Philips, Deborah. "Pleasure Gardens, Great Exhibitions and Wonderlands: A genealogy of the carnival site." *Fairground Attractions: A Genealogy of the Pleasure Ground*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012. 7–30. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781849666718.ch-001>>.

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Pleasure Gardens, Great Exhibitions and Wonderlands

A genealogy of the carnival site

The theme park offers a version of the carnivalesque to the pleasure seeker, but it is a tightly controlled and organised form of pleasure. The theme park is distinct in its difference from the fairground or carnival in that it is (although it may sedulously disguise the fact) a bounded and contained space. The daily processions of floats through the Disneyland Main Streets and their equivalents in other theme parks appear to mimic street carnivals, but Main Street is not an open or public space but a site accessed only by payment of a (substantial) entry fee. The shopping outlets and market stalls dotted throughout the theme park give the impression of individual entrepreneurs competing for custom, but this is illusory; all the trade in a theme park is owned and controlled by the theme park company, and all the most successful contemporary theme parks are now in the hands of global corporations.

Like the shops and stalls of the theme park, what seems to be an array of competing brands and attractions are in fact in the hands of very few entertainment corporations. Alton Towers, Chessington World of Adventures and Thorpe Park (once under the control of the Tussauds Group) became part of the Merlin Entertainments Group in 2007. Merlin claims to be ‘the World’s Number Two company in the visitor attractions market’ (www.merlinentertainments.biz).¹ The Merlin Group’s ‘iconic and local brands’ include all the major theme parks in England: Alton Towers, Legoland, Chessington World of Adventures, and also Heide Park and Gardaland, the biggest in Germany and Italy. Asterix, the French theme park that challenges the Disney parks in Paris, remains French, owned by the Grévin company.²

Since Walt Disney established his WED (Walt Elias Disney) Enterprises in 1952 to manage his assets and his yet-to-be-established theme parks, the Walt Disney Company has grown incommensurately to become a ‘diversified worldwide entertainment corporation’ (in the words of their Reuters entry, www.us.reuters.com). The Company comprises four central ‘segments’: Media Networks (this includes television stations and cable networks), Studio Entertainments (the Disney production studios and other film companies acquired by Disney, including Pixar), Consumer Products (merchandising

Figure 1.1 The Grand Orchestra at Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens, 1803

and publishing) and Parks and Resorts (the Disney theme parks and also the various Disney Travel companies). The pleasure garden, whether owned by Disney, Time Warner or the Merlin Group, is now big and global business, but it has a long history of associations with commerce and trade.

Pleasure gardens

There have always been prescribed sites for carnival and fairgrounds, but the dedicated commercial pleasure garden is a phenomenon of the eighteenth century. The theme park is rooted in the moment of industrialism and also of Romanticism; this is the period that sees the beginnings of a tourist industry, as John Urry has noted (Urry 2002). A new-found appreciation for an untamed 'picturesque' landscape emerged in the eighteenth century in response to the growth of industrialisation and new technological developments; the 'landscape park' as a site to be visited was, as Raymond Williams points out (Williams 1975: 51), the product of industrial capitalism. The pleasure garden and the carnival (and, it can be argued, the theme park) represent an uneasy alliance of an embrace of new technologies and a picturesque setting in the landscapes of the Romantic imagination.

The 'picturesque' is a term that originally designated a category between Edmund Burke's concepts of 'sublime' and 'beautiful', but came to define a popular fashion in landscaping. What the pleasure garden offered was the Romanticism of the picturesque rather than that of the sublime. The picturesque landscape promised novelty, the framing of an 'enticing attraction' for the 'tourist gaze', in Urry's phrase (Urry 2002). The landscaped garden presents a version of nature that may appear wild (as in a Capability Brown garden), but which, while offering the thrill of apparently untrammelled nature, is in fact safely tamed and controlled. The attractions of both the pleasure garden and the theme park promise unexplored territories and exotic adventures, but are known to be unthreatening and contained environments. The sublime gives way to the picturesque in the pleasure garden – it must reassure rather than challenge.

In his three essays on 'picturesque beauty' in 1792, William Gilpin taught the eighteenth-century tourist how to gaze, and so conventionalised an aesthetic. He itemised the requirements of the picturesque landscape and defined the rules for how it should be seen. Gilpin's book of essays includes a set of illustrations which are patterns for the picturesque, and which still remain key scenes in pleasure grounds: a rural scene, a seascape, an antique tomb embellished with an epitaph. These are landscapes that show themselves as both 'natural' and as artistically contrived. Gilpin expresses this tension between artifice and nature that is intrinsic to the landscaped garden and the theme park:

Even artificial objects we admire, whether in a grand, or in a humble stile, tho' unconnected with Picturesque beauty – the palace, and the cottage – the improved garden-scene, and the neat homestall. (Gilpin 1792: ii)

The theme park, with its combination of garden and artificial (literally, in many cases) plants, continues to abide by Gilpin's paradoxical requirements of nature and culture. Gilpin did not object to the use of the picturesque in forms of popular public spectacle, and approvingly invokes theatrical design

as a model, while picturesque gardeners made use of theatrical effects. The once formal gardens of Kenwood House in London were redesigned (probably by Capability Brown) with an ornamental bridge designed to be viewed from the house, an illusion in which the bridge is a two-dimensional flat. In 1793, Humphry Repton remodelled the gardens as a circuit walk, with novelties and framed views at regular intervals, just as Gilpin required. The picturesque garden and its 'delights' in turn shaped the scenery for stage settings: towers, grottos and ruined abbeys became conventionalised theatre sets, often the focus of the pantomime transformation scene.

The pleasure garden and the theme park continue to be landscaped on Gilpin's principles; the regular pattern is a central avenue that offers vistas to uncharted landscapes, while winding walkways lead to the attainment of an object glimpsed in the distance. The theme park is designed as a series of picturesque scenes; the major architectural features are positioned at the furthest point of the parks; the view from the park entrance seems to offer distant lands awaiting exploration. The eighteenth-century stately garden was for many a tourist attraction; visitors were inspired to visit the gardens of England, both natural and cultivated, by the guides of Gilpin and others. The extent of the popular attraction of the picturesque landscape is suggested by the fact that it was the subject of one of the *Dr Syntax* parodies, illustrated by Thomas Rowlandson in 1812.³ As Copley and Garside have explained, the principle of the picturesque could slide between the aesthetic and commercial, and was shared by 'the tourist, the landscape gardener, the painter, the aesthetic theorist, the literary writer' (Copley and Garside 1994: 2). The picturesque landscape was itself a construct and consequence of tourism to Europe. Fashionable eighteenth-century European gardens displayed the cultural capital of their owners, showing off souvenirs and replicating scenes from their travels. Aristocratic gardens therefore referenced a wild array of different cultures and genres, as Humbert and Price explain: '[obelisks] were combined with pyramids, Japanese bridges, Chinese pagodas and Gothic ruins, all of which are usually taken today as having represented a desire for exoticism and nostalgia' (Humbert and Price 2003: 4). This cultural capital could easily be reproduced by aspiring bourgeois landowners, as commercial designs for '[g]arden buildings in every style, Gothic, Hindoo, Moorish and Classical' became widely available in pattern books (de Bay and Bolton 2000: 74); Chinoiserie, Egyptiana and Grecian pavilions were also there to be copied, the fashionable currency of imperial adventures.

The collage of Egyptian, Greek and Roman monuments, European landscapes and water features to be found in many landscaped gardens made no claim to historical or geographical accuracy. Such random displays were in keeping with Gilpin's injunction that 'the province of the picturesque is to survey

nature; not to anatomize matter'. A grand scene 'of incorrect composition' (Gilpin 1792: 49) could still delight the viewer: 'It throws its glances around in the broad-cast stile. It comprehends an extensive tract at each sweep. It examines parts but never descends to particles' (Gilpin 1792: 26). That the picturesque requires no detail but only a 'broad-cast stile' fits neatly with the showman's wish to present a spectacle of grandeur and exoticism; Gilpin's 'parts' are to be found in every carnival site, where the visitor is offered 'an extensive tract at each sweep'.

In his theorising of the picturesque, William Gilpin was in fact describing landscaping 'delights' that had already been put into practice by the owners of large parklands who had themselves travelled. The spectacle of the eighteenth-century landscaped garden was a display of cultural capital and of cultivated wealth. Charles Hamilton⁴ of Painshill was one among many aristocrats who had experienced the Grand Tour and who came back to their estates with a desire to display their newly acquired cultural references.⁵ In their parklands they recreated the temples and ruined castles (or, in Hamilton's case, the paintings of such scenes) they had encountered on their travels, and made these follies focal points for the landscaped vistas of their stately grounds. Painshill Park, in Surrey, is one of the most elaborate gardens developed in what came to be known as the 'English style'. It was devised as a pleasure garden modelled on Romantic principles and visited by Gilpin in 1765. The features of Painshill include a rustic thatched Hermitage, a tastefully 'Ruined Abbey', a Grotto complete with stalactites and artificial lake, a waterwheel and cascade, a Turkish tent and both a 'most elegant Gothic temple' and a Gothic Tower.

Painshill has been described as having 'a Disneyland effect of incongruity in all these juxtaposed scenes ... which may well strike the modern visitor' (Batey and Lambert 1990: 190). The modern visitor may experience the picturesque of Painshill through the frame of Disneyland, but the landscapes of the contemporary commercial pleasure garden were also learned from gardens such as Painshill. Painshill offers an example of a strategy that is employed in most contemporary theme parks, with the visitor being led through the landscape through a series of winding paths and concealed boundaries, which made an estate look much larger than it actually is. While the Disney parks may not have ha-has (although Alton Towers and Drayton Manor in Britain would once have had their own), they do emulate the same practice of disguising the limits of the parklands,⁶ so that the boundaries are hidden even from the highest point in the park. All the elements that Gilpin required for the landscaping of the picturesque are to be found at Disneyland. Grottos remain an intrinsic part of the theme park landscape, and the mountainous landscapes and artificial caves of Adventureland and the ruins of the Gothic Phantom Manor emulate the illustrations to Gilpin's essays.

The picturesque was shaped by tourism and associated with leisure; it was also an aesthetic that lent itself to commodification and to the production of commodities. As Ann Bermingham explains,

Unlike Edmund Burke's categories of the Beautiful and the Sublime, the Picturesque was an aesthetic uniquely constituted to serve the nascent mass-marketing needs of a developing commercial culture; one in which appearances were construed as essence and commodities were sold under the signs of art and nature. (Bermingham 1994: 81)

Public pleasure gardens commodified the picturesque landscape for a mass market and can be understood as early prototypes of the commercial pleasure ground. The Gothic ruins and garden 'delights' of the aristocratic classes were brought to a wider public through commercial pleasure grounds; as Roy Porter has said, 'Nothing could better epitomise the Georgian love of pleasure than the pleasure garden' (Porter 1996: 27).

Vauxhall Gardens was London's most lavish public pleasure garden, although it was by no means the first; Marylebone Gardens had offered a public garden and entertainments from 1650 and survived until 1778;⁷ Ranelagh Gardens in Chelsea was more expensive and therefore more fashionable than Vauxhall, but it closed in 1803 (Rogers 1896: 19). Vauxhall had been first laid out in 1661 under the name New Spring Gardens, but it was in its 1732 remodelled incarnation that it became a public sensation, which it remained until 1859. Like Painshill and other private landscaped gardens, Vauxhall Gardens offered its public a range of picturesque landscapes: a miller's cottage (not unlike Painshill's rustic Hermitage), a temple, a hermit's walk and Pavilion. To these, Vauxhall Gardens added its own Gothic orchestra and a cascade, which presented a spectacle at 9.00 every evening. A Rotunda was the site for performances and attractions, including ballets and dioramas. Admission to Spring Gardens was initially free, but from 1750, the gardens were only accessible via a six penny boat ride, so ensuring that only those of certain economic means could access the space (much like the entrance charge for the contemporary theme park). A verse of a popular song of 1737 extols the delights of the 'Spring-Gardens, Vaux-hall' in decidedly picturesque terms, happily celebrating the artistic arrangement of nature and the intermingling of classes to be found there:

See! A grand pavilion yonder rising near embow'ring shades
There, a temple strikes with wonder in full view of colonades.
Art and nature kindly lavish
Here their mingled beauties yield;
Equal here, the pleasures ravish
Of the court and of the field.

(Lockwood 1737, quoted in Rogers 1896: 3)

The commercial pleasure garden offered paying visitors the experience of lavishly landscaped environs and the thrill of new mechanical rides, a resolution of nature and industry that persists in popular tourist sites. John Urry has argued that ‘before the nineteenth century few people outside the upper classes travelled anywhere to see objects for reasons that were unconnected with work or business’ (Urry 2002: 5), but the commercial pleasure garden could bring the ‘objects’ of travel to an eighteenth-century paying public. The public pleasure grounds brought versions of the ‘picturesque’ landscapes of the aristocratic Grand Tour and the stately home to the populations of London and the industrial cities. One means of bringing the landscapes of foreign travel to those who were unable to travel was in the form of the panorama, which relied heavily on picturesque scenes and images of the Grand Tour.

The panorama had first become a form of commercial showmanship in Britain with the artist Robert Barker’s 1787 patent for ‘an entire new Contrivance or Apparatus, called by him *La Nature à Coup d’Oeil*, for the Purpose of displaying Views of Nature at large’ (Altick 1978: 129). Barker’s panorama was set up in a rotunda in the Haymarket in 1788, where it was ‘prodigiously admired’ by Sir Joshua Reynolds, guardian of the national aesthetic as President of the Royal Academy. A Leicester Square rotunda followed, then another in the Strand; in 1796, the Spring Gardens at Vauxhall acquired its own panorama. While the subjects for the panorama scenes were often of land and sea battles, many of the ‘Views of Nature at large’ were remarkably familiar from the landscaped garden. In 1832, the Colosseum in Regent’s Park offered a series of grottos, which led to a ‘Swiss Cottage’ overlooking a cascade and lake, and ‘The Stalactite Cavern’ (versions of all these features could be found at Painshill and at Spring Gardens). Poole’s ‘Grand Pictorial Tours’ was among the most successful travelling panoramas in England; established in 1840, it could claim to be Britain’s ‘most popular entertainment’ and lasted well into the late nineteenth century. Pooles’ ‘Pictorial Tours’ brought panoramas of battles and excursions (both military and leisure) to theatres and pleasure gardens across the country. Their poster promised a ‘new mastodon diorama illustrating a grand tour around the world!’ (Evanion Collection, British Library) and featured a frieze of landscapes and of characters in national dress, all in colour.

The preferred landscapes of the popular spectacle emulated those already in place in the aristocratic landscaped garden. These panoramic scenes were often painted by those who had themselves followed the path of the Grand Tour, as Richard D. Altick describes them:

[T]hese contributors to the edification of stay-at-home Londoners belonged to the numerous early nineteenth century breed of artist-travelers who, moved by the romantic passion for the remote, the sublime, the picturesque, and the antique, wandered around the continents in search of subjects. (Altick 1978: 138)

The picturesque that had been itemised by Gilpin and actualised by Humphry Repton in his mission for the English garden was now conventionalised for a mass market through tourist guides. The Reverend T.D. Fosbroke's 1826 *Tourist's Grammar: or Rules relating to the Scenery and Antiquities incident to travellers: compiled from the first authorities ...* offered readers a précis of Gilpin's principles, and had 'for its object the dissemination in a cheap form, of the Picturesque' (Fosbroke 1826: 2). Fosbroke told the traveller exactly what to look for in landscapes and gardens; the scenes that Gilpin had admired for their novelty were no longer new, but now the expected features of any pleasure ground.

Alton Towers is currently among the Merlin Group's 'brands', advertised on their website as the United Kingdom's 'leading and most extraordinary theme park' (www.merlinentertainments.com). The gardens of Alton Towers were once a model example of Humphry Repton's principle of 'Mixed Style landscaping'. Alton Towers was then so dedicated to the picturesque that it featured a blind Welsh harpist resident in a Swiss Cottage to entertain visitors on their walks around the garden. The stately home of the Shrewsbury Estate, Alton Towers garden was remodelled by Repton from 1814 to present a dizzying collage of features. To the Swiss Cottage were added an Alpine Garden, a model of 'StoneHenge', a Grecian monument, a Dutch Garden and a version of the Matterhorn. The centrepiece was a pagoda, adorned with 100 dragon fountains; the newly landscaped Alton Towers displayed many of the vistas and attractions to be seen in the public pleasure garden. J.C. Loudon⁸ scathingly reported on the multiplicity of attractions offered by Alton Towers in his 1834 *Encyclopaedia of Gardening*:

(a) labyrinth of terraces, curious architectural walls, trellis-work arbours, vases, statues, stairs, pavements, gravel and grass walks, ornamental buildings, bridges, porticoes, temples, pagodas, gates, iron railings, parterres, jets, ponds, streams, seats, fountains, caves, flower baskets, waterfalls, rocks, cottages, trees, shrubs, beds of flowers, ivied walls, rock-work, shell work, moss houses, old trunks of trees, entire dead trees etc. (Loudon 1834, quoted in Batey and Lambert 1990: 273–4)

Many of these features can be recognised in the current incarnation of Alton Towers as 'one of the World's Leading Theme Parks', if not quite in their original form. The cottages and moss houses are still to be found in the 'Merry England' and 'Storybook' sites, the fountains and waterfalls now host a log flume, while the streams and ponds have become a lake with swan-shaped boats. The trees and ivied walls form a backdrop for the 'Gloomy Wood', and The Swiss Cottage remains in the name of a restaurant. John Urry largely dismisses Alton Towers as 'mainly modern and ... predominantly inauthentic' (Urry 2002: 94), but its modernity was once the fashionability of Humphry Repton's principles, which never claimed any 'authenticity'.

The contemporary publicity for Alton Towers makes no reference to the picturesque, or to Repton. The picturesque vision of the Earl of Shrewsbury has been relegated to a footnote in the theme park's current publicity; 'The Gardens' are listed as only one among the park's attractions, and are succinctly described as follows: 'Beautiful landscapes with rock pools and thousands of plants. Built hundreds of years ago by the old owners of the Towers' (Alton Towers website 2006). Nonetheless, the spirit of Repton remains in the confusion of genres and attractions offered in the current theme park. The contemporary boasts in a promotional leaflet that claim Alton Towers as a 'unique blend of fantasy, magic and style' are not so very different from those made at the time of its landscaping.

Alton Towers was the most popular English garden for nineteenth-century garden visitors, but by 1860 the estate was running into serious financial difficulties, and opened up to a fee-paying public. The incumbent Earl of Shrewsbury tried to support the house and garden by offering a collection of 'curiosities' to the tourist, including a display of his own collection of instruments of torture (see Cross and Walton 2005: 36). This was not enough to sustain the estate, and Alton Towers was eventually sold off to a consortium of businesses; the house was converted into shops and restaurants. The estate became 'Alton Towers Limited' and was requisitioned during the Second World War. After the war, the gardens hosted fairground attractions, and a Scenic Railway was installed in 1952. From 1973, Alton Towers estate was run as a theme park, which was taken over by the Tussauds Group in 1990 and by Merlin Entertainments in 2007.

Alton Towers was not alone in this transition from landed estate to public pleasure ground. The shift from an agrarian to a mercantile economy meant that many of the aristocratic estates and the landscaped gardens of the late eighteenth century could not sustain their displays of financial capital and cultivated wealth. Without the funds or a profitable estate to support his pleasure garden, Charles Hamilton was forced to sell Painshill in 1773; from then it was in private hands and inaccessible to the public until 1980, when it was bought by the borough council. Painshill has since been painstakingly restored by a trust, and so escaped the fate of many similar stately landscapings, which could only survive through the National Trust or with some form of commercial support, in many cases to become a theme park. Like the commercial pleasure gardens of the eighteenth century (Marylebone, Cremorne and Ranelagh Gardens were all sited in the grounds of aristocratic estates), the theme park in Britain is frequently situated on the site of what was once a stately home. The contemporary theme park's former history is now, however, generally erased. The house is often obscured in the theme park map and guides; an inconvenient encumbrance to the attractions located in its gardens, as it is at Alton Towers, Drayton Manor Park and Chessington World of Adventures.

From stately home to theme park

The story of the theme park in Britain is one of the decline of the aristocratic estate, and the incursion of the leisure industry into what had once been pleasure gardens for the aristocracy. The history of Alton Towers and its transition from stately pleasure ground to a 'brand' in the portfolio of a global entertainment group is one that has been repeated to varying degrees and in different forms across landed estates in Britain. While the demise of the once private landed estate as an economically viable unit was a long process that had begun in the late eighteenth century, it was the First and Second World Wars that finally saw an end to most of the privately held stately homes and gardens of England. Most of the major estates had been requisitioned by the army during the years of the Second World War, and the post-war reconstruction saw large numbers taken over by the National Trust. Many estates still occupied by their owners were to become 'half-crown houses' (see Philips and Haywood 1998), named for the entrance fee charged to paying visitors. Government subsidies for repairs and restoration required aristocratic families to open their houses to the public; the paying tourist now had unprecedented access to the landscaped gardens of landed aristocracy. The title of a 1952 guidebook, *Open to View: English Country Houses You Can Visit and How to Find Them*, suggests the new public visibility of the landed estate. The guide suggests that the English country house is in 'a new position of prominence' (Freeman 1952: 5), and lists all the houses and gardens newly open to the post-war visitor.

The Longleat estate in Wiltshire was the first of the stately homes to open its doors to the public, in 1949. Longleat had featured in Humphry Repton's *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (1816) as a particularly fine example of the picturesque. The Elizabethan gardens had been refashioned in 1757 by Capability Brown, who designed a Pleasure Walk and landscaping with winding gravel paths, a river and wooded hills. Repton later added an island and a bridge to the lake in 1804. In 1966, the incumbent Marquess of Bath turned the inner section of the estate into the first Safari Park to be found outside Africa. Repton's island now houses the Safari Park's collection of gorillas, and the Pleasure Walk is only one among the attractions included in the 'Passport Ticket' to the Longleat pleasure park.

Woburn Abbey is the seat of the Dukes of Bedford. In 1970 the estate emulated Longleat by opening up as a Safari Park. Woburn and its grounds are described in the nineteenth-century guide *Picturesque England* as 'remarkably picturesque, with rolling land here and there, water trees, and great spaces of green turf' (Valentine 1891: 162). In 1802, Repton had landscaped the 3,000-acre gardens and deer park. By 1953, the house and gardens were in a state of disrepair, and death duties required the incumbent duke to open

the grounds and house to the public. Rather than hand the estate over to the National Trust, the duke relied on his own enterprise, and opened up an antiques centre. In the 1960s, the then Duke of Bedford added lions, his own collection of vintage cars and later a golf club to the attractions of the abbey and gardens.

Drayton Manor Park at Tamworth was purchased by Robert Peel in 1790, in a transaction that typified the transition from landed to industrial wealth. Peel, a mill owner, father of the future prime minister and a friend of Sir Walter Scott, had purchased the estate from the family who had owned it since the Norman Conquest. Peel rebuilt the house, church and village, and hired Gilpin to landscape the gardens. Several generations of family debts led to the estate being sold off in parcels of land, and the Manor was finally demolished (Smith 1978). In 1949 a private purchaser opened the gardens as an 'Inland Pleasure Resort'; the site became 'Drayton Manor Park and Zoo' in the 1970s and, like Alton Towers, a theme park in the 1980s. Drayton Manor Park maintains its farm, but it is as an attraction for children and very much subsidiary to the zoo and theme park.

Tivoli Gardens

The display of luxury and culture found in the landscaped gardens of the stately homes of England was to be redeployed by pleasure gardens and popular entertainments throughout the nineteenth century. The conventions of the picturesque with its attractions of the grotto, the ruined abbey, the cottage and the cascade were emulated in panoramas, fairgrounds and popular entertainment sites across Britain, and extended to become the conventions across European pleasure gardens. The Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen has regularly been cited by historians and biographers of Walt Disney as the 'inspiration' for Disneyland.⁹ The Tivoli Gardens opened in 1843, originally modelled (and named) after the Tivoli in Paris and London's Vauxhall Gardens. The architect Georg Carstensen secured a charter from Denmark's King Christian VIII, which declared that 75 per cent of the site should be open space. Within this landscaped space were a bazaar for the trading of Danish and foreign goods, a panorama and a pantomime theatre (which produced, and continues to perform, *Harlequinades*). The park opened with two mechanised attractions, a carousel and a roller coaster, in a celebration and display of new technology. The Tivoli's attractions of the pleasure garden, fireworks, landscaped gardens and 'oriental' buildings, shared with eighteenth-century pleasure gardens such as Vauxhall, came together with the mechanical rides of the fairground. This combination of stately pleasures and new technologies is the basis of the modern pleasure ground, a synthesis that is a model for all the Disney parks.

The Exhibition and the Egyptian Hall

The distinction between popular entertainments and educational purpose was not a clear division for audiences of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Victorian concept of rational recreation¹⁰ depended on a world in which the boundaries between work and leisure are clearly marked, and before the domination of industrialisation, they were not. The exhibition hall provided a site for the conjunction of showmanship with the revelation of new machines and new information. The exhibition hall in particular offered public 'scientific' and 'anthropological' lectures that were displays of spectacle as much as they were educational. Richard D. Altick has described the importance of the exhibition for a general public in London (largely illiterate in the generations before the 1870 Education Act), who had no other means of accessing information about other cultures and countries:

To those who could and did read, exhibitions served as a supplement to books, particularly to illustrate in tangible form some of the most popular kinds of informational literature in various periods, narratives of exploration and travel ... treatises on pseudo science ... histories ... works describing successive centers of archaeological discovery. To the uneducated, exhibitions served as surrogates for such books, telling as much about those subjects of civilized human interest as they were ever likely to know. (Altick 1978: 1)

The very thin line between rational recreation and public spectacle and voyeurism is evident in the history of London's Egyptian Hall, which transmuted from a space of educational instruction with informative (if sensational) exhibitions of foreign artefacts to a place devoted entirely to popular entertainment.

The Egyptian Hall in London began and ended as a site for carnivalesque attractions. The Hall was built by the showman William Bullock, who had made a fortune from his touring exhibition of 'upwards of Fifteen Thousand Natural and Foreign Curiosities, Antiquities and Productions of the Fine Arts' (Altick 1978: 237); the display opened the Egyptian Hall in 1812. The show's success was based less on any fascination with the antique than it was on British patriotic triumphalism over the French; the centrepiece was Napoleon's travelling carriage, which had been seized by the British. 'The Foreign Curiosities and Antiquities' on display were the spoils of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition, given up in defeat. The popular embrace of these Egyptian artefacts was more about imperial pride than historical interest.

Popular curiosity coupled with geographical and anthropological instruction was also evident in the display at the Egyptian Hall of such exotic foreigners as the Hottentot Venus and later the 'Ojibbeway Indians'. These exhibitions of people as 'Foreign Curiosities' were no doubt largely about salacious public

interest, but the presence of lecturers and interpreters gave them a veneer of academic authority. The Egyptian Hall also played host to 'biological' spectacles; in 1838, it displayed the 'Lancashire Prodigy ... this extraordinary male child, with two bodies and one head' (Egyptian Hall poster 1838; Evanion Collection, British Library). Such 'subjects of civilized human interest' skated perilously close to the carnival of the freak show, but were presented as educationally improving exhibitions. The carnival would eventually take over from instruction, and by the late nineteenth century the Egyptian Hall was known for its shows of magicians and illusionists.

Great Exhibitions, Grands Expositions and World's Fairs

The Great Exhibition of 1851 was the first international trade fair¹¹ to be a major public attraction, and was the most internationally prominent display of new mechanical and industrial wonders. The Great Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations established an international paradigm for the 'Grand Exposition' and the 'World's Fairs' that were to become a major influence for Walt Disney. The Great Exhibition was a great popular attraction; the date of its opening was declared a national holiday, and six million visitors came on excursion trips from across Britain. Founded and organised by Prince Albert, Consort of Queen Victoria, the Great Exhibition was an unabashed display of industry, modernity and Empire; it celebrated British technology and manufacturing alongside the innovations of its trading partners. Prince Albert opened the proceedings secure in the belief that '[t]he products of all the quarters of the globe are placed at our disposal' (quoted in Blake 1995: ii). The Great Exhibition was laid out around a series of national 'courts', a structure that was replicated in later Grands Expositions and World's Fairs and which continues in the pavilions of Disney World's Epcot World. The spirit of the 'Industry of All Nations' remains strong in the displays of national commodities and architectures at Epcot World Showcase.

The building that housed the Great Exhibition, the architecturally innovative Crystal Palace, was itself a confident display of new developments in manufacturing and industry. The Crystal Palace became a byword for luxury and innovation in amusement resorts; it gave its name to the Assembly Rooms at Blackpool and to the central Main Street restaurant in the Magic Kingdom in Florida. The original Crystal Palace was designed by Joseph Paxton, who had been the Duke of Devonshire's head gardener at Chatsworth, in Derbyshire. Paxton has been described as 'the key figure in the application of science and technology to Victorian gardens' (Batey and Lambert 1990: 246), and his design for a conservatory was the prototype for the Crystal Palace. His building was celebrated in thousands of prints and engravings sold as

Great Exhibition souvenirs and in issues of popular journals. Emulations of Paxton's use of barrel vaulting and glass cladding were to be found across Europe and America; the New York Crystal Palace for the 1853 World's Fair was modelled on the London version, and borrowed the title 'the Exhibition of the Industry of All Nations'. As the Great Exhibition ended, the Crystal Palace was dismantled and moved from Hyde Park, to be rebuilt in Sydenham, South London, in 1854. The Crystal Palace Gardens in Sydenham were laid out by Paxton as a popular pleasure ground, with sites for archery, cricket and quoits, and boats and bicycles for hire. Hans Christian Andersen was one among the many travellers to the site of the Crystal Palace Gardens in 1857, which he described in his diaries as 'like a fairy city'.¹²

The pleasure resort: Blackpool and Coney Island

The excursion trains that made the Great Exhibition such a popular success were also responsible for transforming Blackpool into a major tourist attraction and made possible the 'world's first working class seaside resort' (Walton 1998: 10). The coming of the railways in the 1840s had transformed Blackpool from a provincial resort with a focus on sea bathing to the first commercial leisure resort in Britain. The Northern industrial landscape surrounding Blackpool provided it with a steady flow of holidaymakers from the local mill towns, as a 1923 historian records:

Trade unionism, obtaining higher wages and more leisure for holidays for the working masses, helped to make Blackpool by giving the artisans and their families the means to go there in thousands and tens of thousands ... the railway companies ran special trains at holiday times. It was the beginning of the cheap trip era, the day excursion. ... Blackpool developed from a tiny fishing village with a few hundred inhabitants to a glittering town of pleasure and amusements. (Clarke 1923: 174)

By 1923, Allen Clarke's story of Blackpool could report 200 special excursion trains arriving every weekend: 'as well as the ordinary service, and this does not include the tens of thousands who come by motor coach' (Clarke 1923: 166).

The commercial possibilities of Blackpool saw an early consortium of investors in a burgeoning leisure industry, a model that was emulated in investment in pleasure palaces throughout the nineteenth century. The Raikes Hall Company was formed in 1871 by a group of Blackpool entrepreneurs, who bought up the Raikes Hall mansion and estate for conversion into a public pleasure garden, which opened in 1872. The commercial 'Raikes Hall' maintained the 'classic double-arched gateway entrance for carriages' and the 'grand statuary avenue' of its aristocratic past; these now became the public entrance to its parklands, which offered the tourist the experience of aristocratic

grandeur and attractions, familiar from picturesque landscaping. Raikes Hall gave its visitors access to a skating rink and conservatory, a boating lake, pavilion theatre and concert hall, open-air dancing and firework displays.

In 1875 the rival Blackpool Winter Gardens Company bought up a plot of land and built the Blackpool Winter Gardens the next year. The Winter Gardens offered the public, as had Raikes Hall with its parklands, entry into luxurious fantasy environments. The Winter Gardens attractions were housed indoors, appropriate to the sometimes 'inclement weather' of Blackpool. It was designed with a glazed promenade, aviaries, conservatories, a skating rink and a pavilion that hosted orchestras, opera, ballet and theatre. William Holland, entertainments manager of the Winter Gardens from 1887, capitalised on the provision of upmarket luxury for all members of the public in his advertisement: 'Come to the Winter Gardens and spit on Bill Holland's 100-Guinea carpet'. The entertainment was similarly highbrow; the Winter Gardens' Alpine Hall and Indian Lounge were witness to the opera singers Enrico Caruso and Adelina Patti, and in 1882, Sarah Bernhardt (who was, by all accounts, not well received by the Blackpool audience).

Coney Island in New York had been, like Blackpool, a seaside resort that grew because of the railways. Excursion trains brought in their wake investors in hotels and attractions, so that what had once been a board walk of small independent stalls became America's largest commercial pleasure ground. The eventual electrification of the railways and the building of the Brooklyn Bridge brought day trippers to Coney Island from Manhattan. The Coney Island Amusement Park expanded into three sites, their names living on in the names of attractions and pleasure gardens around the world: Steeplechase, the site of the world's first mechanical racetrack; Luna Park (which gave its name to a World's Fair amusement ground and then for amusement parks including Sydney, Melbourne and Buenos Aires); and Dreamland, which gave its name to a fairground in Margate.

Luna Park was largely destroyed by fire in 1944, and demolished shortly thereafter. The downmarket attractions of Steeplechase Park could not finally compete with the 1964–5 New York World's Fair (although it invested in the spectacular rides after the closure of the fair) and closed in 1964. Astroland was another Coney Island fairground that emerged out of the 'home of the world famous Cyclone' (a roller coaster that dates from 1927 and is still in place at Coney Island). In 1963, it was reinvented as 'Journey to the 21st century' and featured such science-themed attractions as the Cape Canaveral Satellite. Many of these offered simulated flight conditions, much as dioramas had once offered simulations of balloon rides. Astroland, an aquarium and small amusement arcades are all that now remain of New York's pleasure resort, Coney Island.

Blackpool's Pleasure Beach was directly shaped by Coney Island, in its conception and in the attractions that it offered. The Pleasure Beach can be seen as the first commercial leisure park in Britain, in that it was an outdoor but

bounded site of attractions that, unlike the Tower or Winter Gardens, did not require an entrance fee. Alderman William George Bean founded the Pleasure Beach as a family company that continues to be run by his descendants. The founding statement (which remains the company's mission statement) situates the Pleasure Beach in the tradition of American carnival; W.G. Bean declared at its opening in 1896: 'We wanted an American Style Amusement Park, the fundamental principle of which is to make adults feel like children again and to inspire gaiety of a primarily innocent character' (quoted on www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com). The Pleasure Beach was run on the Coney Island model, importing and operating its own purchased attractions, and letting space to other entrepreneurs to run sideshows and mechanical rides.

Bean had learned his trade in fairgrounds in Philadelphia; his admiration for American carnival and particularly for Coney Island led him to look to America for the latest mechanical rides for the Pleasure Beach at Blackpool. Bean was born a Londoner but went to Philadelphia in 1887, where he worked with the amusement machinery industry, an industry that had been promoted by the Philadelphia World's Fair eleven years earlier. On his return to Britain, he set up a bicycle railway, and then began an association with the owner of a carousel, John Outhwaite. The two men formed a syndicate that bought up 42 acres on the South Shore (a much more attractive proposition since the arrival of the electric tram, which brought visitors to the site). The site had previously housed a rickety range of individual small fairground attractions, including a mechanical ride and Gipsy stalls offering fortune telling and phrenology (the remnants of these remain on the Golden Mile at Blackpool and on seaside piers). The Gipsy camp was finally banished from the site on the grounds of 'hygiene' in 1910, and the private Pleasure Beach Company was free to take over the space (Clarke 1923: 231).

The oldest ride still functioning at the Pleasure Beach is Sir Hiram Maxim's Captive Flying Machine, imported in 1904 (its name a tribute to the American inventor). 1907 saw the introduction of a scenic railway and roller coaster, a ride that had begun in America in a disused mine. Many of the attractions at the Pleasure Beach were imported directly from Coney Island, as with the 1905 Helter Skelter (a spiral slide down the side of a replica lighthouse) and the Steeplechase. The importing of mechanical attractions from America was briefly interrupted by the First World War, but resumed in 1921. In 2007, the Pleasure Beach could continue to boast its status as Britain's most visited tourist site; its acquisition of 'The Pepsi Max' with its red, white and blue-striped regalia belongs firmly in the Blackpool tradition of importing the latest and most spectacular ride from America.

The Blackpool Tower Company was an alliance of a London syndicate and a group of Blackpool businessmen, which planned to offer 'Blackpool's most conspicuous group or agglomeration of amusements' (quoted in Clarke 1923: 224). The Tower, which opened in 1898, was built on the site of the

mansion of an aristocratic banker, in emulation of the Eiffel Tower built for the 1889 Exposition Universelle.¹³ The space beneath the Tower's legs housed a menagerie, aviary and aquarium and a circus. The Tower, with its ballroom and indoor attractions, was in direct competition with the Raikes Hall, which finally went under – the estate sold for building plots in 1899.

Coney Island and Blackpool Pleasure Beach were by no means the first commercial pleasure grounds, but they can be seen as the first permanent commercial sites devoted to the provision of mass leisure. As Cross and Walton put it,

The two seaside resorts combined popular modernity, mass consumption and a new collective experience. At the same time, they offered settings for more traditional entertainments across a broad taste spectrum: from dioramas, firework spectacles and music and dance halls. (Cross and Walton 2005: 55)

Blackpool's Pleasure Beach and Coney Island were new in that they represented the first year-round permanent sites for popular entertainments. Both sites grafted the technologies and spectacle of the World's Fairs onto the familiar attractions of the seaside and fairground, and both converted what had been a largely unregulated site associated with buskers and hawkers into a commercial leisure centre.

The attractions at Coney Island and Blackpool were closely allied to those unveiled at the trades fairs and exhibitions held across the world throughout the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Each World's Fair displayed the newest technological attractions, and these were rapidly taken up and transported to the fairgrounds of Coney Island and Blackpool. Blackpool was early in its adoption of electricity – it pioneered electric lighting on the promenade in 1879, and electric trams appeared in 1888, the first in Britain. Blackpool's motto was (and remains) 'Progress', and its appeal lies in its constant reinvention of seaside traditions while simultaneously offering the visitor the latest technological attraction. Like Coney Island, its attractions, from carousels to space pods, relied on industrial innovations.

World's Fairs

While fairgrounds swiftly responded to the potential of the mechanical devices shown at the World's Fairs and Grands Expositions, these exhibitions increasingly welcomed the public and came to more and more resemble fairgrounds. The amusement sections of the World's Fairs became increasingly significant, as the spectacle of technology diminished in its allure. The American World's Fairs are frequently directly referenced in Disneyland and Disney World, and the Paris Expositions at Disneyland Paris, and it is the World Fair that provides the clearest paradigm for the shape of the contemporary theme park.

The success of the Great Exhibition had led to a rush of nations attempting to emulate the popular success of the Crystal Palace. America held a fair in 1853 in New York, but, even with Phineas T. Barnum as a President of the Association, it was not a success. Napoleon III ordered an exhibition for Paris, which took place in 1855. The 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle was the first of the World's Fairs to open in the evening. The grounds featured an amusement park and the pavilions, while ostensibly a display of national architectural styles, were closely related to the picturesque attractions of the landscaped garden, including the familiar attractions of a Swiss chalet, an Egyptian palace and an Indian temple. Hans Christian Andersen's 1868 story 'The Dryad' gives an indication of the exposition's synthesis of the magical and technological:

We are travelling to the Paris Exposition! Now we are there! It was a flight, a rush, but quite without witchcraft; we came by steam, in a ship and on a high road. Our time is the fairy time. (Andersen 1914: 983)

The Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876, celebrating the anniversary of American Independence, was the biggest World's Fair to date. While still directly modelled on the Great Exhibition as 'an international exhibition of arts, manufacturers, and products of the soil and mine' (Act of Congress, 1871), the focus was on American manufacturers and innovations. Although enormously popular, 7 million visitors attended, the exhibition made heavy losses, which were covered by government subsidy. This was the first fair to feature an elevated railway to ferry visitors about the site and also to build hotels on site to house the influx of visitors, both innovations that Disneyland and subsequent theme parks were to borrow.

It is not surprising that Disney should learn from the World's Fairs; there is a direct lineage from the World's Fairs of the late nineteenth century to Walt Disney's first 1955 theme park, Disneyland. Disney's father, Elias, was commissioned to work on designs for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.¹⁴ The Chicago Columbian Exhibition strove to outdo the Paris Expositions and featured the first Ferris wheel. Designed by George Ferris, specifically to rival the scale of the Eiffel Tower, it became the fair's symbol. The Chicago Exhibition was, as Disney's Epcot Center would be some decades later, a dedicated celebration of American industry and technologies, and of American tradition.¹⁵ The main attractions were demonstrations of Edison's kinetoscope in the Electricity Hall and Buffalo Bill's Rodeo Show.¹⁶

The World's Fairs and Grands Expositions added a scale and grandeur to the ambitions of amusement parks, while amusements and popular entertainments became increasingly central to the appeal of what had once been global trade fairs. World's Fairs offered amusement parks in grand and elaborate settings, an alliance of industry and leisure, of tradition and modernity, of technology and landscaped grounds that has marked the theme park ever since. David Nasaw has described the American World's Fairs in terms that evoke both

Andersen's nineteenth-century fascination with modern technology and the current ethos of the Disney parks:

Culture and commerce joined together with the support of the state, to proclaim the arrival of a new and better future where distinctions between work and play, day and night, education and amusement, fantasy and reality, beauty and excess ... were delightfully blurred. (Nasaw 1993: 78–9)

Many of the attractions first seen at World's Fairs are now the staples of contemporary pleasure grounds – the Ferris wheel, the cowboy show, the extravagant display of electric lights. The site map and guide books, which had been central to the Grands Expositions since the Great Exhibition, became more and more conventionalised, and came to provide the model for the contemporary theme park map now presented to all visitors. The map of the 1939 New York World's Fair presented the geography outside the Flushing Meadows site in shadow; from then on, site maps made less and less reference to the location beyond the boundaries of the Fair, until the map presented the site of the exhibition as a world in itself, just as the theme park map represents a self-contained world. The pavilions built in national styles to house the world's commodities went on to inform the exoticised buildings and attractions of the theme park; the decorated ticketing booths, the firework displays, the central walkway through which patrons enter and exit the grounds are now established as common practice in commercial pleasure grounds.

The 1965 New York World's Fair represents a clear alliance of the leisure industry and of global capital. Disney was closely involved with the design of the attractions and himself designed the exhibits for Ford, General Electric and Pepsi-Cola for the Fair (attractions that would later reappear in his own parks). This involvement with large corporate sponsors was to inform the funding structures for the Epcot Center and for future Disney parks. As a director of Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI), Marty Sklaar, acknowledges, '[i]t seems clear in retrospect that Walt used the 1964 New York World's Fair as a stepping stone ... it gave Walt access to the chief executives of GE and other companies he would want to deal with in the future (quoted in Finch 2004: 463).

Disneyland was firmly established by the time of the New York Fair; the stepping stone that Sklaar describes is one towards the expansion of the Disney parks, with the building of Disney World Florida in 1971 and the Epcot Center in 1982. Both took over some of Walt Disney's initiatives from the New York Fair, notably the Carousel of Progress, now displayed as vintage Disney at Disney World, but also a structure of funding, with attractions sponsored directly by General Electric and other major American corporations. The World Showcase at Epcot can be read as a direct descendant of the World's Fair mission to assemble the products of the trading world in a single place. Epcot's claim that the hosts at the national pavilions are 'genuine natives' from

the country concerned is not far removed from the display of ‘natives’ at the Egyptian Hall or at World’s Fairs in the nineteenth century.

Georg Simmel has referred to the ‘outward unity’ of the Trade Fair, which claims to present a myriad of global cultural, social and commercial phenomena:

It is a particular attraction of world fairs that they form a momentary centre of world civilization, assembling the products of the entire world in a confined space as if in a single picture. Put the other way round, a single city has broadened into the totality of cultural production. No important product is missing, and though much of the material and samples have been brought together from the whole world they have attained a conclusive form and become part of a single whole. (Simmel 1991: 120)

This ‘conclusive form’ is exactly what theme park emulates, and is at its most evident in Disney’s Epcot World Showcase, the ‘confined space’ no longer a city, but a theme park.

Disneyland

Disneyland set up a paradigm on which almost all commercial theme parks are now structured. Walt Disney learned his trade and developed his theme parks from his knowledge of Coney Island, World’s Fairs and the European pleasure garden. The Tivoli Gardens are credited as Disney’s inspiration by his official biographers; although the design and layout of the Disney parks may owe something to the Tivoli Gardens, they are also indebted to the American Coney Island and to successive World’s Fairs, and learned from them how to control crowds and to exclude undesirable elements. Disneyland began with the idea of a travelling show:

As Walt’s ideas advanced, however, it became clear to him that a travelling show could never make any money. ... He turned his attention to building a ‘family park’ unlike any amusement park. There would be no Ferris wheel or roller coaster. Visitors wouldn’t be afraid to eat the food. Admission would be charged – ‘If I don’t, there can be drunks and people molesting people in the dark rides’ he said. (Greene and Greene 1991: 115)

Disneyland can lay claim to being the first themed pleasure ground, in that it organised its attractions into themed ‘lands’, a zoning that is in the tradition of the designated areas of the World’s Fairs, but here is landscaped around popular genres rather than nations. The original plans for Disneyland were drawn up by Herb Ryman, a Disney artist who had spent some time with the Ringling Brothers’ Circus:

The artwork showed Main Street leading up to a circular path (the hub), like spokes on a wheel, led to Holidayland, Mickey Mouse Club, Frontier County, Fantasyland, the World of Tomorrow, Recreationland. (Greene and Greene 1991: 121)

Already, the park is structured around generic categories; central to these are fairy tale, the Western, and adventure and science fiction. These zones were finally to condense into the sites that now structure each Disney park: Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland and Tomorrowland. The Disneyland model was a combination of technological wizardry, American enterprise and a European romantic sensibility – just as Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937 (the first animated feature film) had offered an alliance of European folklore and American technological innovation. The narratives and design of the Disney parks nonetheless remain resolutely American, for, as Alan Bryman has pointed out, Disneyland was set up as a 'tribute to America's past and (to) provide a vision of its future' (Bryman 1995: 11).

The Walt Disney Company, Walt Disney Incorporated, had become WED Enterprises in 1952 (with Walt Disney as the only stockholder) and took charge of designing and financing Disneyland. The park was funded through a deal with ABC television, as Bryman explains:

Disney did not own the park, but in return for its small investment and the use of its name, the company received 10 percent of admissions, 5 per cent of food and merchandise sales, and 10 per cent of corporated sponsorship deals. (Bryman 1995: 47)

Disney provided ABC with a one-hour weekly series, 'Disneyland'; this recycled Disney film and cartoons, and in its first year showed footage of the building of the park, acting as pre-publicity for its opening. The Disneyland brand was planned for expansion: Walt Disney World Florida opened in 1971, after Walt's death, Tokyo Disneyland in 1983, Disneyland Paris in 1992, Hong Kong Disneyland opened in 2005, and at the time of writing, a Disneyland is planned in Shanghai. Each of the current Disney parks has itself expanded with additional hotels, theme parks and water attractions. Unlike Coney Island or Blackpool, the Disney parks did not grow out of a location with a history or geography of tourism. The first was built as a self-enclosed space (and every park since has made vigorous attempts to ensure that the site is not encroached upon). The Disneylands have no historical architecture or roots – they are postmodern sites that can be replicated (within the bounds of copyright) anywhere.

Las Vegas

Las Vegas represents another model of the conjunction of entertainment, marketing and the tourist industry. It is a site that flourished in the same decade as the first Disneyland, and it is not coincidental that the same genres recur in the theming of Las Vegas casinos and hotels and in the Disney parks. Beside the fantasy of exotic 'Continental travel' to the sophisticated metropolitan cities

of Paris, Venice and New York, the same genres that have a long association with carnival and fairground sites are to be found in the Las Vegas casinos. The casinos include Excalibur, Treasure Island, Tropicana and Luxor. Each respectively replicates the narrative of chivalric romance, piracy, exotic adventure and Egyptology – the stories that are there in all Disney Worlds and theme parks.

As Helen Stoddart has pointed out, the publicity for the Las Vegas spectacular shows employs much the same rhetoric found in nineteenth-century advertising for spectacle and pantomime:

This rhetoric resonates with the language of nineteenth-century colonialism and there seems to be little difference between this and the advertising of nineteenth century European pantomimes with a colonial theme. ... Both Cirque du Soleil and Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey's The Greatest Show on Earth have regular Las Vegas venues and the combination of earnestness and mimicry ... suggests that, rather than the circus conforming to the conventions of Vegas spectacle, it is the Vegas spectacle which is a descendant of the circus spectacular. (Stoddart 2000: 105–6)

The architecture and theming of Las Vegas spectacles are in a direct line of descent from nineteenth-century popular entertainments. The colonial tales of travel at the Tropicana, the Egyptian orientalism of the Luxor, the medievalism of the Excalibur and the picturesque of the Bellagio and Venice are all narratives that belong to a European tradition of popular entertainment and carnival, shaped for an American market, by way of the circus and Disney.

Las Vegas reconfigured itself in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a family tourist destination, and central to that strategy was the building of hotels and casinos as themed environments. The themes that figured most largely were those found already in the theme park and fairground; the Circus, Circus casino (built in 1968) is entirely themed as a carnival. Las Vegas itself is always concerned to be 'new' and to offer spectacular experience without any weight of history; as a leisure resort it has no interest in promoting its past or of acknowledging the historical forms of its entertainments. But there is also a refusal to recognise a history to the theming of Las Vegas in contemporary cultural and architectural theory – most notably in the postmodern arguments of Scott and Venturi (Venturi *et al.* 1972) who learned how the 'ducks' of Las Vegas were built, but expressed little interest in the historical derivations and intertextuality of their theming.

Heterotopias

The theme park is a privatised space that requires an entrance fee, and yet it borrows the language of the public domain: 'Main Street' at Disneyland, 'Market Square' at Alton Towers. It is promoted as a site for the family day

out, and it is also a social space in which strangers congregate. While the theme park advertises itself as a magical experience, it will frequently be situated in a utilitarian landscape. Often located on the edge of a motorway, near a city but not in it, such sites are described by Foucault as 'heterotopic' spaces; he identifies them as compensatory spaces for the disorder and alienation of modernity. He identifies heterotopias as 'those singular spaces to be found in some given social spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others' (Foucault 1986a: 252).

The theme park is regularly cited as the quintessentially postmodern space, but for Foucault the accumulation of incompatible objects and styles in the heterotopia is not so much a symptom of postmodernism as a consequence of a nineteenth-century modernity:

The idea of accumulating everything ... of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one palace, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place, all this belongs entirely to our modern outlook. (Foucault 1986b: 15)

The confusion of genres of the theme park has been taken by many as symptomatic of a postmodern bricolage – but the carnival site has always been a concatenation of different voices, stories and images; there is nonetheless a history and a logic that shapes the categories and iconography of the contemporary theme park. The pleasure garden continues to be structured on the principles of the picturesque; some theme parks have inherited their landscapes, while others reconstruct the landscaping of the aristocratic estate.

The theme park offers a simulation of the carnivalesque; it is a public space that offers the illusion of congregation and heterogeneity; it offers an apparent experience of a social throng. But the popular pleasure ground is a site that has been increasingly regulated, as global corporations have bought up and standardised what were once diverse sites and attractions. Cross and Walton describe the 'playful crowd' in what they term 'palaces of pleasure':

The playfulness of modern humanity across an astonishingly wide range of contrived and mostly commercial, but still intensely appealing, settings and experiences. ... Their pursuits were distinctly complex – seeking the novel as well as the nostalgic, the thrill of the mechanical ride as well as the majesty of the sea, both the gaudy and the sublime. (Cross and Walton 2005: 5)

This identifies the key elements of the successful tourist site. To work as a pleasure ground, a park must combine both the traditional and innovative, the spectacle of technology and of landscaped nature. The theme park presents the visitor with the picturesque – it offers reassurance rather than challenge. In writing of eighteenth-century popular pleasures, Roy Porter has argued, '[t]he

Figure 1.2 Map of Alton Towers theme park

notion of simple pleasure has been too often a simplification of the past and a disavowal of the complexities of which it is constituted' (Porter 1996: ix). The shape of the contemporary pleasure garden is itself a consequence of complex historical movements; the theme park is no simple pleasure and nor are the attractions that it offers. The contemporary theme park offers an embedded history of the pleasure garden and of commercially successful tourist sites that dates from the beginnings of leisure and tourism as cultural categories.