The idea of modernity

Modernity: a brief definition

Jurgen Habermas has defined modernity as, 'The epochal new beginning that marked the modern world's break with the world of the Christian Middle Ages and antiquity [that] is repeated, as it were, in every present moment that brings forth something new. The present perpetuates the break with the past in the form of a continual renewal' (Habermas 1989: 48).

Modernity has its origins in the Renaissance, and the emergence of modern science – the discovery of 'truths' and 'facts', or rather claims for the possibility of objective truths about the world and 'Man's' place within it. The 'meta narratives' which emerged during the modern epoch were essentially discourses which implied a rigid objectivism, and through this, the potential of a thorough analysis of the world. Such meta narratives might include Darwin's Theory of Evolution and Marx's analysis of capital. Modernism can thus be considered as a set of discourses concerned with the possibilities of representing reality and defining eternal truths.

The idea of progress

An essential proposition of modern thought is an idea of progress, a belief which developed as a constituent part of Enlightenment thinking, and provided modern thinkers with a faith in the ability of humankind to manipulate and exploit their environments for the benefit of society. Such a society could escape from the debilitating elements of the past, and could move ever forward to new horizons. If modernity has a particular essence, it is a belief in rational advancement through increments of perpetual improvement.
Enlightenment thinking provided the foundations of modernity and was an essential element in the foundation of modernity. The Enlightenment was a conception of society and politics that overrode any of the problems that it was either forced to continue or temporarily combine with a faith in humankind's dominance of modernity. The Enlightenment was a concept of science and technology, accompanied at each step by the pursuit of empirical knowledge. (MacCormack, 1986: 4.)

The belief in progress was based on Newtonian physics, as was the Enlightenment concept of time. A belief in growth provided a secure model for progress in all aspects of life. In fact, the concept of progress was also derived from the myth of the scientific revolution. (MacCormack, 1986: 4.)

The progress of ideas in the present, guided to an extent by an apparent sense, as we reflect over the course of events, it is not possible without the other, and the individual, the collective, and the social.
Time in modernity

Time is a culturally specific construction, although years and months are based on natural cyclic periods. The week is in fact a purely cultural unit of time, as are hours, minutes and seconds. Despite this, humans often seem to consider time as a universal or absolute phenomenon. Time, as it is widely understood in the First World today, has its roots in the Enlightenment. This idea of time is undeniably linked with the idea of progress and is crucial to any understanding of the modern world and any disciplines which adopt an historical perspective.

It is probably the Judaic-Christian concept of time which has had the greatest influence on the modern understanding of time. This Jewish concept of time was based on the ‘linear concept of time, founded, in their case, on a teleological idea of history as the gradual revelation of God’s purpose’ (Whitrow 1988: 51). Christians saw the crucifixion as a unique event, and it is this emphasis on the non-repeatability of events which is crucial to explaining the western idea of linear and non-cyclical history (ibid.: 57).

Roman culture also emphasized an idea of linear history, attributing the success of the Roman Empire not to one person in the present, but to many ancestors during Rome’s past. As Whitrow illustrates, Tacitus often cited documents and authors and developed a critical form of history. He recognized the historian’s role as a judge of previous human actions. But as Marwick comments, ‘For the Greek and Roman writers history was unashamedly “exemplar history”, a preparation for life, especially political and military life’ (Marwick 1989: 29).

During the Middle Ages there seems to have been little concern with a fastidious observation of time. According to Whitrow, people rarely even bothered to date their letters (Whitrow 1988: 84). It was with the advent of accurate timekeeping during the latter half of the seventeenth century that the modern experience of time developed. The idea of time as an entity in itself emerged, a belief that there was in fact a definable context of time. Newton’s concept of mathematical time, as outlined in his Principia, understood it as a straight geometrical line. Newton went on to develop a concern with chronology, which, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was symptomatic of a wider concern with the authenticity of the Bible and its chronology (ibid.: 131).

For much of the later Medieval period, time was considered to be a destructive force. ‘The typical Renaissance image of time was as the destroyer equipped with hour-glass, scythe or sickle’ (ibid.: 132). However, during the Renaissance an awareness of change through time developed, and a more optimistic perception of time and its effects emerged.

By the eighteenth century, for many people an appreciation or new awareness of time had developed. This was a period of ‘discovery’ of historical perspective. In 1795 Condorcet’s Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind was published. In this ‘Condorcet expressed his belief in the inevitability of human progress and in the power of science and technology to transform man’s knowledge and control over himself and society’ (ibid.: 147).

During the nineteenth century a more scientifically coherent justification of linear time emerged. The unidirectional nature of time was legitimated by Becquerel’s discovery of radioactivity in 1896. Subsequently explained by Rutherford and Soddy in 1902, the decay of radioactive elements was shown to be uniform and linear.

The idea of progress and history

As discussed above, central to modernity was a belief in progress, but often this was a progress achieved through destruction, often a destruction of lifestyles that had not really altered since the early Middle Ages, or even the late third and second millennia bc. The Industrial Revolution was responsible for the uprooting and disturbance of large sectors of the population. It was partly as a result of this newly imposed rootlessness that an enchantment with the past emerged during the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that the Victorian period was dominated by industrial and scientific progress, it ‘was also an age dominated by a fascination with the past’ (Bowler 1989: 1). Of course, it is understood that societies prior to those of the nineteenth century had an interest in the past, but these interests were quite different from the histories and archaeologies which had their roots in the Enlightenment, and developed into the foundations of the modern disciplines of the twentieth century.

It can be argued that pre-industrial society’s awareness of the past was an experience which was entirely more organic than that understanding of the past which was to develop in the modern urban world. In the rural, or pre-industrial context, there seems to have been an appreciation of the processes which had, and still did, affected daily life. The past was something which was present in the construction of the sense of place. This may be considered as a more organic form of history, one which recognizes the crucial contingency of past processes on present places. Places, natural and human-made features, acted as ‘time-marks’, physical
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phenomena which exist in the present but possess, for those who know them, a temporal depth which gives them a special meaning. An important form of such a time-mark is the boundary, the perceived periphery of a community’s locality. These may range from boundaries made of stone in prehistory, to parish boundaries, and enclosed fields.

In this book, it is considered that a sense of place is an attachment to, or knowledge of, one’s locality, an understanding or appreciation of the processes which have affected a place, both through time and space. Such a sense of place is not based on a narrow parochialism or chauvinism, but rather an understanding of how other places and people have affected one’s place throughout history. This idea of a sense of place will be considered at length in chapter seven.

The experiences of industrialization and urbanization destroyed for many people this organic, or contingent, past. The sense of the past developed by the new urban mass was one that had to be created, in the same way as their places had to be created. The experiences of modernization wrenched a vast proportion of the population from settled, well-established lifestyles, where the past had been a part of their daily experience. ‘The Victorians’ fascination with the past was the product of an age obsessed with change, desperateely hoping that history itself might supply the reassurance that could no longer be derived from ancient beliefs’ (ibid.: 3). The move from the rooted place, to an ephemeral, transitory urban experience, resulted in a conception of the past which was dominated by change – progress towards the ever more modern world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, there does seem to have been a developing awareness of the importance of the past, but this importance was increasingly neutered by the developing perception of the past as something which was separate and had a limited contingency for modern societies. This point will be expanded later in the book.

Also, the idea that such a past was essentially a tale of progress towards the modern was rarely ever questioned by the majority of people. As Dellheim argues in his discussion of the Victorian appropriation of images of the Middle Ages,

Liberal England’s middle-class politicians and businessmen appropriated medieval forms to create pedigrees for their values and to legitimize their quest for hegemony. Although their concern with historic paraphernalia superficially reinforced the authority of traditional symbols, actually it diminished the prescriptive force of the past by reinterpreting its meanings in the light of progressive aspirations.

(Dellheim 1982: 179)

The Victorians tended to believe that social development was a movement in a purposeful, positive direction – a progression towards a meaningfully constituted society. It was this understanding of the nature of progress which saw its clearest articulation in Whig history: the belief in inevitable trends, based on freedom of thought and commercial enterprise. ‘Evolution was the sum total of a vast multitude of individual progressive acts, allowing middle-class values to be seen as the driving force of an essentially purposeful system of nature’ (Bowler 1989: 8).

This idea of progress was reflected in the work of Adam Smith, whose Wealth of Nations (1776) articulated the belief that, despite the fact that people are inherently selfish, their efforts for self-improvement would benefit society as a whole. If uninhibited by ‘unnatural’ controls, then the economy and society will develop naturally, and in a trend that will be in the interest of everybody. Contrary to Darwin’s emphasis on the uniqueness and haphazard nature of all evolutionary developments, it would appear that there was a profound belief in the inevitability of progress as the basis to Victorian evolutionism.

It is this model of progress that contributed to early ideas on societal development in prehistory. This kind of linear interpretation clearly lent itself to static display in museums, although it was probably not until just after World War I that such ideas were represented explicitly in museum displays. It is in part for this reason that today many archaeological and historical displays still follow this basic formula. It is of course very difficult to avoid, and it is the aim of this book to approach some ideas on how this might be achieved.

To an extent, the modern idea of history and its concomitant conception of time implied that the future had already begun. There was a belief in an acceleration and advancing of historical events. Habermas considers that,

At this time the image of history as a uniform process that generates problems is formed, and time becomes experienced as a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise – that is, as the pressure of time. The ‘Zeitgeist’, or spirit of age, one of the new words that inspired Hegel, characterizes the present as a transition that is consumed in the consciousness of a speeding up and the expectation of the differentness of the future.

(Habermas 1987b: 6)

For Stephen Kern, author of The Culture of Time and Space, ‘Thinking about the past centred on four major issues: the age of the earth, the
impact of the past on the present, the value of that impact, and the most effective way to recapture a past that has been forgotten' (Kern 1983: 37).

There was also a concern with the problem of fixity for the past. In 1654, Bishop Usher informed the world that creation took place in 4004 sc. In the 1770s Comte de Buffon considered that the earth was at least 168,000 years old. By the early nineteenth century the age of the earth was reckoned by some to be infinite. During the first half of the nineteenth century the aging of the earth was the province of geologists until 1862 when the physicist Lord Kelvin argued that the earth was probably between 100 million and 200 million years old. This reduced time scale forced biologists and geologists to develop theories of catastrophe which allowed them to hypothesize great surges in development. For the majority of people, however, these debates over the geological age of the earth probably had little impact on their perceptions of history, once it was recognized that the biblical chronology, epitomized by Usher, had been revealed as false. For most people there was probably little difference, conceptually, between a 100-million- and a 20-million-year-old earth.

Despite the realization that humans have had a relatively short past on the earth compared with the planet's age, there was a growing concern with discovering humankind's past. Kern argues that especially during the late nineteenth century, as a consequence of new recording technologies, people became more and more aware of the fact that the present was the result of the past. The phonographic cylinders, the motion pictures, and the preservation societies constituted silent arguments for the persistence of the past and its impact on the present' (ibid.: 40). During the late nineteenth century a new appreciation of the contingency of the past on groups of people developed. A belief that people were constituted by the traces of their pasts emerged. This was ghoulishly elaborated by Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897): 'The blood of several centuries of victims flowed in the veins of the four-hundred-year-old hero along with blood of his ancestors - more ancient, the Count boasted, than the Hapsburgs or the Romanovs' (Kern 1983: 41). This differed from the pre-modern 'organic' sense of the past, where the locality or the place was filled with historical meaning because it had been occupied by a definable community for a long period of time. The later Victorian awareness of the past tended to consider the histories of groups of people who were often separated across space. The impact of modernization had further ruptured many links that had existed between many groups; such disturbances necessitated the articulation of historical traditions. The definition of historical associations between peoples who were now, more so than ever before, removed from their own places seemed necessary for many groups of people who wished to maintain an identity.

Life in time may have become more important for some people, especially if they had lost their spatial roots. Kern believes that this may have been true of Jews, for whom spatial roots were usually only a dream. However Judaism, as with most religions, shows a reverence for the past. It is this rootedness in time which perhaps gives Jews such a great strength and faith. Kern also argues that with the decline of a religious conception of humankind during the late nineteenth century, there may have been the development of a belief that if humankind no longer had a place in God's eternity, then perhaps they had a place in history (ibid.: 50-1).

The first 'modern' histories were produced in the early nineteenth century. It was Conder who had hoped that the history of humankind would be modelled on the history of modern science and rationalization. But for most historians, the first 'true' history was written by Leopold von Ranke, whose History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations was published in 1824. Ranke's aim 'was the misleadingly modest-seeming one of presenting the past as it really was, discovering what actually happened on the basis of a systematic and comprehensive survey of existing evidence and of new evidence that could be collected' (Atkinson 1978: 16).

During the Victorian period the modern discipline of history expanded. Macaulay wrote multi-volumed histories of England, while the historical novel flourished. Interest in the excavations of Assyrian cities by Henry Layard, and the work of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy, was extensive. Schliemann's activities often reached the front pages of newspapers, and Gladstone himself wrote the preface to Schliemann's Mycamae of 1875 (Bowra 1959: 48). The teaching of non-ancient history in universities also developed during the nineteenth century. In 1866 William Stubbs was appointed to the chair of Modern History at Oxford, and in 1868 the new Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes opened at the Sorbonne.

Early archaeological thought

Contemporary with the emergence of history as a discipline was the development of modern archaeology, which was different from antiquarianism in its emphasis on the use of artefacts in a consideration of human development, and of course, progress, through time. An early example of the influence of the modern episteme of progress was the work of Christian Jürgensen Thomsen, who in 1816 became the first curator of the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen. He was the first to arrange the collections systematically on the basis of the Three-Age System in a linear developmental scheme of technological change, moving from the use of stone artefacts, to bronze and ultimately to iron. This followed on from the earlier eighteenth-century work of Nicolas Mahu in others.
The Danish National Museum was opened to the public in 1819. After a few years, the museum was rehoused in part of the Christianborg royal palace, where one room was assigned to each of the Three Ages. Thomsen made a concerted effort to educate 'peasants' who visited the museum, working on the assumption that these were the people most likely to discover prehistoric artefacts. Trigger believes that the motivation behind Thomsen's work was patriotism, but 'The antiquarian research of the eighteenth century and the evolutionary concepts of the Enlightenment were indispensable preconditions for his success' (Trigger 1989: 73). It was his development of relative dating techniques that made his contribution to the understanding and presentation of prehistory of crucial importance.

As mentioned above, modern university history began its development during the early to mid-nineteenth century. This development was mirrored in archaeology, with J. A. Worsaae's (1821–85) appointment as Denmark's Inspector for the Conservation of Antiquarian Monuments in 1847, and then in 1855 his appointment as the first Professor of Archaeology at the University of Copenhagen.

In Britain, Enlightenment archaeology took hold in some areas. Notably the Scottish antiquarian Daniel Wilson (1816–92), influenced by Worsaae, used the Three-Age System to organize the artefacts which belonged to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in Edinburgh. Wilson recommended that the British Museum reorganize their artefacts on the basis of the Three-Age System, but this plea was ignored for many years. By and large the prehistoric archaeology that had been pioneered by the Scandinavians was disregarded by antiquarians in England, and the more scientific approach to the study of artefacts did not really develop in this country before the late 1830s.

Archaeology was seriously hampered in its development as a serious academic discipline by the problem of a limiting biblical chronology. The acceptance of human antiquity was largely brought about as a result of the work of two geologists, William Pengelly and Hugh Falconer. Their excavations at Brixham Cave near Torquay yielded stone tools and bones of extinct animals in close proximity. Other geologists visited the site, including Charles Lyell, and supported the assumptions of Pengelly and Falconer regarding the antiquity of humankind. During 1859 and 1860, a number of papers were published supporting the belief that humanity was far more ancient than had been previously accepted.

John Lubbock, with the publication of his *Pre-historic Times* in 1865, promoted the idea that humankind had developed from the primitive savage, and had arrived at its current position through a steady linear progression and advancement: 'Lubbock ended his book with a hymn of praise to progress' (Bowler 1989: 81), and his hypothesis challenged the theological doctrine of the era, which accepted the idea of degeneration from a state of grace. Some, including the Duke of Argyll in his *Primal Man* of 1869, argued that the evidence only proved that humans had developed technologically. Nothing could prove that they had not possessed an equivalent moral or spiritual capacity and as Bowler says, 'His argument illustrated the extent to which evolutionary anthropology rested upon an assumption about the integral nature of economic and moral development' (ibid.: 81).

The archaeological counterpart to the linear progressionism of anthropology was developed by the French archaeologist Gabriel de Mortillet, assistant curator at the Museum of National Antiquities at Saint-German-en-Laye. His analysis of flint tools was based on a firm belief that any subdivision of such material should be based not on palaeontological, but on cultural, criteria. This progressive sequence comprised the Chellean Epoch (which included the large stone handaxes discovered by Boucher des Perthes whose work on the Somme gravels led to an acceptance of the antiquity of humankind), the Mousterian which was followed by the Solutrean, and finally the Magdalenian. Mortillet was convinced that this was the result of a natural progression in human development. This sequence is still central to the teaching of early prehistory in the Western world.

Another form of progressionism which developed during the nineteenth century was the belief that the cultures of living peoples could be compared, if they were considered as unilinear developments at different stages of progress, ranging from simple to complex. Such studies were based on ethnographic data gathered from around the world by missionaries and explorers (Trigger 1989: 59). A form of institutionalized racism was established. Since the Victorian period, archaeology and history have continuously been used as supportive evidence for the superiority of white European peoples, the most disastrous form manifesting itself in the incorporation of Kosmin's archaeological research on Germanic origins into Nazi racism ideology (ibid.: 163–7).

The development of museums

An important element of Enlightenment and modern thought was a concern with the nature of 'man's' [sic] position in the order of things. Early museums were influenced, to a large extent, by the classical ordering of the universe:
... the Classical *episteme* can be defined in its most general arrangement in terms of the articulated system of *mathesis*, *taxinomia*, and a *genetic analysis*. The sciences always carry within themselves the project, however remote it may be, of an exhaustive ordering of the world...

(Foucault 1970: 74)

Whereas proto-museums were concerned with the naming and ordering of the universe, as will be illustrated below, the museums which developed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were clearly more influenced by the modern idea of progress and the modern preoccupation with representing humankind's place in a world which was recognized as being constituted by fleeting and opaque experiences, a world where humankind was just one element amongst all other phenomena. Thus the modern museum has attempted to represent processes and experiences which are recognized as transient through static and objectifying displays, a form of display which will be considered later in this chapter.

The 'proto-museum'

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it is possible to discern the emergence of proto-museums. These largely took the form of private collections, or cabinets of curiosities. Francis Bacon, in 1594, was quite explicit in his belief that no learned man considered a collection of weird and wonderful things to be 'the first museum of Europe': he identified the 'specific role it had to play in contemporary endeavours to comprehend and to encapsulate "the universal nature"'. Such cabinets would to modern eyes seem full of random miscellaneous objects, but 'those very traits of diversity and miscellaneity which serve in our eyes to impair the serious intent of these collections were essential elements in a programme whose aim was nothing less than universality'. In terms of historical or archaeological material it would appear that greatest importance was attached to classical objects, or antiquities from Egypt. An interest in objects from closer to home certainly developed, possibly as a consequence of the already developed interest in more exotic objects (Impey and MacGregor 1985: 1-2).

Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1988 and 1991) has traced the development of early museums employing Foucault's concept of 'effective history'. This requires the researcher to identify and articulate the important nodal points in the history of the phenomena under study, and she identifies the Medici Palace as the first 'nodal-point' in the development of museums (Hooper-Greenhill 1988: 70).

Clearly a product of the Renaissance, the Medici Palace was a private collection, and essentially an articulation of conspicuous consumption. The display was not a display as such, but rather a collection of exotic *objets*, designed to signify the importance of the owner, for 'Along with economic independence, and greater wealth, came an emphasis on the importance of a life in the present rather than the contemplative ideal of earlier times' (Ibid.: 80).

Objects were ordered in the display through correspondences, through analogies, and the emphasis on the ability of *man* [sic] to know or to discover through the power of the gaze. Humankind was perceived as being able to take a position within the order of the universe, and from this position develop a rational understanding of that universe, and thus appreciate the superiority of humankind's position therein. Part of this emerging experience was the recognition of historically sited cultures that were in some ways superior, and that through the appreciation of this history, Renaissance society could mirror that superiority. During the Renaissance, the Classical period gradually came to be perceived in a new light. No longer was the past feared. Instead 'A gaze informed by the idea that classical artefacts were the product of a superior epoch' emerged (Ibid.: 124).

What was equally important about this proto-museum in the Medici Palace was the fact that it was primarily a private institution, a privileged gaze, available only to those who had mastered the world through trade and the amassing of wealth. The "first museum of Europe" was constituted for the sole benefit of the family who owned it' (Ibid.: 150). The collection was perceived as giving the collector a certain kudos: 'not only did the creation and enrichment of a museum constitute an occupation worthy of a nobleman; they were also means of acquiring renown and prestige and of turning the owner's home into an almost obligatory sight for everyone' (Omri 1985: 13).

The cabinets of the world' are identified by Hooper-Greenhill as being a development of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and they were quite common across Europe, taking varied forms. The cabinets of the world should be differentiated from the cabinets of curiosity, represented by the German *Wunderkammer*.

Such a collection was meant to be no less than a representation of the 'universe', although as Hooper-Greenhill comments, 'The absolutely crucial question of what this “universality” might be now or might have been during the late Renaissance is never raised' (Hooper-Greenhill 1988: 159). Such cabinets, and the ways in which they were organized, were attempts to represent the world, and its order, as it was perceived by their owners. The aim was to constitute "the world as a view" (Ibid.: 161).
The world was divided into macrocosm and microcosm. Macrocosm represented God and that which he created (nature), and microcosm represented 'Man' who was responsible for 'Art'. Nature and Art were presumed to be fundamentally intermeshed and a network of complex correspondences linked the two categories.

The Kunstkammer of Rudolph II at Prague Castle can be considered as 'Encyclopedic' in its design, and represents a perceived position of man as master of his universe (ibid.: 211). It should be made clear that whereas the museum displays which emerged during the nineteenth century and are still common today attempted a form of didactic linear narrative, a representation of progress through the ordered display of artefacts, the Wunderkammer attempted an articulation of universal knowledge through the possession and identification of objects. To name an object is to know it and understand its position within the order of things. The aim of most displays of the late Renaissance period was to represent a sense of unity between the various material phenomena extant in the two spheres of creation, art and nature, highlighted above.

The elevated conviction of the museum as a public service did not really develop until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. And not until the nineteenth century could museums be considered as being truly public, and thus providing some sort of public service.

It is the institutional collections of the seventeenth century that represent the intermediate position between private 'cabinet' and public museum. Hunter believes that the basic difference between the 'private' cabinet and the institutional collection lay in the fact that the institutional collection 'had a potential for continuity which their private counterparts ordinarily lacked' (Hunter 1985: 159). This potential was due to the fact that institutions had a corporate life that was external to those of their members. A good example of such a collection was that of the Royal Society, which opened its museum in 1666.

England's first public museum was the Ashmolean which opened in 1683. The form of the Ashmolean, after its new building was completed in 1683, made it 'the first modern museum, specifically designed to display its collections, organized so that the University could use it for teaching purposes, and regularly open to the public' (Hudson 1987: 21).

The modern museum movement in Britain had its foundations in the philosophical societies that emerged during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Sheffield Society for the Promotion of Useful Knowledge, established in 1804, and the Bradford Philosophical Society, established in 1808, are two examples of such. Brears and Davies point out that many of these societies were actually quite short-lived and had collapsed due to problems caused by the Napoleonic Wars (Brears and Davies 1989: 16). After the Napoleonic Wars many new societies were formed. In the north of England, the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society was formed in 1818. This was followed by the establishment of similar societies in Sheffield and Hull in 1822, Bradford, Whity and York in 1823, Wakefield and Scarborough in 1827, Halifax in 1830, and Doncaster in 1834 (ibid.: 17). Many constructed purpose-designed museums, and, as a result, were important pioneers of the museum movement. Others shared facilities with other organizations, including libraries and theatres.

These philosophical societies' collections usually consisted of objects collected by people with interests in geology, natural history, antiquities and ethnography. Objects were usually donated. Local people and those who had travelled abroad would make donations. The Empire and 'informal Empire' (i.e. those countries that were not officially a part of the British Empire but were under British influence at the time, e.g. Argentina) would have been an almost limitless resource as far as museums were concerned.

The proto-museums developing in America during the eighteenth century were also of the cabinet of curiosities type. An example of such a proto-museum was the Charleston Museum in South Carolina established during the 1770s. The pattern of real museum growth in the US was the opposite of that in Europe. In the US public museums existed years before the great private collections which, in Europe, were the primumgenitiors of museums. Early American museums, such as the Charleston Museum and Peale's Museum in Philadelphia, both of which opened during the late eighteenth century, were committed to displaying their collections to the wider public. However, these early museums were clearly more akin to the cabinets of curiosity as far as the mode of presentation was concerned: 'the collections piled up in a completely disorderly, unplanned fashion yet... this old-fashioned chaos had a strong appeal for children and other unsophisticated people [sic], for whom a museum was, more than anything else, a chamber of wonders, a romantic place which scientific arrangement could and did only spoil' (Hudson 1975: 37).

Proto-museums can be considered as the early articulations of 'objective' understandings of the known world. Such representations were usually only available to the ruling and mercantile classes who had been involved in the 'discovery' and 'mapping' of the known world. However, the processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and empire-building brought a vast new populace into increased contact with the developing political, economic and cultural networks which were a part
of modernity. Such dramatic developments required the expansion of public institutions which could impart a feeling of belonging to, and knowledge of, the modern world. Therefore, the emergence of the modern museum can not be considered without a discussion of the economic contexts within which it developed.

**Industrialization**

The development of the public museum should be seen as the consequence of a number of interrelated factors, including the modern idea of progress and the emerging historical disciplines. But just as important was the impact of industrialization, urbanization and the consequent development of local government and social education programmes.

While the ideas of progress, linear time and history developed, so did the fabric of the societies in which these ideas emerged. It is difficult to say which came first, the idea of progress and scientific rationality, or the processes of industrialization which fundamentally transformed the way most people lived and thought. There is no doubt, though, that in order for the processes of industrialization to be successful, a foundation of rational and scientific thought was necessary.

Before the Industrial Revolution, many communities were probably more firmly rooted in their own localities. These communities, whether they were in mercantile centres, villages, or market towns, would probably have possessed a sense of place, or rootedness, to a much greater extent than many people have had since the middle of the nineteenth century; many generations had lived in the same place.

The developments in Enlightenment thinking went hand in hand with the processes of the Industrial Revolution; the latter itself emerged partly as a result of the scientific advances made by Enlightenment thinkers, which in turn influenced modern thought itself. The confidence that emerged out of Enlightenment thought, and the perceived success of industrial capital, combined to create a conception of a society that potentially knew no bounds.

The Industrial Revolution intensified people’s experiences of life in many ways. Factory work imposed a rigid awareness of and adherence to time. An increase in population, combined with the experience of urbanization, led to the destruction of insular rural communities with an appreciably slower way of life, even if it was harder. All of these experiences combined to impose a different spatial–temporal awareness, an awareness which contributed to the loss of a sense of place, a loss which we shall be concerned with more extensively in subsequent chapters.

The Industrial Revolution, with its roots in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, had its most profound effects on nineteenth-century Britain. Brief comparisons of industrial production between 1815 and 1885 illustrate this point. In 1815 Britain was producing 0.243 tons of pig iron; in 1885 7.4 million tons were being produced. Coal output in 1815 was c. 13 million tons; in 1885 it was 159.4. Between these two dates the population of England and Wales increased from 9.16 million (1811) to 25.97 million (1881), and by 1885 16,594 miles of railway had been laid (after Checkland 1971: 6).

Urbanization was of course the most important consequence of industrialization and population increase. The greatest movement to the urban centres took place during the 1840s. By the 1850s the size of the urban population was greater than that of the rural, and by the 1860s the ratio of urban to rural dwellers was 5:4 (ibid.: 33). By 1881 twice as many people lived in urban areas than rural.

The processes of modernization were mirrored in most Western nations, most importantly in the United States of America. What makes the US important is that, rightly or wrongly, it is often perceived as the nation which sets the ‘standards’ for consumer culture; what is commoditized in the US today, will be on sale in the rest of the world tomorrow. It is in part for this reason that a brief description of North American modernization is necessary.

The US experienced industrialization, and its consequences, some years after Britain. The 1860 census revealed the fact that five out of every six Americans still lived in rural areas, although it was apparent by this date that a shift away from agriculture was emerging (Degler 1984: 132).

During the fifty years leading up to World War I the population of the United States tripled, and the number employed in industry increased by about 330 per cent (ibid.: 259).

During the middle of the nineteenth century, despite being a predominantly rural nation, the US was greatly influenced by industrialization and experienced modernization to the same extent as European nations. In 1846 the first transatlantic steamship line was established. By 1844 the first electric telegraph had been set up between Baltimore and Washington, and by 1861, 31,256 miles of railway had been laid. By 1890 this figure had increased to 166,703 (Brogan 1985: 387–9).
After the Civil War, the light bulb, the telephone and the phonograph were available thanks to the technical ingenuity of Americans. It should thus be clear that despite the US’s relatively small industrial and urban development, it was still an important force in areas of scientific and technical progress. There is no doubt that the industry had a much greater influence on life in the east than in the west of the US. It is for this reason that we should not be surprised to find that early developments in American museums occurred in the east.

As with other industrializing nations, the population of the US expanded greatly during the nineteenth century: between the years 1860 and 1890 the population increased from 31 million to 63 million. Simple arithmetic reveals that the increase was in the order of a million per annum. This increase in population was matched by the increase in the size of the markets and the increases in consumer spending. It was during this period that the highly successful mail-order firms emerged such as Montgomery-Ward and Sears Roebuck (ibid.: 395).

The other factor that contributed to the transformation of the United States was immigration. At the height of nineteenth-century immigration in 1882, 788,992 arrivals were recorded. However, this was not the overall peak: during the 1890s roughly a million immigrants per year were entering the US. In fact, during the period between 1820 and 1920 the total figure for immigration to the US stood at 38 million (Degler 1984: 258). This immigration was not without its problems, and Brogan describes the reaction of some old Americans as ‘nativism’ (Brogan 1985: 414). Some may prefer to call it racism or xenophobia. The perceived threat posed by immigrants, and negroes brought to the US as slave labour, led to the formation of groups that ranged from the proto-fascist Ku Klux Klan, to the more ‘patriotic’ Sons, and Daughters, of America.

As in all industrializing nations the phenomenon that affected people’s everyday lives more than any other was probably the experience of urbanization. In 1850 less than 13 per cent of Americans lived in urban areas. By 1920 over half of the US population was living in cities, by 1950 this figure was 60 per cent and by 1980 it was closer to 75 per cent (Degler 1984: 332). The period of greatest urban expansion was between 1860 and 1890; for example during the decade between 1860 and 1870 the increase in urban population was 59.3 per cent. The impact of urbanization on the experience of modern people is crucial and it is to this, the changing experience of daily life, that we should look for an explanation of why the past has become an important resource or requirement for modern society. Many of the reasons for such a need have been articulated elsewhere, most notably by David Lowenthal in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Lowenthal 1985: esp. 396–7).

Local self-government

The processes of industrialization along with concomitant experiences of urbanization led to the need for a new form of local government: a tier of government which could take on the responsibility for the provision of a wide range of services that were essential to the successful running of an urban place.

In Britain during the 1840s, there was a developing awareness of the need to deal with the problems of urbanization. During the 1850s and 1860s the newly developing towns and cities of Britain began to involve themselves in efforts to improve conditions in their localities, and thus, possibly the proudest period of British local government emerged. The mid- to late Victorian period saw local government probably at its most influential, certainly more so than during the 1880s.

Victorian civic pride manifested itself in various ways, the most obvious being the construction of splendid town-halls, such as in Birmingham and Manchester, both begun in 1832.

Local government became responsible for almost all of the amenities necessary for the managing of urban areas, from sanitation to leisure. The effect of local authorities on the everyday lives of the Victorians should not be understated.

Despite the often disorganized nature of early Victorian local government, with each area of responsibility devolved to separate local institutions, museums and libraries did begin to appear in many larger towns. This was partly due to the efforts of William Ewart, a Liberal MP who urged the development of public libraries and museums. Thanks to Ewart the Museums Act became law in 1845 and permitted the various philosophical societies to transfer their collections to public bodies.

Mid-Victorian cities began to take new pride in themselves, not as ‘county’ capital, local second-bests to London for an old-fashioned social round, not just as places where a lot of money was made, but as growing points of a new world order, where the expansive power of trade could be allied to traditional cultural standards of amenity and style. (Best 1971: 81–2)

The squalor and appalling lifestyles of the industrial working class continued throughout the century, but to a certain extent the quality of life was improved due to the efforts made by the many people who believed in local government. Attempts were made not only to improve the material living conditions of people, but also to develop and enhance recreational and educational facilities.
In the United States, as well as in all industrializing nations, there was an obvious need for local government, but it does not appear to have developed to the same extent as it did in Britain: 'Americans have never distinguished themselves, except perhaps for the TVA [Tennessee Valley Authority], by their social planning; for the most part, social institutions have been left to develop freely and under the stimulus of individual interest' (Degler 1984: 339). There does not seem to have been the same emphasis on the provision of cultural or recreation services, such as parks, libraries and museums. One notable exception was New York, where nearly 20 per cent of the land was parkland. Recreation as with many aspects of American life was in the main provided by the private sector.

The experience of urbanization

Crucial to this perception of modernity is the idea of 'distancing', or Giddens' 'disembedding' (Giddens 1990). The experiences of modernity, especially for the urban dweller, are experiences influenced by processes which have been increasingly removed from the local. These range from economic processes, to the provision of services. Distancing has been a fundamental experience of modernity. Whereas the resources of the locality would have satisfied much of a pre-modern community's requirements, modernization removed those processes from the direct experience of the community.

Part of this distancing has been the institutionalization of many of the services that modern societies rely upon. Life for the urban dweller has had to develop on an implicit notion of 'trust', a faith in the ability of people whom one does not know to provide an efficient and reliable service. This is as true of the car mechanic as it is of the museum curator.

Weber considered that the processes of modernization continuously subsumed all forms of institution: technical, economic, scientific, governmental, artistic and cultural. Instrumental/purposive rationalization led to a society that articulated rationalization in terms of means/ends decisions. Actions were justified rationally only within the accepted framework of modernity's progression, through the scientific, technical, and thus, rational control, of nature for humankind's desired ends.

However, an all-consuming rationalization does not necessarily imply a de-differentiation, or an homogenization of modern societies, where all services cultural, education, and professional services such as legal and financial advice are concentrated in the hands of one faceless organization. In fact modernity has witnessed the opposite process. Since the Enlightenment there has been an increasing emergence of 'expert cultures', of which the museum is one. Habermas feels that the 'differentiation of science, morality, and art, which is characteristic of occidental rationalism, results not only in a growing autonomy for sectors dealt with by specialists, but also the splitting off of these sectors from a stream of tradition continuing on in everyday practice in a quasi-natural fashion' (Habermas 1987a: 335). He has argued that the existence of separate specialist communities denies access to any form of 'universal' knowledge. Rather than one homogenizing faceless organization controlling modern societies, all forms of service have been monopolized by many different expert groups, who in their own way deny the wider public access to much information and knowledge. This practice effectively works as an ideological tool. The acceptance of separate institutional disciplines serves to negate any demand for any form of totalizable knowledge. These structures of knowledge have consequence in the cultural impoverishment and fragmentation of everyday consciousness' (ibid.: 355). Capitalist, and non-capitalist states alike, have always encouraged a diversity of their own forms; that is to say, cultural heterogeneity has only been welcomed as long as it remained 'in line' with the wider hegemony.

This institutionalization of knowledge and services is a part of Giddens' 'disembedding mechanisms', processes which have removed social relations from local contexts and from the daily experiences of people's lives. Expert systems, such as museums, are disembedding mechanisms. The expertise of the professional, from the accountant to the curator, or even the heritage manager, is knowledge based on trust, a guarantee of expectation across distanced time-space, where the expert is removed from public access, and therefore the quality of any service is only guaranteed by a sometimes unjustified trust in the professional (Giddens 1990: 28). It is the processes of studying, interpreting and representing the past, that have been increasingly removed from the day-to-day experiences of the public. The institutions invite, or rather, impose, a need for 'trust' on the part of the public. Expertise has had to be taken for granted, otherwise the public would not use the services provided by the professional. Part of that relationship is an implicit contract between public and expert which ensures that the expert is beyond criticism, and can therefore demand trust and respect from the public: 'Trust in systems takes the form of faceless commitments, in which faith is sustained in the workings of knowledge of which the lay person is largely ignorant' (ibid.: 88).

The idea of disembedding, or the continual distancing from the local, of the processes which affect people's lives is an important element in the experiences of living in the (post-)modern world, and will be considered at greater length elsewhere.
One of the most important elements in this distancing is money. Money throughout the (post-)modern period has increasingly worked outside the material environment within which people work. Since the Industrial Revolution, the money markets have increasingly improved the potential of money to work externally to people and places; basically, money is not restrained by space.

Money is simultaneously everything and nothing, everywhere but nowhere in particular, a means that poses as an end, the profoundest and most complete of all centralizing forces in a society where it facilitates the greatest dispersion, a representation that appears quite divorced from whatever it is supposed to represent. It is a real or concrete abstraction that exists external to us and exercises real power over us.

(Harvey 1985: 3)

The processes of modernization have been largely concerned with the domination of space, the development of processes which enhance the ability of capital to overcome the constraints of space. Throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, this constraint was increasingly mastered. The advent of telecommunication systems and international banking enhanced the ability of money to work 24 hours a day to make a profit while its owners slept.

The triumph of time over space is one which is crucial to the idea of distancing the remoteness of processes which affect our daily lives from the actual experiences which affect those lives. As Harvey argues, the victory of time over space has had its consequence in increasing efforts to overcome the constraints of space, and economic processes since the nineteenth century have been ever increasingly removed from the direct experiences of ordinary people (ibid.: 15).

Modernization, therefore, has contributed to the production of new forms of ‘dis-located’ space. The urban environment was created out of the imperative to modernize; this resulted in the creation of a new form of intensified experience, intensified because of modernity’s need to produce and reproduce itself with ever increasing regularity. The urban city or town developed as a new form of concentrated space, catalysts for the inputs and outputs of capital, new places of enhanced consumption and production.

The destruction of a sense of place and the experiences of time–space compression can not be overemphasized. The re-placing of the majority of the population in modern urban environments, combined with the concomitant imposition of rigid timetables and enhanced com-

munications led to a modern society which was no longer restrained by time-space boundaries. For many it would have seemed that during the nineteenth century the world shrank. An ability to make ‘connections’ with the processes which affected daily experiences began to disappear. A security of place, which was partly a consequence of a knowledge of, and trust in, local relationships and experiences for many people was lost for ever.

The modern place

The places which the processes of modernization produced symbolized the idea of modernity. The enhancement of the economic system, which did for many people bring wealth, as well as hardship and squalor, was the epitome of the idea of progress. The technology/science meta narrative provided the foundations for the ‘profitable’ exploitation of the environment for humankind’s benefit, to an extent which was undreamt of a century earlier. The rationalization and institutionalization of life was enhanced through the urban form. The city represented the state’s ability to organize and control the populace with it hitherto unprecedented efficiency. Unrest in the city was avoided through the development of a sophisticated and reliable form of local self-government. Municipal authorities provided the amenities which ensured a basic quality of life for the majority of the city’s inhabitants, from hygiene to the arts. The urban environment provided the contexts for controlled economic and social production and reproduction.

Modernity witnessed the emergence of unfettered consumption, what Xenos has termed the invention of ‘scarcity’. The discourse of scarcity and abundance that marks the nineteenth century accompanied the creation of an environment carefully crafted to elicit sensations of opulence and desire (Xenos 1989: 85). The urban environment was one where a large body of people began to appropriate ‘style’. There was an emergent consumption of superfluous goods, which hitherto had been confined to a very select group. The city involved ‘cohabiting’ with others to a degree which had rarely been experienced prior to industrialization. The consumption of superfluous commodities was part of a trend towards the construction of an image of self in the light of one’s relationship to others, a construction of identity through the consumption of goods and services which has intensified throughout (post-)modernity.

For many, the perceived success of modernization, combined with the powerful meta narratives which constituted modern thought, resulted in a view of modern society as one which was, or already had, overcome the past. Modernity opened up routes to every potential horizon of
achievement. It was as if the past had been overwhelmed by the success of modernity, and the progressive road to the future had been freed of many, if not all, obstructions.

The development of the museum has to be considered as an integral part of the modern condition and the concomitant processes of modernization which have been considered in this chapter.

Integral to modern thought was an idea that the ‘realities’ of the world were potentially knowable, and ‘From this it follow[ed] that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly’

(Harvey 1989: 27)

The representation of the past had to be ordered if it was to make any sense. People’s developed awareness of time and progress, coupled with the modern understanding of history, was reflected and reiterated in the museum displays of the nineteenth, and more frequently, twentieth centuries.

The first museums boom

... if antiquarianism was a natural and appropriate expression of the spirit of the eighteenth century, then archaeology, with its much greater emphasis on order, method and conformity, is a true child of the nineteenth.

(Hudson 1987: 22)

The early decades of Britain’s modern museum service may be considered as commencing with the establishment of the British Museum, which was created by an Act of Parliament in 1753. The museum opened at Montagu House in Bloomsbury in 1759. During its formative years it was little more accessible than the Renaissance cabinets of curiosity, as entry was restricted to 60 visitors a day. However, this was increased to 120 by 1808, and daily opening was introduced in 1879.

It was the acquisition of the Elgin marbles in 1814-15 that gave the museum its international reputation in the field of classical antiquities. Its perceived aims would appear to have been the ordering and understanding of the world. This was obviously an aim closely tied to Britain’s perceived role as imperial master of the universe.

From such elitist beginnings a number of factors came together which resulted in the first ‘museums boom’ during the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1860 there were about 90 museums; by 1880 the number was closer to 180. The reasons for this boom were a combination of the factors discussed earlier in this chapter. These various processes conspired to create a new experience, or consciousness, of time and space. The pressures of urban life, the ordering of time through adherence to rigid timetables in the factory, the ordering of space through the control of domestic property by landlords, as well as the intensified experience of urban life, and the impossibility of avoiding interaction with other people, all contributed to this emerging consciousness. Museums were, and still are, part of this modern experience. However, this was clearly a class-based experience, and museums, although partly an educational provision, were never really successfully ‘sold’ to the working classes. However, they allowed an educated middle class to develop an awareness of the wider spatial and historical contexts within which they lived.

Many of the museums that were built during the ‘boom’ were built in the industrial cities of the north of England, where the emphasis on civic pride and the provision of public facilities seems to have been stronger. The Education Act of 1870 was also an important factor, as was Queen Victoria’s Jubilee of 1887. This year saw museums opening in Boorl, Halifax, Sheffield, Plymouth and Leeds; several of the larger ones were of the ‘Greek Temple’ type (ibid.: 26).

The foundation of modern museums is essentially a part of the emergence of modern ideas regarding order and progress, and the related experiences of time and space, with their roots firmly placed in industrialization and urbanization. These ideas and experiences are fundamental to the forms of historical and archaeological study that have been undertaken throughout the twentieth century as well as the nineteenth. The basic form of representing the past through the static museum presentation has not really altered in spite of many changes in fashion and style.

The modern museum: a critique

The modern period saw endless voyages of discovery, which for many revealed the world as finite and knowable. One consequence of this was the development of maps, and a kudos attached to objective spatial representation. The museum display articulated a similar sort of perspective. The developing ability to place objects in ordered contexts often implied a unilinear development of progress. Such representations implied a control over the past through an emphasis on the linear, didactic narrative, supported by the use of the object, which had been appropriated and placed in an artificial context of the curator’s choosing. This type of display is closed, and cannot be questioned. The display case is a removed