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FIRST PRINCIPLES

WHAT IS A MUSEUM OR GALLERY?

Most of us will have a fairly clear idea in our heads of what a museum or gallery is and does. So it may come as a surprise to learn that these terms are the subject of regular scrutiny and debate by bodies such as the Museums Association (UK) and ICOM (International Council of Museums), by national governments, and those who study or teach museum and gallery studies. One reason for this ongoing debate is that there has been an enormous expansion in the numbers and types of museums around the world from the second half of the twentieth century. To take a deliberately extreme contrast: the same term 'museum' is used to refer to an institution like the British Museum (Figure 1.1), established in London in 1753, and which holds eight million objects, and the Pencil Museum in Cumbria, also in the UK, which has collected pencils since 1980. The latter is a real registered museum. Given the differences in scale, topic and focus we might ask what if anything they have in common as museums. Can we define any shared 'core' characteristics or purposes? As a starting point, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2008) gives the definition that a museum is only "a building used for storage and exhibiting objects of historical, scientific, or cultural interest".

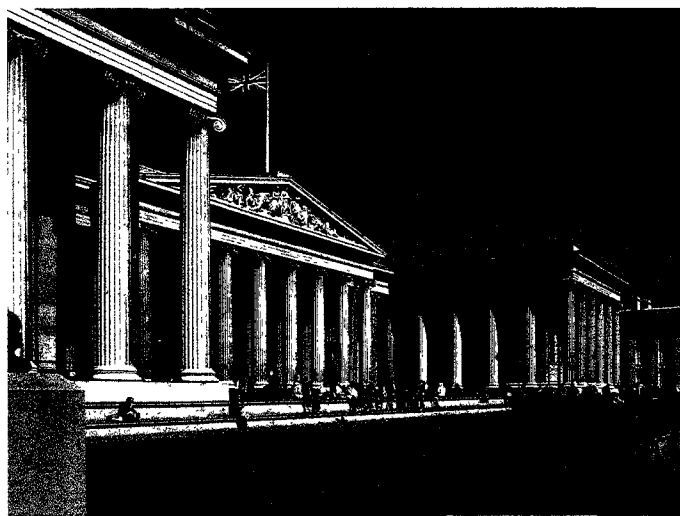


Figure 1.1 The frontage of the British Museum.

© The Trustees of the British Museum.

Notice that the emphasis here is on the museum as a physical space, as a 'container' for its 'contents'. There is very limited indication here beyond the idea of 'interest' as to why institutions collect, at whose expense, or for whose benefit. If we look instead to definitions produced by the museum sector itself, we can find more help in thinking through the roles and purposes of museums. The UK Museums Association's definition (Boylan 1992: 11) takes "public benefit" as a prerequisite for providing accreditation to institutions: "A museum is an institution which collects, documents, prepares, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit".

Such definitions are periodically revised. Looking at these changes can give some insight into debates and preoccupations in the sector and more widely. In 1998 the above definition was revised to be: "Museums enable people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. They are institutions that collect, safeguard and make accessible artefacts and specimens, which they hold in trust for society" (Museums Association 2016). Notice how this latter

definition reorders the idea of a museum by putting the visitor or user first in the definition. The 'internal' activities that museum staff undertake are not the first item mentioned. The museum's role as a store-house or container preserving things for posterity has become secondary. Some have argued that those activities are now seen as means to other ends. "People", understood here as the general public are repositioned as the centre of the museum's actions and priorities. (It is worth noting that in some countries, like the UK, the general public are understood to own the objects both philosophically and legally; this is not the case in all countries.) This shift towards a more visitor-oriented role is indicative of changes in museum thinking and practice in many countries around the world. Kenneth Hudson describes this change of emphasis in the role of museums as a "revolution – the word is not an exaggeration – in museum philosophy and in its practical applications" (1998: 48) that has taken place since the 1970s.

This "revolution" entails a much greater awareness of the political and politicised nature of museums. It requires paying greater attention to questions of power relations that are central to museums. The idea of the museum as 'neutral' space which is simply for 'everyone' whatever it does, and of a so-called 'general' public undifferentiated by class, education, ethnicity or other criteria have all been challenged. Those who began this revolution insist that museums should pay attention to the *effects* they have on individuals and communities, and not simply care for their objects. This idea involves a shift away from the idea of museum as *container*, *shrine* or *temple* to the museum as *forum*, *contact zone*, *platform* or *social activist* (Sandell and Nightingale 2012). This is not to suggest that objects are not important, but that greater attention ought to be paid to representation of varied people's histories and cultures; and indeed to people representing their own histories rather than being spoken about by others. As a consequence, terms such as 'inclusion', and 'empowerment', and 'participation' or 'co-production' have entered museums professionals' vocabulary in many countries, although they may be interpreted or acted upon in many varied ways. Needless to say, different institutions in different places face varied demands on them. For example, the South African Museums Association (SAMA) created a definition in 1999 that places emphasis squarely on museums' social and political roles:

Museums are dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understandings of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and communication programmes that are responsive to the needs of society.

(SAMA 2013)

This fundamental shift in thinking about museums has been widely discussed. It can be neatly summed up by the title of an article by Stephen Weil (1999): "From being *about* something to being *for* somebody: The on-going transformation of the American museum". A number of the ideas described above are also associated with what has been termed the 'new museology'.

'NEW MUSEOLOGY'

The 'new museology' is often associated in Anglophone museum and gallery studies with Peter Vergo's edited 1989 book of that name. He described "a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old museology' ... what is wrong with the 'old' museology is that it is too much about museum *methods* and too little about the role of museums within society" (Vergo 1989: 3; Marstine 2005). In fact, as museologist Peter Davis notes, the ideas around this 'new' museology had predecessors in many different parts of the world since as far back as the 1950s in the US. He notes similar debates in the UK and France in the 1980s, and in ICOM (International Council of Museums) conferences in the 1970s and 1980s. The ICOM debates led to the establishment of MINOM (the International Movement for a New Museology) in 1985 in Lisbon, Portugal, at the second International New Museology Workshop. This had been inspired by the Quebec Declaration of 1984 that set out the "Basic Principles of a New Museology" and that declaration, in turn, identified its origins in discussions about a new museology back in 1975 in Santiago, Chile (MINOM 2014). This long, convoluted history is retold to demonstrate that across the world, over the course of a generation, numerous professionals and academics desired changes: changes in how museums work and who they work for.

What is called 'new museology' in English has also been called 'sociomuseology', 'critical museum theory' or 'new museum theory', in other languages or contexts. The debates are also closely related to debates about 'ecomuseology' and 'community museology' (Davis 1999). While each is distinct, all these movements share similar concerns about the role of museums and galleries in society, and the power they have to influence understandings of the past and the future. A central critique of this movement has been that telling 'official' stories only really tells the *dominant* social group's ideas and histories, and marginalises others. There is an old adage that 'history is told by the victors' but, in effect, new museology has argued that the stories of the present are also told by the 'victors' in the sense that they are typically the stories of those who are most powerful, or the biggest group in society. New museology argues that the cultures, histories and identities of the varied groups who make up each society tend to be less well accounted for.

For many concerned with the ideas of new museology another central question is whether museums and galleries can have a positive, social impact. Can museums foster productive debate, bring people together in their very differences, address prejudice, even improve wellbeing? Taken together, as Davis puts it, the "new museology could be seen as shorthand for the radical reassessment of the roles of museums in society" (1999: 54).

Anthony Shelton (2013: 7) provides another framework for thinking about new museology when he argues there is "not one but three museologies". "Operational museology": Shelton uses this term to describe *how* things are done within museum teams, and the organisation of professional knowledge including protocols and codes of practice, as well as organisational structures, and regulatory systems. "Critical museology": Shelton uses this to describe the critique of 'operational' museology, addressing *why* museum practice has the patterns it does. A 'critical' museology asks what agency museum practice has in the world, and what forms of power it enables or requires. Understood in this way, we see museums as *producers of culture* and as such, embedded in pre-existing power relations rather than 'autonomous' actors. "Praxiological museology": is linked to artistic ideas of 'institutional critique' that challenge museums' orthodoxies by revealing

the implicit politics that have become invisible through repetition and seeming 'normal'.

As Shelton makes clear there are many ways in which conventional understandings of museums, and what they do, have been challenged in recent years. The idea that museums and galleries preserve and work with material cultures – tangible, ownable, often unique and portable commodities, remains probably the single, strongest image of what defines a museum. However, even this has been complicated in recent years, as we will see. For example, the attention paid to 'intangible cultural heritage', to non-European indigenous heritage practices and to oral history and personal testimonies has diversified many people's understanding of what museums can do. At the same time, the enormous increase in the use and potential of digital and social media has also begun to change how people engage with museums. Many museums now count online visits as well as 'physical visits'. In order to really grasp these current debates about what museums do and are for, we need to go back in time to consider their origins and development.

ORIGINS OF MUSEUMS

The most common history told about the development of museums is that they are a European invention, and that they developed out of early, private, Renaissance collections (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). Royal and aristocratic 'cabinets of curiosity', 'Wunderkammern' and 'Kunstammern' of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are usually seen as the distant antecedents of art and natural history museums. 'Wunderkammern' translates literally as 'wonder-cabinet', where 'cabinet' could describe a whole room as much as an individual display case, while 'Kunstammern' means cabinet of art (Bennett 1995: 73). These rooms were mostly privately owned, although they could sometimes be visited by permission of the owner. The very ideas of both 'the public' and 'public' institutions in the way we would understand them today did not exist at this time. The purpose of these collections was to show the knowledge and wealth of the owner but also to inspire awe and amazement at the rarity and novelty of the assembled objects, both natural

and made by humankind. In particular, collectors commissioned explorers to bring back such wonders from the 'New World' as European explorers were beginning at this time to travel further into parts of the globe previously unknown to them. This meant that early collections could include objects as diverse as shells, animals, birds, but also artefacts associated with humans – weapons, decorative objects and, later on, other humans themselves.

The creation of 'public' institutions as we would begin to recognise them, with collections ordered along 'scientific' and scholarly lines familiar to many contemporary societies effectively began in eighteenth-century Europe (Davis 1999). The classical museum is very broadly associated with 'Enlightenment' ideas of rationalisation and scientific forms of classification (although the 'Enlightenment' is itself a complex and contested term which scholars debate). For example, the introduction in the 1750s of 'binomial nomenclature' – a system for classifying and naming species and genus – by the Swedish botanist, Carl Linnaeus, transformed the way that the natural world was understood to be organised. It provided a whole new way of thinking about classificatory and taxonomic systems for organising, differentiating and relating specimens in museums which is still in operation today.

In terms of thinking about the public nature of these institutions, we cannot overstate how any use of the term 'public' needs to be historically specific. In eighteenth-century Europe, in practice the term did not mean much more than 'the minority who owned property': namely the wealthy and literate higher social groups. The British Museum, established by act of Parliament in 1753, was indeed the world's first national, public museum and "granted free admission to all studious and curious persons" as the museum observes (British Museum 2016).

However, in practice, this meant primarily for use only by scholars and 'gentlemen' – and even then on request only. Gaining entrance originally required a letter of introduction from an authority figure (Crow 1985). According to the museum's own account of its history, 'Visitor numbers have grown from around 5,000 a year in the eighteenth century to nearly 6 million today' (British Museum 2016). It was in the nineteenth century that access to this institution became more widely understood, as part of a broader

shift which can be seen in a number of European countries, albeit with variations.

THE LOUVRE: A TURNING POINT

Central to this history of the public museum is the Louvre in Paris. The French Revolution of 1789 led directly to the transformation in 1793 of the King's private collection in the Palais du Louvre into a fully public museum, belonging to the French people. This marked a decisive turning point, though it did not elicit an immediate transformation elsewhere. Most importantly, it set a precedent that new museums across Europe could and should be open to all citizens of the nation state. It instilled the idea that spaces shared by different groups might be one means of creating a sense of belonging to the nation for its citizens. When the South Kensington Museum in London (now the Victoria & Albert Museum) opened in 1857, social campaigners soon argued that its opening hours should be arranged so that even ordinary working people could visit. This was not an accident: there had been revolutions across many European states in 1848 overthrowing old elites.

One underlying and much-discussed aim of new thinking around museums by both social reformers and politicians was precisely to allow different social groups to see each other, in order to promote acceptable models of behaviour and to expose the lower echelons of society to the improving effects of culture, as understood at that time. The overall aim appears to have been to create 'social emulation' where 'lower' groups would try to copy their 'superiors' and be both socially and spiritually improved by their visit (Duncan 1995). Exposure to art and culture, it was thought by social reformers at this time, could have a spiritually uplifting effect and if working men could be persuaded to visit with their wives and children, it was imagined that this would also have an improving and 'softening' effect. It is difficult now to even imagine the stark extremities of difference between people's appearances, education and life expectations of that time but the lives of working people and the growing and educated middle classes could not have been more different. Poverty, disease, no access to healthcare, poor or abject

housing conditions, short life expectancy, very hazardous working conditions, little or no access to education, limited or no political representation, and grinding hardship characterised the daily lives of the majority of working people across the industrialising world.

In this context, museums were seen as prime social spaces by which governments could 'civilise', improve and educate their populations. There is evidence that museums were widely understood by many social strata as providing a form of education. Universal free education through schooling is a relatively recent invention in many European countries and comes after access to public museums in countries like Britain. It was this widespread recognition of the educational value of museums that led both to public subscription campaigns and to the introduction of public contributions through general taxation in 1845, in order to raise the money to create public museums. The result of this history in the UK is the broadly accepted status of museums as institutions that have the educational benefit of a 'wide public' at their heart.

This is not to say that we should think of museums as being wholly benign institutions. In the nineteenth century, some governments and social reformers in Britain explicitly saw museums and art galleries as one means of managing an enormously expanding urban population, especially in London, which became the world's biggest city during the nineteenth century. In many cities in Britain, museums were expressly seen by their advocates as a way to align working-class audiences with the elites, and distract them from drink and radical politics at the same time (Bennett 1995). The development of public museums, in this case, was therefore closely related to ideas about control and management of the population at times of potential crisis. In other cases, leaders or governments have viewed museums and galleries as useful ways to make bold or aggressive statements of civic confidence and wealth. As Carol Duncan (1995) has argued, museums and galleries at this time were also seen as a means of projecting governing groups' self-image as the heirs to Greece or Rome, and having the historic mission of leading the world by governing an empire. When we study the histories of museums it is common to see different rationales like this in operation at the same time.

MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT: NATIONALISM AND COLONIALISM

The creation of new museums in the nineteenth century was undoubtedly also driven by competition between European nations and the rise of nationalism in an age of empire. These developments encouraged many European governments to foster and promote the idea of their nation's distinctiveness, or even unique historical destiny. This might sound exaggerated but at the beginning of the nineteenth century, modern countries including Germany and Italy were not unified states; France was at war with much of Europe; and many governments feared, or even expected revolution 'from below'. Rioting and civil protest was increasingly common as populations became more urbanised and as working peoples began to organise themselves into political movements. In this context, encouraging people to identify with the idea of their nation-state, and to now see themselves as citizens of it, became an imperative in the face of both external war and internal threat. There were few tools at their disposal to positively unify peoples. As described above, the various social classes lived such radically different lives that it was not a given that they would have readily identified with each other as all being part of one nation. The many processes of nation-building and features of national citizenship which we take for granted today were not yet in place prior to the latter part of the nineteenth century. For example, passports as we know them today were not enforced until the early twentieth century, at the time of the First World War in Britain. Prior to this so few could travel internationally, either regularly or voluntarily that it had not been deemed necessary. For all these reasons, the history of European museums must be understood in parallel with the rise of nationalist movements and broader processes of nation-formation, including ideas around national folk culture (Mason 2007).

Nation-building at this time in many Western European countries went hand-in-hand with colonialism. Nineteenth-century civic museums were often built from the wealth created from colonial and industrial expansion into overseas territories which were acquired through treaties or seized through force (MacKenzie 2009). In many cases the material results of colonial encounters, involving violence, exploitation, or subjection of colonial peoples, fed directly

into European national and local museums and their development. Objects were also obtained through European museum-sponsored collecting expeditions on a vast scale around the world, especially in Africa. Shelton observes that one estimate reckoned that "by the mid-1960s, there were more than 1,500,000 ethnographic items in US museums alone, and 4,500,000 in the world as a whole" (Shelton 2011: 68).

Objects and human remains were 'acquired' for museum collections sometimes legally, sometimes not. What is problematic is that even those acquisitions which were considered to have been acquired through legal means at that time may now, according to some, have been illegal or unethical. This is particularly the case where the acquiring country at the time was a colonial power and where the descendants of the colonised people may now reject the legal and ethical right of their former colonisers to exercise that power. One of the most well-known and controversial examples is that of the Parthenon or Elgin Marbles, elements of which currently reside in the British Museum and the Louvre but which is claimed by the Acropolis Museum in Athens.

These kinds of examples illustrate how what is legal in one historical and political context does not necessarily always remain so, and that what is legal and what is ethical are not necessarily the same thing. European museums also hold human remains from these colonial times and this is often considered particularly offensive by those people's descendants. In 2016, for example, it was revealed that the Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation which runs Germany's state museums currently holds in Berlin 4,600 human skulls collected for research between 1885 and 1920. More than 1,000 of these are from Rwanda and 60 from Tanzania; both countries were part of the Germany East Africa Colony from 1885 to 1918. It is thought that these skulls came from African people killed by German troops in colonial wars and that the skulls were subsequently sent back to Germany for so-called 'racial' scientific experimentation (Deutsche Welle 2016). As this example illustrates, the legacies of the relationships between European museums and their states' colonial histories can still be seen in many museums today, explicitly or otherwise.

Unsurprisingly, this history has resulted in sharp ethical dilemmas for numerous museums and art galleries in the twentieth and

twenty-first centuries. Some museums' colonial legacies remain sharply divisive, as above. In South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and North America, museums have been criticised heavily for previously reproducing and bolstering colonial ways of thinking about different cultures in their display and collecting practices. Consequently, many have sought to rethink their displays and decolonise their institutions. What has been particularly problematic is those instances where museums collected human remains from 'indigenous' peoples for display alongside inanimate objects or examples of the natural world. In the process, some museums had presented indigenous people as though they were part of a timeless, 'primitive' or crude 'nature', opposed to the 'culture' of so-called 'civilised' modern races. Many indigenous peoples have expressed their anger at this kind of representation and campaigned for the return of their ancestors' remains and cultural property. In North America the legal framework of NAGPRA (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act) was drawn up in 1990 to manage such processes (National Park Service 2016). At the same time, the concept and definition of 'indigenous' is not straightforward. It varies from country to country, according to diverse histories and legal arrangements. Human remains, looted property, and colonial relations remain highly contentious aspects of many museums and galleries even today. Understanding the interrelationship between nationalism, colonialism and the histories of museums and galleries is an essential part of understanding the place and politics of these institutions in contemporary societies.

DO ALL CULTURES HAVE MUSEUMS?

Public museums like the British Museum and Louvre are European inventions but there are museums all around the world. Nicolas Thomas reminds us how countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Chile created their own 'national art and natural history museums from 1818 onwards' (Thomas 2016: 25). He also notes that museums were created in India (the Indian Museum in Kolkata dates from 1814), in Egypt (the Egyptian Museum of Antiquities was created in 1835) and in Japan (from the 1870s) (ibid.). In part, the spread of the Western European model of museums to other parts of the

globe happened because European colonisation led to these kinds of museums being 'exported' as a cultural form. Consequently, many former colonial countries have European-style museums originally created by the colonisers, rather than created either out of, or for, 'local' cultural traditions.

As with the nineteenth-century idea of 'improving' the so-called lower classes in countries like Britain, similar attitudes towards 'improving' foreign peoples were equally applied at the time of the creation of these colonial museums. These museums were intended to show the locals what they should aspire to be, to impress upon them the sophistication of their colonisers and thereby justify the 'natural right' of the colonisers to be in charge. It is perhaps difficult to overstate how completely hierarchical the dominant theories about race and social organisation were, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In some cases, this extended well into the latter part of the twentieth century. Ashley Sheriff has written about the use of museums in South Africa noting that:

In fact, black Africans were (re)presented in natural history museum spaces as lower species of early humans not quite ontologically separate from indigenous flora and fauna. During the era of apartheid, which officially began in 1948, many South African museum exhibitions fervently codified the status quo of white privilege and power under the colonial regime.

(Sheriff 2014: 2)

It was only with the end of Apartheid in 1994 that museums in South Africa began to be decolonised. In cases like South Africa, many of the current museums still occupy the same buildings previously used for these colonial museums, which can present considerable challenges for reinterpretation.

While the European model of museums can therefore be found worldwide, it has become increasingly recognised by museum and heritage scholars that many cultures have had their own different practices of collecting and displaying significant cultural artefacts. Recent museum-studies scholarship has begun to also recognise how indigenous peoples have their own long-standing, different and complex traditions for recognising and valuing important objects. As part of this process, such scholars are drawing attention to the

importance of intangible heritage practices. In Canada, for example, First-Nations people like the Blackfoot take important objects and place these into bundles. Along with ritualised performances of song, dance and storytelling, these form a central part of their collective ceremonies and the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to another (Onciul 2015). In Australia, Aboriginal peoples have a tradition of 'keeping places' which can range from very small display and collection spaces up to purpose-built cultural centres. In Australia, the public recognition of the importance of these indigenous practices can now be seen in governmental policy statements. It is also recognised by the Australian government that some communities believe that collective memory is the most appropriate 'repository' for knowledge, and that this resides in the community's elders (Australian Government Department of the Environment 2001). The Australian Museums Association recognises both the European and indigenous aboriginal Australian traditions in its following definition:

The Museums Australia Constitution (2002) defines a 'museum' as an institution with the following characteristics:

A museum helps people understand the world by using objects and ideas to interpret the past and present and explore the future. A museum preserves and researches collections, and makes objects and information accessible in actual and virtual environments. Museums are established in the public interest as permanent, not-for-profit organisations that contribute long-term value to communities.

Museums Australia recognises that museums of science, history and art may be designated by many other names (including Gallery and Keeping Place). In addition, the following may qualify as museums for the purposes of this definition:

- (a) natural, archaeological and ethnographic monuments and sites and historical monuments and sites of a museum nature that acquire, conserve and communicate material evidence of people and their environment;
- (b) institutions holding collections of and displaying specimens of plants and animals, such as botanical and zoological gardens, herbaria, aquaria and vivaria;

- (c) science centres;
 - (d) Cultural centres and other entities that facilitate the preservation, continuation and management of tangible or intangible heritage resources (living heritage and digital creative activity);
 - (e) such other institutions as the [Museums Australia National] Council consider as having some or all of the characteristics of a museum.
- (Museums Australia 2002)

This new recognition of parallel traditions and divergent practices of valuing cultural heritage brings novel museological challenges. Increasingly, museums in postcolonial countries are being called upon to bring together the European or Western and indigenous cultural practices, so as to find ways to value them differently and develop a new kind of indigenous museology. Different solutions and approaches to dealing both with artefacts and more abstract concepts like time are required (see Chapter 2). Whereas Western museums are based on an inviolable principle of preserving objects in perpetuity, indigenous communities may wish 'their' object to degrade naturally, or to be ritually destroyed (Onciul 2015).

CAN ANYONE CALL ANY SPACE 'A MUSEUM'?

Given the variety of things which can be called a museum in the definition above, we need to ask ourselves if there are limits to what a museum can be. Let us look again at some other national definitions:

Museums are a public or private institution which collects, preserves, analyses and exhibit objects of cultural and natural heritage.

(Republic of Kenya 2006, The National Museums and Heritage Act, cited in Karega-Munene 2011)

Today, the core competencies of a museum – gather, preserve, research, exhibit and communicate – constitute the foundation for museum work.

(German Museums Association 2017a)

[Museums are] organizations with the purpose of collecting and preserving (including nurturing) materials related to history, the arts, folk customs, industry, natural science, etc., exhibiting them, providing them

for use by the general public on the basis of educational considerations, conducting necessary work in order to contribute to education, research, recreation, etc., and in addition undertaking surveys and research relating to these materials.

(Museum Act (Japan), Act No. 285 of 1951, last amended by Act No. 50, 11 June 2008; Japanese Association of Museums 2008)

According to these definitions there are many examples of collections of material evidence and associated information which have been put together by enthusiastic individuals which would qualify as museums. In some instances individuals have called their collection a museum. However, in many parts of the world to be officially recognised as a museum by a national funding body or a museums association, there are principles and agreed 'industry standards' that have to be met. This can be seen in the following US definition:

Museum means a public or private non-profit institution which is organized on a permanent basis for essentially educational or aesthetic purposes and which, using a professional staff:

- Owns or uses tangible objects, either animate or inanimate;
 - Cares for these objects; and
 - Exhibits them to the general public on a regular basis.
- An institution which exhibits objects to the general public for at least 120 days a year shall be deemed to meet this requirement
 - An institution which exhibits objects by appointment may meet this requirement if it can establish, in the light of the facts under all the relevant circumstances, that this method of exhibition does not unreasonably restrict the accessibility of the institution's exhibits to the general public.

(Office of the Federal Register (US) 2011)

In this last example, it is clear that being open and accessible to the public is seen to be a defining feature of what makes something officially 'a museum'. In many countries, for example, the UK, the US and Australia, the relevant museums associations also run a national system of museum accreditation or registration to which museums

and galleries apply. Accreditation schemes set recognised standards for how a museum is organised, managed, staffed and funded and how collections and buildings are cared for. This matters because institutions with accreditation can apply to receive public funding or loans of objects and artworks from other museums and galleries. Without accreditation, many funders will not provide support or trust that an institution has the necessary policies and practices that others do.

It is also possible for an institution to forfeit its accreditation as a punishment for breaking the rules of the profession. In 2014 the Delaware Art Museum in the US lost its accreditation after it sold off a famous pre-Raphaelite painting. The US's National Association of Art Museum Directors "advised its members to stop loaning works to the Delaware Art Museum and collaborating on exhibitions" (Fishman 2014). To lose accreditation is to risk gaining pariah status amongst peers. Selling off artefacts and artworks is seen in many places as a cardinal sin; in others less so. It is viewed negatively because it marks a fundamental breach of the museum's special status of caring for objects on behalf of the public, and holding them in trust, in perpetuity.

As this example illustrates, the relationship between ownership, ethics and the law is complex when 'deaccessioning' is concerned (removing an object from the principal collections). To date there is no single international accreditation standard, although all ICOM members agree to uphold their code of ethics which sets out minimum standards about professional practice. Museum ethics is a particularly contentious and complex area of museum studies practice and research in its own right (Marstine 2005).

WHAT IS AN ART GALLERY? WHAT IS AN ART MUSEUM OR MUSEUM OF ART?

As with the term 'museum' the words 'gallery', 'art gallery' and 'art museum' are used in different ways by different people and societies. It is important to remember that many museums that collect natural history specimens, social history and archaeology also do house collections of art. Some of these museums can be described as 'encyclopaedic' in their scope. This means they collect across disciplinary

boundaries – acquiring artefacts relating to natural history, ethnography, archaeology, and art. Similarly, historic houses, stately homes, churches and palaces often have art collections. An institution which collects only art may call itself specifically an ‘art museum’ or a ‘gallery’. Most official national and international definitions of ‘museums’ also include art collections, public galleries and contemporary art centres, as seen in these two examples:

Australia operates under the ICOM definition of a museum, which is inclusive of: museums, art museums, public galleries, keeping places, contemporary art spaces, craft councils, artist run initiatives, botanical gardens, herbaria, zoos, historic houses, monuments and historic sites.
(Museums Australia 1998)

Founded in 1917, the German Museums Association is the national organization for all museums and museum professionals. It represents art museums as well as museums of history, cultural history and natural history, museums of technology as well as those on specific topics.

(German Museums Association 2017b)

To give an actual example, GoMA in Glasgow, Scotland, is officially, according to its title, a gallery of modern art but it has a collection of contemporary art and is also part of a museum service: Glasgow Museums in Scotland. This cross-over between the two terms ‘museum’ and ‘gallery’ stems partly from their usage over the period in which European museums developed. The word ‘gallery’ in the early Renaissance referred to a long, narrow space, often with windows on one side where paintings and antiquities were displayed together. In aristocratic palaces these were places to walk and converse. Reflecting that early Renaissance use, the modern word ‘gallery’ can also mean either an institution, or else the individual rooms within a museum, irrespective of what kinds of objects are shown.

In the UK today, the word ‘gallery’ can mean multiple things: a commercial gallery which sells art to private collectors, as well as a public ‘art museum’ as it would be called elsewhere. For example, Dulwich Picture Gallery in London shows historical collections of paintings and would almost certainly be named as an ‘art museum’ in

other English-speaking countries. The term ‘art museum’ is seldom used in the UK, whilst being standard practice in the US. In the UK, ‘gallery’ can also refer to a space showing *either* contemporary art or historical art; and to *either* a permanent collection or a temporary exhibition space. If an ‘art gallery’ or ‘centre for contemporary art’ has no collection then according to most definitions it is not a museum. However, such institutions often have archives that house collections of documents about their work. In much contemporary art, there is little if any gap between a document and an ‘original’ work, so that the difference between an ‘archive’ and a ‘collection’ has narrowed to almost zero. Many kinds of artworks are only made to be seen once or are intentionally temporary, like performance, so documentation is the only way they can be known. Other works are made ‘on demand’ or can be remade without any requirement for storage, so that exhibitions galleries could easily become museums and vice versa.

As we have outlined, terminology varies from country to country and according to different languages. In Germany, for example, there are three different and distinct terms to capture how art is exhibited and/or collected for the public: ‘Kunsthau’ (art-house), ‘Kunsthalle’ (art-hall), and ‘Kunstmuseum’ (art-museum). Traditionally, the division between ‘Kunsthalle’ and ‘Kunstmuseum’ was the division between a contemporary art centre and a museum with a permanent collection, although these distinctions are now, in practice, often blurred. A ‘Gemeindegalerie’, like the one in Berlin, is a permanent museum of art – akin to Dulwich Picture Gallery in its role. So PS1 in New York, Palais de Tokyo in Paris, and the Serpentine Gallery in London are amongst their cities’ principal ‘kunsthallen’ whereas the Metropolitan, Louvre and National Gallery, and MoMA, Centre Pompidou and Tate are those countries’ largest museums of art respectively.

In China what might be called ‘traditional art’ (in other words, not contemporary) can be displayed alongside archaeological, historical and ethnographic material and these institutions are called ‘bowuguan’ which equates to ‘museum’ in English. An example of this would be the Shanghai Museum. There is a different Chinese word ‘meishuguan’ for what would be called in English a ‘museum of fine arts or national art gallery’ but these museums may

also include other kinds of object such as ethnology, for example, the National Art Museum of Beijing. In many Chinese institutions, the traditional distinction between institutions with, and without, permanent collections is not as clear.

State-run museums that specifically focus on contemporary art are also a relatively new phenomenon in China, although there have been privately funded initiatives of great scale. Museums specialising in contemporary art may include the word for contemporary in their title ('dangdai', connoting 'contemporary era'; or 'xiandai' connoting 'modern'), but not necessarily. Another term that may be used in relation to contemporary art is 'hualang' ('gallery'). While institutions dedicated to contemporary art may be a relatively new development, the speed of development is extraordinary. For example, the Rockbund Contemporary Art Museum in Shanghai opened in 2010, describes itself as: "the first contemporary art museum in China that is fully devoted to supporting contemporary art production and creativity" (Rockbund 2016). Numerous other examples have followed in the time it has taken to research and write this book.

As the English, German and Chinese examples demonstrate, the naming practices reflect the complexity of the cultural ecology in different countries, and the principles by which it is subdivided, and supported by different institutions and funders. Moreover, as views about what has sufficient value to be collected change, so do the boundaries between domains. It is worth remembering that the names of institutions themselves are seldom changed even if their remit change or values shift. So, an institution that may have started its life as one kind of space could change its approach without necessarily changing its name.

HOW MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES ARE THERE?

Museums and galleries take diverse forms, but they can be classified according to different criteria. Ambrose and Paine, for example, categorise them according to several ideas: the nature of their collections; their management; their geographical scope; their audiences; and the way they exhibit their collections (2012: 10). To this we would add their sources of wealth or capital stock, income

and status. Some museums and galleries can be almost entirely 'publicly funded'. Their income is entirely or almost wholly provided by the state from money raised by taxes. Alternatively, they can be 'independently' funded, meaning their income can be self-generated through trading (entry charges, cafes, shops, corporate hire), donations from wealthy private individuals including their own trustees and trusts, and from corporate sponsorship. This is more usual in the US than in the UK or many other European countries: a famous example would be the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In Europe most public museums look to grants from government bodies, trusts and foundations to provide awards of money for time-limited specific projects. The balance between different sources of income – or how they interact or lever one another – is important. Few museums can afford to rely on one funder, but operate a 'mixed economy' combining several, or even innumerable different sources of income, each with different agendas (see Chapter 4).

The funding basis of the museum or gallery goes hand in hand with the system of management and governance of the institution. It has important political and ethical implications. For example, in the UK those national museums and galleries which are publicly funded by the central governments of the four nations (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) have been expected to provide free access to their permanent collections since 2001 as a condition of their funding. Yet, the museums in each of the four capital cities, namely London, Edinburgh, Belfast and Cardiff, have different access to private donors, and to the numbers of both tourists and local visitors from whom they can hope to generate income. A look at the list of private and corporate funders of Tate in London contained in their annual reports shows that the largest 'world cities' like London have immense sources of surplus private capital flowing through them which finds its way into public institutions. In this respect, geography has a direct bearing on the scale and scope of museums and their activities in more ways than might be immediately obvious.

In some countries a distinction is made between areas of the museum that are free and those that are charging. Sometimes the temporary exhibitions are charging spaces, and sometimes the permanent collections are. As an alternative model, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, charges a \$25 'recommended' entry fee,

but this includes access to all of their special exhibitions. A museum's charging regime has implications for museums including shaping its visitors' habits. Put simply, it influences who visits and who doesn't. In many state-funded museums, it is closely related to cultural policy measures to increase and diversify audiences along lines of both ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational background and 'cultural capital' (see Chapter 3). Again, income targets influence, whilst not determining what kinds of programme institutions are likely to programme – even if some exhibitions can cross-subsidise others.

Museums and galleries can, of course, also be classified in terms of their scale and remit, and by who owns or manages their collections. The two are not always the same. In the UK, for example, museums and galleries are usually classified as either national (state level), local authority (funded by the regional government body), university (owned and managed by individual universities), independent (owned by charities or independent bodies) or regimental (managed by the army). The UK's museum sector can also be understood to extend to unoccupied royal palaces, historic sites and properties (for example stately homes) which also hold museum-type collections and are managed by charities or bodies such as the National Trust and English Heritage, or Historic Scotland or Historic Wales (Museums Association 2016).

Unsurprisingly, the scope of an institution's collections tends to reflect the funding and ownership arrangements. It is perfectly possible in the UK for collections in smaller cities to be identified or 'designated' as being of national significance. It is also possible for one organisation to legally own the collections or 'hold them in trust' for the public and for another to manage the museum or gallery in terms of its day-to-day operations. This happens for practical or historic reasons. For example, a collection may be owned by a small charitable group who created it in the nineteenth century but this collection may now be part of a museum administered by another body because legal ownership has never been transferred. Collections are built cumulatively often over generations, and single institutions can encompass multiple collections. As we will see, reducing the size of a collection, and therefore reducing ongoing costs, is much more difficult for a museum than almost any other type of organisation.

Some museums and galleries are also part of larger, multi-site families, networks or franchises. In the UK, there are several large organisations with sites around different parts of the country – for example, Tate includes Tate Modern and Tate Britain in London, and Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives. Some art museums have international offshoots: the Guggenheim Foundation has institutions in New York, Venice, Bilbao and Abu Dhabi.

WHAT ARE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES FOR?

As the range of funding sources is extensive, so too is the range of functions and uses which societies or funders expect of their museums and galleries. The basic function of an art gallery might apparently be simply to present art objects or experiences, in the same way that a museum's primary role is to house, preserve and display historical artefacts. Nevertheless, museums and galleries can be seen to play, or have played, incredibly diverse roles as indicated below. It is important to note that some of these may seem historical and anachronistic and would not necessarily be widely endorsed now, or receive universal acclaim across the world.

Let us start with a list of purposes a museum or gallery may have, and which major museums and galleries certainly have had at some point in their history:

- To tell us about the past by presenting artefacts from it or reconstructions of it;
- To tell us about ourselves as parts of collectives, as nations, communities, or a species;
- To educate people about specific places, individuals, events and ideas;
- To unite, and to develop a collective memory and historical consciousness to build national identity, by educating people about a nation's past;
- To create or consolidate a body or 'canon' of 'official' knowledge such as a received history of fine art;
- To protect and conserve things of special importance for future generations;

- To show what people valued in previous times and places and tell us why;
- To celebrate the power and wealth of individuals, groups, cities or nations, in order to make manifest their social status and/or dominance;
- To show how we are different or similar from people across time;
- To show how we are different or similar across space through cross-cultural comparisons;
- To create, perpetuate and reinforce traditions of thought and belief – by making a worldview manifest (or else countering it);
- To give voice to people/s and foster ideas of citizenship;
- To deliver present-day government policy agendas, whether of social inclusion, diversity, wellbeing, happiness, multiculturalism or regeneration;
- To act as a 'forum' for debate through objects and discussion, or in conflict zones to provide a neutral or 'safe space' for such debate;
- To display demonstrations of skill, craftsmanship, or technological or technical achievement;
- To memorialise and create dedicated spaces for acknowledging individual people, places or events that have finished, been lost, or transformed;
- To tell us about things we are likely to have forgotten or never knew; to draw attention to 'hidden histories';
- To allow 'forgetting' or else avoid confrontations with past events;
- To construct knowledge, ways of knowing the world, create and give status to canons of authorised knowledge;
- To give expression to what it is possible to think, do or be;
- To regulate and 'police' social and cultural norms as manifest in material culture practices;
- To reform us and to 'improve' our state of being;
- To delineate and claim the limits of a territory, identity and history for nation- or community-building purposes; where territorial claims are disputed;
- To give form and space to a collective sense of past, present and future and contribute to society's sense of memory and identity across generations and communities;

- To facilitate economic regeneration, especially of post-industrial areas;
- To build cultural tourism;
- To rebrand a city and change public perceptions about a place, an individual, a company or a nation;
- To create a sense of place; as part of a place-making project.

As this list indicates, museum and gallery studies are a major emerging field precisely because of the diversity of the areas they encompasses and touch upon. Since the philosophical 'revolution' of the new museology, and the parallel development of 'New Public Management' principles in OECD countries (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) expectations of museums have changed – and intensified in order to justify their public subsidy amongst other deserving candidates (Scott 2013).

For some academics and museum professionals this means that museums and galleries should aim to be agents of social change by, for example, positively tackling prejudice (Sandell and Nightingale 2012). This can be controversial: some figures have vociferously argued for museums' autonomy and re-emphasising the value of their collections (Cuno 2012). What audiences expect of museums and galleries is equally varied as we will see in Chapter 3.

WHY DO SOCIETIES HAVE MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES?

Let us return to our initial question. Museums can cost hundreds of millions of dollars, euros, pounds (or other currencies) to build. They also cost very large amounts of money to run – and their costs seldom if ever get smaller over time, because collections seldom if ever shrink substantially. They also have an environmental cost given their specific storage and conservation requirements (see Chapter 2). So why do we go to the effort of preserving or creating museums and art galleries or their equivalents? There are some figures who have argued that we should privatise state-run museums or 'contract out' their role as it would be more financially efficient and make cost-savings to taxpayers.

The reasons why societies persist in creating and maintain museums and galleries are contained in that list of purposes outlined above. Nation-building, economic regeneration, fostering patriotism, educating the citizenry; these are just some of the reasons which we explore in detail throughout the following chapters. However, one further thing all societies are doing when they engage with heritage as represented within museums and galleries in the broadest sense is building collective memory and a sense of shared identity based on a shared sense of the past. Some societies and groups will engage in this process of building historical consciousness more explicitly than others; in some cases it will be part of a governmental agenda – for example, the Chinese government has been clear that museums are for patriotic education and cultural diplomacy. In other cases, museums and galleries can be a by-product of a different intention, for example, regeneration of post-industrial cityscapes which simultaneously provides a new opportunity for a museum to tell the history of that city, as in case of the new national Museum of Liverpool in the Albert Docks regeneration area in the UK. Either way, Peter Seixas argues that societies engage in practices of building a sense of shared historical consciousness because of what it enables them to do not just in the present but in the future too:

A common past, preserved through institutions, traditions, and symbols, is a crucial instrument – perhaps the crucial instrument – in the construction of collective identities in the present Belief in a shared past opens the possibility for commitments to collective missions in the future.

(Seixas, 2004: 5)

An example of this can be found in the commemoration processes around the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York, and the new memorial and museum built into the very site of the destroyed World Trade Centre. Such spaces provide a focus and a permanent reminder of events.

Although many tend to think that museums are ‘about’ the past, one of the most important roles of museums and galleries is to enable members of society to think about how their present was shaped and

what kind of society we might wish to be part of in the future. At the same time, we need to remember that people learn about ‘the past’, and receive information, myths or misinformation about it, through diverse media: books, television, newspapers, online, word of mouth, their schooling, families, rituals, folk stories and customs, architecture places and monuments, antiques and other kinds of material culture such as maps or archival documents, and art forms of all kinds. Our idea of ‘the past’ or ‘history’ is formed through a complex and often contradictory composite of sources; museums and galleries are just one source among many, although they often enjoy high status and trust compared to other forms.

Different cultures, and indeed social groups, value some sources more than others, whether oral knowledge and rituals or written records. In Western European cultures, ‘heritage’ as embodied in museums, galleries and physical heritage sites is often variously associated with being official, institutional, collective, formal, public and tangible. It is generally accorded a high status and high levels of public trust because of this. Heritage need not always be tangible though. In recent years, the museum and gallery sector in many countries like the UK have also embraced personal histories, individual stories and incorporated different forms into their displays and interpretation like film, oral histories, sound, photography and digital media, as part of the collecting of everyday life.

In some other cultures, any close association between official bodies like national museums, art galleries and the national government is viewed in negative terms. On the one hand, there can be no ‘neutral’ perspective on the past, but – in some contexts – there are reasonable perceptions that stories have been manipulated or told so selectively as to be unreliable. In such situations, unofficial accounts and personal or community memories may be seen as the real source of authority and reliability. The question of whose histories, cultures, and whose knowledges come to be valued is always necessarily ‘political’ – in the sense of being related to questions of power – but in many parts of the world, museums, galleries and their staff today will generally want to avoid being overtly *politicised* for fear of being seen as propagandist and biased. This distinction is crucial because it underpins public perceptions of trustworthiness.

PUBLIC TRUST

We have already introduced the idea that museums and galleries hold their collections 'in trust' for the public. We can also speak of 'public trust', in the sense of the public having faith in the authority of institutions as reliable, trustworthy, or merely independent of other vested interests or sources of power. What establishes 'trust' is seldom simple and often a matter of perceptions.

In some instances, in studies over recent decades visitors have claimed to place a greater trust in museums than, say, in media like television or newspapers that are known to be connected to sources of power including corporate ownership or political affiliations. The UK's Museums Association (MA) published a report about public attitudes to museums which stated: 'museums are in a rare position of being trusted to provide accurate and reliable information in a national conversation increasingly dominated by bias and vested interest' (Museums Association 2013). Though there is more research available on public trust and museums than on art museums or galleries, a US study found similar conclusions to those of the MA:

When members of the general public were asked to rank the trustworthiness of a variety of sources of information about the past, they placed museums above any other choice, giving them an 8.4 on a ten-point scale, with 10 being the highest.

(Rosenzweig and Thelen 1998: 21–23)

HERITAGE

In this chapter we have usually employed the word 'heritage' to designate a particular sector separate to museums and galleries. It is appropriate at this point to briefly address how it is used within the sector and without. We are aware that 'heritage' is also used as an overarching term which encompasses museums and galleries into a single area both in practice and in academic literature; currently there is much overlap between heritage, museum and galleries studies but also some divergences. (For example, heritage studies in the UK has recently been considerably influenced by the discipline of cultural geography and its particular theoretical trends.) 'Heritage'

also includes things outside of formal cultural heritage institutions and not all heritages are commensurate with Western ways of thinking or standards of preservation. While many cultures assume that museums are the right and proper places to present *material* heritage this is not a universal view. Tangible and material heritage is far from the only sort: how we preserve, present, or conceptualise 'intangible heritage' has increasingly been of interest to scholars. In recent years, UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) has placed considerable emphasis on intangible heritage as opposed to tangible heritage by which they mean the physical, built and material heritage. Intangible heritage – also known as 'living cultural heritage' – is defined by UNESCO to mean: "Oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship" (UNESCO 2012).

UNESCO's (2003) Declaration for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage states:

- 1 The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention, consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.
- 2 The "intangible cultural heritage", as defined in paragraph 1 above, is manifested inter alia in the following domains:
 - (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;

- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

In contrast with the above, the narrowest, most traditional use of the term 'heritage' in English is to mean: 'the material culture of previous elites'. In Europe, heritage can be popularly taken to mean historic buildings or archaeological sites alone, but be aware that this meaning is not uncritically accepted in scholarly literature. Again, heritage is often understood as political in the sense that what societies have materially inherited frequently still belongs to, or is correctly associated with elites, even if it is now owned by the state.

Heritage is also used more broadly to mean what individuals and societies value or have 'inherited' from the past. In this usage it includes and exceeds what we find in museums, galleries or individual heritage sites – e.g. the national heritage of France or the concept of 'world heritage'. Yet, if we accept that 'intangible heritage' is a valuable term, then the problem is that such an idea of 'heritage' excludes almost nothing and can be interpreted unhelpfully broadly. Almost nothing exists only in the present, especially if it is conceived of as a 'practice': everything has some sort of genealogy. The kinds of things that we 'inherit' as intangible heritage include our language, customs, rituals, 'tacit knowledge' and many other kinds of behaviours and interactions.

HERITAGE AS INSTITUTION, ADJECTIVE OR TRADITION

One use of the word heritage can be to refer to the *institutions* and the 'cultural products' themselves contained within those institutions – in other words, both art galleries and the art in them. The crucial thing is that, whilst there are forms of heritage that have world-wide significance, ultimately any type of heritage always 'belongs' to someone. The predecessors of one ethnic and social group or another either created or continued it. So the questions here are *whose* heritage something is claimed to be, and who *lays claim* to it.

There are ambiguities, of course. An art museum in Germany can hold works by French artists who worked in Britain. This raises the point that the domain of fine art, perhaps more than any other, has been seen both in terms of 'national' schools and in terms of its 'universal' historical importance. For example, the British Museum holds important examples of Benin's artistic traditions, although these may also be presented by some people as part of a 'world heritage'. Aside from the issue of 'whose' they are, should the Museum's Benin bronzes be seen as 'art' or 'heritage' or both? Who decides – people in Benin, visitors or curators? Societies that have been subject to colonial regimes or hold different indigenous value-systems can also differ fundamentally to European ones in attitudes to 'heritage'. Some languages make specific distinctions between different kinds of heritage and their management (Kockel and Craith 2007: 1–3).

Another way we may increasingly encounter the term 'heritage' in society is as an *adjective* to denote a set of values, often associated with tradition, wholesomeness, stability, authority, authenticity, community and being 'natural'. For some, the terms heritage and tradition are used interchangeably, creating an implicitly conservative ideal where continuity is an intrinsic good. Therefore, a fundamental question in assessing ideas about heritage and narrating histories in museums is how we evaluate concepts of change and continuity. Privileging 'change' over 'continuity' implies one set of values and vice versa. Put in extreme broad-brush terms, political and social conservatives have emphasised the value of cultural continuity. Most humanities academics have privileged change, both in social history and in stories of art. Dramatic changes in particular receive special attention. This remains true even though historians such as Ferdinand Braudel have emphasised the different 'speeds' of change at which different processes take place and different types of adaptation are negotiated.

Some museum studies scholars have looked to those celebrating radical change, such as the philosophers of history Walter Benjamin and Michel Foucault. Both attempted to rethink the very ideas of 'history' and 'heritage' by drawing our attention to the value of abrupt breaches and discontinuities rather than continuities. They argued against seeing history as a single linear sequence in which all 'heritage' is to be treasured whatever values it embodied when it was first created. Likewise, both figures saw historians' jobs as finding

those things in the past that have been suppressed or ignored, or that remain unspoken. For Benjamin, the historian's imperative was "to blast open the continuum of history" in the face of "the 'eternal' image of the past In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it" (1999: 254).

ELITE OR 'EVERYONE'S' HERITAGE

These intellectual positions suggest that the veneration of certain kinds of elite material heritage encourage forms of conservative politics, or even a subservience or unwitting deference towards modern-day elites. It is important to recognise the gap between the 'aesthetic' appreciation of some types of material heritage, and the imaginative understanding of the lived history of which they were part and parcel. Many Europeans happily enjoy visiting 'stately homes' or large 'historic houses'. Yet, we do so in the knowledge that the historic system of property ownership that concentrated almost all wealth in 0.001% of the population is not one we want back. Most of our predecessors were in the 99.99% and were not landowners but servants, workers or peasants. The point here is not only critic Robert Hewison's much-debated polemic that some parts of "the heritage industry" sell a saccharine, nostalgic, airbrushed and false view of history (Hewison 1987). It is also that few people visit ordinary individuals' houses because they seldom ever owned anything of permanence, and few of their life-stories, memories or possessions could or would have been preserved or written about. The exception here is the tradition of folk museums which does preserve the material evidence of ordinary people's lives and vernacular housing but these are typically shown to illustrate particular national or regional cultures so that the histories of individuals within those groups remain absent.

In Europe, in particular, control over society's material heritage, its history, and even its collective memory, has been largely wielded by elites until very recently. In recent years, there has been a growing official recognition in some countries that many other kinds of heritages have value, whether preserved in material artefacts and buildings or not. We can think about our own personal 'heritage' in terms of family history, place(s), language(s) and cultural identity, in

relation to bigger stories about types of artefacts and practices. The degree to which an individual can choose which heritages to identify with, and whether they can have that claim recognised by others, relates to questions of power and influence. Gaining recognition for a broader spectrum of heritage, of course, requires collective action but has been taken forward, in some instances, by official bodies with some surprising results. For example, Historic England, which is the national statutory body charged with managing England's 'heritage' has developed a scheme called 'local listing'. Listing, in their words, is

the term given to the practice of listing buildings, scheduling monuments, registering parks, gardens and battlefields, and protecting wreck sites. Listing allows us to highlight what is significant about a building or site, and helps to make sure that any future changes to it do not result in the loss of its significance.

(Historic England 2017)

Local listing "helps to raise the profile of local heritage by identifying heritage assets that are of greatest importance to local people" (Historic England). So, as well as listing traditional historic sites of national importance which we would expect, like battlefields, monuments, churches and stately homes, the local listing scheme works to identify much more everyday sites which are important to the local community.

As the above suggests that 'heritage' can be defined at different scales, even at the same time. It can be considered as very localised and identified with a specific group – e.g. the heritage of 'my' community or family. Equally it can be understood as World Heritage and therefore belonging to us all – e.g. some heritage is designated as having universal value by UNESCO. Whether the same heritage can be claimed by different groups for different purposes (e.g. can my heritage also be your heritage if we identify with different groups?) and whether it can be both universal and also particular at the same time (e.g. belongs to Italy and also belongs to humanity, past, present and future) is the source of much debate in heritage studies. For example, the Universal Museum idea argues that such museums hold their collections for the whole of humanity – present and future – not just one specific group. However, material culture

can generally only be in one place at one time and most of the Universal Museums are located in, and held by, former European powers who 'acquired' some of their collections through processes of colonisation. In both practical and philosophical terms this means that some nation-states and parts of the world (e.g. Europe) have much more access to so-called universal heritage than others. As all of the above suggests, 'heritage' is always closely linked to questions of identity, power and politics.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored some first principles in thinking about museums and galleries. What should now be evident is the extent to which people's understanding and perceptions of these institutions will vary significantly according to their own political, cultural, linguistic and historical contexts. This is particularly evident, for example, when we are looking at museums and galleries from the perspective of European colonising powers as opposed to those who were on the receiving end of colonial collecting practices. This chapter also demonstrates how the concept of the museum and gallery is a shifting one and the subject of intense debate in many countries around the world. This is a theme which will reoccur throughout the book. A third key point to take away from this chapter is the vital importance of engaging with the histories of museums and galleries and their collections. We cannot overstate how critical it is to understand how individual institutions were developed and the wider contexts within which they and their collections were formed. These pasts are still very much present within the institutions as we see them today. They are written – both metaphorically and literally – into their architecture, their spaces, their collections, their missions, their staffing structures, and the ways in which they think and act as institutions. A historically and critically informed understanding of museums and galleries is the key not only to appreciating why they are like they are today, but also to having the sense of perspective to think for oneself how they might be different in the future. Having laid this foundation for understanding what museums and galleries are and what roles they may perform in societies, the next chapter will focus on two of the essential features of museum and gallery practice: collecting and curating.

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