

CULTURE: POLICIES AND POLITICS

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

THE BIRTH OF THE MUSEUM

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by popular schooling or whose hearts and minds failed to be won in the new pedagogic relations between state and people symbolized by the open doors of the museum, the closed walls of the penitentiary threatened a sterner instruction in the lessons of power. Where instruction and rhetoric failed, punishment began.

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THE POLITICAL RATIONALITY OF THE MUSEUM

In her essay 'The Museum in the Disciplinary Society', Eilean Hooper-Greenhill argues that the ruptures of the French Revolution 'created the conditions of emergence for a new "truth", a new rationality, out of which came a new functionality for a new institution, the public museum' (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63). Established as a means of sharing what had previously been private, of exposing what had been concealed, the public museum 'exposed both the decadence and tyranny of the old forms of control, the *ancien régime*, and the democracy and utility of the new, the Republic' (ibid.: 68). Appropriating royal, aristocratic and church collections in the name of the people, destroying those items whose royal or feudal associations threatened the Republic with contagion and arranging for the display of the remainder in accordance with rationalist principles of classification, the Revolution transformed the museum from a symbol of arbitrary power into an instrument which, through the education of its citizens, was to serve the collective good of the state.

Yet, and from the very beginning, Hooper-Greenhill argues, (Hooper-Greenhill 1989) the public museum was shaped into being as an apparatus with two deeply contradictory functions: 'that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education' (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 63). To which, she contends, there was later added a third function as the museum was shaped into an instrument of the disciplinary society. Through the institution of a division between the producers and consumers of knowledge – a division which assumed an architectural form in the relations between the hidden spaces of the museum, where knowledge was produced and organized in camera, and its public spaces, where knowledge was offered for passive consumption – the museum became a site where bodies, constantly under surveillance, were to be rendered docile.

In taking my bearings from these remarks, my purpose in what follows is to offer an account of the birth of the museum which can serve to illuminate its political rationality, a term I borrow from Foucault. The development of modern forms of government, Foucault argues, is traced in the emergence of new technologies which aim at regulating the conduct of individuals and

populations – the prison, the hospital and the asylum, for example. As such, Foucault contends, these technologies are characterized by their own specific rationalities: they constitute distinct and specific modalities for the exercise of power, generating their own specific fields of political problems and relations, rather than comprising instances for the exercise of a general form of power. There is, Foucault further suggests, frequently a mismatch between the rhetorics which seemingly govern the aims of such technologies and the political rationalities embodied in the actual modes of their functioning. Where this is so, the space produced by this mismatch supplies the conditions for a discourse of reform which proves unending because it mistakes the nature of its object. The prison, Foucault thus argues, has been endlessly subject to calls for reform to allow it to live up to its rehabilitative rhetoric. Yet, however ineffective such reforms prove, the viability of the prison is rarely put into question. Why? Because, Foucault argues, the political rationality of the prison lies elsewhere – less in its ability to genuinely reform behaviour than in its capacity to separate a manageable criminal sub-class from the rest of the population.

The museum too, of course, has been constantly subject to demands for reform. Moreover, although its specific inflections have varied with time and place as have the specific political constituencies which have been caught up in its advocacy, the discourse of reform which motivate these demands has remained identifiably the same over the last century. It is, in the main, characterized by two principles: first the principle of public rights sustaining the demand that museums should be equally open and accessible to all; and second, the principle of representational adequacy sustaining the demand that museums should adequately represent the cultures and values of different sections of the public. While it might be tempting to see these as alien demands imposed on museums by their external political environments, I shall suggest that they are ones which flow out of, are generated by and only make sense in relation to the internal dynamics of the museum form. Or, more exactly, I shall argue that they are fuelled by the mismatch between, on the one hand, the rhetorics which govern the stated aims of museums and, on the other, the political rationality embodied in the actual modes of their functioning – a mismatch which guarantees that the demands it generates are insatiable.

Thus, to briefly anticipate my argument, the public rights demand is produced and sustained by the dissonance between, on the one hand, the democratic rhetoric governing the conception of public museums as vehicles for popular education and, on the other, their actual functioning as instruments for the reform of public manners. While the former requires that they should address an undifferentiated public made up of free and formal equals, the latter, in giving rise to the development of various technologies for regulating or screening out the forms of behaviour associated with popular assemblies, has meant that they have functioned as a powerful means for

differentiating populations. Similarly, demands based on the principle of representational adequacy are produced and sustained by the fact that, in purporting to tell the story of Man, the space of representation shaped into being in association with the formation of the public museum embodies a principle of general human universality in relation to which, whether on the basis of the gendered, racial, class or other social patterns of its exclusions and biases, any particular museum display can be held to be inadequate and therefore in need of supplementation.

To argue that this discourse of reform is insatiable, however, is not to argue against the political demands that have been, still are and, for the foreseeable future, will continue to be brought to bear on museums. To the contrary, in arguing the respects in which these demands grow out of the museum's contradictory political rationality, my purpose is to suggest ways in which questions of museum politics might be more productively pursued if posed in the light of those cultural dynamics and relations peculiar to the museum which they must take account of and negotiate. In this respect, apart from looking to his work for methodological guidance, I shall draw on Foucault politically in suggesting that a consideration of the 'politics of truth' peculiar to the museum allows the development of more focused forms of politics than might flow from other perspectives.

Let me mention one such alternative here. For the birth of the museum could certainly be approached, from a Gramscian perspective, as forming a part of a new set of relations between state and people that is best understood as pedagogic in the sense defined by Gramsci when he argued the state 'must be conceived of as an "educator", in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilisation' (Gramsci 1971: 247). Nor would such an account be implausible. Indeed, a Gramscian perspective is essential to an adequate theorization of the museum's relations to bourgeois-democratic politics. In allowing an appreciation of the respects in which the museum involved a rhetorical incorporation of the people within the processes of power, it serves – in ways I shall outline – as a useful antidote to the one-eyed focus which results if museums are viewed, solely through a Foucaultian lens, as instruments of discipline. However, I want, here, to bend the stick in the other direction. For once, as in the Gramscian paradigm they generally are, museums are represented as instruments of ruling-class hegemony, then so museums tend to be thought of as amenable to a general form of cultural politics – one which, in criticizing those hegemonic ideological articulations governing the thematics of museum displays, seeks to forge new articulations capable of organizing a counter-hegemony. The difficulty with such formulations is that they take scant account of the distinctive field of political relations constituted by the museum's specific institutional properties. Gramscian politics, in other words, are institutionally indifferent in ways which a Foucaultian perspective can usefully temper and qualify.

THE BIRTH OF THE MUSEUM

Let me now turn, in the light of these considerations, to the origins and early history of the public museum, an institution whose distinguishing characteristics crystallized during the first half of the nineteenth century. In doing so I shall foreground three principles which highlight the distinctiveness of the public museum with respect to, first, its relations to the publics it helped to organize and constitute, second, its internal organization, and, third, its placement in relation both to kindred institutions as well as to those – both ancient and modern – to which it might most usefully be juxtaposed.

Douglas Crimp's account of the birth of the modern art museum offers an instructive route into the first set of questions (Crimp 1987). Crimp regards the Altes Museum in Berlin as the paradigmatic instance of the early art museum, seeing in it the first institutional expression of the modern idea of art whose initial formulation he attributes to Hegel. Constructed by Karl August Schinkel, a close friend of Hegel's, over the period 1823 to 1829 when Hegel delivered his lectures on aesthetics at the University of Berlin, the conception of the Altes Museum's function, Crimp argues, was governed by Hegel's philosophy of art in which art, having ceded its place to philosophy as the supreme mode of our knowledge of the Absolute, becomes a mere object of philosophical contemplation. The space of the museum, as this analysis unfolds, thus becomes one in which art, in being abstracted from real life contexts, is depoliticized. The museum, in sum, constitutes a specific form of art's enclosure which, in Crimp's postmodernist perspective, art must break with in order to become once more socially and politically relevant.

The argument is hardly new. The stress Crimp places on the Hegelian lineage of the art museum is reminiscent of Adorno's conception of museums as 'like family sepulchres of works of art' (Adorno 1967: 175), while his postmodernist credo echoes to the tune of Malraux's 'museum without walls' (Malraux 1967). Yet while it may make good sense, as part of a political polemic, to view art museums as institutions of enclosure from the point of view of the possible alternative contexts in which works of art might be exhibited, Crimp is led astray when he proposes 'an archaeology of the museum on the model of Foucault's analysis of the asylum, the clinic and the prison' on the grounds that, like these, it is 'equally a space of exclusion and confinement' (Crimp 1987: 62). Quite apart from the fact that it's difficult to see in what sense works of art, once placed in an art museum, might be likened to the inmate of the penitentiary whose confinement results in subjection to a normalizing scrutiny directed at the modification of behaviour. Crimp's thesis would require that the context for art's display provided by the art museum be regarded as more enclosed than the contexts provided by the variety of institutions within which works of art, together with other valued objects, had been housed from the Renaissance through to the Enlightenment.

This is patently not so. While such collections (whether of works of art,

curiosities or objects of scientific interest) had gone under a variety of names (museums, *studioli*, *cabinets des curieux*, *Wunderkammern*, *Kunst-kammern*) and fulfilled a variety of functions (demonstrations of royal power, symbols of aristocratic or mercantile status, instruments of learning), they all constituted socially enclosed spaces to which access was remarkably restricted. So much so that, in the most extreme cases, access was available to only one person: the prince. As we trace, over the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the dispersal of these collections and their reconstitution in public museums, we trace a process in which not just works of art but collections of all kinds come to be placed in contexts which were considerably less enclosed than their antecedents. The closed walls of museums, in other words, should not blind us to the fact that they progressively opened their doors to permit free access to the population at large. The timing of these developments varied: what was accomplished in France, violently and dramatically, in the course of the Revolution was, elsewhere, more typically the product of a history of gradual and piecemeal reforms. Nevertheless, by roughly the mid-nineteenth century, the principles of the new form were everywhere apparent: everyone, at least in theory, was welcome. David Blackburn and Geoff Eley, in tracing these developments in the German context, thus stress the respects in which the advocacy of museums – along with that of adjacent institutions embodying similar principles, such as public parks and zoos – was premised on a bourgeois critique of earlier absolutist forms of display, such as the royal menagerie. In doing so, they counterpose its formative principle – that of addressing 'a general public made up of formal equals' – to the formally differentiated forms of sociability and edification that had characterized the *ancien régime* (Blackburn and Eley 1984: 198).

In these respects, then, and contrary to Crimp's suggestion, the trajectory embodied in the museum's development is the reverse of that embodied in the roughly contemporary emergence of the prison, the asylum and the clinic. Whereas these effected the sequestration and institutional enclosure of indigent and other populations, which had previously mixed and intermingled in establishments whose boundaries proved relatively permeable or, as in the scene of punishment or the ships of fools, had formed parts of elaborate public dramaturgies, the museum placed objects which had previously been concealed from public view into new open and public contexts. Moreover, unlike the carceral institutions whose birth coincided with its own, the museum – in its conception if not in all aspects of its practice – aimed not at the sequestration of populations but, precisely, at the mixing and intermingling of publics – elite and popular – which had hitherto tended towards separate forms of assembly.

I make these points not merely to score off Crimp but rather to stress the respects in which the public museum occupied a cultural space that was radically distinct from those occupied by its various predecessors just as it

was distinct in its function. This, in turn, serves to underscore a methodological limitation of those accounts which tell the story of the museum's development in the form of a linear history of its emergence from earlier collecting institutions. For it is by no means clear that these provide the most appropriate historical co-ordinates for theorizing the museum's distinctiveness as a vehicle for the display of power. Depending on the period and the country, many candidates might be suggested for this role – the royal entry, the court masque, the tournament, the *ballet de cour* and, of course, the various precursors of the public museum itself. However, while, in the early Renaissance period, many of these had formed vehicles for the display of royal power to the populace, they ceased to have this function from the sixteenth century as, with the emergence of absolutism and the associated refeudalization of courtly society, they came to function mainly as court festivals or institutions designed to display monarchical power within the limited circles of the aristocracy.

So far as the public display of power to the general population was concerned, this increasingly took the form, especially in the eighteenth century, of the public enactment of the scene of punishment. Yet if the museum took over this function, it also transformed it in embodying a new rhetoric of power which enlisted the general public it addressed as its subject rather than its object. The logic of this transformation is best seen in the respects in which the development of the museum and the prison criss-cross one another in the early nineteenth century – but as histories running in opposing rather than, as Crimp suggests, parallel directions. Thus, if in the eighteenth century the prison is a relatively permeable institution effecting an incomplete enclosure of its inhabitants, its nineteenth-century development takes the form of its increasing separation from society as punishment – now severed from the function of making power publicly manifest – is secreted within the closed walls of the penitentiary. The course of the museum's development, by contrast, is one of its increasing permeability as the variety of restrictions placed on access (when granted at all) – people with clean shoes, those who came by carriage, persons able to present their credentials for inspection – are removed to produce, by the mid-nineteenth century, an institution which had migrated from a variety of private and exclusive spheres into the public domain.

The place of the two institutions in the history of architecture underlines this inverse symmetry of their respective trajectories. Robin Evans has shown how, while there was no distinctive prison architecture before 1750, the next century witnessed a flurry of architectural initiatives oriented to the production of the prison as an enclosed space within which behaviour could be constantly monitored; an architecture that was causal in its focus on the organization of power relations within the interior space of the prison rather than emblematic in the sense of being concerned with the external display of power (Evans 1982). Museum architecture was comparably innovative over

the same period, witnessing a spate of architectural competitions for the design of museums in which the emphasis moved progressively away from organizing enclosed spaces of display for the private pleasure of the prince, aristocrat or scholar and towards an organization of space and vision that would allow museums to function as instruments of public instruction (Seling 1967).

Nor, in thus passing one another like ships in the night, are the museum and the penitentiary oblivious of the fact. When Millbank Penitentiary opened in 1817, a room festooned with chains, whips and instruments of torture was set aside as a museum. The same period witnessed an addition to London's array of exhibitionary institutions when, in 1835, Madame Tussaud set up permanent shop featuring, as a major attraction, the Chamber of Horrors where the barbarous excesses of past practices of punishment were displayed in all their gory detail. As the century developed, the dungeons of old castles were opened to public inspection, often as the centrepieces of museums. In brief, although often little remarked, the exhibition of past regimes of punishment became, and remains, a major museological trope.¹ While the functioning of such exhibitions in relation to Whiggish accounts of the history of penalty is clear, this trope has also served as a means whereby the museum, in instituting a public critique of the forms for the display of power associated with the *ancien régime*, has simultaneously declared its own democratic status. Thus, if the museum supplanted the scene of punishment in taking on the function of displaying power to the populace, the rhetorical economy of the power that was displayed was significantly altered. Rather than embodying an alien and coercive principle of power which aimed to cow the people into submission, the museum – addressing the people as a public, as citizens – aimed to inveigle the general populace into complicity with power by placing them on this side of a power which it represented to it as its own.

AN ORDER OF THINGS AND PEOPLES

This was not, however, merely a matter of the state claiming ownership of cultural property on behalf of the public or of the museum opening its doors. It was an effect of the new organizational principles governing the arrangement of objects within museum displays and of the subject position these produced for that new public of free and formal equals which museums constituted and addressed. In Hooper-Greenhill's account, the function of princely collections during the Renaissance was 'to recreate the world in miniature around the central figure of the prince who thus claimed dominion over the world symbolically as he did in reality' (Hooper-Greenhill 1989: 64). Based on the interpretative logic of what Foucault has characterized as the Renaissance *episteme*, which read beneath the surface of things to discover hidden connections of meaning and significance, such collections were

'organised to demonstrate the ancient hierarchies of the world and the resemblances that drew the things of the world together' (ibid.: 64). As, in the course of the eighteenth century, the force of the Renaissance *episteme* weakened under the weight of, again in Foucault's terms, the principles of classification governing the classical *episteme*, museum displays came to be governed in accordance with a new programme. Governed by the new principles of scientific taxonomy, the stress was placed on the observable differences between things rather than their hidden resemblances; the common or ordinary object, accorded a representative function, was accorded priority over the exotic or unusual; and things were arranged as parts of series rather than as unique items.

It is odd, however, that Hooper-Greenhill should leave off her account at this point. For the epistemic shift that most matters so far as the public museum is concerned is not that from the Renaissance to the classical *episteme* but that from the latter to the modern *episteme*. As a consequence of this shift, as Foucault describes it in tracing the emergence of the modern sciences of Man, things ceased to be arranged as parts of taxonomic tables and came, instead, in being inserted within the flow of time, to be differentiated in terms of the positions accorded them within evolutionary series. It is this shift, I suggest, which can best account for the discursive space of the public museum. The birth of the museum is coincident with, and supplied a primary institutional condition for, the emergence of a new set of knowledges – geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history – each of which, in its museological deployment, arranged objects as parts of evolutionary sequences (the history of the earth, of life, of man, and of civilization) which, in their interrelations, formed a totalizing order of things and peoples that was historicized through and through.

The conceptual shifts which made this possible did not, of course, occur evenly or at the same time across all these knowledges. In the case of history and art history, Stephen Bann (1984) attributes the development of the two principles governing the poetics of the modern history museum – the *galleria progressiva* and the period room – to the Musée des monuments français (1795) and Alexandre du Sommerard's collection at the Hôtel de Cluny (1832), although Pevsner (1976) traces elements of the former to Christian von Michel's display at the Dusseldorf gallery in 1755. In the case of anthropology, while Jomard, curator at the Bibliothèque Royale, had argued, as early as the 1820s, for an ethnographic museum that would illustrate 'the degree of civilisation of peoples/who are/but slightly advanced' (cited in Williams 1985: 140), it was not until Pitt Rivers developed his typological system that display principles appropriate to this objective were devised. Nor was it until towards the end of the century that these principles were widely diffused, largely due to the influence of Otis Mason of the Smithsonian. Similarly, the theoretical triumph of Darwinism had little effect on museum practices in Britain until Richard Owen, a defender of Cuvier's principle of

the fixity of species, was succeeded, towards the end of the century, by William Henry Flower.²

When all these caveats are entered, however, the artefacts – such as geological specimens, works of art, curiosities and anatomical remains – which had been displayed cheek by jowl in the museum's early precursors in testimony to the rich diversity of the chain of universal being, or which had later been laid out on a table in accordance with the principles of classification, had, by roughly the mid-nineteenth century, been wrenched from both these spaces of representation and were in the process of being ushered into the new one constituted by the relations between the evolutionary series organized by each of these knowledges. In these respects, and like their predecessors, museums produced a position of power and knowledge in relation to a microcosmic reconstruction of a totalized order of things and peoples. Yet, and as a genuinely new principle, these power-knowledge relations were democratic in their structure to the degree that they constituted the public they addressed – the newly formed, undifferentiated public brought into being by the museum's openness – as both the culmination of the evolutionary series laid out before it and as the apex of development from which the direction of those series, leading to modern man as their accomplishment, was discernible. Just as, in the festivals of the absolutist court, an ideal and ordered world unfolds before and emanates from the privileged and controlling perspective of the prince, so, in the museum, an ideal and ordered world unfolds before and emanates from a controlling position of knowledge and vision; one, however, which has been democratized in that, at least in principle, occupancy of that position – the position of Man – is openly and freely available to all.

It is, however, around that phrase 'at least in principle' that the key issues lie. For in practice, of course, the space of representation shaped into being by the public museum was hijacked by all sorts of particular social ideologies: it was sexist in the gendered patterns of its exclusions, racist in its assignation of the aboriginal populations of conquered territories to the lowest rungs of human evolution, and bourgeois in the respect that it was clearly articulated to bourgeois rhetorics of progress. For all that, it was an order of things and peoples that could be opened up to criticism from within inasmuch as, in purporting to tell the story of Man, it incorporated a principle of generality in relation to which any particular museum display could be held to be partial, incomplete, inadequate. When contrasted with earlier absolutist or theocratic spaces of representation – spaces constructed in relation to a singular controlling point of reference, human or divine, which does not claim a representative generality – the space of representation associated with the museum rests on a principle of general human universality which renders it inherently volatile, opening it up to a constant discourse of reform as hitherto excluded constituencies seek inclusion – and inclusion on equal terms – within that space.

I shall return to these considerations later. Meanwhile, let me return to the question of the relations between the prison and the museum in order to clarify their respective positions within the power-knowledge relations of nineteenth-century societies. In examining the formation of the new social disciplines associated with the development of the carceral archipelago and, more generally, the development of modern forms of governmentality, Foucault stresses the respects in which these knowledges, in mapping the body with their individualizing and particularizing gaze, render the populace visible to power and, hence, to regulation. While the various exhibitionary knowledges associated with the rise of the museum similarly form part of a set of power-knowledge relations, these differ in both their organization and functioning from those Foucault is concerned with. If the orientation of the prison is to discipline and punish with a view to effecting a modification of behaviour, that of the museum is to show and tell so that the people might look and learn. The purpose, here, is not to know the populace but to allow the people, addressed as subjects of knowledge rather than as objects of administration, to know; not to render the populace visible to power but to render power visible to the people and, at the same time, to represent to them that power as their own.

In thus rhetorically incorporating an undifferentiated citizenry into a set of power-knowledge relations which are represented to it as emanating from itself, the museum emerged as an important instrument for the self-display of bourgeois-democratic societies. Indeed, if, in Foucault's account, the prison emblemizes a new set of relations through which the populace is constituted as the object of governmental regulation, so the museum might serve as the emblem for the emergence of an equally important new set of relations – best summarized in Gramsci's conception of the ethical state – through which a democratic citizenry was rhetorically incorporated into the processes of the state. If so, it is important to recall that Gramsci viewed this as a distinguishing feature of the modern bourgeois state rather than a defining attribute of the state as such. Whereas, he argues, previous ruling classes 'did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere "technically" and ideologically,' the bourgeoisie 'poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and moral level' (Gramsci 1971: 260). It is in this respect, he contends, that the entire function of the state is transformed as it becomes an educator. The migration of the display of power from, on the one hand, the public scene of punishment and, on the other, from the enclosed sphere of court festivals to the public museum played a crucial role in this transformation precisely to the degree that it fashioned a space in which these two differentiated functions – the display of power to the populace and its display within the ruling classes – coalesced.

THE MUSEUM AND PUBLIC MANNERS

Yet this is only half the story. For however much it may have aimed at promoting a mixing and intermingling of those publics – elite and popular – which had hitherto tended towards separate forms of assembly, the museum also served as an instrument for differentiating populations. In doing so, moreover, it too formed a part of the emergence of those techniques of regulation and self-regulation Foucault is concerned with whereby the behaviour of large populations is subject to new forms of social management. To appreciate the respects in which this is so account must be taken of the emergence of new technologies of behaviour management which allowed museums to offer a technical solution to the problem that had always plagued earlier forms for the display of power with their attendant risks of disorder. An examination of these issues will also serve to show how, in spite of its formally addressing an undifferentiated public, the practices of the museum served to drive a wedge between the publics it attracted and that recalcitrant portion of the population whose manners remained those of the tavern and the fair.

Foucault describes well enough the risks of disorder associated with the scene of punishment: 'on execution days,' he writes, 'work stopped, the taverns were full, the authorities were abused, insults or stones were thrown at the executioner, the guards and the soldiers; attempts were made to seize the condemned man, either to save him or to kill him more surely; fights broke out, and there was no better prey for thieves than the curious throng around the scaffold' (Foucault 1977: 63). David Cooper, noting the fairlike atmosphere of public executions, paints a similar picture for late-eighteenth century England by when, of course, the fair itself had become the very symbol of popular disorder: in 1817, for example, Bartholomew Fair, suspected of being a breeding ground for sedition, was attacked by four regiments of horse.³ If the birth of the prison, in detaching punishment from the public scene, was one response to the problem, the birth of the museum provided its complement. Detaching the display of power – the power to command and arrange objects for display – from the risk of disorder, it also provided a mechanism for the transformation of the crowd into an ordered and, ideally, self-regulating public.

This is not to say that it immediately presented itself in this light. To the contrary, in the British context, the advocates of public museums had to fight hard against a tide of influential opinion which feared that, should museums be opened to the public, they would fall victim to the disorderliness of the crowd. In conservative opinion, images of the political mob, the disorderly crowd of the fair, or of the drunk and debauched rabble of the pub or tavern were frequently conjured up as interchangeable spectres to suggest that opening the doors of museums could only result in either the destruction of their exhibits or the desecration of their aura of culture and knowledge by

unseemly forms of behaviour. We know well enough from the literature on rational recreations that, in reforming opinion, museums were envisaged as a means of exposing the working classes to the improving mental influence of middle-class culture. However, the point I want to stress here concerns the respect in which, conceived as antidotes to the forms of behaviour associated with places of popular assembly, museums were also regarded as instruments capable of inducing a reform of public manners – that is, of modifying external and visible forms of behaviour quite independently of any inner mental or cultural transformation.⁴

The museum, that is to say, explicitly targeted the popular body as an object for reform, doing so through a variety of routines and technologies requiring a shift in the norms of bodily comportment. This was accomplished, most obviously, by the direct proscription of those forms of behaviour associated with places of popular assembly by, for example, rules forbidding eating and drinking, outlawing the touching of exhibits and, quite frequently, stating – or at least advising – what should be worn and what should not. In this way, while formally free and open, the museum effected its own pattern of informal discriminations and exclusions. Perhaps more distinctive, however, was the constitution of the museum – alongside public parks and the like – as a space of emulation in which the working classes, in being allowed to commingle with the middle classes in a formally and undifferentiated sphere, could learn to adopt new forms of behaviour by imitation. Supporters of the exhibitions held in the Leeds Mechanics Institute thus likened their pedagogic benefits to those of public walking areas whose virtue, according to one contemporary, was to promote ‘a gentle and refined restraint’ which ‘keeps boisterous pleasure within bounds; and teaches the graceful art of being gay without coarseness and observing the limits which separate sport from riot’ (cited in Arscott 1988: 154). In this way, through offering a space of ‘supervised conformity’, the museum offered a context in which new forms of behaviour might, in being internalized, become self-acting imperatives.⁵

In these respects, the museum constituted not merely a culturally differentiated space but the site for a set of culturally differentiating practices aimed at screening out the forms of public behaviour associated with places of popular assembly. The same end was achieved by the development of new architectural means of regulating the function of spectacle. In his essay ‘The Eye of Power’, Foucault argues that, as architecture ceases to be concerned with making power manifest, it comes, instead, to serve the purpose of regulating behaviour by means of new organizations of the relations between space and vision – the one-way, hierarchically organized system of looks of the penitentiary, for example, or the focusing of the pupil’s gaze on the person of the teacher in popular schooling (Foucault 1980b). While, in their imposing exteriors, nineteenth-century museums retained an emblematic architectural function, changes in their internal architecture instituted a new set of relations between space and vision in which the public could not only

see the exhibits arranged for its inspection but could, at the same time, see and be seen by itself, thus placing an architectural restraint on any incipient tendency to rowdiness.

To foreground the point: the 1830s witnessed an inquiry into the administration of ancient monuments in Britain. A major finding of this inquiry concerned the impossibility of arranging for the effective surveillance of the public in buildings like Westminster Abbey which contained so many nooks and crannies that it was commonly used as a public urinal.⁶ The museum’s precursors, designed to admit only carefully selected publics, suffered from the same problem. Consisting, often, of myriad small rooms cluttered with objects they did not lend themselves to the task of regulating the conduct of a large and unscreened public. The architectural sources which fuelled the development of nineteenth-century exhibitionary institutions are many and various: shopping arcades, railway stations, conservatories, market halls and department stores to name but a few.⁷ However, three general principles can be observed, all of which came together for the first time in the Crystal Palace in ways which exerted a decisive influence on the subsequent development of exhibitionary architecture: first, the use of new materials (cast-iron and sheet glass) to permit the enclosure and illumination of large spaces; second, the clearing of exhibits to the sides and centres of display areas, thus allowing clear passageways for the transit of the public, and breaking that public up from a disaggregated mass into an orderly flow; and, third, the provision of elevated vantage points in the form of galleries which, in allowing the public to watch over itself, incorporated a principle of self-surveillance and hence self-regulation into museum architecture. In thus allowing the public to double as both the subject and object of a controlling look, the museum embodied what had been, for Bentham, a major aim of panopticism – the democratic aspiration of a society rendered transparent to its own controlling gaze.⁸

Of course, this is not to gainsay Hooper-Greenhill’s contention that the museum has functioned as an instrument of discipline, nor the fact that the museum was and remains a space of surveillance in the more obvious sense that the behaviour of the public is monitored by security staff or television. These, however, form only one aspect of the museum’s organization of the relations between space and vision which, in affording the public a position of self-inspection, has allowed it to function – in its own right and directly – as an agent for both establishing and policing norms of public conduct. It is, moreover, in this respect, rather than in view of its ideological influence, that the specific form of hegemony promoted by the museum can best be deciphered. Barry Smart, in preferring a Foucaultian conception of hegemony to a Gramscian one, argues that, for Foucault, hegemony is to be understood as a form of social cohesion achieved by various ways of programming behaviour rather than through the mechanisms of consent which Gramsci posits (Smart 1986). The museum, viewed as a technology of behaviour management, served to organize new types of social cohesion precisely

through the new forms of both differentiating and aligning populations it brought into being. Its functioning in this respect, however, needs to be viewed in a comparative light in order to appreciate the distinctive economy of its effort. If, as has been suggested earlier, the prison served the purpose of depoliticizing crime by detaching a manageable criminal sub-class from the rest of the population, the museum provided its complement in instilling new codes of public behaviour which drove a wedge between the respectable and the rowdy.

In his discussion of the schemes of late eighteenth-century penal reformers, Foucault notes the respects in which punishment, conceived as 'a Garden of the Laws that families would visit on Sundays', was intended to provide a programme of instruction in civic ethics (Foucault 1977: 111). In the event, however, as punishment was withdrawn from the public scene, it was increasingly the museum that was conceived as the primary instrument of civic education. As such its function was a normalizing one. This was partly a matter of what it had to show and tell in constructing a norm of humanity – white, bourgeois and male – whose normative status was reinforced by the display of all manner of deviations: of the 'underdeveloped' crania of Aborigines at the Pitt Rivers Museum, for example, or elsewhere, of the allegedly peculiar crania of criminals. But it was also a matter of normalizing the visitor directly through the influence of a machinery for the regulation of behaviour. Thus when Henry Cole praises the museum for its educative potential, it is worth noting what he regards as its chief lesson. 'It would teach the young child', he writes, 'to respect property and behave gently' (Cole 1884: 356). Going to a museum, then as now, is not merely a matter of looking and learning; it is also – and precisely because museums are as much places for being seen as for seeing – an exercise in civics.

THE POLITICAL-DISCURSIVE SPACE OF THE MUSEUM

The discursive space of the museum, in its nineteenth-century formation, was thus a highly complex one shaped, in the main, by two contradictions which have served to generate and fuel a field of political relations and demands peculiar to the museum form. In considering these contradictions more closely I want, in concluding, to advance a conception of museum politics which, in relating itself to these contradictions self-consciously rather than simply occupying their grooves, would aim to dismantle the space of the museum by establishing a new set of relations between the museum, its exhibits and its publics which would allow it to function more adequately as an instrument for the self-display of democratic and pluralist societies.

The first contradiction, then, that which has fuelled political demands based on the principle of representational adequacy, has consisted in the disparity between, on the one hand, the museum's universalist aspirations embodied in the claim that the order of things and peoples it shaped into being was

generally representative of humanity and, on the other hand, the fact that any particular museum display can always be held to be partial, selective and inadequate in relation to this objective. Paul Greenhalgh puts his finger on the point I'm after here when he notes, in explaining why world's fairs became such important points of focus for late nineteenth-century feminists, that 'because of their claims to encyclopaedic coverage of world culture, exhibitions could not easily exclude women in the way other institutions continually did' (Greenhalgh 1988: 174). It was, that is to say, only the museum's embodiment of a principle of general human universality that lent potential significance to the exclusion or marginalization of women and women's culture, thereby opening this up as a politicizable question. The same, of course, is true of the range of demands placed on museums on behalf of other political constituencies as the space of the museum has been subject to a constant process of politicization in being called on both to expand the range of its representational concerns (to include artefacts relating to the ways of life of marginalized social groups, for example) and/or to exhibit familiar materials in new contexts to allow them to represent the values of the groups to which they relate rather than those of the dominant culture (I have in mind, for example, Aboriginal criticisms of the evolutionary assumptions governing the display of Aboriginal remains and artefacts in natural history museums). These demands arise out of, and are fuelled by, the internal dynamics of the museum which lends them a pertinence they did not, and could not, have had in eighteenth-century cabinets of curiosities, for example, and still do not have in relation to their contemporary bowdlerized versions, such as the Ripley Believe It Or Not Museums.

Yet, important though they are, there are clear limits to what can be achieved by attempts to hoist the museum on the petard of its own universalist rhetorics. Indeed, it is partly as a consequence of the host of competing political demands placed on it that the pretensions of the museum to offer a microcosmic reconstruction of the order of things in the world outside the museum's walls has been exploded from within. Given this, rather than calling the museum to task in accordance with the principle of representational adequacy – thereby generating a politics which, since its goal is unachievable, is insatiable – political effort would be better devoted to transforming the relations between museum exhibits, their organizers and the museum visitor. This is to suggest that, in addition to what gets shown in museums, attention needs also to be paid to the processes of showing, who takes part in those processes and their consequences for the relations they establish between the museum and the visitor.

Presently, to recall Hooper-Greenhill's argument, the division between the hidden space of the museum in which knowledge is produced and organized and the public spaces in which it is offered for passive consumption produces a monologic discourse dominated by the authoritative cultural voice of the museum. To break this discourse down, it is imperative that the role of the

curator be shifted away from that of the source of an expertise whose function is to organize a representation claiming the status of knowledge and towards that of the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources to make authored statements within it. Aspects of this reconception of the museum's function can currently be found in a handful of Australian museums which have ceded to Aboriginal peoples the right to refashion the display of Aboriginal materials in order to make their own statements on their own terms. If the space of the museum is to become more fully dialogic, and if such statements are not to be framed within – and so, potentially, recuperated by – the official voice of the museum, the principle embodied in such experiments needs to be generalized, thereby, in allowing the museum to function as a site for the enunciation of plural and differentiated statements, enabling it to function as an instrument for public debate.

The second contradiction affecting the museum, I have argued, consists in the fact that while it organized and addressed a public made up of formal equals it also served to differentiate populations via a combination of cultural markers which established it in a cultural zone clearly distinct from that of popular assemblies and regulatory technologies aimed at modifying the behaviour of the visitor. Of course, many of the initial arguments made in favour of the museum's openness were based on an assessment of the benefits that would accrue to the state via the exposure of the population to its improving influence rather than on the basis of public rights principles. None the less, it is easy to see how, by virtue of their own democratic rhetoric, museums should have become the objects of politics based on such principles. Again, however, while the requirement that they should be equally accessible to all is one that flows out of the internal dynamic of the museum, that same dynamic, in so far as the museum embodies a means for differentiating populations in accordance with the norms for conduct which it establishes, places impediments in the way of realizing this objective. Studies of museum visitors thus make it abundantly clear not only that museum attendance varies directly with such variables as class, income, occupation and, most noticeable, education, but also that the barriers to participation, as perceived by non-attenders, are largely cultural.⁹ Those sections of the population which make little use of museums clearly feel that the museum constitutes a cultural space that is not meant for them – and, as we have seen, not without reason.

The political issues posed by this second contradiction, however, are complex and contradictory. For, as museums are placed under increasingly strong fiscal pressure, there is enough evidence to suggest that the mechanisms of differentiation which characterized the nineteenth-century museum are being slammed into reverse. In order to attract sufficient visitors to justify continuing public funding, they thus now often seek to imitate rather than distinguish themselves from places of popular assembly: interactive computer displays competing with video parlours, for example, 'touch and feel'

exhibits, the reconstruction of places of popular assembly as museum exhibits (pubs and cinemas, for example), modelling museum shops on the sales outlets of tourist sites. While these attempts to democratize the ethos of the museum are to be welcomed, their capacity to substantially alter the visitor profiles of museums is difficult to assess. Indeed, so long as the education system delivers a culturally differentiated population to the museum's doors, socially skewed patterns of participation can be expected to persist.

The more interesting political questions, to my mind, concern the grounds – beyond those concerning the equitable apportionment of public resources – for arguing the political desirability of more equitable patterns of access to, and use of, museums. The options, as currently posed within the museum profession, are largely polarized between populist and statist positions – the former, envisioning the museum's future as part of the leisure industry, urging that the people should be given what they want, while the latter, retaining the view of museums as instruments of instruction, argues they should remain means for lifting the cultural and intellectual level of the population. Neither position offers sufficient grounds for viewing more democratic levels of participation in museums as necessarily of any positive political value if the forms of participation remain passive. As with the political demands based on the principle of representational adequacy, those demands brought to bear on the museum on the basis of public rights principles need to be re-thought as pertaining to the right to make active use of museum resources rather than an entitlement to be either entertained or instructed.