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MASS TOURISM AND THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SEASIDE RESORT

Introduction

The development of the first example of mass tourism, which occurred amongst the industrial working class in Britain was an exceptionally novel form of social activity. The mass tourist gaze was initiated in the backstreets of the industrial towns and cities in the north of England. Why did this industrial working class come to think that going away for short periods to quite other places was an appropriate form of social activity? Why did the tourist gaze develop amongst the industrial working class in the north of England? What revolution in experience, thinking and perception led to such novel modes of social practice?

The growth of such tourism represents a democratisation of travel. We have seen that travel had always been socially selective. It was available for a relatively limited elite and was a marker of social status. But in the second half of the nineteenth century there was an extensive development of mass travel by train. Status distinctions then came to be drawn between different classes of traveller, but less between those who could and those who could not travel. We will consider later how in the twentieth century the car and the aeroplane have even further democratised geographical movement (see Stauth and Turner, 1988: 521ff.). As travel became democratised so extensive distinctions of taste came to be established between different places: where one travelled to became of considerable social significance. The tourist gaze came to have a different importance in one place rather than another. A resort ‘hierarchy’ developed and certain places were viewed as embodiments of mass tourism, to be despised and ridiculed. Major differences of ‘social tone’ were established between otherwise similar places. And some such places, the working-class resorts, were viewed as embodiments of mass tourism, to be despised and ridiculed. Major differences of ‘social tone’ were established between otherwise similar places. And some such places, the working-class resorts, were viewed as extensions of tastelessness, common and vulgar.

Explanations of the tourist gaze, of the discourses which established and sustained mass tourism for the industrial working class in the nineteenth century, have tended to be over-general. Such developments have normally been explained in terms of ‘nineteenth-century industrialisation’ (see Myerscough, 1974, for example). In identifying more precisely those aspects of such industrialisation which were especially important attention will be paid to the growth of seaside resorts, whose development was by no means inevitable. They stemmed from particular features of nineteenth-century industrialisation and the growth of new modes by which pleasure was organised and structured in a society based on large-scale industrial classes.

The growth of the British seaside resort

Throughout Europe a number of spa towns had developed in the eighteenth century. Their original purpose was medicinal; they provided mineral water which was used for bathing in and drinking. It is by no means clear exactly how and why people came to believe in its medicinal properties. The first spa in England appears to have been in Scarborough and dates from 1626 when a Mrs Farrow noticed a spring on the beach (see Hern, 1967: 2–3; and, more generally, Howell, 1974). Within a few decades the medical profession began to advocate the desirable effects of taking the waters, or taking the ‘Cure’. Various other spas developed, in Bath, Buxton, Harrogate, Tunbridge Wells and so on. An amazing range of disorders were supposedly improved both by swallowing the waters and by bathing in them. Scarborough, though, was distinctive since it was not only a major spa but was also by the sea. A Dr Wittie began to advocate both drinking the sea water and bathing in it. During the eighteenth century there was a considerable increase in sea bathing as the developing merchant and professional classes began to believe in its medicinal properties as a general pick-me-up. At that stage it was advocated for adults and there was little association then between the seaside and children. Indeed since the point of bathing in the sea was to do one good, this was often done in winter and basically involved ‘immersion’ and not what is now understood as swimming (see Hern, 1967: 21). These dips in the sea were structured and ritualised and were prescribed only to treat serious medical conditions. Bathing was only to be undertaken ‘after due preparation and advice’ as the historian Gibbon put it (see Shields, 1990), and was also normally carried out naked. The beach was a place of ‘medicine’ rather than ‘pleasure’.

Spa towns could remain relatively socially restrictive. Access was only possible for those who could own or rent accommodation in the particular town. Younger neatly summarises this:

life in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century watering-places resembled in many ways life on a cruise or in a small winter sports hotel, where the company is small and self-contained, rather than the modern seaside resort, where the individual is submerged in the crowd. (1973: 14–15)

However, as sea bathing became relatively morefavoured it was harder for dominant social groups to restrict access. Difficulties were caused in Scarborough because of its dual function as both a spa and as a resort
by the seaside. In 1824 the spa property was fenced off and a toll gate opened to exclude the ‘improper classes’ (Hern, 1967: 16). Pimlott summarises the effects of the widespread development of specialised seaside resorts where this kind of social restriction was not possible:

The capacity of the seaside resorts, on the other hand, was unbounded. While social life at the spas was necessarily focussed on the pump-room and the baths, and there was no satisfactory alternative to living in public, the sea coast was large enough to absorb all comers and social homogeneity mattered less. (1947: 55)

One precondition then for the rapid growth of seaside resorts in the later eighteenth and especially in the nineteenth centuries was space. Britain possessed an extensive coastline which had few other uses apart from as the location of fishing ports, and which could not be privately controlled since ownership of the shoreline and beach between high and low tide were invested in the Crown (see Thompson, 1981: 14).

The development of such resorts was spectacular. In the first half of the nineteenth century coastal resorts showed a faster rate of population increase than manufacturing towns: 2.56 per cent per annum compared with 2.38 per cent (Lickorish and Kershaw, 1975: 12). The population of Brighton increased from 7,000 to 65,000 in half a century, particularly because the Prince Regent had made it fashionable: ‘a portion of the West End maritimized’ (see Shields, 1990). The population of the 48 leading seaside towns increased by nearly 100,000 between 1861 and 1871; their population had more than doubled by the end of the century. By 1911 it was calculated that 55 per cent of people in England and Wales took at least one trip to the seaside and 20 per cent stayed for a longer period each year (Myerscough, 1974: 143).

A complex of conditions produced the rapid growth of this new form of mass leisure activity and hence of these relatively specialised and unique concentrations of services in particular urban centres, concentrations designed to provide novel, and what were at the time utterly amazing, objects of the tourist gaze.

There was a considerable increase in the economic welfare of substantial elements of the industrial population. The real national income per head quadrupled over the nineteenth century (see Deane and Cole, 1962: 282). This enabled sections of the working class to accumulate savings from one holiday to the next, given that at the time few holidays with pay were sought, let alone provided (see Walton, 1981: 252).

In addition to this was rapid urbanisation, as many small towns grew incredibly rapidly. In 1801 20 per cent of the population lived in towns; by 1901 80 per cent did. This produced extremely high levels of poverty and overcrowding. Moreover, the sea coast was almost no public spaces, such as parks or squares (see Lash and Urry, 1987: ch. 3). Unlike older towns and cities a fairly marked degree of residential segregation by class developed. This was crucial for the emergence of the typical resort, which relied on attracting particular social groupings from certain parts of these emerging industrial towns and cities. The Economist in 1857 summarised the typical pattern of urban development:

Society is tending more and more to spread into classes – and not merely classes but localised classes, class colonies . . . . It is the disposition to associate with equals – in some measure with those who have similar practical interests, in still greater measure with those who have similar tastes and culture, most of all with those with whom we judge ourselves on a moral equality, whatever our real standard may be. (20 June 1857: 669; also see Johnson and Pooley, 1982)

One effect therefore of the economic, demographic and spatial transformation of the nineteenth-century town was to produce self-regulating working-class communities, communities which were relatively autonomous of either the old or new institutions of the wider society. Such communities were important in developing forms of working-class leisure which were relatively segregated, specialised and institutionalised (see Clarke and Critcher, 1985).

The growth of a more organised and routinised pattern of work led to attempts to develop a corresponding rationalisation of leisure: ‘To a large extent this regularisation of the days of leisure came about because of a change in the daily hours of work and in the nature of work’ (Cunningham, 1980: 147).

Particularly in the newly emerging industrial workplaces and cities, work came to be organised as a relatively time-bound and space-bound activity, separated off from play, religion and festivity. Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries work was increasingly valued for its own sake and not merely as a remedy for idleness. Some attempts were made to move from an orientation to task towards an orientation to time (see Thompson, 1967). Industrialists attempted to impose a rigorous discipline on their newly constructed workforce (Pollard, 1965). Tough and quite unfamiliar rules of attendance and punctuality were introduced, with various fines and punishments. Campaigns were mounted against drinking, idleness, blood sports, bad language, and holidays (see Myerscough, 1974: 4–6; Cunningham, 1980: ch. 3 on ‘rational recreation’). Many fairs were abandoned and Saints’ Days and closing days at the bank of England were dramatically reduced. From the 1860s onwards the idea of civilising the ‘rough’ working class through organised recreation became much more widespread amongst employers, middle-class reformers and the state (see Rojek, 1990: ch. 2). The typical forms of preferred recreation were educational instruction, physical exercise, crafts, musical training and excursions. Country holidays for deprived city children, as well as the camps organised by the burgeoning youth movement (the Boys’ Brigade, Scouts, Jewish Lads’ Brigades and so on), were one element of the social engineering of the working class favoured by the rational recreation movement.

As work became in part rationalised so the hours of working were gradually reduced. Parliament introduced various pieces of protective legislation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Particularly
important was the attainment of the half-day holiday, especially on Saturday (see Cunningham, 1980: ch. 5). Phelps-Brown noted that: ‘The achievement of a work-week not exceeding 54 hours and providing a half-holiday was unique in its time and was celebrated as ‘la semaine anglaise’’. (1968, 173; also see Cunningham, 1980: 142-5).

The achievement of longer breaks, of week-long holidays, was pioneered in the north of England and especially in the cotton textile areas of Lancashire (see Walton, 1981). Factory owners began to acknowledge ‘wakes weeks’ as regularised periods of holiday which were in effect reserved for much more regular attendance at work during the rest of the year: ‘The total closure of a mill at a customary holiday was preferable to constant disruption throughout the summer, and there were advantages in channeling holiday observances into certain agreed periods’ (Walton, 1981: 255).

Some employers thus began to view regular holidays as contributing to efficiency. However, the gradual extension of holidays from the mid-nineteenth century onwards mainly resulted from defensive pressure from the workforce itself, particularly from the more affluent sections, who saw such practices as ways of developing their own autonomous forms of recreation. The factory inspector Leonard Horner ascribed the survival of holidays to custom rather than to ‘liberality on the part of the masters’ (Walton, 1978: 35). A particularly significant feature of such holiday-making was that it should be enjoyed collectively. As Walton argues, at wakes week ‘as at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide, custom dictated that holidays should be taken en masse and celebrated by the whole community’ (1978: 35). From the 1860s onwards wakes weeks came mainly to involve trips to the seaside away from normal places of residence (see Walton and Poole, 1982).

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a certain shift in values, which was partly connected with ‘the Romantic movement’. Emphasis was placed on the intensity of emotion and sensation, on poetic mystery rather than intellectual clarity, and on individual hedonistic expression (see Feifer, 1985: ch. 5 on ‘The Romantic’ tourist, as well as Newby, 1981). The high priests of romanticism in Britain were the Shelleys, Lord Byron and the Wordsworths. The effects of romanticism were to suggest that one could feel emotional about the natural world and that scenery was something one could gaze at with delight. Individual pleasures were to be derived from an appreciation of impressive physical sights. Romanticism implied that the residents of the newly emerging industrial towns and cities could greatly benefit from spending short periods away from them, viewing nature. Romanticism not only led to the development of ‘scenic tourism’ and an appreciation for magnificent stretches of the coastline. It also encouraged sea bathing. Considering the generally inclement weather and the fact that most bathers were naked since no suitable bathing attire had yet been designed by the early nineteenth century, some considerable development of a belief in the health-giving properties of ‘nature’ must have occurred. Much nineteenth-century tourism was based on the natural phenomenon of the ‘sea’ and its supposedly health-giving properties (see Hern, 1967: ch. 2; Walton, 1983: ch. 2; Feifer, 1985: 216).

A further precondition for the growth of mass tourism was greatly improved transportation. In the late eighteenth century it took three days to travel from Birmingham to Blackpool. Even the trip from Manchester to Blackpool took a whole day. Only Brighton was reasonably well served by coach. By 1830 forty-eight coaches a day went between London and Brighton and the journey time had been cut to 4.5 hours (see Walvin, 1978: 34). But there were two major problems of coach travel. First, many of the roads were in very poor condition. It was only in the 1830s that the turnpike trusts created a reasonable national network and journey times fell dramatically. Second, coach travel was very expensive, costing something like 2½d. to 3d. a mile. Richard Ayton noted of Blackpool in 1813 that: ‘Most of them come hither in carts, but some will walk in a single day from Manchester, distant more than forty miles’ (Walvin, 1978: 35).

At first in the 1830s the railway companies did not realise the economic potential of the mass, low-income passenger market. They concentrated instead on goods traffic and on transporting prosperous passengers. But Gladstone’s Railway Act of 1844, an important piece of legislation, obliged the railway companies to make provision for the ‘labouring classes’ (see Walvin, 1978: 37). Even before this the opening of the railway lines between Preston and Fleetwood in 1840 had produced an extraordinary influx of visitors to the port — many of whom then travelled down the coast to Blackpool. By 1848 it was estimated that over 100,000 trippers left Manchester by train for the coast during Whit week; by 1850 it was over 200,000 (Walvin, 1978: 38). The effect on the social tone of Blackpool in the middle of the century was noted at the time:

Unless immediate steps are taken, Blackpool as a resort for respectable visitors will be ruined . . . Unless the cheap trains are discontinued or some effective regulation made for the management of the thousands who visit the place, Blackpool property will be depreciated past recovery. (quoted in Walvin, 1978: 38)

Indeed the ‘social tone’ of Blackpool appears to have fallen quickly since fifteen years earlier it was said to have been ‘a favourite, salubrious and fashionable resort for “respectable families”’ (see Perkin, 1976: 181).

But the role of the railways should not be overemphasised. Generally the railway companies found that the seasonal nature of the holiday trade meant it was not particularly profitable. It was only at the end of the century that they really set about promoting travel to different resorts by outlining the most attractive features of each resort (see Richards and MacKenzie, 1986: 174-9). And only very rarely, as in the case of Silloth in the north-west of England, did they try to construct a wholly new resort: in this case it conspicuously failed (see Walton, 1979).
It has also been argued that the pattern of railway development accounted for the difference in 'social tone' between the various rapidly emerging seaside resorts in the mid-nineteenth century. On the face of it a reasonable explanation of these differences would be that those resorts which were more accessible to the great cities and industrial towns were likely to be more popular and this would drive out visitors with higher social status. Thus Brighton and Southend were more popular and had a lower social tone than Bournemouth and Torquay, which were not in day-tripping range from London (Perkin, 1976: 182). But such an explanation does not fully work. Perkin notes that Scarborough and Skegness were practically the same distance from the West Riding, yet they developed very different social tones. Although the railway obviously made a difference to such places its arrival does not completely explain the marked variations that emerged. Nor, Perkin argues, do the actions of local elites. There were in fact strong campaigns in most of the places that became working-class resorts (such as Blackpool or Morecambe) to stop the local railway companies from running Sunday day trips because it was, correctly, thought that the trippers would drive out the wealthier visitors that all resorts were keen to attract.

Perkin argues instead that the effect of the local elites on the respective 'social tones' of different resorts resulted from the particular ways in which land and buildings were locally owned and controlled. The factor determining each resort's social tone was the competition for domination of the resort between three fractions of capital: local, large capital, especially owners of the main hotels, concert halls, shops etc.; local, small capital, especially boarding-house keepers, owners of amusement arcades, etc.; and large, externally owned, highly capitalised enterprises providing cheap mass entertainment (1976: 185). Particularly important was the prior ownership and control of land in each locality. Perkin shows this most convincingly in the contrast between Blackpool and Southport, the latter being located nearer to large centres of population and possessing fine wide beaches. Both resorts began with the more or less spontaneous provision of sea-bathing accommodation by local innkeepers, farmers and fishermen. But in Southport land was unenclosed and various squatters who provided sea-bathing facilities soon became tenants of the joint lords of the manor who in turn laid out the spacious and elegant avenue, Lords Street. The landlords also prevented new industrial and much commercial development, with the result that Southport became a resort of large hotels, residential villas, large gardens, and retirement homes for cotton magnates and the like (see Walton, 1981: 251).

Blackpool, by contrast, began as a community of small freeholders. By 1838 there were only twenty-four holdings of land in the town over 25 acres and most of these were well away from the seafront. Even the larger holdings on the front were sold off and divided up into plots for seafront boarding houses. Walton notes that no large resort was so dominated by small lodging houses as Blackpool. This was because:

There was no room for a planned, high-class estate to grow up on the landowner's own terms, for Blackpool's small freeholders were understandably more concerned with taking the maximum profit from a cramped parcel of land than with improving the amenities of the resort as a whole. Land in Blackpool was thus developed at high densities from the first, and few restrictions were placed on developers by landowners, for the fragmented pattern of landownership meant that there was always competition to sell building estates. (Walton, 1978: 63)

As a result the whole central area became an ill-planned mass of smaller properties, boarding houses, amusement arcades, small shops and the like, with no space for the grand public buildings, broad avenues and gardens found in Southport. Although local small capital attempted to appeal to the rapidly expanding middle-class tourist market, Blackpool did not possess the scenic attractions necessary to appeal to this market, and simultaneously it was proving immensely popular, partly because of its cheapness, with the industrial working class. This included both trippers and those staying overnight. The numbers of visitors increased greatly during the 1870s and 1880s by which time, the Morning Post declared, in Blackpool 'more fun could be found, for less money, than anywhere else in the world' (24 August 1887). Efforts by the Corporation to exclude the traders selling cheap goods and services failed, and Perkin suggests that by the 1890s enough local ratepayers had acquired an interest in catering for the working-class holiday-maker for Blackpool's 'social tone' to be firmly set (1976: 187). The main exception to this pattern was to be found in the area known as the North Shore where the 'Blackpool Land, Building and Hotel Company' acquired control of three-quarters of a mile of seafront and carefully planned a socially select and coherent development (see Walton, 1978: 70-1). It is interesting to note that during the nineteenth century Southport in fact prospered more than Blackpool, with a larger population even in 1901 (Perkin, 1976: 186).

So differences in the 'social tone' of resorts (the 'resort hierarchy') seem to be explicable in terms of the intersection between land ownership patterns and scenic attractiveness. Those places which ended up as working-class resorts, or what might be described as 'manufacturing resorts' linked into a particular industrial city, were those which generally had had highly fragmented land ownership in the mid-nineteenth century and a relatively unattractive scenic landscape. Ashworth says of Skegness, or Nottingham-by-the-Sea, that it is situated on 'the most colourless, featureless, negative strip of coastline in England' (the Guardian, 21 June 1986). Such resorts developed as fairly cheap places to visit, with the resulting tourist infrastructure to cater for a mass working-class market, but a market normally derived from a specific industrial area. As the market developed, so wealthier holiday-makers went elsewhere looking for superior accommodation, scenery and social tone. Holiday-making is a form of conspicuous consumption in which status attributions are made on the basis of where one has stayed and that depends in part upon what the other people are like who also stay there. The attractiveness of a place
and hence its location within a resort hierarchy also depends upon how many other people are staying in the same place, and especially how many other people there are like oneself.

There were some interesting differences in the nineteenth century between popular holiday-making in the south of the country and in the north (see Walton, 1981). In the south, day excursions were more popular and they tended to be organised by the railway companies, national interest groups like the National Sunday League, or commercial firms like Thomas Cook (see Farrant, 1987, on the development of south coast resorts, of ‘London-by-the-Sea’). This last organisation was founded in 1841 when Thomas Cook chartered a train from Leicester to Loughborough for a temperance meeting (see Feifer, 1985: 167). His first pleasure excursion was organised in 1844 and the ‘package’ included a guide to recommended shops and places of historic interest upon which to ‘gaze’. Cook wrote eloquently of the desirability of mass tourism and the democratisation of travel:

But it is too late in this day of progress to talk such exclusive nonsense . . . railways and steamboats are the results of the common light of science, and are for the people . . . The best of men, and the noblest of minds, rejoice to see the people follow in their foretrod routes of pleasure. (quoted in Feifer, 1985: 168–9)

Interestingly, amongst those undertaking Cook’s ‘packages’ to the continent women considerably outnumbered men. In restrictive Victorian Britain Thomas Cook provided a remarkable opportunity for (often single) women to travel unchaperoned around Europe. The immense organisational and sociological significance of Thomas Cook is well summarised by Younger: ‘His originality lay in his methods, his almost infinite capacity for taking trouble, his acute sense of the needs of his clients . . . He invented the now universal coupon system, and by 1864, more than a million passengers had passed through his hands’ (1973: 21).

In the north of England the already existing voluntary associations played a more important organisational and financial role in the evolution of the holiday movement (see Myerscough, 1974: 4–5). Pubs, churches and clubs often hired an excursion or holiday train and provided saving facilities for their members. This also had the advantage that the proximity of friends, neighbours and local leaders provided both security and social control. Large numbers of quite poor people were thereby enabled to go on holiday, spending nights away from home. The pattern was soon established of holiday-makers returning again and again to the same accommodation in the same resort. Blackpool, with its high proportion of Lancashire-born landladies, enjoyed a considerable advantage in this respect. Holiday clubs became very common in many places in industrial Lancashire, although they remained a rarity elsewhere. Walton well summarises late nineteenth-century developments in industrial Lancashire:

The factory communities, after early prompting by employers and agencies of self-improvement, thus created their own grassroots system of holiday organisation in the later nineteenth century. Each family was enabled to finance its own holiday without assistance from above. The unique Lancashire holiday system was thus based on working-class solidarity in retaining and extending the customary holidays, and by cooperation and mutual assistance to make the fullest use of them . . . Only in Lancashire . . . was a balance struck between the survival of traditional holidays and the discipline of industrial labour. Only here did whole towns go on holiday, and find resorts able to look after their needs. (1978: 39)

This pattern was particularly found in the cotton textile industry, partly because of the high employment of women. This meant higher family incomes and a greater interest in forms of leisure that were less male-based and more family/household-based (see Walton, 1981: 253). Elsewhere, Walton maintains, ‘too great an attachment to customary holidays and ways of working retarded the development of the working class seaside holiday over much of industrial England’ (1981: 263).

Indeed this was a period in which many other leisure events came to be organised – there was a plethora of traditions invented between 1870 and 1914, often promoted and rendered sacred by royal patronage. Examples
included the Royal Tournament in 1888, the first Varsity match in 1872, the first Henry Wood Promenade Concert in 1895, the Highland Games (first made royal in 1852), and so on. As Rojek argues, in the late Victorian/Edwardian period there was a restructured system of moral regulation, which involved not the denial of pleasures but their cultivation. In this national spectacles played a key role, most spectacularly through the ‘Trooping the Colour’ on Horse Guards Parade (see 1990: ch. 2). Participating at least once in these leisure events came to be an important part of the emergent sense of Britishness in the late nineteenth century, a sense derived in part from people’s leisure activities.

In the inter-war period the main developments affecting the tourist gaze in Britain were the growth of car ownership to over 2 million by 1939; the widespread use of coach transport; the considerable growth of air transport – with over 200 million miles flown in 1938; the development of new organisations such as the Cyclists’ Touring Club, the Cooperative Holidays Association, Sir Henry Lunn’s, the Touring Club of France, the International Union of Official Organizations for Tourist Propaganda, the Youth Hostels Association, the Camping Club of Great Britain and so on; the initial development of the holiday camp, beginning with Joseph Cunningham’s Isle of Man camp in 1908 and culminating in this period in Billy Butlin’s Skegness camp opened in 1936; and the development of pleasure cruises (see Brunner, 1945; Lickorish and Kershaw, 1975, Ward and Hardy, 1986). However, despite all these developments, Brunner maintained, the seaside resort remained the mecca for the vast majority of British holiday-makers throughout the period. Indeed she claimed that such resorts are ‘essentially native to this country, more numerous and more highly specialised in their function as resorts than those of any other land’ (1945: 8). Seaside holidays were still the predominant form of holiday in Britain up to the Second World War and had expanded faster than other type of holiday in the inter-war period (see Walvin, 1978: 161–168).

To cope with the millions of visitors the resorts had initiated an enormous programme of investment. Private investment in hotels and houses was worth between £200 and £300 million while the municipalities invested very heavily themselves, although these were often Conservative controlled (see Pickvance, 1990, on the importance of such ‘municipal conservatism’ in the Thanet resorts). In Blackpool, for example, £1.5 million was spent on the promenade and the gardens, £400,000 on swimming pools, £1.25 million on a park, and £1.25 million on the Winter Gardens (Walvin, 1978: 117). Four resorts, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Brighton and Southend, had become major urban centres by 1931, with populations of over 100,000. Such resorts had unusual demographic characteristics, with much higher proportions than the national average of personal service workers of men and especially of women; and an increasing proportion of retired people.

One final change in the pre-war pattern should be noted. There was a strong development of the holidays-with-pay movement which culminated in the Holidays Act of 1938 (see discussion in Brunner, 1945: 9; and Walvin, 1978: ch. 6). As early as 1920 fifty-eight agreements which guaranteed paid holidays had been signed by the unions; by the mid-1920s about 16–17 per cent of the wage-earning labour force received holidays with pay. Little further progress was made during the depression years especially as it became obvious that legislation would be necessary. Various Private Member’s Bills were proposed but they all met stiff opposition. Finally a Select Committee was set up in 1937 and this culminated in the 1938 legislation, much of which only came into effect after the war had ended. Sir Walter Citrine, giving evidence to the Select Committee for the TUC, declared that going on holiday ‘is an increasing factor in working-class life. I think most people now are appreciating the necessity for a complete change of surroundings’ (quoted in Brunner, 1945: 9). It was estimated that the number of UK holiday-makers in the postwar period would double from 15 million to about 30 million. So by this time there had grown up an industry which had become particularly ‘geared to dealing with people en masse and had become highly efficient and organized at attracting and coping with armies of working people from the cities’ (Walvin, 1978: 107).

Thus by the Second World War there was widespread acceptance of the view that going on holiday was good for one, that it was the basis of personal replenishment. Holidays had become almost a marker of citizenship, a right to pleasure. And around that right had developed in Britain an extensive infrastructure providing specialist services, particularly in the resorts. Everyone had become entitled to the pleasures of the ‘tourist gaze’ by the seaside.

The next section details how that gaze came to be organised in one particular ‘working-class resort’, Morecambe in the top north-west corner of England south of the Lake District. It will be shown just how differentiated is the organisation of that gaze as different resorts came to specialise in the provision of services to distinct social groupings.

‘Bradford-by-the-Sea’, beaches and bungalows

As we have seen, it was in the north of England, and especially in the Lancashire textile towns, that the development of working-class holidays was pioneered in the 1850s and 1860s:

It was here that the seaside holiday, as opposed to the day excursion, became a mass experience during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Elsewhere, even in London, the process was slower and patchier. But working-class demand became the most important generator of resort growth in northern England in late Victorian times. (Walton, 1983: 30–1)

Up to the mid-nineteenth century almost all of the largest resorts were located in the south of England, close to the middle-class patrons and sources of finance (see King, 1984: 70–4). Only these resorts could attract
visitors from a national market; resorts away from the south coast had to rely on a local or regional market. But by the beginning of the twentieth century this had dramatically changed. A number of major resorts had developed in the north of England. By 1911 Blackpool had become the fifth-largest resort in the country while Lytham, Morecambe, Southport and St Anne's all showed major population increases. This was therefore a period which 'saw the swift and emphatic rise of the specialized working-class resort' (Walton, 1983: 67). Compared with the previous period the fastest growing resorts were much more widely dispersed throughout the country.

The pattern of growth in Morecambe has been described as follows: 'Morecambe . . . tried to become a select resort and commuter terminus for West Riding business men, but became instead the Yorkshireman's Blackpool' (Perkin, 1976: 104; and see Quick, 1962).

A condition essential to the growth of the working-class holiday resort was the strong ties of community found in the industrial centres in the north of England (see Walton, 1978: 32). But Morecambe could not hope to compete with Blackpool for the bulk of the holiday trade from Lancashire because Blackpool had established a sizeable tourist infrastructure somewhat earlier. It had better rail links (using the same company throughout the journey) and it was considerably nearer the rapidly expanding towns and cities in south and east Lancashire and could therefore develop a huge day-tripper clientele. Once a resort had established a pull over its 'industrial hinterland' it was unlikely that its position would be challenged, since visits to that resort became part of the 'tradition' of holiday-making in those industrial centres. Resorts that developed later, such as Bournemouth or Skegness, generally were able to do so because they had no obvious or similar rivals close by (see Walvin, 1978: 161). In the case of Morecambe it had become clear in the second half of the century that it would be unable to compete with Blackpool for the bulk of the Lancashire holiday market. Thus the Wigan coalowner and alderman Ralph Darlington declared to a Commons Committee in 1884 that: 'Morecambe does not stand in estimation with us as a watering place. I should say it is not one at all' (quoted in Grass, 1972: 6). Likewise Thomas Baxter, chairman of the Morecambe Board of Health in 1889, observed that: 'there was no doubt that Blackpool had always had the pull all over Lancashire' (Observer, 11 October 1889).

The inability to compete for the Lancashire holiday market combined with the development of the Yorkshire woollen towns meant that much of the Morecambe trade came from the West Riding. This was because the connections with Yorkshire extended not only to the holiday trade but also to patterns of migration. Considerable numbers of people from Yorkshire, both workers and employers, came to live in Morecambe, some of whom commuted to Bradford or Halifax daily (Perkin, 1976: 190). The first mayor of the new Corporation, Alderman E. Barnsbee, was a Bradford man who retired to Morecambe. In addition Morecambe was not the only holiday destination for those living in the West Riding. It had to face considerable competition from the resorts on the east coast, in both Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Yet it did become increasingly popular. A Daily Telegraph correspondent wrote in 1891:

as Margate is to the average Cockney, so is Morecambe to the stalwart and health-loving Yorkshireman. For it is allowed on all sides that Morecambe is true Yorkshire to the backbone . . . Yorkshiremen, Yorkshire lads, and Yorkshire lasses have selected to colonise and to popularise this breezy, rainy, wind-swept, and health-giving watering-place. (quoted in Grass, 1972: 10)

While in the inter-war period a Lord Mayor of Bradford proclaimed that: 'most of the citizens of Bradford, to say nothing of the children, have enjoyed spending some of their leisure time in this wonderful health resort' (Visitor, July 1935, Diamond Jubilee Souvenir).

Morecambe, however, could not attract sufficient numbers of the middle-class visitors that were wanted. Partly this was because the town leaders could not prevent the growth of the day-tripper trade, described by the Lancaster Guardian as a 'disorderly and riotous mob' (22 August 1868). And partly this was because the existence of very many relatively small houses (often 'back houses') made it impossible to stop the establishment of new boarding houses and small hotels which provided accommodation for less well-off visitors, especially those from West
Yorkshire. There was a considerable debate between the champions of 'respectability', who were organised through the Board of Health until 1894 and the Urban District Council after then, and the providers of mass holiday consumption such as the large entertainment companies. In an editorial in 1901 the Visitor supported the latter group on the grounds that in a town with 'no public band, no public parks, no pier supported from the rates', they had 'done their work catering for the visitors admirably this season' (2 October 1901). As early as the late 1890s the advocates of commercial development had won the day and attempts by the Urban District Council to maintain 'respectability' had failed. The Daily Telegraph summed up Morecambe in 1891: 'It may be that, to the fastidious, rough honest-hearted Morecambe is a little primitive, and slightly tinged with vulgarity. But it is never dull' (quoted in Perkin, 1976: 191).

In the later parts of the century there were a number of related developments in Morecambe: a rapid rate of population increase (over 10 per cent per annum); a considerable growth of capital expenditure, especially on major facilities including a revolving tower; and an extensive growth of lodging-house and hotel accommodation (see Denison-Edson, 1967).

But its prosperity was dependent upon the level of prosperity, particularly in the west Yorkshire area. When Bradford, and especially the woollen industry, was doing well then Morecambe seemed to prosper. As the Observer noted in 1883, when 'the Bradford trade has been at a low ebb it has not been at all plain sailing for "Bradford-by-the-Sea"' (25 May). Also Morecambe remained the prisoner of the railway companies and the quality and quantity of the train services they provided.

In the inter-war period Morecambe was successful, partly because there was an extensive growth of paid holidays for those in work, and partly because most holidays were still taken at the seaside and family-households were transported there by rail and to a lesser extent by coach. Spokesmen from Morecambe advocated that all workers should receive a week's holiday with pay (Visitor, 22 January 1930). By 1925 there were two holiday camps in Heysham, which was part of the same borough. Morecambe experienced considerable annual growth in population, 3.8 per cent during the 1930s, and its total rateable value rose by 54 per cent between 1930 and 1946 (Denison-Edson, 1967: 28). The 1930s and 1940s were particularly prosperous, with the town council investing heavily in new objects for the tourist gaze, a clear example of how a Conservative council in a resort may well engage in 'municipal conservatism'.

I shall now very briefly describe two other resorts by way of comparison: Brighton, on the south coast, and Birchington, in Kent. Each is responsible for having been first to develop new objects of the tourist gase at the seaside, Brighton with the first beach devoted to 'pleasure', and Birchington with the first bungalows.

We have already noted the early and extensive development of Brighton in the eighteenth century. The beach was viewed as a site for medical treatment and was regulated by the 'dippers', the women responsible for immersion (on the following, see Shields, 1990: Part 2, ch. 2). In the mid-nineteenth century this medicalised beach was replaced by a pleasure beach, which Shields characterises as a liminal zone, a built-in escape from the patterns and rhythms of everyday life. Such a zone had a further characteristic, of carnival, as the beach became noisy and crowded, full of unpredictable social mixing, and involving the inversion of social hierarchies and moral codes. In the classic medieval carnival, the grotesque body was counterposed to the disciplined body of propriety and authority; in the nineteenth century holiday carnival the grotesque body was shamefully uncovered and open to the gaze of others. Literally grotesque bodies became increasingly removed from actual view and were gazed upon through commercialised representations, especially the vulgar picture postcard. Shields summarises the carnival of the beach rendered appropriate for pleasure:

It is this foolish, impudent, undisciplined body which is the most poignant symbol of the carnivalesque - the unclosed body of convexities and orifices, intruding onto and into others' body-space, [which] threatens to escape, transgress, and transcend the circumscriptions of the body. (1990)

The fact that Brighton was the first resort in which the beach became constructed as a site for pleasure, for social mixing, for status reversals, for carnival, is one reason why in the first few decades of the twentieth century Brighton came to have a reputation for sexual excess and particularly for the 'dirty weekend'. This has become part of the place image of Brighton, although the beach no longer functions as a site of the carnivalesque.

Whereas Brighton's class associations were with royalty and the aristocracy, the resorts in Kent in the mid-nineteenth century were associated with the relatively new middle class (see King, 1984: 72-8). But as early as 1870 both Margate and Ramsgate were becoming less attractive to this holiday market, especially to the professional middle class, which was increasingly staying in Cliftonville and Westgate. In the latter all the roads were private and only detached houses were allowed. The first bungalows in Britain thus came to be built in 1869-70 in Westgate and more extensively in Birchington in 1870-3, just next door (King, 1984: 74). Until this development there was no specialist house building by the seaside. Indeed in the earlier fishing villages houses were often built with their 'backs' to the sea, as at Ravenglass in the Lake District. The sea was there for fishing not for gazuing on. Nineteenth-century resorts were public places with some distinctive public buildings, such as assembly rooms, promenades, public gardens, dance halls and so on. Residential provision was similar to that found in inland towns and was not distinctive.

By contrast, the development of the bungalow as a specialised form of housing by the seaside resulted from a number of developments: the
heightened attraction of visiting the seaside not for strictly medical reasons but for the bracing air and fine views; the increasing demand from sections of the middle class for accommodation well away from other people, for being able to gaze at the sea in relative solitude; and the rising popularity of swimming as opposed to dipping and hence the perceived need for semi-private access for the whole family and especially for children. Birchington ideally met these conditions; there were no public facilities, there was an attractive coastline for building, the first bungalows were 'rural looking' and offered attractive contrasts with the urban, and tunnels could be built linking each bungalow with the beach. In the twentieth century there has been an extensive 'bungaloid growth' at the seaside so that in some sense in the twentieth century the bungalow is the seaside. And as it has become the housing of the lower middle class so its earlier fashionability and bohemianism has disappeared, and indeed it has become an object of considerable status hostility (see King, 1984: ch. 5).

It is worth considering for a moment holiday developments in a country much influenced by British culture but where the outcome has been quite different – New Zealand. There are basically no seaside resorts, the closest being Day's Bay, near Wellington, but even here there are no facilities except for one municipally owned teashop. In addition the bungalow could hardly become associated with the seaside in New Zealand since it is the form of house building found everywhere. There seem to be several main reasons for the lack of resort development in New Zealand: since all the major towns are on the coast it was unlikely that 'going to the seaside' would be seen as in any way special; population growth only occurred after the development of the motor car, so leisure became more privatised and less geographically dependent upon the railway, which was important in Britain, as we have seen; and finally the very strong emphasis on family-organised leisure has been associated with a tendency to self-provisioning rather than purchasing the required services.

The postwar period saw both the rapid growth of the British seaside resort in the 1950s and rapid decline in many places in the 1970s and 1980s. I shall deal with these processes fairly briefly here since much of the rest of the book is taken up with a rather broader analysis of how the tourist gaze is being transformed in western societies with the result that the British seaside resort has become a much less favoured object of that gaze.

The end of the pier?

In this section I shall chart what has happened to seaside resorts in the postwar period, and try to make sense of the following paradox. In Britain tourism has become a massively important industry, yet the places which were the most developed in terms of their infrastructure to take advantage of this, namely seaside resorts, have not shared in this growth. In the past ten years the proportion of total tourist expenditure spent in the resorts has fallen from about one-half to one-third and the number of bed nights has declined by 25 per cent (Wickers and Charlton, 1988: F6). For example, between 1973 and 1987 in Morecambe the number of small hotels and guesthouses fell from 640 to 267 and the number of bedspaces from 12,340 to 7,115 (Bagguley et al., 1989: ch. 3). Many of the hotels have been converted into accommodation for those released from psychiatric hospitals, for those on income support, and for the elderly. Resorts have thus become merely one of a large number of potential objects of the tourist gaze. The spending of a week or fortnight's holiday by the seaside in Britain is now viewed as a less attractive and significant touristic experience than in the decades around the Second World War.

In the immediate postwar period there was no hint of the troubles to come. As Parry says, if the 1920s and 1930s were the heyday of the resorts then the 1950s and early 1960s were a kind of Indian summer: 'rationing ended, “austerity” ceased and business boomed; the holiday abroad was still the preserve of the few and package tours were non-existent' (Parry, 1983: 189). Moreover, the majority of northerners stayed loyal to their own resorts. This traditional or organised pattern continued, with whole towns moving off to the seaside in a given week. A central role in sustaining such patterns was played by the railway. British Railways organised many specials or excursion trains, taking visitors from particular destinations to the resorts which had been traditionally visited. For example, at Easter 1960 at least forty-eight specials arrived at Morecambe, whose stationmaster declared it the busiest Easter in the past eighteen years. Major new investments were planned although most of the visitors still stayed either in traditional hotel or bed and breakfast accommodation (which was unlicensed), or in a holiday camp. The latter expanded greatly in the 1950s particularly with the arrival of Pontins (see Ward and Hardy, 1986: ch. 4).

In this period the holiday experience was remarkably regulated. Even where people stayed in apartments this generally involved the provision of set meals for a week. The holiday was based on the time zone of the week (see Colson, 1926). It was almost impossible to book mid-week. Visitors knew when they were to eat, what they would eat, and exactly how long they were to stay. If people were staying in a holiday camp then much else was organised and indeed 'from one camp to the next the mix was identical – the same pattern of entertainment, the same diet, the same type of accommodation, the same weekly routine' (Ward and Hardy, 1986: 161). Although television was appearing in such places the emphasis was still upon the provision of live entertainment. In the 1950s big-name artists were regularly attracted to Morecambe, while Blackpool boasted fourteen live shows (Parry, 1983: 191).

However, much of this began to change dramatically in the 1960s, and
the rest of the book charts a series of transformations in the organisation of the tourist gazes away from many of these resorts. I shall now describe changes in what is ordinary and hence what is taken to be extraordinary in what is gazed upon at the seaside.

Seaside resorts in Britain normally possessed at least one pier (Blackpool had three) and often one tower. Both such constructions involved an attempt to conquer nature, to construct a ‘man-made’ object which at all times and for ever would be there dominating either the sea or the sky. Their domination is what gives them a reason for being there, that is their function. Barthes says of the similar Eiffel Tower that it enables the visitor to participate in a dream (1979). The Tower is no normal spectacle because it gives observers a wholly original view of Paris. Indeed it transforms Paris into nature, ‘it constitutes the swarming of men into a landscape . . . the city joins up with the great natural themes that are offered to the curiosity of men [sic]: the ocean, the storm, the mountains, the snow, the rivers’ (1979: 8). The most famous such building in Britain is the tower at Blackpool, opened in 1894 and an imitation of the Eiffel Tower. It is a unique building in Britain, and effectively stands for the town. Such towers, and to a lesser extent, piers, enable people to see things in their structure, to link human organisation with extraordinary natural phenomena, and to celebrate the participation within, and the victory of, human agency over nature. They are part of that irreducibly extraordinary character of the ideal tourist site. Thompson says of Blackpool Tower:

It also adds a third dimension to the east/west and north/south axes of movement. Rather like the beach/sea interface, it offers some specific pleasures by transcending the normal and day-to-day. It enables the holidaymaker to enjoy Blackpool from a different perspective. (1983: 126)

In the past two or three decades, the extraordinary character of piers and towers has dramatically declined. Piers have been falling into the sea and do not demonstrate the domination of nature, rather the reverse. In Morecambe for example one pier has been washed away and the other is half burnt down and may be demolished. For years both Brighton piers were derelict. Piers and towers now stand for nostalgia, for the ‘theme’ of the old seaside holiday which is well expressed in the 1988 Isle of Man advertising slogan ‘You’ll look forward to going back’. At the same time, much more spectacular and modern examples of the mastery of the sea can now be found, in bridges, tunnels, hovercraft, ships, and marinas (with one even planned for Morecambe). Likewise towers connecting the land and the sky are now dwarfed by skyscrapers, hotels, space capsules, and of course by aircraft, all of which are much more obviously ‘modern’ and extraordinary.

A second major attraction at the seaside resort was the funfair or pleasure park. In Britain Blackpool Pleasure Beach has been since its beginnings in 1906 the leading site for such a regime of pleasure (see Parry, 1983: chs 17, 18; Bennett, 1983). From the 1920s onwards it has always tried to look resolutely modern. ‘Its architecture of pleasure has taken on a streamlined, functional appearance’ (Bennett, 1983: 145). The employment of the architect Joseph Emberton created a wholly new ‘Architecture of Pleasure’ in which everything was light, sun, fresh air and fun (Parry, 1983: 152–4). And it has been periodically updated. The designer of the Festival of Britain, Jack Radcliffe, gave it a new look during the boom period in the 1950s. New rides kept being added, mostly based either on innovations pioneered in world fairs (for example, a ferris wheel based on one exhibited at the Chicago World Fair of 1893), or on futuristic rides found in American amusement parks (for example, the Starship Enterprise introduced in 1980). Central to the strategy of the management of the Pleasure Beach has been progress, being first (at least in the UK), biggest and best. It even has its own tower using latest technology and which makes the Blackpool Tower seem rather quaint (Bennett, 1983: 147). The Park is still owned by a local company; it has not gone the way of much of Blackpool’s entertainment facilities, which became part of London-based leisure companies, such as THF and EMI, in the 1960s and 1970s (Bennett, 1983: 146). It attracts 6.5 million visitors a year. Most other places at the seaside cannot compete with it. For example, people staying at Morecambe often travel to Blackpool to visit the Pleasure Park.

The main competition to Blackpool now comes from the new-style amusement and theme parks, the most successful in the north of England being that at Alton Towers. These new parks are not normally located at the seaside, although they generally have a very attractive ‘rural’ location close to the motorway (rather than the rail) network. Apart from Blackpool Pleasure Beach the pleasure parks located at the existing seaside resorts will struggle to compete. Such places should exhibit ‘modernity’, high technology, youth, controlled danger, anticipation and pleasure. But if they are located in ‘old fashioned’ resorts (almost anywhere but Blackpool or Brighton) there are many counter-messages, of previous technologies, age, danger through neglect, and regret at not being elsewhere. In Morecambe the major pleasure park has been turned into a theme park, bizarrely based on the theme of the wild West.

Blackpool, by contrast, has more generally tried to construct itself as irreducibly modern, as a cosmopolitan, international leisure centre, the ‘Las Vegas of the North’, having less now to do with its previous Lancashire/northern/working-class associations. As Bennett notes: ‘At Blackpool, everything is new no matter how old it is’ (1986: 146). It is the biggest seaside resort in Europe with more visitors than the whole of Greece, and more beds than Portugal (Wickers and Charlton, 1988: F6; Waterhouse 1989a: 10). There are currently 2,700 hotels, tourism accounts for 12,000 jobs, 16 per cent of all short-break holidays in Britain are made to Blackpool, and an incredible 25 per cent of day visitors have made at least fifty previous day trips to the resort (Lancashire County
Council, 1987: 24). Keith Waterhouse summarises its over-the-top charms: ‘it would have been, in all its gaudy tattness, the greatest show on earth. It still is, outvulgurised ... only by Las Vegas’ (1989a: 10). By contrast, all other seaside resorts appear old-fashioned and cannot offer anything like the same range of facilities. The few that have prospered, such as Bridlington, Torquay or Southport with its proposed £300 million marina, have the advantage of few modernist buildings to spoil the image of what a typical resort (apart from Blackpool) ought to look like (see Wickers, 1987: 8).

Another feature of most resorts were holiday camps (see Ward and Hardy, 1986). They had begun before the First World War when they literally consisted of a camp of tents. Even at that time their development was said to be a reaction against the relatively poor quality of accommodation and services in the typical seaside boarding house. The most significant development came with the ‘luxury’ camps started by Billy Butlin, beginning with that in Skegness which opened in 1936. Compared with what was available at the typical hotel or guesthouse, Butlin provided really luxurious facilities, with extensive on-site amusement, good-quality food, high-class entertainments and modern sanitation - what Ray Gosling has termed a ‘veritable Beveridge of leisure’ (quoted in Ward and Hardy, 1986). Interestingly, when the first camp was opened the visitors appeared bored and Butlin concluded that holiday-makers required some degree of organisation. The famous ‘Redcoats’ were invented - they ‘would lead, advise, explain, comfort, help out, and generally make themselves the closest thing to holiday angels on earth’ (quoted in Ward and Hardy, 1986: 63).

The heyday of such camps was in the immediate postwar period up to 1959 when the BBC television series Hi-de-Hi! is set. This prosperity resulted from a number of factors including the coming into effect of the 1938 Holidays with Pay Act, the high levels of employment, and the reduced age of marriage and high rate of family formation. In 1948 one in twenty of all holiday-makers stayed at Butlin’s. The holiday camp was a symbol of the postwar society, reflecting the modernist architectural style of the period. Some camps looked little better than scaled-down council estates, such as Pontin’s at Middleton Sands near Morecambe. Others, that at Prestatyn in Wales for example, captured something of the glamour and fantasy of the ocean liner in its clean, functional styling (see Ward and Hardy, 1986: ch. 5).

In the 1950s a considerable effort was made to construct the camps as places for ‘family holidays’ and to limit the number of single visitors. There was also an attempt to prevent the majority of visitors to the camps being mainly from the ‘working class’. This was unsuccessful as the camps, like their host resorts, became unable to attract large numbers of middle-class visitors, although it should be noted how the camps tried to construct their clientele as classless through treating them all as ‘campers’. There was also a shift in the camps towards ‘self-catering’ especially by Pontin’s. They tried to construct this as involving increasing ‘freedom’ and indeed the term ‘camp’ has itself been dropped since it implies regimentation. They are now known as ‘centres’, ‘villages’ or ‘holiday-worlds’. Nevertheless their attraction has undoubtedly diminished, with the number of such camps in England falling from 114 in 1939 to 83 in 1986. In 1983 two of the largest, the Butlin’s camps at Filey and Clacton, were closed. Ward and Hardy concluded from their study that by the 1970s and 1980s:

holiday camps are something of a period piece ... new concepts of holidaymaking have been developed ... Package holidays to exotic places, coupled with more individualistic off-season breaks, increase the difficulties of the camps ... Much about the holiday camp is now commonplace. (1986: 152)

They are no longer the stuff of which dreams are made. The response of their owners has been both to concentrate on larger centres (as at Butlin’s), and to segment the market with different centres tailored to different tastes, including adult-only centres, special-interest holidays, and short breaks (as at Warner’s) (see Glancey, 1988).

Such camps will certainly be weakly placed to compete with the newest ‘concept’ in holiday provision in Europe, the Center Parc development in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire. This is a £14 million holiday village in which an artificial ‘seaside’ has been constructed within a giant double-skinned plastic dome which sustains a constant temperature of 84°F. In this complex, swimming is entertainment, fun and pleasure with tropical heat, warm water lagoons, palm trees and waterside cafes. Other features include sailing, canoeing and a immense variety of vegetation. Such centres do not have to be located near the sea since the technology in effect permits the seaside to be constructed anywhere. The second Center Parc is being built in East Anglia.

Resorts were believed to be extraordinary because concentrated there were the sea, the sand, sometimes the sun, as well as the absence of the manufacturing industry that was present in almost all other substantial towns and cities. But in recent years a number of transformations have changed all this. As I pointed out, the seaside can now be constructed and gazed upon anywhere. But the relative attraction of the sea itself has also declined. In the nineteenth century the development of the resorts was based on the presumed health-giving properties of sea bathing. Sunbathing, by contrast, was relatively uncommon partly because of the high value placed upon pale skin which signified delicacy, idleness and seclusion. However, this began to change within the upper classes from the 1920s onwards, particularly with the development of newly fashionable resorts such as Cannes and Biarritz. Amongst such groups a tan was associated with the presumed spontaneity and natural sensuality of black people. Sunbathing was presumed to bring people closer to nature (see Turner and Ash, 1975: 79-83).

In the postwar period it has been the sun, not the sea, that is presumed
to produce health and sexual attractiveness. The ideal body has come to be viewed as one that is tanned. This viewpoint has been diffused downwards through the social classes with the result that many package holidays present this as almost the reason for going on holiday. The north European resorts have thus come to be seen as less attractive, less fashionable, because they cannot guarantee to produce a tanned body (see Fiske, 1989: ch. 3, on the semiotics of the Australian beach for contrast). Although this may change with the current panic about malignant melanoma and it may become fashionable again to be pale, so far in Europe this concentration on the sun has enormously benefited the development of resorts around the Mediterranean. This began in France and Spain, then spread to Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, and then to north Africa and most recently to Turkey.

Beaches in Britain cannot guarantee the sun. Nor can they guarantee clean water, if one wishes to swim in the sea. Of the 392 beaches in Britain listed by the government, 40 per cent do not meet EEC standards, including almost all of those in the north-west of England (see Scott, 1988). By comparison France had 1,498 and Italy 3,308 beaches. It should be noted that beaches are complex spaces, anomalously located between land and sea, nature and culture. Different stretches of beach are to be read quite differently - with strikingly different possible forms of activity possible.

Seaside resorts have also become less distinctive because of the widespread de-industrialisation of many towns and cities so that there is less need to escape from them to the contrasting seaside. As the everyday has changed, as towns and cities have become de-industrialised and many have themselves become objects for the tourist gaze, with wave machines and other features of the beach, so seaside resorts are no longer extraordinary.

People used to go to the seaside in order to find concentrations of those services specifically organised for the provision of pleasure. Now, however, many resorts boast poorer services than comparably sized towns. A recent report on Morecambe stated that:

In 1973 the resort boasted two piers, five cinemas, theatres, a dance hall, a wealth of live entertainment and many other attractions. Today the piers and cinemas have ceased operating, the theatres have closed and the range of live entertainment is extremely limited. (quoted in Lancashire Evening Post, 23 December 1987)

A number of processes have reduced the distinctiveness of the resorts in this way. The growth of television has at a stroke evened out the provision of entertainment so that now one does not need to go to resorts in order to see the big names. As Parry expresses it: ‘television paraded the top talent every night of the week’ (1983: 192). Further, most resorts are in population terms fairly small and cannot support a high concentration of entertainment services. Often therefore they rely on some level of public provision. However, since they are generally run by Conservative councils there is considerable reluctance to pay for such activities 'on the rates'. And even if they do develop such facilities they are often still less impressive than those to be found in the potential visitor's home town. Many councils away from the coast have built sports and leisure centres, while national entertainment companies have expanded almost anywhere except at the seaside. More generally, as we shall see later, many towns and cities have developed as centres of consumption, both for their own residents and for potential tourists. Harvey notes that increasingly every town and city has: 'to appear as an innovative, exciting, creative and safe place to live, play, and consume. Spectacle and display became the symbols of [a] dynamic community' (1987: 13).

I shall examine such changes in the following chapters. Just why have 'spectacle and display' become characteristics of almost everywhere? What processes have produced the generalising of the tourist gaze? And what does this mean for the organisation of those industries which have developed to provide services for the tourist gaze?

One important point to consider is the internationalisation of contemporary tourism. Every potential object of the tourist gaze now has to compete internationally, and this has led to substantial changes in just what is extraordinary and what is internationally ordinary. Parry well expresses how the cheap 'package tour' had devastating effects upon the northern seaside resort:

The holidaymaker of the 1930s had no choice and was prepared to take a chance. If he [sic] lived in a mill town at least all his neighbours would have suffered from the same 'poor week'. Not so his counterpart in the 1970s. He wanted sun – and if half the street was to come back from Marbella or Torremolinos with burned backs, peeling noses and queasy stomachs he wasn't going to be left out. (1983: 192-3)