few decades since the European discovery but the long reaches of unrecorded time comprised in Aboriginal life and, before that, in the history of nature itself, the animals and plants and the very rocks of the Australian continent. Thus the felt past expands, enabling Australia to equal the antiquity of any nation.

(Lowenthal 1978: 86)

He might also have noted the similar function of the increased significance accorded maritime history in recent museum and heritage policy. This has emerged as a major area of interest within each of the states whose various maritime collections received a point of national co-ordination when the National Maritime Museum opened towards the end of 1988 – a year that saw the nation's maritime past conspicuously foregrounded through the First Fleet re-enactment, the Tall Ships events and the national tour of the Bicentennial Shipwreck exhibition. More generally, the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act of 1976 has officially annexed pre-settlement maritime history to the national past in declaring all wrecks found in Australia's coastal waters a part of the National Estate. The temporary return to Australia of Hartog's plate – currently the property of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam – for the period of Shipwreck exhibition's tour is symptomatic of the role maritime history plays in pushing the national past as far back beyond 1788 as possible to include the voyages of the explorers. Yet this particular way of extending the past also meets a broader purpose. To the degree that they are fashioned to represent both the outgoing history of Europe and the incoming history of Australia, the inclusion of the voyages of the explorers within the national past allows at least some of the various European constituencies in a multicultural Australia to anchor the 'shallow' histories of their recent immigration in the structures of a deeper time. At the same time, this rooting

of the nation in a broader history of contact also serves to liberate the national past from the British dependency which results from an exclusive focus on the moment of settlement.

Much of this is not surprising. Nor, in itself, is it in any way deplorable. That said, this process of elongating the national past does have some questionable aspects of which, here, I want to focus on two: the use of Aboriginal culture as an instrument of nationing, and the forward trajectories of the nation to which these newly created deep pasts – of the land and of the sea – are connected.

The following extracts from the 1982 *Plan for the Development of the Museum of Australia* offer a convenient illustration of the first of these concerns:

The Museum of Australia will be a museum about Australia; a museum with which every Australian can identify. It will tell of the past, present and future of our nation – the only nation which spans a continent. It will tell the history of nature as well as the history of the Australian people . . .

Much of the history of Australia – the driest continent – has been shaped by its climate, its geological antiquity, its vast distances and its island isolation. Because of this, its flora and fauna are unique, and the same timeworn landscape conceals ancient life forms and enormous mineral resources.

Australia's human history is ancient and distinctive. Aboriginal people populated Australia early in the colonising surge of modern peoples across the world. Over a period of at least 40,000 years, the Aboriginal people developed a spiritually complex society with an exceptional emphasis upon ritual life and attachment to place. Through time, Aboriginal societies modified the environment and, in their turn, adapted to it with considerable regional variation.

As the nation approaches the bicentenary of European settlement it has become a complex multicultural society. The continuing story of the transformation of Australia from a country of hunter-gatherers to an industrial nation is one of tragedy, triumph, persistence and innovation. It should be told with vigour and objectivity, using our collective heritage to promote the consciousness and self-knowledge which foster a mature national identity.

(Museum of Australia 1982a: 2)

In 1975, the Pigott Committee was sharply critical of the tendency, in late nineteenth-century museums, for Aboriginal remains and artefacts to be exhibited as parts of natural history displays (Museum of Australia 1982a: paras 4.27, 4.30). The function of such exhibits was clear. Occupying a

twilight zone between nature and culture, Aboriginal materials served both to differentiate the two while also accounting for the transition between them. Placed on the lowest rung of the ladder of human evolution, they represented culture at the stage of its emergence out from nature – a sign whose value was purely negative in demonstrating how far humanity had progressed beyond its 'prehistoric' origins. The above passage clearly intends a decisive breach with such conceptions in the significance it accords Aboriginal culture as well as its inclusion of Aborigines within the national subject ('every Australian') its constructs and addresses. Yet it would be an indulgent reading which remained at this level. Indeed, what is most striking about the passage are the respects in which it retains Aboriginal culture in the same representational space (the relations between nature and culture) albeit transforming the function of that space in using it as a device of nationing. For the role assigned Aboriginal peoples is that of a mediating term connecting the history of European settlement to the deep history of the land (its 'geological antiquity' and 'timeworn landscape') and of its flora and fauna ('ancient life forms'). In thus overcoming the cliff-edge of 1788 to anchor the nation in the structures of a deeper time, this conception fulfils a number of further tasks. First, it overcomes any sense of rupture between the phases of pre- and post-settlement in suggesting that Aborigines be viewed merely as a first wave of settlement (they just came 'early in the colonising surge of modern peoples') who, just as did their successors, adapted the environment to their needs. In this way, an essential unity is constructed for a 40,000 year span of history by enfolding its different phases into a discourse of development which tells the history of the nation as a 'continuing story of the transformation of Australia from a country of hunter-gatherers to an industrial nation', a never-ending story of 'tragedy, triumph, persistence and innovation'. This also enables the discourse of multiculturalism to be back-projected into the mists of time where it finds its support in the regional variation of Aboriginal cultures.

It might be thought that this is making too much of a few paragraphs from a relatively early planning document. Certainly, in many of its details, the Museum of Australia may well turn out differently. Yet, they are key paragraphs – the first definitive statement of the concept of the Museum – and accurately indicative of the nationing rhetoric governing its conception as a co-ordinated arrangement of three galleries: the Gallery of Australia since 1788, the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia and the Gallery of the Australian Environment. There seems little doubt, from more detailed plans, that the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia will be seriously critical in its depiction of the effects of European settlement on Aboriginal peoples. Yet, to some degree, this will be overshadowed by the overall conception of the Museum which, in its very structure, is unavoidably deeply ambiguous in the connecting role it accords Aboriginal history.

At the very least, these remarks should suggest the inappropriateness of displaying Aboriginal materials within the frameworks of nationalized

narratives. There is, however, a further problem with such narrativizations of the national past, one deriving from the discursive pressure to which they are subject from the broader cultural environment. This is particularly true of forms of narrativization which, like that embodied in the plan for the Museum of Australia, are organized in terms of a discourse of development in view of the degree to which this discourse has been annexed to the public imagery of Australia's leading business corporations. Paul James has usefully shown how, in the aftermath of the 'new nationalism', such corporations sought to renovate their public images and, in doing so, to attach the forward impetus of the new nationalism to their corporate interests (James 1983). Yet, in thus claiming to embody the future trajectory of the nation, the advertising strategies of such corporations have also sought to connect pre-existing nationalized images and traditions – the iconography of the Australian landscape, the frontier spirit, the motif of 'the quiet achiever' – to their public images. The meaning potential of such images and traditions is consequently now significantly overdetermined by the corporate imagery which has become attached to them through extended and highly influential advertising campaigns. In BP Australia's 'Quiet Achiever' advertisements, for example, both the Australian land and its surrounding oceans are represented in terms of a discourse of development which presents the corporation's exploratory activities as the outcome of a long story of exploration and development reaching back into the remote history of the continent.²³ Nor have the thematics of multiculturalism proved any less immune to corporate appropriation. The Bond corporation's Bicentennial advertisement, for example, also represents the story of the nation as a continuous story of 'tragedy, triumph, persistence and innovation' in portraying successive waves of settlers and immigrants, all those 'who thought they'd never make it', whose differences are finally annulled as they make their way through to their ultimate historical reward and destiny: a glass of Swan lager.

In his examination of the British national past, Patrick Wright characterizes one of its dominant past-present alignments as 'the complacent bourgeois alignment':

This alignment makes it possible to think of historical development as complete, a process which finds its accomplishment in the present. Historical development is here conceived as a cumulative process which has delivered the nation into the present as its manifest accomplishment. Both celebratory and complacent, it produces a sense that 'we' are the achievement of history and that while the past is thus present as our right it is also something that our narcissism will encourage us to visit, exhibit, write up and discuss.

(Wright 1984: 52)

The past-present alignment embodied in corporate advertising strategies might appropriately be characterized as an active bourgeois alignment. For

it, too, views the past as a cumulative process which has delivered the nation into the present as its accomplishment. Yet that present, while marking an accomplishment, does not mark a completion; rather, it stands poised as a moment between a past and a future cast in the same mould. The future trajectory for the nation which it marks out is governed by the logic of 'more of the same'; a never-ending story of development in which multinational corporations figure as the primary representatives of a process of uninterrupted development which seems to emerge naturally out of the relations between the very land itself and its inhabitants. The temptation, by no means limited to the Museum of Australia, to work along with such narratives in view of their familiarity and, therefore, ready intelligibility, is understandable. However, given the degree to which those narratives have been hijacked by particular sectional interests, it is a temptation that should be actively resisted.

The penal past

When Millbank Penitentiary opened in 1817, a room festooned with chains, whips and instruments of torture was set aside as a museum (Evans 1982). Thus did a new philosophy of punishment committed to the rehabilitation of the offender through the detailed inspection and regulation of behaviour distance itself from an earlier regime of punishment which had aimed to make power manifest by enacting the scene of punishment in public. The same period witnessed a new addition to London's array of exhibitionary institutions. In 1835, after decades of showing her waxworks the length and breadth of the country, Madame Tussaud set up permanent shop in London. Her new establishment included, as a major attraction, the Chamber of Horrors where, among other things, the barbarous excesses of past practices of punishment were displayed in gory detail (see Altick 1978). As the century developed, the dungeons of old castles were opened to public inspection, as they still are, and, in many places, as the centre-pieces of museums – as at Lancaster Castle, for example, or at York's Castle Museum, located in two eighteenth-century prisons. And Madame Tussaud's now has a rival in the London Dungeon, one of the city's most popular tourist attractions, where special-effects technologies reproduce the mutilation of the body in scenes of torture and punishment from yesteryear.

These developments are not merely of an anecdotal significance. Although little remarked upon, there is an important symbolic symbiosis between the development of imprisonment as the major modern form of punishment and the simultaneous tendency of museums and related institutions to include past forms of penalty within their repertoire of representational concerns. It is the logic of the penitentiary that punishment should remain hidden from public view. To the degree that this is so, the penitentiary's reforming rhetoric – its claim to embody humane forms of punishment oriented towards the rehabilitation of the offender – is deprived of public validation. The exhibition

of the excesses of past regimes of punishment thus provides the penitentiary with the visible supports which Whiggish views of its history require. The very openness of past scenes and practices of penalty to public inspection helps to ensure that the doors of the penitentiary remain well and truly shut in conjuring up visions of such barbarity that the prison, whatever its defects, could not but seem benevolent in comparison.

These considerations are especially pertinent to Australia in view of the unique importance accorded representations of penalty within the structure of the national past. Yet this, too, is a relatively new development. Twenty to thirty years ago, most penal institutions from the convict period were either disused or dedicated to other government functions. Since then, the number of such institutions – as well as late nineteenth-century prisons – which have been converted into museums is truly remarkable. Port Arthur, Hyde Park Barracks, Old Melbourne Gaol and Old Dubbo Gaol are among the most obvious examples, but these are complemented in innumerable local prisons which have been converted to house local history displays. Yet it is not simply the marked increase in the quantitative significance accorded representations of penalty that most distinguishes their function. This derives from the fact that such representations usually play in two registers simultaneously: as parts of Whiggish views of penal history, and as components of discourses concerning the nation's origins.

Where the former concern predominates, the emphasis falls on depicting the harshness of the convict system or that of the penal institutions developed to deal with indigenous crime in the course of the nineteenth century. It is thus that Jim Allen urges that Port Arthur should be primarily concerned to demonstrate the failure of the convict system. Similarly, although in its day – like Port Arthur – embodying the ideals of nineteenth-century penal reformers in their aspiration to use imprisonment as a mode of rehabilitation, Old Melbourne Gaol now functions as a testimony to the harshness of a penal regime that is represented as past. In its display of the instruments of prison discipline (the cat, truncheons, a whipping post), the scaffold (reconstructed for the film *Ned Kelly*), the condemned cell, the white masks prisoners were obliged to wear outside their cells and the death masks of hanged felons, the Gaol fulfils the same function in relation to Australia's modern penal system as did the museum within the Millbank Penitentiary for the mid-nineteenth century: it locates penal severity in the past.

The more distinctive rhetoric, however, is that which retrieves the convict population as one of the cornerstones of the nation. In this respect, the penal past forms a part of a broader process in which attitudes towards the convict period have been significantly transformed – so much so that the discovery of convict ancestry is now one of the most sought-after prizes of genealogical inquiry (Cordell 1987). A healthy demotic tendency, no doubt. What is more questionable is the accompanying tendency for the convicts to be cast in the role of enlisted immigrants or early pioneers in order to provide an early point

of reference to which the subsequent histories of settlers, squatters, miners and so on can be connected in a relationship of uninterrupted continuity. As an official catalogue glosses the lessons of Port Arthur:

Gradually a tourist traffic developed, until today, visitors from all corners of the globe come in their thousands to Port Arthur to catch a vision of bygone days and relive a history of which we should be very proud, for it is the story of the pioneers, bond and free, who laboured together to build the foundations of the Tasmania we know and enjoy today.

(*Port Arthur Historic Site* 1984).

The same rhetoric is evident at The Rocks where, in being combined with a nationalized version of the Whiggish view of penalty, it serves the unlikely purpose of establishing a moment of origin for the nation which, in its developmental tendency, is represented as free of conflict. Cadman's Cottage and the First Impressions sculpture in The Rocks Square thus both suggest that the only forms of conflict to mar early Australian history were those imported from the old world in the form of the antagonistic relations between the colonial administration and the marines on the one hand and the convicts on the other. Yet these antagonisms – alien intrusions imposed by a past and foreign regime of punishment – are retrospectively erased once Australian history proper gets under way as the convicts and marines, when granted land, are portrayed as rubbing shoulders with the settlers in laying the foundations for a free, democratic and multicultural society²⁴.

While it may seem fairly innocuous, this transformation of the penal past into a device of nationing has the further consequence of pre-empting the uses to which that past can be put. The use of a nationing rhetoric is never an innocent choice; its consequences have to be assessed partly in terms of the alternatives it excludes. Thus, in according the penal past the role of a foundational chapter in the history of the nation, that past is simultaneously detached from other histories to which it might be more intelligibly, and certainly more critically, related – in particular, the broader and subsequent history of Australian penalty. This would involve different representational choices at both the synchronic and diachronic levels: synchronically, in relating prisons to other historically contemporary penal institutions – asylums, for example, or institutions for destitute women and their children – and diachronically in relating the penal past to present-day forms of punishment. In their singular failure even to gesture in this direction, all of the institutions mentioned above serve a crucial role in institutionalizing amnesia with regard to contemporary practices of punishment. In aligning the penal past to the present within the framework of a rhetoric of national development, and in representing that past as one whose excesses have been overcome, contemporary forms of punishment are bereft of any public history except that which, axiomatically, declares their benevolence.

The tourist past

Dean MacCannell has argued that 'the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society'. Museums and heritage sites 'establish in consciousness the definition and boundary of modernity by rendering concrete and immediate that which modernity is not', rendering the present 'as revealed objects, as tourist attractions' (MacCannell 1976: 8-9, 84).

While a useful general comment on the amount of social effort modern societies devote to the social production and preservation of their pasts, MacCannell's observation applies with particular force to living-history or open-air museums. The rapid development of this form - at Sovereign Hill, Timbertown and Old Sydney Town, for example - has constituted the most distinctive addition to Australia's museum complex over the last two decades, and certainly the most popular: Sovereign Hill, a reconstruction of a late-nineteenth-century gold-mining town, attracted five million visitors in the twelve years after its opening in 1970. It is also, seemingly, the most democratic of museum forms in its concern to reproduce the timbre of the everyday lives of ordinary people in past forms of community.

Yet such appearances are often deceptive. The history of open-air folk museums is a deeply ambiguous one. Michael Wallace traces the prehistory of the form to 'such eighteenth-century aristocratic productions as Marie Antoinette's play peasant village (complete with marble-walled dairy), French *folies* such as Parc Monceau, and the great landscape parks of the English gentry which excised all signs of daily peasant activity and eradicated any sense of time other than the artificially constructed "natural"' (Wallace 1985: 40). The late nineteenth-century Scandinavian open-air museum movement - conventionally regarded as the origin of the form - was strongly influenced by romantic conceptions of folk culture as an imaginative antidote to the degradations of capitalism, and accordingly, tended towards an idealized depiction of past social relations cast in the mould of a pre-Edenic organic community. The same was true of the development of the form in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, except that - as at Henry Ford's Greenfield Village - the lives of the pre-industrial folk to which open-air museums were dedicated were so fashioned as to emblemize 'the "timeless and dateless" pioneer virtues of hard work, discipline, frugality, and self-reliance' - exemplary precursors of capitalism rather than its imaginary antitheses (Wallace 1981: 72).

In brief, the form has tended to be populist rather than democratic in conception, finding a place for the lives of ordinary people only at the price of submitting them to an idealist and conservatively inclined disfiguration. Of course, this is not an intrinsic attribute of the form as such. There is nothing in principle to prevent open-air museums using the resources of the

form - which are, in essence, theatrical - to offer a more critical relation to the pasts they produce.²⁵ None the less, the form's history does tend, in practice, to exert a pressure on the ways in which its uses are conceived, often with the consequence that serious museum enterprises are side-railed into the heartland of conservative mythologies. An added difficulty is that the form now comes under pressure from another source, one whose development it facilitated: Disneyland, whose evocation of Main Street USA draws substantially on the earlier restoration of colonial Williamsburg.

This is not to suggest a relationship of equivalence between Disneyland (and its imitators) and open-air museums. But they are institutions which overlap, and in several ways. Their thematics are often similar. If Disneyland mimics colonial Williamsburg, the goldmining sector at Dreamworld - a theme park on the Gold Coast - calls Sovereign Hill to mind. They are, moreover, connected by virtue of their closely related positions within the tourist's itinerary. A survey of Disneyland visitors reveals that a high proportion of them regard a trip to Disneyland and visiting historic sites as closely related activities (Real 1977: 72-3). While there is no equivalent information for Australia, it seems likely that associations of meaning are carried over from one type of institution to the other within the tourist's itinerary.

Perhaps most important, however, are the distinct similarities between the ways in which Disneyland and open-air museums organize how their visitors negotiate and experience the relations between their constructed interiors and the outside world. Moreover, these constitute the respects in which Australian open-air museums most strongly resemble one another even though, in other respects, they are quite distinct. Most obviously, they differ with regard to the styles of performance regulating the ways in which costumed museum workers mediate the relations between the visitors and their reconstructed historical milieux. At Timbertown, a museum which reconstructs the life of a logging community in northern New South Wales, the stress falls on the use of such staff as living history props, costumed complements to the historical setting. The same is true of Sovereign Hill, except that costumed staff will step out of their roles, rupturing their illusionistic function, if asked for information, while there are also non-costumed site interpreters. By contrast, the staff at Old Sydney Town, which recreates Sydney during the period of the Napoleonic Wars, specialize in what can best be characterized as historical hi-di-hi, mixing the routine of vaudeville theatre and holiday camp hosts to produce a jocular relation to the past which, at one level, they are meant to embody. When such differences are acknowledged, however, there remain two overriding common features which - precisely because it embodies them to excess - a comparison with Disneyland usefully illuminates.

Perhaps the most important similarity between the two institutions consists in their miniaturization of past social relations. At Disneyland this is achieved by a reduction in the scale of historical reproductions. The buildings on Main

Street USA, for example, are at least an eighth less than their true size. 'This costs more,' Walt Disney explained, 'but made the street a toy, and the imagination can play more freely with a toy. Besides, people like to think that their world is somehow more grown up than Papa's was' (cited in Real 1977: 54). While open-air museums rarely go to the same lengths, their effects are similar. In clustering together, in a compressed space, every conceivable building type – workers' cottages, school, hotel, church, saddlery, smithy, stables, store, sawmill, newspaper office – they offer the visitor the illusion of knowable, self-enclosed little worlds which can be taken in at a glance, revealed to the tourist's gaze in their entirety in the course of a morning's stroll. Or, as at Timbertown, laid open to a controlling vision via the railway ride which – like the one at Dreamworld – circles the site and establishes its perimeters, separating it from the bush with which, however, it also merges imperceptibly. As the brochure prepares the visitor for the experience which beckons:

Step back into the past . . . and take a stroll through Australia's history. Timbertown is an entire village, re-created to demonstrate the struggles and achievements of our pioneers. It reflects the way they lived, the way they worked, their hardships and their skills.

It is not a lifeless museum . . . it lives! It's an authentic, vital township where the stream train runs, timber is still sawn, the bullock team still trudges with its heavy load, the woodturner transforms natural timber into works of art, and the general store sells home-made wares and lollies in glass jars . . .

Hear, too, the noises of yesteryear . . . the whistle of the steam train, the bellowing of the bullocks, the clanging of the blacksmith's iron. And, as you pass the old hotel, you hear the sounds of the pianola or true Australian folk music, the happy sounds that entice the folk of the village into the tavern for a hearty singalong . . .

And in this atmosphere of rural serenity, its [*sic*] likely that the township fringes will reveal kangaroos, wallabies, kookaburras, bower birds and other species of Australian fauna.

Timbertown . . . a fascinating reflection of how people lived and worked in the simplicity and ruggedness of 19th Century Australian bush life.

A number of difficulties coalesce here. The first consists in the false naturalization of past social relations which results from their miniaturization and, more particularly, from their self-enclosure. Timbertown is not merely a compressed and knowable little world, it is also an isolated one; the railway does not lead out of the town, connecting it to a wider set of social and economic relations, but rather circles it, closing it in on itself. The consequence is that the tale of pioneer hardship which the museum tells – largely

in the form of push-button commentaries which relate the conditions of work in the sawmill or in the forest – seems to be one which flows from the harshness of nature itself. If the millworkers' living conditions were spartan and their working days long and arduous, this is because the bush was a stern taskmaster. It has seemingly little to do with the encompassing system of economic relations which governed the structure of the timber industry – the conditions of ownership prevailing within it, the organization of the world market, the degree to which its profits were retained in Australia or returned to Britain – and thus powerfully influenced the ways and standards of living within timber towns as well as their internal structures of power and authority.

In brief, by excerpting the reconstructed township from any sense of a broader historical context, Timbertown mystifies past social relations, transforming a particular phase in the capitalist exploitation of Australia's natural resources into a rural idyll where the village folk troop off to the tavern every night for a communal singalong. This screening of past economic relations is complemented by the ways in which Timbertown simultaneously masks the economic relations which secure its own existence. As is true of many open-air museums, this venture in living history rests on a dual economy. A part of the function of such museums is to deliver a market for the various retail outlets – selling refreshments, craft products, tourist curios, historical fetishes – which constitute a significant proportion of their interiors. While sometimes run by salaried staff, such enterprises are often run privately by local entrepreneurs who, much like side-stall operators at amusement parks, are leased their premises on a concessionary basis. Although the rent charged such private businesses helps to meet overhead and salary costs – including those associated with the special displays which provide one of the major tourist enticements – these are mostly provided for through admission charges.

Both aspects of this dual economy tend to be shrouded. Transactions with costumed retailers are conducted in an imaginary mode, as if the visitor were buying a genuine historical article from an authentic inhabitant rather than paying for a commodity decked out in the attire of history from an entrepreneur or salaried worker. The masking of the economic relations associated with the demonstration of past crafts and skills has a somewhat more complex structure. At Timbertown, most of the forms of labour displayed are manifestly unproductive on their own terms: a team of bullocks drags the same log round the same circle several times a day, and is yoked and unyoked in a demonstration of traditional skills; an operating sawmill is activated at set times, but it cuts no timber. A significant amount of social labour with no readily discernible end-product, its productivity consists entirely in the revenue which its display generates. It is, in other words, labour as spectacle, labour transformed into a form of tourist consumption whose nature as such, however, is withdrawn from the arena in which it is performed to the degree that the transactions which sustain it take place off-site, outside the boundaries of the fabricated historical milieu in the buffer zone which

regulates the visitors' transition between the site's inside and its outside, between past and present.

The markers of such transition zones are many and various. Those at Old Sydney Town are perhaps the most elaborate, beginning in the car park ('Park your car here and leave the twentieth century behind'), continuing through the entry building – a large, modern complex of tourist kiosks which urge the visitors to make sure they have all they need before they pass through the turnstiles, as there were no cameras, batteries or films in 1788 – and then, once the price of admission has been paid, through a barbecue and tea-house area before entering a tunnel which gives access to the zone of history, to 1788. Although not so complex, the buffer zones of Sovereign Hill and Timbertown are essentially similar in nature. Timbertown is fronted by a hyper-modern building within which the boundary between past and present is marked by a turnstile (staffed by costumed museum workers) which divides the foyer (modern and functional) from a period setting which gives way to a passageway displaying equipment associated with the timber industry – adjustment zones leading to the zone of history proper. The effect of these markers is reinforced by their virtual absence within the reconstructed historical milieux of the museums' interiors. These are rigorous in their exclusion of any signs of modernity. Sovereign Hill is bereft of explanatory notices in case these might detract from the authenticity of the illusion. Old Sydney Town provides historical information in the form of notice-boards which contrive – in their appearance of age, their antiquated spelling and modes of address – to be intended for a citizen of 1788 rather than a modern tourist. Rubbish bins are hidden in barrels. Toilets are coyly signposted as privies and contained within period buildings – as at Timbertown where, as if to deny them official existence, they are not indicated on the plan of the site in the museum's brochure.

Yet nowhere is an inside more effectively separated from its outside than at Disneyland. M.R. Real notes that, apart from the physical boundaries of a huge parking lot, a circulating railway and the ticket booths, the visitors are screened to ensure that prescribed dress codes – no political messages are allowed on patches, buttons or T-shirts – are observed, and that potential unruly elements (drinkers or addicts) are excluded. Perhaps more important, however, is the screening out of money through its replacement by different classes of tickets, special tokens which allow free participation in the entertainments of the interior – but free, of course, only because it has already been paid for. Yet this screening out of money is designed only to secure its more liberal passage when the visitor moves from the entertainments covered by the entry ticket to Disneyland's innumerable retail outlets in encouraging the illusion of a world in which consumption is experienced as play. 'The Main Street facades', as Umberto Eco puts it, 'are presented to us as toy houses and invite us to enter them, but their interior is always a disguised supermarket, where you buy obsessively, believing that you are still playing'

(Eco 1987: 43). The scale, no doubt, is different; none the less, the principle embodied in open-air museums is essentially similar – stimulating commodity circulation by organizing consumption under the sign of history – as are the means by which it is accomplished.

There is, however, a more general problem arising from the relationship between the preserved or reconstructed past and the economics of tourism which open-air museums serve merely to highlight. It is, moreover, a problem which is especially acute in the Australian context and threatens to become more so now that, in contrast with the loftier sentiments of the 1970s, the search for the tourist dollar has become the primary driving force of museum and heritage policy. As Dean MacCannell notes, the logic of historical tourism is to drive a wedge between the modern world and the past by fashioning the latter in the image of modernity's imaginary other; a world which we have supposedly lost and which we retreat to from the present in search of a never-to-be-found set of roots or identity. Even as noted a historian as Manning Clark is not immune to the allure of this conception:

On a journey round the inhabited parts of Australia today the eye of the traveller is rarely given respite from the monuments of the age of the motor car and the jet engine. The motel, the used car lot, the petrol bowser, the fast food dispenser and the bottle shop have become the main features of the scenery in which we live out our lives. In the cities high-rise buildings dominate the horizon, in the country wheat silos have replaced the temples of an earlier age.

Yet from time to time, in places such as Windsor in New South Wales, Carlton in Victoria, Burra in South Australia, Kalgoorlie in Western Australia, Roma in Queensland, Evandale in Tasmania, Gungahlin in the Australian Capital Territory or Darwin in the Northern Territory, the traveller or the local inhabitant is immediately aware of another Australia, remote from the Australia of the skyscraper and conspicuous waste: there is also an old Australia.

(Australian Council of National Trusts 1978)

It is clear even to casual observation that the structure of the Australian past is the victim of a rural gerrymander which brings with it a marked temporal imbalance owing to its disproportionate concentration on the lives of pioneers, settlers, explorers, gold-mining communities and rural industries in the nineteenth century at the expense of twentieth-century urban history. Nor is this simply a matter of the preponderance of museum and heritage sites devoted to such themes. In tourist literature, with a consistency which belies exception, the past is represented as precisely something to get away to, often in the register of the Dreamworld jingle 'Take a trip away from the everyday'. Michael Bommers and Patrick Wright, noting a similar tendency in the British context, argue that it serves to dehistoricize both past and present to the degree that the former becomes a tourist spectacle precisely because it is

divorced from the present while the latter – or, more accurately, the recent past – seems devoid of history precisely because it does not fall within the zone of the officially demarcated past (Bommes and Wright 1982: 296). There is a clear dilemma here. The more the structure of the past is subject to the exigencies of tourism, the greater the likelihood that it will focus on the country rather than the city, and on the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century. It will, as a consequence tend to offer the great majority of Australians an imaginative diversion from their present conditions of existence rather than affording a familiarity with the more immediate histories from which those conditions effectively flow. Such a policy, in the Australian context, runs the further risk – and the more so as tourism becomes an increasingly export-orientated industry – of fashioning a past which meets the demand of foreign visitors for tourist locations which seem to embody the virtues of the exotic, the eccentric and the authentic – in short, which seem to be the antithesis of the metropolitan centres from which they travel. The more the Australian past is fashioned to meet this demand, the greater will be its tendency to represent Australians to themselves through the cracked looking-glass of the Anglo-American gaze in its tendency to cast the national character in the form of a heroic and primitive simplicity – the Crocodile Dundee factor.

If this is cause for concern, it is because more than history is at stake in how the past is represented. The shape of the thinkable future depends on how the past is portrayed and on how its relations to the present are depicted. Nietzsche recognised this in his comments on those 'historical men' who 'only look backward at the process to understand the present and stimulate their longing for the future' (Nietzsche 1976: 14). Yet he also spoke of an antiquarian attitude to the past which, valuing all that is 'small and limited, mouldy and obsolete', organizes the past as a refuge from the present in which the conservative and reverent soul of the antiquarian builds a secret nest' (ibid.: 24). Both orientations are evident in the structure of the Australian past – a future-orientated trajectory governed by the rhetoric of Australia's unending development and the preservation of the past as an enclave within, and retreat from, the present. Foucault, echoing Nietzsche's critique of these two orientations, recommends instead the virtues of what Nietzsche called 'effective history'. Such a history would not aim to inscribe the nation within an uninterrupted narrative of its self-development. Rather, it would seek to disrupt such pretended continuities, and it would do so, Foucault argues, 'because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting' (Foucault 1980a: 154). Perhaps the cause of a critical national consciousness would be best served by the institution of a public past which cut into, and thus questioned, those narratives of nationing which currently enjoy the greatest cultural weight rather than lending them the authority of governmental benediction.