

**How did the Reticent Object become so Obliging?
Artists' Interventions as Interpretive Strategies
in Galleries and Museums**

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Declaration

This doctoral study was conducted under the supervision of Dr Pam Meecham and Dr Nicholas Addison.

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or award in any other university or educational establishment.

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Dedicated to the memory of my mother: Olive Courtney

This research is motivated by two central questions

1. Why have Artists' Interventions become so widely deployed by galleries and museums as interpretive strategies intended to facilitate (and challenge) visitors' meaning making processes?
2. In what ways does the employment of a parodic or disruptive tactic, common to many Artist's Interventions, contribute to the production of new meanings in galleries and museums?

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Sophie Calle From *The Appointment* (1999), an intervention at
The Freud Museum, London

Abstract

This is a study about knowledge/power in galleries and museums, contested and re-configured by a genre of artworks, referred to as Artists' Interventions. Such artworks, their intended functions, and pedagogic uses are the locus of the study.

I define galleries and museums as inherently pedagogic institutions, which have historically constructed and disseminated dominant systems of value. In order to examine in what ways these values have been reconfigured through Artists' Interventions, I undertake a historiography of the role of the gallery and museum.

In defining interventions, I differentiate between interventionist artworks that disrupt and contest the 'normative' or dominant discourse of galleries and museums, and artworks that support and confirm established interpretations of art and artefacts, and focus attention on the former.

I propose art-historical predecessors for Artists' Interventions and situate contemporary initiatives in relation to disruptive, dialogic and parodic methodologies. These are more closely examined in a central case study, a practice-based aspect of the thesis in which I make my own intervention, *An Elite Experience for Everyone*, performed and exhibited at the William Morris Gallery, London (2005).

Where Artists' Interventions have emerged against a backdrop of dominant regulatory and divisionary discourse their disruptive and parodic strategies re-establish the museum as a discursive forum. However, the trope of disruption and dialogue has recently been accommodated within curatorial and pedagogic initiatives. Only the trickster is allowed to evade this assimilation.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Introduction

'The reticent object', in the title of this doctoral thesis, makes direct reference to Peter Vergo's (1989) chapter of the same name, in which he conceptualises artworks in galleries and museums as objects which need to be explained or interpreted in order that visitors might adequately 'learn' from and about them. The need to provide interpretive materials **for** exhibits is now commonly upheld in public galleries and museums. However, the starting point for my study is the identification of a parallel, and somewhat contradictory phenomenon; the increasing occurrence of contemporary artworks used by galleries and museums **as** a form of interpretation. It is now quite common to encounter contemporary art in the midst of an historic collection, in a museum of science or of natural history where it is intended to set in motion a dialogue with permanent exhibits, proposing alternative possibilities for meaning to be made. Lisa Corrin (2001) has remarked that the presence of such contemporary anomalies, 'often works to disturb the tidiness of a museum's taxonomy to reveal the disjunctive and disconnected realities that the museum has created' (p.7).

Logically, a development that places contemporary art as part of a museum or gallery's interpretation strategy would intimate that shifts have taken place since Vergo's text was written in 1989. Perhaps, it could be construed that the object 'art' referred to by Vergo has changed quite considerably in form and content, perhaps also that approaches to interpretation taken by galleries and museums have undergone a substantive rethink.

In the United Kingdom and internationally even the casual visitor would have noticed that in the past two decades cultural institutions have increasingly sought out alternative and supplementary methods to their traditional interpretive models. New technologies, interactive exhibits, knowledgeable invigilators and audio guides exert a presence in many galleries, (which for several centuries favoured silent communion the aesthete's models over overt text based explanations¹), and museums where

¹ Although the recent legacy of 'interpretation' in galleries and museums has been saturated by the word, (e.g. labels, panels, leaflets, catalogue essays and to a lesser extent by the spoken word in the form of guided tours and audio guides), the dominant mode of reception for several centuries has been an aesthetic and silent communion between visitor and exhibit, unhampered by the worldly intrusion of the word and notions of learning. This is particularly the case in art galleries where the legacy of Kantian aesthetic thought has been particularly tenacious. Kant's 'Critique of Judgement' (1781) has been central to the development of a particular mode of visitor engagement with art and selected artefacts.

scientific methods have hitherto promoted logo-centric interpretations of collections. This move has not been without its detractors and debates about the role of galleries and museums continue. Some, for example Alexander Chancellor (2003), James Cuno (2006), Tiffany Jenkins and other members of the Institute of Ideas (<http://www.instituteofideas.com/about/index.html>) still perceive there to be some fundamental dangers to the integrity museums posed by the more inclusive, public-facing approaches that have been championed by Richard Sandell (2002, 2003, 2007) and Lois Silverman (1995); a debate which I elaborate on, see footnote p. 44.

Word domination

During the latter part of the twentieth century 'interpretation' galleries and museums came to be 'received' by visitors largely in the form of written texts, e.g. labels, panels, leaflets, catalogue essays and to a lesser extent by the spoken word in the form of guided tours and audio guides. The task of interpreting has fallen to curators and education staff who, as experts in their fields of study (anthropology, art history, history, education and science etc.), have attempted to convey complex knowledge about collections and individual exhibits to a wide ranging visiting public.

The employment of a neutral manner, evoking objectivity, has dominated the style of writing on labels and information panels since the nineteenth century. Individual authorship has rarely been acknowledged, furthering a detached, yet authoritative, persuasiveness whereby such interpretive materials appear to 'speak' on behalf of the gallery or museum². This situation continues, in so much as there are plenty of un-authored yet debated interpretations of art and artefacts to be found in museums, as Andrea Witcomb (2003) and Louise Ravelli (2006), testify. However, there have also been discernable trends, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, towards alternative, less didactic paradigms that acknowledge both the subjectivity of curatorial decision-making and the uncertainty of knowledge itself. Approaches to display have consequently moved away from the assuredly defined, disciplinary based

In Kant's view, recognition of beauty or aesthetic is universal, requiring sensitivity and a particular gaze, but little else. Kant insists on a state of disinterestedness, unimpeded by personal interests, this separates out certain forms of sense experience from others in a hierarchical manner. Roger Fry (1920) further differentiates between the acts of 'seeing' and 'looking' giving the latter an elevated position. Fry places a greater emphasis on aesthetic in art than in nature shifting an understanding of aesthetic from response to the object via the concept of *significant form*. He writes:

I have admitted that there is beauty in nature, that is to say, that certain objects do, and perhaps any object may compel us to regard it with that intense disinterested contemplation [...] but in objects created to arouse the aesthetic feeling we have the added consciousness of purpose on the part of the creator that he[sic] made it not for the purpose of being used but to be regarded and enjoyed; and this feeling is characteristic of aesthetic judgement proper. (1981:26)

The implications from Kant through to Fry and Bell in the 1920s, endorse the importance of silent contemplation of artworks. It is only in patches and pockets during the twentieth century that 'interpretation' came to be synonymous with the word and the acquisition of knowledge and understanding through learning.

² These developments are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

exhibition, where the specialist curator provides an authoritative account, and towards more interdisciplinary and thematic approaches which often raise questions and may also critique received wisdom in a given field.

A significant number of galleries and museums have looked directly to the services of artists to assist in a shift from disciplinary to interdisciplinary approaches, from meta to micro narratives, and from universal knowledge to partial and contingent truths. The hope is that artists will intervene and by doing so may provide direction and some creative solutions such as those discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

A turn towards commissioning artists' services, such as Artists' Interventions, has significant connections with wider shifts in thinking about the production of knowledge and understanding that can be achieved through the visual and other sense modalities. In the field of gallery and museum education there is an acknowledgement of the efficacy of alternative ways of constructing, exhibiting and sharing knowledge, that eschew the pure aesthetic model referred to earlier, but that do not rely solely on the word. 'The fundamental relations between museums and their visitors are changing, enabling more dynamic encounters, and more diverse interpretations' (Ravelli 2006: 2). This is a welcome development for all those who have doubted the over reliance on logocentric and monomodal approaches to learning. Simultaneously it has opened up epistemological questions, concerning the ways in which such alternative forms of interpretation might contribute to visitors' meaning making processes. In asking, what is valued in the provision of artists' services, such as Artists' Interventions, it becomes apparent that the answer is not just a straightforward turn towards the visual in interpretive methodology.

By undertaking a historiography of interventionist artworks within a continuum of avant-garde art-practices³ (Chapter 3), I have identified a strong lineage of critical, disruptive, visual, immersive, and parodic methods employed in such artworks. Characteristically, Artists' Interventions rarely follow accepted codes and conventions

³ The avant-garde in art is most generally concerned with countering social and economic hegemonies. In this sense the avant-garde can be seen as positioned in opposition to the hegemonic discourse, favoured by museums. Importantly, the avant-garde of the early twentieth century (sometimes referred to as the historic avant-garde), was set on extricating art from its autonomous status and reconnecting it with everyday life. Bürger writes, 'avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art... The avant-garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life' (Bürger, 1992: 62). Bürger's account of the avant-garde accommodates both institutional critique and Artists' Interventions in museums and galleries where there is resistance to autonomous form and a connection with wider social, political and economic issues. However, Bürger's argument sets up a dialectic between the institutional discourse and that of the radical project of the artist. Bürger's theory of the avant-garde is all about rupture, contestation and revolution but ignores the avant-garde's more parodic dimensions whereby it critiques the machinations of the modern age and in particular the co-option of culture for ideological/institutional purposes. Foster (1994), more accurately suggests that 'the aim [of the avant-garde] is neither an abstract negation of art nor a romantic reconciliation with life but a perpetual testing of the conventions of both' (p. 16).

for explaining complex topics to inclusive audiences. This makes the investigation of their presence, as alternative methods of interpretation in galleries and museums, particularly significant, because contrary to the text panels and guided tours, artworks seldom attempt to conceal the subjective nature of their concerns nor are they generally renowned for their straightforward modes of communication.

For example, artist Fred Wilson's Seattle Art Museum intervention *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993) pictured below, highlights, by use of gentle parody, the inherent problems of 'displaying others'.

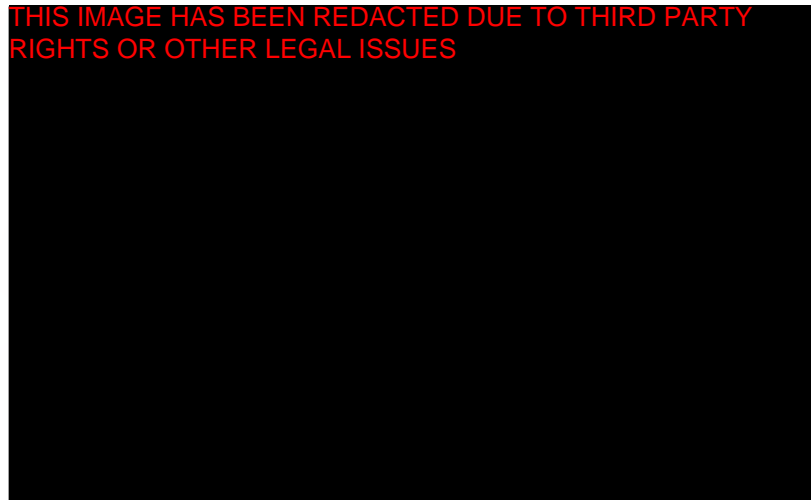


Fig. 1: Fred Wilson *Mixed Metaphors* (1993)

By inserting an anomaly, the western suit, into the museum's permanent display of African culture, his intervention acts to disrupt the museum's interpretation of the art and artefacts on display. By corollary the intervention disrupts the expectations of many western museum visitors, who are likely to be more familiar with the display narrative for the continent of Africa - than with the artefacts displayed, (often from different regions and countries), or the people represented.

Wilson's accompanying text label for the suit reads:

Certain elements of dress were used to designate one's rank in Africa's status-conscious capitals. A grey suit with conservatively patterned tie denotes a businessman or member of government. Costumes such as this are designed and tailored in Africa and worn throughout the continent.

The parody is played out through the appropriation of the particular tone and use of language (distanced, objective, didactic) typically used in galleries and museums. For example, the term 'costume' becomes suddenly value laden when applied to a Western suit. Wilson's intervention reveals the extent to which the easing of an object into a particular narrative is aided by an explicative label. The text, which

usually fixes down and holds a particular meaning or ‘truth,’ in this instance, proffers an alternative ‘truth’; one which is incommensurate with the discourse of ‘Africa on display’ in many western museums. Wilson undermines or ‘mines’⁴ as he might say, the museum’s claims to authority and truth by destabilising the fixity of meaning; thereby possibly opening up through irony more dialogic possibilities.

Interpretation

Interpretation, therefore, is a central concern in this thesis. Although in general parlance the term is often used to describe translations between different languages, in galleries and museums it has come to mean accounting for and explaining the significance of art and artefacts for diverse audiences. Interpretation is firmly positioned as an essential aspect of the gallery or museum’s educational remit. The translation is between a specialist ‘language’ and an accessible and relevant ‘language’ for a wide audience. Many recent intellectual debates within museology, and culture more generally,⁵ have contested the fixity of meaning that flourished under the aegis of modernism. The desire to provide ever more information, in order that a supposedly passive visiting public could be educated or inculcated into a particular paradigm of knowing, has also been critiqued by those working in museums. Lois Silverman, for example, writes:

In striving to educate visitors and develop ‘museum literate’ people who know how to view and appreciate objects according to specific paradigms, we as museum professionals have long over focussed on the task of providing visitors with information, facilitating the traditional or expert discourses as aspects of visitors’ meaning making process, such as their abilities to see formal elements in the work, or to provide historical context for artefacts from the past. In the process the more personal and subjective ways in which visitors make meaning (such as through life experiences, opinions, imaginations, memories, fantasies) are at best ignored and more often invalidated in museums where they tend to be regarded as naive and inappropriate.

(Silverman 1995: 161)

Artists’ Interventions exist as part of this intellectual museological debate in that they provide an interpretive paradigm that is frequently ambiguous, open ended and counter to traditional museological interpretations. The interventionist work of art, even at its most didactic, does not have the weight of authority carried by the gallery or museum’s legitimised label or text panel. This is not simply reducible to the notion that word and image/object are received differently and it is important to stress that language (text, verbal and visual) appears together with image and object in many

⁴ Wilson’s (1993) exhibition, *Mining the Museum* took its title from the act of mining, as in archaeology - but also from the analogy of laying land mines - causing explosions.

⁵ Barthes 1957, Foucault (1966) and Lyotard (1972)

Artists' Interventions. Nor does it mean that artists' work escapes the creation of another set of privileges and a sense of its own authority. At the crux of this thesis is the notion that Artists' interventions have been sanctioned by galleries and museums precisely because they break with hegemonic interpretation practices.

Dialogic potential

The line of enquiry proposed in this thesis, situates the pedagogic potential of many interventions as rooted in the concept of dialogism. Interventions have been, and continue to be, particularly concerned with constructions of meaning and with opening out possibilities for meaning making in order to provide alternative, often more socially situated meanings which contrast with the fixity of an 'official' interpretation offered historically to visitors. The Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, as a confluence of 'voices' almost battling to establish meaning, may not exactly define the intentions or outcomes of all interventions, but the establishment of counter positions is common to most.

Mikhail Bakhtin's study of dialogism is particularly focussed on instances where the dialogic aspects of language are made explicit in contrast to, and against a backdrop of, state or official language in which there is an attempt to elide difference and create a unified (unifying) official language. This can be seen as having parallels with the Artists' Interventions, positioned in relation to the legitimised discourse of the gallery or museum disrupting sanctioned versions. Bakhtin acknowledges both the quintessential social activity of language, and the complexity of language as a fluid form. Importantly, his trajectory of dialogism, like many Artists' Interventions, is 'permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self parody' and moreover 'retain[s] a semantic open-endedness' (1981: 7).

These qualities are present in many interventions and are aspects that I chose to explore further through a case study intervention, *An Elite Experience for Everyone* written and performed by the author (Chapter 5) at the William Morris Gallery, London (2005). In the intervention attention is paid to the slippage between language forms in the gallery or museum environment. The performance takes the form of a parodic, guided tour conducted by 'Victoria Fielding,' a character who appropriates a composite text, garnered from the words and manners of others, specifically sampled from legitimated discourses. At one juncture she refers to herself as 'a kind of translator' but, unlike the interlocutor at a diplomatic conference or the translator of texts, Victoria, in common with gallery and museum curators and

education staff, translates the language of specialisation. This is a language that is appropriated and used sometimes as a tool with which to administer 'symbolic violence'⁶ on the layperson. Translation in this instance can be seen as more akin to the requirements of certain styles of teaching, where the task of the teacher is to make complex ideas accessible to a wide range of learners whilst reinforcing a hierarchy of knowledge and by extension power. The performance of this translation is marked by a signalling of difference, that iterates the authority of the speaker or text by making the audience, or reader, aware that their lack of knowledge is at the root of the necessity for such a translatory process in the first place. Visitors to galleries and museums will be well aware of the need to have things explained, the pressure is on the visitor to take the hand-out, accept the audio tour, download the pod-cast; the message is, don't go it alone it's a complex intellectual quagmire out there, you could sink.

The world of museums has produced a cult of expertise and mythos of greatness that weight the ordinary pleasure of looking at art and responding to it with an alarm about ignorance. Catalogues, with page after page of sometimes abstruse and often dull "explanations." Earphones [...] to guide the visitor from one work to another and long textual notes below every picture are all reminders to the viewer that he goes it alone at his own peril, that seeing is not enough, and perhaps worst of all, that without coaching, the art hanging on the walls will be unintelligible to the onlooker.

(Hustveld 2005: xxi)

The guise of the translator *qua* interpreter, is therefore one that I would suggest has sometimes been embodied by gallery and museum culture, in order to reinforce public perception of authority and shore up belief in the ideological neutrality of such a believable account of the worlds.¹ Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin's criticism's of *bourgeois* theatre and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence* referred to on p. 94, all question the 'naturalisation' of practices and relations between practices that are based on principles of consent. Historically, galleries and museums have attempted to ameliorate any impression of partiality by assuming an unprejudiced detachment afforded to those who 'simply translate,' in this case, the world of material culture into classified knowledge - a visually rich 'believable' narrative.

Distancing is one device, which affords an authoritative and authorial weight of institutional knowledge and power to written language in common to the discourse

⁶ In Bourdieu's analysis of domination he uses the term 'symbolic violence' to designate, in his words, 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' in other words when there is an acceptance of the way things are in a given social system then that acceptance emanates from thinking that is constructed in that same system' (Bourdieu 1992: 167).

of government and law where avoiding reference to individual opinions bolsters objectivity. Without the signature, as Judith Butler writes, ‘how are we to account for the power of written discourse, or bureaucratic discourse which circulates without voice or signature?’ (Butler 1997: 6). Of course there are, and always have been, individual authors of gallery and museum texts, but it is only very recently, and in relatively few museums, that the name of the author has been publicly displayed with a text that appears on a gallery or museum wall⁷.

In the twenty-first century it is difficult for galleries and museums to elide the fact that an institutional voice has a point of view. A curatorial decision, an interpretation panel, even a label can be seen to reflect ideological positions and methodological approaches. As Sandell writes, ‘there is no neutral position and exhibition makers face choices concerning the way they develop narratives’ (Sandell 2007: 195). Artists’ Interventions have played a significant role in reinforcing the need for galleries and museums to share with their publics some of the thinking behind the choices they have made or that have been historically imposed upon collections.

Wilson’s intervention referred to earlier (Fig. 1) shows a public interrogation of museum interpretation practices which in the late twentieth century could no longer be accepted as part of a legitimate order. Wilson’s intervention reinforces Anthony Shelton’s observations that colonial practices, particularly those seen in the ethnographic museum, have become open to critique ‘by members of the disjunctive populations they once tried to represent’ (Shelton in Bennett 2006: 58). With the drive towards achieving more inclusive museum audiences there is an inevitability that audiences will be ‘increasingly made up of peoples they once considered part of their object’ (ibid). This is an important point for my thesis, in so far that many interventions have been made by artists from sections of society and global culture once marginal to the museum’s concerns or, indeed, represented as an object of study. Parodic objectification of the self has become a reoccurring trope in Artists’ Interventions⁸ and is intended as a critique of the objectifying tendencies of the museum’s and by extension the visitors’ gaze. Ojibway⁹ performance artist Rebecca Belmore is one such artist who ‘exhibited’ herself as a ‘living artefact’. Belmore’s,

⁷ Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC, USA and London’s Tate Galleries are two such examples.

⁸ In 1988, James A. Luna proposed himself as a ‘native Californian exhibit.’ The work was shown again as part of the Decade Show, New York Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and at the Studio Museum in Harlem 1990. Labels appeared next to the glass case in which he was encased, which read: ‘Born February 9 1950 Luiseño Indian. Burns on the upper and forearms [...] sustained during days of excessive drinking’ (cited in Buskirk 2005: 193). Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña performed ‘The Amerindians’ which was a satirical commentary on the history of the ethnographic display of indigenous people - see p. 134.

⁹ The Ojibway are the largest group of American Indians north of Mexico, they are divided between Canada and the USA.

Artifact 671B (1988), was made in response to the decision to exclude contemporary artist's contributions from an exhibition of 'native art' at Canada's Glenbow Museum. The exhibition, titled 'The Spirit Sings,' was advertised as a flagship cultural event of the winter Olympics 1988 and Belmore's intervention took place on the main route of the Olympic torch procession. It was intended to signal that the exclusion of contemporary artists' work from 'The Spirit Sings' designated both American Indian peoples and their art as inherently historical, and by implication manageable.

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Fig. 2: Rebecca Belmore *Exhibit 671B* (1988)

Allan Ryan describes such interventions as, 'serious play [...] the ultimate goal of which is a radical shift in viewer perspective and even political positioning by imagining and imaging alternative viewpoints' (Ryan 1999: 5).

Interventions exist therefore, not as autonomous exhibits or discrete entities but always in relation to and in conversation with other objects and subjects, often acting to destabilise a dominant discourse. Bakhtin stresses the need to 'dismantle the position of a controlling centre of and for discourse, paying attention instead to the multiaccentuality of meaning that arises out of the dialogic to-and-fro, the discursive give-and-take' (in Bennett 2006: 63). And, in Bennett's view, this is exactly what galleries and museums of the twenty-first century need to aspire to. Bennett makes a case for galleries and museums to become more inclusive spaces where the past can be

examined and the present reflected, but cultural institutions have been slow to reflect changes in culture and the demographic composition of audiences. Moreover they have sometimes been resistant to the notion that they have an inclusive social role to play. Sandell acknowledges that forces for inclusivity and change, of the kind that Bennett proposes, 'are pitted against deeply entrenched attitudes, structures and systems [...] where few museums share decision-making with individuals or groups outside of the organization or genuinely empower audiences to influence their direction. Belief in the authority of the museum professional as 'expert' remains strong and serves to constrain dialogue between the museum and the communities it seeks to engage with' (Sandell www.hlf.org.uk¹⁰). In contrast to much popular opinion the citation from artist Alan McCollum, that follows, serves to illustrate the point that it can also be artists who feel alienated from cultural institutions.

Whenever I walk into a Museum. I am very much aware - and maybe this is because I have sometimes worked in Museums for money, as a labourer - of the fact that I had nothing to do with choosing what got in there. Museums are filled with objects that were commissioned by a privileged class of people who have presumed that these objects were important to the culture at large - and who have made sure that they are important to the culture at large. [...] Obviously if I felt that all was well with the world and if I approved of the mechanisms of connoisseurship and expertise, and thought that these were value-free talents that some people had, it would be very different. But I believe that connoisseurship has always been part of a self answering structure which has supported a class of people who feel themselves better than everyone else, an attitude on account of which others suffer.

(McCollum in McShine 1999: 46)

If the museum sector has been resistant to the notion of dialogue with its public, then the rise of the Artists' Intervention can perhaps be seen as part of a repertoire of approaches that encourage, or at least acknowledge, the need for more dialogic strategies. Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums appear to offer a model for achieving a form of multiaccentuality of meaning. But, as my research reveals this is a model that often involves disruptive, parodic and ambiguous tactics. The hermeticism or exclusion that such art practices might engender has been a point of contention for some critics. Because the art object, like the museum, is closely tied to modernist theories of perception and reception outlined on p. 68 it is unsurprising that some commentators (e.g. Rice 2003; Latimer 2001; Miller 1992) are concerned that contemporary artists simply conspire to present museum visitors with another layer of inaccessibility. These observations deserve serious consideration, as do suggestions from Hal Foster (1996) Arnd Schneider (1999) and others, that Artists' Interventions may have been aimed less at encouraging *wider* audiences for museums

¹⁰ http://www.hlf.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/DF2FCDA8-85B3-4A28-B68A-A59E2796951F/0/needs_inclusion.pdf

and more at bringing in a specific, younger audience of art cognoscenti. Examining the diverse spectrum of contemporary artworks that have been commissioned or curated into historic collections in galleries and museums, it becomes clear that evidence can be found to both support and dispel the critics' doubts.

As galleries and museums continue to increase in number and expand their public programming there has been a simultaneous recognition of visitor diversity, increased competition for visitors and a need to be relevant to wider audiences. In the UK, government incentives¹¹ to increase the social role of museums have made access and inclusion unavoidable issues for public galleries and museums. Whilst social inclusion might have once directly equated with issues of access, as Sandell remarks, 'there is now growing recognition that the challenges presented by the inclusion agenda are, in fact, much more significant and the implications more fundamental and far-reaching [...] In short, if museums are to become effective agents for social inclusion, a paradigmatic shift in the purpose and role of museums in society, and concomitant changes in working practices, will be required' (Sandell <http://hdl.handle.net/2381/52>). The educational challenge for galleries and museums has come to be about striking a balance, between providing accurate information and engaging audiences in a way that gives them agency by acknowledging and validating their own knowledge; implicating them in a more open ended process of meaning making. Foster has remarked that, galleries and museums need to ask 'is an exhibition didactic enough to educate newcomers and elliptical enough to provoke initiates?' (Foster 2006: <http://transform.eipcp.net> accessed: 9.09.08).

Updating the context

A part time PhD can be a long, lonely process. In the years that accumulate from registration to final stages, specialist book catalogues, personalised 'Amazon' missives, and significant shelves in favourite bookshops, take on a more acute significance, often engendering feelings of trepidation. If reassurance can be gained it comes in the form of regular checks for the continued absence of a comprehensive publication on that all important research topic; one's own. From such an egocentric perspective, I might take comfort from the fact that there are still very few histories of Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums. Amongst the substantial number of recent

¹¹ DCMS (2000) *Centres for Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All Policy Guidance on Social Inclusion for DCMS Funded and Local Authority Museums, Galleries and Archives in England*. Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DCMS(2001) *Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*. Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DCMS (1999) *Museums for the Many: Standards for Museums and Galleries to Use When Developing Access Policies*. Department of Culture, Media and Sport
DCMS (2005) *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life — the Value of Museums*. Department of Culture, Media and Sport
See also *Museums and Social Inclusion under New Labour*, International Journal of Cultural Policy 11(3): 275—88.

contemporary art and museological publications, there have been relatively few which direct their attention to the distinct contributions that twentieth and twenty-first century artists have made to gallery and museum interpretation practices; fewer still, if any, that recognise the pedagogic potential of interventionist artworks in galleries and museums. From a more wide-reaching viewpoint this thesis brings such an absence into question, in that it demonstrates that Artists' Interventions have been effectively teaching oblique but none-the-less useful lessons to education, visitor services and curatorial departments in galleries and museums for some time.

Publications on relational, dialogic, and socially engaged art practice (some of which share methods and intentions with Artists' Interventions) have been both many and influential. There have also been significant texts that focus on art practices which follow and extend anthropological and ethnographic methodologies¹², and those that privilege relational and networked engagement with gallery and museum audiences, but in the main, this large body of literature remains devoid of references to interpretation, meaning making and learning in the context of galleries and museums.

In the expanding domain of museum studies publishing there are now many texts on learning in galleries and museums, but again, only a few of these make reference to the way in which Artists' Interventions have enabled, or problematised visitors' learning. These few should not be underplayed but it remains significant that Artists' Interventions have been written out of many discussions about developments in interpretation and visitor learning, even when a connection or debt is obvious¹³. Significant academics and critics who refer to Artists' Interventions may be few and far between but the claims that they make for Artists' Interventions and artists' roles more generally, in the changing landscape of the museum's social and pedagogic role, are often powerfully put. John Walsh (2006), for example, believes in galleries and museums 'giving more interpretive voice to artists [...] whose responses are vivid and imaginative and might inspire visitors to have more courage themselves' (p. 100); Shelton (2001), states that artists 'excavate and lay bare to an incredulous gaze the

¹² In particular attention has been given to the methodologies employed by artists whose work intervenes in institutional discourses, significantly by Schneider, Shelton, Foster and Fraser.

¹³ For example, although Riegel (1996) demonstrates a successful curatorial use of irony used to increase visitors' critical awareness, the exhibition *Fluffs and Feathers* at the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada (see p. 169), to which she refers, is not given an historical context. The fact that the exhibition grew directly from a 1988 Task Force on Museums and First Peoples in Canada, is acknowledged by Riegel but she omits to say that this same task force was initiated in response to interventionist protests including Belmore's prominent intervention *Artifact 671B* (1988) referred to in my introduction (see Fig. 2 – p. 19). When Belmore ironically proposed herself as an artefact - the object of ethnographic study, she did so with the intention to do just what the Task Force subsequently suggested - to bring 'better relations between museums and aboriginal groups in Canada' (Nicks 1996: 95). Although Riegel acknowledges that the use of irony relates to a recent reflexive and critical turn in museology (1996: 84) she does not associate its forms with the precedent set by Belmore, who created the conditions that made *Fluffs and Feathers* possible.

working of dominant forms of cultural, economic or political expression' (p. 147) and Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (2000), claims that of all the strategies to challenge museums' values 'some of the most revealing are those used by artists' (p. 141). Although these citations suggest a substantive recognition of artists' roles, with the exception of Shelton, the texts as a whole tend to lack evidence to support the nature of the claims that are made. Comments on artists' achievements are often passed over quickly, for example, to support her comments on the revelations made by artists, Hooper Greenhill refers only briefly to two interventions at the British Museum¹⁴ before she turns her focus to London's National Gallery 're-hangs' to indicate the effects that new juxtapositions of paintings have had on possible interpretations.

Characteristically, the contribution to interpretation and visitors' experiences that has been made by contemporary artists has been considered alongside a number of other important developments in gallery and museum culture. It would seem that it is only very recently that more specific and singular attention is being paid to the examples that artist have made and might continue to make to the practices of the gallery and museum sector. In August 2009, it is clear that there has been no diminution in the number of Artists' Interventions commissioned by galleries and museums, Kettles Yard, Cambridge has an exhibition entitled *Upside down/inside out*, running through the house and gallery which features 'some of the best Artists' Interventions from the last fourteen years' (Kettlesyard.com). The Hunterian Museum, London is about to host *Narrative Remains* in which artist Karen Ingham

re-locates, re-embodies and re-unites the lost narratives with their dislocated organs. This will be achieved through the creation of specially made museum vitrines, layered with image and text, and through a digital film which projects and layers the organs and their stories onto the absent, but re-visualised as present, body. The organs are thus empowered to perform their own story of corporeal demise and post-mortem preservation.

(<http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums/exhibitions/narrative-remains>)

Between June 27th and August 5th 2009, Ansuman Biswas spent forty days and forty nights alone in the Gothic Tower of the Manchester Museum in England, with the aim of examining attitudes to loss and conservation. Each day a new object from the stores was presented in his blog as a stimulus for public discussion and to determine the object's fate. The web listing states:

On September 3rd 2009 at a specially convened meeting in the Manchester Museum the fate of these objects will be formally decided. Until then you are

¹⁴ Wentworth's (1997) intervention in the Egyptian Gallery of the British Museum, and Wilson's placing of Smoking Indian figurines with their backs to the visitor.

welcome to consider all the arguments and put forward your own view. No decision will be taken without sufficient weight of opinion behind it, so please stand up for what you believe in.

([http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/Sept 1 09](http://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/Sept109))

I could list more, but this selection will suffice as an indication of the ubiquity and diversity of Artists' Interventions across a wide range of museums and galleries. It is noteworthy too that the need for more analysis and discussion of such projects is gathering momentum. In September 2009 Amgueddfa Cymru - National Museum of Wales ATRium, with Cardiff School of Creative and Cultural Industries, University of Glamorgan hosted an international cross-disciplinary conference focusing on the role of the artist in mediating between collections and audiences. Shortly prior to this event, there was a conference in Queensland Australia, August 2009, on *Artists-in Residence/ Artists' Interventions in Museums*. And in April 2010 aspects of this doctoral thesis will be presented in a paper, *Meaningful Encounters with Disrupted Narratives: Artists' Interventions as Interpretive Strategies*, that has been accepted for an international interdisciplinary conference exploring the interpretive potential of architecture, exhibitions and design organised by University of Leicester and University of Nottingham.

Definitions

What is an Artists' Intervention?

I use the term Artists' Intervention to describe a specific genre of works of art, located as an interlocutor within permanent gallery and museum collections and temporary exhibitions. Site-specific works, installation art, institutional critique, conceptual art, performance art, and curating, are also descriptors that could be applied to interventions, but none, other than 'intervention,' seems to adequately describe the potential for precipitating change. Therefore, I have persisted with this somewhat awkward designation as the most precise term to encompass the specificity of examples, which I examine.

Inter-ven-tion (n) - Stepping in, or interfering in any affair so as to change its course or issue (OED on Historic principles 1970). An action undertaken in order to change what is happening or might happen in another's affairs, especially in order to prevent something undesirable.

(Encarta® World English Dictionary © 1999 Microsoft Corporation)

The proviso, that most commonly constitutes an 'intervention,' is that the art 'engages' with an existing context, for example, a museum's collection, civic

architecture, social histories, or with interpretive strategies. There are examples of commissioned contemporary artworks in galleries and museums that adopt each of these examples of engagement, but relatively few constitute an action undertaken in order to change what is happening or to prevent something ‘undesirable’ from taking place.

More commonly Artists’ Interventions have come to be understood as the temporary insertion of contemporary art’s physical presence into the permanent collection of a cultural institution. This broad taxonomy brackets together contemporary art experienced in an environment designated for other types of objects, for example historical artworks or artefacts. A definitional system that has privileged the visible invasion of such gallery and museum spaces, has meant that benign (and often anodyne) Artists’ Interventions have been aligned with those of a more *radical* and or critical intention.

For example, Andy Goldsworthy’s *Sandwork* (1994) (thirty tons of compacted sand formed into a snake motif) that meandered around the Egyptian galleries of the British Museum in the exhibition ‘Time Machine’ (1994), and Joseph Kosuth’s *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1991) (which addressed the censorship of art and design dictated by political and religious circumstances at different points in history) at the Brooklyn Museum, New York (1991), are poles apart in every aspect, apart from being examples of contemporary artists’ work exhibited within permanent museum displays. (See Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 below.)



Fig. 3: Andy Goldsworthy’s *Sandwork* (1994)

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ISSUES

Fig. 4: Joseph Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable* (1991)

On the one hand, Goldsworthy's work intervenes only in so much as it is an unexpected visual element. The intention of the work was to parallel concerns and connections between contemporary and ancient worlds and across cultures. Artists still make work inspired by natural forms and Goldsworthy reminds and reassures visitors of this continuum by presenting contemporary work that appears as if it might be ancient. In this instance a temporary cohesion is attempted and the cultural differences are elided under the universalising co-ordinates of the natural world, the artist and the museum. Goldsworthy's work stabilises rather than problematises, and in this sense its presence is not in the spirit of intervention *qua* intervention but more akin to a complimentary contemporary element, signifying continuity. Similar statements can be made in relation to the British Museum's exhibition of Anthony Gormley's *Field for the British Isles* (2002-2003) in which human forms around the museum as diverse as Mexican figurines from 900BC to those from neolithic Greece were brought to the viewers' attention by the universal humanising presence of 'mini gorms'¹⁵.

Kosuth's work, on the other hand, overtly raises the issue of external influences of what and how visual culture is made available in public galleries and museums. Where art has been perceived as a threat to political cohesion, Kosuth presents a critical appraisal of historical examples as a warning for the present day. He intervenes to make a point; to demonstrate and raise awareness of a situation, in this instance censorship, a mechanism that, in his opinion, calls for public attention.

¹⁵ A popular affectionate term for Gormley's small clay figures made by members of the public to Gormley's instructions as follows.

'Take a hand-size ball of clay, form it between the hands, into a body surrogate as quickly as possible. Place it at arm's length in front of you and give it eyes.' (<http://www.anthonygormley.com> accessed 06.04.2003)

Recent literature typically ignores the distinctions between interventions which have intended, attempted, and even achieved changes in the way that museum collections are interpreted, displayed and understood by visitors, and those that pay homage to existing canons and perpetuate notions of the universality of art. Similarly, interventions, invited and sanctioned by host institutions, have been drawn together in the same designation as those that most definitely have not. James Putnam's 2002 publication, *Art and Artefact*, is an excellent example of an overview of artists' multifarious engagements with galleries and museums. Its emphasis is on breadth rather than depth and, whilst such a text enables readers to become cognisant of a very large range of contemporary art projects that have referenced and inhabited galleries and museums, it offers little in the form of an explication of intention (the gallery's, museum's or the artist's) nor their affect (on gallery and museum practices or visitors' understanding of the interventionist art and its relation to its site).

Although it is easy to fall into the error of making crude oppositional categories, it is also important to differentiate between contemporary art placed in collections and temporary exhibitions to 'brighten things up' and other more significant intentions that include facilitating new readings of existing orders.

Some differentiating should also be acknowledged between 'official' and 'unofficial' interventions. Juan Capistran's *The Breaks* (2000), for example, was performed 'between rounds by security guards' on Los Angeles Contemporary Museum of Art's Carl Andre lead sculpture floor piece.

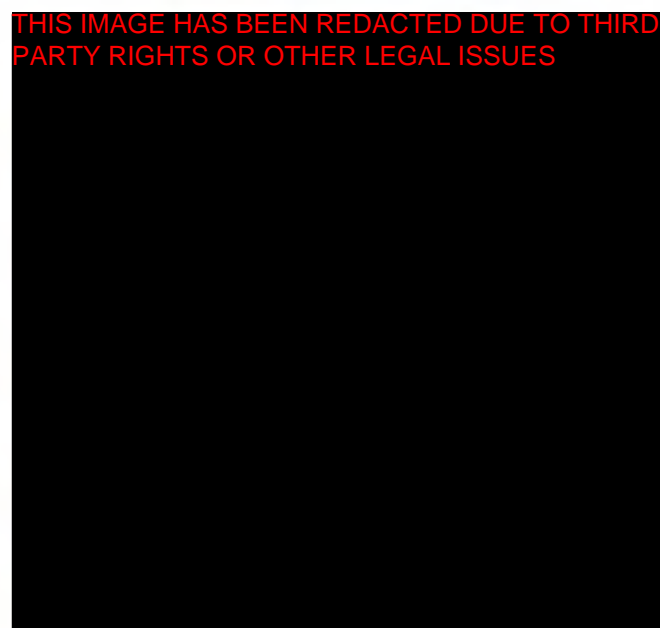


Fig. 5: Juan Capistran *The Breaks* (2000)

I would not labour this point of distinction too forcefully though, as there are a number of artists who have made both invited and uninvited interventions, and in fact Capistran's photographic records of his intervention (Fig. 5) have now passed into mainstream museum collections.

Galleries and museums

Throughout this thesis, for the purpose of clarity if not brevity, I frequently use the terms 'galleries and museums' together, and refer only occasionally to 'museums' or 'galleries' as single collective nouns for cultural institutions. I have kept with the use of both terms to indicate that I intend reference to museums of artefacts, natural history, local history etc. and those that solely exhibit works of art.

Gallery is a term that can be used to describe a room within a museum, e.g. gallery 37, it is also used to describe commercial outlets for exhibiting and selling art, and specialist public museums that house collections of art; my use of the term refers to the latter meaning unless otherwise specified.

I acknowledge that the terms gallery and museum can be confusing; they are often used interchangeably to describe similar types of cultural institutions. It is noteworthy that such nomenclature is not universal: this inconsistency is particularly marked on either side of the Atlantic, where the USA's large public art galleries are known as art museums, for example the Washington DC Museum of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, whereas the UK has The National Gallery and The British Museum.

In all references to actual galleries and museums I have used their proper names.

Chapter 2 Methodology

This section provides a rationale for employing a mixed methodological approach in this study and, in particular, explains the place of a case study involving 'art practice' as an element of the research.

My research, and by implication myself as researcher, can be positioned between four interrelated 'fields' or disciplines: art practice, art history, education and museology. In defining a situation in which it may be beneficial to draw on methodological approaches from more than one discipline, I have found Tony Bennett's description of cultural studies useful. Cultural studies, says Bennett, is 'less a specific theoretical and political tradition or discipline than a gravitational field in which a number of intellectual traditions have found a provisional *rendez-vous* [and] a shared commitment to examining cultural practices from the point of view of their intrication with, and within relations of power' (in Stratton and Ang 1998: 362). In this study a *rendezvous* of intellectual traditions and methodological approaches has been brought about not to map and elucidate whole fields, but to sophisticate an understanding of a particular nexus where fields overlap or coalesce. Artists' Interventions and their insertion into the interpretive frameworks of galleries and museums raise issues concerning relations of power between legitimated interpretive practices and alternative ones. Such interventions often question the museum as a representative of dominant societal interests and values and propose more nebulous, sometimes conflicting and ambiguous representations.

Tracing historical trajectories

The scope of my thesis is restricted to Europe and North America, for the specific reason that this is where the most prolific expansion of Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums has been witnessed¹⁶. I also made the choice to limit the historiographic tracing of interventionist impulses, to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is not to suggest that there were no forms of resistance to the dominant discourse and pedagogic imperative of galleries and museums in previous centuries, but rather to delineate coherent and influential methodological approaches to intervention and critique that are inherently linked to the avant-garde.

¹⁶ It needs to be acknowledged that Australian museums have also hosted a number of Artists' Interventions in the last two decades notably by Gordon Bennett and Fiona MacDonald.

There are two historiographies in my research. The first examines galleries and museums as pedagogic institutions typically disseminating dominant and normative systems of value. The second examines the interventions that have been made by artists into these dominant discourses and analyses the strategies that artists have employed.

In tracing galleries and museums as pedagogic institutions I intend to bring to the fore the paradoxical element of the ideals of the period in which the public museum was conceived: 'the Enlightenment which discovered the liberties also discovered the disciplines' (Foucault 1991: 222). As Foucault highlights, the emancipatory principles, promulgated in the eighteenth century, also came with new impositions of control achieved by ordering, observation and classification. From the eighteenth century onward, culture became entwined in the symbolisation of power and nationhood, where it has steadfastly remained.¹⁷

It is pertinent that in many academic accounts of gallery and museum's histories, Foucault's voice has a strong presence. 'Discipline and Punish' (1975), in particular, has been used as a guiding methodological framework from which to discuss the evolution of burgeoning new institutions in the eighteenth century and their concomitant discourses of knowledge and power. In establishing the apparatus of social control and management Foucault invites comparisons across the various institutions that were superseding earlier versions of themselves to develop their own specialist discourses. Schools, hospitals, prisons and museums all emerged in a new eighteenth century European order.

From a Foucauldian perspective, the continued importance of these systems can be seen as two-fold, first to impose a 'natural' progress of the mind and second as an instatement of a code for educative procedures. The categorisation and tabulation of the spatial (geographies) and temporal (histories) can therefore be seen as intrinsically linked with the creation of knowledge and power. 'In the eighteenth century, the table was both a technique of power and a procedure of knowledge. It was a question of providing oneself with an instrument to cover it and master it; it was a question of imposing upon it an 'order' (Foucault 1991: 148). Bourdieu,

¹⁷ An example from the twenty-first century serves to illustrate this continuum. Tessa Jowell proposed that New Labour's role for public museums was very much about the dissemination of particular national values, she stated: 'Museums and galleries tell the story of this nation, its people and the whole of humanity. It is impossible to imagine how else that story could be told.' There, of course, are many ways in which 'the story' could be told inside and outside of museums and by implication more than one narrative. Jowell's language perpetuates the notion of galleries and museums in the service of the nation state, she continues, 'emblematic of veracity, rationality and authority, they [museums] have a singular remit to provide 'the true' account of the nation's heritage' (Jowell 2005).

commenting on the mechanisms by which systems of dominance persist, point to a similar conclusion: 'of all forms of hidden persuasion, the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things' (1992: 167). Fostering and making visible a sense of order for the world has been absolutely central to the pedagogic remit of galleries and museums. Amongst notable others, Foucault, Bourdieu and artists such as Broodthaers, Ukeles, Hiller, Dion, Fraser, Wilson and Lawler provide readers and visitors to galleries and museums with an invitation to question the effects of such powerful and influential ordering systems.

In his examination of the historic pedagogy of the museum, Donald Preziosi (2004) posits some key questions: 'What, then, did museums illuminate, discipline, address or re-dress, what became visible in these new museological spaces, in this new disciplinary machinery?' (p. 73). In attempting to outline what was to be learnt and how learning was to take place in the emergent spaces of erudition and social regulation of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Foucault's explication of the contradictory nature of these institutions is highly significant. It provides an understanding of museums, as both radical institutions, born out of the emergence of a new bourgeois order,¹⁸ (which promised democratic ideals) and concomitantly as institutions of social conformity and control.

This is further examined by Jürgen Habermas, for whom the museum of the eighteenth century represented an important dimension of the newly emerging public sphere which was 'one of the institutions embodying a form of publicity'¹⁹ that functioned to challenge the *representative* publicity of royal collections (in order to realise a conception of publicness opposed to the secret politics of absolutism)' (Habermas in Ward 1995: 76). Methodologically *representative publicity* appropriated and thus shared the power of spectacle and splendour exerted by royal collections. The public gallery/museum, in effect, grew up inhabited by the spectre of former collections, leading Ward (1995) to refer to it as a 'haunted' institution.

Where such contradictions abound, it is unsurprising, despite the egalitarian principles of the Enlightenment, that emergent class division relating to the recognition of hierarchies of knowledge and the privileging of certain constructions of meaning/

¹⁸ The emergence of the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries created a particular bourgeois sphere of private individuals coming together to form a public, in meeting places such as clubs, and cafes. Although these were exclusive, they encouraged debate among equals and became the ground of democratic anti-absolutist politics – oppositional politics against the absolutist power of the aristocracy. The museum contributed to the formation of the self-representation and self-authorisation of the subject of reason.

¹⁹ Habermas' use of the term does not refer to a notion of advertising but to the quality of being public – being open to public observation and knowledge.

learning was also to become part of its structural inheritance. For example, Habermas (1989) points out that 'The same economic situation that pressured the masses into participating in the public sphere in the political realm denied them the level of education that would have enabled them to participate' (p. 168).

A cultivation of difference, implicit in new taxonomies extended into the social realm and can be traced to the earliest moments in the evolution of the museum by the insistence on pre-requisite modes of reception 'producing a specific disciplined subject, a particular kind of knowledge and object as well as presupposing a particular relation to the world' (Atkinson 2006: 18). This introduced the separation of pleasure from the serious business of knowledge, for example, whereby the proclivity to be amazed and astonished was thought only suitable for the lower orders or, as Patrick Mauriès writes, 'the most vulnerable in society: women, the very young, the very old, primitive people, the uneducated masses: a motley group collectively designated as *the vulgar*' (2002: 193). This lacuna in the museum's egalitarian aims has been reliably persistent, particularly in the case of the art museum or gallery, where taste and cultural capital became increasing markers of difference.²⁰ It is against this backdrop of dominant regulatory and divisionary discourse that art practices as forms of critique emerged, perhaps it could be said, to redress the balance and preserve the continuum of the museum as a discursive forum.

Activating the passivity of the viewer

The second historical chapter, chapter four, examines the interventionist strategy in art, embedded in avant-garde practice but evolving in relation to wider socio-cultural and economic change. My prime motive has been to look for causal relationships that shed light on the position of Artists' Interventions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the many hundreds of examples of interventionist artworks, I have sought out those that most closely attempt to change the ways in which galleries and museums present and interpret collections and exhibitions for their publics.

I therefore embark on a short genealogy of Artists' Interventions, as both disruptions to the dominant discourses of galleries/museums, and as a continuation of the museum's discursive possibilities intended at its inception. By genealogy I intend a study of how discourses, specifically Artist's Interventions, are formed, why they emerge and disappear again and how they influence and disrupt other forms of discourse. I am aware that in Habermas's conception, the position that I take is one

²⁰ Kester's chapter 'The eyes of the vulgar' (2004) is devoted to an explication of the avant-garde and how its tactics of shock involve a necessary hostility to audience.

that is concerned with an 'historical knowledge of struggles' (1987: 220), focusing on the elements of knowledge that are often disqualified or low down the list of institutional hierarchies. I am simultaneously conscious that by 'taking the side of those who resist established practices of power' [ibid] in the normalised discourse of the gallery or museum, I therefore become implicated in this process of articulating a counter power which generates its own privileges.

Research sites, collections and exhibitions

As part of my methodology I made research visits to a considerable number of collections and exhibitions in the UK, Europe and the USA. 'The Museum as Muse' (1999) curated by Kynaston McShine for the Museum of Modern Art, New York had a major influence on nascent ideas for my thesis. The exhibition focussed mainly on twentieth century artists who had taken galleries or museums as the subject of their work. It brought together a range of approaches, from artists who had created their own 'galleries and museums' (e.g. Marcel Broodthaers, Joseph Cornell, Herbert Distel, Claus Oldenburg), artists who photographed or made paintings of galleries, museums and their adherents (e.g. Günther Förg, Candida Höffer, Ed Ruscha, Thomas Struth, Garry Winogrand) to artists who had intervened in pre-existing collections with their own work (e.g. Lothar Baumgarten, Sophie Calle, Janet Cardiff, Andrea Fraser, Hans Haacke). 'Museum as Muse' did not give consideration to the educational implications of contemporary artworks that intervene in museological discourse however, pedagogic potential was a thread woven through contestation of meaning and reinterpretation in many of the exhibiting artists' work. The Serpentine Gallery's collaboration with the Victoria and Albert Museum, which resulted in 'Give and Take' and 'Mixed Messages' (2000), was also an important exhibition for critiquing museum practices through the rearrangement and disruption of a collection and the insertion of contemporary artworks into a collection.

In August 2006 I made a visit to a permanent contemporary art project, set up in 1990 in the Chateau D'Oiron on the borders of Poitier and Val de Loire France. In the sixteenth century a cabinet of curiosities once existed in the chateau, under the aegis of Claude Gouffier. Although the remnants of the collection (an embalmed crocodile, a pair of mongooses painted on *trompe-l'oeil* tablets, a mermaid-rabbit hybrid and some effigies of Roman Emperors) were scant, the concept of the *wunderkammer* formed the inspiration for the overall commissioning programme for

new artworks²¹. Martin talks about an intention for contemporary artworks to act in a similar way to the original curious and wonderful objects in the Chateau's sixteenth century collection, to 'draw viewers into the world of the imagination, to entice them into narratives involving role-plays and projection' (Martin 2000: 127). D'Oiron's exhibition site provides an on going dialogue with curiosity and wonder in which exhibits can simply defy the taxonomies and categorisations of contemporary galleries and museums. For example, Hubert Duprat's (2000) work *Trichopteres*, allows humble cadis fly larvae to demonstrate their design and construction prowess utilising tiny fragments of gold and precious jewels to make their transitional carapaces. This captivating piece (see Fig. 6) seems neither to truly belong in an art gallery or natural history museum. Instead it questions the efficacy of inherited systems for displaying and learning in galleries and museums, suggesting unfamiliar connections and alternative ways of understanding the world.

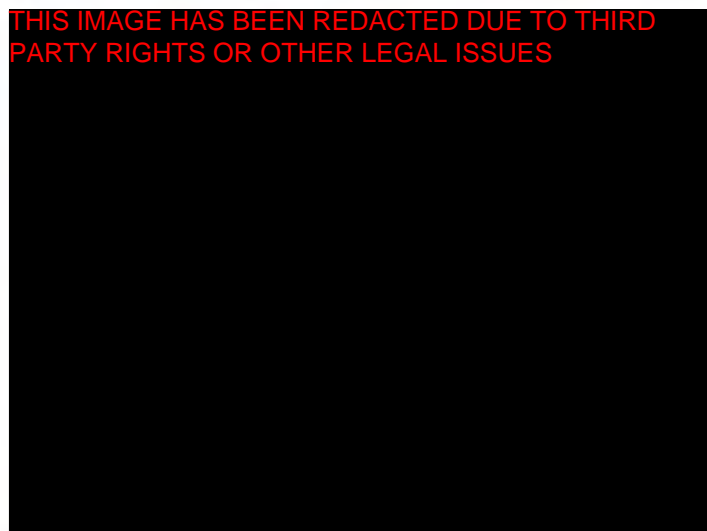


Fig. 6: Hubert Duprat *Trichopteres* (2000)

Of the interventions that took place in the 1990s, Wilson's *Mining the Museum* has proved to be an enduring, seminal example. Perhaps more than any other intervention, it garnered positive responses from both the museum sector, art world and simultaneously increased visitors numbers²² and audience diversity. To understand more about the circumstances surrounding this intervention and to evaluate its legacy I travelled to Baltimore to conduct a series of interviews at the Maryland Historic Society (MdHS) and at Maryland Institute for Contemporary Arts (MICA). I was particularly interested to trace the impact of the intervention on

²¹ The new collection has works by Christian Boltanski, Ilya Kabalkov Annette Messager, Gavin Bryars, Giuseppe Penone, Lothar Baumgarten, James Lee Byars and Daniel Spoerri, among others.

²² Sophie Calle's (1999) intervention *Appointment* at the Freud Museum, see frontispiece, produced 240 visitors in a single day, the highest number in one day since the Museum opened. (www.freud.org.uk/exhibitions/10519/appointment, accessed 10.06.2006)

MdHS's exhibition programming, interpretation and education. I interviewed George Ciscle (see Appendix 1) who, as former director of The Contemporary (an itinerant contemporary art organisation) proposed and organised Wilson's Intervention *Mining the Museum* at MdHS. Ciscle now teaches a curating course at MICA and has retained close connections with MdHS. The Contemporary is not entirely written out of the history of *Mining the Museum* but it is fair to say that it is at the margins of most accounts. The visit to MdHS in Baltimore enabled me to gain a better understanding of delicate collaborative ventures between museums and contemporary artists, the brokering of permissions and the accountability of the museum to multiple audiences holding often contradictory values. Wilson's intervention, (in what was until the 1980s a private museum - a members only domain, in a city with a turbulent history of race relations) offered a critical appraisal of a museum attempting to join the public sphere but bringing with it a history that spoke strongly of power relations.

Art practice: borrowing across intellectual traditions

Martin writes that 'the territory of art has been hugely enlarged by the inquiring approach of artists who have laid claim to great swathes of the human and physical sciences in order to transpose and appropriate them for their own poetic end' (Martin in Mauriès 2002: 231). Poetic ends are not, however, the sole outcome and objective of artists' borrowings from other intellectual traditions, nor does the poetic or aesthetic have to be situated in opposition to what might be described as 'the political'. Like the field of cultural studies, it is apparent that art has co-opted the methodologies of other disciplines often for precisely the same reasons: to examine relations of power within its own domain and within the extended cultural field. This critical turn has been particularly pronounced in the latter half of the twentieth century when a number of dominant discourses of art²³ were questioned in and through artists' recourse to philosophy, anthropology, sociology and psychoanalysis. In each case, it is the 'trespass' of artists into other fields of knowledge that resulted in, arguably, a more judicious understanding of art and particularly of its framing technologies. By corollary, claims have been made for the 'trespassed field' becoming the beneficiary of new perspectives and methodologies acquired from art: Peter Osborne, for example cites philosophy²⁴, Haacke, sociology²⁵, Shelton/Schneider

²³ Such as: the cult of the artist as individual genius, the gendered and Eurocentric perspectives that have informed criticism and the interrelationship between art forms.

²⁴ Osborne holds that philosophy played an important part for artists who were looking for a tactical strategy for weakening the formalist stranglehold. He suggests that 'Philosophy was *the means* of this usurpation of critical power by a new generation of artists; the means by which they could simultaneously address the crisis in the ontology of the artwork (through an art definitional conception of their practice) and achieve social control over the meaning of their work' (1999: 50).

anthropology/ethnography and ²⁶ Jana Graham, cultural studies.²⁷ Adding to this list, I make the claim that in both praxis and theory, museology and museum education have benefitted from the trespass of contemporary Artists' Interventions.

Art practice as research

Throughout this study I examine the potential benefits in recognising a particular genre of artists' work - Interventions, as a viable form of research. This is neither to propose that all art is a form of research nor to set up an opposition between image and word, but rather to suggest that the practice of art can give rise to new meanings and insights that should not be discounted for their lack of 'fit' in relation to accepted educational research methodologies. Whilst I agree with Christopher Frayling who believes 'There is still an enormous cachet attached to people in higher education who interpret the world through scholarship and detachment, and not nearly enough attached to people who perform or make things to try and change the world' (1999: 55), I hold that traditional divisions between engagements with art practice as a 'sensory experience' and with reading, writing and research as 'rational activities', present a false dichotomy that needs to be reappraised in the debates surrounding research and contributions to knowledge.

Bourdieu has directly championed the work of two contemporary artists (whose artwork takes a form of research into the practices of cultural institutions): Haacke, with whom he collaborated for the conversational publication *Free Exchange* (1995) and Fraser for whose publication, 'Museum Highlights,' he wrote an introductory chapter. Both Haacke and Fraser have had a significant influence on the contemporary and current inter-connectedness between art and museological practices. Both examine the ways in which museums 'naturalise' particular cultural phenomena and their interrelationship with political and economic networks. Their art practices often take the form of research that bears a striking resemblance (albeit sometimes parodic) to that conducted by a social scientist, but their modes of dissemination are substantively different, although not always in appearance. The written reports, statistics, and findings expected of the social scientist are sometimes still there, but they are couched in another language, the language of avant-garde art practice which makes use of parodic and ironic strategies to disrupt dominant

²⁵ Haacke's engagement with social systems led him to embark on quasi social science audience polls, see Haacke in Conversation with the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, in Haacke H. and Bourdieu, P (1995) *Free Exchange*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

²⁶ Shelton, A. (2001). 'Unsettling the Meaning: Critical Museology, Art and Anthropological Discourses' in M. Bouquet. (ed) *Academic Anthropology and the Museum* New York: Berghahn Books.

²⁷ See Graham, J. (2003). 'Museum Acrobatics: Artistic Intervention and the Work of Cultural Studies.' *Cultural Studies* 17(6): 843-855.

meaning. Augmented through the extended vocabularies of avant-garde approaches to art making, outcomes of research about the cultural sector cited above are made manifest through the agency of artworks.

Learning and teaching

In my thesis I am arguing for and attempting to bring greater recognition to certain art practices for what they may be 'teaching' about education in galleries and museums. I paraphrase here from Elliot Eisner's (2004) paper: 'What can Education Learn from the Arts about the Practice of Education?' where he posits a similar argument in relation to the field of education in schools. Eisner also opines what he sees as an ironic situation in which 'qualities as fundamental and powerful as those that constitute art have been so neglected in research methodology' (1998: 154). It may be that an intransigent interpretation of both art and methodology are amongst the root causes for this neglect in certain sectors of academe. This is particularly so in the field of education, where art is often interpreted as a practice that bears little resemblance to contemporary manifestations and concerns. In reality, today's contemporary artists, as Graeme Sullivan (2005) notes, 'adopt many patterns that dislodge discipline boundaries, media conventions, and political interests, yet still manage to operate within a realm of cultural discourse as creator, critic, theorist, teacher, activist and archivist' (Sullivan: 225).

My own practice as an artist is not media specific; I studied fine art and specialised in sculpture. When I was at art college 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' Rosalind Krauss' seminal (1978) essay was nearly a decade old, in it she proposes that following conceptualism, sculpture, unrestricted by media, opened out from the 1960s onwards to encompass an expansive range of art practices such as land art, performance etc. Like many artists of my generation, my work developed with an acceptance of art as a fluid form where installations, curations, books, photographs, texts, films, sound pieces, workshops and events, had already been assimilated into art's ever expanding definitional net. It is, in part an acceptance of such a flexibility of approach, that allows artists to work successfully in a range of unlikely contexts. As the constituting framework of art has expanded, its colonising enterprise has also encouraged hybridity where text and image, sound and found objects, performance and theory can co-exist. Within art and design education, the research potential of art practice is predicated on an understanding that interdisciplinary approaches and mixed methodologies have already proved to be creative models for producing new educational insights (evidenced in the research and writings of Candlin 2000; Prentice 2000; Eisner 2002;

Sullivan 2005; Hickman 2008). One of the 'lessons' that Eisner proposes education might learn from forms of thinking that the arts embody, is the inextricable connection between form and content, between 'how something is said and what is said' (Eisner 2004: 6). For example if you 'Change the cadence in a line of poetry [...] you change the poem's meaning' (ibid 7). Speaking about his encounter with W.H. Auden's *Five Songs no V*, Dana Gioia²⁸ remarks, as if to confirm Eisner's point, 'we experience the joys of words so intricately arranged that their secret harmonies become tangible... Auden's work employs pleasure as the most reliable means to enlightenment. Intelligence not detached from emotions' (Gioia 2007). Gioia expresses his enjoyment of the multi-textuality of the poem, its fun, its musicality its contradictions and complexity as enabling 'the meaning to be felt, in ways more intense than mere ideas could generate. Sometimes the fun is in the subject itself, more often the pleasure is stitched into the very verbal fabric of the line' (ibid). Eisner draws on and cites both Polanyi (1966) and Dewey (1938; 1941; 1953) to stress what Gioia believes; that in the cohesion of form and content the aesthetic and embodiment are inextricable from the intellect. Paul Crowther (1993) further elaborates the interconnectedness of mind and body in the process that allows meaning to be felt. He references Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1972) to argue that meaning in symbolic formations becomes stabilised through embodiment. Crowther's point is that prior to language there is being in the world, feeling, seeing, moving etc. through which the vectors of difference (as articulated by Derrida²⁹) are experienced prior to their articulation in language. The body and embodied experiences are for Merleau-Ponty what make consciousness possible, 'our fundamental knowledge of the world comes through our body's experience of it' (Merleau-Ponty in Crowther 1993: 41). This situates art practice, with its ready acceptance of multimodalities as a significant way of 'coming to know'³⁰.

In their interventions in galleries and museums contemporary artists Dion (1990) and Fraser (1991) embody generic characters within the museum's infrastructure; Dion becoming the archaeologist or anthropologist, Fraser the tour guide or guest speaker. These roles build on those appropriated by artists earlier in the twentieth century, where Ernst and Baargeld (1919) and Warhol (1970) become curators, Broodthaers (1961), the museum director and Ukeles (1973) the museum cleaner. Of earlier initiatives, Broodthaers and Ukeles, knowingly utilise parodic strategies, similar to

²⁸ Dana Gioia, Chief executive for National Endowment for the Arts speaking on Radio 3, 20 August 2007.

²⁹ Derrida's concept of difference – whereby 'whether in the order of spoken or written discourse no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which is not simply present.' Derrida in Crowther p. 28.

³⁰ I borrow the term from Phillida Salmon's 1980 publication of the same name in which her advocacy of experiential learning is clear.

those which underpin Fraser and Dion's work. In order to investigate the construction of 'nature' by the natural history museum, Dion suggests that it helps to use some of the institution's own tactics, particularly the microcosmic and the macrocosmic. He talks of 'becoming the museum performing all of its activities – collecting, classifying, archiving, conserving, displaying, in order to propose the museum's functions as vital organs of a body that interacts with other bodies [institutions],' (in McShine 1999: 98).

It is perhaps all too easy to set up an opposition between art driven solely by aesthetic concerns and socially engaged/political art. However, as an artist and educator with a professional involvement with gallery and museum education, I am well aware that there is still antimony, not only between the aesthetic and educational viewpoints in galleries and museums but also between the fields of art and education more generally. Art, it would be fair to say, is not of great concern to many debates about education and education is sometimes viewed with suspicion in the field of art³¹. Carol Duncan (1995: 25) outlines some further antagonism between three fields of study, aesthetics, education and social politics, that lay claim to the gallery and museum's terrain. Although rarely held in total isolation, viewpoints aligned to these fields of study can be seen to inflict dislocation between education, intellect, aesthetics and ideology in galleries and museums.

Allegiance to subject position, discipline and methodological approach can result in some particularly entrenched views particularly about learning. Falk and Dierking have highlighted some problems surrounding definitions of learning in museum settings, (which also hold true for learning in galleries). They write 'learning is a much used and much abused term, and our belief is that the confusion lies in the various ways learning is defined as well as, in some of the underlying assumptions of traditional learning theory [...] Much of the confusion can also be attributed to the tendency to treat as synonyms the words *learning*, *education*, and *school*' (Falk and Dierking 1992: 97/98). This is an important point for this thesis given that Artists' Interventions operate across the aesthetic/education/ideology spectrum – they form part of a more general development that questions the efficacy of traditional subject divisions.

³¹ In recent debates about education in galleries and museums it is noteworthy that many institutions have taken the term 'education' out of departmental and job titles. For example, educators at Tate are now known as 'Curators of Learning'.

A case study

I have used my own intervention, *An Elite Experience for Everyone*, as a case study within my PhD thesis. A case study is a 'strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence' (Robson 1993: 52). The phenomenon in this instance is an Artists' Intervention, made by the author, in the context of the William Morris Gallery, London. Yin (1984) defines case study research method as an enquiry 'that investigates a contemporary phenomenon [...] when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used' (Yin 1984: 23). This definition enables me to take a reflexive approach to my own practice as an artist alongside my interactions with others, both direct and mediated through the intervention.

My intervention paid homage to Fraser's *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, which was performed initially at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in February 1989.³² In her extraordinary 'tour guide performance,' Fraser outlines the circumstances surrounding her invented museum 'docent' (guide), Jane Castleton; who would typically be a volunteer, possessing a certain amount of leisure time. The precision with which Fraser uses dress, and language redolent with the insecurities of 'urhs' and 'ums', carries her audience's belief in the character but as Fraser comments: 'Jane is a fictional docent, I would like to consider her less an individual "character" with autonomous traits than as a site of speech constructed within various relations constitutive of the museum' (1991: 105³³). Fraser's gallery talk was performed a number of times before it was produced as a text in the highly influential periodical *October* in 1991. Fraser's decision to publish the performance script makes available the sheer magnitude of research and erudition that underpins her artwork. This too, can be said of many Artists' Interventions, which require in-depth research beyond the field of art in order to achieve their outcomes. Yet outside the art field, it is unlikely that many would recognise that 'research activity,' normally made explicit through report writing and other publications, is implicit in critical art practices.

Through the process of planning and staging the intervention I was able to engage at first-hand with networks of gallery and museum practices that were held in place by social relations of power. Through an interventionist process I explored parody,

³² Fraser's intervention was developed over a one year period as part of the *Contemporary Viewpoints Artists Lecture Series*, organised by the Tyler School of Art of Templeton University.

³³ Fraser *Museum Highlights; A Gallery Talk* *October* published in *October*, vol. 57, Summer 1991 pp 105-22.

legitimised transgression and fictitious narrative, all aspects that I had already identified within a history of Artists' Interventions.

Attempting an analysis of *An Elite Experience for Everyone* involves a complex case of self-positioning as I am the artist and the researcher. This is further complicated by my identity as a lecturer of Art, Design and Museology at the Institute of Education and my former lecturing positions in Colleges of Art and Design. I currently teach MA modules in which students examine the social and philosophical underpinnings of learning in gallery and museum contexts. My research interest in gallery and museum education is long-standing, it formed the locus of my MA thesis in 1991, where I worked closely with the Whitechapel Art Gallery to research their artist-led educational provision for school groups and its impact on young people's learning in art and design. More recently I worked on a two year DCSF (DfES/DfEE) funded research project *Creative Connections*³⁴ to discover the key factors that determine teachers' effective use of galleries and museums as a learning resource and to examine the extent to which current provision of museum and gallery continuing professional development (CPD) contributes to this.

I therefore approached the opportunity to intervene in the William Morris Gallery collection with self-interest that stems as much from pedagogical involvement with galleries and museums as a learning resource, as it does from prior experience of institutional critique, as a component part of my practice as an artist.

In this case study I too took some calculated risks. As a qualitative research method, a case study permits the researcher to stand inside rather than outside the case. I aimed to use the opportunity afforded to me to bring new understanding of the complex issue of intervening in an historic art and design collection, extending experience and adding strength to what was already known through previous research. The case study was, of course, too specific to draw general conclusions so in my thesis it has been used as part of a mixed methodology of research approaches, with the intention to bring specific insights to that research that would have been impossible to gain through other means.

Methodological shifts or connotations which allow something to be said differently and which break with expectations of the 'correct procedure' can be very illuminating. The possibilities for such shifts often occur in-between categories, in the grey areas

³⁴ See: Robins, C. and Woollard, V. (2002) and Robins, C. and Woollard, V. (2003)

between theory and practice, between social science and art, between pedagogy and parody. The potential of such 'sites,' exists for me, as for many others, as a productive area of resistance to dominant, yet sometimes unnecessarily limiting institutional methodologies in the field of education. This has confluence with my interests in practice-based research³⁵ more generally and my advocacy of alternative modes of assessment within academic systems.

³⁵ Practice-based research is the term used within higher education to describe making disciplines when aligned to research, e.g. in the form of doctoral studies. See James Elkins' (2009) *Artists with PhDs: on the new Doctoral Degree in Studio Art*. Washington DC: New Academia Publishing.

Chapter 3 Galleries and Museums as Pedagogic Institutions

Outline of chapter

This chapter is not intended as a comprehensive study of learning in galleries and museums but rather provides a pedagogic backdrop, against which Artists' Interventions are positioned. It is important to stress that Artists' Interventions have been situated both in opposition to, and in confluence with, the gallery or museum's discourses. 'Educating' a public has been at the heart of public galleries and museums since their inception, and can even be seen in their pre-history, when collections were used as an effective means of supporting narratives and ideologies.

Chapter three provides a backdrop for the ways that education has been threaded through gallery and museum collections from the outset and charts the often conflicting aims for the use of visual and material culture in the pursuit of power, knowledge and understanding and in support of taste. The chapter is divided into sections that chart changes in emphasis of the gallery or museum's pedagogic roles and methods. The first section examines the museum's proto-period. It may seem that reviewing the condition of learning through collections prior to the eighteenth century is remote from the contemporary concerns of this thesis. However, I would argue that this territory is important precisely because pre-Enlightenment models have had an influential hold on artists due to their open ended, imaginative and poetic possibilities for interpreting the world, possibilities that were somewhat punitively banished in the rational ordering systems that followed. These early collections, such as those that formed the Tradescants' 'Ark' in Lambeth (established 1629), do not offer an evolutionary model of development through to the museums of today. However, they are historically significant, and propose ways of understanding the world that appear to have recently accrued more significance as the assuredness of scientific master narratives has faded in late modernity under the influence of post-structural theory.

Introduction

Today's public galleries and museums owe their provenance to the Enlightenment; they are products of the modern period. Since their inception in the late eighteenth century they have been developed, deployed, enjoyed and scrutinised as pedagogic and political institutions. Education, immutably intertwined with the concept of

modernity, has been at the core of public museum culture for over two centuries. 'To enlighten is to educate to lay out knowledge so that it may be absorbed' (Hooper-Greenhill in Carbonell 2004: 561). But the museum's pedagogic role, predicated in the present climate on the deceptively simple egalitarian principle of extending access to learning from collections beyond an elite minority, continues to divide opinion and fuel debate³⁹, as do issues of how knowledge might be constructed through the interpretation of exhibited material and what exactly galleries and museums are for. The Artists' Intervention currently, (rather than historically) can be seen as one strategy for brokering between the museum and inclusive education.

One of the overarching intentions of my research is to question and review assumptions concerning the distinctive potential of Artists' Interventions for meaning making and learning in the gallery or museum. This immediately raises questions concerning the particular circumstances and environments into which artists intervene and are requested to intervene, as well as questions about the changes in ownership and hierarchies of meaning making in the context of such institutions.

There are those who see the museum as an irredeemable reservoir of class ideology - the very notion of the museum is corrupt to them. Then there are those who are critical of the museum not because they want to blow it up but because they want to make it a more interesting and effective cultural institution.

(Dion 1997: 16)

If it is possible to accept galleries and museums as axiomatically pedagogic, it follows that the discourses of these institutions, which have been disrupted or contested by Artists' Interventions, are similarly pedagogic. Corrin, chief curator at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 2001, claims that contemporary artists can: 'breakdown artificial boundaries imposed on objects' and 'inflect questions regarding categories of thinking around visual culture and [encourage] visitors to take up the gauntlet to become collaborators or partners in considering the questions raised by the conjunctions that are formed' (Corrin 2001: 11). If, as Corrin and others claim, new understandings can be gained from artists' initiatives, and if pre-existing (possibly ineffective) learning and teaching models can be questioned and modified, then it is important to critically review aspects of the museum's developing 'discourse of learning'. It is through and

³⁹Debates about the role of education in museums formed part of a 'Cumberland Lodge' weekend conference in Windsor 'What are Museums For?' September 2004. Claire Fox, who was one of the organisers and a key speaker, stated that: 'the whole of museum life is being reorganised around educational ends [...] learning is no longer to be intermittent it is to be relentless.' The implication being, that other functions of the museum were being compromised by education's central and all pervasive role. She continued, 'museums and galleries are in danger of prostituting their work to closed educational and political ends' (Fox in Ovenden 2004: 2). The conference was organised by the 'Institute of Ideas' and was attended by many directors of national & regional museums, a considerable number of whom appeared to support the views voiced by Fox.

in such discourse, with its increasingly sophisticated systems of representation, that artists have made interventions and disruptions.

Pre-Enlightenment: collections for the curious

Until the time of Elias Ashmole, in the closing years of the seventeenth century, cabinets of curiosities remained associated with a 'mysterious and hierarchical vision of society', fundamentally indebted to the legacy of scholasticism and its allegorical perception of the world. Behind the mystery of each object – unique fascinating and marvellous – there loomed the shadow of an ancient body of learning that had been lost, and which in order to be revealed once more awaited only the meticulous, impassioned gaze of the collector.

(Mauriès 2002: 35)

In the museum's proto-period, as cabinet of curiosity or wunderkammer,⁴⁰ educational and political roles were not entirely absent but had yet to achieve clear expression. The founding principles of these, mainly princely, early collections are substantially different from those of the public museums that would supersede them. However, there are some confluences, namely: accumulation, conservation, definition, classification and prestige. In most accounts of the transition from pre- to post-Enlightenment collections, disorganisation and confusion tend to characterise the 'pre' period, while the 'post' period is denoted by the order and rationalism of newly formed classification systems described as a direct outcome of scientific progress (mainly referencing Linnaeus⁴¹ and philosophical thought⁴²). However, these stark polarisations are somewhat misleading. It is not that early collections had no sense of order but the order that they intended to communicate appears alien and wayward to contemporary western understanding⁴³.

It needs to be conceded however that in the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, collections were more subjectively accrued than those that succeeded them and many appear to be extremely whimsical in character. This was a time when the cult of curiosity reigned; historically, it held brief sovereignty for understanding the world, an interregnum of about 300 years, between the dominance of theology and science. In this period selected artefacts and natural specimens enjoyed an

⁴⁰ The term Cabinet of Curiosity came into use only gradually and had no specific meaning before 1550. In Italy and France precursors were known as Studioli and Estudes, in Germany as Kunstkammer (Chamber of Art) soon after Wunderkammer (Chamber of Wonders).

⁴¹ Swedish Botanist, Carl von Linné (1708–1778), or Linnaeus as he is better known, invented a universal classification system for plants, animals and minerals, some of which are still in use today.

⁴² Indebted to René Descartes' *Discourse and Method* (1637) and to John Locke (1690, 1693) and Francis Bacon (1620, 1623).

⁴³ In Borges' essay *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins* he writes about a 'Certain Chinese Encyclopaedia,' which I refer to in more depth on p. 176. This has been cited by Foucault and Crimp, among others, to illustrate how cultural constructions for ordering the world become 'naturalised' therefore eliding the contingent or arbitrary characteristics of familiar taxonomies that serve and reproduce particular constructions of knowing the world and hence ideological positions.

unprecedented autonomy as 'purveyors and enigmas of the universe' (Mauriès 2002: 43). Voyages of discovery and colonisation circumscribe collecting in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Travel and mercantilism created the conditions for the rise in popularity of 'curiosities' and 'wonders' and moreover enabled artefacts and specimens to be accrued outside the auspices of the church. The emergence of a new secular context for collections, developed in the private and guarded treasuries of the aristocracy (and eventually the bourgeoisie), symbolised, not only a shift in power and wealth away from church but also the beginning of the unsettling of theology from its hegemonic discourse.

The underlying principles of many early collections continued to reflect a unifying principle for understanding the world, something along the lines of: God is prolific, prodigious and ingenious; be impressed, be in awe and be afraid. However, there were signs in other collections of a new order, an attempt to represent the knowledge of the world in miniature; yours to possess and control. The ideal museum of the 1560s, according to Samuel Quiccheberg, in his treatise on museology, was: 'a theatre of the broadest scope, containing materials and precise reproductions of the whole universe' (Quiccheberg in Mauriès 2002: 23). This is not so distant from the simultaneous pedagogic development of public museums and encyclopaedias some two centuries later.

Spectacular visions

An awareness of the construction of meaning through the principles of display also predates the educational quests of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Religious collections, in particular, often employed theatricality and spectacle to rival any twenty-first century interactive display. Their intentions, according to Bann (1995), were to entertain and astonish audiences whilst simultaneously inculcating them into the doctrines of the Church. This is an important point; the zealous enthusiasm with which the Church laid claim to objects from the material world in order to impress and impose a vision on its audience was to set an example in ideological persuasion that would be intrinsic to collections as they expanded from church to aristocracy and to the public sphere. In Stephen Bann's account of viewing religious collections in the Middle Ages, he draws on Erasmus' satirical account of a visit to Thomas Becket's shrine at Canterbury Cathedral, made between 1512–1514. This extract, although somewhat tongue-in-cheek, illustrates the spectacle and theatricality of the event:

“He opened up for us the chest in which the rest of the holy man's body is said

to lie”

“You saw the bones”

“No that is not permitted nor would it be possible without the use of ladders. But within the wooden chest is a golden chest; when this is drawn up by ropes, it reveals immeasurable treasure”

“The cheapest part was the gold. Everything shone and dazzled with rare and surpassingly large jewels some the size of a goose egg. Some monks stood about reverently. When the cover was removed we all adored. The Prior pointed out each jewel by touching it with a white rod, adding its French name, its worth and the name of the donor. The principal ones were gifts from Kings.”

(Erasmus in Bann 1995: 21)

From early collections to the present day a continuum can be observed whereby art and artefacts are arranged as purveyors of narratives and devices for publicly instituting meaning. Since medieval times careful attention has been paid to the presentation of collections and to the construction of particular viewer experiences. Learning in these instances can be seen to be formed around an act of looking, animated by a process of showing and fixed by the dual forces of context and narrative. This context and experience of viewing cannot be easily separated from the privileging of certain meanings and the dissemination and construction of knowledge. The notion that making meaning is always embedded in context is evident in Erasmus’s related scenario as much as it is in an early twentieth century European ethnographic display.

Spectacle the antithesis of dialogue?

The lineage of the spectacle in the museum is a long and strong one that stretches back to the museum’s proto-period prior to the eighteenth century. The church, as evidenced in Erasmus’s account above, set an early precedent for laying claim to objects from the material world which could be displayed in order to impress and impose a vision on a credulous audience. Both early ecclesiastical and princely collections demonstrate a zealous enthusiasm for the power of representation mapped onto ideological persuasion. Spectacle’s part in an effective repertoire of persuasion may seem by definition to be immune from human activity but in fact it often took the form of participant activity, albeit activity that was inaccessible to any projected review or correction.

Display and containment, marking difference

Early collections, as their names suggest,⁴⁴ placed great importance on display apparatus and paraphernalia such as cabinets and cupboards.

The founding secret that lay at the heart of cabinets of curiosities was thus dual in nature: their intention was not merely to define, discover and possess the rare

⁴⁴ See footnote 5.

and the unique, but also, and at the same time, to inscribe them within a special setting which would instil in them layers of meaning.

(Mauriès 2002: 25)

Cabinets, cases, panels, boxes, and drawers spoke of many different orders. But there was a notable overarching desire to establish continuity between art and nature. These categories of *artificialia* (art & artefacts) and *naturalia* (specimens) were exhibited cheek by jowl in many early collections such as the cabinet of Francesco Calozari 1622. Here, prize possessions were displayed on a kind of altar. The collection was not without hierarchy or order, but this was a much more personal matter. Rarity was often the *a priori* justification for an object's presence and placement within a display hierarchy. However, rarity was certainly contingent, e.g. geographically as in the case of ethnographical objects, or in relation to time, as with many relics. Priorities for viewing would often be constructed around how fiercely items were desired. Strangeness and size were often qualifying qualities, as pioneer collector, John Tradescant's⁴⁵ letter of 1625 testifies. He requests of Edward Nicholas, secretary to the Navy, that voyages to North America and West Africa would supply examples of wonders from the natural world – 'a riverhorse (hippopotamus); an elephant's head 'with the teethe in it very larg'; 'the greatest sorts of Shellfishes Shelles of Great flying fishes & Sucking fishes with what els strang' (in Potter 2006: 167).

Scopophilia and the imaginative allure of anecdote

When viewing such collections as those of Francesco Calozari or Johann Septimus Jörger⁴⁶ the eye was privileged above other sense experiences. According to Olalquiaga, 'these collections privileged and confirmed looking as the foremost mode of intellectual apprehension and retention' (1999: 222). This also echoes Mauriès's assertion regarding the ancient body of learning awaiting only the meticulous, impassioned gaze to be revealed once more⁴⁷. Olalquiaga suggests that: 'Such an accumulation presents its collection as surfaces on which the eye can register colours textures forms as a composite sensation of elusive meanings' (ibid). A sense of awe and wonder, not dissimilar to the pre-requisite responses to ecclesiastical collections, would be seen as an appropriate response. A state of held breath, a literal arresting of the emotions, would suffice as the manifestation of awareness of human insignificance in the face of cosmic magnitude. The opening out of this response was to extend by

⁴⁵ The John Tradescants, father and son, were gardeners to Robert Cecil the Duke of Buckingham and Charles I. Their collection of rarities became the London's first public museum, commonly known as 'Tredskin's Ark' in South Lambeth, this was later to become celebrated as Elias Ashmole's collection when it went on show in the 1680's in a new building in Oxford. See Potter 2006.

⁴⁶ Jörger's mid 17th century collection in Nuremberg contained natural objects but was dominated by classical sculpture, see Olalquiaga 1999.

⁴⁷ See footnote 1.

association a sense of reverence to those who tamed, presented or mediated such magnitude and who could therefore not be overlooked. Again this has significance for the cultural capital accrued by contemporary collectors and by extension those who become directors of public museums.

Joining things up

The sensory intensity of scopophilia and the imaginative allure of anecdote were further tied and amplified by the principle of analogy. Barbara Stafford's (2001) explorations of the principles of analogy suggest that the dismissal that analogous connections have received since the eighteenth century is a problematic oversight. She reminds her readers that: 'Analogia, or ana/logos, signifies 'according to due ratio' and 'according to the same kind of way [...] both ancient and modern, its figures of reconciliation expressed how self could relate to other, how human beings might exist in reciprocity with society or in harmony with nature' (Stafford 2001: 22). In these early collections, of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the secret that lay at the heart of everything was unity; the antithesis of Enlightenment's ordering (differentiating) principles that would supersede them. Looking was focussed as a passion for finding analogies or hidden connections.

Weaving tall stories

Objects fabricated by the human hand and those from the 'natural' world had equal status and allure in the museum's proto-period. Most collectables were acquired from travelling traders who went from court to court selling intriguing items and telling fantastic tales about them. The narratives that were spun around objects of 'curiosity' were often more curious than the objects themselves. This was also an age in which the ubiquitous presence of magic, mysticism and superstition permeated the meaning of objects. With a desire to acquire unique and rare items, the aberrant and the freak became significant categories along with the proliferation of fakes.

Natural objects were often read allegorically as representatives of extraordinary narratives that linked the visible to the invisible. The invisible could follow the trajectory of the unseen in religious collections and displays, but could also refer simply to a distant land, another country. The fragmentary aspect of natural specimens would have been essential for the imaginative projection that could accompany them. Similarly the repetition of anecdotes cemented desires to return fragments to the whole and was fundamental to an imaginative projection that increased their desirability. All the while the totality remained unknown, it could be

re-configured at will; flying deer's wings or unicorn's horns were deliciously tantalising material possessions that wetted the appetite of many to acquire the whole animal. In the novel *The Four Wise Men*, Michel Tournier's character Gaspar, King of Meroë recounts:

I was passing with my retinue through the market of Baaluk, famed for diversity and distant origin of merchandise displayed there. I have always been curious about strange things and bizarre creatures that nature has seen fit to invent. At my orders, a kind of zoological reserve has been set up in my parks and in it remarkable specimens of the African Fauna are kept. There I have gorillas, zebras, oryxes, sacred ibises, pythons of Seba, and laughing cercopithecids. No lions or eagles, they are too common, too vulgar in their symbolism, but I am expecting a unicorn, a phoenix and a dragon, which have been promised me by travellers on their way through. To be on the safe side I have paid for them in advance.

(Tournier 1982: 5)

Clearly Tournier's is a fictional characterisation, but real life peddlers of such fantasies were very much present and in demand. Such 'trading' was also supplemented by the enhancement of natural objects to render them more fantastic and more desirable. Rare 'birds of paradise', were in fact often specimens of various bird varieties whose legs were severed to fit their legendary status as legless creatures of continual flight. Mermaid skeletons⁴⁸ were the composite results of fixing fish and the human remains of small children or monkeys, in a grotesque fabrication process that met demands for ever more exotic rarities. Tales of far off lands, told at a time when the majority of people had tangible experiences of only the most immediate local environments, led to some of the most imaginative and fantastically mythic projections of the world.

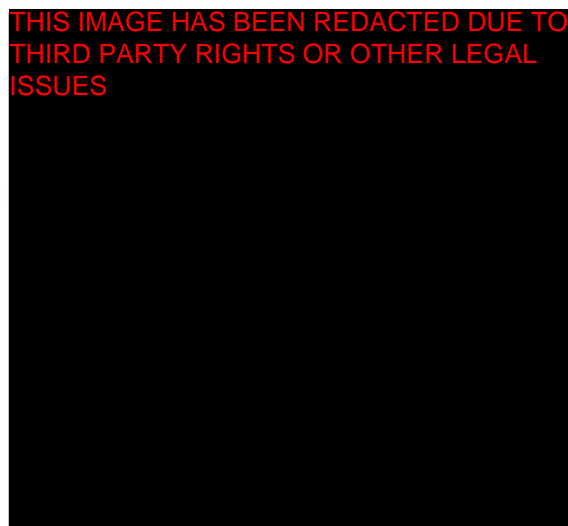


Fig. 7: Thomas Grünfeld *Misfits* (1994)

⁴⁸ Such as the one on display in the British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery.

The Enlightenment

The programme of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy. The only thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self destructive.
(Adorno and Horkheimer 1997: 3)

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, curiosity's interregnum experienced a stultifying decline as the term became increasingly associated with ignoble causes, and idle pleasures. René Descartes' *Search after Truth*, published in 1701, after his death, made the assertion that a 'healthy mind' was not compatible with 'insatiable curiosity'. Although it was some time before this notion was fully assimilated into praxis, wonder was slowly entering its ebb tide to become, as Mauriès writes, 'a low, bumptious form of pleasure' (2002: 126).

Descartes could in some ways be proposed as the natural father of the Enlightenment and, at the birth of the public museum, it became clear that it too was to inherit enduring characteristics from the same paternal lineage. From Descartes the museum became heir to a quest for knowledge that could be based on 'pure reason', distinguishable from what was already known and from tradition and superstition. In a European worldview, intoxicated by the 'certainties' of science, new public museums had an important first lesson to teach: that curiosity was not only harmful to the feline species but would be of little benefit to homo sapiens. 'Unprejudiced' pure reason was thought to lead to objective knowledge producing 'universal truths' and 'grand or meta-narratives'. This had a significant impact on societal values; in the new spirit of scientific enquiry and belief in a judicious order, curious collections such as those referred to earlier, were temporarily relegated to the lower slopes of human knowledge until such time when they could be rationally reconfigured. The collections that would follow banished to the sidelines the freak, the fake, the joker and the trickster. But it wasn't just idiosyncratic collections and rationally suspicious exhibits that came under attack, religion too, particularly the Old Testament, started to look a bit tenuous even irrational under the cold eye of reason.

In Britain, the biblical account of the 'raising of Lazarus,' was described by Thomas Woolston, in his *Six Discourses* (1727-30), as 'fable and forgery' (in Porter 2000: 114). Porter goes on to demonstrate the growing doubt of eighteenth century thinkers who questioned the plausibility of that most sacred of texts by asking questions such as: 'how could evil spirits have been driven into Gadarene Swine when everyone knew that the Jews didn't keep pigs? [or how] could Jesus really have seen – at least, not

without a miraculous telescope – all the kingdoms of the world from any conceivable mountain?’ (Porter 2000: 114).

In brief, just as Cabinets of Curiosities had marked a transition of power from church to aristocracy, the eighteenth century witnessed a momentous period of upheaval in Europe, where the pendulum of power swung from royalty to bourgeois nation state. It is difficult to imagine the scale of disruption and change in some parts of Europe at that time. In France there was a revolution that led to the execution of a Monarch and the declaration of a republic together with a fairly substantial assault on Christianity.⁴⁹

To the reformers of the eighteenth century, cabinets of curiosity, which encouraged a mythic view of the world, sent out the wrong educational messages, they encouraged imaginative projections, wild speculation, poetic analogy, mystery and superstition. In the doubt, division and suppression of parts of collections that would follow, it was the aberrant, the fake and the downright weird that were deemed inappropriate in newly emergent taxonomies. The new order sought out very different forms of educational engagement. That is not to say that curious items disappeared from view altogether, far from it, their presence surfaced elsewhere, in the circus, the freak show and other such spectacles (Meecham and Sheldon 2009: 133-138). But, like the repressed in Freud’s psychoanalytical theories (1932, 1934), these banished aspects of the museum’s discourse: (jokers, fakes and frauds), would eventually, some 200 years later, return as useful component parts for understanding the world. I suggest that Artists’ Interventions form a part of that return and explore this link on p. 174.

New values new orders

The process of re-evaluation and re-ordering was substantial and involved two main directives: the institution of many new discrete branches of knowledge or ‘disciplines’ formed by the division of pre-existing domains and the presentation of these new branches of knowledge to enlighten the public. From the eighteenth century onwards the separation of practice and knowledge, and the further division of knowledge and practice into branches of autonomous disciplines progressively came to dominate Western epistemology. With the Enlightenment period ‘knowledge, was no longer to consist of drawing things together, but in setting things apart, in differentiating on the basis of difference, rather than joining on the basis of similitude’

⁴⁹ Religion was momentarily usurped by new values to the extent that ‘in 1793 the Bishop of Paris was forced to confess himself a charlatan and declare that from now on “there should be no other cult than liberty and equality” (Jones, 2003: 22).

(Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 15). As this quotation suggests, the concepts of collections and their interpretation changed considerably when differences became more important than correspondences. In Britain, the dual influences of Cartesian logic, (which advocated a deductive methodology working from general principles to the particulars that could be used to prove them) and Baconian empiricism (a method which prioritised experiment, observation and recording) can be seen to exert a force on approaches to displaying, and interpreting collections. Curiosity's fixation with exotic, aberrant and rare specimens could not provide an overview from which such deductions could be made. 'To Descartes or Bacon the habit of curiosity was offensive because it attached itself almost obsessively to the individual object, rather than using the classes of objects to arrive at general conclusions, which would have the force of law' (Bann 1995: 24).

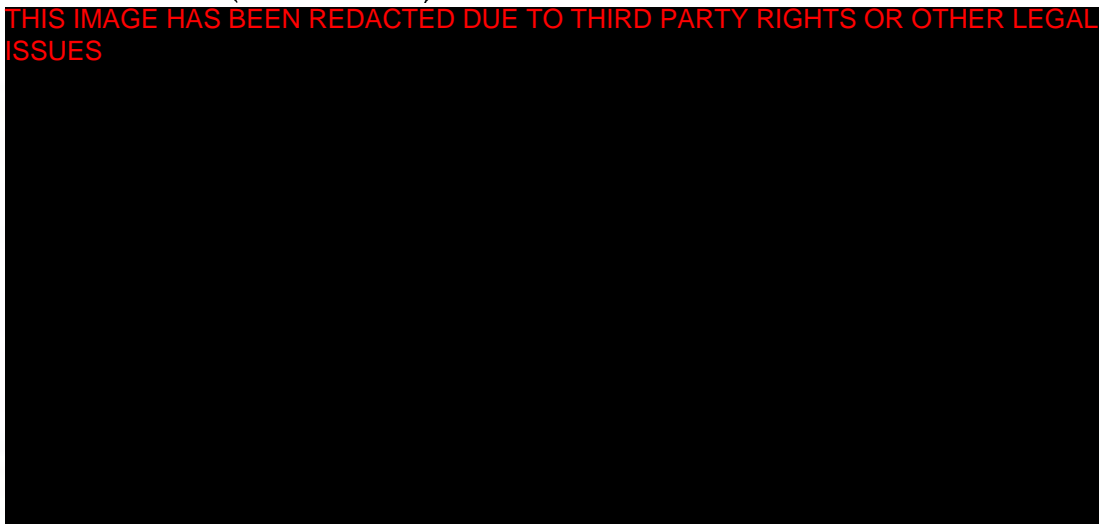


Fig. 8: Mark Dion
Scala Naturae (1994)

Fig. 9: Mark Dion Drawing for Scala Naturae,
The Great Chain of Being (1994)

Pre-existing models for ordering the museum's contents, taken from the princely and scholarly collections, had to be replaced with new orders and classes. Material culture was re-conceptualised to construct rational knowledge and formulate new meaning. One of the intentions was to identify universals in knowledge that could supersede a propensity for superstition and myths. Gradually collections began to follow a train of thought that positioned man, intellectual rational man, the inventor of the hierarchy, at its pinnacle and the world arranged in a chain of relationships beneath him. Contemporary artist Mark Dion has an enduring preoccupation with the persistence of such a model in natural history museums and the discourses they promote.

How is the story of life told? What are the principles of organisation, the master narratives, employed to construct the tale of nature? What does each set of assumptions, each conceit, promote or conceal? Each museum and every textbook and nature show on TV possesses a narrative skeleton. One of the most pernicious is the Great Chain of Being or Scala Naturae. This

ancient visual metaphor, rooted in Aristotle's zoological works, dominated natural history through well into the nineteenth century. The Great Chain of Being depicts life as a one-dimensional progression from the simplest forms (sometimes even minerals) to the most complex: almost always to humans, who construct the hierarchy, but sometimes even to this invisible realm of angels, archangels etc.

(Dion 1999: 98)

The development of European museum collecting and the arrangement of collections closely followed the more general evolution of European classification. Order was imposed and collections became more and more split and hierarchical. Natural specimens and artefacts ceased to be seen out in public together reflecting the antithetical nature of the new order to the old. As art and science continued to develop and refine their particular discourses, categories such as specimen, artefact and art were moved to separate rooms and eventually separate museums. In the 1880s the definitive split of Sir Hans Sloane's and other collections into artefacts and natural history (to form the British Museum and Natural History Museum respectively), bears testimony to this realignment. The presentation and communication of knowledge pursued the contours of newly emerging disciplines with museums themselves ordered according to such principles. Over the last 200 years further categories have been refined and developed, bringing with them distinctive display technologies, modes of classification and educational narratives. Such specialisation has meant that visitors have acquired quite different expectations of a visit to a local history museum, design museum, science museum, or art gallery.

Teaching machines

If how to arrange things? was a characteristic problem in the eighteenth century, re-arrangements, mainly in the form of further separations of classes of objects, continued to preoccupy curation well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the number of specialist museums increased. Similarly, the content of what was to be learnt was further structured along the emerging principles of the defining discipline under whose aegis a collection fell. The scholarly patterns of study were the deciding factors through which a particular conception of knowledge, whether it was art history or biological evolution, was made manifest in the museum. The most advanced art museum or gallery's emergent pedagogic methodology was hence aligned with and fixed by an emergent art history.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The emergence of a developing history of art can first be seen in the Belvedere Palace where paintings from the Royal collections of Vienna devolved to the state in 1776. Here Christian von Mechel, the curator, displayed works by national school or chronology so that the collection should as far as possible represent a visible history of art. Works were labelled and an informative guide-book accompanied their exhibition. See Syson, L. (2004) 'The Ordering of the Artificial World: Collecting Classification and Progress', in Sloan. Central to the new

As collections' affiliations with emergent branches of knowledge strengthened, curatorial methodology became increasingly didactic. As Philip Fisher remarks the museum became the first teaching machine (Fisher in Walsh 2006: 92). In the eighteenth century, instruction took over as the key objective in arrangements and juxtapositions of exhibits. Where once, pre-Enlightenment, sensory values or poetic association had governed displays of art, with paintings, mirrors, artefacts and sculptures placed in relation to one another in such a way as to produce 'a pleasing harmony', the public art museum developed new forms of exhibition that: 'involved an instruction in history and cultures, periods and schools, that in both order and combination was fundamentally pedagogic' (Fisher in Bennett 1995: 44). Through cohesion and ratification, the museum could present an impressive and reassuring configuration of knowledge from abstract thought to material culture. Even where arrangements of artefacts and art in the museum were grouped around subjects or themes (for example, collections of cooking implements, shoes or storage containers) a new imperative would mean that they would begin to be arranged to demonstrate *the* evolution of human/artistic progress.

Progress writ large

Progress was one of the great narrative tropes of the eighteenth century, destined to be internalised by its new public. It was intrinsically linked with improvement and new museum collections were often employed in its service. Visitors would be inculcated in an emergent progressive evolution of natural history by species and also to an emergent evolution of a civilising aesthetic. Whether for the pupil in a school or the patient in a hospital, progress became measurable by improvements and advancements and it needed to be visualised. The museum offered a perfect site where visualisation could be readily realised. But, as Roy Porter writes, progress and improvement were not taken as given – education towards an ideal moral and social state was key to the notion of progress.

Improvement – that ultimate Georgian buzzword [...]Landscapes, gardens, manufactures, manners, taste, art and literature – all were constantly talked up as 'improving' [...] and the public had to be constantly reassured that change was truly educative, morally edifying and socially advantageous.

(Porter 2000: 426)

The Enlightenment sought to produce, through the process of education, an autonomous rationality in individuals but also to institutionalise them in meta-

configurations of collections was an adherence to the ideal forms of Greek and Roman art and concomitantly Greek Revival architecture was often selected to inform the display these collections. Winckelmann's systematic cataloguing of Greek art formed the template for the organisation of painting at the Belvedere. See: Fisher, P. (2004) in Carbonell, B.M. (ed.) *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*. Oxford: Blackwell.

narratives and in particular theories of the grand narrative of progress. Human progress and sometimes decline⁵¹ were central components in the narratives of newly configured collections. The belief that progress in all areas would emancipate the whole of humanity from ignorance is a central utopian aspect of Enlightenment thought.

The concept of the public gallery or museum was both born of, and essential to, the constitution of social, political and pedagogic transformations in many European Nation States. Hence the museum's inception can be seen as firmly associated with revolutionary thought and action, the emergence of the bourgeoisie and the concept of a bourgeois public sphere. The notion of a public sphere may seem quotidian today but in the eighteenth century this new arena for discussion marked the constitution of the right to dissent that is fundamental to the Western concept of democracy.

Against the pleasure principle

The removal of particular forms of pleasure from the serious acquisition of knowledge is significant to the hierarchies of knowledge and institutions that would soon emerge. It wasn't exactly, as Mauriès (2002) states, that pleasure and learning were to become totally antithetical, more subtle forms of distinction would emerge. What started as small fissures between education and entertainment, amusement and pleasure, and furthermore between the emotions and senses and cognitive rationality would widen and deepen. The Cartesian system of binary oppositions, in which Mauriès's 'distinctions' were formed, is still deep rooted enough to trouble curators and gallery and museum directors today. Glenn Lowry illustrates this persistent anxiety in his discussion of the functions of galleries and museums in the twenty-first century:

What distinguishes the Guggenheim from other art museums is that rather than keeping a fine balance between the museum as school and the museum as theatre, a place for learning and a place for enjoyment, it has focussed its energies on becoming an entertainment centre and appears to be no longer interested in or committed to the ideas and the art that gave birth to the museum at its founding.

(Lowry 2004: 138)

⁵¹ In 1795 Alexandre Lenoir opened his 'Musée des Monuments Français' in Paris. It was 'filled with the contents of churches that had been sacked during the Revolution. Its longest gallery showed sculptures from sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (with some earlier material) arranged in rough chronology to encapsulate what Lenoir viewed as progress and decline. His curation aimed at providing viewers with an opportunity to learn and measure the degrees of perfection and imperfection in the evolution of these monuments. Lenoir saw the museum as serving both political and pedagogic ends. See Syson, L. (2004:113)

For Lowry (a museum director) it seems that returning to Enlightenment ideals is a matter of calling up egalitarian and emancipatory educational values, but even in the eighteenth century, the belief that it would only be a matter of time before the discernment of those relatively few 'men' would extend to the whole social spectrum was obviously optimistic. There is dialectical element within the gallery and museum's pedagogic role that cannot simply elide ideological contradictions. And perhaps the difficult task of how to make knowledge accessible, how to achieve inclusive galleries and museums, has always been tempered by a guilty secret that this very accessibility may not always be to the advantage of those whose self interests are most closely connected with these institutions. In this, galleries and museums can be seen to echo the church and the aristocracy in their realisation that the ideological potential of collections is one through which a maintenance of particular configurations of social order may be possible. The concern with divestment of any ideological tarnish has been a constant trope in the field of culture.

Science rules and measures

In the ensuing era of empirical rationality, connoisseurship in the visual arts could be regarded as akin to a science. According to Jonathan Richardson (1665–1745) whose ideas were based on Lockean empiricism: 'To be a connoisseur a man must be as free from all kinds of prejudice as possible; he must moreover have a clear and exact way of thinking and reasoning, he must know how to take in, and manage just ideas and, throughout, he must not only have a solid, but unbiased judgement' (Richardson in Syson 2003: 276).

Immanuel Kant's 'Critique of Judgement' (1781) leads to a similar conclusion and is a fundamental text, informing the development of modernist reception theories pertaining to art. Recognising the problems of subjectivity in matters of aesthetic judgement and therefore what constitutes superior quality and becomes canonical, Kant sought to instate the category of disinterestedness whereby judgement is unimpeded by personally motivated interests. 'Taste is the faculty of estimating an object or mode of representation by means of a delight or aversion apart from any interest. The object of such delight is called beautiful' (Kant 1952: 50). Beauty, or what we refer to now as aesthetics, is separated out by Kant from other forms of enjoyment, for example, 'agreeable' enjoyment (inherently connected to self interest and gratification) and 'good' (associated with a moral order). Beauty in contrast, requires disinterest; this does not mean we are not interested, but that the object, art for example, is viewed without a self-motivational interest. In Kant's view,

recognition of beauty or the aesthetic is universal precisely because it precedes any such interest we may have in any object and moreover comes before any cognitive apprehension. Knowing or cognising involves applying concepts to our sensory responses, and for Kant aesthetic experience exists prior to this. But this does not mean that he conceived it as an experience that was devoid of rationality or spirituality. In this thread of philosophical thought, failure to recognise beauty would be attributed to insensitivity. Some individuals would simply be deemed not to possess the requisite sensitivity to apprehend what to others was flagrantly palpable.

The implications of such pronouncements for viewing artworks seem clear, a special kind of looking is advocated and the ability to look in this way has produced a form of distinction. Bourdieu and Darbel have described Kantian aesthetic pleasure as 'an empty pleasure which contains within itself the renunciation of pleasure, pleasure purified of pleasure' (Bourdieu and Darbel 1979: 491). These distinctions as Bourdieu would comment, separate out, by a process of sublimation, the carnal from the cerebral, the transcendental from the natural. The ruptures to such an order occur in the form of the repressed erupting in, amongst other things, parodic and or burlesque forms (ibid). More recently, Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden and Ruth Philips (2006) have located such separations of sense modalities and hierarchies between forms of perception in museums, within an evolution of complicated colonial histories.

Objects at the service of the nation state

Echoing the ideas of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), who advocated that the quality of art could be read as a reflection of the society that produced it – and that art should not be analysed as self-referential, Richardson (1792), made a case for a new version of history. This version would reflect not 'accounts of revolution in empire and government' but 'a history of the arts and sciences wherein it would be seen to what heights [sic] some of the species have risen in some ages and in some countries, while at the same time on other parts of the globe, men are but one degree above common animals' (Richardson in Syson 2003: 345). These ideas are highly significant in the formation of knowledge that allowed objects to be put at the service of ideas. It is not hard, vis-à-vis colonisation and expansion of empire, to see the ideological uses to which such arguments could be deftly put. These new systems for classification brought with them an astonishing opportunity to construct the world according to principles that had the appearance of objective (scientific) veracity but which were in fact manipulated knowingly to serve the interests of a new order. As Preziosi so eloquently states:

The *dismemberment* of the traces of the past was thereby *re-membered*, rewoven into artificial narratives that had orientation and episodic sense. The museum presented documentary evidence of a state sanctioned evolutionary history outlining in a bold and materially palpable (and aesthetically sensible) manner just how we the citizens of the brave new world were what the past was aiming at all along (sound familiar).

(Preziosi 2004:73)

Just as 'flying deer's wings' could be conjured from fragments in the old collections, in the new Enlightenment order objects removed from their original context could demonstrate or prove the inferior nature of particular societies or be used as evidence of the hierarchy of value attached to cultural products. The new didactic role of the museum can be seen positioned within the problematised domain of Michel Foucault's codifying social practices. The rational and coherent display of art and artefacts was becoming more and more important to the articulation of knowledge.

The Enlightenment brought a new rationality to bear on the function and potential of galleries and museums as useful components of civilised society and by the nineteenth century, museums were duly graced with the task of social reform. It was intended that they should function as spaces of emulation within which visitors from the 'lower classes' might improve their knowledge, cultural sensibilities and their public manners and appearance by imitating the forms of dress and behaviour of the middle classes (Bennett 1995: 169). In *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault devotes an entire chapter to the production of such 'Docile bodies' in the eighteenth century. Bennett, who writes from a distinctly Foucauldian perspective, reveals subsequent developments that happened in the nineteenth century when museums became instructional spaces to regulate and normalise certain codes of behaviour. He identifies the learning that was advocated in galleries and museums from the outset, as following particular patterns and containing programmes that shaped possibilities for educational experiences. Through, for example, the institution of a division between the producers and consumers of knowledge – 'a division which assumed an architectural form in the relations between the hidden spaces of the museum, where knowledge was produced and organised in camera and its public spaces, where knowledge was offered for passive consumption – the museum became a site where bodies, constantly under surveillance, were rendered docile' (Bennett 1995: 89).

Protection of collections and regulation of the visiting populace were high on the agenda, and rules of conduct were closely interwoven into new legislation that permitted the public to visit galleries and museums. Whilst inclusive visitor profiles were advocated there was a parallel assumption that a noisy troublesome rabble from

the 'lower orders' would endanger exhibits and jeopardise the more learned and studious from visiting. Dr. Ward, quoted in Wilson (2002:36) shares his concerns that 'If public days should be allowed.... no persons of superior degree will care to come on such days so that this low Class with the lowest of the Mobb [sic], will make the museum that day a place of diversion'.

When Sir Hans Sloane's collection was offered to George II – for the nation,⁵² stipulations in his will stated below were to prove a considerable problem for the trustees of the museum for almost another century. 'It is my desire and my intention, that my said museum or collection should be preserved and kept... as well towards the satisfying of the desires of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons' (Sloane in Wilson 2002: 35). The inclusivity invoked by '*all persons*', was a somewhat challenging requirement for the trustees to achieve. In 1757, a draft of the rules and statues compiled by the trustees stated:

For although it was chiefly designed for the use of learned and studious men, both natives and foreigners, in their researches into the several parts of knowledge; yet being founded at the expense of the public, it may be judged reasonable, that advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general, as may be consistent with the several considerations above mentioned.

(Sloane in Wilson 2002: 35)

In the initial phase of the museum's opening, entry was so complicated and bureaucratic as to be off-putting to all but the most persistent. Tickets had to be obtained in advance and were limited to 10 per hour. The principal librarian had to approve the name of the applicant. Once in the museum the visitor would be escorted by a guide. The speed at which visitors were ushered through the collection was certainly not ideal and became a cause for concern. However, a visitor's account from 1782 points to the diversity of visitor the museum was attracting: 'The company who saw it, when and as I did, was various and of all sorts, and some, as I believe, of the lowest classes of the people of both sexes; for as it is the property of the Nation, every one has the same right (I use the term of the country) to see it.'⁵³

'For want of a little information'

Vergo, in contradistinction, recounts the woeful experiences of an eighteenth century bookseller, a Mr Hutton, who with some effort attains admission to the British Museum only to be humiliated by one of the museum's guides for enquiring as to what a group of objects actually were. 'Did the exhibits not have names written

⁵² The will was written but redrafted with added codicils between 1739 & 1752 – Sloane died in 1753.

⁵³ Carl Moritz, a German visitor in 1782, cited in Wilson, D. (2002) *ibid* p.35.

on many of them?’ came the curt retort with the implication that in itself this should be sufficient. Reflecting on the incident Hutton wrote, ‘It grieved me to think how much I lost for want of a little information’ (in Vergo 1989: 48). Hutton makes the case for museums to dutifully explicate what might otherwise be understood as a meaningless jumble of esoteric objects, by means of an analogy about finding a scrap of paper on the floor, rationalising that, if he was told that this scrap was in fact a letter written by Edward VI, he would suddenly value it.

What comes first the visitor or the object?

In the nineteenth century, a pedagogic imperative continued to dominate the museum’s function, coalescing with a strengthened belief that galleries and museums would have a civilising affect on society. However, more tensions concerning the museum’s role began to emerge as the nineteenth century unfolded. Was its pedagogic role to its audience or to its objects? Would its scholarly curatorial function be compromised by its pedagogic role? John Ruskin stated that: ‘The first function of a museum is to give an example of perfect order and perfect elegance to the disorderly and rude populace’ (in McClellan 2003: 15). Ruskin’s conviction of the inherent synonymy between art and high moral values, set up a persuasive axiom for art’s efficacious promise as a panacea for social ills’ (this was also a concept that would see a resurgence in the New Labour agenda of the twenty-first century⁵⁴). Ruskin believed that there were prerequisites for culture, for example: ‘you must have the right moral state first, or you cannot have art’ (1904: 80). And on this topic of reciprocity, he noted: ‘when that art is once obtained, its reflected action enhances and completes the moral state out of which it arose, and above all, communicates exaltation to other minds which are already capable of the like’ (ibid). Yet there is a caveat to Ruskin’s argument, which suggests there would still be ‘minds’ which were not capable of realising such a state of exaltation. For Ruskin there was now a bigger question; could such individuals be educated to become appropriately sensitive? This uncertainty was taken as a clarion call by other social reformers such as Matthew Arnold and became a challenge, which underpinned the pedagogic direction of galleries and museums well into the twentieth century.

Expansion of cultural institutions

In the nineteenth century wealthy philanthropists, in Europe and in the USA, inspired by a belief in the transformational powers of art, (and perhaps also by the

⁵⁴ e.g. The Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) (2001) published *Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives for All, Co-operating Across the Sectors to Tackle Social Inclusion* in which Museums, galleries and archives are urged to ‘develop projects which aim to improve the lives of socially excluded people’ (p. 9).

promise of immortality through an enduring legacy) founded galleries and museums for the public. An imperative to extend the civilising effects of art to disadvantaged parts of towns and cities may have been influenced by Ruskin's somewhat high-handed ideals, but for those who troubled to involve themselves more fully with the sections of society that they aspired to help a more pragmatic chord was struck. In London, the Barnetts, (who started The Whitechapel Fine Art Loan Exhibition in 1881 also called the St. Jude's Picture Exhibition that later became the Whitechapel Gallery in 1901), had a much more practical and wide reaching approach to what could be achieved through looking at paintings. Their notions of citizenship were not invested solely in an expectation that transformation could come about through culture alone, but were planned to work alongside other aspects of social reform. For example, Samuel Barnett, a staunch supporter of the introduction of the old-age pension, argued that the inequities of class distinctions could be ameliorated through education in many forms. Barnett's vision was part of the Victorian ethos of self-improvement. He proposed university extension lectures, debating societies, classes in arts and crafts *alongside* the provision of artworks for the public to view free of charge.

In time, the question of the nineteenth century public for galleries and museums became not so much about 'who was admitted, for virtually all were welcome, but how museums could be called upon to shape the public in keeping with perceived political and social needs'¹ (McClellan 2003: 7). How could museums be usefully employed as part of a transformational programme? The changing needs of particular societies started to directly shape the face of new galleries and museums and to determine what and how, learning was to take place in existing institutions. The 'how' could largely be characterised as a didactic form of information giving where knowledge is seen as an entity to be passed from an authoritative source to an uninformed recipient. 'The receiver of the message to be communicated is conceptualised as open to the reception of the message, which is received more or less efficiently, and in the same way by all' (Hooper-Greenhill 2004: 560). The 'what' followed a narrative of nationalism, rationalism and industry.

Transformational institutions

Nineteenth century concepts of the visiting public were often based on the assumption that citizens, particularly those of the 'lower orders' were eponymous empty vessels waiting to be filled with good or wicked influences. The museum's function was to provide the former. The museum and the transmission of knowledge through the museum was sometimes viewed as akin to a form of redemption for 'the

great unwashed'. As the cleansing machine first and foremost, the museum had to handle knowledge as if it was a commodity to be kept pristine, objective, singular and value-free - ready to be transmitted to others. Although there were exceptions, this model of learning in museums in the nineteenth century dominated until well into the twentieth century often eliding traces of the active (ideological) role of the museum in the construction of meaning. As Georges Bataille went on to write, in 1930, 'A Museum is like a lung of a great city each Sunday the crowd flows like blood into the museum and emerges purified and fresh' (1986: 25).

Serving the Commonwealth

A growing sense of the potential role that museums could play in oxygenating the nation's citizens and saving them from the amoral smog, meant that educational and political ideals became even more closely intertwined. In England, as in other colonial European countries, this also meant serving the needs of the *Commonwealth*. Ensuring high quality artisanship and producing skilled manual workers became an enduring legacy for Henry Cole, the first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington. Cole was also a senior civil servant with responsibilities for education in the mid-nineteenth century, he was focussed on facilitating a vision for education that would ensure that the quality of British craftsmanship would be exemplary. The museum's role, in concord with the school, was to educate by exemplar. The specific objective was that of producing skilled deferential manual workers.

Some of America's earliest major museums, in Boston and New York were modelled on strikingly similar values. The first director of the Metropolitan Museum in New York, speaking in 1887, deliberately echoed Henry Cole when he stated that museums were a 'resource whence artisanship and handicraft of all sorts may better and beautify our dwellings, our ornaments, our garments, our implements of daily life' (Cesnola in McClellan 2003: 17).

But changes were soon to come in the USA, a new aesthetic model would dislodge the objective of addressing the needs of industry from its prime position in the educational role of the museum. Benjamin Ives Gilman, secretary of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts (1893-1925), was one of the first to champion a set of goals that rejected the commodity associations of Cole's industry aligned pedagogics. The transition in the educational remit of the museum, from practical tool of instruction to one that placed far greater emphasis on an aesthetic response is outlined effectively

by Carol Duncan (1995) and Andrew McClellan (2003). Duncan cites from Gilman's *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (1918) which illustrates how aesthetic contemplation of timeless transcendental beauty came to take precedence (p. 16). Still echoing some of Ruskin's views, the civilising effect of museums was to induce in the viewer, (and this meant viewing in its strictest sense) an emotional and spiritual state, comparable, according to Gilman to the 'spiritual conversations' of Renaissance altarpieces (in Duncan 1995: 16). This 'otherworldly experience' was configured as an antidote to the ever-increasing materialism in the twentieth century. As Gilman's words, originally published in 1909, illustrate, the principal function was the cultivation and appreciation of beauty.

Any permanent repository of works of fine art has a double function: a primary one, that of securing appreciation of its contents; and a secondary one, that of conduction or at least permitting the investigation of them

(Gilman 2004: 419)

Making works of art easily accessible to all became education's new goal. Gilman advocated what he referred to as 'close companionship in beholding.' This was to be provided by museum guides (known as docents in the USA) and also by handbooks and lectures. His approach at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston extended to the training of tour guides and of schoolteachers alongside the establishment of a programme for schools.

Gilman's emphasis on the universalising aesthetic contemplation of carefully selected artworks was not without its critics. John Cotton Dana, a contemporary of Gilman's, blamed the aesthetic approach for producing what he referred to as 'gazing museums.' He saw museums as reproducing the values and distinctions of an elite. 'The kinds of objects, ancient, costly and imported that the rich feel they must buy to give themselves distinction, are inevitably the kinds that they as patrons and directors of museums, cause those museums to acquire' (Dana in Duncan 1995: 65). By contrast Dana favoured a model where the museum would focus on community and serving the everyday needs of visitors.

Both, Dana and Gilman, as McClellan points out, were in favour of the democratising potential of the museum and both were committed to education supporting docent programmes and forging close links with schools. Their opinions erred towards polar ends of a spectrum in which Dana placed little emphasis on the emotional and transformative power of works of art and Gilman stayed wedded to the concept of a universalising aesthetic. These two views of the pedagogic role of the museum

became locked in a tug-of-war that would last throughout the twentieth century.

By the beginning of the twentieth century aesthetic rationales for education had also led to the construction of a new ideal viewing subject, who should not be distracted from the power of selected works of art. Ever more careful attention was paid to viewing conditions, selection of works and to how viewers could be helped to appreciate supposedly universal aesthetic values. This was primarily in the domain of the gallery but museums where artefacts from a range of cultures were on exhibition adopted similar patterns. The power of display held an increasingly important position in determining interpretation and configuring meaning. And although the production of accompanying educational materials was present throughout many museums in the nineteenth century, it became a more serious matter in the twentieth. The challenge was how to make those silent witnesses those reticent objects speak and to ensure that what they were ventriloquised into saying could be shared by all.

Labels and tables

Alfred H. Barr Jr.'s installations, for The Museum of Modern Art's (MoMA) first exhibition in New York 1929, set the precedent for accepted reception theories regarding viewer-artwork relationships that would dominate throughout the twentieth century. Neutral coloured walls with paintings hung at a standard height seem so orthodox today that it is hard to imagine what a distinctive and purposeful break Barr's innovations made with previous conceptions of ideal viewing conditions. Notions that the visitor would want to see as much as possible had been questioned for some time⁵⁵, but with expanding collections overcrowding became a problem. To see these shifts as merely about interior design or aesthetic choices concerning the arrangement of artworks in a given space, would be to miss the significance of an emergent museological discourse that was developing through a whole spectrum of technologies that were essential to the formation of the MOMA, not just in New York but the modern art museum more generally.

The visitor as a viewing subject in these Barr installations was treated as if he or she possessed an ahistorical, unified sovereignty of the self – much like the art objects the spectator was viewing. These spare installations isolated the individual art objects the spectator was viewing, creating a one to one relationship with the viewer. ... The result magnified awareness of the object's, and the individual's independence. This aestheticised, autonomous, seemingly neutral exhibition method created an extremely accommodating ideological apparatus for the reception of modernism in the United States, where the liberal

⁵⁵ Berliner Gustav Waagen who advised the National Gallery in 1853 advocated giving works room to breathe and highlighting the gallery's 'better works' (in McClellan 2008: 125).

democratic ideal of the autonomous, independent individual born to natural rights and free will is the foundation of the mythology of the American dream.
(Staniszewski 1998: 70)

No longer were paintings 'skied' (i.e. hung above each other), nor were they arranged on rich brocades or against wooden panelling. Eye level hangs, where each work was isolated against a neutral background that supposedly 'said' nothing about period or context, formed part of a continued tendency to pare back gallery environment in order that visitors' attention could be focussed on individual works.

Although didactic labels were not present in Barr's initial exhibitions, they went on to become a hallmark of his exhibition technique. In 1974, Barr's art historian wife Margaret commented about her husband's innovative approach to text panels, that has now become a standard gallery practice,

the labels that my husband used to write were not labels for each picture, but they were general intellectual labels to make people understand what they were seeing [...] they explained the general nature of that room or the whole exhibition... Such a thing had never been done before.

(Barr in Staniszewski 1998: 64)

One of Barr's key triumphs was his ability to present radical new art and design to the public, in a way that gave the impression that it existed as part of a linear progression from already accepted past precedents. To facilitate this he utilised diagrams and flow charts such as Fig. 10. These position cubist and abstract works as the ultimate goal of a progressive continuum from nineteenth century antecedents. The inclusion of Japan and Africa would also suggest abstraction's synthesising and universalising properties.

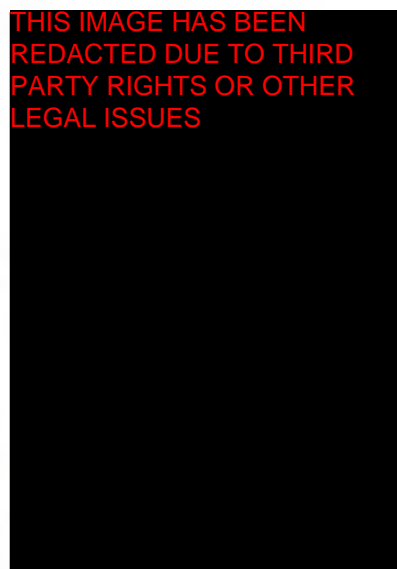


Fig. 10: Alfred H. Barr Jr *Flow Chart* (1936)

Confirming the influence of both Barr and Gilman a 1934 conference for museum professionals, held in Madrid, indicated the 'overwhelming consensus in favour of isolating works of art for purely visual consumption.' And a decade later, Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery London in 1945, said of works of art: 'the important thing is our direct response to them. We do not value pictures as documents. We do not want to know *about* them we want to know *them*, and explanations may often interfere with our direct responses' (in McCellan 2003: 26). But this dominant model was not without significant critics. From Dana's critique of Gilman's approach onwards many other examples can be found that highlight similar shortcomings in failing to acknowledge social history and cultural difference. Meyer Schapiro, for example, was amongst those who criticised Barr for eliding all social and political contexts in which art was and is produced and exhibited. Theodore Low, a pupil of Paul Sachs⁵⁶, similarly expressed his disappointment that America's museums had not lived up to their democratic goals, laying much of the blame on what he saw as the 'seductive charms' of scholarship and collecting. The training in connoisseurship on graduate training programmes for art historians was at the crux of Low's criticism. His tutor Sachs might be seen as justly deserving of this critique given that he advocated, in his speech to dignitaries, at the 1939 opening of the new Museum of Modern Art in New York, that the necessary qualities for a museum director were to:

be ever watchful to resist pressure to vulgarise and cheapen our work through the mistaken idea that in such fashion a broad public may be reached effectively. In the end a lowering of standards must lead to mediocrity... The Museum of Modern Art has a duty to a great public. But in serving an elite it will reach... the great general public by means of work done to meet the most exacting standards of an elite.

(in McClellan 2003: 22)

This is a significant moment when scholarship and education seemed to become detached from one another. A polarisation of concerns in museums, particularly in the USA of the 1930s, started to become more pronounced and widespread. *Education* – the interpretation of exhibits for a knowledge-hungry public and *connoisseurship* – scholarship, accessioning and curating – drifted apart, to appear like seemingly unconnected concerns⁵⁷.

⁵⁶ McClellan cites Paul Sachs (Founder of the first Museum Course at Harvard University and an influential figure in the establishment of the Courtauld Institute, London) as the most significant individual contribution to the professionalisation of museums.

⁵⁷ Henrietta Riegel writes of the dual processes of collecting and displaying within the museum context which she describes as 'scholarly, and more recently educational' positioning the two terms as if they were disconnected. (Riegel 2006: 83).

The work of interpretation was, from the 1930s, to be left increasingly to education departments. These have been typically housed in basements and staffed by women (Zolberg 1994; McClellan 2003). Seen as less important than other aspects of the museum's activities, increasing numbers of volunteers were recruited to work in education when at the same time a 'professionalisation' of other museum employees was underway. Curators became increasingly concerned with refining the conditions of display for ever more rarefied exhibits. However, as the twentieth century drew to a close, the need to consider interpretation throughout the full range of a museum's activities re-emerged.

The corporate museum and the emergence of a *New Museology*

The antidote, for public galleries and museums to the positivism of the nineteenth early twentieth centuries, arrived in the form of uncertainty, laced with a little guilt. The gallery and museum took a post-modern turn. By the mid-1990s the notion of the museum/gallery as a classic bourgeois institution had also been tempered by an understanding of its global, corporate institutional logic.

No longer, it seemed could public galleries or museums afford to shy away from expansion. Nor could these cultural institutions ignore the powerful allure of spectacle, the expansion of tourism and the commodification of the brand identity of the gallery or museum itself. Providing experiences that would have wide audience appeal, appeared to shore-up the institution's future against a competitive market. The portents for this new, corporatised model were exhibited much earlier in 1972 by Broodthaers in the final phase of his quasi-museum in which he predicted precisely such a development in gallery and museum culture. In its final moments, Broodthaers's museum (further discussed in chapter 4, p. 105), changed its name to become *Musée d'Art Ancienne, Département des Aigles, Galerie du XXeme Siecle* (1972) and offered itself up for sale in a last gesture of total commodification.

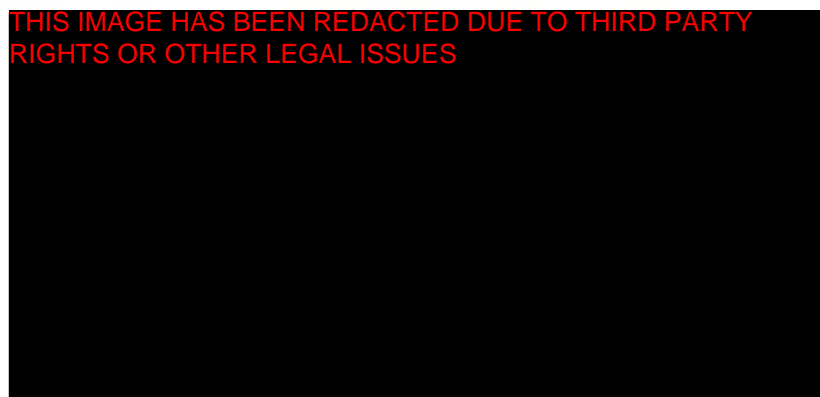


Fig. 11: Marcel Broodthaers's notice 'Musée à Vendre' (1972)

Douglas Crimp (1993) has suggested that Broodthaers etched out a 'parodic endgame':

These final gestures point pessimistically to a new phase in the museum's history, the one we are now experiencing: the conjunction of exhibitions as a form of public relations, of the ultimate reduction of art to private property and of the evolution of artistic strategies into those of a pure alignment with power. Broodthaers did not live to see the fulfilment of his darkest predictions in the present take-over of the culture industry by corporate interests.

(Crimp 1993: 228)

Crimp's bleak interpretation of the state of museum culture in the 1990s, is indeed suggested in Broodthaers's vision of the future, but with his critique of patrician values synonymous with the old museum, Broodthaers may himself be partially implicated in the evolution of the new corporate model. Artists who critiqued the divisive and hierarchical nature of museum culture wanted to change the situation. Although their radical critique of cultural elitism (most obviously evidenced in the 1960s and 1970s) revisited moments of the public museum's historical inception⁵⁸, it also had a surprising amount in common with a nascent new corporate agenda. For example, classic corporate incentives would include a desire for the largest possible market; this maps almost perfectly onto notions of expanding audience, inclusive practices, and breaking down hierarchies. Expanding or including new audiences may have started out as one of the aims of institutional critique but it has become evident that the corporate enterprise that has colonised most cultural institutions has similar objectives but for vastly different reasons. The corporate logic intends no agency for those who have previously been marginalised or excluded from cultural institutions, instead its aims are to co-opt them as potential market targets.

The corporatisation of the gallery or museum, outlined above, can be linked to forms of visitor consent, through pacification, superficial amelioration of difference and plenty of consumer opportunities and places to eat and drink. This was notably vilified in the Victoria and Albert Museum's slightly ill-judged ironic advertising campaign circa 1988, whose strap line read, 'An ace caff [sic] with quite a nice museum attached.'⁵⁹ But more quietly there has been a vast expansion of visitor facilities such as restaurants or retail floor spaces in nearly every major museum. Competition for visitor's attention and loyalty, via membership schemes, has increased and so has the prominence of corporate sponsorship reminders on display. However, this was not the only development in the museum's commitment to its public role

⁵⁸ For example it was the radicalism of the French Revolution that resulted in the Louvre opening as a public museum.

⁵⁹ The advertisement was developed for the V&A Museum by Saatchi and Saatchi, London.

that has burgeoned in the twenty-first century. Acknowledging the increasing trend towards corporate involvement in larger galleries and museums, Nina Montmann suggests that alongside this, other 'flexible institutions' came into being (Montmann 2006: 12). Montmann suggests that a continuum of the intentions of institutional critique can be seen in the emergence of smaller cultural organisations, which are organised along more adaptable lines. It is also clear that even within larger organisations, the publicly funded spaces, there have been some notable examples of a desire to play out the implications of critique in through curatorial and educational activities, displays, interpretation, re-hangs and outreach programmes.

From reticent to obliging object

The notion that works of art in particular should be left to speak for themselves takes no account of the fact that such works are, for most visitors, remarkably taciturn objects. Left to speak for themselves, they often say very little; and sometimes quite considerable effort is required on the part of the historian, art historian, critic or the viewer to coax them into eloquence.

(Vergo 1989: 49)

The above citation is from a chapter entitled 'The Reticent Object' in Vergo's *The New Museology* (1989) a phrase which I borrow for the title of this thesis. The 'object' in Vergo's chapter, is fine art – painting, sculpture and other more contemporary permutations. Its reticence, for him, is the presumption of the object's innate esotericism, its inability to communicate lucidly, particularly to the uninitiated viewer. Vergo's concerns were not so much with the way that meaning is constructed, in terms of the intentionality of artists, or even in the subsequent perception of works of art by viewers. Instead, he develops a critique of what some readers may now conceive as outmoded and obsolete gallery and museum practices, where the only viewing experience advocated is an unmediated relationship between viewer and artwork, the aesthetic model discussed on p. 10. Here is not the place to question at length whether such a thing is conceivably possible in the first place. But the very act of placing an object in a museum must surely constitute a form of mediation and, moreover, the consecration of an object as an object of art, the juxtaposition of an object next to those of a similar period, style, provenance all act as nuances of mediation from which a notional pure gaze would always be constituted.

Vergo argues against the perpetuation of an 'aesthetic' model of communion that maintains fine art's tacit difference and impenetrability, because he sees it as 'arrogant' and likely to alienate many visitors. He highlights a curious historical anomaly of 'learning' in art museums or gallery, (that differentiates them from those dedicated to

science or local history), in which the interrelationship between epistemology and subject pedagogy have traditionally appeared unrelated. Unlike the development/acquisition of knowledge in other disciplines, art was proposed in the eighteenth century to be something 'you got' or 'didn't get,' you were either predisposed to, or not. Inability to recognise aesthetic qualities of 'great works of art' would be attributed to insufficient sensitivity on the part of the particular viewer. In Kant's (1781) view, recognition of beauty or aesthetic quality was universal and preceded any interest viewers may have had in an artefact or artwork, and moreover this recognition would come before any cognitive apprehension⁶⁰. Bell's remarks written in 1928, a century and a half later, uphold similar notions.

Beauty of course has no practical value whatever [...] It is the mark of a barbarian – a Philistine – that, having no sense of values, failing to discriminate between ends and means and between direct means and remote, he wants to know what is the use of art and speculation and pure science. The reply that they are direct, or almost direct means to emotional states of the highest values and intensity for obvious reasons does not impress him.

(Bell 1938: 87)

By contrast Vergo, writing at the end of the twentieth century, calls art, which had hitherto been graced with such universalistic notions as pure aesthetics, into question and finds it needing explication. In the intervening decade since *The New Museology* was published, Vergo's text has contributed to a growing contention that simply allowing visitors to view artworks, falls short of the requisite educational conditions needed to promote understanding (echoing Dana's position see p. 61). Within many gallery and museum education departments the importance of developing a range of more structured learning opportunities has been carefully considered with due reference to a range of learning theories from Gardner's 'multiple intelligences' (1983; 1999) to Vygotsky's activity theories of learning through social interaction (1978). Reticent objects are now coaxed into loquaciousness with the aid of audio guides, interpretation panels, information leaflets, activity packs, gallery talks, family days, lectures and conferences. And visitors are conceived and acknowledged as significant, if not always central, to the process of meaning making.

As a slight aside, an invitation to stray away from thoughts of publicly funded art museums and into the world of 'the white cube'⁶¹ as seen in the commercial gallery,

⁶⁰ Knowledge of Biblical, Greek and Roman iconography was also essential.

⁶¹ The White Cube is defined by Brian O'Doherty in a series of essays, published in 1976 in *Artforum* and later available in book form. O'Doherty traces the semiotics of the architectural imperatives that led to contemporary gallery spaces. In particular he notes the intention to banish the outside world and to remove any extraneous distractions to appreciating the artwork as separate, temporally and spatially, and which describes the gallery as a 'ritual place of meeting for the members of a caste group' (O'Doherty 1986: 76).

provides a noticeably different protocol for viewing. The New Museology's pedagogic sphere of influence has not extended to these sites – perhaps for the very obvious reason that these domiciles of luxury goods have never intentionally proposed themselves as sites for learning, although it is most certainly possible to learn in them. To learn about techniques, material processes, presentation and even to have profound and significant moments of realisation without recourse to interpretive materials are aspects of learning that tend to be overlooked in the desire to equate education in galleries with the giving of art historical information. However, with no specific remit for education, and a market-driven imperative to preserve the aura⁶² of the art on display, commercial galleries, and even some smaller publicly funded galleries, continue to promote a pure aesthetic experience. Such adherence to the Kantian transcendental visual relationship between art and viewer sets art apart from other kinds of objects and everyday visual experiences. In this context the categorical distinction of 'sensitivity' or 'intellect' as necessary and intrinsic qualities are paramount to complete the circuit of successful reciprocity between artwork and viewer. Moreover, universality is taken as *a priori* in aesthetic experiences, which is where Vergo's point can be picked up. Far from accepting this universalising power of the aesthetic Vergo contests that it is arrogant to assume that everyone who visits a public gallery or museum will be able to relate, in this way, to the art and artefacts displayed. His solution therefore, is an interface to provide direction, explication and context for the visitor. Vergo's argument rests on an advocacy of mediation; the visitor needs to be taught, not necessarily in a didactic manner, but certainly assisted in her /his learning process.

There is little doubt that the experience, where bemused visitors have stared at unfamiliar art and artefacts and found them taciturn and unyielding, has been re-enacted many times in galleries and museums across continents. Simultaneously it can be assumed that the 'initiated' have learnt and adopted the appropriate countenance of gravitas that completes the play of manners and confers their 'cultural capital' in the arena of performative social relations.

Vergo's commitment, alongside that of others,⁶³ to increasing access to galleries and museums by promoting them as sites for learning, has influenced and helped to consolidate the educational philosophy of many gallery and museum departments.

⁶² Aura of the work of art is an important theme in Benjamin's (1937) essay, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. It signals the special quality of original works of art whereby they are seen as quite distinct from reproductions and having a much elevated status to the point of becoming almost sacral. See Benjamin, W. (1999) *Illuminations*. London: Pimlico.

⁶³ E.g. Anderson (1999), Hein (1998), Hooper-Greenhill (1994, 2004, 2007).

However, polarisations of unmediated visitor experiences (bad) and structured experiences (good) can promote an emphasis on teaching at the expense of recognition of the more subtle nuances of learning. Twenty-first century galleries and museum professionals have become increasingly aware of the need to provide a balance, to allow visitor to engage emotionally as well as to acquire concrete information.

In the epistemology of learning in galleries and museums it is significant for this thesis that the un-interpreted work of fine art, so deeply criticised for its status as a 'reticent object' has come to be reincarnated in many galleries and museums as the 'obliging object,' now so forthcoming that it is even able to speak for others and perhaps even to elucidate historic works of art and artefacts. The intervention of contemporary artists' work amongst a permanent collection, as Corrin has remarked of *Give and Take* (2001), is to encourage visitors to refocus on the permanent displays (2001: 10) and proffer another way of thinking about exhibits.⁶⁴ If the contemporary artwork really is, as Vergo suggests, tacit and esoteric, then how are we to understand the rise of its presence as a surrogate museum docent. In a somewhat surprising development, when seen in relation to Vergo's thinking, contemporary art has been invited into cultural institutions to propose, expose, or enable alternative histories or interpretations.

In instances where contemporary art is deployed as a part of a gallery or museum's interpretation strategy, it is also redeemed from its former incarnation in order that it can occupy a position of loquaciousness. All this begs some important questions such as whether Vergo's supposition about the inaccessibility and muteness of fine art for the uninitiated viewer still holds true in the context of the Artist's Intervention. If it doesn't, then how does the specificity of the interventionist strategy in art, (often aligned with Institutional Critique, mild didacticism, parody and disruption) relate to the proposition of an aesthetic response? Are the two mutually exclusive? Or is the political-poetic or the aesthetics of the political possible, as Haacke (1998) and Rancière (2000) would suggest? Crucially, at stake in this thesis is the question of whether Artists' Interventions proffer visitors a continuum of didactic or dialogic experiences, or whether they can occupy a middle ground, able to function more fluidly than binary oppositions allow. Is it possible that certain artworks can encompass contradiction without being trapped in an endgame?

⁶⁴ Corrin comments on how the juxtaposition of Andres Serrano's graphic and confrontational photographs amongst the chalices and portable altars in the Victoria and Albert Museum's collections might redefine an emotional response to religious imagery (2001:9)

Chapter 4 Cultivating Disruption through Intervention

Outline of chapter

The rationale for this chapter is to enable a clearer understanding of the evolution of contemporary interventionist methodologies (now used widely as interpretive strategies), and to map the continuities and changes that have occurred throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The chapter is divided into three sections corresponding to what I consider to be three significant historical periods in which interventionist strategies in Europe and America have been prominent: the 1920s and 1930s, the 1960s and 1970s and the 1990s and 2000s. In the first section of the chapter, I investigate three examples from the 1920s and 1930s that have had a significant role in shaping the development of Artists' Interventions in the 1960s and 1970s through to the 1990s and 2000s. These are by no means exhaustive but have been selected in order to examine pedagogic, political and ethical dimensions of proto-interventionist work. Duchamp's 'Fountain' (1917), Ernst and Baargeld's exhibition at the 'Dada Spring Awakening' (1920) and the Surrealists' (1931) collaboration with the Communist Party offer distinctive approaches to intervening in the orthodox practices of galleries and museums. All make reference to immediate social and political circumstances beyond the concept of 'artworld'. They demonstrate a heightened awareness that exhibitions of art and artefacts have significance that goes beyond aesthetic concerns and can be read as part of a process of constructing meaning within a given society/culture. Duchamp and Ernst concentrate their attention on the art gallery, its cultural exclusions and taxonomies, whereas the Surrealist group's allegiance with the French Communist Party (PCF) turns attention to the ethnographic museum or collection and its place in the definition of nation state, empire and the process of naturalising subjugation. Moribund institutional practices were the specific target for critique and the interventions aimed to change the way in which such institutional practices were understood. A recognition that galleries and museums covertly perpetuated ideological standpoints and systems of value is apparent as is an understanding that the discourses, into which interventions were made, had a pedagogic imperative. Significantly, all three examples used disruptive, parodic and ironic methods to achieve their goals.

The practice of Institutional Critique⁶⁵, to which many contemporary disruptions to the gallery or museum's discourse owe their provenance, is a key coordinate in the genealogy of Artists' Interventions and curatorial initiatives in galleries and it is for this reason that close attention has been given to the period of the 1960s and 1970s, when Institutional Critique first became recognised as a distinctive genre of art practice.

The particular interrelationship between artists of the 1920s and 1930s and those of the 1960s and 1970s has been likened to a return to an unfinished or sublimated project that was never fully articulated in its first incarnation and these two periods have a close relationship in the field of Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums. In the main this is due to the re-investment in radical art practices that critique dominant cultural mores. The ways in which artists addressed the practices of galleries and museums in the 1920s and 30s had neither the momentum nor the impact of later ventures but never-the-less provides significant examples of approaches that would be appropriated and developed to achieve more widespread effects. Foster, characterises this as a 'return' (of the earlier 'radical' art practices) which he explains by referencing Sigmund Freud's model of deferred action in studies of trauma: *Nachträglichkeit*. In this sense 'one event is only registered through another that recodes it' (Foster 1996: 29) and the radical work of artists who were concerned with forms of Institutional Critique in the 1920s and 1930s is never historically effective or fully significant in its initial moments. The significance of Duchamp's conceptual art practices for example, garnered interest amongst artist friends and a few collectors but did not gain widespread recognition and critical appraisal until the 1960s and 1970s⁶⁶. Freud's theory posits that in the case of shock or trauma (which was a central motif of the avant-garde) the affects are not registered in actions at the time of the shock, but occur later. The full significance of events cannot be registered in an immediate form precisely because it 'is traumatic - [representing] a hole in the symbolic order of its time that is not prepared for it, that cannot receive it, at least not immediately without structural change' (Foster 1996: 29). 'Recoding'⁶⁷, Foster's term, is a return in a reconfigured form where realisation and significance of initial intentions is more fully achieved.

⁶⁵ Institutional critique may well be a term coined by Fraser, she lays claim to it in her essay 'From the Critique of Institutions to the Institution of Critique' published in *Artforum*, September 2005. Her use of the term dates from her 1985 essay about Louise Lawler entitled, 'In and out of Place', published in *Art in America*, June edition. However, Foster can also be found using the term in the same year, in relation to the practices of Haacke, Buren, Asher, etc. see: Foster, H. (1985: 100).

⁶⁶ Artists interest and enthusiasm for Duchamp's work was not reflected concurrently in more public recognition. Only in 1963 did Duchamp have his first retrospective.

⁶⁷ Foster's earlier publication, *Recodings (1985)*, centres its thesis on the myths and limitations of postmodernism as a cultural 'break'. Through an exploration the relationship between post modern art forms and post structuralist theory a critique of art spectacle and cultural politics of the 1980s is undertaken.

For some, such as Peter Bürger, writing in 1974, this is a less than satisfactory account of unfinished business. Bürger cites what are sometimes regarded as neo-Dadaist events, the 'happenings' of the 1970s, as examples of neo-avant-gardist practice continuing the project but unable to 'attain the protest value of the Dadaist manifestations' (Bürger 1999: 57). The point here, for Bürger, is the lessening of radical intentions within the return. Bürger's position is also reinforced by O'Doherty, who writes of the compromises that are often a part of successful assimilation,

At its most serious the artist/audience relation can be seen as the testing of the social order by radical propositions and as the successful absorption of these radical propositions by the support system – galleries, museums, collectors, even magazines and house critics – evolved to barter success for ideological anaesthesia.

(O'Doherty 1986: 74)

Foster, however, sees the possibilities posited in returns or recordings more in terms of a transformation through a process of reworking whereby *different* possibilities are opened up. This, of course, is not without caveats; there is a danger in mistaking the recoding for the same object as that which it recodes and the recoded form may indeed be less 'radical' in relation to the terms by which it was initially conceived.

Even so, to follow the concept of 'relational aesthetics,' expounded by Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), the 'new form' might allow for the potential of negotiation and reconciliation to work its charm in those instances where dogmatic opposition and confrontation had been unable to achieve change. Similarly confrontation without the space for dialogic relations can lead to stalemate and this was a fate of early twentieth century avant-garde practices that would be further addressed in the 1990s and 2000s.

In the case of Institutional Critique and its effects, on both the practices of galleries and museums and on visitor understanding, Foster's model may be instructive. Art produced as an Institutional Critique in the first part of the twentieth century, such as the Dadaist interventions referred to earlier, rarely achieved more than a flash-in-the-pan disruption. Establishment feathers may have been momentarily ruffled but this certainly did not seem to have the effect of destabilising or influencing the practices or ideologies of the institutions in which they were being contested. When radical thoughts and actions fail to signify in their own time then a necessary time lapse is needed before such thoughts and actions can be assimilated and seen to have historical significance. It follows that it was not until the 1960s and 1970s or even the 1990s

and 2000s that the historical precedents of Artists' Interventions of the 1920s and 1930s could be acknowledged as having significance for the practices and procedures of galleries and museums.

Part 1: Seeds of dissent - 1920s and 1930s

Culture can be, and is, used as a means of social control... But culture can be, and is, used as a means of cultural resistance, a place to formulate other solutions. In order to strive for change, you first have to imagine it, and culture is the repository of imagination.

(Duncombe 2002: 35)

Is it art when you say it's art or when I say it's art?

When Kosuth stated in 1969 that, 'all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually' (1969: 10), he was making a claim, as a conceptual artist⁶⁸, for a philosophical redefinition of art and simultaneously for an acknowledgement of the provenance of his statement, in artworks that had been produced more than fifty years earlier.

Duchamp, to whom Kosuth refers, has been consistently and ubiquitously cited as the central figure in the establishment of conceptual art's pre-history⁶⁹. But he could equally be credited for radically unmasking the gallery/museum; revealing it as a privileged site where selected (and therefore arbitrary) objects enter into the legitimating discourse that enables them to literally *become* art.

Duchamp's enduring preoccupation with critiquing art as an institution are important in tracing Artists' Interventions, because he intervenes in the procedures, protocols and prejudices of the art museum/gallery through a combination of carefully balanced parody, disruption, intellectual acumen and physical art object and publication.

Questioning authority

Duchamp's interventionist tactics undoubtedly questioned hide-bound authority. Although it would be fallacious to pinpoint any single event as responsible for a recurring aspect of an artist's work, it would equally be an oversight not to give

⁶⁸ Conceptual Art: Alexander Alberro's useful identification of the four trajectories of conceptual art: 1) its self reflexivity and problematising of traditional structure of artwork; 2) a reductivism that pushes the object to the point of dematerialisation; 3) the negation of the aesthetic and 4) the framing or situation of the artwork (2000: xvii).

⁶⁹ Robert Lebel who published the first monograph on Duchamp in 1959 notes that the movement to 'elevate' Duchamp happened in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the United States, 'where the Pop artists attacked their too "arty" predecessors, the abstract expressionists, and Duchamp became the chosen pre-cursor for this new wave' (Lebel in Kuenzli and Naumann, 1990: 3).

significance to the circumstances that first directed Duchamp to question the motives and authority of individuals who determine the canonic constituents of exhibitions of art.

Duchamp's (1912) rejection of painting started as a critique of what he perceived to be the absurdly traditional restrictions of art's definition by representatives of cubism, which at that time, held the credentials of a purportedly 'radical' art movement. When Duchamp was trying to establish himself as a painter (following in the footsteps of his two elder brothers who were well known cubist artists) he entered a painting entitled *Nude Descending a Staircase (No 2)* 1912, into the Salon des Indépendants.

The committee's prognosis of the painting did not result in wholehearted rejection. Instead, suggestions for changes that might redeem the work were proffered - 'at least changing the title', which the committee found too literal (in Godfrey 2004: 17), and which furthermore was written on the canvas itself. But the committee also disliked the way Duchamp had depicted movement, as it 'too closely resembled Futurism.' They announced that 'A nude never descends the stairs ... A nude reclines' (ibid). These criticisms, reflecting the selectors' preferences and tastes, (which erred towards an orthodoxy antimonious to the avant-garde standing that cubism enjoyed), were relayed to Duchamp by his brothers. Duchamp chose not to heed the proscriptive advice, and simply withdrew the offending painting, claiming that within the confines of cubist dogma there 'was no thought of anything beyond the physical side of painting' (in Godfrey 2004: 27).

It seems that the cubists, for Duchamp, were hide-bound traditionalists unable to see beyond the formal aspects of a painting. His decision not to acquiesce to the relative authority of the hanging committee, questioned the members' values as artists and as those with the authority to determine and preserve particular definitions of art. And he was not alone in contesting authority within the networks that constituted the art world: his affiliation with the short-lived and radical group of artists known collectively as Dada grew out of such mutual concerns.

The Dadaist allegiance was formed in a heightened period of distrust of the power structures that pervaded Europe at the time of the First World War. Comprehending how heavily implicated art had become in the maintenance of a moribund and corrupt belief system, Dada artists sought to denounce traditional European cultural

values.⁷⁰ When Duchamp, alongside many other European artists, fled Paris for New York it became clear that Americans too were heading for a similar dose of the institutional doubt that had already become ingrained in the psyches of many Europeans. America, writes Tony Godfrey, entered the First World War partly 'to defend culture and higher values' against 'the barbarism of the Hun' (Godfrey 2004: 30) an irony that would not be missed by the incoming artists. As was the case in Europe, in the USA a litany of human lives and destruction shook the foundations of a belief system until structural damage revealed it to be riddled with rot. Dadaist rejection of institutional values in the field of art needs to be viewed within these wider circumstances. Much avant-garde art in the early 1900s as Schneider notes, 'was deeply suspicious of stable orders of collective meaning' (2006: 30). But such a rejection provides an historical model for using artwork as a form of critique that would be employed again at other junctures in the twentieth century. The desire to change the status quo through art was high-lighted by bringing critical awareness to art's place in maintaining that status quo.

The spirit of 'blague'

Before arriving in New York Duchamp had already started a series of works that he would come to call *Readymades*⁷¹. The most famous and comprehensively documented of these, a now seminal work titled *Fountain* (1917) was first exhibited at the annual exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists, of which Duchamp was a founder member.

The intention of the exhibition was to steer clear of any process of selection (an antidote to the dogmatism of the Salon des Indépendants' selection criteria mentioned earlier). Anyone who paid a six dollars entry fee could exhibit. Having the six dollars to expend in the first place seemed to be strangely overlooked in this otherwise democratic-minded swipe at the legacies of academy protocol. In America, just as in France, 'contemporary art' as a class of objects was largely determined by the taste of

⁷⁰ The links between the atrocities of the First World War and the subsequent loss of belief in those in positions of power and authority have been comprehensively documented. This extract from George Grosz's and Wieland Hertzfeldt's essay 'Die Kunst ist Gefahr: ein Orientierungsversuch' published in 1925, in Berlin demonstrates the impossibility for these artists to conceive of a pure autonomous art, unmarked by societal values.

'What did Dada do? They said it's all the same, whether one just blusters or gives forth with a sonnet from Petrarch, Shakespeare or Rilke; whether one gilds boot heels or carves Madonnas: the shooting goes on, profiteering goes on, hunger goes on lying goes on; why all that art? Wasn't it the height of fraud to pretend art created spiritual values? Wasn't it unbelievably ridiculous that art was taken seriously by itself and no one else?'

⁷¹ Duchamp's first proto-readymade was probably produced as early as 1913 when he fixed a bicycle wheel onto a stool (in 1916 he had a replica of this first piece made in his studio in New York). In 1915 the term readymade had been coined by Duchamp to designate this form of manifestation, by then he had begun to accumulate other pieces such as *Bottle Rack* (1914) and 'In advance of the broken arm' (a snow shovel), (1915). Time has rendered these everyday objects nostalgic representatives of a bygone era, but to understand them more fully it is important to recognise their qualities as quintessentially prosaic. At the time they were selected their choice was intended as one of complete aesthetic indifference and their title was coined from the mass production of 'off the peg' garments by the fashion industry.

conservative hanging committees.⁷²

As organiser and exhibitor, Duchamp managed to posit a complex question concerning who really determines what is art, and what art is. The question came in the form of a signed, dated, and upturned urinal titled *Fountain*. The rest of the story is a well-trodden parable, recited and reworked by artists, art historians and cultural theorists alike such as, Camfield (1989), Kuenzli and Nauman (1990) Godfrey (1998) and Lucas (1996) to name but a few. Duchamp presented not so much a snub to narrow mindedness but a *catch 22*: 'by what authority could the directors of the Society say it [Duchamp's Urinal] could not be defined as art? And contrariwise if they could not define what art was what authority did they have?' (Godfrey 2004: 31). Moreover given the censorship of Duchamp's work, was the exhibition truly democratic and without censorship? or was it committed to a finite and clandestine set of values concerning art's definition?

Fountain revealed the limitations of a purportedly inclusive exhibition and found it to be covertly delimited by an elite's shared cultural and social assumptions. The readymade sculpture revealed that the delimitations were not simply determined by the artist but by a larger network, those who organised, interpreted and profited from the work. Osborne suggests that *Fountain* 'functions as a critique by drawing attention to the various ways in which these conditions are sustained and function through inequalities of power' (Osborne 2002: 164). As an example of proto-interventionist work Duchamp's gesture matches Osborne's definition for Institutional Critique, in that it 'take[s] as its conceptual materials the institutional conditions that contribute to the understanding of something as art' (ibid: 167).

Fountain far exceeded Duchamp's discursive intention. It poses some serious points yet its very form is a vessel in which to take [a] the piss. One of the key aspects of this example is that in the spirit of *blague*, it practically undermines its significance by making light of its critique of the selection systems of galleries and museums (and hence the systems of taste and belief that determine which objects enter the field of legitimate symbolic value to become works of art). It pre-dates by decades some of the most significant twentieth century writings about art and its institutions and yet its form: a urinal, appears to belie serious intent. A point which I shall return to on p.171.

⁷² The exhibition was specifically an attempt to circumvent the inherent conservatism of institutions such as the National Academy of Design.

In 1917, *The Blindman* (an avant-garde review) published 'Buddha of the Bathroom', a statement about *Fountain*, written by Louise Norton⁷³. In her article Norton cites the comments of a puzzled viewer who asks: 'Is he [Duchamp] serious or is he joking?' to which she replies 'Perhaps he is both! Is it not possible?' Adding, 'and there is among us today a spirit of "blague" arising out of the artist's bitter vision of an over institutionalised world of stagnant statistics and antique axioms' (Norton in Weiss 1994: 125). The spirit of 'blague' referred to by Norton has an overarching sense of negation that undermines or subverts normative and naturalised assumptions. Its effects, although not identical in form, are similar to irony, in that the literal meaning, the sincerity of the object, is simultaneously a deadpan rebuke of the same. Blague according to fellow Dadaist Hugo Ball, was one of the few options open to artists in the dehumanised context of the 1914–18 war. 'Since no art, religious faith or politics seems adequate to damn this torrent, there remains only the blague, and the bleeding prose' (Ball in Higgie 2007: 31).

The emergence of ironic and negatory principles in proto-interventionist examples extended to rituals and taxonomies. This can be seen in attacks on exhibition selection procedures, curatorial strategies, and art-world niceties, made by other Dadaist members. For example, in Germany the Cologne Dadaists Ernst and Baargeld incorporated miscellaneous objects, works by children, 'Sunday painters' and un-authored sculptures from Africa amongst their own art. This was intended as a counter exhibition, an event at which artists had been placed at the margins by forming an allegiance with denigrated categories of art: the so-called 'primitive', the amateur, the immature and the artefact, through which they raised significant hierarchical issues concerning the taxonomy and classification of works of art, craft and design. All the work that they selected to hang alongside their own had been already been ordered and relegated in European taxonomy, to the lower slopes. The hierarchical model of cultural value, to which they drew attention, was topped by representations of art as a marker of cultural sophistication redolent of a civilised nation state. As noted on p. 49 chapter three the development of classificatory systems in the eighteenth century determined the establishment of new branches of knowledge, the process of way that such knowledge was often displayed also be manipulated to become state sanctioned veracity, thereby 'proving' for example, the superiority and inferiority in class, gender and ethnicity. Ernst and Baargeld's proto interventionist works confronted the ideological alignment of classificatory systems by using their own positions as artists, within existing hierarchies of art, craft and artefact,

⁷³ Under whose name Duchamp is thought to have submitted *Fountain* to the exhibition of the Society of Independent Artists in 1917.

to highlight the ways in which such orders perpetuate and cultural social divisions. Their intentions were to disrupt a given order but perhaps also to cultivate disorder.

Significantly, Artists' Interventions had started to parody the protocols and practices of galleries and museums, the exhibition process *per se*. The 'artworks' produced often took the form of performance, parodying the activities of others such as selectors, directors, curators. Individual pieces of art were often subsumed into the larger process, event and its reception. This can also be viewed as a precursor to the phenomenon of the curator as creative producer that would become so significant later in the century.⁷⁴

A new sense of order – curating and negating

The following year, April 1920, the same artists, Ernst and Baargeld, mounted another attack on the definition and expectations of what should constitute an exhibition of art. In response to having their work removed from a purportedly 'open' exhibition, they rented a courtyard of the Winter Brewery in Cologne and mounted an exhibition that could only be entered through a men's toilet.

Having found little more than cursory accounts of this event in a wide range of publications, it is unclear who the visitors to this exhibition were. It is certainly likely that most were other artists and associates of the Cologne duo; whether members of the general public visited remains unknown as does the effects of the gendered implications of the entry process,

The event, entitled 'Dada Spring Awakening', featured a young girl dressed in a communion dress reciting obscene poetry and proposing that visitors could take part in the destruction of artworks. Godfrey's account states that 'those who ventured in were invited to destroy everything they did not like' (2004: 48). In other accounts, such as Robert Short's, the principle was not to destroy the exhibition as a whole, but direct attention to a specific work: Ernst's *Destructible Object* (1920), which had an axe beside it and an invitation to hack at it (1980: 50). Whichever was the case, the avant-garde gambits of the Dadaists appear to have been to turn the world of art exhibitions - as middle class soirées - upside down by inverting the given order and undermining social and cultural codes of behaviour. The carnivalesque tenor of this

⁷⁴ In the latter half of the twentieth century curator and artist became almost competitors for the symbolic position of principal creative agent. The increasing occurrence of installation art marginalised the curator of contemporary art as the artist became her/his own curator with whole spaces being given over to the total work of art, at the same time the curator began to theme exhibitions and take more ownership for the success of the exhibition as a whole, relegating artists within an exhibition to materials to be combined.

particular exhibition was not solely aimed at the art establishment but represented a more general rejection of established social conventions and beliefs, particularly the sanctimonious observances of morality and religion which were mimicked and parodied in performances. As Hugo Ball a fellow Dadaist wrote in 1916 'Introduce symmetries and rhythms instead of principles. Contradict the existing world orders. What we are celebrating is at once buffoonery and a requiem mass' (Ball from *Dada fragments 1916-17* in Higgin 2007: 31).

It is particularly significant that, as with Duchamp's work, the exhibits in *Dada Spring Awakening* were made, or more often selected, specifically with little regard for longevity or aesthetic and craft concerns beyond measured notions of provocation. The events themselves took precedence over individual exhibits in a typical Dadaist strategy to blur and obfuscate the boundaries between discrete forms of practice in the arts.

Confrontational aesthetics

Duchamp, Ernst and Baargeld's work employed a radical set of confrontational aesthetics to question art's socio-political position. In their work, the physical object (art) was often a by-product of an event, intended to have little significance outside its point of insertion into the network of meaning that constituted the art world and its place in society. Assertions, regarding the de-aestheticisation and de-materialisation of art, made much later in the 1960s by Lippard and Chandler (1967: 48), also pertain to selected works of this 1920s generation of artists. The increasing emphasis on conceptual phenomena for instance, is something that is equated with both dematerialised and post/anti-aesthetic, but as Lippard and Chandler go on to claim, the aesthetic continuum can be recognised in a different guise.

The actions of Duchamp, Ernst and Baargeld can be seen as localised and relating to specific circumstances whilst simultaneously achieving the effects of wide-sweeping gestures, provocative and radical critiques of art and society. In different ways, they intervene in the comfortable narrative of the gallery or museum by asking how artists can wrestle art from the service of prevailing or dominant institutionalised political ideologies. Whilst recognising culture is often employed in the service of social control, these artists simultaneously recognised that it can be a place to formulate alternative solutions. It may be that the solutions were, in the main, acts of negation, but some fundamental questions concerning the production, display, function and consumption of art within bourgeois society were posed through these Dadaist

initiatives. Bürger suggests in such strategies: 'the individual creation of unique works is thus provocatively called into question. The act of provocation itself takes the place of work' (Bürger 1999: 56). Another reading might suggest that the act of provocation subsumes or becomes the work itself.

Either way, this sets a significant precedent for the ways in which artists would later enter into dialogue with, and critique, institutionalised practice through the production of 'dematerialised artworks'. The artwork as discrete physical entity was dematerialised to resurface as event, protest, processes and service provision; and many Artists' Interventions in museums and galleries adopted these dematerialised forms later in the twentieth century, a point that is discussed further on pp 95-97.

Critiquing colonial methodologies for displaying others

In terms of its relevance in the history of interventions, the 1931 Surrealist exhibition 'La vérité sur les colonies' (the truth about the colonies) marks a significant shift from earlier Dadaist examples. In this instance the engagement was not with contemporary art's collusion in the perpetuation of institutional values, but with the unspoken ideologies of ethnographic curatorial strategies adopted by museums; strategies, which in a colonial age, acted to legitimate and strengthen the political ends of the coloniser. 'La vérité sur les colonies' was a form of intervention with a much more specific target. The viewer was invited to draw parallels between cultural belief systems in which certain inanimate objects were given elevated status and others in which very similar objects were denigrated.

Surrealism's affinities with politics, and the politics of display have often been ignored or played down in accounts of the movements' history, as Niru Ratnam (2004) confers in his study *Surrealism's encounter with otherness* (p. 54). Histories of Surrealism tend to privilege associations with psychoanalysis and particularly with humanist Freudian concepts (id, ego, superego, the realm of the unconscious). But within Surrealism key aspects of twentieth century thinking are confluent. Foster, for example, suggests that Surrealism is representative of 'the nodal point of three fundamental discourses of modernity – psychoanalysis, cultural Marxism and ethnology – all of which inform Surrealism as it in turn develops them' (1993: xiv). Surrealism is threaded through significant political events and turbulent circumstances, and the Surrealists did not altogether abdicate social responsibility in the name of

aesthetic autonomy nor did they always shy away from forms of political declaration.⁷⁵

In France, the Surrealists' incentive to form an allegiance with the French Communist Party (PCF) was intended to extend the Surrealists' social role beyond the paradigms laid down for artists and writers at the time. However, the simultaneous desires: to be a part and apart; wishing to extend the scope of artists' influence into a broader political arena but also wanting to represent the cultural avant-garde free from the dictates of party politics, was difficult to achieve. The PCF were unwilling to accommodate the latter of the two intentions, which meant party political recognition of the Surrealists' status, as leaders of the avant-garde, was never really cohesive. Steven Harris states 'the Surrealists situated themselves on the extreme left both artistically and politically, but without calling for a politically engaged art', (2004: 49) and this was untenable to the Communist Party at that time.

This makes 'La vérité sur les colonies' all the more remarkable, as it was an exhibition conceived with the intention of furthering a desired allegiance through a difficult political engagement. There is very little documentation of the exhibition⁷⁶ and only two photographs published by the Surrealists exist as a visual record. From extant sources it is clear that the exhibition proposed a model of disruption and value contestation in relation to an official government 'Exposition Coloniale'⁷⁷ which was held in the Bois de Vincennes on Paris's south-eastern edge, in the same year. 'La vérité sur les colonies' was a direct counter exhibition, and utilised a knowing parody of museological practices and display techniques. It had three distinct elements: the first comprised examples of colonialist and revolutionary activity, the second a didactic display denouncing France's colonial policies, (replete with quotes by Marx), the third, entitled 'cultural problems', was designed by Eluard, Aragon and Tanguy and most closely resembled Surrealist practices visible outside the collaboration with the PCF. This display included a selection of art by colonised people. Short texts

⁷⁵ The attack on the Rif Tribesmen in Morocco by the French government in 1925 prompted Breton's Surrealist circle to publish the first of many open tracts condemning France's colonialist actions and declaring an abhorrence for many of the values of the West. They declared 'we profoundly hope that revolutions, wars, colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilisation' (in Woolrich 1992: 132). Breton also travelled to Haiti in 1945 where, as art historian Michael Richardson writes, 'The revolution could not have taken place if it was not for Breton.' For Europeans the effects of Breton's lectures in Haiti may come as a surprise. We do not expect literary figures to make an intervention in a political arena' (in Ratnam 2004: 54) although this is clearly not without precedent.

⁷⁶ Janine Mileaf's is the most extensive research to date, and is sourced from documents held on micro film in the Bibliothèque Marxiste de Paris, (the originals of which were sent to Moscow in the 1930s) and the memoirs of Andre Thirton (a writer and political activist). From the December 1931 issue of *Le Surrealisme au service de la Revolution* (LSASDLR) translated by Mileaf. See Mileaf, J. (2001) "Body to Politics" *RES* 40 (Autumn): 239 - 255.

⁷⁷ The exhibition followed a tradition of world fairs, offering up microcosms of world culture made visible through pastiches of indigenous architecture in which full scale buildings stood in for entire countries. It was attended by a staggering 33 million (Statistics from General A. Messimy, *Le Bilan financier de Exposition coloniale*. In Mileaf 2001 241)

accompanying exhibits recalled 'the destruction of the art of colonised people by religious missions who, to consecrate the progress of Christianity, had gathered and burned anything that was considered a fetish and was often nothing more than the expression of a simple human art without any particularly religious character' (translated in Mileaf 2001: 247).

Alongside the selection of the art of colonized peoples, Catholic iconography was juxtaposed in the form of mass produced statues and votive offerings. The European classification of the fetish was central to the Surrealists' parody in the 'cultural problems' section.

Through an ironic and striking opposition, things that could be called European fetishes are exhibited in the same room. First, there are the propaganda tools of the Church, the innumerable images of piety in colour, then ingenious adaptations of Christianity for each race: A baby Jesus and black virgins. Amusing photos reproducing the sculptures that one church built through a big exploiter from Java and where the saints and all the sacred characters are of a more purely Asia type and present faces and profiles of Buddha. Other photos show the exploitations of indigenous peoples in work sites or enterprises belonging to religious missions.

(Mileaf 2001: 247)

The insertion of a collection of western religious artefacts, mainly in the form of statues and images of Catholic saints into the 'standard' ethnographic art section was made all the more poignant by the labelling of these items as 'fetishes'⁷⁸. The intention would most probably have been for the visitor to question not only the conflagratory action of missionaries but also of museums' particular use of the term 'fetish' as a label descriptor used with sole reference to African and Oceanic sculptures.

The parodic tactics employed in 'La vérité sur les colonies' can be seen as an erosive strategy, intended to undermine those museological conceits of artefact display that reinforced the prevalent concept of African peoples as superstitious and therefore inferior. Relics and votive offerings are all imbued with special properties and powers but require a system of belief to activate the potency of these powers, a trajectory not too dissimilar from art's own.

⁷⁸ The term fetish has particular interest for the Surrealists who would have been cognisant of its meaning for both Marx – in terms of commodity fetishism – the way in which manufactured objects within commodity culture become imbued with a surplus of meaning and significance, and for Freud – for whom the fetish object represents a substitute for the whole. For example, a displaced fixation with a part of the body or a transformation/extension of the body that becomes the missing phallus of the mother. The original use of the term was associated with the worship of inanimate objects believed to have magical powers or to be animated by a spirit. It is particularly associated with wooden sculptures from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where it was believed that by pounding metal objects into the wooden surface of the figure a protective spirit force could be brought to life.

In Ludmilla Jordanova's (1998) account of the fetish object she acknowledges the term's passage into anthropological and artistic discourses and in particular its association with artists in the 1920s. Jordanova's argument, like that of many others, links artists and museums as jointly culpable of a Eurocentric 'othering' exercise; blissfully unaware of their ideological manipulations, which would be revealed later in the century:

The history of the fetish is closely bound up with European relations with the exotic – particularly with Africa... One aspect of the fetish is accordingly about mastery and control over objects and over people, it is about the material world and its ability to freeze social relations. The other side of the fetish is about finding magic in things and is tightly bound up with psychic development. Here are encapsulated the issues in following through the link between museums and knowledge.

(Jordanova 1998: 38)

Jordanova has a point, in that a number of the artists involved with 'La vérité sur les colonies', definitely Breton, Eluard and Aragon, were also collectors of so-called 'arts sauvage'. They seemed impervious to the contradictions between their own trading activities, the cultural climate created by colonialism and their anti-colonialist stance. However, Jordanova does not make distinctions between constructions of knowledge through the legitimating discourses of museology, and attempts to redress these constructions by marginal interventions of artists, such as the Surrealists.

Whilst 'La vérité sur les colonies' engages the Surrealists' schemata of juxtaposing the incongruous and inverting the familiar, an ideological awareness of the way in which knowledge is shaped by such discourse also deserves to be more clearly acknowledged. The pedagogic imperatives of 'La vérité sur les colonies', erring as they did towards didacticism, were observably antithetical to the unleashing of irrationality. Legibility and ambiguity favoured by education and art respectively enjoyed a brief encounter but the PCF and Surrealists parted company shortly after the exhibition. The potential to overcome the perception of incommensurability between art, politics and education nonetheless, has continued to preoccupy interested parties through to the twenty-first century. Moreover it has particularly relevant for this thesis.

Modern art is the cocoon in which the transformation of bourgeois art into counter culture is bred. Surrealism marks the moment in history at which modern art programmatically destroyed the shell of a no longer beautiful appearance in order to take its place, desublimated, in real life.

(Habermas in Connerton 1976: 385)

Before moving on it is useful to review the arguments developed thus far. From the early part of the twentieth century the use of undermining parodic methods, in response or retort to museological practices, situates Artists' Interventions as a mechanism of critique with political leanings.

The use of shock tactics to destabilise is evident in such proto-interventionist works, as is an element of confrontational humour. In the works of Duchamp, Ernst and Baargeld and the Surrealists, discussed earlier, the spirit of Institutional Critique and effective methodologies for achieving destabilisation of institutional discourse are established, so too are discrete forms of art that engage with galleries, museums, collections, practices and policies.

Making connections with and increasing the visibility of interrelationships between practices in cultural institutions and practices in society can also be observed as a driving force in proto-interventionist practices. In this sense such interventionist practices form part of the wider incentive of the avant-garde, to breakdown the separation of art from social reality.

Parodic and disruptive tactics can be observed as favoured methods, and their affects, although marginal at the time of execution, are put to the direct task of shifting a prevalent public perception that the museum, (in the case of 'La vérité sur les colonies') and the gallery (in the case of 'Dada Spring Awakening' and 'Fountain'), stand for true and noble causes.

Part Two: The germination of Institutional Critique

An art of change

In this second section I examine the close associations between Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums and art practices that came to be known as Institutional Critique. The specificity of the Artists' Interventions that I have chosen to research, links them, in an often indistinguishable way, to critical art practices that materialised in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In this period, interventions in galleries/museums most frequently took the form of a critique, not simply of the practices of institutions but in a number of instances, of what had become accepted as the institution of art itself. The legacy from Duchamp is clear, a major preoccupation for both Artists' Interventions and Institutional Critique at this time was 'the laying bare of the

institutional conditions of art' (Osborne 2002: 43). As with Duchamp's approach, many of these initiatives erred towards the conceptual and showed a consciousness of their own imbrication⁷⁹ with the gallery and museum system.

Preoccupations with revealing instances where art was co-opted for what artists regarded as dubious political and economic purposes can be seen as emanating directly from a quest for ontological disentanglement but simultaneously as revelations of institutional sleights of hand. Artists' position-taking sometimes followed the contours of a 'higher moral plane' reflecting wider social concerns with injustice and marginalisation of sections of society.

Interventionist approaches became more widespread in the late 1960s reflecting compelling concerns with ethical and political issues and with art institutions. This ushered in an interrogation of the histories of art, within the specificity of particular societies and cultures, and heightened awareness of the constructed nature of art's 'special status', its aesthetic separation from the quotidian, the moral and ethical and its subsequent otherworldly quasi-religious 'aura.'⁸⁰

In the short term the outcomes of such initiatives led to a reconfiguration of avant-garde artists' terms of engagement with galleries and museums. In the long term, this extended to the creation of new interpretive methodologies and a reconceptualisation of policies and practices in some galleries and museums.

Artists who sought to examine the institutional networks, mechanisms and technologies through which art's status was conferred and preserved, eschewed the notion of pure autonomous works of art. A defining characteristic, of Artists' Interventions and Institutional Critique in the 1960s and 1970s, was that the provision of an 'aesthetic experience' alone, ceased to dominate art's remit. This harks back to Dadaist and Surrealist initiatives, discussed in the previous section, where the aesthetic is subservient to the project as a whole.

Researching the background to the mid twentieth century terrain from which Institutional Critique and Artists' Intervention emerged, it is possible to position these

⁷⁹ I borrow the term *imbrication* from Stephen Ball (2006), it refers to an overlapping pattern such that seen in the tiles of a roof, where one element or unit is not easily extracted from the rest. Ball uses it to describe the ways in which networks of causes and effects are not easily prised apart, he states 'Epistemological development within human sciences is ultimately imbricated in the practical management of social and political problems' (Ball, 2006:2) see Educational Policy and Social Class: the selected works of Stephen Ball. Routledge.

⁸⁰ Kant is generally seen as the originator of the separation of art from everyday but see also Benjamin's 1936-39 essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

newly configured critical art practices, as oppositional to the dominant modernist account of art practice. However it would be inaccurate to situate the act of intervention in the gallery or museum as necessarily oppositional or as an exclusively radical, declarative gesture against a supposedly conservative institution. This is perhaps one of the biggest misunderstandings of the development of Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums. When artists started to engage with the network of relations necessary for the construction of art, the epistemological challenge was to relocate meaning from within the previously 'autonomous' art object to the contingencies of context, thus implicating galleries and museums. As O'Doherty states:

This may be why the art of the seventies locates its radical notions not so much in the art as in its attitudes to the inherited 'art' structure, of which the gallery space is the prime icon. The structure is questioned not by classic resentment but by project and gesture, by modest didacticism and phrasing of alternatives. (1999: 77)

Many artists in the 1960s and 1970s openly acknowledged their recourse to the activist art practices of previous generations in the 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Dadaists and Surrealists whose strategies they appropriated and transformed to disrupt (temporarily or marginally) established relationships between artist, gallery/museum and viewer, and moreover to articulate a rationale for the imperatives of art as a potential form of social and cultural critique.

Instituting critique

Although the practice of art as Institutional Critique has not solely been concerned with galleries and museums⁸¹ artists were inevitably drawn to these sites as the institutions with which they were most concerned. Critiques were therefore aimed squarely at curatorial strategies, display methodologies, exhibitions, funding policies and pedagogic approaches. The ideological construction of exhibitable knowledge (that which can be shown) formed the focus for many Artists' Interventions.

It was the ideological status of institutional enclosure of art in galleries and museums that many artists chose to unmask as much as, somewhat hopelessly, to break free from. As Bennett comments, 'The museum, in sum, constitutes a specific form of art's enclosure which [...] art must break with in order to become once more socially and politically relevant' (Bennett 1995:92). Artists whose work reflected a critical

⁸¹ For example, the initiatives of the Artists' Placement Group (APG) which was one of the most influential initiatives directly concerned with intervening in institutions to achieve social change. The principles by which APG inserted artists into organisational structures, has some parallels with interventionist practices in galleries and museums but the placements did not focus on these particular sites.

engagement with the institutionalised practices of galleries or museums, could be seen to be embarking on a self-conscious and theorised analysis of how art had come to be so seamlessly implanted in its twentieth century framework of production (studio) and reception/consumption (gallery). Even artists who claimed to be principally concerned with art's ontology (e.g. Kosuth) were inevitably drawn to examine those institutions, which since the eighteenth century had become the legitimate physical and spiritual containers of art.⁸²

There are distinctions between the museological interventions of the 1920s and 1930s and those that followed 30–40 years later. The most significant being, that the later interventions were no longer sporadic happenings but part of a much wider engagement with institutions by artists: Institutional Critique.

Compared to the examples from the 1920s and 30s, Artists' Interventions and Institutional Critique in the 1960s and 1970s also placed a much stronger emphasis on site specificity, contingency, audience response and interaction⁸³. Institutional Critique can be seen as developing in tandem with minimalism's approaches to site but was more focussed on the ideological discourses (both overt and covert) of institutions. Minimalism challenged the idealist enclosure of the autonomous art object by deflecting its meaning to its place of presentation. Institutional Critique, as Miwon Kwon comments, in her study on site specificity, 'further complicated this displacement by highlighting the idealist hermeticism of the presentation itself [Institutional Critique] challenged the "innocence" of space and the accompanying assumption of a universal viewing subject' (Kwon 2002: 13).

Climate changes in fields of knowledge

During the interim period between 1931, when 'La vérité sur les colonies' was shown and the end of the 1960s, escalating value came to be placed on 'purity' and subject specialisation as a coordinate in the advancement of all fields of knowledge.

Autonomous disciplines and branches of knowledge continued to be separated out in attempts to refine, still further, their fundamental significance. This led to an increasing division of theory and practice with differentiation and specialisation in both realms. Approaching the mid-twentieth century, dominant forms of art can be seen slipping deeper under the spell of a particular set of intrinsic values, seduced by

⁸² Kosuth's *The Play of the Unmentionable*, (1990) at Brooklyn Museum, responded to current attempts at censorship in art – it featured work that would once have been seen as controversial. Kosuth stated, 'This particular exhibit tries to show that artworks, in that sense, are like words: while each individual word has its own integrity, you can put them together to create very different paragraphs. And it's that paragraph that I claim authorship of' (Kosuth cited in Putnam 2001:134).

⁸³ In this respect, 1960s Institutional Critique can be seen to be directly informed by minimalism.

the siren calls of autonomous status and a belief in universal aesthetic values. Such values drew on early twentieth century writings such as Clive Bell's concept of 'significant form,' which made claims for the universality of aesthetic experience as distinctive and 'disinterested' (a legacy of a particular interpretation of Kantian aesthetics). Bell had remarked 'To appreciate a work of art we need to bring nothing from everyday life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. [...] To associate art with politics is always a mistake' (Bell 1924: 21). In a series of essays written between 1900-1920⁸⁴ Roger Fry had similarly developed an insistence on art's spiritual and universal aesthetic quality in relation to post-impressionism. Opticality was reinforced in both Bell and Fry's ideas to convince that if one looked hard enough one would recognise significant form.

But what exactly was 'one' looking for? By the 1950s the internal logic of theory and practice within art became specialised and regulated around difference. Persuasive rhetoric of the day, epitomised by the writings of Clement Greenberg (1965), suggested that by following a quest for purity and its internal logic, art was in the process of achieving a kind of epiphany regarding its essential ontology. Moreover, there was a reciprocity in which a great many 'pure' abstract artworks such as those produced by Jackson Pollock or Morris Louis appeared to uphold this belief.

If, as Bourdieu (1993) suggests, the degree of autonomy of a specific realm of activity is defined by its ability to reject external determinants and obey only the logic specific to the field, then in the art world of the mid-twentieth century this logic made itself evident in four principal trajectories defined by Osborne thus: 'material objectivity, medium specificity, visuality and autonomy' (2002: 18). These dominant definitional laws⁸⁵ reached something of an apotheosis in the art criticism of Greenberg and subsequently Michael Fried. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s Greenberg's persuasive voice was underpinned by his stalwart belief in the necessity of maintaining a restricted field of cultural production, constituted by the 'essential nature' of discrete traditional art forms; painting and sculpture.⁸⁶ T.J. Clark has summarised Greenberg's

⁸⁴ See Fry, R. (1920, 1981 edition) *Vision and Design*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸⁵ See footnote 2.

⁸⁶ Greenberg's formidable influence over art's production and dissemination in the US, Europe and further-a-field continued for well over a decade. He advocated that artists and critics (should) concern themselves with the aesthetic particularities of specific media as the only viable way to 'progress' from the lineage of the 'great masters'. His central dictum pivoted on the necessity to purge all that was not fundamental or inherent from each specific art form. For painting, this would mean extricating all that could be seen as extraneous or contaminant to the articulation of surface and two-dimensional shape. A logical disavowal of any sculptural properties or narrative tropes would therefore be mandatory for a painting's success. 'Content is to be dissolved so completely from form that the work of art and literature cannot be resolved in whole or part to anything that is not itself' (Greenberg 1967: 6). This purgative form of high modernism was realised, for Greenberg, in the work of a number of

position as 'Eliotic Trotskyism' (in Mitchell 1994: 230). Greenberg's early writings were Marxist but somehow (fiercely and unapologetically) couched in an elitist agenda.

Maintaining these distinctions/divisions necessitated a physical and intellectual confinement, the restriction of art's production and exhibition to predetermined uses of particular sites. In Greenberg's vision, the artist was fettered both physically and mentally to his studio (in this schemata the artist was certainly male), cut off from wider worldly concerns, in an effort to become at one with his inner muse⁸⁷. It was a paradigm that effectively, in practice if not in theory, prevented the contamination of art by repressing its status as a culturally, socially and politically situated activity. In recounting the development of the historical avant-garde Greenberg comments:

Retiring from the public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his [sic] art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relatives and contradictions would either be resolved or beside the point. 'Art for art's sake' and 'pure poetry' appear, and subject matter and content become something to be avoided like the plague.

(1967: 6)

A theory of contamination, such as this, served to preserve and create the logic for further divisions of labour in the art world; ensuring a rationale for perpetuating and deepening a network of distinct and hierarchical roles and power relations acted out in the gallery or museum's discourse. Under the regulatory aegis of modernism, the institutionalised relationship between artists and galleries and museums had become as deftly 'naturalised' as their workplace occupancy of studios. A critique of these modernist coordinates drew attention to the fact that artworks were conditioned, by both their site of production and final destination, indicative of the pre-requisite illusion of a hermetic cultural field as outlined by Bourdieu. Whilst there were notable exceptions to this state of affairs,⁸⁸ dominant fine art practices obeyed a rationalised logic of predetermined production, exhibition and dissemination.

Taking Formalist values apart

It is a significant snub to purity, that the tools that were utilised to deconstruct those mid-twentieth century modernist values that the art world had become inured of, were not so much art's own as borrowed from other disciplines. In Artists'

American artists associated with *abstract expressionism* and *colour field painting*, including Jackson Pollock, Morris Louis, Clifford Still, Robert Motherwell, and Jules Olitski, whom he championed at different stages of his, and their, careers.

⁸⁷ Binary oppositions between inner and outer worlds were also significant to the project of expressionism as Foster states: 'The old metaphysical opposition of inside versus outside, soul versus body, is the very basis of expressionism' (Foster 1985: 61).

⁸⁸ E.g. art aligned with Fluxus and Situationist practices.

Interventions and Institutional Critique, theory from other fields of knowledge was applied to lay bare, through practice, the mythical internal logic of art and its institutions, particularly the construction and maintenance of notions of expertise and connoisseurship as a logical development of cognitive rationality.

Not only did artists take recourse to the discourses of other disciplines, they also started to be productive in realms that were hitherto occupied by other professionals both in and outside the art world. Art criticism, curating, investigative journalism and social science could all be confused with work that was heralded as art in the 1970s. This was a decade in which the contingency of art was tested to new limits. What Osborne says of conceptual art, '[that it] is a classic example of strategic position-taking within a regional domain of the cultural field ('art'), aimed at a redistribution of the positions constituting that domain as a relational structure of possible actions' (1999: 50) could equally apply to Artists' Interventions and Institutional Critique. A burgeoning awareness of the relational structure of the art world and an understanding of the pivotal role played by galleries and museums, critics and curators was made possible by moving not only away from the gallery in a physical sense but in moving outside the domains of knowledge on which art and its institutions had hitherto been inscribed.

Artists moving into the field of criticism in the late 1960s signalled incipient moves towards a concept of the artist as a flexible cultural 'multi-tasker' able to work fluidly across a number of disciplines/roles. Contemporary truisms such as Pringle's comment, 'Artists have the ability to take risks and experiment and they feel comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty' (2006: 14), may emanate from a legacy of uncertain employment prospects but became affirmed as a positive quality in the 1960s as artists increasingly became associated with 'pushing the envelope' and bringing fresh approaches in and across disciplines and professional fields. Artists' perceived disregard for traditional conventions was coupled with a growing proclivity for them to assume more critical positions, within the field of cultural production and dissemination, than had been the case mid-century. This development was recognised by the art critic Lucy Lippard⁸⁹ in whose territory (criticism) artists had begun to metaphorically set up camp. Lippard was a supporter of the divergent practices of artists who recognised the inevitability and effects of such moves under the aegis of conceptualism. She suggested that the critic's position of authority 'needed to be questioned by the artists that he [sic] was judging' (Lippard 1971: 24).

⁸⁹ Lippard's essay 'Change and Criticism: Consistency and Small Minds' was first published in 1967 in *Art International*.

Questioning the site

Questioning the status quo and the 'logic' of power hierarchies was, of course, by no means confined to the internal workings of the art world. All this was a part of the more general contestation of social injustice that became manifest in social activism – civil rights campaigns, feminism, queer politics, multiculturalism, all informed by important theoretical counterparts. The museum and gallery as predetermined site for artists' work was no longer to be taken for granted. Nor was the physical, conceptual and economic control, wielded by art gallery owners, directors and curators. Their exclusionary practices of exhibiting almost exclusively white, male, European or north American artists became an equally important reason to question their centrality in determining and legitimating the canon.

There was a short period of time in the late 1960s early 1970s when the gallery/museum appeared to become almost otiose in the practices of artists who turned to: land, body, mail, print media, and public spaces as alternative sites for realising artwork. Artists' drift into new fields of production, where the dissemination of outcomes was open-ended, occurred in tandem with a conscious withdrawal from the gallery/museum as the pre-ordained site for exhibiting artworks. This retraction has significance for any study that examines the ways in which artists began to critique museological practices and effect changes to the ways in which meaning is constructed in these sites. Renunciation of what had become an inevitable matrix: studio, artwork, gallery or museum, was indicative of a desire not simply to evade, but rather, to re-conceptualise art and artists' relationships with these institutions. With reference to Benjamin (date), this represents resistance to supply the system without attempting to change it.⁹⁰ Artists not only recognised that their own voices needed to be heard in the field of criticism, but also, that to be in control of their own work they needed to be in control of the site in which it would be seen. Increasing engagement with alternative spaces/places led to the formation of a new genre of ephemeral artworks, which came to be known by the somewhat prosaic title of 'site-specific art'. In these initiatives the art purportedly gave itself up to its environmental context, being determined or directed by it. This way of working disrupted the notion that art was a durable travelling commodity with enduring meaning that needed both the most emptied out space (white cube) and to be the controlling element for the arrangement of its own display.

It is noteworthy that many of these initiatives to redefine art's relationship with

⁹⁰ Benjamin's comments refer to the failure of *New Objectivity* photography to achieve social change. See Benjamin 1983: 95.

society, were directly informed by Marx's historical materialism, in which the gallery/museum was under suspicion as a bastion of 'bourgeois' cultural values imposed on the 'proletariat'. Bourdieu's theory of *symbolic violence*, further elaborates the ways in which such impositions are rarely recognised by aiming to make visible the seeming natural order by which domination is made almost imperceptible and therefore acceptable (Bourdieu 1992: 167). Concerns such as these informed the desire of artists to step outside of their former relationships with galleries and museums in order to view them in a more analytical manner.

A self-conscious desire to resist the forces of mature capitalist market economy underpins a number of artists' decisions to adopt site-specific, critical and ephemeral practices⁹¹. But extricating art from the perceived 'evil clutches' of galleries and museums was not an easy task, and even when the art was far removed from its traditional institutions of display to be placed in the desert or the high street, the gallery still exerted the ghostly presence of its absence. Artists were not so much escaping the institution in these new approaches to site but, more often than not, taking it with them. Where site conditioned the artwork, in both physical and conceptual terms, attention was drawn to art's context and framing. What, in hegemonic modernist discourses since Kant, had been situated outside the art object: the frame, the walls, the audience, the curator, the architectural context – all that was previously superfluous to art's aesthetic condition, came to be implicated at this moment in the 1960s/70s, as very much a part of it.

Back to the gallery or museum with more questions

If some artists publicly flouted the logic of galleries and museums, then others chose to return to these institutions with a critical agenda. In 1968, at the *Salon du Mai*, Museum of Modern Art, Paris, Buren exhibited *Proposition Didactique* (1968), one of many related art pieces that could be broadly interpreted as lessons for gaining a better understanding of art and its institutions. For this particular show, Buren covered one wall of an empty gallery with the green and white stripes that were to become his trade-mark formula.⁹² Identical stripes were then placed on 20 billboards throughout the city. Buren also employed the services of two perambulating sandwich-board-men, whose boards displayed yet more vertical stripes. Refusing the position of exhibited things within a space, Buren fused his work with the architecture of the

⁹¹ E.g. Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, Richard Long, Chris Burden.

⁹² 'Vertically striped sheets of paper the bands of which are 8.7cms wide, alternate white and coloured, are stuck over external and internal surfaces: walls, fences, display windows, etc.; and/or cloth/canvas support, vertical stripes, white and coloured bands each 8.7cms, the two ends covered with dull white paint. This has been my work for the last four years' (Buren, 1970: 100).

space allowing the work to act as a sign or logo. Osborne states that, 'Buren's art lay in the placing of these *paintings* both inside and outside the gallery in such a way as (i) to reveal the constitutive power of their location frame or boundary to produce meaning, and (ii) to comment on particular institutional circumstances' (Osborne 2002: 43 *my italics*).

Repetition was part of the process of 'de-aestheticisation,' that can be seen in minimalism and conceptualism, and was used by Buren to reference formalist practices such as those of Barnett Newman and Frank Stella, and to act as sign, a signature for art and for Buren himself. Site-specific practices, such as Buren's, are sometimes linked with the removal of visual pleasure, as Kwon notes, '[the] work adopts strategies that are aggressively anti visual – informational, textual, expository, didactic or immaterial' (Kwon 2002: 24).

By analysing certain pre-conditional expectations for art, Buren had developed a concept of framing that he applied to both his writings and art practice. The frame that Buren referred to was the literal frame, such as that containing and completing the objectification and reification of painting, and the frame of the museum space itself. In two seminal essays: the 'Function of the Museum,' and 'Function of the Studio' Buren demonstrated a substantive analysis of these related locations, and proposed them as part of the 'ossifying customs of art.'⁹³

Buren's intention was not to reject or vilify the museum but rather to acknowledge the dialectic whereby, the more that galleries and museums control the 'framing' of art, the more the artists' freedom (of expression) appears to be celebrated. He regarded the gallery/museum as a privileged place with a triple role, which he defined as follows:

1. Aesthetic. The museum is the frame and effective support upon which work is inscribed/composed. It is at once the centre in which the action takes place and the single (topographical and cultural) view point for the work.
2. Economic. The Museum gives sales value to what it exhibits, has privileged/selected. By preserving or extracting it from the commonplace, the Museum promotes the work socially, thereby assuring its exposure and consumption.
3. Mystical. The Museum/Gallery instantly promotes to "Art" status whatever it exhibits with conviction, i.e. habit, thus diverting in advance any attempts to

⁹³ Buren published three significant tracts on the framing technologies of art in *Studio International*: 'Function of the Museum' (1970), 'Function of the Studio' (1971) and 'Function of Architecture' (1975). In each he examined how art is constituted by the rules of these s/p(l)aces.

question the foundations of art without taking into consideration the place from which the question is put. The Museum (the Gallery) constitutes the mystical body of art.

(Buren in Bronson 1983: 57)

Buren's tripartite definition of the museum expresses his and other artists' unease with the increasing power of galleries and museums and in particular with the ways in which such cultural institutions converted what they exhibited into rarefied commodity forms.

Questioning the structure

As more artists began to make galleries and museums the subject of their work, an articulate and substantive understanding of the historicity and contemporary condition of these institutions started to be researched and translated into art practice. Context became content, and the gallery, both public and private, was regarded as a site whose illusion of impartiality could no longer be elided.

Many interventionist's relationships with their host institutions in the 1960s and 70s are marked by their intention to expose what they believed was 'concealed' by the gallery/museum. Such approaches aimed to divulge what was normalised and hence hidden from public view: namely hierarchies and power structures redolent of dominant ideology that had become too densely woven into the fabric of the institutional discourse to be easily identified.

In the case of galleries and museums, seemingly benign architectural features were some of the first elements to be unmasked as coded signifiers actively dissociating the space of art from the outer world. The institution's idealist imperative of rendering itself and its values, 'objective,' 'disinterested' and 'true,' was critiqued as shown by Buren and also by Asher. In what has been referred to as an 'assault on the false neutrality of vision that provides the underlying rationality for those institutions', (Buchloh in Alberro 2000: 528) these artists set out to debunk such notions.

O'Doherty's discussion of this same 'false neutrality' focuses, not on the public gallery/museum's classical edifice that Buchloh refers to, but on the contemporary art space, a.k.a. 'The White Cube'. Commenting on the minimalist architectural devices, used by art galleries in particular, from the mid-twentieth century he writes that 'the white wall's apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions. Tracing the physically emptied out, but conceptually overloaded conditions for exhibiting contemporary art he adds, 'the wall's content

becomes richer and richer (maybe a collector should buy an “empty” gallery space)’ (O’Doherty 1999: 79). What sounds like a preposterous or perverse suggestion had in fact already become a reality.

Vico Acconci’s *Seed Bed* (1969), was ostensibly an empty gallery space apart from a ramp, under which Acconci was allegedly masturbating on one or two days of the week. Like the sign outside a motel where I stayed in New Mexico, which read ‘These premises guarded by shotgun three nights a week; you guess which three,’ Acconci’s whereabouts was conjured by suggestion as a strange omnipresence. The empty gallery could never quite achieve emptiness; presence continued to be asserted by absence.

Closer still to an articulation of this state of contradiction was Asher’s *Revealing the Frame* (1974) which along the lines of O’Doherty’s thesis, revealed the frame *per se* to be far from empty. Asher removed a wall separating the exhibition area from the office area at the Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles. The newly configured gallery space simultaneously presented its deficit and its excess. There were no physical art objects to see, no painting, no sculpture, just the space. But the absence of artwork was offset by the removal of delineation between public and private space. What was hitherto successfully concealed, creating an illusion of a rarefied place unconnected with the everyday, was open to view; revealing the vivid presence of the gallery as a commercial and bureaucratic institution.

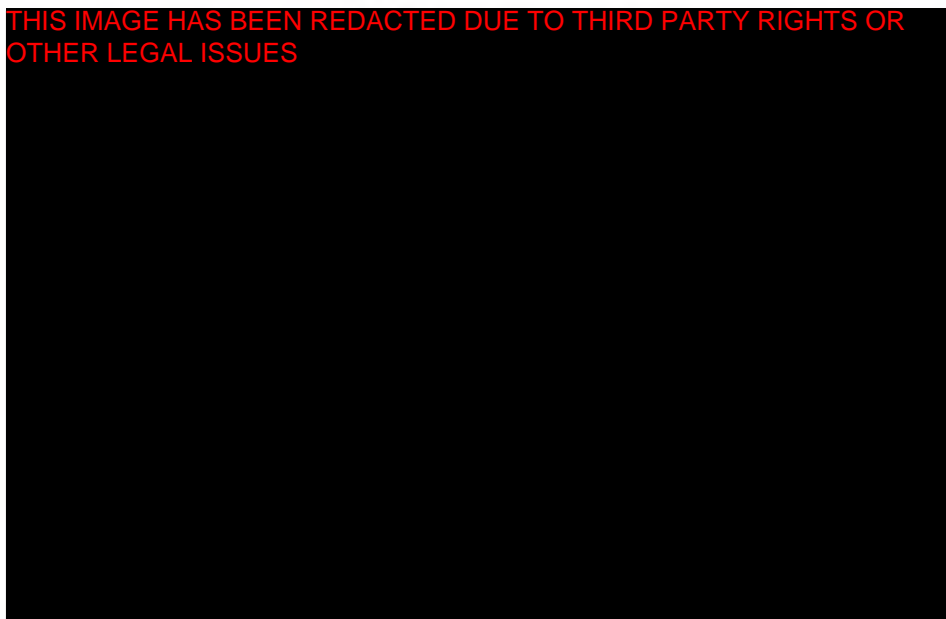


Fig. 12: Michael Asher *Revealing the Frame* (1974)

In interview Asher stated that, ‘the function of the work at the Claire Copley Gallery was didactic, to represent materially the visible aspects of [the] process of abstraction’ (Asher in Owens 1994: 134). Specifically, his intervention reveals the network of economic and social relations that are essential for the construction of ‘the art experience’; curators, directors, writers, dealers, installation workers, invigilators, guards, receptionists, collectors and visitors; phones, faxes, computers, files, spreadsheets, accounts. The gallery or museum of contemporary art had been designed to minimise visitors’ awareness of these quotidian markers of commerce and administration. Asher’s work operates as a deconstruction of the white cube’s primed and powdered public-face. Another interpretation of the gallery is also suggested in his visualisation of the *aura-breaking* technologies of the gallery as a workspace; purity is defiled by unveiling the support mechanisms of administration, accounting, publicity all of which would normally have been architecturally silenced.

Cleaning the museum

Mierle Laderman Ukeles also chose to engage with the politics of labour which appear absent from the pristine spaces of the gallery or museum. Ukeles presented a series of interventionist performances entitled *Maintenance Art*, performed in 1973 at the Wadsworth Athenium in Hartford Connecticut. In two performances, *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside* (see Fig. 13) and *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Inside*, Ukeles, on her hands and knees, washed the exterior steps and the internal foyer of the museum for a period of four hours during the time that the museum was open to the public.

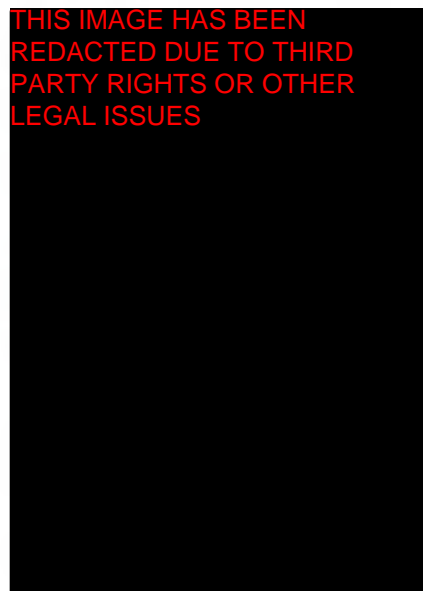


Fig. 13: Mierle Laderman Ukeles *Hartford Wash: Washing Tracks, Maintenance Outside* (1973)

Similarly to Asher and Buren, she complicates notions of public and private and

points to the social and gendered characteristics of the labour relations maintaining the gallery and museum's edifice. Institutional Critique, as Kwon observes, 'insisted on the social matrix of the class, race, gender and sexuality of the viewing subject' (Kwon 2002: 13). There are aspects of Ukeles' performances that would have been uncomfortable or even embarrassing for some viewers. Aligned to Mary Douglas' theory that, whatever needs cleansing is 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1966: 35), the act of cleansing itself, along with the cleaner, become matter out of place, transgressing the order of visibility and invisibility in the museum. Little documentation exists on Ukeles' performances and this in itself is significant, especially when Buren and Haacke now enjoy almost iconic status as originators of social critique. Despite the intentions of institutional critique to address Kwon's 'social matrix' it is the women artists who appear to have been marginalised by art historical voices from the 1970s.

More matter out of place can be found in Haacke's (1971) exhibition, at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, which was cancelled by the then director Thomas Messer, in the very month it was due to open. Messer's rationale for this last minute decision was that he had to decide 'between the acceptance or rejection of an alien substance that had entered the art museum organism' (in Buskirk 2005: 166). The 'substance' was a work proposed by Haacke that had grown out of a longstanding interest in 'systems', which led him from early minimalist pieces, such as the micro environment of *Condensation Cube* (1963-65) to more explicitly sociologically influenced pieces that demonstrated a determination to reveal the very system that he himself was part of. In this particular instance in 1971, he had traced the owners of slum properties in New York's Lower East side and Harlem to members of the Guggenheim Board of directors and intended to present the findings of his research in the form of documents charts and photographs relating to the aforementioned real estate holdings.

A clear intention to politicise the gallery or museum as a socio-economic entity had been evident in Haacke's early pieces such as *Exhibition of Americans* at the Fondation Maeght St Paul de Vence in 1970⁹⁴ and his *MOMA Poll* (1970) and *Gallery Visitor's Profile* (1969-1973) in which he gathered data about the social phenomena of museum audiences.⁹⁵ As Alberro writes, Haacke's work:

⁹⁴ In response to the contradictions between the way he and his fellow exhibitors had been treated and the Fondation's attitude towards its other guests (presumably potential clients) Haacke made an additional sound piece that drew attention to the Maeght Fondation's commercial interests; its gallery in Paris.

⁹⁵ Visitors were asked information about their age, gender, ethnic group, occupation, religious beliefs etc., using a similar methodology to that which a social scientist might employ.

explicitly recognises that the work of art's status as such arises not from characteristics of its own inner logic, nor from the nominal act of the autonomous agent in absolute control of his [sic] creative impulses, but, in the first place, from the "relative ideological frame" of the privileged social group that constitutes an art audience and administers the discourse of art in our society, and second, from the gallery museum power nexus that bestows value on the work of art.

(Alberro 2000: xxiv)

What needs to be concealed in order that we can see?

By drawing attention to the institutional conditions that make 'the museum experience' possible, (whether these are architectural conditions, labour relations, financial aspects of art and artefacts in museums), interventions act to highlight the ways in which galleries and museums are linked to other institutions, labour relations and social conditions. Ukles's, Haacke's and Asher's interventions, although preoccupied with different concerns, encourage visitors to consider the gallery or museum as an ideological landscape whose contours and territories are all implicated in the visible dimensions of its displays. Asher and Haacke's interventions draw attention to curatorial process as they both mounted 're hangs' and mini exhibitions within art institutions and this was soon to be expanded upon by others. It is noteworthy that at the same time as Haacke was involved in his quasi-sociological art projects in Europe and the USA, Bourdieu was carrying out questionnaire studies for *Distinction*¹ in France⁹⁶. Haacke's work interested Bourdieu greatly and years later, in 1995, the two collaborated on the publication *Free Exchange*, which documents their conversations about galleries, museums and the socio-political networks that constitute them.

Artists as curators and directors

Jean-Hubert Martin has written that the 'phenomenon of museums or exhibitions conceived by artists appeared in the [nineteen] seventies' (Martin 1995: 55). Although this is not strictly accurate, (there are much earlier precedents dating right back to museums' inception)⁹⁷, what can be seen as distinctive, about artists'

⁹⁶ In *Distinction* Bourdieu undertook far reaching empirical research to map the cultural tastes, habits and preferences of the French public. He argued that distinctions of taste inform a hierarchy of social judgement. See Bourdieu, P. (1979, 2002 edition) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge

⁹⁷ Artists' roles in museums can easily be overlooked, but the divisions and hierarchy of responsibilities as we know them today are relatively recent and artists often occupied the spaces now more commonly inhabited by directors, curators and fundraisers whose studies of art, rather than practical involvement with art, will have assured them of their particular status and responsibilities. A case in point is that of the Louvre and Hubert Robert. Robert, who was born in 1733, was a painter famed for his landscapes of ruins in a sentimental and decorative style, but from 1784 – 1792 and again from 1795 – 1802 it was Robert who had responsibility for the Louvre's collection and its arrangement. His job title was 'Garde du Musoeum' (keeper of the museum) but he would equally be considered as the first curator of the museum's collections. It may also be Robert who first made the museum a significant subject for painting. His vision for the future configuration of the Grand Galerie 'Project d'Aménagement de la grand Galerie du Louvre' became a counterpart to his *Imaginary view of the Grand Galerie*, Robert's projections into

relationships with galleries and museums in the 1970s, is a discernable turn towards a more knowing and critical appropriation of the collector's, curator's or director's role. In taking on such a role artists began to intervene in the classification of material and appropriating the roles that had been hitherto hidden from direct public view.

If pre-1970s ventures suggest artists gently slipping their feet into curator's shoes, with resultant exhibitions often reflecting orthodox curatorial practices, then the 1970s could be characterised by a vision of artists donning platform-soles (that did not look like they belonged to a curator at all) and strutting their newfound critical status with a seeming disregard for propriety. As Osborne (2002) suggests, changes in cultural consensus about where meaning resides, meant that interpretation, and particularly self-interpretation, became central concerns for artists, galleries and museums. 'Barthes' death of the author/artist⁹⁸ was rapidly followed by the birth of the artist as self-curator. This led to an inflation in the cultural authority of the artist's critical discourse' (Osborne 2002: 43).

Although there were many curatorial Artists Interventions in this period I have singled out two very different examples that have proved influential as models for investigating and questioning museological practices concerned with the construction of meaning. The first, by Andy Warhol, in the invited role of curator, is an apolitical intervention by default. In this instance the museum's rationale for inviting a 'celebrity' artist to work with them is of particular interest as is the resultant tension which the curation precipitated. The second, by artist Broodthaers in the role of museum director, is a knowing parody of museological practices, in the form of a series of museum openings which he presided over. Both installations were aimed directly at unmasking the assumed neutrality of taxonomies and accepted interpretive conventions. Warhol's and Broodthaers's projects can also be seen as part of 'the great escape' from roles ascribed to mid-twentieth century Western artists. This was not confined to trespassing in art criticism's territory or to embracing the methodologies of sociology and philosophy as previously discussed. Artists infiltrated the domains of other disciplines and professions just as adroitly.

the immediate and long term future. His choice to render these visualisations as oil paintings, fully conceived and realised works of art, rather than as architectural plans, texts or diagrams speaks of the possibility for interconnectedness or fluidity between what are now configured as very different areas of expertise. This is noteworthy in relation to the increasing specialisation of arts workforces that happened in the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁹⁸ The first English translation of Barthes's *Death of the Author* appeared in 1967 in *Aspen Magazine* 5-6, edited by Brian O'Doherty. In reductive terms Barthes gives agency to the reader by suggesting that the meaning of a text resides within their decoding of it. In this same edition artist Sol LeWitt published *Serial Project # 1*, in which he wrote: 'The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise.' (Le Witt in Buchloh 1990:140)

You can't be serious?

In 1970 Warhol was invited to select and design an exhibition at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Long Island, which he titled 'Raid the Icebox'⁹⁹. Warhol's curatorial foray was not intended as an 'intervention,' even in the broad contemporary use of the term.

In common with many collections, the Museum of Art: Rhode Island School of Design Museum was a bequest collection that was largely kept in storage, in fact only ten percent was exhibited. The archive, ordered with attention to the pragmatics of storage rather than overarching taxonomies is a space that houses the also-rans and suggests alternative narratives and has proved a favourite haunt for artists¹⁰⁰.

The inception of the project grew from a need to increase the financial standing of the museum by courting potential funders for conservation work. Daniel Robbins, the museum's director, had responded directly to a suggestion made by Jean de Menhil who proposed a series of exhibitions curated by a 'vanguard of artists'. The concept of 'cutting edge' artists as available raw material for marketing and publicity purposes is something that the art world has become inured to since the final decades of the twentieth century but in 1970 the idea was still fairly novel.

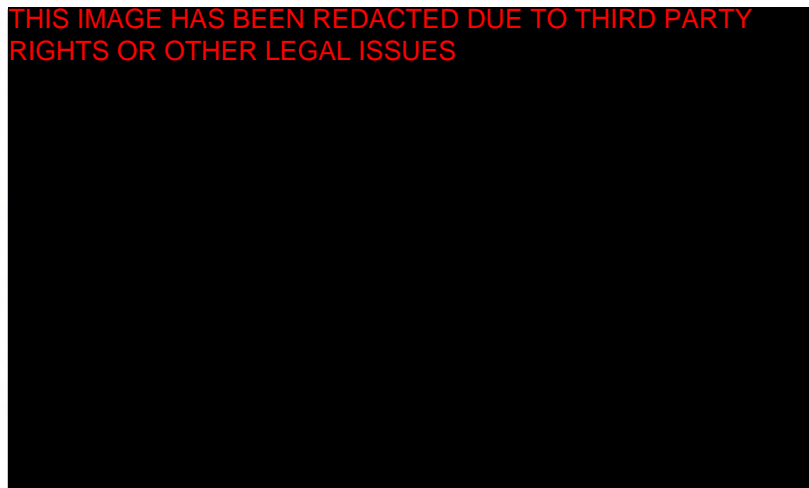


Fig. 14: Andy Warhol *Raid the Icebox* (1970)

Warhol's curatorial debut turned out to be an intervention by default. With total disregard for conventional hierarchy and value it could not fail to 'challenge' conventional notions of display. The museum's curatorial staff was incredulous of his

⁹⁹ In America an 'icebox' is a refrigerator. The somewhat parodic suggestion of a relationship between foraging for comestibles in a domestic appliance and curating an exhibition would have been interpreted in itself as indicative of a lack of respect for cultural value.

¹⁰⁰ Calle, Haacke, Hiller, Kosuth and Wilson are just a few of the artists who have used or referred to the archive in relation to exhibited work.

intentions, unwilling perhaps to countenance, even temporarily, a system that differed from the logic of their own training. To the request, from Warhol, to borrow the entire shoe collection the curator of costume replied in a somewhat disciplinarian tone, 'Well, you don't want it all - because there's some duplication' - Warhol raised his eyebrows and blinked... in fact, he wanted all the shoes, all the hat boxes (without taking the hats out)' (in Wollen 1993: 167). The museum's discourse articulated by the costume curator had particular narratives to tell, and Warhol's predilection for 'reintegrating the rejected' (Wollen 1993: 168) was not one of them. Warhol's selection, for this exhibition, has been described by Amanda Bright as 'random, indiscriminate and maliciously indifferent to value' (Bright 2001: 280). Wollen however, take a different view positing the curation as indicative of Warhol's general interests in rejects. Bright's understanding of Warhol's strategy rests on the negatory effects of his intervention on existing museological values; as she points out, the traditional power of the label to 'assert a coherent narrative' (ibid) was substantially undermined by Warhol's tactics. Wollen, on the other hand, unpicks Warhol's proclivity for siding with the aesthetic of the overlooked and marginal. Both accounts point to the project's disruption of a 'given order' but the potential consequences of such disruption on both museum practices and visitor experiences remain largely unexplored.

After Warhol's inaugural exhibition, Robbins' initial proposition for a series of curatorial projects was quickly abandoned. This one venture it seemed, had ruffled too many institutional feathers to risk embarking on other such projects. Bright makes an interesting observation suggesting that what irked museum employees would not have affected the student populace in the same way. 'Any such subversion had been imperceptible to the student body studying at Rhode Island in the era of the late 1960s campus protest' (2001: 284). This was an apolitical curation by most people's reckoning. Its disruptions of museum classification and value systems, let alone its implications for gender stereotype and commodity (accessioning) excess would not register for some further decades when difference and 'othering' became mainstream theoretical and practical museological concerns.

Power, knowledge, eagles

Two years earlier, a very different response to the gallery or museum's classification systems and taxonomies¹⁰¹ emerged. Broothaers' *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles*, although not originally situated within a gallery or museum, recreated poignant

¹⁰¹ Empty forms, mussel shells, egg shells; containers that condition the form that resides within, were a theme throughout Broodthaers's work, as were taxonomies and classification systems.

aspects of the museum in the form of a series of installations. Broodthaers's illusory museum was, in part, an archaeology of the modern gallery or museum's history with a particular emphasis placed on its relationship to the marketplace. Although its various guises and manifestations spanned a four-year period, significance should be accorded to the timing of its inception in Broodthaers's Brussels home¹⁰² in 1968. Unlike Warhol's consciously apolitical stance, Broodthaers was amongst those artists, students and activists who had protested against governmental control of cultural production and the growing commercialisation of art itself¹⁰³. The criticality of the fictional narratives that Broodthaers created continues to provide points of reference for interventions into strands of museological discourse such as classification, interpretation, knowledge, status and power.

It was no mere coincidence that in the months from May to September of 1968 Broodthaers had gravitated from protest occupancy of a museum (the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels) to the creation of a quasi-museum within his own home. Broodthaers, in effect, 'occupied' a museum for the next four years in an extended form of protest. His strategy involved complex position taking and, like Warhol, he became involved in the emulation of the role of another. Within his faux museum he became, not the curator or the collector but the museum director, a portent perhaps, of the increasing corporatisation of the cultural sector. Douglas Crimp (1993) assigns Broodthaers's directorial construct to a particular realisation of the museum's historical trajectory, posited much earlier by Benjamin in *Unpacking my Library* (c.1927-34) where Benjamin elaborates on the process and of collecting rather than the collection itself. Benjamin writes 'What else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?' (1999: 62). Foster, similarly, sees Broodthaers engaging in the act of paraphrasing Benjamin's notion of the counter-collector 'cultural reification turned into critical poetic' (Foster 1996: 24).

The 1968 opening of the 'museum' was dedicated to the nineteenth century, which Broodthaers used as a constant reference point for the formation of contemporary attitudes about culture. For Broodthaers it was a point at which the romantic disposition 'took hold of art and provided it with an always-ready alibi for its alienation from social reality' (Crimp 1993: 226). His so-called 'museum' was in fact an installation, a fabrication of the museum's conceits. If Duchamp's *Fountain* posited, 'it's art when I say it's art' then Broodthaers's suggestion was: 'it's a museum when I

¹⁰² It is noteworthy that Buren attended the opening of Broodthaers's, *Musée d'Art Moderne* in 1968.

¹⁰³ Along with other activists Broodthaers occupied the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels in a direct political protest against what they perceived to be the increasing capitalist consumption of culture, controlled and directed by the few in the supposed interest of the many.

say it is'. As if to prove the point the inscription 'Musée' could be read, from the outside on the windows of his apartment. Inside, appropriating galleries and museums' conventions for storage, transportation and labelling, were thirty wooden 'art storage' crates, marked *fragile, keep dry*. Alongside the crates were fifty postcard reproductions of nineteenth century paintings stuck to the walls with transparent tape and a slide projection showing nineteenth century satirical caricatures (by Grandville). Invites to the opening were sent out stating:

We have the pleasure of announcing to the customers and the curious the opening of the 'Département des Aigles' of the Musée d'Art Moderne... We hope that our formula "Disinterestedness plus admiration" will seduce you.
(Broodthaers in Crimp 1993: 206)

Broodthaers's strange press release-come-invite evokes the pervasive effects of the legacy of Kantian aesthetics on the reception of art in the West. Turning Kant's dictum into a marketing/publicity statement achieves the effect of rendering it absurd and slightly sinister. Broodthaers's probing parody of 'museums' fictions' bears close associations with Foucault's 'archaeology,' in its commitment to oppose cultural history. His museum project's affinity with the work of Michel Foucault stems from respective methodological engagements with the relationship of imperial power to knowledge/power. This is perhaps most clearly visible in the last morphology of his Musée d'Art Moderne in (1972), 'Section des Figures' in *Der Adler Vom Oligozän Bis Heute* (The Eagle from the Oligocene to the present), here the epistemological and totalising inference can be understood as a parody, similar to that explicated by Foucault, of the historicizing tendencies within Western culture. The eagle was used as the establishing classificatory link, allowing Broodthaers to bring together an heterogeneous collection of artefacts linked only by their shared association with a bird of prey and symbol of imperial power. Using multifarious object forms as far ranging as typewriters, beer bottles, armour and umbrellas, Broodthaers displays, in vitrines and on walls, the desire to take ownership of power.

It is noteworthy that Broodthaers's explication/exhibition of power/knowledge in this final section, anticipated the direction that Foucault's work would take in *Discipline and Punish*, which was published in 1975, three years after the close of Broodthaers's museum.

The naturalisation of classification systems achieved by chronological developments relative to discrete discourses of knowledge is absurdly disrupted by a collection of objects linked only by their associations with eagles. Why eagles? The viewer's

acceptance of groupings of objects in a gallery or museum as entirely 'sensible' as if representative of an almost 'natural' order becomes subsumed to the question, why eagles? Broodthaers's critical examination of the powers of museums' meaning making that had accrued the illusion of neutrality/truth, necessitated an engagement with the evolution of particular branches of knowledge that informed display methodology and shaped those constructions of meaning. Whereas categories have arisen at particular points in history, a dominant impulse in the twentieth century was to attempt a pre-historic tracing of such categories, an attempt to go back to the geological, the palaeontology of history in order to present collections, classifications and constructions of knowledge as somehow trans-historical and/or trans-cultural. Broodthaers's order can be read as a parody of these historicizing tendencies within Western culture. This relates to the points made by Preziosi cited on p. 55 in which the museum reweaves the past to present an 'evolutionary history' (Preziosi 2004: 73).

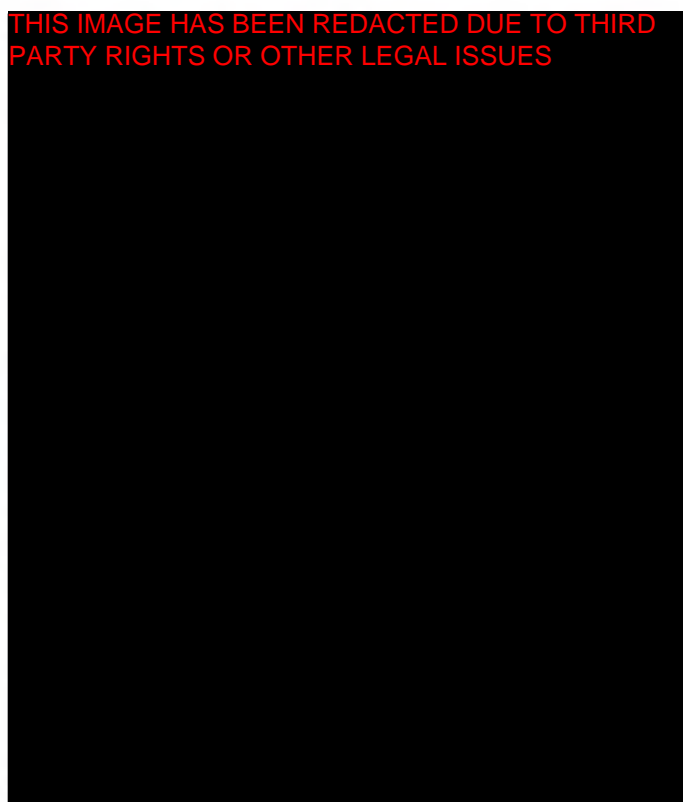


Fig. 15: Marcel Duchamp *Fountain* (1917)

Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917), exposed the confirmation of status that institutional framing bestows on objects and Broodthaers argued convincingly in his catalogue for the exhibition *The Eagle from the Oligocene to Today* in Düsseldorf in 1972, that it was Duchamp who revealed the very syntagmatic construction and contextual definition of art - art as institution. Duchamp proclaimed, with the deftness of an alchemist transforming the scatological to the sublime, *this is a work of art*. René Magritte's *Ceci*

n'est pas une pipe (1929) expanded the semiotics of the work of art in the signifying chain in a similar direction. Broodthaers conflates and develops both of these ideas with his common label description, 'this is not a work of art'¹⁰⁴ for various exhibits in the *Section des Figures*.

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Fig. 16: Marcel Broodthaers 'Section des Figures' in *Der Adler Vom Oligozän Bis Heute* (1972)

The labels were written in English, French or German thereby opening up the possibilities for linguistic twists. Ambiguity, as in Duchamp's work, was afforded by slippages in translation and colloquial meaning. The phrase 'Il n'est pas un aigle' is understood in French to mean 'he is not a genius'. Although Broodthaers spoke mainly of the eagle as a symbol of power¹⁰⁵, the relationship between eagle and genius and genius *per se* as an integral binding concept for the fields of art and museology, would be unlikely to have passed him by.

Broodthaers attempts to unravel the noticeable 'firming up' of particular museological discourses that had taken place in the twentieth century; the ways, for example, that gallery or museum discourse naturalises the place of the 'genius', the 'exotic', or notions of progress and civilisation.

Galleries and museums, like all educational institutions, have favoured stabilising discourse, aware that in order for things to stay in their place, a certain amount of tying in or down is required. This process of 'fixing' is also related to what Lacan (1977) refers to as the *point de capiton*; literally a quilting point or button that ties down, or threads through, layers of wadding (floating signifiers) to fix or partially fix meaning. The *point de caption* is thus the point in the signifying chain at which 'the

¹⁰⁴ The labelling device was also employed by Spoerri in his *Grocery store* installation of 1961 in which all sorts of food packages were stamped "Attention - work of art". Each item was then sold off at the same price as it would have cost to buy in a food store.

¹⁰⁵ Adopted by both Germany and America as a nation symbol.

signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of the signification' (Lacan 1977: 309) and produces the necessary illusion of a fixed meaning. The point de capiton is therefore the point at which the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of signification' (Lacan 1977: 303) and gives an illusion of fixed meaning. However, what started to become apparent in the 1960s/70s but was not fully acknowledged until the 1990s, was that the gallery or museum's discourse and the interventionist's discourse can never succeed in imposing total order and continues to be subvertible by a contingent surplus of meaning.

Materialising language

During the 1960s and 1970s a new wave of critical and interventionist practices in galleries and museums began to explore the possibilities of using 'words' as a material from which to 'make art'. As can be seen in Broodthaers's use of labels, invitations, press releases (see Fig. 11 and Fig. 16) the written word is an anchor that allows artists to reference the particularities and protocols of galleries, museums and other institutions.

The Artist-writer could hardly be seen as a new phenomenon of the 1960s, however, artists for whom the delineation between writing and art had become consciously imperceptible, represented something of a marker of difference. For many artists, turning to language was not simply a play for de-stabilising an order within the art world but also a manifestation of the centrality that language (text/visual) was taking within an evolving understanding of the construction of knowledge. This acknowledgment, according to Newman and Bird, is an acknowledgement that the work of art is a sign, constantly 'competing for recognition in the cultural and ideological codes of society' (Newman and Bird 1999: 7). In a turn to the word there is also:

recognition that materials and procedures, surfaces and textures, locations and placements are not only sculptural or painterly matter to be dealt with in terms of a phenomenology of visual and cognitive experience or in terms of visual analysis of the sign (as most of the minimalist and post-Minimalist artists had still believed), but that they are always already inscribed within the convention of language and thereby within institutional power and ideological and economic investment.

(Buchloh 1990: 136)

Ad Reinhardt provides some valuable contextualisation for these developments. Although he did not produce physical interventions in gallery and museum spaces, his parodic and satirical writings and cartoon strips which targeted the art world in

America in the 1940s and 50s were highly influential in generating a critique of America's cultural institutions. On face value Reinhardt was one of a generation of artists working in the U.S.A. under the auspices of modernism,¹⁰⁶ but it is his position as a political critic and parodist that is significant to the methodologies employed in Artists' Interventions. His unpublished and undated poem 'Museum' sets in motion some of the contradictions and complexities of his thinking on galleries museums and the artworld and society more broadly.

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(Reinhardt in Rose 1991: 128-129)

¹⁰⁶ The imperative for an autonomous, pure art object, clearly delineated from everyday life (à la Greenberg) appears substantiated in his monochrome abstract paintings. However, mutuality between Greenberg and Reinhardt did not follow, Reinhardt rejected Greenberg's theories and his work, in turn, was dismissed by Greenberg.

'Museum' is a meeting place of clashing, possibly irreconcilable values, articulated by an artist engaged in a dialectic of political/social activism on the one hand and belief in art's autonomy on the other. In 'Museum', line after line of tautology, cliché, hyperbole, aphorism and appropriated historic/traditional values vie with the rhetoric of exigency. The struggle to reconcile seemingly antithetical ideals is articulated by the profusion of binary oppositions: 'public-private', 'major-minor', 'high-low', 'inside and outside', 'fine-practical', 'free-servile', 'detached-engaged'. These are indicative, not just of Reinhardt's difficulty in coalescing the political with the aesthetic, but of the taboo of the political under the aegis of high modernism. In particular, Reinhardt mounted a critique of the simplistic flattening out of such complex antagonisms.

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Fig. 17: Ad Reinhardt *How to Look at Modern Art in America* (1961)

How to Look at Modern Art in America (1961) parodies the type of diagrams and synoptic tables that were often used to teach modern art in universities. Many of these emanated from Barr Jr's flow chart (see Fig. 10) reproduced on the jacket of the original edition of the catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York Museum of Modern Art 1936). Similar schemata were used in the UK and Europe where representation of 'the history of art,' by diagrammatic schemata, was being used to establish a hierarchy in galleries and museums and in teaching more generally. These 'didactic attempts to comprehend the complexity of developments in art by simplistic text book diagrams' (Hutcheon 2000: 46) were compelling in their simple ordering of centuries of historical material into a neat 'story of art,' through which, a justification for certain contemporary views and opinions could be seen as rational, and part of a 'natural' progression or teleology.

Reinhardt's predated, (by some decades) Lucy Lippard's observations on the growing propensity for artists to reclaim a legitimate critical voice, and succeeded in juggling a range of critical and creative outputs as painter, political activist¹⁰⁷, acerbic art critic and graphic satirist. His writings on art, aesthetics, architecture and education, from the 1940s to the 1960s were published in *Art News*, *Art International*, *Artforum*, *Art in America* and his cartoons (funny, ironic and sardonic) appeared in the socialist newspaper *PM* and *The New Masses*.

In Reinhardt's 'cartoons', the presence of the very devices (narrative, representation, humour, parody, reflections on art and life) that he was fixated on expunging from his art (painting) are all-pervasive, like a kind of leakage or overspill. During the Cold War years in which Reinhardt was working, there were substantial FBI files kept on him¹⁰⁸, circumstances forced him to conceal facets of his life, to adopt pseudonyms¹⁰⁹ and to deny much of his political activity.¹¹⁰ In this light, his tactics of negation might be more realistically viewed as strategies intended to maximise influence in a hostile environment. Having, in effect, a number of segregated and hierarchised job descriptions, allowed him to maximise his effect on the spheres of culture and politics with which he was profoundly concerned.

¹⁰⁷ He was engaged in political and social activism throughout his life, adamantly opposing America's involvement in Vietnam. He participated in organised protests and donated work to benefits for civil rights activities and anti-war campaigns. See (Rose 1991: 171)

¹⁰⁸ Some 123 pages of notes on Reinhardt were kept in FBI files. See (Craven 1993: 41 – 52)

¹⁰⁹ Daryl Friedrich was a name used when he was on the editorial council of 'Soviet Russia Today' in 1937. See (Craven, D. 1993 *ibid*)

¹¹⁰ In 1958, Reinhardt categorically denied communist party membership. His travel abroad was nevertheless monitored. (See Craven, D. 1993 *ibid*)

In the biography that Reinhardt composed for himself, at the occasion of his retrospective at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1966, he incorporated major episodes in world history alongside artistic achievements:

1955- Listed in Fortune magazine as one of the top twelve investments in the art market

1956- Borrows money from the bank to travel

1956- Suez crisis

1956- Makes last cartoon, a mandala.

(Reinhardt in Rose 1991: 171)

At the time Reinhardt's self-authored chronology was interpreted as mere documentation, peripheral to the 'real work' – the paintings. With the linguistic developments that were to follow, via Conceptual Art, the chronology can be seen very differently: as art in its own right, which changes significantly the way that Reinhardt might be understood. The very impossibility of divorcing cultural endeavours from the social and political context in which they are pursued is certainly hinted at here. Reinhardt was significant for a later generation of artists who shared with him the desire to move into pivotal socio/cultural positions. It is not until Reinhardt's work is viewed as a whole that it is possible to see the potential for the breakdown in the specificity of roles that dominated modernist practices, to borrow Nancy Spector's (1994) term the sites that would later become recognised as 'symptoms of possibility' (p. 29).

Reinhardt was an inspirational figure to artists and writers aligned to both minimalism and conceptualism. If parts of Reinhardt's practices refused the possibility of a coherent whole then, others such as Smithson and Bochner quickly saw the potential to combine text, art and criticality as total artwork. Smithson and Bochner's *The Domain of the Great Bear* was published in *Art Voices* in 1966, (the same year in which Reinhardt's 'autobiography' was published). It was a venture that in Anne Rorimer's words was to 'eliminate the once firm distinction between the defining characteristics of an artwork versus that of a magazine article, it deliberately elude[d] typecasting as one or the other' (1994: 254–266).

Text based art began to gain institutional recognition during the 1960s, although this would take some time to filter into museums' accessioning and taxonomic programmes. Increasingly other artists such as Robert Morris and Donald Judd also infiltrated spaces of criticism opened up by a developing publications network. The case of the journal, *Artforum*, in 1967 serves particularly well to situate the lively dialogue that challenged the gallery system as a physical and ideological site. 'Art and

Objecthood' by critic Michael Fried, 'Notes on Sculpture' by artist Robert Morris and 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' by artist Sol LeWitt all appeared in the same volume. Release from the containment of the studio into a declarative critical forum quickly affected the working practices of artists, a number of whom chose to examine through their work the institutional practices of galleries and museums. Whilst these observations direct attention to the centrality of language it is important to recognise what language became, in the hands of many artists from the 1960s onwards. Far from a logocentric approach, language was morphed in the hands of these artists to be re-asserted as representation, image and object.

Liz Koltz (2007) argues that artists such as Lawrence Weiner and Carl Andre went so far as to evacuate language of meaning, reducing it to the status of an 'object to be looked at'. Koltz takes the title of her book, *Words To Be Looked At*, from a sentence in a press release for Robert Smithson's exhibition, 'Language to be Looked at and/or Things to be Read'. She argues that words, in the context of 1960s conceptual art, 'were treated in some sense like objects – to be looked at, and also to be accumulated, built up, moved around, and broken apart. [She goes on to suggest that] objects could be read or interpreted to have meanings beyond their mute physical appearance' (Koltz 2008: 2). Koltz believes that critical theorists have not sufficiently addressed the deeply ambivalent status of language in the post war period (ibid 223). She emphasises the fact that the communicative capacity and function of language is far removed from an exact science, and relies substantively on metaphor, connotation, and historical convention. This 'deficiency' or quality of slipperiness and flux in language is something that can be seen in extremis in artists' appropriation of the word in art. Many Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums rely on disrupting visitors' expectations of how the written and spoken word will be used. This is true of proto-interventions such as those of Ernst and Baargeld (1919), as it is of interventions in the late 60s and early 70s, where more word games involving irony and parody are played including the double meaning, the *double entendre*. This can be seen in Broodthaers's use of the term *Department of Aigles* (see p. 108), Duchamp's urinal which he named *Fountain* (see pp 77-79), Wilson's understated use of the term *Metalwork* (see p. 181), Fraser's parody of the postmodern architect Frank Ghery, in *Little Frank and his Carp* (see p. 129). In these instances the irony destabilises and undermines interpretation by positing alternative readings.

Before moving on, it is again useful to review the arguments developed thus far. I suggest that from the 1960s and 1970s it is possible to see the development of

Institutional Critique and Artists' Interventions as more established and coherent genres of art. The use of shock tactics to destabilise is still evident in some interventionist works but this has largely been replaced by a more didactic and explicit socio/political critique. In this period, interventions in galleries/museums most frequently took the form of a critique, not simply of the practices of institutions but in a number of instances, of what had become accepted as the institution of art. Critiques of institutionalised practice in the 1960s and 1970s were often circumscribed by a very real danger of artists attributing to themselves a superior set of moral values. An absence of adequate reflexivity meant that some artists thought it possible to look down in a detached manner, and reprimand an institution for its failure to reflect social concerns with injustice, without questioning their own part in these same institutional systems.

Interventionist approaches became more widespread in the late 1960s reflecting compelling concerns with ethical and political issues and with art institutions. This ushered in an interrogation of the histories of art, within the specificity of particular societies and cultures, and heightened awareness of the constructed nature of art's 'special status', its aesthetic separation from the quotidian, the moral and ethical and its subsequent otherworldly quasi-religious 'aura.'¹¹¹

Part 3: The contingency of art and knowledge in a climate of change

In the third section I focus on the developments taking place at the end of the twentieth century through to the twenty-first century. In temporal terms this is a short hop, a mere twenty or thirty years from the last point of demarcation in section two. However, I suggest that alongside continuities there have also been some significant changes in artists' approaches to 'intervening' in the institutional discourse of galleries and museums; not least because there have been considerable changes in the constituent parts of this discourse¹¹².

Most significantly for this study, the 1990s brought some academic recognition that Artists' Interventions from earlier in the twentieth century had had a substantive influence on museological interpretation and curatorial practices. Shelton cites those 'practices undertaken by artists assuming curatorial roles through which the process of constructing exhibited knowledge is itself explored and problematised' (Shelton 2001:

¹¹² These changes are outlined in chapter 2.

147) and the processes through which artists ‘consciously seek to deconstruct, or excavate and lay bare to an incredulous gaze the working of dominant forms of cultural, economic or political expression’ (ibid). The significant difference of such practices is that they offer variance from the detached and analytical observations by employing a process of making. Shelton suggests that ‘they reconfigure the specific meaning ascribed to things in the natural theory of value, producing new contingent meanings generated through a process of assemblage and reassemblage’ (ibid). It is no coincidence that the preoccupations and issues shared by many of these artists are similar to those of critical museologists and anthropologists, since they share an almost common set of problems, inherited from the same contemporaneous field of critical discourses. Some artists, such as Dion and Hiller also trained as anthropologists before they became artists. Shelton is certain that the critical practices of artists have had a significant and direct affect on the development of praxiological museology. So too does anthropologist Arnd Schneider, who goes so far as to attribute the realisation of ‘the West’s obsession with the fictive construction of evidence in museums,’ to artists from as far back as the 1960s. He considers that artists articulated this understanding ‘through various installations, making reference to anthropological practices,’ adding by way of admission for his own discipline that these ‘artistic practices and criticisms [such as Boltanski’s¹¹³] went unnoticed by anthropologists for almost two decades’ (Schneider 2006: 33). Perhaps this lack of recognition in the 1970s and 1980s is unsurprising. Throughout the 1980s, a ‘resurgence of interest in ‘traditional’ positivist aesthetic experience and models of artistic subjectivity eclipsed critical and situated art practices’ (Ward 1995: 71), exacerbated in the 1980s/early 1990s by critics¹¹⁴, on the political left, who concluded that radical art practices, including Institutional Critique, had failed. This sense of failure can also be attributed to a nostalgia for the oppositional strategies of the past, obscuring the continuum of criticality that had morphed to assume a less overtly confrontational or bombastic guise.

By the 1990s, the assuredness with which institutions had once narrated, classified and re-presented the past had already been substantially questioned. An ‘increasing incredulity towards meta narratives’, articulated in postmodern theory (Lyotard 1978),

¹¹³ For example: in Boltanski’s *Inventory of a Man from Barcelona* he writes: ‘At the beginning of January 1973 I wrote to directors of sixty-two, art, history and anthropology museums, suggesting that that they arrange an exhibition which would consist of all the available objects that an individual has had around him during his lifetime, from handkerchiefs to cupboards. I asked them to concern themselves with such things as classification and labelling, but not with the choice of person. They were to acquire the objects through an auction or by borrowing them from someone living in their area (it is indeed necessary that the objects, on each occasion, be obtained from the district in which they are being shown). The person concerned should always remain anonymous. Pieces of furniture as well as small objects under glass should be carefully arranged to a certain order, or in some cases a photographic inventory could be compiled’ (Boltanski in Schneider 1993: 6).

¹¹⁴ e.g. Bürger (1986) who, in the light of the fall of Communism, consigns the radical possibilities of revolutionary politics and aesthetics to history.

played a key role in the demise of the tendency to present particular and partial constructions of meaning as universal knowledge (Robins 2005).

The twenty-first century is one in which post-colonialism, feminism and interculturalism inform educational and cultural theory as much as they inform many artists' practices. It is therefore inevitable that galleries and museums will continue to be asked: who has the right to select and represent on behalf of others? Whose history is being told, by whom and for whom? Is the restitution of cultural art/artefacts a postcolonial imperative? How should exclusions from the canon be acknowledged? Artists had been asking these questions from the beginning of the twentieth century, as can be seen in the first two sections of this chapter. From the 1990s onwards, artists (and those outside the field) continued to unwind the gallery and museum's grand-narrative comfort blanket, which it had clutched so tightly throughout the modern period, but this process would not have been possible without the examples of earlier Artists' Interventions.

Demise of the radical

It's not a question of being against the institution we are the institution it's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalise, what forms of practice we reward, and what kind of rewards we aspire to.

(Fraser 2005b: 283)

The revolutionary impetus that had dominated artists' approaches to Institutional Critique and Artist Interventions in galleries and museums throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s waned considerably by the 1990s. This has been characterised by Foster as a 'move away from grand oppositions to subtle displacements' (1996: 25). The gambits of Dadaists and Surrealists, although different in many ways, can be seen as part of an oppositional continuum, stemming from the nineteenth century when Independent Salons were set up 'against' the Academy. In the twentieth century the instigation of a radical progressive approaches to counter hide-bound traditionalism became the avant-garde. More extreme calls for the destruction of all traditional art establishments can be found in the Futurists' manifesto of 1909, where Filippo Marrinetti declares, 'We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, and fight against moralism, feminism and every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice' (in Harrison and Wood 1994: 145).

The neo-avant-garde

It is noteworthy that the recognition that the institution of art (including the

gallery/museum) was not something monolithic, that should be opposed, seems to have happened, not within the historical avant-garde of the early twentieth century, nor within the radicalised practices of the 1960s and 1970s (Part 2) but according to Foster, 'within the neo avant-garde of the late twentieth century' (Foster 1994: 32). Bourriaud maps out similar developments in art practices that operate (in contrast to those of the 1960s and 1970s) on the premise of a set of interwoven social relations. In confluence with Foster, he claims that artists in the 1990s were 'no longer trying to advance by means of cultural clashes [...] no longer seeking to represent utopias; [but] rather attempting to construct concrete spaces' (Bourriaud 2002: 46). This pragmatic grounding necessitated a different stance towards what it might mean to 'intervene.' Louise Lawler's observation that 'being an interventionist artist at the end of the twentieth century [...] is no longer a matter of trying to subvert or intrude, those strategies are now recognised and invited' (in Buskirk 1994: 184) suggests that artists were entering into different relationships with host institutions. Two key factors underpinned these reconfigured relationships, the first concerned changing understandings of 'institutions' and the second concerned artists' self-positioning and the pathology of the artist.

Fraser suggests that when artists move 'from a substantive understanding of *the institution* as specific places, organisations, and individuals, to a conception of it as a social field, the question of what is inside and what is outside becomes much more complex' (Fraser 2005: 281). Her insightful comments reflect and draw on Bourdieu's concepts of a social field and in the specialist fields within this - the Field of Cultural Production¹¹⁵. Fraser's point is that for an artist there is no possibility of being outside the cultural field looking in, this delusion of critical abstraction had already been found wanting from within art's practices and from the field of cultural and social theory. As she states 'we [artists] are the institution it's a question of what kind of institution we are' (Fraser 2005b: 283). This is a substantive reconceptualisation of the arena in which interventions take place and although Fraser cannot be taken to be speaking for all artists involved in interventionist practices, the reconfiguration of what a 'radical position' might actually look like was widespread.

The onset of pragmatism

In 2005, a conference at what was formerly - Hornsey College of Art¹¹⁶, was

¹¹⁵ See p.27.

¹¹⁶ In May 1968 a group of students at Hornsey College of Art formed the 'Student Action Committee (SAC),' With the support of a large percentage of the student body and some staff, they went on to form the Association of Members of Hornsey College of Art AMHCA. They issued a paper stating that they had taken control of the college 'for the purpose of implementing a new educational structure'. For the next 6 weeks the AMHCA held

advertised as: ‘an opportunity to return the discussion about the structure and nature of art and design education and wider concerns about the role of the artist/designer in society to its (sic) origin in open student-led debate and lateral thinking conceived in 1968’ (www.hornseyschoolofart.org 22.11.2005). The example is useful because a ‘return to [an] origin’ in the 1960s,’ brought together a significant number of the original activists with their like-minded, but subtly reconstituted, contemporary counterparts.

Discussions at this event attested to a sense of common value but also revealed a chasm demarcating the strategies and language of generations separated by thirty years; as this simple exchange, between a young female secondary school teacher of art and design and an older man (possibly one of the 1968 student activists), serves to illustrate. The young woman spoke engagingly about how she was ‘bending the rules’, in relation to the increasing league table accountability and narrow assessment demands in her subject area, when she was interrupted by the older man who forcefully suggested that she should ‘burn the rules not bend them’ (Video from Conference proceedings 2005). Whilst the woman’s tone was realistic and matter of fact, the man’s declaration seemed symptomatic of the rhetorical language of revolution, which Foster refers to as ‘more situationist than situated, [and which] echoes the oracular, often macho pronouncement of high modernism’ (1996: 25). Foster has in mind the hyperbole of artists such as Kosuth and Buren; the latter of the two he quotes calling for ‘total revolution’ in 1970, as the only possible response ‘after having seen a canvas like ours’ (Buren in Foster 1996: 25). Out of the context of its era, Buren’s ejaculation appears slightly more risible than radical. And Foster is not alone in noting the gendered nature of the clarion calls for revolution in the 1960s and 70s. In the intervening decades gender, race and sexuality have become highly significant to the discourse of intervention, often taking centre stage from the economic and class relations that had hitherto dominated the art practice that examined museums and their collections.¹¹⁷

Expanding to new sites

Prior to the 1990s, aside from the few notable exceptions¹¹⁸, Artists’ Interventions had focussed on the condition of art within its own institutions and provided a critical

continuous seminars, both in small groups and en-masse, producing over 60 documents relating to educational structure, curriculum and the role of the artist in society. Hornsey College of Art re-opened for three weeks for the purpose of reappraising the agenda for educational reform in art and design, set down in film and document during the 1968 student occupation of the college.

¹¹⁷ This is similarly noted by Foster (1996), who paraphrases ‘The Author as Producer’ (1934), Benjamin’s classic essay on class relations and avant-garde art, and identifies the rise of the ‘artist as ethnographer.’ He refers to the increasing numbers of artists whose works engage with a broader field of alterity.

¹¹⁸ Such as ‘La vérité sur les colonies’.

interpretation of art as an institution. Artists' Interventions in the 1990s and 2000s expanded their focus from the museum of art and/or design, to interpret: natural history museums (Dion), dioramas (Sugimoto), private collections (Lawler), science museums (Leonard), local history museums (Wilson), 'blue plaque' residences /museums (Hiller), educational tours and audio guides (Fraser) and even touring fairs and 'live' art exhibits (Ulrichs, Fusco, Gomez-Peña and Luna).

Mining the Museum: a closer look

Wilson's work, and in particular his now seminal intervention *Mining the Museum* (1993), has shaped and influenced many subsequent Artists' Interventions that have been commissioned by galleries and museums. Since becoming aware of *Mining the Museum* I had always had difficulties understanding quite how this intervention had come about, why it received so much attention, and what the impact of the intervention had been on Maryland Historic Society's approach to interpreting their collection for diverse audiences. Travelling to Baltimore to interview Ciscle, whose role was crucial in facilitating the intervention, allowed me access to information beyond that available in published materials. Wilson's intervention happened, in part, because Maryland Historic Society's director Charles Lye wanted to attract a more inclusive audience that reflected Baltimore's demographic and in particular to solve the problem of making the collection relevant to such an audience.¹¹⁹ But the driving force behind the intervention was The Contemporary, a nomadic, alternative arts organisation, who wanted to make their critique of mainstream gallery and museum practices more pronounced. Ciscle was The Contemporary's director in 1993 and says, 'we purposefully started to look to do a project that would illustrate our mission and question museum practices. How museums collect, how they exhibit, what they exhibit, where are the artists? who are the audiences? All these were important issues. So Lisa¹²⁰ and I started to look at, very consciously, artists whose very practice was about museological issues' (Ciscle in interview with the author 2007).

After selecting Wilson as the artist who they wanted to work with, they then left the choice of one of Baltimore's museum up to him. Ciscle reports that after visiting them all, 'Fred [Wilson] said, the Maryland Historic Society is the one I want to work in. "It's very obvious", he said "when I go in there and I look for my history, you know, when I look at the Victorian parlour, where am I?" (Ciscle 2007: *ibid*).

¹¹⁹ In conversation with Ciscle, Lye had remarked 'when those children come in from "the projects" how do we make [the collection] relevant to them?' (Ciscle 2007 see appendix 1)

¹²⁰ Lisa Corrin went on to become chief curator at the Serpentine Gallery where she worked with Haacke to produce *Give and Take* and *Mixed Messages* (both 2001) see p. 33.

Wilson's selection of the Maryland Historic Society was highly apposite; in that the director had already confessed that although his aim was to encourage new audiences, he hadn't any idea how to 'reach out to them'. Furthermore, initial discussions, about using artists to broker issues of accessibility, had already begun between the Historic Society and The Contemporary, who specialised in artists' outreach projects. Wilson's residency and subsequent intervention was however, still a risky undertaking for the Society. They were laying themselves open to a self-initiated public critique of how racial inequities and divisions in Baltimore society could be seen to be perpetuated by their collection. Lengthy negotiations began between The Contemporary and the Historic Society, but eventually Wilson was given an office in the museum and free rein to research, select, display and interpret material from the museum's collection and archive. There were still strict guidelines, as Ciscle remarks, 'everything had to be approved, all the labels, he couldn't bring in things from outside that were from other collections just to make a point. And he had to use their collection, there were all these perimeters because they are an historic museum and pride themselves on scholarship' (Ciscle interviewed by the author 2007).

The resulting exhibition brought to light a marginalised history of African Americans and American Indians. By delving in the museum's archive, Wilson was able to represent an alternative to the interpretation of Baltimore's history represented by Maryland Historic Society. Wilson says he selected archival materials because 'What they put on view says a lot about the museum but what they don't put on view says even more' (in Karp and Wilson 2000: 255). His 'finds' included controversial artefacts from Baltimore's history of slavery such as a whipping post and slave manacles. In a knowingly ironic juxtaposition of artefact and label, reminiscent of the Surrealists' 'La vérité sur les colonies', Wilson intervened with artefacts that would set up 'conversations' with other artefacts.

The first item to be encountered by visitors was a 'truth globe', a silver trophy with the word 'truth' on it that was made in the 1870s to represent 'the truth in advertising' about which Wilson jokes 'they stopped making it in 1938 which I guess is when people stopped believing there was any truth in advertising' (Wilson 2000: 255). With scepticism about the tendency for museum displays to tell 'a' history as if it were 'the' history, Wilson invited visitors to consider where truth *per se* resided in the museum, and by extension, whose truth it might be? The truth globe's placement, at the entrance, in effect set the tone of the whole intervention.

In proposing such questions, Wilson was aware that the licence he had been afforded in this sanctioned intervention reflected an expectation that his would be an inherently personal reading of a collection; in contrast to the authoritative interpretations of the institution's own curatorial staff. Wilson highlights the differences in role thus, 'with curating, the whole notion of irony is not involved, often for good reason – because the public in the museum space often expects some form of universal truth or knowledge, a notion I hold suspect' (Wilson in Buskirk 1994: 109).

A frequently reproduced image from *Mining the Museum*, is a pair of rusty slave manacles placed in a vitrine containing *repoussé* silverware; the label reads simply 'Metalwork 1793-1880': discussed further on pp 182-185.

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Fig. 18: Fred Wilson From *Mining the Museum* (1992)

Another exhibit features a Ku Klux Klan hood (discovered in the archive – its donor remaining anonymous), which Wilson displayed in a nineteenth century pram labelled *Maker Unknown*.

In 1993 taking the decision to work with Wilson and with The Contemporary would have been a risky strategy for any museum, heightened, but perhaps also enabled, by the fact that the American Associations of Museums was holding their annual

conference in Baltimore that year. Ciscle again explains, in interview, the impact of this event:

When the American Associations of Museums' Conference was here, that's when things exploded of course, because word spread. And the reason the show was extended was because of the field's demand for it. [...] everyone was calling from all over the country saying, "we didn't come to the conference but we've heard about this show". You know, and it was supposed to be ending like in the next couple of weeks and they said how can we, when there was this huge demand, that's why it was extended because of the field...

(Ciscle in interview with the author 2007)

The museum director's incentive for collaborating with an 'alternative arts' organisation (with a reputation for successful community projects) and an artist (with a minor reputation for critiquing colonial museological practices), can be seen in a slightly different light with this additional information. This was an attempt to put Maryland Historic Society, a very conservative museum in a racially divided city, on the map for doing something innovative and remarkable – and it paid off with nationwide press coverage that then spread to become international.

Mining the Museum predated by a decade Witcomb's (2003) suggestions that museums should present 'multiple interpretations of history side by side' (p. 164). It was the most popular temporary exhibition in the 150 year history of Baltimore's Maryland Historic Society and was extended to a total of eleven months. Maryland Historic Society's 2003 exhibition, *What's it to you? Black history is American History*, grew directly from the experience of working with Wilson and the 'Contemporary.' And according to Malone, as Wilson's work became widely disseminated, 'the commissioning of artists to re-hang permanent collections as a form of subversive service became a familiar museological practice' (Malone 2007: 16).

Breaking with passivity

Artists' Interventions offered more than just a subversive service; they also offered an alternative way of engaging audiences with permanent collections. Susan Hiller says of her intervention, *At the Freud Museum* (1994) initially sited at 'The Freud Museum', London, that 'it aims to clarify a shared situation by providing space where viewers can experience their own roles as active participants/collaborators, interpreters, analysts, or detectives' (in McShine 1999: 237). In common with Wilson's approach, Hiller intended to promote a shift in her intervention, away from the notion of visitors as passive receivers of spectacle and routinised experiences.

Hiller's work, like Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, is an archaeology of sorts, one that mines the past for omissions. She has said of *At the Freud Museum* (1994) (now in a later avatar titled *From the Freud Museum* at Tate Modern) that she sees it as 'an archaeological investigation uncovering something to make a different kind of sense' (in Morgan 1996: 56). Reworking or recoding the discourses of others often stems from a desire to locate something that appears to be missing. In Hiller's intervention an acknowledgement of a lacuna is addressed but interestingly, because interventions tend to be bi-textual, this is not just the gap or omission in previous interventionist discourse but also the elision of the dominant discourse of galleries and museums.

Hiller was drawn to Freud in an effort to re-think or 'rewrite' him. To be more precise, when Hiller embarked on *At the Freud Museum*¹²¹ she began to coalesce Freud's totalising psychoanalytic theory with the material world of the social and cultural. The installation was visually predicated on an appropriation of archaeological archiving systems, common to many museums. It consisted of twenty-two archaeological collecting boxes, containing a range of diverse artefacts from the kitsch to the esoteric, all immaculately framed, labelled and protected and then further removed from their contexts through placement in sealed vitrines¹²².

For Hiller, the act of retuning¹²³ becomes complicated by its interdisciplinarity, as she appropriates the discourses of scientific enquiry¹²⁴ and museum taxonomy, threads them through those of feminism and psychoanalysis and partially ties them down through art. Hiller searches for what is 'not-said' in Freud. She states, 'my "museums" have concentrated on what is unspoken, unrecorded, unexplained and underlooked – the gaps and the overlaps between content and context' (in McShine 1999: 93). She carefully points to a cultural specificity of objects that will test different viewers' responses stating that what she wants to make are 'situations where people are aware that what they are seeing is because of who they are' (in Morgan 1996: 61). Where previously Artists' Interventions had typically addressed themselves to an insider audience of the cultural cognoscente, questions of communication with wider audiences can also be seen to occupy a significant place in Hiller's and other artists' work. Hiller's approach to audience is reflected in the words of Hooper-

¹²¹ *At the Freud Museum* was exhibited at the Freud Museum in London in 1994 and consisted of 22 boxes. Further exhibitions of the work extended the box numbers to 44. These are entitled *From the Freud Museum* now part of the permanent collection of the Tate Modern. *After the Freud Museum* is a book by Hiller published in 1995.

¹²² Hiller's tactics could also be seen to follow a trajectory from Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles* (see p. 105) in that she makes a copy of a system intended for elucidating the world by ordering and containing it and then asks viewers to question how this model engenders meaning.

¹²³ Hiller was certainly not the first to attempt to re-write Freud, notably Lacan had already engaged in such a search for omissions when, through the discourse of psychoanalysis, he returned to Freud's 'gaps,' to the lacuna of the social and cultural.

¹²⁴ Hiller originally trained as an archaeologist.

Greenhill, who remarks that 'Meaning making also depends on the interpretive community to which the viewer belongs' (2004: 118).

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Fig. 19: Susan Hiller *From the Freud Museum* (1994)

'Nama-ma/mother' (1991) is a reference to Aboriginal cave paintings at Uluru by Australian aborigines. Hiller's text reads 'the title means mother in an aboriginal language that I can't speak or understand' (in Robinson 2006: 76). In attempting to research and make explicit how meaning has been 'tied down' by the gallery or museum's interpretive procedures, Hiller serves as an example of the way that artists have moved away from the tendency to offer a replacement definition, to simply swap one interpretation for another. Hiller's approach has parity with the methods employed by other interventionists in the 1990s and 2000s, who gently suggest other ways of reading things. Haacke, for example, said of the exhibition *Mixed Messages* at the Serpentine Gallery (2001), (which he curated from art and artefacts in The Victoria and Albert Museum collection), that it was 'intended to provoke visitors to take up the challenge of making sense in different ways, namely according to your own life experiences in today's society' (Haacke 2001: 52). The search for certainty and the quest to reveal hidden 'truths' has been replaced by an analysis that examines 'how' certain understandings came to dominate others. Asking 'how' has taken the scope of artists' critical practices into a more hermeneutic¹²⁵ terrain in which the viewer is also invited to enter into some meaning making of their own. Hooper-Greenhill (2004) has remarked that 'interpretation is a means of making confused meanings clearer; it is concerned with coming to a fuller understanding of **how** things mean' (p. 566 my emphasis).

Artists of the 1990s and 2000s have not so much been driven towards 'putting things right' by opposition, as previous politicised art forms had attempted, as by suggesting subtle differences in approach, alternatives that could offer up strategies for a change

¹²⁵ An interpretive philosophy concerning how understanding can be achieved.

in the ways that certain canonic works of art, and museum practices might be understood and how difficult and different histories can be acknowledged. Their work does not necessarily express certainty or ready intelligibility but accepts the ambiguity and open-endedness, slippages and humour that pervade their work.

Whilst some, for example Bourriaud (2002), seem to imply a simple continuum from 1960s and 1970s conceptualism to contemporary relational art practices, artists such as Dion have concerns about the lack self reflexivity that the previous 60s generation brought to their interventionist practices, he is likely to be referring to Haacke, his former tutor, and Kosuth who came to be viewed as problematic because it was felt that they 'ape[d] a scientific sociological proceeding without any criticality towards its methods' (1999: 46). Dion's critique of such approaches reflects the increasingly theorised position of a generation of artists who are cognisant of their own implicated roles. As Fraser comments, of herself and others who have critiqued arts institutions through their practice it is also important not to lose sight of the fact that 'we are the institution' (2005b: 283). But it doesn't mean artists can't be critical of the institution that they form or suggest ways that they can change it.

Theorised art practice

In the USA many of the artists involved in critiquing systems and institutions studied at the New York School of Visual Arts, under the theorised tutelage of Crimp and Owens¹²⁶. More theoretically aligned approaches to art practice were also echoed in some UK art schools in the mid 1980s and early 1990s where they were often based on a cultural studies model started in Birmingham¹²⁷ and informed by The New Art History. Graham (2003) sees the links between Artists' Interventions and cultural studies in their mutual concerns with 'articulations of institutional power, the voicing of hidden histories and revelations of sexist, racist, elitist practices in the museum' (Graham 2003: 846). I would agree with these motivating factors for interventions but with the caveat that from the 1990s onwards, artists were less driven towards revelation as a way of putting things right' by opposition, in the way that previous politicised art forms had attempted. Articulations of institutional power and hidden histories were brought to gallery and museum visitors in the form of more subtle suggestions, playful alternatives that could offer up strategies for a change in the ways that certain canonic works of art and museum practices might be understood and how difficult and irreconcilable histories can be acknowledged.

¹²⁶ See: Crimp, D. (1993) *On Museums' Ruins*. Cambridge Massachusetts: MIT Press.
Owens, C. (1992) *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

¹²⁷ See: Morley, D. and Chen, K. (eds) (1996) *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge.

Parody performed

Many artists have used parody to offer up alternatives to official gallery and museum discourses. Some have been specifically produced for particular venues, others offer a more general critique or counter-voice, but have been curated into exquisitely matched locations. One such example is *Bird Calls*, which was initiated by Louise Lawler in 1972, and curated into an almost perfect context in 2009. *Bird Calls* is a sound piece in which Lawler parodies the alarm calls and aural territory establishments of birds, by screeching and twittering the names of 28 male artists¹²⁸. In 2009 the piece was temporarily sited in the grounds of the resolutely male domain of the Chinati Foundation Texas¹²⁹. Chinati was set up by artist Donald Judd, with the help of the Dia Art Foundation, and opened to the public in 1986. Originally intended for housing Judd's own work, the site was expanded to give a permanent home to a collection of minimalist works by twelve artists selected by Judd. It includes the work of only two women artists: Roni Horn and the collaborations of Jeanne-Claude with husband Christo. In the quiet desert terrain, in which Chinati is situated, the sound of Lawler's *Bird Calls* has belatedly been perfectly, if temporarily, placed by curators Regina Basha, Rebecca Gates and Lucy Raven. As a way of subtly and humorously alerting visitors to the bombastic and macho approach to materials and scale that dominates work in Judd's collection the sound piece offers an undermining parody of territorial establishment on a grand scale and to the gendered selection process that initiated it.

Uninvited intervention

In another audio piece, but this time with an essential visual component, Fraser performs *Little Frank and His Carp* (2004), an uninvited parody of the Guggenheim Bilbao's official audio tour. She forsakes the process of collaging and researching to amalgamate the discourse of others (a tactic used in many of her other pieces¹³⁰), for a word-for-word parodic account of listening to the Guggenheim's audio guide, which in Fraser's hands becomes an example of the inculcating persuasiveness that the audio guide can have on its listeners. Fraser acts out an exaggerated emotional interpretation and an uninhibited response to the ecstatic, seductive yet controlling voice of the audio guide. When the audio guide suggests, 'these curves are gentle, but in their huge scale powerfully sensual - you'll see people going up to the walls and stroking them,' she enacts an encounter that tips over from sensual to sexual, as she pushes up her dress to press more bare flesh against the curvaceous surface of the

¹²⁸ See <http://ubu.clc.wvu.edu/sound/>

¹²⁹ *Bird Calls* was sited in a disused swimming pool area of the Chinati grounds as part of an exhibition, 'The Marfa Sessions' (2009) curated by Regina Basha, Rebecca Gates and Lucy Raven for 'The Ballroom', Marfa, Texas.

¹³⁰ Such as, *Notes for the Margin* (1990), *Aren't They Lovely?* (1992) and *Welcome to the Wadsworth* (1991).

walls. 'You might feel the desire to do this yourself. These curving surfaces have a direct appeal that has nothing to do with age class or education' (ibid). To the increasing amazement of unsuspecting visitors, Fraser's seeming inability to distinguish metaphor from direction results in alarm and bemusement as social codes and conventions for behaviour in the museum are broken.

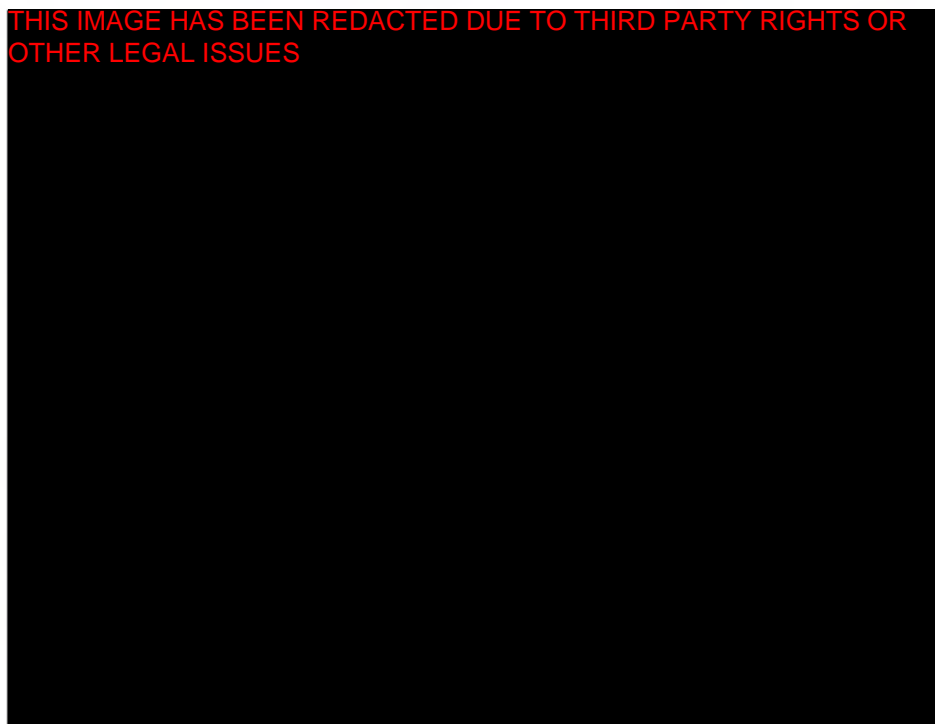


Fig. 20: Andrea Fraser *Little Frank and His Carp* (2004)

'Isn't This a Wonderful Place?' (A tour of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao)
Official Audio Guide to the Guggenheim Bilbao taken from the performance
Little Frank and His Carp by Fraser¹³¹.

If you haven't already done so walk away from the desk where you picked up this audio guide and out into the great high space of the atrium. Isn't this a wonderful place? It's uplifting. It's like a Gothic cathedral... This building recognises that modern art is demanding, complicated, bewildering, and the museum tries to make you feel at home, so you can relax and absorb what you see more easily.

As you look around, you'll see that every surface in this space has curves. Only the floor is straight. These curves are gentle, but in their huge scale powerfully sensual. You'll see people going up to the walls and stroking them. You might feel the desire to do this yourself. These curving surfaces have a direct appeal that has nothing to do with age class or education.

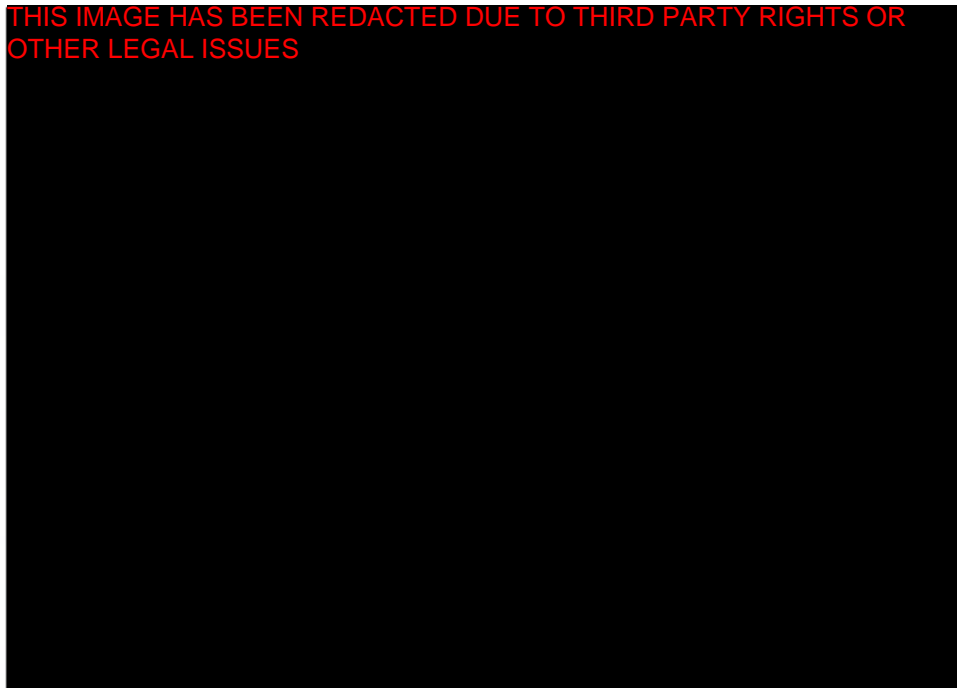
(From the Official audio guide, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao – Spain)

¹³¹ For a full transcript of the audio guide used in the performance see Appendix 2.

The interesting aspect of Fraser's parody is that it sits so close to the original. She has to do very little to tip the Guggenheim Museum's own audio guide over into contradictory and delusionary rhetoric. Like Lawler's mimicry in *Bird Calls, Little Frank and his Carp* is far from a mechanical parodic exercise. Both artists, as Rosalind Deutsche has written of Lawler, use the skills they have honed 'to warn audiences away from the danger of a position of passive agreement with the art institution's grandiose fantasies, whose war like effects, are no laughing matter' (Deutsche 2006: 10)

Chapter 5 Case Study - *An Elite Experience for Everyone: an intervention at the William Morris Gallery, London*

In this chapter I focus on parodic methodology and trickster tactics by engaging in them directly in the form of an intervention *An Elite Experience for Everyone* at the William Morris Gallery, London (2005). See DVD Appendix 3.



The William Morris Gallery is set in Lloyd Park, Walthamstow within the borough of Waltham Forest. It is housed in the eighteenth century 'Water House', formerly Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856. The contrast, between the living conditions enjoyed by the Morris family in the nineteenth century and the conditions in which many residents of Walthamstow currently find themselves, is stark. As a borough Waltham Forest is ethnically mixed and has the 3rd largest Muslim community in London (www.walthamforest.gov.uk accessed 2009). As with many London boroughs issues of overcrowded, unsuitable accommodation and unemployment are real concerns. As Jonathan Glancey states,

the house [Water House] represents 'a world of beautifully crafted romance. The rest of Walthamstow is virtually bereft of such special moments.'

(www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2007/apr/17/design.jonathanglancey accessed 20.04.07)

Now in receipt of Heritage Lottery Funding (2008), the William Morris Gallery's future appears a little more certain than it did in 2007 when Waltham Forest Council began a drastic claw back on funding, staffing and opening hours. Waltham Forest Council's 2007 position on its priorities for funding communicated an evident disjuncture between the historic Water House, its collection of fine crafted artefacts and the immediate environment and demographics of Walthamstow. There also appeared to be some misunderstanding about the functions of galleries and museums and a misjudged perception of the gallery's irrelevance to residents of the borough. According to Morris biographer Fiona McCarthy, one local politician is said to have described Morris as 'just a white imperialist' (cited in Glancey *ibid*). The council's swingeing cuts and rumours of the possible closure of the gallery, brought about outraged responses and an online petition of support (11604 signatories accessed 5.09.09) <http://www.petitiononline.com/savewmg>. The petition also created a space for debates about museums, heritage culture and inclusivity. Now in 2009, the council's plans for re-development state their aim to make the gallery 'more accessible, [to] build an extension to house an education and exhibition space and provide high quality visitor facilities.' (www.walthamforest.gov.uk/william-morris accessed 5.09.09). The hope is that developments will enable the gallery 'to attract a more diverse audience ...and further develop its programme of heritage-based workshops and events. The council will apply for £1.32 million second stage funding in spring 2010' (*ibid*). Although my intervention at the William Morris Gallery preceded both these twists and turns in the gallery's fate, the context of a blue plaque house with a heritage arts and craft collection in a borough facing economic challenges signalled significant challenges.

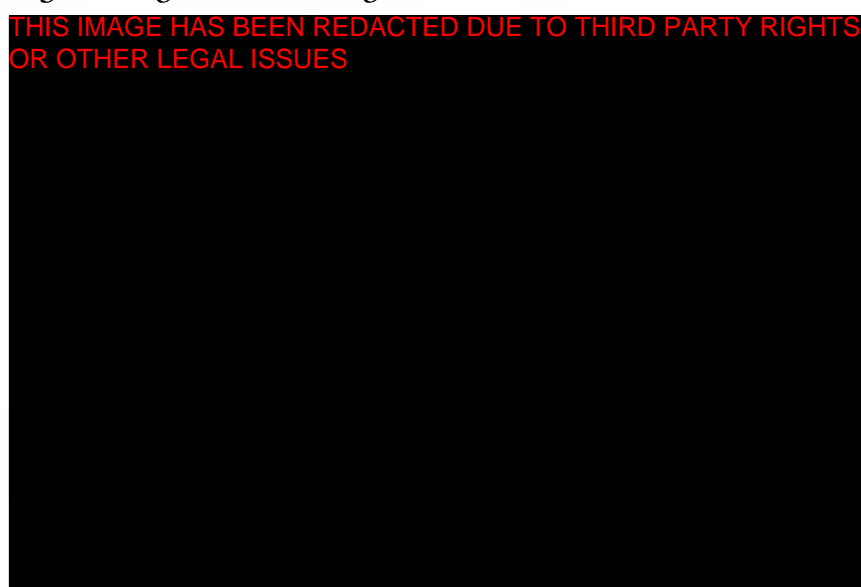


Fig. 21: News from Nowhere: Visions of Utopia (2005) Exhibition catalogue produced in the form of a newspaper

The context for my intervention

A decision to include an element of practice in this study wasn't determined at the outset but rather came in the form of an unexpected invitation to take part in an exhibition, entitled 'News from Nowhere'¹³²: Visions of Utopia', curated by artist and freelance curator Steve Wheeler, who suggested that I might like to work with the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow. After an initial visit I realised that the gallery offered up educational territories, both in relation to art's histories and towards gallery and museum education, that were irresistible in the light of my thesis. Time to research and prepare for the exhibition was very limited, with only two months to come up with a proposal, negotiate terms and execute the work.

An email to the exhibition curator shows my initial ponderings:

Hi Steve

I seem to have quite a lot of different ideas at the moment but the one that I keep coming back to is either a performance in the form of self as heritage tour guide/or an audio guide along the same lines. Again not sure on the details of any of this - but sort of Andrea Fraser meets Mrs Merton¹³³! I am planning to work on it this week.

What form do you need the proposal to take - is this enough?

How about liaison with the museum curator/director, can I just get on with this or should it all come via yourself?

Claire X

The initial proposal eventually developed into an intervention in four parts:

1. A performance was filmed in the lower galleries of the William Morris Gallery, with visitors present on August 19th 2005;
2. A video of the performance was shown in the foyer of the Gallery for the duration of the exhibition September 9th – October 7th 2005;
3. A 'spurious' artefact (a false beard) and accompanying label¹³⁴, was featured in the performance and remained in a cabinet alongside other examples of Morris's belongings for the duration of the exhibition September 9th – October 7th 2005;
4. 'Fake' merchandise (William Morris beard) was offered for sale in the shop area of the Gallery for the private view on September 8th.¹³⁵

¹³² 'News from Nowhere' was originally published in 1890. See Morris, W. (1993) *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*. London: Penguin.

¹³³ Mrs Merton was the *faux naïve* character of the parodic talk television show *The Mrs Merton Show*. Created and played and by comedian/writer Caroline Ahearne it ran between 1994 -98.

¹³⁴ See Appendix 3.

¹³⁵ See Appendix 3.

Artists' Interventions often draw on multimodal means of communication, bringing together text, image, object, display technologies and performances, in this instance, set within a parodic frame. The potential of a practice-based element to my research is that it allows for a close (embodied) examination of disruptive and parodic methodologies, which are common to many interventions. My concerns were to gain insights into how parodic and confrontational practices could be understood to ameliorate sedimented privilege within cultural institutions promoted as panaceas for achieving social goals.

I decided to focus attention on some of the very ordinary items, a cup and a satchel, which are in the collection solely because they once belonged to William Morris. The fetishisation of objects connected with famous people is a fairly common phenomenon, not confined exclusively to museums and encompasses anything from the relics of saints to Dickens' walking boots and Elvis's toe nail clippings sold on 'ebay'. Many such artefacts (specimens and paraphernalia) are open to debates about authenticity. It is the very ordinariness of common personal possessions and otherwise insignificant artefacts that necessitates their freighting with narrative in order for their significance to be conferred. Objects such as these have been turned into significant material culture through their connections with the histories of noteworthy individuals. Selection and display bring them more fully into the world of particular human values, which need to be enunciated for audiences. Everyday objects, although offering no curious starting point, share the need for narrative with those fantastic, exotic and mysterious objects in the museum's precursor - the *wunderkammer*. The provision of narrative brings their significance to light and, in confluence with principles pertaining to objects of 'curiosity,' those narratives are often much more fascinating and curious than the objects themselves.

There were precedents for my work. Daniel Spoerri, a significant member of the Fluxus group exhibited his *Museum of Fetish* and accompanying *Aberrant Boutique* at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1977. The *Museum of Fetish* was arranged as a corridor with vitrines of various proportions set into the walls in which artefacts implicated by their association with French culture were displayed; René Magritte's bowler hat, Ingres's violin, Van Gogh's furniture from his house at Auvers-sur-Oise. The *Aberrant Boutique* was the *Museum of Fetish's* shop where all sorts of mystery objects collected from Spoerri's artist friends were offered up for sale; old paintbrushes, unfinished works, books, and other items left lying around their studios. These 'fetishised' artefacts, miscellaneous detritus parodying the belongings of the famous deceased, were sold to benefit Amnesty International.

William Morris's Beard

Even as a kid, one of my dreams was to publish an encyclopaedia in which all the information was false. Wrong dates for every historical event, wrong locations for every river, biographies of people who never existed. What kind of person imagines doing that? A crazy person I suppose, but Christ how the idea used to make me laugh

(Auster 2005: 125)

As my ideas developed further I thought about adding a third object to the two I had selected from the museum's collection, but this one would follow the spirit of mythic projections mentioned on p. 49.

To the collection I added a beard, reminiscent of Morris's own, purchased from a theatrical supplier. With the assistance of the gallery staff, I also produced a label using the same, font ('Bembo'¹³⁶), paper and scale that had been used for all the other gallery labels.

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FALSE BEARD, c1875

From a design by **William MORRIS** (1834-1896)

Human hair woven onto lace

William Morris's wonderful full beard was the envy of many a man. He was aware that the privilege of possessing such a beard, set him apart from others. To make amends, he mastered the craft of wig-making in order that beards like his own would be available to his fellow citizens. This rare example is believed to have been woven by Morris himself using his own hair.

Donated in 2005

¹³⁶ Bembo is the font I have chosen to use throughout this thesis as homage to the William Morris Gallery.

My intention, although I was not 100% aware of this at the time, was to deploy one of the key methodologies of Artists' Interventions referred to earlier, humour and in particular parody. The 'target' was educational discourse, of a specific denomination, that of the voluntary female tour guide and her panegyric to the 'great men' of art, and to a lesser degree the educational agenda and social conceits of Morris himself. I presumed, inaccurately as it transpired, that there would be resistance to some aspects of my proposal (in particular to my idea of placing an erroneous artefact and label in one of the vitrines). In reality, I encountered very little resistance to any of my plans. I worked in close consultation with the director of the museum, Peter Cormack, whose enthusiasm and support of the project exceeded my expectations.

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Section 1: In the Foyer of the Gallery

'Welcome to the William Morris Gallery. And welcome to today's tour *An Elite Experience for Everyone*.'

An Elite Experience for Everyone, is taken from the title of an essay by Vera L. Zolberg published in several edited books. Zolberg, V. (1994) 'An Elite experience for Everyone'. In: S.D.I. Rogoff, *Museum Culture: Histories Discourses Spectacle*. Routledge (pp 49-65). Zolberg first used the term in her (1992) essay 'Barrier or Leveller? The Case of the Art Museum' published in Lamont M. and Fournier M. (eds) *Cultivating Differences*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 187-209. Her own source for the phrase originates from two texts where she uses two quotes from Joshua Taylor, 'The role of museums is to expand the elite' and to provide an 'elite experience for everyone'. As she states 'Modern countries whether liberal democracies or authoritarian states, are committed to making previously elite-based art forms available to all who wish to access to them. Indeed these publics should be educated to want such access. From being a private good or a matter of personal taste, cultural capacity has come to be considered a right of citizenship that redounds to a nation's standing in the world' (Zolberg 1992: 187).

'I'm Victoria Fielding and I'm going to be conducting your tour of the William Morris Gallery.'

The name was selected for several reasons. Victoria - as a marker of a particular class of Englishness, with obvious connections to the period of nineteenth century Monarchy (Queen Victoria) associated with developing and consolidating many familiar museological practices. Fielding, over and above being a common English family name, lends itself in definitional terms to: 'the setting outside a workplace, office, school or laboratory in which somebody has direct contact with clients, the public, or the phenomena being studied'. It is also an area or region within which 'a force exerts an influence at every point', and used as a verb it means 'to handle something such as a question or complaint'. The choice of the name has further confluence with Bourdieu's use of the term 'field' to describe the networks through which, for example, art becomes possible see *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993).

'I would firstly like to say, that it is a very great privilege for me to be able make a contribution here today, in my capacity as a volunteer guide.'

The status of Victoria as a volunteer is ambiguous, in her use of language it is difficult to be certain who she is implicating as privileged. It could be that she is referring to herself but she may be suggesting that her audience are privileged to receive her guided tour. She is not part of the museum staff and yet has assumed the authority usually associated with professional expertise to address her lay-audience. She is not engaged in paid work and hence forms part of a leisured class of women who are often supported by wealthy partners. In the past this has been particularly true of gallery and museum educators where these roles tended to be dominated by white, middle-class women who did not need to earn a salary. The kudos involved in association with culture is clear: it is 'cultural capital' not financial capital that is being traded. Sectors of the gallery/museum as an employment zone continue to be poorly paid and even voluntary. The situation of volunteers remains at the expense of a more inclusive workforce for the cultural sector For a detailed discussion of these issues see, Sandell, R. (2000) 'The strategic significance of workforce diversity in museums' in *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6 (3): 213-230.

'And secondly, I want to stress how very welcome all of you are - because we are especially keen to encourage people from all walks of life to visit museums.'

All walks of life – a somewhat anachronistic phrase that manages to sound patronising in a concession to imposed inclusivity. (I noted in early December 2006 that the IoE had started to use the phrase on its web pages to describe its student body.)

'You know, some people think that galleries and museums are only for the scholarly and the cultured - but that couldn't be further from the truth. Public museums were founded so that ordinary people, like yourselves would have exactly the same advantages and access to culture as the elite.'

These were the radical aims of the museum in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, (see Borzello F. (1987) *Civilising Caliban: The Misuse of Art, 1875-1980* London: Routledge) but now sound like 'New Labour' rhetoric, along with seeming oxymorons such as 'excellence for all' an aspiration which was used in the Labour Government's 1987 Green Paper on Special Educational Needs, but has been widely used in the UK and elsewhere in connection with public sector reforms.

'I am sure you will agree that it is really "the uncultured, the coach party [like yourselves], and the sort of people who would visit theme parks ... who may benefit most from places like... this gallery.'"

A slightly reworded quote from Jan Marsh, who is discussing visitors to Kelmscott Manor, Morris's home in Gloucestershire, now open to the public on a limited basis. 'Indeed it can be argued that it is the uncultured, the coach party, the theme park visitor who may benefit most from places like Kelmscott'. See Marsh, J. (1996) 'Kelmscott Manor as an object of desire,' in L. Parry, *William Morris Art and Kelmscott*. Bury St Edmonds, Suffolk: Boydell Press. p. 19.

'The William Morris Gallery has so much to teach us, not just about fine fabrics, wall-papers, furniture, paintings and embroideries but also about social values.'

Morris was closely involved with the movement for socialism in the later years of his life. His writings, especially 'News from Nowhere', (which was the reference text for this exhibition), were utopian, if not a tad Luddite. My reference to Morris's social teachings is paralleled with the possible idea of the gallery as a site for research, where insights into social values might be gained. In this instance, the

'But this isn't simply a museum.
I expect that most of you have realised that it is
also an (h)istoric house.'

'Water House was once home to the young
William Morris and his family.
It's a splendid property, and of course in 1848,
when the family moved here after Morris's
father died, it would have set in beautiful
countryside - not built up with ugly houses and
roads like it is today.'

'You see, William Morris's family were
extremely wealthy.
His father made his money as a bond-broker in
the city and (he) ensured his family's prosperity
after his death by wise investments in the
copper mining industry in Cornwall. The
dividends paid from these shares ensured that
the family could live in luxury in perpetuity.
For William Morris it meant that he would
never have to worry about earning a living.'

'But we will see on our tour today, just how
true the old saying, money can't buy you
happiness really is - because William Morris's
wealthy background was not something he was
proud of. In fact, the inequities of the class
system were something he spent his life trying
to redress.'

'I think he would have been especially pleased
to see you all here today.'
Awkward pause...

'Morris saw that in the nineteenth century his
society was divided into two classes, one of

social values become absurd in their comic
extremity but none-the less have their origins
close to the surface of some gallery and museum
practices.

The pedantic use of a silent 'h' after 'an' in
spoken language e.g. an 'otel, is simply used as a
marker to assert class difference.

The historic house, heritage site is contrasted
with the possible living conditions of the
prospective audience reinforcing that same
distinction of privilege observed by Morris.

Associations to 'real estate' are intended here.

Note of distancing, inferring that she does not
live in the locality.

This is a parodic reference to the status of some
heritage tour guides who similarly do not have
to 'worry about earning a living,' and can
therefore undertake unpaid voluntary work in
the cultural sector.

The ironic juxtaposition of Morris's personal
circumstances, that enabled him to take up this
cause, appear lost on Victoria.

which was privileged to be kept by the labour of the other – that is, it forced the other to work for it and took from this inferior class all that it could take from it, and it used the wealth to keep its own members in a superior position.’

Taken from, Morris, W. (1993) *News from Nowhere and Other Writings*, London: Penguin. p.294. ‘We have seen that modern society is divided into two classes, one of which is privileged to be kept by the labour of the other – that is, it forces the other to work for it and takes from this inferior class all that it can take from it, and uses the wealth so taken to keep its own members in a superior position’.

‘It must have been awful in the nineteenth century.’ *Pause – cough.*

Awkward silence...

‘Anyway... Let’s move on.’

Section 2: Gallery rules

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Moves to Gallery 1 - stops inside the entrance blocking the passage of the visitors.

‘Now before we begin our tour I am sure that most of you **have** been to a museum or gallery before?’

‘Hmmm yes? – No?’

‘OK – Well for those of you who haven’t I had better just mention a few ground-rules before we start. Obviously, we need to respect the collection, and the other visitors – So, it’s: – no eating; no drinking; no running; no dirty clothing; no photography; no laughing and no talking loudly, that’s you, of course, not me, I’m allowed to talk loudly so that you can all hear me.

This is one of a series of closed or rhetorical questions that Victoria asks. Her audience are unresponsive having recognised that she isn’t really interested in their answers. As Barnes remarks, teachers who complain about classes who will not talk often present this as a moral failing of the pupils; it is more likely that the pupils have learnt from their schooling that their knowledge is irrelevant in a context determined by teachers, examinations and school syllabuses. (Barnes 1998: 84) *From Communication to Curriculum*. See also Basil Bernstein’s (1996) regulatory and instructional discourse within pedagogy– Pedagogic Codes, Recognition, Realisation Rules and Research (p. 109).

The ‘civilising’ effects of the museum, and therefore the regulatory nature of behavioural codes within it are expounded by both: Bennett, T. (1995) *The Birth of the Museum*. London, Routledge, and Duncan, C. (1995) *Civilizing Rituals*. London: Routledge both of whom draw on Foucault’s work on regulation and control.

In an unpublished paper ‘Beyond Vested Interest,’ given at the BERA conference 2000, I

Right, shall we make a start?’

spoke about the privileging of particular voices in galleries and museums. In particular I referred to the findings of my research from the DfES funded Research project ‘Creative Connections,’ and drew on Foucault’s work on specialist discourse, to suggest the way in which power relations and hierarchies continue to be constructed in galleries and museums; some have the authority to speak, others are silenced.

‘Now today we’re not so much going to be looking at the legacy of William Morris and his glorious interiors and soft furnishings. We’re going to be looking at some of Morris’s most ordinary and personal possessions. I hope that by the end of the tour we will all feel a bit closer to Morris. He really was an exceptional man of quite superhuman dimensions. designer, craftsman, writer, painter, poet, conservationist, publisher..... and socialist, of course.’

Morris has become the doyen of a particular branch of the interior design world, with his wallpaper and curtain designs probably more famous than any of his social edicts.

‘Now we are going to start our tour over here.’

In her eulogy of Morris’s creative output, the afterthought of mentioning Morris’s socialist involvement echoes that of the museum itself where visitors have to look hard to find information about the ideological underpinnings of Morris’s craft and design activities.

Section 3: William Morris’s coffee cup

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William Morris’s Coffee Cup

‘No don’t put your hands on the cabinets it makes the glass dirty.’

‘Come a little closer.’

‘It’s objects like this, I think, that make the museum come alive. This was the **actual** cup that William Morris drank from on his regular Sunday visits to his good friend Burne-Jones the

The Fetishisation of ordinary objects for their associations with a cult figure, is outlined in footnote 79, p. 90. Victoria’s focus on Morris’s personal possessions draws on the two meanings of the term fetish, commodity fetishism and sexual fetishism. See also in relation to Spoerri’s *Museum of Fetish* p. 132.

painter. The **actual** cup – (*muses on the fetishistic aura of the object*). There's Burne-Jones over there in the photo, the one with the long beard.'

Returns her attention to the cup.

'What a charming object. Do you know why he had his special cup there? – Well their cups just weren't big enough for him.'

'And what does this cup say about Morris?'

'Hmm?' (*Rhetorical*)

'You see, I think that every object, or artefact, as we in the museum refer to them, has a story to tell. And I'm here to help those objects to speak to you – I'm a sort of translator really.'

'For example, what sort of man would choose this cup over fine Sevres porcelain – over Wedgwood or Royal Dalton? – because he could have afforded those you know, whole sets of them.'

'This simple earthenware cup contains all the values that Morris held true – He despised the factory mass production of his own era, the wasteful and ostentation displays of vulgar goods; cheap shoddy items intended to appease the masses.'

'What does the cup say to you?'

'Hmm?'

'Yes – Yes – he liked coffee, obviously' – (*irritated by visitor's answer*)

'No,... the cup wants to say to us: in this hand crafted object are the values of honesty and good design that Morris championed.'

'And I don't think that any of you who have travelled here today on this little pilgrimage would dream of buying your coffee cups in a

Victoria seems to find this both amusing and extraordinary, but to her audience, who are less infatuated with Morris, this simply sounds like an over enthusiastic delivery of banal information.

This echoes Vergo's concerns in *The New Museology* (1989) referred to on p. 68 where he advocates that the museum should provide forms of pedagogic mediation to enhance or direct the visitor's own capacity for meaning making. See also Preziosi, D. (1989) *The Coy Science in Rethinking Art History*.

Victoria employs closed question techniques, and she quickly and often rudely repudiates answers that do not correspond with the one she is anticipating. This stands in contrast to the practices of many museum education departments where acknowledging the plurality of possible interpretations is seen as good practice. However in 2006/7, I observed tour guides in a national museum and at several historic houses using a very high proportion of closed questions.

Little did I know at the time that Woolworth too would become an historical phenomenon, along with The Crafts Council's London exhibition space and shop.

Woolworth or worse still those awful *pound shops*
– Well, apart from the fact theirs are so tasteless
and dull, there are so many other places where
you can buy beautiful hand made cups. At
Heals, The Crafts Council, Contemporary
Applied Arts you can purchase cups that are
works of art in their own right.’

The central London shopping emporiums
suggested by Victoria, two of them affiliated to
galleries or museums, suggest not only her
‘London-centric’ view of the world of shopping
that separates her from her audience, but also
provides a link to Morris’s own nineteenth
century outlet in London’s, Oxford Street
which was similarly outside the reaches, both
physically and financially, of the ‘ordinary’
people that he hoped to ‘speak’ to. The
(un)knowing creation, cultivation or
‘culturation’ of difference has been identified as
a significant factor in visitor perceptions that
galleries and museums as public institutions are
‘not for the likes of us’ (see Bourdieu 1984
‘choix de necessaire’).

‘It’s not just an investment in an item of beauty
it is also, as Morris would have seen it, a step
towards the eradication of an exploited
workforce – cheap labour in Taiwan or
wherever it is these things are made.’

‘You see Morris knew that when he sipped his
coffee it wasn’t a product of colonial
exploitation... I mean the cup – not the coffee’

- Pause -

‘Umm yes the coffee well yes, that probably
would have ...no – I actually think that- uh
that – uh -Morris probably grew his own coffee
because there certainly weren’t any Fair-trade
schemes in the nineteenth century.’

‘Of course the Victorians were very good at
growing lots of exotic – sort of foreign plants
you know – Have any of you been to the
wonderful *Lost Gardens of Heligan*?’

‘No ... no, it’s not in Walthamstow dear – it’s
in Cornwall.’

Section 4: William Morris's satchel

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William Morris's Satchel

'This, in fact, is not the object that Morris carried his books to school in.

In fact it is improbable that Morris would want to remind himself of this time, as he did not enjoy his own schooling very much.'

'He attended Marlborough College' –

'No, no it has got nothing to do with cigarettes. It's one of the most prestigious public schools in this country. It's confusing I know, but public – means private – fee paying – whereas in the museum, public normally means free, which is fabulous.'

'Morris felt that he learnt next to nothing at school – because in his words "nothing was taught."'

'Even when he went to Oxford, which would have been the logical progression for a young man of his status, he was still disappointed by the tuition he received.'

'But he was an exceptionally gifted individual' (*Wistfully* –)

'You see it just goes to show that – neither money – social standing nor education made Morris the man that he was. He gained little from education or from his parents – He was quite simply a genius.'

The cultural patronage of the aristocracy that the Duke of Marlborough and others brought to cultural venues is being replaced by a corporate culture where for example, Unilever, British Petroleum, Sainsbury and an expanding range of commercial enterprises are the main financial supporters of cultural events. See p. 68 on the corporatisation of cultural institutions.

Here the combinatory effects of privilege and education – power/knowledge are glossed over as if they are an entirely natural.

Genius – linked with the canon and usually associated with dead white European males bestows a talent or 'gift' that transcends education, social advantage and even hard work.

'Ah, I'm sorry, I'm sorry - (*in a loud, imperious voice*)

Can you speak a bit quieter, you're not part of this tour are you?

You're probably having a very nice time but... well ...no one can hear **me** when you and your children are making so much noise.'

In 1996, a curator made very similar comments to a family in a major London museum during a talk he was giving to a group of students that I had brought to the museum.

To her audience - 'Sorry about that.'

'Now let's get back to the satchel, which is of special significance because Morris used to carry it with him on his socialist lecture tours.'

'Morris became increasingly drawn to socialism in the 1880s. His dreams for the future were that everyone could enjoy the same privileges as himself. *An Elite Experience for Everyone* is what Morris would have wished for all of us. Morris was acutely aware that the sort of life that he was born to was very far removed from that of the working classes. When he looked out of the windows of his house in Hammersmith and saw the unkempt crowds passing by he said' -
...reads awkwardly from a sheet of paper...

'It was my good luck only of being born respectable and rich that has put me on this side of the window, among delightful books and lovely works of art and not on the other side in the empty street or foul degraded lodgings.'
Pause...

'And throughout his life he dedicated himself to trying to bring beauty and justice into peoples lives.'

'Now you may think that was a hopeless dream - but in a way his dream has come true because we can all enjoy this beautiful house today, and we can enjoy many other beautiful and important heritage sites and museums around the country. Of course we can't live in them, no. But we can admire to them, and aspire to recreate a small part of their beauty for ourselves.'

Morris, quoted in Evans, B. *William Morris 1834 - 1896 Some Appreciations*, first published in 1934 by the Walthamstow Antiquarian Society, in an edition of 350 distributed only to society members. Reprinted in 2003 by the Walthamstow Historical Society.

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The Beard

'Now this is a recent donation to the collection and it reveals some new aspects of Morris's democratic idealism.'

'As I said before, - privilege pained Morris. And he was acutely pained by the privilege of possessing such a wonderful full beard.

'It was bad enough for him that his family had riches and wealth that enabled him to do whatever he wanted but he also had a beard that was so fabulous that he could not help himself from wanting to help those around him who were less fortunately endowed; those with scrappy, patchy facial hair growth... *(pause)* or tiny little goatees.

By way of recompense, in his characteristic style, Morris turned his hand to the ancient craft of wig making in order to bring to society at large the benefits, privileges and potency that accompany the possession of a very large beard.'

'This one was actually woven by Morris using hair from his own head. It is a

This section was intended to tilt the performance into absurdity. Gender issues are significant here. Morris was not a champion of the women's movement and although his views on women's rights have been variously interpreted see (Cockroft, I. 'New Dawn Women: A New Light on William Morris and Women's Rights'. <http://www.morrissociety.org/2005conf.programme.html> accessed November 12th 2005, and (Richardson, L. A. 1989. *William Morris and women experience and representation*. Thesis (doctoral)-University of Oxford, 1989). It seems his notions of reform or democracy were unlikely to embrace gender inequalities.

The privileges implied are simply those of being male in the nineteenth century. The beard's signification of a man's strength and physical prowess is closely intertwined in the West with its relationship to potency and lust. See: Warner, M. (1995) *From The Beast To The Blonde*. London, Vintage.

painstaking process each hair is woven onto a lace backing and it probably took him many weeks to complete. There were in fact very few of these ever produced. It is a splendid object and I must admit that when'...

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Puts on beard

Cut away...

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Wearing beard

'...When I put it on - it really does change the way that people respond to me I also feel that I have become closer to Morris and his ideals. It obviously wasn't meant for women - but I think that Morris would have wanted us all to share his dream of beauty and democracy through excess facial hair.'

'It frees us from the bonds of class difference, and symbolically we can see it was part of Morris's utopian dream.'

When I wrote the script I clearly imagined this would be the case. As outlined on p.151 this was not in fact borne out.

Again, it seems unlikely that Morris's notions of reform or democracy were likely to embrace gender equality.

'I wish I could allow you all experience this too.
But for conservation reasons this is simply not possible.'

The privilege afforded to the curator or scholar is evoked here, as noted on p.191, these are the few who would be allowed to touch, manipulate and even wear artefacts. 'Such privilege evidences the fact that knowing through sensing beyond the visual is regarded as necessary to the achievement of adequate understanding. – The curator translates his or her experience of objects in the museum and the field to broad publics through a range of didactic practices' (Edwards et al, 2006: 19).

'But after you finish your visit here today, do have a look in the shop where you can buy a very good acrylic replica.'
'I would highly recommend it.'

'Thank you all so much for coming here today, I hope that you enjoyed yourselves as much as I enjoyed myself.'

Victoria Fielding – Volunteer.

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ISSUES



Replica beards were on sale in the shop during the private view of the exhibition, hanging between Morris tea towels and bags. Many people, (even those who realised

in the early stages that the performance was a parody) thought that these false beards were 'genuine William Morris merchandise'. Perhaps people are simply prepared for galleries and museums to turn anything into a sales opportunity? Interestingly, this was the only part of the intervention that was not allowed to stay in place for the duration of the exhibition. The reason given was that in a small merchandising area the presence of the 'fake merchandise' would jeopardise sales of the 'real' William Morris goods. This suggests some very interesting issues, concerning the ways that 'museum merchandise' retains aura and becomes transformed into art and thus given authenticity. The fake is imbued with quasi authenticity by the authority of the museum. It also begs some questions about my fake beard exhibit in the gallery vitrine, which stayed in place for the duration of the exhibition. There was seemingly little concern that this might jeopardise understanding of real William Morris artefacts.

The performance contextualised

The composition of the script for the performance follows the contours identified in Bakhtin's explication of parodic-travesty in classical and medieval society, in which, 'certain types of texts were constructed like mosaics out of the texts of others. The so-called Cento (a specific genre) was, for instance, composed exclusively out of [an] other's verse lines and hemistichs' (1981: 69). I used a range of sources from the William Morris Gallery's archive and supplemented these with publications from the fields of museology and art history. I also drew from personal recollections of guided gallery visits and heritage tours.

Bakhtin (1965) suggests that there are two spectral ends for the use of a quotation, reverent and iconic at one, debased and parodic at the other. *An Elite Experience for Everyone*, allowed me, temporarily, to move away from academic writing, which favours an adherence to the former (although an oppositional stance is also advocated within academia's protocols) and into the practices of art and humour which are legitimate territories for the latter.

A quality of the parodic use of quotation is that it stays close enough to its source to enable moments of doubt as to whether it is not reverent and iconic. Bourdieu's (1993) analysis of Flaubert's 'Sentimental Education' (1869), led him to remark that Flaubert's use of quotation is 'eminently ambiguous and can be taken either as a token of approval or a signal of derision' (p.159). Although such moments of doubt were necessary I also was keen to push quite quickly beyond that doubt, in order to

minimise confusion. Giorgio Agamben (1999) has commented, with reference to Benjamin's (1928) *One Way Street*, that the quotation and its particular power is attained, not by the ability to transmit the past but in the ability to 'make a clean sweep to expel from the context, to destroy' (Benjamin in Agamben 1999: 104). This is pertinent to my use of quotation in *An Elite Experience for Everyone*, which was intended to be recognised as a vestige of a past era (albeit one that still has currency in many venues) with a concomitant value system that no longer provides a relevant pedagogic direction.

The volunteer tour guide

At the outset, *An Elite Experience for Everyone* seemed to be a relatively straightforward satirical performance piece. It was important for me, and for the William Morris Gallery, that the performance would be understood as a parody of generic heritage sector tours, a ubiquitous educational genre. This type of guided tour was not part of the William Morris Gallery's learning and visitor services, yet its genre was recognised by the gallery's staff as an ongoing feature in many English Heritage and National Trust properties. Although there are clearly exceptions to the norm, volunteer guides are invariably white, middle aged, middle class women with no formal training in art, history, education or museology. When visiting Batemans, (the former home of Rudyard Kipling in East Sussex) in 2007, I encountered three volunteers, all of whom met this description. Their 'type' is something that I attempted to parody in the performance. I recognise that I didn't have to try too hard with the first two descriptors, but my interest was really focussed on the ways in which the guide embodies values, or a perception of values about this particular genre of gallery or museum, and how she interacts with her audience.

Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and bodily hexis point to the manifestation of symbolic power that is afforded through the dispositions of the body and language. 'Bodily hexis is political mythology realised, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu 1997: 70).¹³⁷

Volunteer guides are invested and implicated in their own desire for a 'speaking part' in a performance where knowledge is passed from teacher to learner – guide to

¹³⁷ Bourdieu links the correspondence between social and cognitive structures in 'advanced societies' to the patterning that operates in school systems but this can equally be seen as corresponding to and replicated in the museum/gallery as a pedagogic and classificatory enterprise experience. 'Cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instils in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalise the necessities of the extant social environment, inscribing inside the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external reality' (Wacquant in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 2 13).

visitor. Volunteer guides at Batemans provided information that was learnt from a text, available to them but not available for visitors. This meant that they would repeat the same information to all visitors but were mostly unable to answer the specific visitor's questions they therefore tended to discourage visitors from asking questions. Such practices treat visitors as universal subjects for whom a transmission model of education is wholly appropriate.

Some English Heritage sites offer visitors solely guided and scripted tours. Although there are opportunities for learning from such formats there can also be severe limitations. Charleston, the former home of Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, near Lewes in East Sussex is one such venue¹³⁸. When I visited, in August 2007, the guide (female, white, middle aged and middle class) talked to our group of ten adults in a theatrical manner as if she was repeating memorised lines. Her tone of voice was oratorical and contrasted noticeably from her 'off script' timbre, which she used when speaking to colleagues. Although she was efficient and very well informed, the learning experience of visitors was shaped again, by her adherence to a transmission model of passing her knowledge to us, the eponymous empty vessels. There were a few limited opportunities for asking questions but it also appeared that there were 'unwritten rules' concerning the content of questions. Our group discovered this in the second room, a dining room where the subject of the household's servants was mentioned. One visitor enquired 'where did these people [Bell and Grant] get their money from?' It was not an unreasonable question. In the narrative that the guide was spinning, selling avant-garde paintings and ceramics simply did not equate with the visitor's understanding of a style of living where servants could be afforded. Unfortunately, it seemed to have been interpreted by our guide as a slur on the integrity of the 'bohemian' artists. Our guide's 'passionate attachment' (Butler 1997) to the Bloomsbury group, who constituted her identity as a tour guide, meant that the question was interpreted as tantamount to a personal affront. Her manner when answering this visitor was irritated and almost aggressive. This also had the effect of indicating to the group that questions, which exposed the fragility of the scripted narrative, were not welcome.

'Speaking in quotation marks'

With heightened awareness of the dangers of producing an insider critique comprehensible only for other artists or academics (Foster 1996; Schneider 1993), I therefore sought in my intervention, to exaggerate and distort to the point of

¹³⁸ It is possible to make unaccompanied tours on some Sundays but for all other days visitors are admitted on a timed rota, in groups of a limited number, accompanied by a guide.

grossness certain voices within gallery and museum culture. Bakhtin (1981) discusses this phenomenon of the use of speech in quotation marks as a dialogic unfolding between two speaking subjects. 'This is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense, rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other' (p. 76). To speak the words of others, whilst gesturing quotation marks, acts to destabilise meaning, it indicates a gulf between the speaker and what is spoken. 'So called' or 'allegedly' is implied. Similarly, appropriating the accent (ethnicity, regionality, class, gender and sexuality can all be suggested) of another, achieves the effect of distancing and subverting meaning. Bakhtin writes that in such instances 'every word used with *conditions attached*, every word enclosed in intonational quotation marks, is an intentional hybrid – if only because the speaker insinuates himself from this word as if from another language' (ibid).

As the process of learning the script began, questions were raised about just how explicit this intonational 'othering' of language would need to be? I began to realise that the answers would not be forthcoming until I experimented and there was very little time for that. I would probably only discover whether the parody was over or under played through the embodied process of making: performing and showing the DVD. The embodied nature of practice as research was essential to the understandings gained in this project. It permitted me to have access to the museum, in both a physical and conceptual manner, that would have been impossible to gain through other means. It opened up possibilities for forming relationships with others that were uncertain and required negotiations and it involved testing limits that would otherwise have been disallowed. To put this another way, I chose to negotiate a series of transgressions (placing an erroneous artefact and label in the collection, temporarily removing an artefact from the collection, impersonating a beard wearing tour guide whilst the museum was open to the public, and subsequently screening the DVD of the tour in the Foyer). These 'transgressions' involved liaison with a number of museum staff, including the museum director, and opened up discussions about trust, truth, education, marketing and audiences.

Is seeing **believing**?

The performance of *An Elite Experience* was filmed in one day, with visitors present. Filming the performance was a salutary experience, which led me to reconsider the power that institutional frameworks exert as narrative forces. During the filming I felt perplexed by the way that many visitors appeared not to 'see'/understand, how

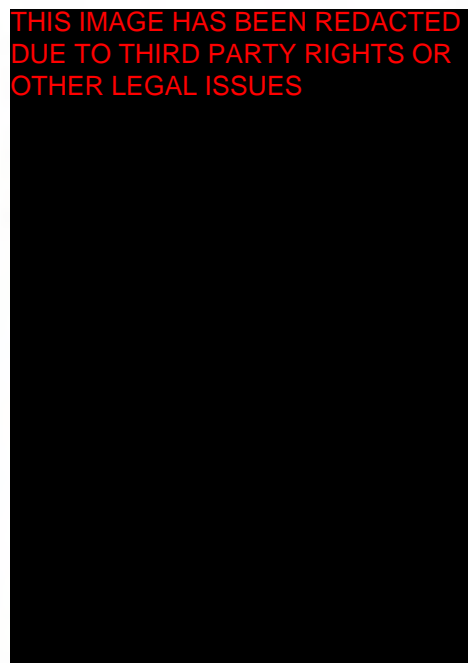
ridiculous my speech and behaviour was. The character of 'Victoria' that I imagined I was constructing was comical and absurd for me, and my friends who helped with the filming. I made the assumption that others would understand the performance as blatant artifice but this was not always the case.

Coco Fusco has remarked similarly, of her performance *Amerindians* with Gomez-Peña in which she and Gomez-Peña appeared as 'live tribal exhibits' performing in a large gilded cage. Viewers of the performance thought that they actually were 'exotic tribe's' people on display¹³⁹.

It wasn't our intent to fool anybody, and you'll see, I'm going to play you a clip from the documentary. We look pretty ridiculous; we look more like we walked off a television set of *Gilligan's Island*. And that's what the performance experience was for us, to learn just how little control we have over how people see us when we start engaging in these kinds of performances in public.

(Fusco 1999 www.moma.org: accessed 7.10. 2005)

Towards the end of filming *An Elite Experience for Everyone* we took a break outside the gallery to take some stills shots. As I posed in the entrance to the gallery, dressed in a navy blue blazer, velvet hair-band, blue court shoes and long grey beard, a young woman with a small child in a pushchair approached me and asked: 'What time does the gallery close?'



¹³⁹ Fusco states that the 'idea was to make a satirical commentary on the history of the ethnographic display of indigenous people...We were sort of arguing that the practice [began] with Columbus, [who brought] Arawak Indians back [to] the Spanish court and had put one of them on display. That's a kind of intercultural performance that we thought hadn't been really recognized as part of performance art history, and we traced its path from the early period of contact to its development into a kind of circus/freak show of phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century' (Fusco, C. 1999 www.moma.org accessed 7.10.2005).

She did so without hesitation, irony, a smile or glimmer of recognition that there were a few strange things about the appearance of the person she was approaching. When I provided the necessary information, momentarily absorbed in being helpful, she walked away saying that she would ‘have time to come back later.’ By this time my small group of friends who were assisting with the filming were doubled up in hysterical laughter at the woman’s seeming inability to recognise me as ‘odd’.

What had happened? Similarly to Fusco I had not intended to fool anybody, but the woman with the pushchair seemed not to see ‘me.’ Perhaps she had not ‘seen’ a woman in a beard or a man in a skirt. Is it possible that what she ‘saw’ was just an extension of the museum, a representative, a source of information that rendered the former trans-gender possibilities simply irrelevant? In *What Art Stops us from Seeing*, Darian Leader suggests that ‘what we see and where we look, will depend, in part, on what someone else sees and where someone else looks’ (2002: 13). As we look so we are looked at. This dynamic of looking forms the starting point for Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of vision, and it is from Lacan’s theory that Leader explores our relationship with art. Leader proposes that ‘The world of represented reality is structured by language... it is less sight than ideas that matter’ (Leader 2002: 109). He is not suggesting that ideas are always verbal, but that prior inscriptions can override the act of ‘simply seeing’. To follow Leader’s trajectory, the woman’s behaviour might suggest that because understanding of the world is structured by language and concepts and constructed by desire, a fantasy had been projected, scant symbols had been recognised as an extension of museum/ness. What she had seen was no more ‘odd’ than what she believed the museum to be. As Nicholas Addison (2007)¹⁴⁰ suggests my oddness ensured that I was of the museum and not, like her, a visitor, I thus served her purpose. My difference may have been occluded by a certain deference for authority (power/knowledge) not, therefore like the misrecognition à la Fusco, more, as I suggest, a non-recognition.

In fact, willingness to believe or at least to assume a countenance of belief was common to many visitors who stood to observe the performance being filmed. Only children dared to point out the obvious: ‘Mummy that lady’s got a beard,’ parents whisked their offspring away looking apologetic and embarrassed, as if a wisp of excess facial hair had been inappropriately drawn to attention.

¹⁴⁰ Comment made in response to an earlier draft of this chapter.

Henry Cole's (1884) praise for the museum's educative role posits that its chief lesson is '[to] teach the young child ... to respect property and behave gently' (in Bennett 1995: 102). Bennett's observations on the history of the behavioural and socialising codes that galleries and museums encourage, show that 'going to a museum, then as now, is not merely a matter of looking and learning; it is also – and precisely because museums are as much places for being seen as for seeing – an exercise in civics' (Bennett 1995: 102).

The museum's reach

After the filming came the editing and then the performance was presented as a DVD playing in the foyer of the gallery. According to Cormack, the museum curator, the DVD of *An Elite Experience for Everyone* was very popular with visitors. The gallery attendants at the front desk who directly witnessed visitors' responses also seemed pleased with its reception. I felt, however, that the film was too long and that, for the casual viewer, catching only a minute or so of Victoria's oration might be confusing. This was certainly the case for one visitor who responded angrily by demanding of the staff: 'who does she bloody well think she is?!' It apparently took museum staff some time to placate and convince the visitor that this was not an official tour but was in fact 'part of an *art* exhibition', to which I imagine equal, albeit different objection was maintained. Ivan Karp remarked similarly about Fusco and Gomez-Peña's *Amerindians*, that, 'Viewers comments were mainly positive [...] but a Cherokee woman left the museum outraged without reading the chronology' (Karp and Wilson 2000: 266).

This was not my first experience of 'exhibiting' work outside of a gallery or 'art world' context, but it was my first taste of making work that would primarily be seen by a historic gallery/museum audience. I make this distinction because there are differences between audiences' expectations for these respective venues not least because frequent visitors to contemporary art galleries may be more used to suspending one sort of belief in favour of another.

Chapter 6 Humour, Irony and Parodic Methodology in Artists' Interventions

Here is an irony that is merely a goad for thought, quickening it when drowsy, disciplining it when dissipated. There is another irony that is both the agent and the terminus towards which it strives. There is a dialectic which[...] never fatigued, is always ready to set the problem afloat should it go to ground.

(Kierkegaard 1966: 151)

Parody has the advantage of being both a re-creation and a creation, making criticism into a kind of active exploration of form.

(Hutcheon 2000: 51)

Introduction

In this chapter I examine parody and irony's somewhat denigrated status in educational theory and attempt to reconcile this with their potential as dialogic interventionist tropes. Whilst the mimetic impulses of pastiche enjoy an almost unrivalled position in many areas of art and English education, particularly in schools where transcription of canonic exemplars is favoured, parody's potential denigratory effects are not so commonly encouraged as a practice or studied in the work of others.

Parody is a complex form. In parodic and ironic interventionist artworks, meaning is not encountered as immanent but instead is configured, (often without a direct or explicit awareness that is taking place) when parody or irony pose questions and disrupt the viewer's perception. Alongside Benjamin (1938), who explores the effects of distraction and disruption, I draw on the writings of Bakhtin (1966), Linda Hutcheon (2000) and Søren Kierkegaard (1841), to facilitate a closer examination of the effects of such disruption, as a textual, visual and performative phenomenon. Kierkegaard and Benjamin in particular search for the potential of irony and disruption to precipitate ethical/ideological change, whilst Bakhtin and Hutcheon are more concerned with the formal aspects of these methods in relation to art forms.

These explorations of the potential of parody and irony are set here in contrast to the two common viewpoints adopted by critics from both the political 'right' and 'left.' The first suggests that what is 'best' for the visitor, is a cohesive re-enforcing approach to learning in the museum, as could be characterised by didactic explicative texts or lectures. The second advocates extreme individualism/ relativism, what Cheryl Meszaros (2007) describes as 'whatever interpretation,' where visitors' own perspectives and prejudices remain unchanged. Residing at two spectral ends of a

learning continuum, one overly didactic and patrician in stance, the other heuristic to the point of relativism, both perspectives aim to minimise the likelihood of visitor mis-understanding. For example, if the museum presents concrete information in an accessible form then the museum's narrative is proposed as the 'right' way of engaging, thereby closing down possible meanings beyond those intended by exhibition makers and regarding such interpretations as misconstruals. The aim here, is for maximum visitor consensus achieved through persuasive and authoritative rhetoric. If on the other hand the museum does not proffer views and opinions of curators, scholars and others then this takes us to the second spectral end - something close to relativism, where all views and opinions are of equal significance and original values remain intact.

These caricatures of extreme perspectives share a common feature, in that they both elide contradiction and any hint of antagonism. In this sense they also eschew dialogic possibilities where visitors might dissent from a unified (unifying) official language or appreciate that their own views may be in contrast to, and less developed than, those of others¹⁴¹. By contrast, the more precarious and fragile terrain of Artists' Interventions often intentionally 'stirs things up,' to create a climate of uncertainty and consternation. In *An Elite Experience for Everyone* the pedantry of the generic heritage museum tour guide was the target of parody and a disruption to the visitor's experience was intended, if not always achieved. In this sense I would embrace the anger and objection of the visitor who complained.

Discovering parody

The realisation that a parodic method links the earliest Artists' Interventions that I have considered to some of the most recent, was made, or perhaps I should say acknowledged, some way into the research. Despite the fact that I had 'instinctively' employed parody in my own intervention, it was not until I came to analyse *An Elite Experience for Everyone*, in chapter 5, that the prevalence of a parodic methodology in the artists' work that I had already examined became the proverbial 'elephant in the room'. This may have been an initial, wilful negation on my part, as I have certainly found more than one reference to parody in literature about Artists' Interventions. In a chapter in which he considers the artist's ability to unsettle anthropological meaning in the museum, Shelton for example suggests that 'parody engineered through the logical extension of operative rules and procedures, can... provide an erosive strategy in deconstructing the work of museums' (2001: 147).

¹⁴¹ The suppression of disruption in dominant ideology is what, according to Bourdieu (1991), also leads to misrecognition of a different order¹⁴¹ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999: 26).

Shelton's characterisation of the erosive intention of parody, seen in relation to rules, is indicative of theories of humour more generally. Freud (1905), Bergson (1911) and Douglas (1968), all relate humour to an attack on over-determinism and control. Douglas is at pains to stress that jokes 'change the balance of power,' (1968: 365) albeit often, only momentarily. 'The joke ... affords opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity. The excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary or subjective' (ibid).

The, concomitant 'problem' of bringing parody and ambiguity to the field of education was also something that had not escaped me. Looking more closely at the interface between parody and education it seemed initially to be an unproductive element in an analysis of the pedagogic potential of interventionist approaches. If the very act of parody assumes the adoption of existing forms in order to subjugate or subvert and unsettle their implied meaning by rendering them nonsensical, then claims that the nonsensical will educe sense-making do not seem to follow the contours of a logical argument. As Michael Fischer writes of 'trickster humour'¹⁴² which is at once parodic, ironic and pedagogic:

Considerable potential still exists... to construct texts utilizing humour and other devices that draw attention to their own limitations and... do so with aesthetic elegance, and are a pleasure to read, rather than with pedantic labouredness. Subtlety however, (as in the subtlety of Trickster humour) is a quality that seems often (but not necessarily) to run counter to the canons of explicitness and univocal meaning expected in scientific writing
(Fischer in Ryan 1999: 9).

This is a significant point in that the contours of logical argument referred to earlier are the contours of explicitness and univocal meaning from the scientific canon. My hesitancy stemmed precisely from this epistemological clash of values. Where interventionist artwork has been commissioned as an interpretive aid to visitors' meaning making, parody, irony and humour as driving forces in the interventionist artwork problematise a traditional case for learning, despite Sheri Klein's claims that 'through humour an artist is able to accomplish the three Es: enlighten, elevate and educate' (2007: 11).

However, because parody employs repetition and emulation of existing forms it can be seen to merely confirm and perpetuate original intentions. Perceptions of parody

¹⁴² Ryan (1999) writes that the trickster as an 'essential manifestation of irony' and that s/he should be understood as a 'doing' rather than a 'being' (p5).

in this sense, position it as a conservative trope and make claims for the more radical effects of parody difficult to sustain.

Defining parody and parodic method

Hutcheon, (2000) defines parody as a form of repetition with ironic critical distance marking difference rather than similarity. Although she draws on the writings of Bakhtin, unlike Bakhtin she believes that parody in visual artworks is not just a transfer from the practice of literature. Her concerns are focused on claims for the importance of parody in the work of a range of significant visual artists alongside examples drawn from theatre, film, and music.

Because many Artists' Interventions are hybrid forms, my concerns do not rest solely with defining the parodic within the image rather than the text or the verbal inflection. The examples that I have examined draw on multi-modal means of communication, bringing together text, image, object, display technologies and performances to be set, with critical distance, in a parodic frame. Where a repetition or emulation of an aspect of gallery or museum practice or an object from the collection has been brought into question, the interventionist strategy operates at a remove from imitation, quotation or allusion. Therefore in Artists' Interventions the process of repetition or mimicry is most often couched in Bakhtin's (1981) 'quotation marks', implying a device that distances speaker from spoken, display cabinet from simulacrum, tour guide from performance artist.

The notion of distancing can be read as two fold within parody. Commonly, parody is accepted as a derivative from the counter song or narrative. It is noteworthy however, that the prefix *Para* has two meanings, one counter or against, which is most frequently mentioned, (suggesting a difference that leans towards being oppositional and derisory) and the other, *Para* which in Greek can also mean beside, as in *parallel*. In the second, closeness rather than contrast is deduced. The neglected meaning for parody in this sense can be much more gentle, critiquing through a repetition that admits humour and absurdity. Here the prefix is useful to consider in relation to the complexities of Artists' Interventions as they have developed to become more widely utilised with educational intent, as interpretive strategies.

The concept of parody, outlined by Hutcheon, acknowledges that parody is neither trans-historical nor trans-cultural. In her analysis of parody's aesthetic manifestations she attributes the status of a permitted transgression, as outlined by Bakhtin (1981).

This is key to understanding the ways in which Artists' Interventions employ parody as a legitimate function; invited and sanctioned by the institution that is often also the target of the parody.

Hutcheon's in-depth understanding of parodic methodology brings into question some authors' resistance to seeing parody as a complex and nuanced form. For example, in her writings on Hiller, Robinson does not think that Hiller's method of containment and chronology of making, in *At the Freud Museum*, (see pp-pp) is parodic *per se* but sees it as having the effect of gently mocking the processes and hierarchy of 'cultural history'. She writes, 'It is this gentleness that is significant as this mimicry does not challenge, but collapses its logic by extending the classificatory process of the museum: Presented, 1991; Filed, 1991; Boxed, 1993; Positioned, 1994; Located, 1994; Remaindered, 1994; Represented, 1994' (Robinson 2004: 101). The distinction is an interesting one, as the tactics of a 'mimicry that collapses meaning', are difficult to distinguish from definitions of parody explicated by both Bakhtin and Hutcheon. Perhaps, as Hutcheon notes, 'twentieth century art [poses] serious challenges to the many existing theories of parody' (2000: 32).

Defining irony

Semantically, irony is a negating trope of contrast, but there is also an evaluative and perhaps even an ethical aspect to irony.

It is like a riddle and its solution possessed simultaneously.

(Kierkegaard 1966: 265)

Irony is central to the functioning of parody and in many instances the boundaries between the two are in a state of flux. Hutcheon, (2000) indicates that the critical distance between the two parallel texts of the parody is usually occupied by irony 'which can be playful as well as belittling ... critically constructive as well as destructive' (p. 32).

Although Lee Capel (1966) writes that 'an ironic work, even a satiric parody, need not in any way militate against its also being the vehicle for serious meaning and the repository for philosophic value' (p. 36), irony occludes certainty. Its resistance to being tied down by one particular meaning, which is symptomatic of the free play and ambiguity in parody and irony, suggests an incompatibility with truth or fact, and a leaning, instead, towards ambiguity and relativism. Such a tendency can also be seen in contemporary art practice (not just in Artists' Interventions), where the term

'ambiguous' has been much overused by reviewers and critics. Artist, Ceal Floyer comments on the paradoxical nature of contemporary practice:

I think what informs my [art] practice is a certain dissatisfaction with being an artist, with operating in an art context, even if it's the very situation that accommodates, and tolerates my sort of cultural practice. I still don't trust the situation though... By manifesting this uncertainty as art I compound the situation further.

(in Watkins 2003: 10)

Floyer's quote is from a catalogue essay to *Days Like These*, Tate Britain (2003), which posits a celebration of negatory tactics in contemporary art and starts with the sentence, 'many of the most interesting artists working today don't believe in art' (Watkins 2003: 10).

This was not always the case: for Georg Hegel (see *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807]) such slipperiness expressed by irony helped to signal the downfall of art. In his dissertation¹⁴³ *The concept of irony* (1841) Kierkegaard makes close reference to Hegel's views on irony and enlightenment, alongside those of Solgar. In this text, as Summers (2001) elucidates, Kierkegaard's key question is:

If we wish to return the free play and open-endedness which are the hallmarks of irony, are we not then forced to abandon any possibility of serious meaning? The question therefore, is whether there is any way of holding onto irony, with all that this implies, without thereby having to succumb to a nihilistic relativism. (p. 290)

This is an interesting proposition for Artists' Interventions that appear to act as interlocutors between collections and visitors yet offer little in the way of concrete meaning. Kierkegaard gets around the negative, destructive aspects of irony in his thesis by making distinctions between two types of irony 'romantic irony', which he does see as nihilistic, and what he refers to as 'controlled or mastered irony,' which in contrast he argues has an ethical self-actualising dimension.

Although Walsh (1991) argues that Kierkegaard's analysis of irony and repetition should not be confused with the post-modern notions of radical hermeneutics and deconstruction, there are some confluences. The role that Kierkegaard ascribes to irony is also not unlike that which others have ascribed to the comedic – irony is an instrument for bringing about self-knowledge. Even in conceptual art there are some

¹⁴³ Conceding that Kierkegaard's dissertation may well be an ironic work, it is necessary to consider that he may well have been totally subverting the academic genre. The extent to which Kierkegaard's appropriation of Hegel is parodically and ironically intended is a matter of debate between Kierkegaard scholars.

comic moments where irony engages the artist and others in a double bind. When Michael Craig-Martin exhibited a work called *An Oak Tree* (see Fig. 22) in London in 1974 he followed a similar semiotic trajectory to that of other conceptual artists, in that the piece was not an oak tree but a glass of water on a shelf. In the accompanying text, the artist explained that it was an oak tree because he had decided it was. But in a double ironic twist 'the work was bought by a gallery in Australia (Tate has a copy) but Australian Customs refused to let it in on the grounds that an oak tree was prohibited vegetation. Craig-Martin had to own up that it was really only a glass of water after all' (Reynolds 2008: 6).

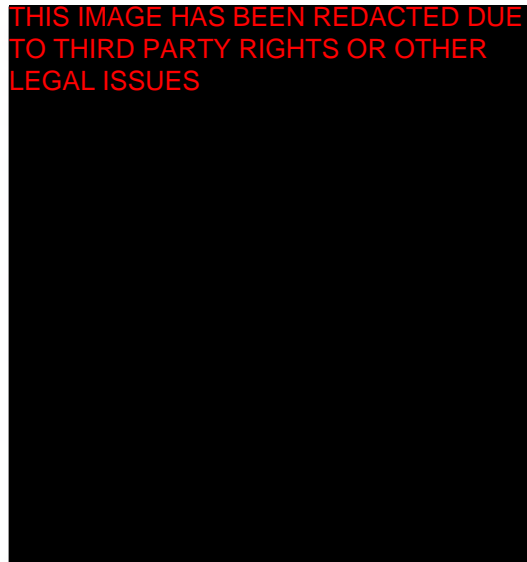


Fig. 22: Michael Craig-Martin *An Oak Tree* (1974)

Like parody and humour, of which it can be a part, irony can destabilise pomposity¹⁴⁴. This has some parity with Simon Critchley's (2002) claims that certain forms of humour recall us to the modesty and limitedness of the human condition, 'a limitedness that calls not for tragic-heroic affirmation but comic acknowledgement, not Promethean authenticity but inauthenticity' (p. 102).

In our day there is much talk about the significance of doubt for philosophy, but doubt is for philosophy what irony is for the personal life.

(Kierkegaard 1966: 338)

Controlled or mastered irony acts, for Kierkegaard, in both moral and ethical terms for the individual who, he suggests, should cherish it as a 'bath of regeneration and rejuvenation' (p. 339). More religious metaphors follow in another description of 'the cleansing baptism of irony that redeems the soul' (ibid). Irony, for Kierkegaard,

¹⁴⁴ It needs to be noted that Kierkegaard did not see humour and irony as one and the same and attributed both a much deeper scepticism and a much deeper positivity to humour than to irony. See Kierkegaard S. (1966) *The Concept of Irony*. p.341.

would appear to function less like a bath and more like a very cold shower that should be taken when the need arises, for example 'should the atmosphere become too oppressive' (ibid). The intention would not be to stay in the shower too long but to emerge having benefited from its invigorating effects 'gladly, lightly to clad oneself again' (ibid). Ultimately its role is one of challenging and chastening.

Summers (2001) proposes that when irony is extended to involve the subject (e.g. controlled irony), it becomes relational and for Kierkegaard, marks 'the emergence of the self in self relation' (p. 311). It positions the subject as being in a world, it is therefore not a case of rejecting the real world because it falls short of the ideal, but rather of working to express the ideal in the circumstances of actuality, for it is in this awareness of its situatedness that the self has to choose its possibilities and make its life. There is no longer a subject confronting a world out there, 'but a self relating to itself and to other selves in a world of which it is a part' (Summers 2001: 311).

Kierkegaard's examination of irony's potential to 'rescue us from prolixity' seems indeed ironic in the case of his examination viva, which lasted five hours. However, his understanding of the form as potentially enlightening has significance, particularly for the ethical dimension which he attributes as a levelling device, and a reminder of the fragility inherent in creating meaning. Kierkegaard provides no concrete examples of how this might happen but the artist Barbara Bloom's *The Reign of Narcissism* (1989) might serve as an example. Bloom created a collection of objects: portrait busts, cameos, books, china cups, wall friezes etc. all made in, or including, her own likeness, see Fig. 23. These were displayed in a hexagonal rotunda alluding to a neo-classical salon or period museum room.

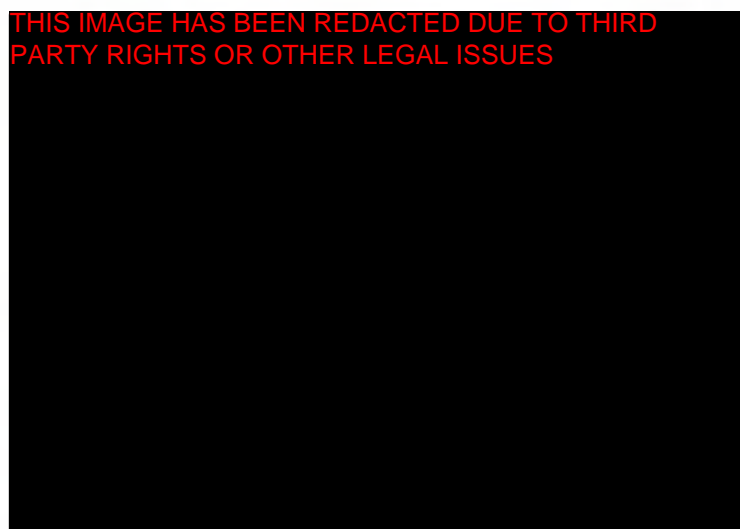


Fig. 23: Barbara Bloom *The Reign of Narcissism* (1989)

The visitor was not instructed how to interpret this scenario, so Bloom's ironic alter-ego as an altruistic eighteenth/nineteenth century collector may be apparent to many, but her ironic take on the desire to amass and exhibit, to add to the collection, in which she herself is implicated, may not be immediately understood by all. This is an example of what Foster refers to as 'parallactic' work – art that attempts to frame the framer as he or she frames the other' (Foster 1996: 203).

In terms of pedagogic failures and successes there are some confluences here with Kierkegaard's discussions of Socrates who was well known as both an ironist and teacher. Socrates's role was to awaken his interlocutors out of their illusions and set them free. But the response that they would make to their new situation was not in his control – he favoured the heuristic as opposed to the didactic end of the learning continuum. In Kierkegaard's words:

He helped the individual to an intellectual delivery; he cut the umbilical cord of substantiality. As an *accoucheur* [obstetrician], he was unrivalled, but more than that he was not.

(in Summers 2001: 295–6)

Yet this in itself was not an insubstantial achievement. Because pedagogy is traditionally an act of reproduction¹⁴⁵ but moreover, because it is formed from the 'tradition of consciousness' there is a certain perception of irresponsibility that resides in the provision of guidance to think, rather than to think 'that'. Both the conscious and the critical¹⁴⁶ tend towards belief and rightness and similarly some critical Artists' Interventions prescribe a clear sense of rightness for gallery and museum visitors to align themselves with. For example, in *MetroMobilitan* (1985), there was little doubt how visitors were meant to understand Haacke's institutional critique of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Banners made by Haacke were intended to demystify corporate sponsorship practices in museums and galleries and took the particular case of oil company Mobil's sponsorship of an exhibition of ancient Nigerian art at the museum as a target for critique. Haacke made visual an interrelationship between violence in Apartheid South Africa and Mobil's continuing supply of oil to the South African military and police. It would have been unlikely

¹⁴⁵ See Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage, and Bernstein, B. (1996) *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*. London: Taylor Francis.

¹⁴⁶ Critical theory can be dated back to the Frankfurt School (1923). Formed around the ideas of the then radical thinkers such as Freud and Marx but also influenced by Kant & Hegel. Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm, Habermas, Adorno and notable others and presented challenges to those 'normalised' facets of modern life that involve the subordination of the many to the will of the few. The term today would cover many other theorists who were not part of the Frankfurt School but share a commitment to the notion that the world is fundamentally unjust and in need of change. Critical theory can be understood as an enabling form of Marxian theory it proposes theory not just for understanding but for change. The prefix critical has come to have more widespread application extending to and critical pedagogy (see Freire, Giroux and McLaren) and critical art practice (e.g. Artists' Placement Group, Art and Language, On Kawara,) both of which intend to affect change.

that visitors came away with any other perspective than that Mobil were the bad guys and the museum was semi-bad for accepting their blood money.

In contrast, ambiguity and contingency, that are part of a more parodic/ironic methodology, set in motion a hermeneutic formulation, which Smith suggests, can also be used to problematise the 'hegemony of a dominant culture in order to engage it transformatively' (Smith 1999: 35). This might be seen in Sophie Calle's Intervention *The Appointment* (1999) (see frontispiece) at the Freud Museum, London, where the boundaries of fact and fiction were obfuscated in order to create works that on one level appear to be plausible Freudian case studies, but on another level may be gently parodying some of the clichés of Freudian analysis. Calle does not ask her viewers to make judgements but she does prompt a number of questions. Visitor's may have been unsure whether to take Calle's sexually suggestive autobiographical fragments seriously. The conjunction of text and context encourages a straightforward reading, but the introduction of 'ready made' and sculptural objects destabilises meaning and allows for other possibilities. Through humour and absurdity a gentle critique of some of Freud's more totalising theories is suggested, see Fig. 24 and Fig. 25 below.

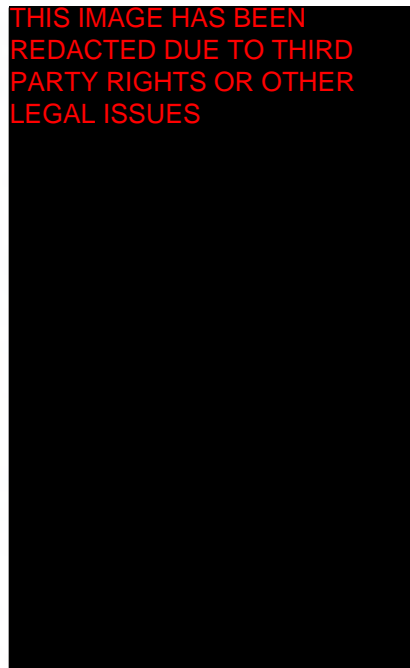


Fig. 24: Sophie Calle From *The Appointment* (1999)

When I was fifteen I was afraid of men. One day in a restaurant, I chose a dessert because of its name: 'Young Girl's Dream'. I asked the waiter what it was, and he answered: "It's a surprise." A few minutes later he returned with a dish featuring two scoops of vanilla ice cream and a peeled banana. He said one word: "Enjoy." Then he laughed. I closed my eyes the same way I closed them years later when I saw my first naked man.

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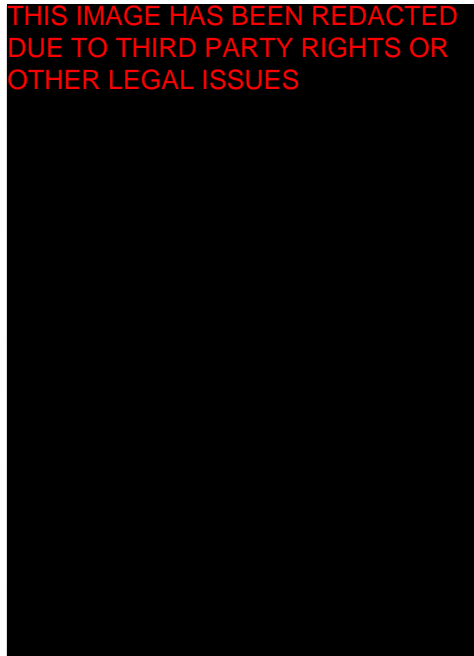


Fig. 25: Sophie Calle From *The Appointment* (1999)

I was six, I lived in a street named Rosa-Bonheur with my grandparents. A daily ritual obliged me every evening to undress completely in the elevator on my way up to the sixth floor where I arrived without a stitch on. Then I would dash down the corridor at lightening speed, and as soon as I reached the apartment I would jump into bed. Twenty years later I found myself repeating the same ceremony every night in public, on the stage of one of the strip joints that line the boulevard in Pigalle, wearing a blond wig in case my grandparents who lived in the neighbourhood should happen to pass by.

Interpreting parody and irony in galleries and museums

Before the sort of transformative function advocated by Smith can be performed in a gallery or museum intervention then a recognition of parodic/ironic methodology has to take place. Parody and irony are sophisticated genres which make demands on both their practitioners and its interpreters. In the case of Artists' Interventions the artist (producer), then the visitor (interpreter), must effect a structural superimposition of texts, (and here I include the visual) that incorporate the old into the new. For some interventions this superimposition might take the form of role-play, in others the imposition is a direct borrowing of the language, visual and verbal, of display or interpretive conventions. In all instances both things (parody and the object of parody) appear simultaneously, although one may partially obscure a reading of the other. Achieving this state of 'bi' or even multi-textuality in artworks has emerged as a significant *modus operandi* of the interventionist.

For both producer and interpreter, visual/linguistic competence is layered with the need for parodic/ironic competence and, as Hymes points out, 'Cultural competence and ironic confidence are intertwined' (Hymes in Ryan 1999: 11). Whilst emphasis in formal education is placed on understanding 'the rules' of the use of language and

of image – grammar, syntax, proportion, composition, etc, outside of formal education other competences are deemed as important, if not more important and they involve encoding and decoding competences. ‘The ironic figure of speech also contains an attribute characteristic of all forms of irony namely exclusiveness deriving from the fact that although it is understood it is not directly understood. Hence, this figure of speech looks down, as it were, on plain and ordinary discourse immediately understood by everyone; it travels in an exclusive incognito’ (Kierkegaard 1966: 265). Recognising parody and irony’s disguises therefore needs to be learnt. To facilitate the acquisition of appropriate interpretive abilities instructional myths and fables and stories are used throughout many cultures to teach that words and images are slippery things that should not always be interpreted in a literal manner. The tale of *Bluejay and His Older Sister*, is one such story, it revolves around the woes of Bluejay who interprets all of his sister’s directions literally instead of ironically with disastrous and hilarious results. Ryan, (1999) describes this as a myth that draws upon a verbal pattern ‘to highlight meta-linguistic incompetence, incompetence in ironic exchange, and at the same time to entertain and instruct in the consequences of lack of competence’ (p. 10). Similarly, popular TV series, such as *The Simpsons*, feature characters whose use of irony presupposes the meta-linguistic competence of viewers. Advertising too uses irony as can be seen in ‘Dixons’ (2009) tube advertisements, which pit ‘Dixons’, the distinctly unfashionable audio visual retailer, against more sophisticated high street contenders. A series of three advertisements employ parodic descriptions of ‘Selfridges’, ‘John Lewis’ and ‘Harrods’; they all end with a small but significant ironic line ‘Dixons the last place you’ll want to go’:

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In Dixon’s advertisement, the myth of *Bluejay* and other popular forms of irony, it is clear that what is meant and what is said do not directly correlate. But the acceptance of this process of negation when creating an artwork, comprised of parallel texts separated by irony, is often more complicated. In Dion’s *Artful History, a Restoration Comedy* (1985), the workings of parody for the producer(s) can be observed. Made

with fellow artist Jason Simon, the piece can be seen as transitional, marking a new approach in Dion's working methods. It went through several incarnations but its last was a pseudo-documentary film about the art restoration business, in which Dion worked at the time. In discussion he says: 'in the film we could explore the issues with incredible complexity. We examined how history is constructed through fragments like painting, which are subject to external factors like economics, labour conditions, chance' (Dion 1999: 41). How the parodic coding is translated from producer to interpreter, reveals the delicate balance involved in this sophisticated genre. It is, as Hutcheon (2000) elaborates, a formal quality of parody that marks it as a 'bitextual synthesis or a dialogic relation between texts' (p. xiii). Dion remarks that: 'The humour and irony of the film is cut very close to the seriousness of the documentary form' (1999: 42). This makes demands on the interpreter as they are 'expected to construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statements and supplement the foreground with an acknowledgement and knowledge of a background context' (Hutcheon 2000: 34).

The slippages between foreground and background signal a territory marked by uncertainty for both producer and interpreter, something that is often overlooked by theorists such as Hutcheon who sometimes treats the intention of the artist as a given and as something stable (2000: 55). As Dion's states: 'I remember Jason and I would show it to some audiences where the irony and comedy were lost; other audiences would see the entire work as fiction – as a tongue-in-cheek film' (1999: 42). His remarks outline the precarious balance between the intentions and employment of ironic and parodic strategies of the producer and the understanding of the interpreter. The notion of intentionality is also significant in this proto version of what would become Dion's *modus operandi* in the Natural History Museum installations for which he is now well known. In an interview with Alex Coles, he says of the film: 'It is unclear, even to Jason and I, if I am in character or a real art restorer; if this is a fictional work or a documentary; which stories are true and which are fiction' (Dion 1999: 41-42). Because presumably both truths and fictions exist simultaneously, irony and parody function as a technique of self-referentiality by which art/artists reveal(s) an awareness of the context-dependent nature of meaning, of the importance of signification of the circumstances surrounding any utterance. The *Para* of closeness, rather than contrast, is educed in this work and can be seen in Dion's subsequent installations.

Irony as a curatorial strategy

In galleries and museums parody and irony are not entirely confined to Artists' Interventions and have also been adopted as a method by some curators. Henrietta Riegel (1996) gives an account of two exhibitions at the Royal Ontario Museum, Canada where irony has been used as a curatorial strategy with the intention of increasing visitors' critical awareness. Riegel acknowledges at the outset that irony is a 'rich and risky trope' (p. 84), and that its use relates to a recent reflexive and critical turn in museology (ibid). However, Riegel does not associate these forms with the precedents set by artists, in curatorial style interventions, or other forms of ironic and parodic institutional critique. This seems to be an omission in her otherwise insightful analysis of two curatorial ventures in which she argues against ironic ambiguity that does not encourage a dialogic outcome and in particular against verbal irony which she sees as relying on an intellectually distanced stance. In a consideration of the possibilities for using irony in a more constructive manner, she refers to an exhibition entitled *Fluffs and Feathers*, 'which shows on an experiential level how stereotypes are created [and which] subverts the mode of representation by taking it to excess' (Riegel 1996: 97). *Fluffs and Feathers* was an exhibition concerned with representation of cultural groups in Canada¹⁴⁷ which utilised irony as a more visual and emotional trope. Although the exhibition began with what appeared to be a standard ethnographic approach this became disjointed as classificatory and taxonomical patterns were disrupted. Authentic and reproduction, popular and sacred culture became mixed. The exhibition offered visitors a chance to try on costumes and headdresses, they could then stand next to a cardboard cut out of a chief and his family and pose against a painted backdrop to regard their newly configured selves a mirror. Riegel draws on Babcock (1984) to suggest that this allows 'an ironic double moment ironic not in the sense of false and true meaning but in the sense of a 'double play', an interplay between social criticism and comedy' (Riegel 1996: 97). Where irony extends its critique to the logic of representation itself, according to Riegel, it is more successful in bringing visitors along with it into a critique. This would certainly seem to be the case in many Artists' Interventions, and furthermore has parity with Kierkegaard's notion of 'controlled' irony, that marks the emergence of the self in self-relation. It positions the museum not as other-worldly, not as rejecting the real world because it falls short of the ideal, but rather, of working to express the ideal in the circumstances of actuality. To paraphrase Summers, there is no longer a [museum] understanding, confronting a world out there, 'but a [museum] relating to itself and to other selves in a world of which it is a part' (Summers 2001: 311).

¹⁴⁷ It was a travelling exhibition that started its life in Ontario at the Woodland Cultural Centre which 'serves six 'native' communities from two cultural groups the Iroquoian and the Algonkian' (Riegel 1996: 95).

Tricksters, clowns, jokers, shamans and artists

Flaubert's droll entries in his 'Dictionary of Received Ideas,' written at the end of the nineteenth century, included one for artists which reads 'Artists: You have to laugh at everything they say.'¹⁴⁸ All charlatans. Praise their disinterestedness (*old fashioned*) Express surprise that they dress like everyone else [...] What artists do can't be called work' (1987: 294). Although Flaubert's 'dictionary' targeted its parody at pervasive polite nineteenth century opinion, the entry under artists might still pass muster in twenty-first century popular opinion. The artist and the trickster is an enduring coupling which has 'artfully' obscured the fact that what most artists do is often very much like work, (although, contrary to Flaubert's speculations, often not so well paid)¹⁴⁹. Artists often operate along the lines of an inversed social network; they are implicated in a belief system that values symbolic over economic capital. As Fraser states, artists 'are always ready for change and quick to adapt. We prefer freedom and flexibility to security. We don't want to punch the clock and tend to resist quantifying our labour time. We don't know the meaning of "overtime"' (2006: 94). If this sounds like a cross between someone's ideal freelance employee, religious fervour and the behaviour of a fool, this is perhaps because it has some features in common with them all.

The artist's joke

The joker appears to be a privileged person who can say certain things in a certain way which confers immunity. He ... expresses the creative possibilities of the situation.

(Douglas 1968: 372)

Characterisations of contemporary artists as the joker, clown, trickster or shaman are still fairly ubiquitous, but far from perceiving this as a slight, many artists actively cultivate and maintain these forms of identification.¹⁵⁰ There are advantages offered in adhering to such stereotypes, not least of which is the possibility of transgression, of being given license to act outside regulatory rules and norms. But occupying *the role* of jester or clown, does not mean *being* a fool, as Bourdieu's (1993) explication, of the ways in which writers have been able to utilise the benefits of such a position, illustrates. It is the fool in medieval tradition that Bourdieu draws upon to support his sociological reflections on more contemporary mores. Far from suggesting madness

¹⁴⁸ First sentence taken from Susanne Cotter's translation from the original in Cotter, S. *The Unbearable Lightness of Meaning* (2003): in Higgin (ed.) *The Artist's Joke*. London, Cambridge Massachusetts: Whitechapel and The MIT Press.

¹⁴⁹ Flaubert suggests that 'artists earn huge sums but squander them' (1976: 294).

¹⁵⁰ For example, Paul McCarthy and Mike Kelly have appropriated the role of clowns and buffoons, Joseph Beuys and Marcus Coates that of the shaman, Richard Prince the joker and Sophie Calle the trickster.

or ignorance this is 'a character freed from convention and conformities to whom is accorded transgression without consequences' (1993: 165). Further explorations of the social condition of the artist illustrates that transgressions have their place in the social order. Transgression affords a sense of illicit pleasure (not just to the perpetrator but to those who bear witness), and this often arrives in the form of humour. In the case of Artists' Interventions humour is often, as Critchely extracts (drawing from the words of Hans Driessen), 'a form of critical social anthropology, defamiliarising the familiar, demythologising the exotic and inverting the world of common sense' (Critchely 2002: 65). Examples of Artists' Interventions discussed thus far (e.g. *La vérité sur les colonies*, and *From the Freud Museum*) could be seen in these terms.

Legitimate transgression of the kind accorded to the 'fool' in the middle ages can help to frame an understanding of how the parodic, ironic, critical and disruptive tactics of twentieth and twenty-first century Artists' Interventions have been embraced by galleries and museums and how the space for the 'fool' that some artists have occupied in interventions, has allowed them to act in ways that would be unacceptable for others. My own intervention at the William Morris Gallery immediately highlighted this affordance. Why would a museum director allow someone who they hardly knew to place an erroneous artefact and label into their museum's collection and then to conduct a farcical visitor tour of the gallery spaces in full public view? Who else would be permitted to make this sort of transgression, apart from someone referred to as *an artist*? This cannot be viewed simply as an unreasonable and unprecedented gesture of trust and largesse. It is part of a wider tolerance of buffoonery indicating a desire to let in certain forms of transgressive behaviour, in the belief that chaos or release from orthodoxy, can be beneficial.

Acting the fool

In discussing the artist of the nineteenth century, Bourdieu (1993) writes that it is the 'structural ambiguity of their position in the field of power that leads writers and painters [...] to maintain an ambivalent relationship with the dominant class - with the dominated, the 'people' they form an ambiguous image of their own position in social space and of their social function' (p. 165). Like the Shakespearian fool, for example in *King Lear*, the artist can cross unlikely societal boundaries but rarely occupies secure territory in any domain. Again Fraser's (2006) comments are pertinent: she writes 'as artists we're convinced that we work for ourselves and our own satisfaction even when we work for others. We tend to value non-material over material rewards, which we are willing to defer, even to posterity. While we identify

with social causes we tend to come from backgrounds which discourage us from seeing ourselves as labour' (p. 76). Fraser's somewhat romantic and ahistoric comments never-the-less corroborate some of Bourdieu's ideas on the societal position that many Western artists have occupied throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Bourdieu includes the modern intellectual into a grouping of individuals inscribed into the personage of the fool. He explains that the character is not one who generates widespread esteem but is more of an 'ugly buffoon, ridiculous, a bit vile, but he is the alerter who warns or the advisor who brings forth the lesson; and above all, he is the demolisher of social illusions' (Bourdieu 1993: 165). Bourdieu's fool therefore appears to be an educator of sorts, but one whose role is at a slight remove from the reproducer of social norms¹⁵¹, an educator who instead can also occupy dangerous and unpredictable positions in a fragile social order.

If Bourdieu's trajectory is followed, it begins to illuminate a pedagogy that can coexist, against the odds, with parodic and disruptive tactics. Here the dual role of pedagogue and tolerated outsider appear to enhance each other. When viewed in relation to artists who have intervened most successfully in the museum's discourse to precipitate change, from Duchamp (1917) and Broodthaers (1972) to Ukeles (1979) and Fraser (1990–2009), this would seem to be a particularly apposite observation.

The demolition of social illusions is a risky business, likely to cause consternation, so who better to select for this task than someone whose position in the social order is not altogether stable, someone whose 'lesson on deconstruction' is a little bit ambiguous, perhaps poetic, amusing, unorthodox and given in an idiosyncratic manner. If the gallery and museum sector were looking for a way of admitting to some problematic practices without wanting to draw unwanted attention to itself, then trying to find a way of redressing the past that offers more than bald admissions of lessons learned would be crucial.

Gently mocking, parodying, negating, and destabilising, Artists' Interventions are a form of communication that generally avoids a direct didactic, prosaic or literal *modus operandi*. Like a raised eyebrow, a wink or a sardonic intonation, a lot can be 'said' without recourse to explicit use of the word. Freud's use of the term *Verneinung*, (of saying something by leaving it unsaid) is used by Bourdieu (1993) and proves a useful

¹⁵¹ See, Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.

analogy to illustrate the way that what is revealed and simultaneously veiled is often that which is painful or causes discomfort; that which is at the root cause of a problem (1993: 158). Bourdieu explains too that literature (here he means fiction) so often reveals, by means of negation 'that which social sciences, with their promethean ambitions cannot quite grasp' (1993: 159). A point that he further elaborated in his 1998 comments on Fraser's interventionist performance work in galleries and museums, where he argued, that through performance art Fraser's work 'convinces far more effectively than any abstract analysis as it exposes the unseeable and unsayable in that social universe, so highly armoured against ordinary forms of objectification' (Bourdieu 2005: xv). His caveat is that in such a process what is unveiled is veiled simultaneously, so that both producer and interpreter remain suspended in a state of negation. This has an imperative to it, in that an 'author [or artist] reveals truths that would otherwise be unbearable' (1993: 158).

Performing the unspeakable, breaking social codes and conventions

Bourdieu also suggests the 'charm' of literature, and I would suggest of art too, 'lies to a great extent in the fact that, unlike science, [...] it deals with serious matters without asking to be taken completely seriously' (1993: 159). This again can help to explain why some Artists' Interventions have been particularly successful in bringing difficult, complex subject matter, such as racial and gender prejudice, colonial plunder and the acquisition of sacred artefacts, to attention without labouring a point or exacerbating tensions. It is the 'charm' of the artwork that takes the visitor's focus in several directions simultaneously, whether that is through the parallel or counter-text within parody or whether it is through a visual pun or juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar language. If an artwork is dense with meaning, ambiguous, poignant and emotionally resonant it can be pleasurable as much for what it doesn't say (its intrigue), as for what it does.

Vaccination

There have also been suggestions that a critique of a gallery or museum's past practices, acted out in the form of an Artists' Intervention, may protect the institution against future public or academic criticism. Foster (1996) suggests that particular artists, (often, although not exclusively, those whose work is concentrated on issues of alterity) have somehow been given a licence to 'inoculate' the gallery or museum against claims of exclusive practices. 'The museum imports critique, whether as a show of tolerance or for the purpose of inoculation (against a critique undertaken by the institution, within the institution)' (Foster 1996: 191). Inoculation's principle is

that the host body/institution will be protected against further attack by absorbing and combating a less virulent strain or a miniscule amount of a potentially life threatening entity (a sort of cultural homeopathy). Its methods are the introduction of micro-organisms into a culture medium. The artist's momentary and perhaps relatively benign critique, in the form of an intervention, protects against the more harmful effects of full-blown self-admission and possible public dissent. The gallery and museum, from the 1990s onwards, experienced a plethora of metaphoric pathogens threatening its Enlightenment corpus.

Millennium challenges for museums in the UK, for example posited a range of government demands suggesting:

Cultural activities can be pivotal to social cohesion and social change, helping to generate community identity and pride, celebrate cultural and ethnic diversity, and improve educational attainment. Museums, galleries and archives provide a special social and learning environment. Collections can be a starting point, [but] ... To achieve these goals, museums, galleries and archives must be seen to be relevant, and must act in innovative and adventurous ways.

(DCMS 2000: 9)

For some cultural institutions the task of reflecting cultural change may have felt challenging enough without a mandate to take a pivotal role in achieving it. Artists appear to have been helpful in assisting their host institution's surprisingly vulnerable modernist body to survive the assaults of diminished public trust, accusations of elitism, and government demands for achieving ever more inclusive visitor spectrum and influencing social reform¹⁵². The ability to withstand offensives whilst staying substantially intact has always been essential for the evolution of the gallery or museum but, in common with most evolutionary processes, change – even if this is minor modification, goes hand-in-hand with survival. Artists' Interventions, in this sense, can be seen to have opened up one possible way for managing and adjusting in a transitional time where the 'fool,' once again, has a role to play.

The paradox of confrontational and parodic practices employed as form of cultural amelioration

It is apparent from the examples discussed throughout this thesis that Artists' Interventions can question and subvert dominant gallery and museums' discourse by deployment of surprise, juxtaposition, incongruity and humour. In all four instances

¹⁵² For example, DCMS (2005) *Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life: the Value of Museums*. Department of Culture, Media and Sport, Hooper-Greenhill, E., Dodd, J., Philips, M., Jones, C., Woodward, J. and O'Riain, H. (2004) *Inspiration, Identity, Learning: The Value of Museums*. Report to DCMS and DfES. URL DCMS, (2000) *Centres For Social Change: Museums, Galleries and Archives for All*, , Group For Large Local Authority Museums, GLLAM Report October 2000, *Museums and social inclusion*

they can be seen to follow a similar trajectory to Douglas's (1968) description of the joke, in that the intervention: '...imagines the subversion of something formal and organised (a control) by something informal and energetic (that which is controlled) so that the balance of power is changed' (pp. 364–5). Part of the exercise of shifting the balance of power involves the possibility for something to be perceived as 'other'. This seems particularly pertinent in contexts, such as galleries and museums, in which perception may have become prescribed and overly regulated and where normative values may have sedimented and occluded possibility of alternative narratives. But deploying humour and disruption as a way to shift a power balance and achieve a more inclusive environment, presents a paradox as humour has both inclusive and exclusive components and disruption can be an unwanted intrusion.

Acknowledging that the functions of humour may vary from culture to culture, Avner Ziv never-the-less states that, 'humour has four basic functions: first, to achieve group solidarity; second, to reduce conflict; third, to control, perpetuate or challenge norms and stereotypes; and fourth, to induce pleasurable experiences' (in Klein 2007: 11). This gives humour a lot of options for functionality, notwithstanding some mutual exclusivity. However, when employed by artists in the context of museum and gallery interventions, it is the formation of group solidarity that humour proposes and the challenge and/or perpetuation of norms that it precipitates that generate most criticism.

Sympathetic critiques of interventionist approaches most commonly express their unease about the solidarity that may be enforced, fearing an 'insider narrative,' confined to an elite group (e.g. Foster¹⁵³, 1992, Schneider¹⁵⁴, 1993). More hostile objections emanate from a perception that artists' work will subvert and disrupt forms of normalised and dominant discourse that are considered sacrosanct by the critic (e.g. Latimer 2001; Rice 2003). What becomes clear in some Artists' Interventions, such as Jens Haaning's 'Turkish Jokes' (1994), in which the artist broadcast jokes told in Turkish, in a Copenhagen Square, is that the joke has the power to destabilise social

¹⁵³ Foster recognises art's shift, in the late twentieth century, away from the issues of economic and class relations that Benjamin wrote about in 'The Author as Producer' (1934), and towards paradigms rooted in cultural identity. Paraphrasing Benjamin, he identifies the 'Artist as Ethnographer' and cites examples of artists whose works have occupied the museum as a site to engage issues of alterity. Foster notes that: 'In this new paradigm the object of consternation remains in large part of the bourgeois-capitalist institution of art (the museum, the academy, the market, and the media), its exclusionary definitions of art and artist, identity and community' (Foster 1996: 173). He writes 'for all the insight of such projects, the deconstructive ethnographic approach can become a gambit, an insider game that renders the institution not more open and public but more hermetic and narcissistic, a place for initiates only where contemptuous criticality is rehearsed' (Foster 1995: 196).

¹⁵⁴ Schneider has written about the work of contemporary artists who have appropriated: 'what anthropologists perceive as ethnographical objects and subjects' (Schneider 1993: 3). Schneider believes that there is much that anthropology can learn from these artists' methodologies, but with a caveat that, 'the dangers of these critiques of cultural institutions and hegemonies are that they remain in and for the cultural/academic field' (Schneider 1993: 9).

relations. In an ironic twist Haaning's piece enabled the minority diaspora to become the 'insider elite'; they were the ones who got the jokes thereby inverting their marginal status though and in the public sphere.

Reconfiguring understandings

If the joke 'affords the opportunity of realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity [then] its excitement lies in the suggestion that any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective' (Douglas 1968: 364-5). Therefore, formation of humour can be a powerful tool in the reconfiguration of ideas. As the following example from the field of literature illustrates, Borges' essay 'The Analytical Language of John Wilkins' contains a passage about a close pedagogic relation of the museum: the encyclopaedia. In this case it is a 'Certain Chinese Encyclopaedia,'

In which it is written that animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a very long way off look like flies'.

(in Foucault 1986: xv)

This passage has been cited by Foucault,¹⁵⁵ and Crimp¹⁵⁶ amongst others, to illustrate how cultural constructions for ordering the world become 'naturalised' therefore eliding the contingent or arbitrary characteristics of familiar taxonomies that serve and reproduce particular constructions of knowing the world and hence ideological positions. These points are made, not through elaborate didactic explication but by a humorous fictional narrative. I would suggest that it is no coincidence that eminent theorists take recourse to a seemingly mad-cap imaginative narrative to make a serious theoretical point. Foucault writes:

It is out of the laughter that shattered as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things, and continuing long afterwards to disturb and threaten with collapse our age old distinction between the Same and the Other... In the wonderment of this taxonomy, the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that, by means of the fable, is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking *that*.

(Foucault 2000: xv)

The surplus of meaning is a key coordinate in the ways in which this passage can act on the perception of a reader. 'Laughter that shatters is an affirmative laughter, arising

¹⁵⁵ Foucault, M. (2000) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge. (p. xv).

¹⁵⁶ Crimp, D. (1993) *On Museums Ruins*. Massachusetts: MIT Press. (p. 220).

from the overflow, the excess, and capable of momentarily and instantaneously catapulting us out of negative dialectics by negating negation itself' (Davis 2000: 2). A call for reflection on pre-existing models is often a component part of a strategy aimed at eliciting a humorous response, in which incongruity or surprise plays a part.

In the case of Artists' Interventions, humour and disruption, which interrupt habitual assumptions or behaviour in a gallery or museum, may come in a guise which visitors interpret as antagonistic or challenging. This can still bring laughter but can also cause disorientation, bemusement or anger. My own intervention, for example, provoked an angry response from one visitor. In this case the particular visitor had understood the video of my parodic gallery tour as 'an official guide'. His anger was not so much at the unpleasant air of superiority assumed by the character I had acted but that the museum couldn't see how wrong they had been to employ such a diabolical guide. Although this was a minority response, (one out of many hundreds of visitors who had had a positive reaction and got the joke), it raises the uncomfortable issues of misrecognition and insider humour (as was the case in the minority of angry responses to Fusco and Gomez-Peña's *Amerindians* see p. 140), such responses reveal as much about visitors' views of galleries and museums as they do about their reactions to artworks *per se*. But whether galleries and museums offer an environment conducive to any discussion of differences of opinion is another matter.

I am cautious of the tendency to ascribe simple 'misunderstanding' to visitors' negative reactions to exhibits or exhibitions. The notion that 'to the public at large, modern art has always implied a loss of craft, a fall from grace, a fraud or a hoax' has an undeniable simple logic to it (Gablik 1984: 13). So too does the suggestion that 'the public' will 'accept with good grace not understanding a foreign language or algebra, but in the case of art it is more likely, as Roger Fry once pointed out, that people will think when confronted with a work they do not or cannot understand, that it was done especially to insult them' (Gablik *ibid*). But in Gablik's illustrations, the part that is played by context, and by extension by the complex network of social relations surrounding art that act as societal dividers, is elided. People are generally very happy to embrace abstract art's motifs if they adorn their curtains or clothes. Similarly Conceptual Art's oh-so-clever linguistic gymnastics present no problems if they form part of an advertising campaign. Assumptions that bracket a lack of understanding of autonomous art with hostility to it have been questioned¹⁵⁷. And

¹⁵⁷ Research cited in Halle, D. *The Audience for Abstract Art: Class, Culture and Power*. In, Lamont M. and Fournier M. (1992) *Cultivating Difference*, describes the pleasure that people with no art training gain from abstract paintings,

whilst intellectual, cultural and financial capital, have an undeniable role to play in people's enjoyment of contemporary art, attributing resistance or hostility solely to qualities that reside within the art or the viewer is too simplistic.

The butt of the joke

Kester (2004) is sceptical when an artist produces work that intentionally challenges the assumptions or values of others that this emanates from an attitude of condescension towards the viewer or visitor. In particular, he attributes hostility, which can arise in the viewer or visitor, to a lack of dialogic potential or a perception that their own values may be the 'butt' of an artists' joke. Where the possibility for any open, discursive (hermeneutic) relation appears prohibited then an antagonistic reception between viewer and artwork will probably follow. In reflecting on my own intervention I wondered if it would have been better placed, not in the public domain but maybe as part of a National Trust tour guide training course where it could have communicated to its target audience and in a situation where discussion was possible. In other words I had begun to wonder if targeting those on the 'inside' might be precisely the point where many interventions can maximise their influence.

Kester's (2004) critique is aimed at the idealistic, but often unwittingly elitist and self-fulfilling, tropes of modernist art; it almost mirrors Reinhardt's 1948 cartoon: *What does this represent?* (see Fig. 26). Here an uninitiated viewer has a confrontational exchange with a painting, which, in 1948, might well have presented itself as a challenge to pre-existing parameters of what constitutes art.

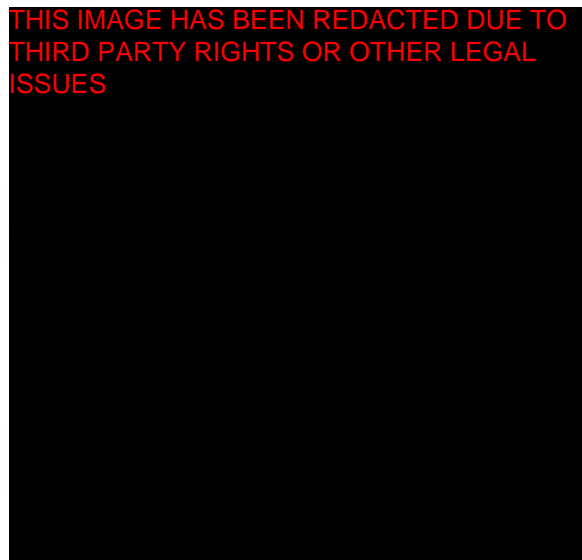


Fig. 26: Ad Reinhardt *What does this represent?* (1948)

thereby refuting the usual claims for necessary education or cultural capital as a pre-requisite for enjoyment of such works.

Reinhardt captures an atmosphere of mutual hostility between abstract artwork (as possible signifier for 1940s contemporary art world) and visitor (for 'general public'). The suited male viewer openly ridicules the painting, which unexpectedly anthropomorphises, to round on him with an echo of his question and accusatory gesture: 'What do you represent?' In Reinhardt's cartoon, as with Kester's concerns, there is a question of whether the art joke is at the expense of the ignorance of the viewer? This could be read as an art world 'in' joke, the revenge of the misunderstood abstract painter working valiantly towards the cause of an enlightened conception of the formalist art object or against the intransigent conservatism of a general public.

From another perspective, the suited man's reaction appears to be based on the simple misconception that an art object 'must' represent something, when the mimetic imperative, traditionally dominant in Western painting and aesthetics, is absent, the man's expectations are challenged. Temporally he is distanced from the developments of painting in the modern period, a chasm exists between his working knowledge of art and specialist knowledge in the field. Kester would also suggest that the scenario is indicative of a desire to maintain a divide between certain audiences, or to preserve an hostility to certain audiences to safeguard fine art's symbolic value as cultural capital.

Passivity and criticality

Leading USA museum educator, Danielle Rice has argued that visitors to museums don't benefit from too many shocks or disruptions to their expectations and significantly, the disruptive tactics of contemporary Artists' Interventions are the target of her critique. Rice contends that artists and theorists¹⁵⁸ have been collaboratively 'constructing a conspiracy theory against the museum' (2003: 84). She says: 'critiques of these institutions by contemporary artists [...] use a model of the institution as bully. This model is often at odds with the way the museum is perceived by *ordinary* visitors' (ibid: 82 my italics).

Far from embracing the potential for change that the counter-voices of Artists' Interventions have encouraged, Rice positions such interventions as part of a plot by the political left to represent the museum as a 'bad guy who hides his tracks by obfuscating the nature of the practices in which he engages making displays look seamless and natural to force their own concepts of knowledge on an innocent and

¹⁵⁸ Rice makes some noteworthy points; the museum as a public institution that is ripe for critical appraisal, has not just been examined through Artists' Interventions, but through the field of museology more generally e.g. Bennett, Duncan and Wallach (all 1995).

receptive public' (2003: 84). Rice draws on personal experience of a visit to Wilson's intervention *Mining the Museum* to highlight the intervention's shortcomings and align it with unwanted ideological bias and questionable educational practice. She describes walking through the exhibition with a young African American woman friend, as follows:

I was struck by how Wilson's installation was clearly addressed to art world insiders. My young friend was baffled that a museum would display something that seemed so obviously critical of its own practices. Like many novice viewers she came with the expectation that museums uphold standards of culturally defined "truth" and "beauty," rather than choose to challenge them. (Rice 2003: 82)

Her friend's expectations had been questioned and, from this Rice had deduced that as a 'novice viewer' (one preumes this means someone who had not visited many museums, rather than someone who had recently gained the powers of sight) Wilson's curation would be bewildering, and could not be made sense of, without requisite training in contemporary art. Below is a photograph of Maryland Historic Society's permanent collection Fig. 27.

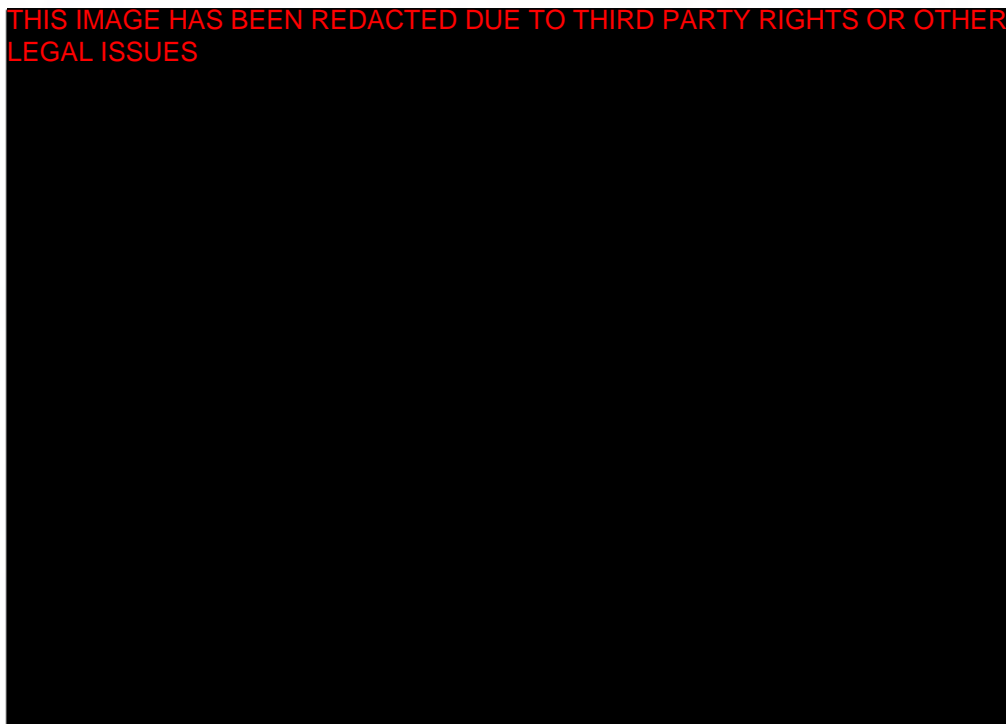


Fig. 27: Room from the permanent collection at Maryland Historic Society
Baltimore, USA (2007)

As a spectacle to gaze upon, this room may well meet some visitors' expectations but whether it can be deemed to 'uphold standards of culturally defined truth and beauty' (Rice 2003), is another matter, and one which is freighted with social, cultural and aesthetic controversy. Hein writes:

For any theory of museum education, epistemological positions, whether articulated or tacit, determine how a museum decides what it is that is contained within its walls, and how it should be displayed. Does the museum take the view that its mission is to impart truth, independently of the particular previous experiences, culture and disposition of its visitors? Does the museum take the position that knowledge is relative?

(Hein 1998: 190)

The heart of Debord's concept of the passivity inducing spectacle is raised by Rice's account, namely 'the specialisation of power' (1994: 17-18). Rice upholds a concept of a 'general public' who 'hold a transcendental view of artistic virtuosity and extol artworks as apolitical and universal' (ibid), to Rice this is indicative of the 'conservatism' of the public. On the other hand she insists on the 'progressive' approaches taken by the museum professional, who she characterises as 'an intellectual class,' and as such, aware of progressive scholarship in art history that 'challenges the notion of individual genius and focuses instead on process, content and social/political contexts of works of art' (Rice 2003: 86). Although Rice holds that museum visitors will have naïve expectations that galleries and museums uphold 'standards' of culturally defined 'truth' and 'beauty,' like many others, she ignores the logical inference that if this is the case (and I am sceptical about this), then galleries and museums must be implicated in the public's acquisition of this idea.

I would also argue that it is possible to find a major reason why, contrary to Rice's assessment, Artists' Interventions have had a substantive pedagogic significance. Far from treating visitors as passive receptors of spectacle, the intervention encourages a questioning approach. Instead of the nullifying distraction, what Benjamin¹⁵⁹ characterised as 'bourgeois entertainment', there is an attempt to encourage a critical awareness.

To relate this back to Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, instead of finding ornate late eighteenth and early nineteenth century furniture at Maryland Historic Society, there is an invitation to contextualise the production and acquisition of these fine goods. Instead of learning that 'in 1822 a merchant and real estate developer James Bosley installed an eleven-piece suite of New York furniture in his new Fayette Street town house' (Maryland Historic Society's interpretation panel: 2007), visitors may be invited to reflect on significant others whose presence is notable only in its absence from the narratives available in Maryland Historic Society.

¹⁵⁹ Benjamin's model in *The Author as Producer* (1934) proposed to move the viewer away from passivity, this involved a shift where 'a certain concrete pedagogics takes the place of sensationalism; Schulung replaced Bildung, training – the training of expert judgement – replaces a culture of acceptance (in Eiland 2005: 3).

Truth and beauty?

In Benjamin's (1934) view, it was Brecht who most fully achieved the engendering of critical distance, not by coddling his audience but by seeking to astonish them through 'the alienation effect', which, by making ordinary objects and actions seem strange, renders them conspicuous and encourages the audience and actors alike to reflect on them. The relative stability of the gallery or museum has acted as a good foil to even minor displacements and disruptions. Wilson has discussed the normative codes of behaviour and expectations of gallery and museum curatorial strategies as important for securing an environment in which disruption can happen. He says, 'In other less proscribed environments the likelihood of people feeling uncertain and on their guard can work against the effects made possible in a more secure terrain' (in Buskirk 1994: 111). When things are out of place and do not conform to regulatory and classificatory systems, their presence is easily detected by those familiar with the taxonomy in question. 'Instead of identifying with the characters, the audience are educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function' (Benjamin 1999: 147).

The experience of the intervention can be seen to work with the same principle; the ordinary object; the object that completes the pattern that should exist within the order, is displaced by another. As seen earlier in Wilson's intervention (Fig. 18), instead of another piece of *repoussé* silverware, there is a slave manacle. Viewing is therefore disrupted by a break in the stable coordinates or the rhythm of things; this acts to 'undermine the audience's [or viewer's] illusion of the world' (Eiland 2005: 4). Through the juxtaposition of objects, Wilson argues for another reading of Maryland Historic Society's collection and in so doing brings the concrete determinism of the gallery into question.

Maryland Historic Society, ten years after *Mining the Museum*

By 2007, Wilson's installation was a distant memory at the Maryland Historic Society, which had by then moved to a new building. The museum, however, had maintained a commitment to encourage a more inclusive visitor profile and to continue working with artists.

When I visited the museum I was drawn to a fresh critique of Rice's comment about 'ordinary visitors' expectations', which appeared to have been made with scant consideration to who an 'ordinary' visitor to Maryland Historic Society might be (prior to and after Wilson's Intervention). Demographically, an African American

woman would still be an unusual presence, not an 'ordinary' one in the Museum's predominantly white, domain. The Historic Society has only been open to the public since 1980, and according to Erin Kimes, the Society's Head of Education, 2007, they 'are still trying hard to encourage members of the black American community to visit'¹⁶⁰. In April 2007, I did not see a single African American in the two hours that I spent at the museum, a phenomenon that is hardly replicated outside the museum's doors, or at the nearby, recently opened *Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture*. I would suggest that Rice's young friend's presence in the Historic Society cannot be regarded as entirely unconnected to the fact that Wilson's installation had something to say to an African American or American Indian visitor that its permanent displays and usual curatorial programming did not. Rice holds the view that Artists' Interventions, and what she refers to as 'the dominant museum's studies thesis' (Rice 2003: 83) are 'culpable' of assuming that 'the museum is a value-laden narrative that communicates its message effectively to all visitors whether they know it or not' (ibid). However, artists and museologists are not alone in this respect and it appears axiomatic, in almost any text on the museum's history, (even those penned by the most conservative representatives), that museums are, and have always been, concerned with constructing a value-laden narrative¹⁶¹.

It might be appropriate to ask: where the 'public' are to learn about the political and social contexts for works of art if not in the museum? Interventions, such as Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1993), appear to provide precisely this social context, not just about the art or artefacts but about the framing of them within the institutional discourse of the museum - its history, community and locale. If all this was genuinely surprising to Rice's 'young friend,' then this register of astonishment, or disruption of expectation perhaps needed to be examined a little more closely for its potential as part of a learning experience, rather than dismissed out of hand for its failure to replicate norms and confirm expectations.

In 2006, some years after I had embarked on research into Artists Interventions, I presented a lecture, on two separate occasions, to participants of two short Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses at the IoE: *Museum Learning and Learning in Galleries*. The lecture was titled *The Potential of Artists' Interventions as Interpretive Strategies*. In it I presented examples of some of the artworks discussed in this thesis and spoke about the potential that such approaches might have for visitors'

¹⁶⁰ Erin Kimes in interview with Claire Robins at Maryland Historic Society, Baltimore, April 2007.

¹⁶¹ Whether their chosen narratives have been 'effectively communicated,' is in itself worthy of another thesis, but this discussion falls outside my current concerns.

meaning making processes. At the end of the talk I was keen to find out what the students knew about such initiatives and what their opinions were.

The *Museum Learning* group was comprised of museum professionals from a wide range of backgrounds and not one member of the group was familiar with the phenomenon of Artists' Interventions. The *Learning in Galleries* group differed, in that most came from visual arts backgrounds and were consequently familiar with the term Artists' Intervention. However, (with the exception of Dion's *Thames Dig*, which had been on display at Tate Modern from its opening until 2006), none of the group was aware of the particular examples I discussed.

After I had presented a number of different approaches to intervention in galleries and museums including the work of Haacke, Wilson, Fraser, and Fusco, I began to discuss the potential educational impact of these initiatives with each group. The respective groups viewed the interpretive and pedagogic potential of the interventions favourably; both groups were impressed by the 'eloquence' and 'deftness' of contemporary artworks as agents for promoting new understandings of museum collections. However, there were distinct and noteworthy differences in the groups' opinions about the roles that had been played by the artists.

The overriding position of the *Museum Learning* group was to question why artists might have been necessary to initiate and achieve these forms of interpretation when, in their view, as one of the course participants stated, 'anyone could have done this'. None in the *Learning in Galleries* group asked a question about why artists had initiated visually rich and often parodic approaches to interpreting collections.

The *Museum Learning* group had very limited knowledge of, or interest in, contemporary art. They struggled to understand how some of the initiatives that I presented could be defined as 'art' at all. Although they found what the artists had done inspiring, illuminating, visually engaging and poetic, they also felt that these strategies 'ought to have been initiated by museum people' (course participant 2006). The art trained *Learning in Galleries* cohort seemed to think it was perfectly understandable that artists had been needed to insinuate themselves into the museum's spaces before such new approaches to interpretation could be made visible.

The disparity in the two groups' analysis of artists' roles in developing interpretive/pedagogic strategies, highlights the way in which a lack of knowledge or

understanding of contemporary art often underpins the perception that contemporary artwork as an interpretive ‘device’ is something bordering on oxymoronic. As Latimer’s views illustrate (2001), populist accounts of contemporary art, in which it is typically characterised as: ‘difficult’, ‘elitist’, ‘obscure’, ‘esoteric’ and ‘nonsensical,’ do not sit easily with the idea that contemporary artists/art can communicate with audiences, in ways that may be more effective as an aid to personalised meaning making and more thought provoking than a didactic text panel.

Changing the balance of power

In examining the phenomenon of disruption and hostility, Kester’s slightly predictable route back through the pioneers of formalism (Bell, Fry and Greenberg) may account for the uncanny way that Reinhardt’s cartoon *What does this represent?* (see Fig. 26) appears to illustrate his point. But *Mining the Museum* (1992), to which Rice refers, does not operate in the same manner as Reinhardt or Kester’s hermetic art objects. Wilson’s is the antithesis of an autonomous artwork. His motivation for juxtaposing disruptive archival artefacts is underpinned by a conscious effort to engage visitors whose response to some of the Maryland Historic Society permanent collection could indeed have been to ask the question: what or whom is represented or absent from Maryland Historic Society’s historical narrative? Carol Becker (1994), suggests that contemporary art often asks viewers to consider ‘from what ideological position was it formed? For whom was it made? Whose interests does it represent? Whose does it serve? What underlying questions does it ask? What implicit power relationships frame it? (p. 103); this too seems to have been Wilson’s intention at Maryland Historic Society. The museum’s motive was to reach a hitherto alienated audience who may have found that exhibits (such as those in Fig. 27) and interpretation panels such as those below (Fig. 28) ignore their own histories and experiences of Baltimore.

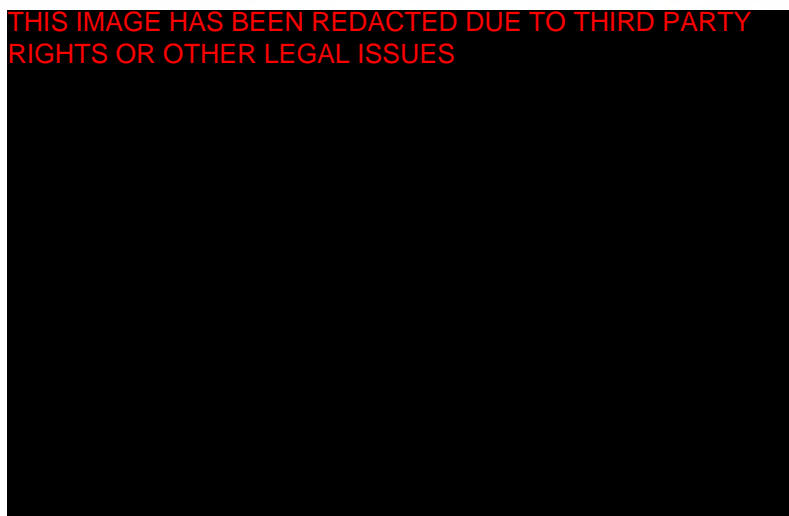


Fig. 28: Interpretation Panel, Maryland Historic Society Baltimore, USA

Wilson's interventionist technique employs elements of parody and irony. He asks the viewer to accompany him in a reading of material culture that dislocates the viewer, heightening awareness and creating juxtapositions of artefacts that can be both shocking and humorous. Asking visitors to question preconceived ideas and to deconstruct hegemonic discourse, sits within traditions of critical pedagogy¹⁶² couched within post-structuralist theory. In galleries or museums the artists' intention would be to turn the visitor from passive receiver to active constructor of meaning. This process proposes knowledge not as fixed entity but evolving and in a state of flux, plural and negotiable. The challenge to think differently and accept that there may be more than one way of understanding an artefact, artwork or phenomenon is present in most learning contexts but has been a particularly effective strategy for engaging learners in informal learning contexts. A review of a BBC television history series reads: 'an engaging guide, making us reconsider who we are and where we have come from' (Skegg 2007: 75)¹⁶³. Many similar strap lines appear in advertising for informal learning, for example, 'be surprised' and 'look again,' can be found in gallery and museum literature, on-line learning resources, books and periodicals. To substitute 'find what you expected' and 'have your own point of view confirmed,' would seem antithetical to the provision of an edifying learning experience. But perhaps this is an oversimplification because the gallery and museum's complicated legacy, as explicated in chapter three, means that it is not simply a site for learning, it is also a site for reflection, and particularly in the case of the art gallery, for absorption in beauty and elevated aesthetic contemplation.

Meszaros (2007) sees a recent trend in galleries and museums towards a neo-liberalist and neo-conservative driven advocacy of extreme individualism/relativism, what she refers to as 'whatever' interpretation. Meszaros aligns this tendency in gallery and museum interpretation/culture with 'a selective uptake of constructivist learning models that demote [d] received knowledge as oppressive and educationally backward and promote [d] individual interpretation (sometimes also referred to as the visitor experience) as supporting democracy and educational thinking' (2007: 18). The tendency to eschew the imposition of received or authoritative interpretation has been replaced with the misguided view, according to Meszaros, that the meanings made by individual museum visitors will be true and formed without prior situation in meaning making traditions. Similarly, in a research report for the London Cluster of the 'Enquire project' phase one, Addison and Burgess (2006) highlight the

¹⁶² See Freire, P. (1985), Giroux, H. and McLaren, P. (1994), hooks, b.(1994).

¹⁶³ Martin Skegg's TV review of the documentary television series 'History of Modern Britain' presented by Andrew Marr.

potential for engagement with contemporary art to ‘transform attitudes, practices and, ultimately values’. They characterise this as in keeping with the practices of ‘many contemporary artists whose work can be seen to *challenge* normative practices and naturalised beliefs’¹⁶⁴ (my italics).

Expressing dissent: confronting the visitor

The potentially cordial dialogic and relational aesthetics championed by Bourriaud and Kester (2002; 2004), are not always in attendance in Artists’ Interventions. This is particularly the case where Artists’ Interventions open up uncomfortable discursive possibilities such as political struggles, and the economic and social realities of marginalised groups of people. Kester sees the outcome of antagonism as non-productive or leading to a stand off. Others such as Bishop (2006a), Howe and Mouffe (1996) and, earlier, Benjamin (1934) and Debord (1967) see the potential to break through from antagonism by means of dialogic possibility, into the more productive realm of agonism. Agonists advocate that there should be optimal opportunities for people to express their disagreements. They also acknowledge that conflict has a non-rational or emotional component. These two positions mean that they are opposed to aspects of ‘consociational’ and ‘deliberative’ theories of democracy; ‘the former, because it wants to mute conflict through elite consensus, the latter because it gives a rationalist picture of the aspirations of democracy’ (Mouffe, C. <http://www.ciudad-derechos.org/english/pdf/kb.pdf>online. Accessed 2008). In the case of Wilson’s intervention *Mining the Museum* at Maryland Historic Society, or Hiller’s *From the Freud museum* the intention is to offer cultural institutions possible ways of reconciling a divided past. On other occasions the contemporary interventions can take even a different trajectory and confront, not a history, but the present. In such instances the intervention seems more risky and less likely to emanate from a sponsored commission.

In a work for the 2001 Venice Biennale, Spanish artist Santiago Sierra offered 60 Euros to Venice’s ubiquitous illegal street vendors¹⁶⁵ in exchange for having their hair dyed blonde. Sierra’s one condition, ‘that their hair should be naturally dark’, was not difficult for this marginal group, of mainly Senegalese and Chinese illegal immigrants, to meet. The street vendors are not a social group who would be associated with attendance at the Biennale; however, those who entered into Sierra’s ‘contract’

¹⁶⁴ The ‘Critical Minds’ project (2004–2006) was part of enquire phase 1, it investigated the critical thinking of students when engaging with unfamiliar and potentially challenging [contemporary art] practices (Addison and Burgess 2007: 46). See Addison, N. and Burgess, L. (2006) ‘Critical Minds: The London Cluster Research Report’ (pp 44–87). In: B. Taylor (ed.) *Inspiring Learning in Galleries*. London: engage.

¹⁶⁵ These are often Senegalese and Chinese illegal immigrants, who sell fake Louis Vuitton and Gucci handbags to tourists.

became implicated in a visible spectacle of furthering their difference throughout the city. The vendors with their newly white blonde hair became, like Asher's caravans, in Sculpture Project Munster, Germany 1977-2007¹⁶⁶, visible beyond the confines of the official Biennale's sites. In some senses Sierra's work can be seen to parody or rework the formal aspects of minimalist offerings from artists such as Asher and Buren, whilst substantively moving the content of the work away from radical and utopian gestures and towards uncomfortable issues of market and economy. The city sightings of incongruous blondness were coupled with a presence in the Biennale's 'Arsenal'¹⁶⁷ a 'pay to access' official site. Sierra also gave his exhibition space in the 'Arsenale' over to the vendors to sell their wares, thereby forcing the Biennale's visiting international public to encounter this marginal group out of context. Bishop, who acknowledges Sierra's gesture as both in a continuum with and at a remove from, historical practices of Institutional Critique, discusses her encounter with the vendors in Sierra's exhibition space inside the Arsenale:

Instead of aggressively hailing passers-by with their trade, as they did on the street, the vendors were subdued. This made my own encounter with them disarming in a way that only subsequently revealed to me my own anxieties about feeling "included" in the Biennale. Surely these guys were actors? Had they crept in here for a joke? Foregrounding a moment of mutual nonidentification, Sierra's action disrupted the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken race and class exclusions, as well as being blatant commerce. It is important to Sierra that his work did not achieve a harmonious reconciliation between the two systems, but sustained the tensions between them.

(Bishop 2004: 73)

The failure of an interventionist artwork to communicate comprehensively with an inclusive audience is the most commonly cited criticism of such ventures. However, in the instance of Sierra's work, the target, as Bishop's response to his work makes explicit, was precisely the privileged 'insider'. The Venice Biennale is almost totally the territory of 'insider art world' visitors. Whilst this might seem to confirm prevalent critiques of Artists' Interventions it does not always follow that an 'elite' will be in on the joke and able to read and quickly understand its logic as one which confirms their own views. Nor is it necessarily the case that they are likely to look down on those who 'don't get it'. This is contested by Karp, a museum director (so a definite insider) who recalls that when he first saw Wilson's *The Other Museum*, (which had a wall display of masks from colonised regions of the world partially

¹⁶⁶ Asher, in four successive instalments (1977, 1987, 1997, 2007) of the Sculpture Project Muenster has exhibited four, now vintage camping trailers in sites around the city as 'mobile sculptures'. The caravans are positioned for one week at a time (moved every Monday when the gallery is closed) in various spots throughout the city and its suburbs. The list of sites has remained unchanged since 1977.

¹⁶⁷ Major exhibition space for the Venice Biennale.

obscured by the national flags of the coloniser), that he was ‘totally taken in by it’ (in Karp and Wilson 2000: 259), he remarked:

I had just finished signing some papers for loans, and I walked in [to *The Other Museum*] and I said, “How the hell did he do that?” The labels said, “Loan courtesy of the Musée de L’Homme”, “Loan courtesy of the British Museum” – “How the hell did he do that? How did he get permission?” The British Museum doesn’t do that, they insist on couriers who carry everything, and then control precisely how objects are displayed.

(Ibid: 259-160)

Bishop and Karp experienced the work of artists who had the acumen to effectively disrupt *their* thinking, that of the art and museum world cognoscenti. The notion that interventions form part of an insider critique cannot be dismissed out of hand, anymore than the fact that the language of critical theory (including Kester’s and Rancier’s) is alienating to most readers. This may be more significant than has been previously credited. Shifting the thinking of those who are in a position to implement institutional change – (whether that be through criticism, teaching or through curatorial decision making) – is more likely to lead to the sorts of philosophical and practical changes that will ultimately achieve institutional change.

Should we agree to disagree or disagree to agree?

Chantal Mouffe uses the concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’ to present an alternative to a traditional liberal conception of democracy, as a negotiation among interests. In particular her work stresses the problems with concepts of democracy that highlight the creation of a consensus, on the basis that consensus is possible when subjects think as rational beings, leaving behind self-interest. She suggests that the essential role of the democratic process is to provide an arena where differences can be confronted, always allowing for the possibility that conflict may appear (Mouffe 2008a). Mouffe has argued that the public sphere needs to build in opportunities for ‘agonism’ if democracy is to survive. She states that ‘a well functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. If this is missing there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications’ (Mouffe 2008b). According to such a view the aim of a public institution is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere but to defuse the potential hostility that exists in human societies by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into agonism (Mouffe in Sheikh 2006: 149).

As significant institutions in the establishment of the public sphere, associated with

revolutionary thought and action, galleries and museums are also implicated in the constitution of the right to dissent that was so fundamental to the Western concept of democracy in the eighteenth century. Artists' Interventions can be seen to carry on the constitutional right to propose dissent; they use galleries and museums for such purposes, not in the way that might have been envisaged in the eighteenth century, nor as forms of rational logical argumentation, but as disruptions, interruptions, questions and subversions.

Importantly, interventions allow the possibilities for expression of the emotional and the non-rational alongside, rather than in contrast to the cognitive. It is this that aligns them with Mouffe's concept of the need for articulating difference.

Montmann (2006) asks of the current expansion of cultural institutions, whether it is possible to use this vast development of cultural activity for anything other than the promotion of tourism, consumption, and the batch-processing of human attention? The answer, according to Holmes, depends on the availability of two elusive commodities: confrontational practice and constructive critique (Holmes in Montmann 2006: 28). Holmes' claims may seem rather extreme and perhaps confrontation does not rank highly on all visitors' motivations for visiting galleries or museums¹⁶⁸. But it may be useful to view such claims in the light of the concept of agonism, as a vital component for retaining democracy, enabling and respecting different subject positions and facilitating a vibrant exchange of views. From this vantage point it is possible to see ways in which Artists' Interventions can continue to have a role in the pedagogic development of galleries and museums. An acceptance of a less hierarchical view of knowledge and respect for multiple points of view is an emergent new direction in the ways that galleries and museums can encourage collaboration to aid visitors' agency to make meanings. Galleries and museums have progressively moved towards the adoption of social constructivist learning models which recognise knowledge, not as a product of induction or of the construction of general hypotheses, but as a process mediated by culture, history and social context.

Brooks and Brooks (1993) identify a number of strategies as important in developing constructivist approaches, one of which is to engage learners in experiences that might engender contradictions to their initial hypothesis and then encourage discussion. Discrepant data is therefore encouraged alongside a recognition that visitors will bring

¹⁶⁸ For example it can be a motivation for visitors who dispute the display and or ownership of art and artefacts acquired throughout colonial occupation or those who deem the exhibition of contemporary artwork a 'waste of taxpayer's money'.

with them preconceptions and value systems which will influence how meanings are made, and how interpretations might develop in a public space that genuinely values discursivity.

An acknowledgement that the visitor might want to 'argue' with an exhibition, be sceptical about its contents and claims and that furthermore the exhibition itself has an ideological standpoint, is expressed at the outset in a text panel at the entrance to the main exhibition in the National Museum of the American Indian, Washington DC. It begins thus:

This is about history and about the past - two different things.
The exhibit that surrounds you now examines the alchemy that changes the past into stories - the histories we tell about it.
The past never changes. But the way that we understand it, learn about it and know about it changes all the time.
What was 'gospel' then is often in dispute now. Yesterday's truth becomes false or ill informed or offensive today. And visa versa.

And ends:

The gallery is making history and like all other makers of history it has a point of view and an agenda

What is said - and what you see here - may fly in the face of what you've learned. [...]
Here we have done what others have done - turned events into history. So view what's offered with respect but also with scepticism
Explore the gallery
Encounter it
Reflect on it
Argue with it

(Paul Chaat Smith, NMAI: 2007)

The significance of an authored text panel, 'Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche)' represents another nod to making public the subjective nature of much 'information' provided by galleries and museums. In this particular case, it is also the right of self-determination and self-representation overthrowing centuries of source peoples being represented by others.

The place of art in eliciting criticality and emotionality in interpretation

As outlined in chapter three, the influence of ideas developed in the eighteenth century has shaped most contemporary Western hierarchies of knowledge in galleries and museums. The potential efficacy of alternative ways of constructing, exhibiting and sharing knowledge and values have been slow to become publicly accepted. Fissures between education and entertainment, amusement and pleasure, and

furthermore between the emotions, senses and cognitive rationality were set in place at the birth of the museum and it seems that it is only now, in the twenty-first century, that considerable doubt is being cast on the pedagogic effectiveness of such ingrained divisions.¹⁶⁹

The complexity of individual experiences in galleries, museum and other cultural venues has been the subject of much research and theorising (Bourdieu 1979; Bouquet and Porto 2005; Duncan 1995; Falk and Dierking 1992; Hooper-Greenhill 1994; 2000; 2004). From expectations of behaviour to forms of engagement and the benefits or disadvantages of formal educational training to 'appreciate culture', the topic has also been a perennial one in fictional literature. Zadie Smith's (2005) novel *On Beauty*, presents a familial example of different responses and interpretations of the same cultural event. The Belsey family are at an open-air concert of Mozart's *Requiem*. Both Zora and her mother Kiki feel themselves to be in unsure cultural territory (this is not music they are familiar with, and furthermore it is sung in Latin) they seek out interpretive materials that will ameliorate their unease. Zora listens to her 'Discman, on which a recording of the voice of a professor N.R.A. Gould carefully guide[s] her through each movement,' (Smith 2005: 70) whilst her mother strives to faithfully follow the programme notes, quickly recognising the folly of this strategy when the notes 'reveal that the past fifteen minutes of wrangling over your soul have been merely the repetition of an inconsequential line' (ibid). Howard, Zora's father, and a lecturer in 'art history', expresses his disdain for the canonic predictability of the crowd pleasing concert by falling asleep, and on waking utters, cynically: 'That's it then? Everyone been touched by the Christian sublime? Can we go now?' (ibid) In contrast, Jerome, the eldest son and instigator of the family outing, 'gives himself over' to an emotional experience and sits silently weeping; a response envied by his mother who directs her daughter to the 'marvel of Jerome, as if these tears were rolling down the cheeks of a stone Madonna' (ibid). Her daughter's mediated experience, on the other hand, is met with pity. 'Poor Zora – she lived though footnotes. It was the same in Paris, so intent was she on reading the guide book to Sacré-Cœur that she walked directly into an altar, cutting her forehead open' (ibid).

In this short passage, Smith offers her readers a précis of themes that run throughout the novel; debates between intellectualisation and feeling, analysis and embodiment,

¹⁶⁹ See Edwards, E. Gosden, C. and Phillips, R. (eds) (2006) *Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture*. Oxford: Berg. Gioia, D. (2007). Mitchell, R. and Thurtle, P. (ed.) (2004) *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*. London: Routledge. Schneider, A. and Wright, C. (2006) 'The Challenge of Practice'. In: A. Schneider and C. Wright (eds) *Contemporary Art and Anthropology*. Oxford: Berg.

living and theorising. These too are quintessential twenty-first century themes for the gallery and museum sector. Moving beyond the notion of binary oppositions, Smith's family fiction takes Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' and supplements class determinism with gender and ethnicity. The characters share an immediate family background and disposition and yet conform to and refute along pathways that are drawn from gendered, cultural and political subject positions. Kiki, a black American from a civil rights activist background in Florida; Howard, an Englishman from a profoundly working class family in east London, with Marxist leanings honed through the criticality of a cultural studies agenda; Jerome, the antithesis to his father's cynicism, embracing the spiritual and embodying an immediate and overwhelming effect of aesthetic experience and Zora, in awe of her father's knowledge and academic status, unable to find her own voice and desperately collaging a response from the words of others.

Through the convolutions of Smith's plot, it is the power of an embodied, emotional and even spiritual experience that protagonists are searching for, in some form or another. Such deep, significant experiences are not counter-posed in actuality with meaningful intellectual engagement but are precisely what enable meaning to be **felt**. To return to Crowther's point, cited in the introduction p. 35, it is the interconnectedness of mind and body that allows symbolic formations to become stabilised. As Edwards, Philips and Gosden write, 'perception sounds like a passive activity, but it is not. The human senses can be seen [...] as part of the set of physiologically grounded human skills which render the world intelligible and workable' (Edwards, Philips and Gosden 2006: 5). Crowther's proclamation that 'Our fundamental knowledge of the world comes through our body's experience of it' (1993: 41) asks for a re-conceptualisation of the hierarchical values attached to ways of coming to know. In pre-Enlightenment collections, cabinets of curiosity, visitors regularly engaged in the sensory experience of collections – smelling touching. But as more museums emerged throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and collections evolved, the senses were thought to need to be both regulated and relegated in an intellectual hierarchy in which abstract thought was at the apex. The 'felt', both in terms of emotional and sensual pleasure, was to be limited to those who could be trusted with appropriate discretion and self-control. The curator and the scholar would be allowed to touch, manipulate and even wear artefacts, as illustrated in *An Elite Experience for Everyone* when Victoria takes *William Morris's beard* from its vitrine and put it on see p. 144. 'Such privilege evidences the fact that knowing through sensing beyond the visual is regarded as necessary to the achievement of

adequate understanding. The curator translates his or her experience of objects in the museum and the field to broad publics through a range of didactic practices' (Edwards et al 2006: 19). As Victoria remarks, 'I wish I could allow you all to experience this too, but for conservation reasons, this is simply not possible'. Conservation is still a major responsibility for museums; the sheer volume of visitors make the availability of touch out of the question for some exhibits, but this is not the whole story there are other factors determining the centrality of looking.

Reclaiming lost sensations

In the field of galleries and museums John Walsh (2006), Director Emeritus of the John Paul Getty Museum has argued the case for 'giving more interpretive voice to artists [...] and other people whose responses are vivid and imaginative and might inspire visitors to have more courage themselves' (Walsh 2006: 100). Walsh, above all, wants visitors to have 'strong responses' that move them emotionally as well as intellectually. And he is not alone; there is a discernable trend towards recognition of the benefits to be gained from engaging on an *intellectual and emotional* level in order to have significant learning experiences. Moreover acknowledgement that the construction of meaning can be achieved through the visual and other sense modalities is gaining currency in mainstream education too.

Gaynor Kavanagh (2000) also argues a case for the recognition of the symbolic spaces accessed through intense experiences within the gallery or museum. Based on Annis's (1987) work, her concerns are with, the 'dreamspace' which Annis defines as 'a field of subrational image formation' (in Kavanagh 2000). And it is within such a symbolic space that Kavanagh believes visitors have the most personally significant museum experiences. She writes:

It is within the dream space, at times interacting with the cognitive and social, that the most enlivening, enjoyable and possibly subversive parts of the visits lie. It energises both our imaginations and our memories. It illuminates feelings. Anarchic and unpredictable, through the dreamspace we can arrive at all sorts of possibilities not considered by those who make museum exhibitions. In dream space, many things might tumble through our minds: bits of songs, half written shopping lists, things left unsaid. The shape or shadow of something, its texture or colour, the operation of space and the people moving through it can be triggers to an endless range of personal associations. Therefore accepting Annis's idea of the dream space, we have to accept more fully the imagination, emotions, senses and memories as vital components of the experience of museums.

(Kavanagh 2000: 3)

This points to another aspect of the Artist's Intervention, where what is valued, amongst the pedagogic possibilities offered by the insertion of artworks into collection, has less to do with critical and/or political commentary, and more with the range of forms that artists' work takes and the poetic/aesthetic dimension that artists offer. A recognition that artwork may provide a site where visitors' sense modalities, cognitive and emotional faculties will be utilised or 'activated,' may also suggest that such immersive experiences may be fulfilling and affecting, leaving a long lasting impression and stimulating significant personal meaning making.

Bourdieu may perhaps seem an unlikely candidate to be similarly arguing for visitors to have an emotional epiphany in the gallery or museum, but his interest in artists' interventions can be seen as part of a trajectory following on from that initiated by Benjamin (1934) who looked at the potential of the arts to contribute to a pedagogic project that changes the way that the social/cultural is understood. Pre-dating the Royal Academy's major 'Brit Art' exhibition 'Sensation' (1998) Bourdieu (1995) identifies the artist's ability to **make a sensation** as a specific competence and a defining characteristic for art as a powerful communicative and political tool. By 'sensation' he does not mean art being sensational, but 'putting across on the level of sensation - that is touching the sensibility, moving people' (p. 23).

Although a substantial proportion of Bourdieu's work, particularly 'Distinction' (1979) and 'The Field of Cultural Production' (1993), is concerned with the detrimental effects of the reproduction of 'bourgeois' values through the institutions of art, he also acknowledges the potential for the disruption of these same values through certain critical forms of art that can engage audiences in ways that affect them emotionally and intellectually.

Chapter 7 Integrating Contemporary Art and Re-investing in Emotion and Curiosity at Wellcome Collection, London

Wellcome Collection opened in June 2007, with a key aim to encourage people to think and talk about health, medicine, and medical science; and explore their connections with art and life. An acceptance of a less hierarchical view of knowledge and respect for multiple points of view can be seen as an emergent new direction in the ways that galleries and museums encourage collaboration to aid visitors' agency to make meanings. Head of public programming, Dr Ken Arnold, has actively sought to programme events and exhibitions that utilise the work of contemporary artists and writers in order to challenge and inspire visitors. Although the incorporation of contemporary art into permanent and temporary exhibitions at Wellcome Collection is at a slight remove to the Artists' Interventions that I have examined, its exhibitions and visitor evaluation surveys never-the-less provide useful information about the effects of using contemporary artworks to engage visitors with other types of exhibit. Public response to curatorial programming at Wellcome Collection has been examined in an evaluation survey and a peer review survey¹⁷⁰. Both reports were generously made available to me for the purpose of my research and the evaluation report, in particular, provides relevant data on visitors' reactions to curatorial boundary crossing between art and science.

In Wellcome Collection there are two permanent exhibitions: *Medicine Man* - selected artefacts and artworks from the personal collection of Sir Henry Wellcome¹⁷¹, and *Medicine Now* - which address many complex ethical issues germane to contemporary medicine. Both exhibitions feature contemporary art but *Medicine Now* has a much larger representation of commissioned contemporary artworks, a number of which were produced under the aegis of Wellcome's then *Sci-Art* programme¹⁷².

Arnold promotes his curatorial principles¹⁷³ in *Medicine Now* and *Medicine Man* as a

¹⁷⁰ The evaluative survey, conducted by Morris, Hargreaves McIntyre in 2007, questioned visitors about the permanent collections and the first temporary exhibition at Wellcome Collection, 'The Heart'.

¹⁷¹ Henry Wellcome (1853-1936), with Silas Burroughs, set up a pharmaceutical company Burroughs Wellcome & Co. They were one of the first to introduce medicine in tablet form under the 1884 trademark 'Tabloid'; (<http://www.wellcomecollection.org/aboutus/WTD027248.htm>) previously medicines had been sold as powders or liquids. He collected a vast array of medical related objects, at his death there were 125,000 in his collection.

¹⁷² In 1996, Arnold initiated Wellcome's *Sci-Art* programme, an ongoing series of public projects, where artists and scientists invest in each other's work, often focussing on ethical issues and allowing subjectivity to find a voice.

¹⁷³ *Medicine Man* was co-curated with Daniella Olsen.

continuum of Henry Wellcome's somewhat eclectic attitude towards collecting and displaying material culture for educational purposes. In *Medicine Man*, the sheer scope of Wellcome's collection is emphasised, and as Arnold comments 'the collection is undisciplined' (2006). It is not too far removed from the collections of the museum's proto-period, a cabinet of curiosity or wunderkammer. In these collections clear expression of educational or political roles had yet to achieve and influence in the order and display of material. In most accounts of the transition from pre to post Enlightenment collections, disorganisation and eclecticism are associated with the 'pre' period, classification and rationalism with the 'post' when the privileging of a scopophilic gaze that encouraged awe, wonder and curiosity also became regarded with suspicion. It appears, however, that Wellcome Collection has a curatorial commitment to wonder, curiosity and excitement and is reinvesting in the promotion of such visitor experiences. Certainty, rationality and order play second fiddle to the more fertile potentiality offered by eclecticism, boundary crossing and an inclusive search for knowledge that does not subscribe to subject divisions in the way that many other science collections might. Bringing together different fields of specialisation is not necessarily an easy task, as Arnold remarks, 'this is something that is almost impossible to do in academe, because everyone becomes so specialised, but in public programming there is room to draw on the interconnections between areas' (Arnold in conversation with the author 2008). In Wellcome's impressive and slick new gallery spaces, artworks appear in considerable numbers and have a consistent presence. Some examples are illustrative others are explicative; some may be difficult to recognise as artworks at all.¹⁷⁴

Wellcome is not the only museum to make an active commitment to use art and artists as a way of opening out potential interconnections. Dresden's curiously named Museum of Hygiene¹⁷⁵ demonstrates a similar curatorial approach to placing artworks alongside medical exhibits. Both museums focus on themes that have relevance to art and science, both commission and/or select artists and artworks that critically engage with the moral and ethical, emotional and spiritual aspects of life, medicine and death. This carefully thought out strategy often involves collaborations between artists and scientists. In both instances Artists' Interventions, as I have characterised them so far, aren't clearly in evidence, but artworks have definitely been given a platform that acknowledges their potential as interpretive tools.

¹⁷⁴ Although I have touched on notions of mis-recognition, I have not really explored issues surrounding the contemporary artwork as a hybrid entity that is context dependent. I would however propose that it is possible to experience, understand, learn from, and enjoy Artists' Interventions without necessarily stumbling over the question of whether or not they are art.

¹⁷⁵ The museum owes its title to its origins as a museum of public health information. However it has now outgrown this original remit and incorporates such topics as nanotechnology, brain research and global warming.

At Wellcome Collection contemporary art has been almost seamlessly incorporated into the museum's displays and interpretation ethos. The approach is neither didactic nor consensual, but instead manages to bring together and address a number of antithetical ideas using artwork as an aid to do so. This does not mean that cutting edge scientific developments go unexplained and remain mysterious, but it does mean that there is an acknowledgement of the limits of understanding, and a concession to the notion that there may be more than one way of understanding the human body. For example, a subject of Wellcome's *Sleeping & Dreaming* Exhibition (2007-2008) asks: what purpose does dreaming serve? This was made possible only by an admission that 'there is much that science cannot account for'. Opening an exhibition with claims of what is **not** known as well as what is known, positions the museum as a place of enquiry and discussion rather than as the font of knowledge.

Similarly Wellcome's *The Heart* Exhibition, 2007, proposed its approach as one that 'brought together objects and images from the histories of both science and art, as well as from everyday life'. Unusually for an exhibition with a science bias, it was acknowledged that the heart 'has always featured as a potent symbol in our religions, myths and rituals [and that there is a resistance to] let go of the notion - deeply rooted in everyday language and imagery - that the heart is the home of our emotions and of our true character' (<http://www.wellcomecollection.org> accessed 09.09.2008). *The Heart*, therefore differed considerably from exhibitions traditionally associated with the display and study of human organs in museums of science and anatomy. The exhibition's guiding light strayed a little from stringent rationalism and empiricism, associated with scientific method, to illuminate the symbolic significance of the heart. The wide range of cultural artefacts and contemporary artworks juxtaposed with anatomical and scientific exhibits not only broke with conventional museum taxonomy but also encouraged visitors to experience and reflect on the heart from multiple vantage points. Sound 'listening posts' were distributed throughout the exhibition in order that concepts such as 'the broken heart' could be explored through music. The inclusion of Elvis Presley's (1956) rendition of *Heartbreak Hotel* encouraged an immediate connection with the symbolic references to the heart in contemporary music and popular culture. As Michael Breakwell writes the heart 'stands not just for love in its romantic and erotic sense but also for the vulnerability of the self and the inner self - the fragile, sacred core of one's being and the capacity to feel alive in the world' (Breakwell 2002: 206).

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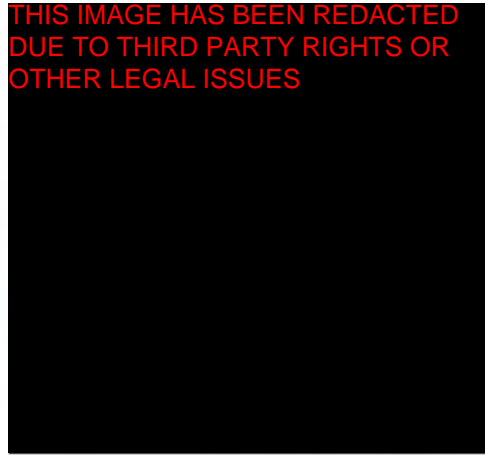


Fig. 29: Swimming Pool at Heartbreak Hotel featured in *The Heart* exhibition at Wellcome Collection

Data that sheds light on visitors' impressions of such a multifaceted exhibition is therefore very valuable. My personal impressions of *The Heart* were of seeing juxtapositions of artefacts, subjects and concepts that I had never before experienced together in a gallery or museum. It was in effect, a curatorial break-through, a science exhibition that acknowledged the visitor as an embodied subject looking for the opportunity to make personally meaningful connections and discoveries. The peer review report suggests that: 'a standard science exhibition with an artistic veneer would only alienate audiences and critics [but] by genuinely bringing a critical artistic perspective to science, the collection is able to excite the imagination and – particularly if one is of a scientific bent – lead one on a journey towards understanding how the outcomes of laboratory research are perceived by the wider world' ¹⁷⁶ (in Morris and Pes 2008: 29).

Interestingly, the evaluation survey identified quite a significant difference between visitors' 'motivations' for visiting the exhibition and the 'outcomes' of the visit. It would be fair to imagine that, like myself, many visitors to *The Heart* would not have previously encountered the mix of cultural artefacts, art, music and science in quite the way in which they were presented in *The Heart*. This may also account for the anomalies between what visitors thought they would experience (and therefore how they envisaged they would benefit from a visit) and their visit 'outcome' (their actual experiences as they left).

Motives are what make people set off for a visit. As they enter the building, they become expectations and as they leave they become outcomes.

¹⁷⁶ Comments in the report were anonymous but Aosaf Afzal, expert in science communication and senior manager at the Royal Society, London and Wim van der Weiden chairman of the European Museum Forum and previously director of 'Naturalis', the National Museum of Natural History in Leiden and the Omniversum in the Hague, were the science experts on the panel.

This is why they are so important. Being able to measure motives, expectations and outcomes can provide deep insight into visitors and the visitor experience.

(Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2007: 25)

The results of the survey point, not to a case of visitors expecting something and being disappointed when it wasn't present, but rather, to visitors' recognition that their museum experience in *The Heart* exceeded their expectations in ways they had not been expecting, but that were never-the-less significant.

Hierarchy of motivation

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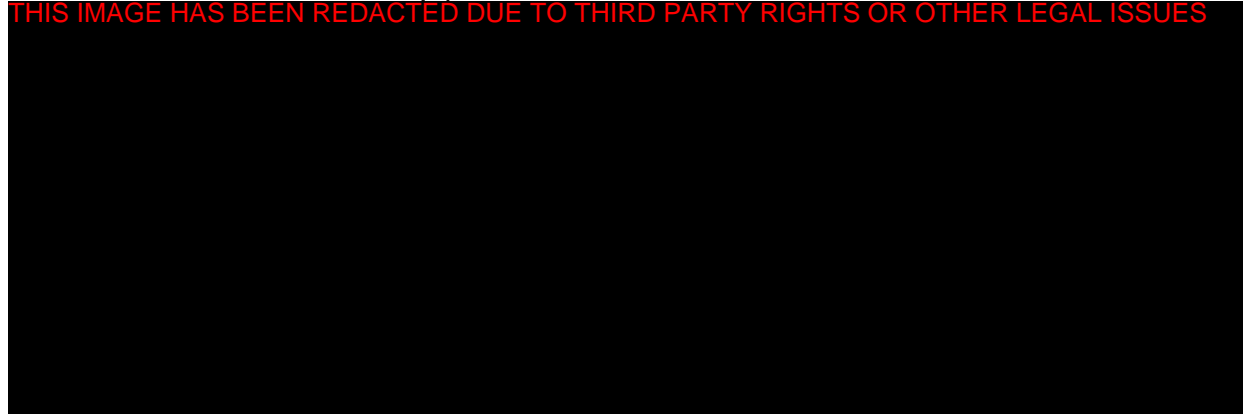


Fig. 30: Hierarchy of Motivation

In order to examine different motivations for visiting the researchers identified four main drivers, illustrated in the model above. Morris Hargreaves and McIntyre constructed a 'hierarchy of motivation' which appears to draw heavily on Maslow's (1943), *pyramidal hierarchy of learning needs*. In this model, basic needs for a museum visit, (such as ease of access, friendly staff, enjoyable place) would need to be met before a discovery of 'new things' could be possible. At the highest levels in Morris Hargreaves and McIntyre's model, as with Maslow's pyramid, deep sensory and inspirational experiences and meaningful personal reflection surpass the quantifiable acquisition of new information¹⁷⁷. The gallery or museum's ability to fulfill different motivational needs situates a spiritual outcome at the top of the hierarchy in the same way that Maslow situates self-actualisation or fulfillment at the apex of his learning pyramid. Morris Hargreaves and McIntyre comment:

At each point on the hierarchy visitors have different needs. Meeting these needs is the visitor's primary motivation for visiting and is also, therefore, their minimum expectation of a visit. In moving up the hierarchy from *social* to *spiritual* motivators, visitors experience increasing levels of engagement with the gallery and its contents. The further up the hierarchy visitors move, and the

more outcomes they experience, the more fulfilling and rewarding their visit.
(Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2007: 25)

In museology, analogies between church and museum may have become something of a cliché but references to the church in Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's evaluation survey have less to do with awe inspiring architecture, stringent codes of respectful and decorous behaviour and more to do with the systems of belief that operate in both institutions. 'Food for the *soul*' is Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's term for the experience characterised by high levels of engagement and fulfilment. Findings in the evaluation survey suggest that although visitors may not have been expecting to have an emotional experience a substantial number of them did.

Fig. 31 below illustrates that while visitors arrived with primarily social and intellectual motivations, they left having been emotionally and spiritually engaged. That is, they achieved a significantly more engaged outcome than the main motivation they arrived with.

The reunion of pleasure, emotion, sensation and knowledge, so long separated out¹⁷⁸, appears to be gaining a considerable following. A challenge for museums of the twenty-first century is to provide visitors with emotional and spiritual engagement in addition to meeting expectations of intellectual and social experiences. Shifts towards emotional and spiritual outcomes, reflect the deeper engagement visitors achieve when taking part in more immersive learning experiences.

Motivation to outcome journey - Heart

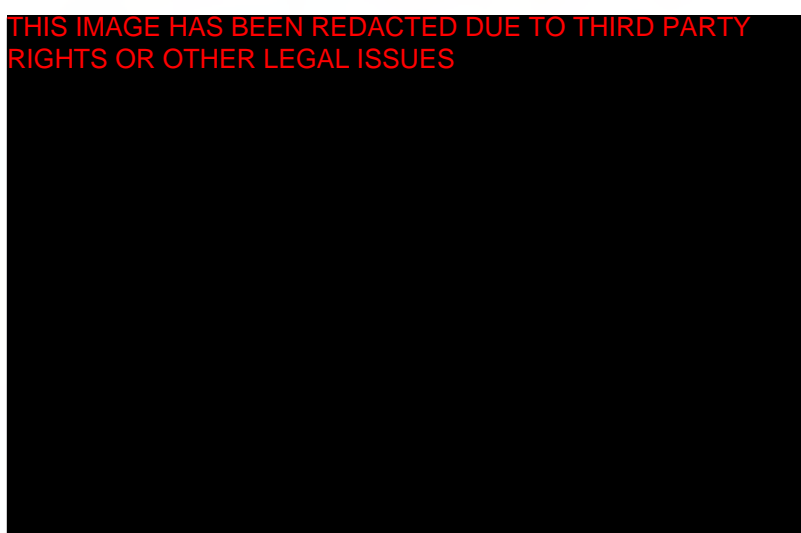


Fig. 31: Motivation to outcome journey – Heart

¹⁷⁸ For example, something the visitor gains that can subsequently be measured by testing as suggested by the generic learning outcomes (GLOs) recommended in 'What did you learn at the museum today?' (2006).

If Wellcome's curatorial direction, along with that taken in a few other European Museums, looked a little radical in 2007, it seems to have taken only a very short period of time (less than 2 years) before art is being incorporated to achieve similar effects into a whole gamut of exhibition frameworks¹⁷⁹. This research suggests that these current developments would not have happened so readily if it were not for the precedents set by Artists' Interventions. The legacy of Artists Interventions may well now lie in their oblique but substantial influence on current curatorial direction, interpretation and public programming. Much of the most influential work by artists, from Duchamp to Ernst and Baargeld, Spoerri, Hiller, Wilson and the Chapman Brothers, is essentially curatorial in nature. It involves not just the production of one piece of work but the bringing together of all the objects surrounding the ones the artists have selected in a reconfiguration of understanding and exhibition design. In the period of time since the museum community in the USA regarded the potential in Wilson's intervention *Mining the Museum* at their Baltimore conference, Artists' Interventions have become a model with which to effect changes in gallery programming.

Artists Interventions offer historical precedents for building bridges between hitherto hostile domains of knowledge, for engaging the senses and the intellect and for providing an extended range of encounters that have been found to be highly valued by visitors.

¹⁷⁹ *Assembling Bodies: Art Science & Imagination* (2009) at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge, in common with *The Heart* (2007) suggests that 'artistic insights and practices are crucial in both revealing and mediating between different ways of knowing the body' (Herne Elliot and Empson 2009: 8). The exhibition extended research to include art history, history of science, bio-medicine and contemporary artistic practice (ibid), and was described as 'a challenging, cross disciplinary project ... which promoted increased dialogue between academic colleagues' (ibid). A concurrent exhibition, at the Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge: *Endless Forms: Darwin Natural Science and the Visual Arts*. (2009) states on its web pages that 'artworks will be seen in juxtaposition with scientific material of all sorts, from geological maps and botanical teaching diagrams to fossils, minerals, and ornithological specimens. They reveal the many interactions between natural science and art during this period' (<http://www.darwinendlessforms.org/exhibition-overview>).

Chapter 8 Conclusion

Re-visiting the research questions

At the outset I questioned *why Artists' Interventions had become so widely deployed by galleries and museums as interpretive strategies intended to facilitate (and challenge) visitors' meaning making processes*. The decision to differentiate between artworks that disrupt and contest dominant gallery and museum discourse, and artworks that support and confirm established interpretations of art and artefacts, undoubtedly affected the research findings. By focussing attention on disruptive and critical examples, parodic and disruptive methods were brought to the fore.

Artists' Interventions do not necessarily express certainty or ready intelligibility instead, irony and parody, ambiguity, open-endedness, slippage and humour pervade. Such ambiguous and paradoxical approaches initially appeared to compromise the pedagogic potential of the Artists' Intervention. Parody, irony and disruption, in particular, seemed out of line with strategies for promoting learning in galleries and museums. Moreover, such unsettling approaches suggested possible reinforcements of difference and concerns that Artists' Interventions might only be understood by initiates. Identifying the possibility of productive elements within these indicative tensions therefore became important for this research necessitating a parallel question, which asked, *in what ways does the employment of a parodic or disruptive tactic, common to many Artists' Interventions, contribute to the production of new meanings in galleries and museums?*

Contributing through irony and parody to visitors' meaning making processes

Although irony and parody have a somewhat denigrated status in educational theory and remain at the margins of educational practices, in society more broadly they are a way in which meaning is made and/or made more complex. In contemporary art irony and parody are situated within traditions of appropriation of visual language (as can be seen in re-workings of compositions in painting and emulation of display conventions), but also in an interplay between text and image – title and work etc. Parody and irony also abound in advertising, political sketch shows and cartoons. Despite claims of ambiguity and insider decoding it is apparent that in many instances irony and parody are confidently employed as targeted forms of communication and persuasion. It has also been acknowledged that parody and irony can be possible

conduits for serious meaning-making (Capel 1966: 36) but their ambiguous form and occlusion of certainty have remained a problem in education. This has been especially true of educational interpretation practices in galleries and museums where there have been concerns that to offer visitors ambiguous guidance is tantamount to irresponsibility.

This research proposes that in many Artists' Interventions pedagogy can coexist with parody and disruption and furthermore that there are specific situations when Artists' Interventions communicate with audiences effectively through these strategies. In Artists' Interventions humour is often integral to parodic and disruptive processes and is used to de-familiarise the familiar, demythologise the exotic and invert 'common sense'; the intention is often to change the balance of power. Douglas (1968) has pointed to the way that jokes can provide a release from what has become over-determined and can also aid an understanding that an accepted ordering experience has no absolute necessity. Where Artists' Interventions make comments on pre-existing gallery and museum models (whether that be taxonomy, display or interpretation) they suggest other possible experiences and, as Bourdieu (1983) has observed, with this can come a simultaneous demolition of social illusion. Within conservative and reproductive forms of pedagogy Artists' Interventions, their strategies of defamiliarisation, and ambiguous meanings, can therefore be perceived negatively as a threat to the stable order. Within more progressive and co-constructivist educational models destabilising particular orders are viewed positively (e.g. Giroux et al 1996).

Changing attitudes to visitors and interpretation

Endorsements for ever more clear and straightforward mediation between collections and visitors can be seen from nineteenth century imperatives over clear museum labels to educate and civilise, to twentieth century campaigns for 'Plain English' in the 1970s and beyond. Positive advancements in access grew from such concerns for educating the visitor. However, with hindsight, it is possible to see how the outcomes of increasing an over-emphasis on clarity might lead to a didactic imposition of fixed meaning. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, thinking about inclusivity and audiences has increasingly pointed to the need to give visitors agency in the meaning making process. With this in mind, attempts to prevent visitors going 'off message' begin to look limiting, as if they might create their own forms of exclusion. Furthermore, authoritative and conclusive explication of art and artefacts has brought some problems of reductivism and visitor dependency.

Where visitors to galleries and museums come with alternative understandings of artefacts to those promoted by the museum, then characterising such responses as 'misunderstandings' has been brought into question. Amongst others, Sandell has advocated the need for museums to 're-cast audiences – not as empty vessels about to be filled with the museum's truths or people who are liable to be confused or misunderstand fixed or non-negotiable meaning.' (Sandell 2007:75) Museums in the twenty-first century are now much more likely to understand their audiences as plural and interested in more than one way of coming to know.

The intention of many interventions has been to promote a shift away from the notion of visitors as passive receivers of spectacle and routinised experiences. Hiller, whose work addresses experiences that are eclipsed or marginalised in the dominant field of explanation, provided a good example when she stated that she intended her intervention at the Freud Museum 'to provide visitors with opportunities to become active participants/collaborators, interpreters, analysts, or detectives' (Hiller in McShine 1999: 237).

'The more personal and subjective ways in which visitors make meaning (such as through life experiences, opinions, imaginations, memories, fantasies) are at best ignored and more often invalidated in museums where they tend to be regarded as naive and inappropriate' (Silverman 1995: 161). Silverman's comments about the tendency for museums to have an over-determined perspective on how visitors relate to and interpret collections and exhibits, are also addressed in many Artists' Interventions where it is often exactly these personal and subjective visitor experiences that are re-validated through the juxtapositions of contemporary art works. This can be seen in the case of many interventions into science collections where the subjective response of the artist counterbalances what is otherwise a controlled, objective and distanced interpretation of the world.

Pedagogic values in galleries and museums may have been slow to develop in line with contemporary learning theories, but there are strong signals of reconfiguration of and acknowledgement of the complexities of visitors' learning experiences. As galleries and museums rethink who their visitors are, they are moving away from hegemonic narratives. Artists' Interventions have been utilised, sometimes successfully, sometimes less so, as part of a schema underpinning perceptible social changes in the attitudes of galleries and museums towards their collections and their visiting publics.

The necessity of moving beyond a concept of a reticent object

I initially co-opted the term 'reticent object' – used by Vergo (1989) to describe fine art – in order to highlight some differences between Artists' Interventions and Vergo's preconceptions about the need to interpret art. Concepts of esoteric art objects intended for aesthetic contemplation, *qua* 'reticent objects,' stand in contrast to the more loquacious examples proposed by Artists' Interventions. I clarify these developments and distinctions in order to provide an understanding of the emergence of Artists' Interventions in galleries and museums as part of the wider turn in art away from the isolated production of objects solely for aesthetic contemplation.

Importantly for this thesis, it is the developing recognition of art as a socially situated and networked practice that has enabled museums and galleries to become the beneficiaries of models for reflexivity and alternative interpretation strategies.

I propose the distinct contributions and working methods of a sub-genre of Artists' Interventions which even in their nascent stages of development as a genre eschew the dominance of an isolated artwork, favouring instead context and dialogue with existing gallery and museum discourse. This does not imply disregard for aesthetic concerns. However, artists' engagement with interrelationships between viewer, artwork and context, results in art that often complicates aesthetic experience by aligning it to social commentary. Further intricacy arises when parody and irony are employed to achieve social comment as this can result in a parody of aesthetic experiences as much as the provision of such experience.

As Modernist notions of the autonomous art object have been superseded, so too have notions of the autonomous self. Alongside perceptual shifts, in what art might be taken to be, the role and social position of the artist has been brought into question. Dennis Atkinson (2006) outlines how perceptions of autonomy had been replaced in the last decades of the twentieth century, with an 'understanding of the self as a socio-psychic *performance* that occurs within specific discourses, practices and their immanent power relations' (p. 18). Atkinson does not refer specifically to interventionist art practices, but his notion of 'performing the self' is significant, in that it sidelines the idea of the self as solely a production of the social, and incorporates possibilities of new or transgressive social positions. As art practice has become more reflexive and relational, many artists have understood the possibilities and limitations of their own positions more clearly. The working relationships with museum and gallery professionals and freelance curators that interventionist artists of

the 1990s and 2000s¹⁸⁰ have been able to form have been enabled by a re-assessment of positions within cultural networks and hierarchies and in relation to dominant and marginal histories.

By resisting the utopian gestures and idealism associated with forms of Artists' Interventions and institutional critique in the 1960s and 1970s, many contemporary artists have understood a need for more complex forms of self-positioning than those evident in previous generations of socially engaged art practitioners. As outlined in chapter four, part three, contemporary artists have recognised the ambiguities and paradoxes of critiquing institutional practices and often made this difficulty a focus of their work. Theoretical shifts in the way the 'self' is understood have been essential to this process of reflexivity.

It is important to re-emphasise that the institutions whose cultural power and influence artists critique are often the same institutions with which they desire to be associated and through which their identities are maintained. Such contradictions and complications may seem to imply an impossibility for critique, but as Malone suggests, 'this does not necessitate a 'melancholic loss of autonomy' (Malone 2007: 16), but requires an articulation of the different relations, within which the work is caught, in the hope of 'disturbing, if not facilitating a transformation of these systems' (ibid). Working with such an understanding also necessitates an acceptance that definitions of artist, object and spectator have shifted 'from an essentialist understanding of these terms to one in which they are also viewed as social, psychic and discursive productions/performances' (Atkinson 2006: 18). The importance of reflexivity becomes crucial for artists and institutions.

Edwards, Gosden et al (2006) propose that 'a phase of activism has begun in which many museums are redefining their role as one of advocacy for social change' (p. 21). I suggest that rather than being positioned as oppositional to the new socially nuanced programmes of cultural institutions, it is possible to understand contemporary Artists' Interventions as discursive projects in confluence with curatorial and directorial decision making. Bourriaud (2007) talks of the contemporary art exhibition as an 'information centre' – placing 'tools at the public's disposal' (p. 69), and has characterised contemporary art as 'an alternative editing table that shakes up social forms' (2002: 72). Similarly Artists' Interventions provide information and alternative perspectives for visitors. Bourriaud's comments also point to a strand of

¹⁸⁰ Such as: Kolbowski, Dion, Lawler, Williams and Fraser.

contemporary art that provides information for its public, splices and reinterprets material culture and destabilises social expectations as it does so; this is art that is far from reticent.

The role of Artists Interventions in opening up micro and counter narratives in galleries and museums

The examples discussed in this thesis make it clear that interpretations offered by Artists' Interventions are frequently tangential, and sometimes completely alternative, to those previously offered by 'host' galleries and museums. This has met with some disapproval¹⁸¹ but more significantly, this research shows how a counter narrative aligns interventions with incentives to re-present museum and gallery collections.

The historiographic tracings in chapter two establish the counter narrative of Artists' Interventions as a characteristic of avant-garde art. As early as the 1900s there is ample evidence to suggest that artists were deeply suspicious of the ways in which galleries and museums encouraged stable orders of collective meaning.¹⁸² Artists' Interventions have proposed counter narratives which, as explicated by Giroux et al (1996), stand counter to a 'grand' or 'meta' narrative but also to 'the official and hegemonic narratives of everyday life: those legitimising stories propagated for specific political purposes to manipulate public consciousness by heralding a national set of cultural ideals' (1996: 78). In short, Artists' Interventions have countered the museum's discourse on both counts, disrupting what is stable and ordered and countering hegemonic ideals with alternative or marginalised ideological perspectives. In many instances such alternative positions have then become assimilated into the mainstream.

Proposing alternative readings by dislodging fixed meaning and 'meta' narrative, is also symptomatic of what Bakhtin (1981), refers to as 'dialogism'; where lively debate becomes central to the establishment of meaning. Artists' Interventions act as forms of interpretation that often reconfigure learning through disruption. Gallery and museum taxonomies and contiguous narrative threads are exchanged for those that meander and challenge. In some instances their pedagogic success (or failure) is purely reliant on dialogism. Contra-wisely their ability to engender deep sensory and inspirational experiences and to precipitate meaningful personal reflection is part of their pedagogic potential too.

¹⁸¹ Such as Baxter (2008), Rice (2003), Latimer (2001), and Miller (1992).

¹⁸² This is affirmed too by Schneider (2006: 30).

Polarisations of autonomy and heteronomy, as they occur in Kantian aesthetics¹⁸³, seem to be problematised by this genre of artworks, which can often occupy the ground between. Artists have increasingly moved towards positions in which their work is produced in collaboration with others and in response to site and context. A confluence of new understandings of art, institution and self has helped to propel Artists' Interventions away from binary oppositions¹⁸⁴ and this is again where their interface with museum and gallery discourse has been productive. Modernist dichotomies,¹⁸⁵ such as institution/individual, freedom/constraint, inside/outside, radical/orthodox, either/or, for/against, have started to be replaced by an acknowledgement of complexity, contradiction and discursivity and dissent.

Facilitating understanding between past, present, socio-political and cultural differences

In the late twentieth century many traditional gallery and museum practices were destabilised by a diminution of trust in meta-narrative and universal truth and by insecurities about representing 'others'.¹⁸⁶ Galleries and museums had to respond to the realisation that they were perceived, by some, as elitist and by others as obdurately colonial in outlook, with a litany of dubious accession histories. Imperatives to redeem 'difficult'¹⁸⁷ collections became ever more urgent as museums strove to reconcile past values with contemporary critique and plan for future developments in which competition for public attention would see them competing with other galleries and museum and the leisure industries more broadly.

The hope of reconciliation is one that drove many museums to seek assistance from individuals adept in representing and encouraging dialogism and discursivity thereby increasing relevance for diverse audiences. This research demonstrates that by the 1990s Artists' Interventions were starting to be commissioned to deconstruct, what for many galleries and museums had become a legacy of uncomfortable truths and embarrassing fictions. Artists such as Fraser, Dion, Lawler, Wilson, and Green in the USA and Smith, Cummings and Lewandowska, Shonibare, Quinn, Deller and Himid in the UK and Europe, became perceived as part of a solution, mediating between

¹⁸³ Preziosi Although Kant's Critique of Judgement was originally published in 1790 his influence on aesthetics can still registers to the present day. See, for example, Crowther, P. (1993) *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹⁸⁴ Derrida (1981), in particular, has been influential in his disavowal of binary oppositions. His concept of the *pharmakon* (a word that means both cure and poison) is used to characterise an 'undecidable,' that which refuses to be pinned down to the fixity of meaning.

¹⁸⁵ See p. 36.

¹⁸⁶ See, Owens, C. (1992) *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press on 'the discourse of others' p 166-190.

¹⁸⁷ Such as those where racial and gender prejudice, colonial plunder and the acquisition of sacred artefacts are brought to attention.

collections and audiences to reconfigure and problematise collections and the construction of meaning. However, an ameliorative reconciliation has not always been the outcome. Artists' Interventions more often follow Mouffe's (2008b) concept of agonistic pluralism, furnishing visitors with a tangible collision of ideological positions.

Artists' Interventions have been deployed by museums as part of a turn toward more reflexive practices and in an attempt to address the exigency of reconciliation. Dion, for example, has been called upon to reframe some of the problems that museums carry with them in a post-colonial era. (His suggestions may seem relatively straightforward and echo those made earlier by many ethnographers and anthropologists¹⁸⁸) in that he says 'museums need to 'be honest with themselves and with the public [...]. Rather than try to hide colonial practices and racist tendencies of the past, the museum must implicate itself and come clean' (Dion 1999: 51). However, it is not just a confessional being advocated here so much as an opportunity to be more open with the public about the past in order that lessons can be learnt. This may mean that the gallery or museum foregoes the aim of achieving a rational consensus in the public sphere in favour of more discursive possibilities that nonetheless provide the possibility for antagonisms to be channelled into the more productive realm of agonism.

The unstable position of artists as invited interventionists

My intervention at the William Morris Gallery (2005) questioned certain aspects of the pedagogic authority at work in galleries and museums. The 'target' of my parodic performance, 'An Elite Experience for Everyone,' was the educational discourse of voluntary female tour guides in heritage culture. I employed the use of speech in quotation marks, as a dialogic unfolding between two or more speaking subjects, in this case, myself and those in museum and gallery culture whose behaviour and values were antithetical to my own. My intention was not to create a credible character, but to propose Victoria Fielding volunteer tour guide, as a site for the confluence of discourse, controversy and humour. The hope was that by speaking the words of others whilst gesturing quotation marks, I might affect a destabilisation of meaning bringing into question the pedagogic implications of some of my own experiences of visitor tours in 'blue plaque' heritage sites.

¹⁸⁸ For example, Clifford and Marcus (1986), Clifford (1997), Ames (2001).

I intended that my intervention should question the cultivation of difference, implicit since the earliest moments in the evolution of the museum. The politics of representation and inclusion within galleries and museums are dependent on critiques of the relationships between objects and subjects and as such have been affected by interventions that have been made by artists. My intervention enabled a recognition of the way that difference is achieved through the insistence on pre-requisites: e.g. certain forms of knowledge, reception, behaviour and values. Although Foster (1996) has indicated that in the 'alterity stakes', ethnicity has overtaken class – issues determined by class divisions were under scrutiny in 'An Elite Experience for Everyone'. In the twenty-first-century, as Habermas (1989) wrote of the eighteenth century, a zeal for 'pressurising the masses [sic] into participating in the public sphere in the political realm' (p. 168) exists, with the identical concomitant problem: a failure to provide 'the level of education that would enable them to participate' (ibid).

Through the process of planning and staging the intervention I was able to insert myself into networks of gallery and museum practice, not as a researcher conducting interviews and behaving objectively, but more akin to the 'trickster' testing gallery practices and values that were held in place and made 'normal' by social relations. I understand now, how closely my response to the William Morris Gallery followed the contours of Bourdieu and Darbel's critique of museums, in which pleasure has become purified of pleasure and the carnal is eviscerated from the cerebral. My intervention developed as a rupture to an order of repression in 'parodic and or burlesque form' (1979: 149).

Through the intervention I explored parody, legitimised transgression and fictitious narrative. I discovered at first hand the authority that the museum carries with it and its effects of belief. I didn't have a premonition of the swingeing cuts that the William Morris Gallery experienced in 2007, but I could recognise that it was a gallery temporally and conceptually distanced from its local context. I could recognise too that finding ways to reach new audiences was a motivational factor for letting myself and other artists in. The exhibition 'News from Nowhere: Visions of Utopia', of which *An Elite Experience for Everyone* was a part, undoubtedly brought new audiences to the William Morris Gallery and other Walthamstow venues; however, I am unsure how well it engaged with the local populace or encouraged their sense of connection with the gallery. In order for that to have happened there needed to be clearer aims on the part of the museum and the contemporary art curators about the objectives of the project. Of equal importance, if there is a serious

commitment to a programme of intervention then time and funding are needed to allow artists to undertake adequate research¹⁸⁹. The problem with projects such as *News from Nowhere*, in common with many other initiatives involving artists in 'project work', was the lack of recognition of the time it might take to produce a successful and meaningful site-specific work. Fraser has commented that artists 'don't want to punch the clock and tend to resist quantifying labour time' and this may well point to the reasons why a mismatch of intentions and outcomes may result. Magical expectations that artists will provide a panacea for a museum's ills or more simply brighten things up, need to be reappraised in the light of previous initiatives, successes and failures. Greater awareness of and consultation with a range of artists should also be a priority for museums wishing to open their doors to interventions.

Viv Golding's recent questioning of the licence given to artists in museum interventions, is disappointing for its tendency to perpetuate a concept of the artist operating *against* rather than *with* the museum. She cites Wilson's (2006) installation, *Site Unseen: Dwellings of the Demons*, at the National Museum of World Culture in Göteborg, Sweden, as an example. Here Wilson might have been speaking out of turn and she asks, 'should the artist be viewed as the gifted genius of western culture, with full and inalienable rights to free and imaginative speech, since the creative view of the artist genius casts a true light on reality?' (Golding 2009: 104) Golding's comments were made in response to her archaeology students' criticisms, of what they perceived to be Wilson's cavalier attitude towards the museum's previous work with the Kuna peoples of Panama. She asks 'What if this free speech [afforded to the artist] disparages real achievements, the gathering of knowledge and truth, by the archaeologists?' (ibid). Setting free speech in opposition to 'real achievement', Golding's comments also start with an assumption that archaeologists 'gather knowledge and truth' more successfully than others, even when history demonstrates this not to have always been the case. Her concerns about the licence given to artists are by no means irrelevant but the tendency to pit free speech as a de-stabiliser of the museum's pedagogic responsibility implies a contiguous narrative of manageable knowledge. Such a consensual and stable position is one which Simon Sheikh (2006) suggests needs to be countered 'though a model of the cultural institution not as the pillar of tradition and a stable social order but rather as the producer of a certain instability, flux and negotiation. In short a conflictual rather than consensual version of democracy' (p. 149). This is where many Artists' Interventions have succeeded,

¹⁸⁹ Wilson's *Mining the Museum* involved over 12 months of research at Maryland Historic Society prior to its opening and Fraser's *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk* (1989), was developed over a similar period as part of the *Contemporary Viewpoints Artists Lecture Series*.

some as ripples on the surface of a still pond others causing more of a splash. To return to Goldings' critique of the 'artist as gifted genius', it is important to stress that an intervention in a gallery or museum, like a chess game, involves many players. If the artist superficially appears to be the King or Queen, then a closer look might suggest that their role in the power hierarchy is far less central to the overall 'game'.

Summary

This thesis sought to bring to light and clarify many of the contradictions surrounding Artists' Interventions, where on the one hand, artists stand accused of alienating audiences and on the other, appear to have played a significant role in orchestrating changes to the way that learning is defined and configured in galleries and museums.

Artists are not solely responsible for shifting thinking in the gallery and museum sector, nor for singlehandedly challenging the fixity of modernist interpretations of art and artefacts. But it could be said that artists have a closer and more tangible interrelationship with the contents of galleries and museum than most, in that even at their most conceptual, artists continue to be makers **of** things and meaning makers **for** things.

Artists' Interventions commonly engage visitors through a range of sense modalities. They operate in dialogue with other objects and subjects in the gallery or museum. Moreover their intimate engagement with how objects come to 'mean', implies that they are also particularly aware of how meanings of objects are permeable and easily saturated by texts and contexts.

When artists have been commissioned to intervene in collections in order to disrupt visitors' expectations I suggest that the host gallery or museum intends to signal a shift in the way its collection and itself as an institution are understood. I therefore place the growth of Artists' Interventions since the 1990s, in close relation to galleries and museums' incentives to change and update their social and pedagogic roles. The reasons why galleries and museums have co-opted artists cannot be equated with the employment of educational consultants or the commissioning of visitor research. Galleries and museums invite artists with full recognition that they have a history of critical engagement with certain museum and gallery practices and also with a realisation that they are often critically insightful, visually affecting and emotionally and intellectually engaging. Working with an artist can appear to be a risky strategy exacerbated by institutionalised perception of artists as 'special' individuals. However,

in this research I propose that the affordances offered to artists are related, not to the notion that artists should continue to be viewed as geniuses (if in fact they ever truly were), but to artists' somewhat unstable role in society which enables them to be celebrated and sidelined simultaneously. It is true that in gallery and museum interventions, artists have been allowed to behave in ways not available to others (this was the most immediate finding of my own intervention), however in a gallery or a museum, a transgression isn't allowed by a slip of concentration or accident; this is where positioning the Artists' Intervention *against* the institution falls apart. Interventions occur in institutions where there is already a desire for some transgression to be made. Significant others within the museum, with whom the artist liaises, are also implicated in the disruptions and parodic transgressions that an artist might make.

In my interview with Ciscle, I asked him to comment on what happened at Maryland Historic Society after the unprecedented success of Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992); his comments were illuminating:

What you need to know (and I don't know if this has come up in the things that you have read), is that once the show was over... their director [Charles Lye] was fired. Do you know all this? ... and the reason he was fired... not because of the controversy, it was because when the show ended the board [of trustees] wanted to know, what's next? I remember during *Mining*, when it started to become a success, he kept trying to pump us, you know "what should happen next?" Every time he would say this we wouldn't give him answers, we would say the answer lies in artists, you bring artists in and they will help you find the answers. And of course he wanted 'The Contemporary' to keep on doing projects there [MdHS] – well that's not what we were about. Plus we weren't going to solve his problems. So he didn't have an answer to them on – what was next. That's why.

(Ciscle 2007, in interview with the author)

Some fifteen years on from *Mining the Museum*, the most astute outcomes and strategies of Artists' Interventions have started to become assimilated into the repertoires of exhibition designers and curators. It is crucial that artists and others who have affected changes to the pedagogic and social roles of galleries and museums should not be written out of history. Recognition that artists have been influential in the field of museum and gallery interpretation and in shaping visitor experiences certainly exists, but Artists' Interventions have a complex history and continue to embody contradiction. The body of literature attempting to analyse this complex phenomenon, is an emergent, rather than an established one. I position this research as a contribution to new understanding within this emergent field.

Artists' Interventions are both fissures in the dominant discourses of galleries and museums and stand as part of a continuum of radical discursive possibilities, intended for the public sphere at the museum's inception. Where Artists' Interventions have emerged against a backdrop of dominant regulatory and divisionary discourse this research suggests that their disruptive and parodic strategies re-establish the museum as a discursive forum.

I recognise now, with the hindsight offered as I complete this conclusion, that in order for the *modus operandi* and intentions of interventions to be more fully understood the focus of my initial question changed into one that asked: *what does the Artists' Intervention do?*

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Interview with George Ciscle, Former director of The Contemporary, Baltimore, USA. Conducted on the 24th April 2007 at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA)

CR I hope you don't mind if we go back to *Mining the Museum* because you were involved with this project, if I've got this right you were director of The Contemporary at the time?

GC Yes, Lisa was the curator, I was the director, my role for *Mining* was really the Project director, to work with the artist, the Historical Society and The Contemporary.

CR Yes -To me, having done quite a lot of research into Artists' Interventions and how they have intend to widen audience participation, I keep coming back to this one, *Mining the Museum*, in Baltimore, as one that really seems to have had an influence, and one that's had some staying power as opposed to the sorts of intervention that have scored a temporary hit but haven't really changed the polices and practices of museums to that extent.

So a few questions...From reading the literature I was quite interested to see people like Judith Stein, who wrote about *Mining*, talk about the way the museum [Maryland Historic Society] was looking to widen their audience, as how, um, this is presented as the reason why the exhibition [*Mining the Museum*] came about, in others accounts it says that Fred Wilson was given free rein to choose the museum he would work with. I wonder if you could talk a bit about how it actually came together?

GC Let me just give you a bit of Backdrop on that. The Contemporary, of course at the time, we were a nomadic museum and our interest was in going into different neighbourhoods, different communities buildings -non-arts institutions, with artists, to try to make a real life connection between artists and their artwork to the audience. How do you create this forum not just for discussion and dialogue but for experience for a larger audience than the artist and the collector and the art historian? So we had been doing these projects for with artists in all these different neighbourhoods for about two years and what we were finding out was that the in the neighbourhoods and communities we were very successful in reaching them but everyone kept looking at what we were doing as 'projects'. They really weren't looking at, even though we did call ourselves a museum we were the un-museum, we really ...our existence was in 1989, when I founded The Contemporary much different than today. I talk to students

about this today and they are going “really?” and I say no, museums, the doors were not wide open and artists certainly weren’t welcome there, let alone in the larger community. People didn’t talk about outreach, those things happened in alternative spaces and in artists’ collectives, so what we were finding out, after 2 years, was that no one was realising ... that our very existence was questioning the museum. They loved these projects but somehow didn’t get it. We purposefully started to look for to do a project that would illustrate our mission and question museum practices. How museums collect, how they exhibit, what they exhibit, where are the artists? who are the audiences? All these were important issues, back in the late 1980s especially. So Lisa and I started to look at, very consciously, artists whose very practice was about, was about museological issues. And, as you well know, there was more than just Fred, there were many of them that we looked at, and er, but Fred was the one we were most interested in because he was the one that more than anyone, who had never worked in a museum, his artwork was always in alternative spaces or in a commercial gallery; number one. And secondly, he had never worked with real objects, they were all reproductions or *faux*, fake things – African masks the sort that you could buy on the street corner today and so on. So these were very important to us that, what about giving an artist an opportunity who could work in a museum and use their collection as his materials, no different to a painter using brushes or canvasses and oil paints. So it was very conscientious on our part in terms of what we were looking for. So when we invited Fred to come to Baltimore it was really with the intention of looking at existing museums here and collections and sort of playing a game with us: what if you were to work in a museum with their collection, which one of these seven museums which we took you to would it be?

CR So there was no kind of collaborative decision about which museum it should be?

GC Not yet, not at that point. However ... some just other backdrop. One of the projects we had done prior to *Mining the Museum* was actually in an abandoned building, the old ‘Greyhound Bus’ terminal which is now ironically where the Maryland Historic Society is now in. We did a project there, in 1990, and when we were working on the rehab of the building, to adapt it because it had been vacant been for 15 years, we didn’t have bathrooms or things like that. So this is like the practical end of it, we went to the Maryland Historic Society’s original building, which was literally a block away, their old original building, and we went in to ask if we and our volunteers, whilst our show was up, a block away, (A show called *Photo Manifesto* from photographers from the USSR) could we use their bathrooms? And they said ‘oh you’ll have to talk to the director’, so we made an appointment to meet the director, and we did, and we talked about who we were, what we were doing. He was fascinated, he said that he’d heard about these just crazy people, crazy people doing these wild things and he’d heard about it and he said to us, he said “I wish I knew how

to make those *high boys*? and those paintings in our collection on the first floor ...when those children come in from 'the projects' how do we make them relevant to them ? And it was like -when Lisa and I walked away from that meeting - we said to ourselves we'll be back here some day not knowing..., I'm getting ahead of my story now... not knowing what was going to happen next because it was only five months later that we said to ourselves now we need to find a project that shows our mission as an institution. And then the Fred thing came about, so when we looked at all these museums with Fred and Fred said the Maryland Historic Society is the one I want to work in. It's very obvious, he said 'when I go in there and I look for my history, you know, when I look at the Victorian parlour, where am I? Other than behind the scenes cooking and cleaning - ughh.

So we already had this sort of *entre* into the Historical Society. Getting back to the director to say, "hey we think we may have a way for you to address that question that you are trying to answer".

CR So it was quite fortuitous? I was trying to piece those things together, you know, which came first.

GC Very much so, And of course they [Maryland Historic Society] had never worked with artists -conceptual artists. We spent a year, the first six months was just introducing Fred to the staff the trustees everyone.

CR But Fred had worked as a curator before?

GC In an alternative space.

CR Not as a curator in a museum?

GC No, he had worked in an education department .. but he had no curatorial credentials. Plus what we were trying to state to the authorities, although I don't think it truly ever got through, was that this was not going to be an exhibition curated by an artist. Unlike today, with all these projects of artists curating exhibitions, this was not to be that, this was to be a site specific work an installation by an artist ...it was his artwork. So it took us six months just to talk about Fred's work to them, to talk about the issues there may be and also another six months for The Contemporary to come up with a letter of agreement with the Historic Society - see they'd never worked with an artist before.

And this time [1990/91] is the heart of the culture wars - this is Andre Serrano's *Piss Christ* - this is Robert Mapplethorpe being cancelled at the.... So we had to cover all those things with Fred, and Fred couldn't tell a lie. You know in the past when he did these projects he'd tell that something was from the British Museum.

- CR** Yeah, I read about this.
- GC** And it wasn't - of course not. He couldn't do that in *Mining the Museum*. Everything had to be approved, all the labels, he couldn't uhm take, he couldn't bring in things from outside that were from other collections just to make a point. And he had to use their collection there were all these perimeters because they are an historic museum and pride themselves on scholarship.
- CR** But that must have been a really big leap for them?
- GC** Huge, Huge, Huge Leap. But also keep in mind at the same time the American Associations of Museums' Conference this time was coming to Baltimore.
- CR** Ah ha so ...
- GC** Right! ... and this was like, oh, so every museum was planning what show they are having in Baltimore when these 4000 professionals coming for the first time to our town. This was also to be looked at, ah... we're going to have these professionals here to see this exhibition and what does that say about both The Contemporary - course as you probably see The Contemporary has sort of been written out of the history in many ways.
- CR** Yes.
- GC** Even... whether you read about Fred, the Historic Society or *Mining the Museum*. The Contemporary, of course, this was their idea, we facilitated it, we made it happen, we raised the money for it, we published the book by ourselves - laughs -We were the forest. No one's complaining about it because it was their facility and their collection, it was fair, no question about it. We were a guest in their house, and so we, of course did become the invisible partner. And now, in many places we are written out of the history it is always *Mining the Museum*, Maryland Historic Society, period. It is a rarity that you will find reference any more to us.
- CR** I have, but I know what you mean, you have to look quite hard for it.
- GC** Exactly right. So anyway right that's the backdrop on your question of how and why this whole thing happened especially the Historic Society and The Contemporary - what our agenda was.

- CR** Thanks – I’ve now got a much better picture. I still find umm...It must have been a tremendous achievement to overcome prejudices in the museum and stage this exhibition.
- GC** Very much so, because, excuse me, we had everyone from the trustees, keep in mind the trustees many of whose families have been responsible for what that collection was.
- CR** This is the interesting aspect for me, coming to Baltimore to actually see what the Historic Society has – what it is.
- GC** And you see my students, 15 years after *Mining*, have also uncovered for this show¹⁹⁰ more stuff for this show you know they only used two objects from *Mining*.
- CR** I only clocked one of them.
- GC** Which one did you catch?
- CR** Er .. laughs - The Naughty Nelly– what was the other one?
- GC** The Naughty Nelly, yes, and there was a chair, a chair - laughs - that you wouldn’t have know.
- CR** The impact and the success of the previous exhibition *Mining the Museum*, How did that unfold? When did you realise that you had really big success on your hands in terms of doing what the exhibition had set out to do. Because it really increased audience numbers didn’t it?
- GC** Well yeah, I think we had 55,000 people to see the show.
- CR** And they extended it?
- GC** Yes you see we had been this nomadic museum where we were lucky to have 2- 3000 coming to see a show and we had 55,000. When the American Associations of Museums’ Conference was here, that’s when things exploded of course because word spread. And the reason the show was extended was because of the field’s demand for it. Because of the field, everyone was calling from all over the country saying, ‘we didn’t come to the conference but we’ve heard about this show’. You know, and it was supposed to be ending like in the next couple of weeks and they said how can we when there was this huge demand, that’s why it was extended because of the field –

¹⁹⁰ An exhibition curated by George Ciscle’s students.

and of course we started seeing it in terms of the press, – what was happening, with the New York Times – Magazines, and people wanting – from the field – to really critique this, in terms of what it meant to the field, umm that's also why it was extended.

CR Right ok... and the museum itself? They realised at that point that they had at that point actually been part of that innovation?

GC Very much so. Because people were like saying –wow how brave – Not just in terms of doing a project with an artist, but the fact that it was this...they (MdHS) were under the microscope in terms of their collecting practices.

CR Exactly.

GC Let alone their interpretive practices. And so people sort of looked at them, as if to say how brave, this is important. This is also why they [MdHS] have been the ones who have 'gotten' the credit because they were the brave ones, we [The Contemporary] weren't the brave ones. From there we went on to do a project in the back of a 1959 pick-up truck, which went into 4 states and 80 communities, dealing with folk traditions in neighbourhoods. So for us it was like, this was just another way of working for, us, that just happened to be in an institution not in an abandoned building or a pick-up truck. But for them, they really were seen as the heroes, rightfully so, for taking this on and not knowing what they were letting themselves in for – because it's not like he's [Wilson's] making an object that we can look at, – a proposal of what he would do. This was all a work in progress – to the last minute for him –constantly changing altering, adding, deleting. So for them it was a big deal uhm... to have, to have that kind of flexibility to work with us. What you need to know (and I don't know if this has come up in the things that you have read), is that once the show was over, we were into other projects but once the show was over, their director was fired. Do you know all this?

CR No, I don't.

GC It's very important to know this institutionally. Because everyone assumed when he was fired...

CR This is Charles Lye?

GC Yes, – he works now in Astor House, up on the Hudson – now everyone assumed it was because of the controversy of the show and all that – that the board had fired him. Quite the contrary, the board got hundreds of thousands of dollars just to do educational activities with projects, I mean money was pouring in to them –unsolicited

money – believe me –laughs. People wanted to be associated with them [MdHS] we [The Contemporary] couldn't raise a dime before the show opened – a dime. Once it opened everyone was all“oh what can we do?”

CR Why was that?

GC So many un-knows people just couldn't see what this might be and how important it could be. It's the same sort of thing when people have a vision whether it's an artist or an institution, you can't see a vision – laughs – it's not very concrete. So if you don't have that faith or experience then you're not going to support that, necessarily. So when the show ended he was fired and the reason he was fired... not because of the controversy.... it was because when the show ended the board wanted to know, what's next?

CR And the only reason it had happened was because of you guys?

GC That's right, and I remember during *Mining*, when it started to become a success, he kept trying to pump us, you know “what should happen next?” And we kept saying – you bring an artist in. Every time he would say this we wouldn't give him answers we would say the answer lies in artists, you bring artists in and they will help you find the answers. And of course he wanted the ‘Contemporary’ to keep on doing projects there [at MdHS] – well that's not what we were about. Plus we weren't going to solve his problems. So he didn't have an answer to them on what was next. That's why.

CR Wow!

GC Even though he had the courage to do it he didn't have a vision.

CR Or see how this would fit in with the long term plan?

GC Exactly.

CR That's really interesting for me. But you do seem to have a long term link with the museum.

GC That's why I'm here working at MICA with these young people because they're the ones who are learning and exploring these ways of doing things. They are the ones who are going to be agents of change in the future not me.

CR recording undecipherable...

GC Keep in mind though the 'Contemporary', the artists we chose – we never did a project with Richard Serra – why not? I choose artists who are open to exploring relationships, not just with historians, art historians and collectors but with the other 98% of the population. So is Richard Serra going to open himself? – can he talk to my father? Can my father have a conversation with him? – So these were the important questions.

Appendix 2

If you haven't already done so walk away from the desk where you picked up this audio guide and out into the great high space of the atrium. Isn't this a wonderful place? It's uplifting. It's like a Gothic cathedral. You can feel your soul rise up with the building around you. This is the heart of the museum and it works like a heart, pumping the visitor around the different galleries. If you look up you can see walkways, elevators, and stairways leading up and around the walls of the atrium between the galleries. These are the arteries. The separate galleries all lie off this central space and to go from one to another, you must come back here.

In the great museums of previous ages, rooms linked from one to another, and you must visit them all, one after another. Sometimes it can feel as if there is no escape. But here there is an escape: this space to which you can return after every gallery to refresh the spirit before the next encounter with the demand of contemporary art. This building recognises that modern art is demanding, complicated, bewildering, and the museum tries to make you feel at home, so you can relax and absorb what you see more easily.

As you look around, you'll see that every surface in this space has curves. Only the floor is straight. These curves are gentle, but in their huge scale powerfully sensual. You'll see people going up to the walls and stroking them. You might feel the desire to do this yourself. These curving surfaces have a direct appeal that has nothing to do with age class or education.

They give the building its warmth, its welcoming feel. And in this way the atrium makes you feel at home and prepares you for the purpose of the building, the art it contains.

Let's take a look at one of the stone clad pillars in this space. If you stand with your back to the entrance, there's one to your right, holding up a large stone box that actually contains a tiny gallery. Go right up to it. The pillar is clad in panels of limestone. Run your hand over them. Squint along the surface. Feel how smooth it is.

Paradoxically these sensual curves have been created by computer technology. Because of the way the surface of the pillar curves, each of these panels is slightly different. No two are quite the same. And this is true for all the curved walls of the building. If these panels had been produced by conventional means, this would still be a building site and the cost of the building would be astronomical. But these panels were cut and shaped by robots working to a computer programme developed for aircraft design. To a computer, the mathematical problems involved in fitting together this vast jigsaw are simple. This process is very new, and it should have a revolutionary effect on the way architects work, because it will allow them to embody more freely the productions of their imaginations, as well as allowing them to build more cheaply and better quality.

Now turn right and look at the glass tower that contains two of the elevators. The glass surface of this tower also has curves, and again the curves are produced by panels fitted together. But they overlap, like the scales of a fish. This is no idle metaphor. The architect who designed this building, Frank Ghery, has always found inspiration in fish. He dates his obsession from the days when he used to go with his grandmother to the market to buy a live carp, which he would then take home and

put in the bath tub until it was time to cook it. Here little Frank would play with the carp and here the magic of its sinuous, scaly form somehow entered his bloodstream.

If you look to your left now, beyond the pillar under the stone box that we looked at a moment ago, you'll see the entrance to a large space. This is the largest gallery in the museum and, believe it or not, it's known as the Fish Gallery, because the long curving shape of this part of the building is derived, once again, from the shape of a fish. Let's go in there now. Press your Pause button until you are in the gallery.

You are standing in a room of 3,200 square metres. It's 150 metres long and between 12 and 25 metres high. Contemporary art is big. In fact, some of it is enormous, and this gallery was designed to accommodate the huge pieces that artists have begun to create.

(Transcript of the Official audio guide, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain)

Appendix 3

DVD *An Elite Experience for Everyone* (2005), three clips.