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INSTITUTION AND INTERVENTION:
ARTISTS’ PROJECTS IN
OBJECT-BASED MUSEUMS

MA MUSEUM CULTURES
DISSERTATION

Danny Birchall
INSTITUTION AND INTERVENTION:
ARTISTS’ PROJECTS IN OBJECT-BASED MUSEUMS

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that while artists’ interventions in museums are increasingly common, understanding of them is still dominated by the idea of the museum as a rigid and generic institution awaiting the enlivening touch of an artist. Against this it posits the idea of museums as both fertile and particular, possessed of institutional and intellectual agendas that shape interventions through collaboration.

It traces the history of interventions from institutional critique to historically and culturally engaged practice, and looks at other influential artistic currents. It examines the work of Mark Dion to observe these influences, and then looks at some UK-based exhibitions since the 1980s to show how interventions have become a collaborative practice whose critical content varies.

A case study of the Freud Museum shows how the museum’s need to attract new visitors and maintain Freud’s relevance have produced work that, despite its critical and ambivalent attitude to both the museum and Freud, has succeeded in serving both goals. A case study of the Science Museum shows how artists’ work has been used in the context of changing institutional priorities around contemporary and historical science, and how art at the Science Museum has also become a catalyst for the participation of audiences.

This dissertation concludes that the Freud Museum and the Science Museum have each developed a distinct body of artists’ work related to their collections and priorities. Collaborative practice in these rich and rewarding environments expresses the voices of the museums as much as the voices of artists.
Introduction: What the museum finds difficult to say

In May 2011, had you been walking along Maresfield Gardens in Hampstead you would have seen an extraordinary sight. One house in a leafy row of interwar suburban villas was bound in ropes: across its front, looping over the roof, and even entwining its chimneys. This daylight embodiment of a dark Freudian dream, a home imprisoned, would perhaps have seemed all the more uncanny when on closer examination the building turned out to be the Freud Museum, final residence of the famous father of psychoanalysis.

In the same month, visiting the mathematics gallery of the Science Museum in South Kensington, you might have come across something equally perplexing. Above a display of slide rules lay a length of multicoloured woven rope. Next to a working model of a differential analyser sat some irregular blue shapes labelled simply 'Hyperbolic Swarf Drawings’ without further explanation. Unlike the ropes enveloping Freud’s house, these objects were unobtrusive, blending in with those around them.

What connects these two strange experiences? They seem not to belong to the museums’ regular mode of display, interrupting the carefully preserved psychoanalytical home and a history of mathematics told through analytical objects. At the same time, they seem to intimately address meanings connected to these museums: the Freudian apparition of a house in bondage, and the curious sculptural echoes of mathematical formulae. Both these interventions into the museum space were commissioned by the museums themselves. Alice Anderson’s Childhood Rituals (2011) involved the entanglement not only of the outside of the Freud Museum, but also its interior with ropes woven from doll’s hair. Conrad Shawcross’ Protomodel (2011) emerged from a residency at the Science Museum exploring the intangible mathematical equations expressed in the physical world: the relationship between the speeds at which different parts of a drill turn, for example, produced the strange blue swarf.

Artists working with museums, in their spaces and with their collections, has become an increasingly common phenomenon. In May 2012 Simon Stephens in Museums Journal described museums as being ‘awash with artists’, listing a slew of projects in which museums large and small had invited contemporary artists to work
with their collections and audiences.¹ These projects are described by Stephens as ‘fresh and innovative’ looks at collections and displays, implying both that existing displays lack something, and that artists possess a particular faculty for working with a museum’s materials in a way that curators and exhibition designers cannot.²

The relationship between museums and the artists invited to work with them is the subject of this dissertation. What began in the late 1960s as an antagonistic critique of the idea of museums by a generation of conceptual artists has become a collaborative practice with deep roots in museums. Mark Dion, an artist who has worked extensively with museums across the world declares that ‘the artist can say things that the museum finds difficult to say’.³ While it’s clear that artists create a kind of work very different from traditional museum displays, Dion’s statement itself leaves something unsaid about what it is that the museum wants to say but can’t.

The literature on artists working with museums is dominated by two major surveys. Kynaston McShine’s The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect is the catalogue of a major exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art in 1999 which covers ‘some of the most notable museum-related art’.⁴ It includes conceptual artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and Hans Haacke and artists strongly identified with institutional critique such as Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser. McShine’s museum is a locus of art rather than social or material history and the art gallery in particular is a source of inspiration and focus for critique. James Putnam’s Art and Artefact: The Museum as Medium looks at artists’ work with a broader selection of cultural and historical museums, and is structured around different modes of work with museums. While Putnam doesn’t seek to identify artists working with museums as a single practice or even a tendency, he explicitly contrasts the museum’s ‘institutional rigidity with the artist's free spirit’.⁵

Deep Storage, the publication accompanying a 1998 exhibition at PS1 in New York, looks at art addressing the museum’s hidden collections rather than displays, art

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³ Mark Dion, ‘My Taxidermy Taxonomy’ (Lecture presented at the The Culture of Preservation, Natural History Museum, 12 May 2011).
that ‘assumes the storeroom’s cladding and demeanor’.

A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale’s *Museums by Artists* anthologises writings about artists emerging from a period dominated by conceptual art: concern with the ideology and history of museums figure large.

Callum Storrie’s *The Delirious Museum* is a personal journey across similar territory, exploring the ways that artists have made use of the idea of the museum.

Writings on the practice known as institutional critique are extensive. Peter Osborne’s survey of conceptual art makes institutional critique, an artistic concern with the institution of art, a distinct mode of conceptual practice. Douglas Crimp’s *On the Museum’s Ruins* sounds a death knell for the modernist idea of the museum through an examination of postmodern appropriation that also embraces the idea of the museum itself. Benjamin Buchloh’s *October* essay ‘From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions’ proposes that conceptual art’s quarrel was not with the museum but with art itself. Alberro and Stimson’s *Institutional Critique* anthology brings the legacy of institutional critique up to date with more recent and politically active artistic currents.

Earlier origins of the critique of the museum itself are identifiable. In ‘The Museum Without Walls’ Andre Malraux reflects on the museum which turns objects into art by removing them from their cultural continuum, while presenting tradition in response to contemporary artistic concerns. In ‘Valéry Proust Museum’, Theodor Adorno likens museums to ‘family sepulchres of works of art’ where living traditions are neutralised. It is this question of the dead and restrictive space of the museum in contrast to the living will of the artist, the distinction between freshness and tradition that both implicitly and explicitly still dominates much of the discussion of artists working in museums.

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Looking for evidence with which to examine these theories and assumptions can be problematic. In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski makes the case for the temporary exhibition as a repressed element of art history: where the individual work of art is discussed, its historical presence in actual exhibitions is often forgotten or neglected.\(^\text{15}\) This applies doubly to site-specific installations in museums, where not only the installed ‘intervention’ is no longer present, but the implicit web of relationships and complex visual interactions which it formed with the objects and environment of the museum are also gone. For this dissertation I have interviewed two curators directly responsible for interventions in their museums in order to understand how interventions have been conceived as well as displayed. I have also used press clippings, photographs, catalogue essays, publicity, artists’ statements and museum archives to try to describe works of art and situations that existed briefly and were witnessed by few. That each of these forms has its own relationship to the museum only adds complication to describing works whose subject is often precisely this kind of relationship.

This dissertation begins by looking at the history of artists intervening in museums, from conceptual art through more complex practices in historical and anthropological museums to the present day plethora of projects, and argues that what began as an idea of critique has become a practice of collaboration. A case study of London’s Freud Museum looks in detail at several artists’ interventions and at the ways in which they have reinforced both the museum’s programme and the legacy of Freud. A second case study, of the Science Museum, investigates the role of art in a museum originally defined by the exclusion of art, and structured by tensions around the history and understanding of science. Finally, the conclusion suggests that while artists adopt certain practices around museums, much of the quality of the work emerges from the complexity and contingency of museums themselves.

By concentrating either on the work of individual artists or on types of work produced in museums, much of what has been written on the subject of artists’ interventions assumes a generic ‘museum’ as the counterpart to individual and dynamic works of art. While the rhetoric of ‘institutional rigidity’ and deadness implies that the museum possesses little dynamism of its own, the idea that the museum also has something that it ‘finds difficult to say’ suggests that unfulfilled

desires lie beneath the surface. By examining the historical evolution of artists’
practice in museums, and through case studies of two very different museums I hope
to show instead that individual museums have particular characteristics which
distinctively inform and shape the work that appears as interventions; that they are
rich and fertile spaces from which artists draw much of the inspiration for their work;
and that their overt desire to communicate new meanings for their collections causes
them to actively seek out artists to collaborate with on deep and complex projects.
From critique to collaboration: Artists working with museums

The roots of artists’ work with museums lie in a trenchant and totalising critique of the role of the museum itself. To understand how avant-garde theories questioning the nature of art inspired practices rooted in the organisational and curatorial operation of museums, we need to trace the history of those ideas, related traditions and influences, and their emergence into new kinds of artworks and processes. By looking at some recent examples of artists’ work with museums, we can then discern whether the critique of museums survives in an artistic practice based on close and deep collaboration with museums themselves.

Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917) opened a consciously critical dialogue between artist and museum. A mass-produced porcelain urinal, distinguished only by the signature ‘R. Mutt’, it was rejected for display by the Society of Independent Artists and became the locus for the twentieth century’s ongoing argument about the authority to define art. Traditionally it had been the museum’s privilege; Duchamp asserted the right of the artist. Vindicating Duchamp, replicas of *Fountain* now reside in the collections of the world’s leading art galleries. While Duchamp’s own work continued to explore the idea of the museum, his playful battle with artistic institutions themselves was not taken up again in earnest until Joseph Kosuth’s conceptual art manifesto of 1969, ‘Art After Philosophy’. ‘All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature),’ declared Kosuth, ‘because art only exists conceptually.’

Conceptual art’s negation of modernism’s insistency on the autonomy of art gave rise to practices that emphasised art’s social construction, coupled with assaults on its material and visual status. A type of practice retrospectively labelled ‘institutional critique’ drew attention to museums’ status as places where art is preserved and defined, and to their responsibility as public institutions. Daniel Buren’s striped paintings on Paris billboards rejected the museum as the only possible location for art; inside the museum they confronted its sculptural and spatial

18 Osborne, p. 18.
19 Alberro and Stimson, p. 4.
qualities.\textsuperscript{20} Hans Haacke’s work exposed the web of political and financial relationships between museums and their staff and sponsors.\textsuperscript{21} Marcel Broodthaers created parodies of the museum in a series of displays of objects connected only by their representation of eagles (Figure 2.1).\textsuperscript{22}

Duchamp’s legacy was no guarantee of the artist’s ascendancy over the museum: several conceptual artists came out the worse from their confrontations with galleries. Buren’s \textit{Visible Verso Recto Painting} (1971), designed to compete visually with the architectural space of New York’s Guggenheim Museum was removed from its International Exhibition at the behest of fellow exhibitors.\textsuperscript{23} In the same year, Haacke’s solo show at the Guggenheim was cancelled for the inclusion of a work that detailed the shady economic dealings of a real-estate company with art world connections, and Robert Morris’s exhibition of sculptures inviting the audience’s physical participation was closed after five days by the Tate.\textsuperscript{24} Other artists, like Michael Asher, developed a practice of making subtle modifications to museum environments that were more easily accepted by artistic institutions.\textsuperscript{25}

Institutional critique’s legacy is precarious. Benjamin Buchloh argues that conceptual art ultimately only created an ‘aesthetic of administration’ recuperating the utopian impulses of early twentieth century avant-gardism for a conformist postwar world.\textsuperscript{26} A critique that was not of the literal institution of the museum, but of the social and cultural institution of visual art, could not escape institutionalisation. Andrea Fraser expresses a nostalgia for a moment of possibility, acknowledging the simplistic opposition of the critical artist to the oppressive museum while defending the achievements of Haacke and Buren in making institutional power visible.\textsuperscript{27} Peter Osborne also suggests that the appropriation of institutional critique is inevitable ‘in all but its most radical forms’.\textsuperscript{28} While Haacke, Buren and Morris established their critical credentials through conflict with institutions, work like Asher’s that satisfied

\textsuperscript{20} Putnam, pp. 26–7.
\textsuperscript{22} Osborne, p. 168.
\textsuperscript{23} Osborne, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{24} Osborne, p. 154, 174.
\textsuperscript{25} Putnam, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{26} Buchloh, 105–143 (p. 119).
\textsuperscript{27} Andrea Fraser, ‘From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique’, \textit{Artforum}, 44 (2005), 278–85.
\textsuperscript{28} Osborne, p. 44.
itself with an internal exploration of the ideology and history of the museum has become a ‘staple of mainstream art institutions’.  

If institutional critique took a theoretical drubbing, its practice survived with a shift away from art galleries towards institutions with cultural and historical collections. Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland Historical Society broke new ground with a provocative presentation of historical objects. *Metalwork, 1723-1880* (1992) arranged decorative silverwork around a pair of slave shackles, calling attention to Maryland’s historical economic dependence on slavery (Figure 2.2); a mounted slave ship carried a similar message. *Mining the Museum* is notable not only for the impact it had on the art world and Wilson’s career but the fact that despite exposing the ‘latent racism and cultural bias’ of the Maryland Historical Society it involved both close collaboration with the society and an adoption of museum display methods. Wilson, formerly a museum educator, worked in the museum as a curator would: researching, presenting and displaying objects, while his installations retain the status of an artistic work.

Artists’ work with museums has also developed in other contexts than that of institutional critique. The blurring of the distinction between artist and curator is far from unique to Wilson, and the rise of the curator as an auteur is reflected in the career of Harald Szeemann, whose *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) and *documenta V* (1972) demonstrated his own personal and intellectual enthusiasms. Elsewhere, artists have dispensed with professional curators and gallery spaces altogether: the 1988 *Freeze* exhibition which launched the Young British Artists as a movement, was curated by Damien Hirst in a disused Docklands building.

The idea of a ‘residency’ as a way of introducing artists into organisations outside the art world was pioneered by the Artists’ Placement Group in the late 1960s, who placed artists in British industry. While residencies offer opportunities for artists to leave the studio, art has also been increasingly recognised as a kind of investigation. In the UK, the 1992 amalgamation of universities and polytechnics gave

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29 Osborne, p. 45.
new academic status to vocational art and design departments with consequent access to research funding.\textsuperscript{35} Artistic practice is increasingly recognised as a form of research with academic rigour.\textsuperscript{36}

A fascination with the museum has found a parallel in a fascination with archives and what Hal Foster calls an ‘archival impulse’ in recent art.\textsuperscript{37} Where the museum’s rhetoric of power is literally on display, the hidden power of archives to determine and reveal history has also attracted artists. For some this has meant creating new archives of overlooked or neglected culture, such as Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane’s \textit{Folk Archive} (2005) project.\textsuperscript{38} Okwui Enwezor’s 2008 \textit{Archive Fever} exhibition took the archival status of photography as the starting point for interrogating the ‘self-evidentiary claims’ of the archive.\textsuperscript{39} Others have found inspiration in archaeology: a group of artists including Christian Boltanski staged a 1974 exhibition in Hamburg entitled \textit{Spurensicherung} (‘Forensics’) critiquing and parodying archaeological investigation of the past.\textsuperscript{40}

Other artists have looked to museums’ history and in particular the cabinet of curiosities or \textit{wunderkammer}. Cabinets of curiosities of the sixteenth century were the first universal collections, suggesting spiritual and intellectual associations to their viewers rather than the historical or categorical narratives that we associate with the grand museums of the Enlightenment which replaced them.\textsuperscript{41} The revival of interest in the \textit{wunderkammer} coincides with the emergent museological criticism in the 1990s of writers like Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who sought to rehabilitate and understand the historical systems of knowledge underpinning the ‘irrational’ cabinet.\textsuperscript{42} Stephen Bann describes this ‘historical ricorso to curiosity’ as an institutional rejection of the


\textsuperscript{38} ‘Folk Archive’, \textit{British Council} \textless http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-aad-folk-archive.htm\textgreater [accessed 30 August 2012].


\textsuperscript{40} Cornelius Holtorf, \textit{From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology as Popular Culture} (Lanham, MD: AltaMira, 2005), p. 68.

\textsuperscript{41} E. Bruce Robertson, ‘Curiosity Cabinets, Museums, and Universities’, in \textit{Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation}, ed. by Colleen Sheehy (University of Minnesota Press, 2006), pp. 43–53 (p. 49).

\textsuperscript{42} Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, \textit{Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge} (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 79.
historicist conventions which still dominate contemporary museum experiences. He suggests that a fascination with ‘curiosity’ indicates both a faltering of the authority of the museum and an interest in the rejuvenation of its purpose for audiences.

The *wunderkammer* privileges visual association and personal discovery over academic knowledge and taxonomic order; it foregrounds artistic authorship in the presence of institutional authority. The influence of a revived interest in the *wunderkammer* has been considerable. The British Museum's Enlightenment Gallery, reopened in 2003, references early traditions of collecting and includes ‘curiosity’ objects such as a half-fish/half-monkey ‘merman’ (Figure 2.3). MoMA’s *Wunderkammer* (2008) exhibition applied the logic of curiosity to the work of contemporary and outsider artists who all ‘felt the pull of unusual and extraordinary objects and phenomena’.

These emerging trends in art, rather than supplanting institutional critique as a framework for artists engaging with museums, have offered alternative approaches, not all of which are based on a binary opposition between the static museum and the innovative artist. Many of them, from the artist-as-curator to the use of the *wunderkammer*, can be seen in the work of Mark Dion. While a formal and intellectual critique of museums remains central to Dion’s multidisciplinary work, a key recurring component of his practice is collaborations with institutions, and museums in particular.

Exploring archaeology in a series of works during the 1990s, Dion presented it not just as a system of knowledge and classification but also a process. *Thames Dig* (1999) involved a team of curators and local volunteers digging on the Thames’ foreshore to retrieve artefacts which were then sorted, cleaned and displayed. Objects were eventually put on display in a ‘Wunderkammer’, but *Thames Dig* as a work consisted of method as much as artefact, excavating the discipline, and muddying

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institutional boundaries by engaging in a performance of archaeology for an art
museum. 46

Between 1997 and 2002, Dion created a series of cabinets of curiosities in
collaboration with university museums, building on his own growing fascination with
Renaissance modes of display. 47 In its most elaborate instance, Cabinet of Curiosities
(2001) at Weisman Art Museum, the project involved over fifty separate academic
object collections and nine cabinets organised in Renaissance classifications of the
human and natural world (Figure 2.4). 48 While the final formal arrangement of the
work may have ‘dislodged a sense of certainty’ about the objects, process was as
important to Cabinet of Curiosities as it was to Thames Dig. 49 Dion took

Dion’s Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy (2005) at
Manchester Museum presented a mysterious curator’s office containing an
arrangement of objects and furniture assembled from the museum’s stores. 50 Dion
suggests a personal affinity with the ‘restrained’ surrealism of Man Ray and Buñuel
rather than Dali’s exuberance. 51 He also identifies with the tradition of institutional
critique; he maintains that museums’ internalisation of critique is what makes fruitful
collaborations like his possible. 52 Marion Endt argues that by moving the site of his
practice from the fine art museum to natural history and university museums Dion has
gone further than the tradition from which he emerged. Bureau of the Centre in
particular uses the devices of both surrealism and the wunderkammer to undermine
the ‘binary logic’ of institution and critique. 53

Dion exemplifies a number of important trends in work with museums. Research
and collaboration both play important roles, the more so when working with
collections of objects. As Dion turns the act of investigation into a performance, his

46 Robert Williams, ‘Disjecta Reliquiae: The Tate Thames Dig’, in Archaeology: Mark Dion, ed. by
50 Mark Dion, Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and Its Legacy (London: Book Works,
2005).
51 Mark Dion and others, ‘Mark Dion in Conversation’, Papers of Surrealism, 4 (2005), p. 7
[accessed 11 June 2012].
52 Dion and others, p. 10.
53 M. Endt, ‘Beyond Institutional Critique: Mark Dion’s Surrealist Wunderkammer at the Manchester
displays, with their visual and associational logic confound the principles of order, allowing the discarded and repressed to slip through. His frequent return to the model of the wunderkammer is neither as nostalgia nor re-enactment; he chooses museum spaces, but rejects established rhetorics and methods of display.54

In the UK, one of the first major collaborations between an artist and a historical museum was Eduardo Paolozzi’s Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons from Nahuatl (1985) at the Museum of Mankind, where Paolozzi worked for three years with the British Museum’s ethnographic collections.55 Lost Magic Kingdoms offered a new and surprising perspective on ethnographic display. Drawing on his own techniques of bricolage and montage, Paolozzi brought together elements from disparate sources, creating new visual effects through their combination. The catalogue for the exhibition includes juxtapositions of museum artifacts with Paolozzi’s own work (Figure 2.5), showing his interest not only in reconfiguring the museum’s displays but also in demonstrating the direct relationship between his own practice and that of non-Western peoples.56

The problem of ethnographic museums – that objects are only described and displayed through their removal from living practice, often through colonial expropriation – was resolved by Paolozzi creating ‘new patterns of meaning’ according to Museum of Mankind curator Malcolm McLeod.57 Rather than offering a confrontational or political critique of the museum’s anthropological practice, however, Paolozzi responded to the material qualities of the objects themselves.58 This unsettling of the Museum of Mankind’s curatorial practices nevertheless provided an indication of how artists could work both profitably and provocatively with difficult material in collaboration with museum staff.

The practice of artists working with museums proliferated in the UK during the 1990s, particularly in historical and cultural museums. Significant programmes of artists’ projects have taken place at the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford, at Sir John

54 Horrigan, pp. 30–42 (p. 38).
58 Susan M Pearce, ‘Museums of Anthropology or Museums as Anthropology?’, Anthropologica, 41 (1999), 25–33 (p. 30).
Soane’s Museum in London, and at the British Museum.⁵⁹ Though there has been a growing tendency towards prolonged and research-based collaboration, this has not necessarily blunted elements of critique. Three recent exhibitions in the UK illustrate the ongoing and evolving practice of museum interventions.

In 2011-12, the Arnofini Gallery in Bristol celebrated its 50th anniversary with the major two-part *Museum Show*, a broad survey of art’s use of the museum as a concept.⁶⁰ On display were a selection of ‘museums’ created by artists: some historical, such as Duchamp’s *Boîte-en-Valise* (c.1943), and some in the form of projects created especially for Museum Show, such as Marko Lulic’s *Museum of Revolution* (2011). Artists’ collections of other artists’ work included Peter Blake’s *Museum for Myself* (1982). Conceptual art and institutional critique were represented by a wing of Marcel Broodthaers’ *Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles* (1968). Museums created by artists included Tsuyoshi Ozawa’s *Nasubi Gallery* (1993) a wooden milk crate parodying the white cube. Bill Burns’ *Museum of Safety Gear for Small Animals* (1994-) was one of several works using the idea of a museum as a vehicle for a political or artistic statement. *Museum Show* sought to be nothing if not comprehensive in its approach to displaying contemporary artists’ ideas of the museum, where the tradition of critique remained strong. But its premise began with the artist rather than the museum. One could be forgiven for absorbing the impression that museums were a figment of artists’ imagination, rather than existing institutions with their own collections, audiences and ideologies.

Also in 2011, the British Museum was once more working with an artist to address the issue of the ‘lost’ makers of what had become museum objects. Grayson Perry’s *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* opened in October 2011, displaying Perry’s work alongside objects from the British Museum’s collections, around a centerpiece of a funerary vessel adorned with ethnographic objects, rehabilitated as a tomb to their unknown makers (Figure 2.6). Perry recognises *Lost Magic Kingdoms* as a ‘direct forebear’ of his work (like Paolozzi, Perry’s project involved a long period of

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research) but reversed the terms of the relationship between the artist and museum.\textsuperscript{61} Rather than responding to the British Museum’s collections, Perry chose to develop his own works, exploring his existing interests in personal systems of mythology, and find objects from the collections that related to them.\textsuperscript{62}

\textit{Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman} displayed a significant amount of Perry’s work (30 artworks to 170 museum objects) and embodied some of Perry’s ambivalence about the artworld. He chose the British Museum for an exhibition that ‘looked and felt like a historical or ethnographic show’ capable of displaying Perry himself as a representative of the culture of contemporary art.\textsuperscript{63} Critics contrasted the flamboyant, cross-dressing Perry with the British Museum’s ‘sedate image’ and construed \textit{Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman} as part of an effort to reassert the ‘relevance’ of British Museum collections.\textsuperscript{64}

Two years previously, Bristol Museum opened its doors on a surprise exhibition: \textit{Bansky vs Bristol Museum} (2009). Bristol-born street artist Banksy, notorious for his subversive graffiti, was invited to make an intervention throughout the entire space of the museum. The exhibition featured as its centerpiece a burnt out and vandalised ice-cream van serving as an information point, alongside a model of a riot policeman on a child’s funfair ride (Figure 2.7). Detourned oil paintings were hung alongside the existing art collection, and Banksy’s trademark anthropomorphised rats were inserted into natural history displays. The exhibition was rapturously received, both as art and also as a success for the museum and the local economy.\textsuperscript{65} Despite coming from a very different artistic tradition to conceptual artists, many of Banksy’s interventions humorously called attention to the same institutional factors, like the role of authority and commercialisation, that were targeted by conceptual artists.

If \textit{Museum Show} presented artists’ most concerted critique of the idea of the museum, it was in the absence of museums themselves: the exhibition played with

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{62}] Perry, \textit{The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman}, p. 11.
\item[\textsuperscript{63}] Grayson Perry, ‘My Night and Days at the British Museum’, \textit{The Observer}, 18 September 2011, section Review, p. 8; Perry, \textit{The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman}, p. 14.
\end{itemize}}
archetypes within the neutral white space of a contemporary art gallery. *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*, by contrast, involved serious and deep collaboration, but lacked any sustained critique of the British Museum. *Banksy vs Bristol Museum* managed to unite both critique and collaboration: the museum in many ways mocked its own structure and practices to the delight of press and public while receiving credit for having the bravery to do so.

It is in museums of history and culture rather than art museums that collaborations with artists have flourished. Wilson’s concern with America’s racial history, Dion’s fascination with archaeology and taxonomy, and Banksy’s tilt at Bristol’s civic pride all require very particular institutional contexts and collections with which to work. As collaborations have evolved, the relationship between museums and artists has become as much about process as about the production of art. While collaboration does not necessarily defer critique, neither does extensive research guarantee critical art. By looking at two London museums very different in scale, orientation and institutional history, the Freud Museum and the Science Museum, we can see the ways in which specific institutional needs and intellectual concerns have informed these museums’ increasing use of contemporary art and collaboration with artists.
Freudian Spaces: 20 Maresfield Gardens

During the 26 years in which the Freud Museum has been open, it has exhibited a significant programme of exhibitions and interventions by world-class contemporary artists whose fascination with Freud’s home and legacy seems inexhaustible. The museum’s peculiar combination of personal and cultural history make it not only a unique historical site but also a productive space for artists’ work. While the museum lacks an extensive collection, it possesses a rich and resonant domestic environment on which interventions have focused. Interventions at the Freud Museum have always been in practice collaborative, responding to the challenges of a small, privately-funded museum whose priorities are attracting new audiences and preserving the contemporary legacy of the founder of psychoanalysis. A wide variety of work in a number of different modes, critical of both the museum and Freud to a greater or lesser degree, has addressed these challenges.

The Freud family moved to 20 Maresfield Gardens in 1938, fleeing the Nazi annexation of Austria and bringing with them the contents of their apartment in Vienna, including the famous couch on which patients were analysed. Sigmund Freud’s study and collections were re-established in Hampstead, and he worked there until his death the following year. His daughter Anna Freud continued to live and work in the house but preserved her father’s study as it was when he died. After her death in 1982, the house became a museum which opened in 1986 as an independent privately-financed charity.66

The house and its collections are curated not only as evidence of the life of Freud and his family, but also as an explication of Freudian theories of human psychology, aiming to ‘present Sigmund Freud and his worlds indirectly through his house and possessions’.67 Interpretive labels are interspersed with excerpts from Freud’s works, particularly The Interpretation of Dreams. Joanne Morra thinks of the Freud museum as ‘a museum, as well as a memorial and a mausoleum’.68 Though the museum is not literally home to the remains of Freud, she is perhaps referring to what

67 Erica Davies, p. 4.
Marina Warner describes as the ‘act of enshrinement’ that Anna carried out in preserving her father’s study. For Freud himself, the house held metaphorical significance: his dictum that ‘the ego is not master in its own house’ casts the building as the mind’s archetype. Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever*, originally presented at the Freud Museum, makes 20 Maresfield Gardens the symbol of the structuring ‘law’ of the archive.

Loaded with history and significance of a peculiarly Freudian kind, the Freud Museum is nevertheless far from immune to the problems that affect many small museums. In a 2010 television documentary, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, Richard Macer presented the Freud Museum as one of three ‘struggling museums’ attempting to make themselves popular and relevant. Looking at its displays, interpretation and events programme, he concluded that the museum was ‘aimed at Freudian academics, not the general public’. Perhaps even scholars might need tempting: while Freud’s ideas remain influential in the humanities as well as in popular ideas of the ego and ‘subconscious’, his work carries little weight in contemporary psychiatry, and his theory of the human psyche is frequently contested.

Though they have served to attract audiences and maintain the relevance of Freud, artists’ projects at the Freud Museum did not begin as a direct initiative of the museum itself. A small exhibition room was part of the museum’s original layout and used for temporary exhibitions related to Freud’s work and collections. The first significant use of the space by an artist was in 1994, with Susan Hiller’s contribution to a large multi-site project by publisher Bookworks, *The Reading Room* which paired artists and locations on the theme of reading. Hiller was introduced to the museum by Bookworks’ Joanna Rollo and developed a work dealing with collection and

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classification, *At the Freud Museum*. Following its critical success and an increase in visitor numbers (Figure 3.1) the Freud Museum embarked on its own programme of working with artists directly, under director Erica Davies. Paul Coldwell’s *Freud’s Coat* opened in November 1996 including two new site-specific sculptures inspired by Freud’s exile in London.

The independent curator James Putnam was crucial in bringing contemporary artists to the Freud Museum. During the 1990s Putnam worked at the British Museum, organising a series of groundbreaking exhibitions including *Time Machine* (1994-5) which juxtaposed the work of artists including Marc Quinn and Andy Goldsworthy with ancient Egyptian artefacts. Putnam’s first intervention at the Freud Museum took advantage of an exhibition of Sophie Calle’s work at the nearby Camden Arts Centre to stage Calle’s fantasy-biographical work *Appointment* (1999), which introduced objects from Calle’s personal narrative into the museum’s display and saw a record number of visitors.

In the sixteen years between 1996 and 2012, the Freud Museum hosted 71 exhibitions. Of these, eight exhibited material from the Freud Museum’s own collection, 13 were group shows, and 50 were solo shows. Well-known artists exhibited during this period include Louise Bourgeois, Maggi Hambling, Sophie Calle and Valie Export. Sixteen of the exhibitions involved an intervention in the space of the museum beyond the gallery, and seven were curated by James Putnam. With an average of over four exhibitions a year, the Freud Museum could be considered to be doing well by the standards of a small contemporary art gallery, never mind a museum for which temporary exhibitions are only an adjunct to a permanent collection and display.

Artists’ projects have been a cost-effective way of bringing new and different audiences both to the museum and to the ideas of Freud. Attracting external sponsorship and lacking the conservation overheads of object-based displays, they

76 Interview with Erica Davies
have also opened channels to potential financial support for the museum through art world connections.\textsuperscript{82} However, they were not universally popular with the museum’s governors. In 2003 Davies was dismissed as director by a board chairman citing the prevalence of art exhibitions and the need for a ‘change of direction’ back towards Freud himself.\textsuperscript{83} In the following years the museum did organise more exhibitions related to Freud’s work and life, but contemporary artists’ projects also continued, with work by Valie Export, Penny Siopis, and Ellen Gallagher appearing.\textsuperscript{84}

The variety of approaches that artists have taken to the museum and to Freud is vast.\textsuperscript{85} Looking at a few representative examples in some detail may provide an illustration of the different ways in which they respond to the house, to Freud’s collection and to Freudian themes. From there we can draw out some of the ways in which the museum works as a space for artists, how artists respond to the particular characteristics of the building and Freudian thought, and how they then present the relationships between museum, history and theory to visitors.

Susan Hiller’s work \textit{From the Freud Museum} (1991-6) is a series of archaeologists’ cardboard boxes containing objects and texts with personal significance for Hiller, parodying the historical specifics and psychoanalytic generalities of Freud’s own collection of objects. Hiller’s multi-disciplinary work touches on many aspects of popular culture and participation: she trained as an anthropologist in the 1960s, but rejected the discipline’s claims to scientific objectivity and began an art practice which frequently returns to address issues of authority and ordering.\textsuperscript{86} Her original installation, \textit{At The Freud Museum} (1994) consisted of 23 boxes displayed in Freud’s former bedroom. An accompanying publication, \textit{After the Freud Museum}, was produced in 1995. Hiller developed the work to include 50 boxes overall, and it was purchased by the Tate as \textit{From the Freud

\textsuperscript{82} Interview with Erica Davies.
\textsuperscript{84} ‘Exhibition Archive’.
Museum in 1998 (Figure 3.2). It was shown in The Museum as Muse in 1999 and then re-exhibited at the Freud Museum in 1999-2000.

Hiller’s arrangement of boxes is neither didactic nor educational; the objects collected and arranged have no value other than their perplexity or curiosity and the associations Hiller assigns to them are not explicit; the viewer’s own understanding and associative powers are called into play to make sense of the arrangement. From the Freud Museum explicitly addresses the practice of collecting, and Freud’s collection of antiquities and artefacts in particular. Hiller sees Freud’s collection as an archive of his own view of civilisation; her own work, by contrast ‘complicate[s] any such notion of heritage’. She suggests that her work also attempts to ‘break up the notion of the museum’; a concept that she extends to an imprisoning and restrictive epistemology: ‘we are all living in the Freud Museum and we can’t get out’. Despite her politicised refusal of the constraints of both collection and curation, the popular success of From the Freud Museum and its iterations has led to a lasting association between Hiller and the museum.

Stuart Brisley’s work for the Freud Museum, The Collection of Ordure (2002-3) addresses Freud and the nature of collections in the context of waste and detritus. Brisley’s career as a performance artist has often involved filth, abjection and bodily fluids. The Collection of Ordure incorporated glass display cases containing faeces and other waste products (Figure 3.3), as well as new objects placed in Freud’s study: Louise Bourgeois’ Leg (2002) laid on an ironing board, and Stakhanov’s Finger (2002) placed on a shelf among Freud’s ornamental antiquities. The curation of the Collection was attributed by Brisley to Rosse Yael Sirb, whose adventures in curating the collection for a mysterious Collector were chronicled in an accompanying Bookworks publication by Brisley, Beyond Reason: Ordure.
Brisley’s work clearly addresses some core Freudian concerns: *The Collection of Ordure* realises Freud’s ‘museum of excrement’ from *The Interpretation of Dreams*; it is also germane to Freud’s psychoanalytical practice of sifting through the detritus of the psyche for evidence of trauma. At the same time Brisley challenges the idea of the values inherent in collections. *Beyond Reason: Ordure* ends in failure, with Sirb dismissed by the Collector and rejecting the practice of collecting. In Michael Newman’s assertion that ordure only becomes art in the process of ‘the enactment of the collection as a kind of performance’ there is also a dark echo of Dion’s curatorial performances.

Both Hiller and Brisley’s works are an emphatic rejection of the narratives that connect and contextualise objects in the museum space. Hiller’s imaginary museum refuses to impose a narrative, leaving it to the viewer to construct their own connections. Brisley’s collection is enveloped in a multi-layered fictional narrative that fails to make sense of the waste material at its core. Both also rely on the status of their work as art to separate it from the curatorial practices of the museum. Hiller denies that *From the Freud Museum* is any kind of investigative anthropology, and Sirb’s faith in *The Collection of Ordure*’s artistic status problematises his role as curator. The juxtaposition of their work with Freud’s own collection stands as justification for their engagement with the systems of understanding that structure it. Just as Derrida makes Freud’s house a model for the structuring law of the archive, so Hiller and Brisley use Freud’s house as a vehicle for work that criticises and decentres the structuring function of the museum.

Sarah Lucas’s 2000 installation *The Pleasure Principle* very visibly erupted into a visual dialogue with the living spaces of the former Freud household, using furniture. In the dining room, *The Pleasure Principle* (2000) connected two chairs with female underwear (Figure 3.4), and in Freud’s study *Hysterical Attack (Mouths)* (1999) attached Lucas’ familiar motif of stuffed stockings to a small stool. The

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exhibition’s central piece, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2000) consisted of a red futon mattress pierced by a fluorescent tube hung from a clothes rail over a white cardboard coffin.\(^9\) The work directly referenced Freud’s 1920 essay of the same title, which controversially appended a death wish to the existing structuring function of sexual desire.\(^100\)

The feminisation of furniture is a repetitive theme in Lucas’ work: attaching underwear to Freud’s furniture also raises questions of the suppression of the female in psychoanalysis. *The Pleasure Principle* brought the strangeness of the Freudian imagination into the Freud house, rudely disrupting the genteel space of 20 Maresfield Gardens with its assemblage of ‘naff’ furniture.\(^101\) The pairing of sex and death provoked art critic Adrian Searle to reiterate Adorno’s sepulchral model of the museum, seeing Lucas’ work as ‘running amok in this dead Viennese household’.\(^102\) For Lucas herself, Freud invoked context more than critique. She sees the Freud Museum as a necessary framework, enabling the audience to ‘see some of the broader aspects of my own work’ and Freudian theory of the unconscious as ‘totally relevant to me’.\(^103\) While Lucas’ work interacts with the house, it doesn’t address the Freud Museum directly so much as gain a dimension of meaning from it.

Like Lucas, Tim Noble and Sue Webster’s 2006 exhibition for the Freud Museum, *Polymorphous Perverse* took its title from an element of the Freudian universe – the state of unfocused libidinality in infants – and made use of the museum’s domestic spaces.\(^104\) *Serving Suggestion* (2004) placed a tin of baked beans and a phallic pop-up frankfurter beneath an image of Moses. In Freud’s study, *Black Narcissus* (2006), was an array of resin casts of Noble’s penis and Webster’s finger which lit from below cast a two-sided silhouette of the artists’ faces onto the wall. The exhibition’s major work, *Scarlett* (2006) was installed in Anna Freud’s study, an extensive kinetic sculpture involving the fragmented bodies of mechanised dolls

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engaged in squelching repetitive movements amid a field of plastic detritus (Figure 3.5).  

In the accompanying catalogue Linda Nochlin suggests that Scarlett is itself a polymorphously perverse construction, not only in its iconography but in its very assemblage and motion. Psychoanalyst Darian Leader suggests its reminders of the darker, violent side of the Freudian psyche justify the work a permanent place in the museum. But Noble and Webster’s ties to Freud seem less certain. James Putnam recalls that visiting Noble and Webster’s studio he saw a work in progress that would become Scarlett and recognised the possibility of an association with the Freud Museum: the work grew and adapted to respond to Freudian concerns at Putnam’s suggestion. Putnam himself thinks it ‘questionable how much the artists were knowledgeable about, and influenced by, Freud’.  

Indeed both Lucas’ and Noble and Webster’s work is more intimate with Freud’s home than it is with his theories. While Hiller and Brisley demonstrate a commitment to the politics and perspective informing their work, Lucas and Noble and Webster wear their theoretical garments more lightly. In *High Art Lite*, Julian Stallabrass suggests that the Young British Artists and their successors (a group that includes Lucas, Noble and Webster) have an ambivalent relationship to the critical and cultural theory that influenced a previous generation of artists’ work. While concern for theory offers a guarantee of high art’s status above popular culture, it also signals a redundant academic orientation that the artists were keen to ditch for a more direct engagement with public audiences and the mass media. The stark genitality of both *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Scarlett* offers an immediate means of access to the works that doesn’t depend on a particularly deep or detailed Freudian understanding. When Stallabrass says that in Lucas’ work, “‘responsibility” for reading is placed entirely on the viewer,’ it is in a different mode to Hiller’s making

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the viewer responsible for the meaning of the objects in her work: an abdication rather than a provocation.\textsuperscript{110}

Alice Anderson’s \textit{Childhood Rituals} (2011) engaged with both the physical fabric of the museum, and with some of the knottier issues in the work of both Sigmund and Anna Freud. Anderson is a hotly-tipped London-based contemporary artist whose works since 2000 have involved performance and film and latterly sculpture and site-specific installations.\textsuperscript{111} Anderson’s work often includes small replica dolls of herself, and large quantities of artificial doll’s hair in a shade that matches her own. She studied with \textit{Spurensicherung} artist Christian Boltanski and her work has been compared to that of Annette Messager and Louise Bourgeois for its use of semi-fictional autobiographical mythology.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{Childhood Rituals} consisted of a number of interventions into the spaces of the Freud Museum. \textit{Housebound} (2011) used thick ropes of woven doll’s hair to bind the building from roof to ground (Figure 3.6). In Freud’s study, a single strand formed \textit{Web} (2011), dividing the half of the room containing Freud’s couch from the half containing his desk. The centrepiece of the intervention \textit{Confinement Room} (2011) came in two parts: in Anna Freud’s room, a miniature Anderson doll sat at Anna Freud’s loom, creating a grid pattern from hair. In the exhibition room, an identical doll sat imprisoned inside a wooden cage made from woven hair, while rectangular wooden grids of wood and hair lined the walls.\textsuperscript{113}

Anderson’s work, at the Freud Museum and elsewhere, has been read as having Freudian overtones, particularly as a ‘contemporary uncanny’.\textsuperscript{114} Engagement with the ideas of Freud, however, does not signal the acceptance of Freudian paradigms: \textit{Confinement Room}, as well as referring to Anna Freud’s domain of child psychology addresses Freud’s assertion that female crafts such as weaving were compensation for the ‘genital deficiency’ of women, an idea Anderson finds risible.\textsuperscript{115} Her work also deals in memory and recollection, the meat of Freudian analysis, but resists any kind

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\textsuperscript{110} Stallabrass, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{112} Alice Jones, ‘Tressed for Success’, \textit{The Independent}, 5 April 2011.
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of interpretation that reveals a simple meaning.\textsuperscript{116} It is Anderson’s intention to both ‘celebrate and subvert’ Freudian theory, bringing its powerful and recognisable associations to the surface in her work at the same time as undermining and questioning them in the context of her own personal mythology.\textsuperscript{117}

Anderson’s engagement with Freud’s home was also subtle and multifaceted: the process of installation demonstrated that the obsessive qualities of Anderson’s work extended to her interaction with the building, reworking and reinstalling her work.\textsuperscript{118} The choice of Anna Freud’s loom as the centerpiece of \textit{Childhood Rituals} also shows a recognition of the importance of Freud’s couch in many previous artists’ projects, and a need to find an alternative.\textsuperscript{119} Anderson’s intervention has become not just an intervention in the Freud Museum, but also an intervention in the history of interventions there.

The depth possible in Anderson’s work demonstrates that far from being a dead space awaiting the enlivening breath of contemporary art, the Freud Museum is an extraordinarily fecund site for artistic exploration. Though Anderson’s work on the outside of the building and preference for the loom over the couch illustrates a subtle evolution, we can also understand the interventions examined above as belonging to three modes: opposition, appropriation and ambivalence. In the tradition of institutional critique, Hiller and Brisley use the Freud Museum as an opportunity to address the idea of the museum and collections. Sarah Lucas and Noble and Webster have little interest in the politics of museums as such, but appropriate a Freudian ambience for their work. Alice Anderson’s ambivalence towards both Freud’s theories and home creates work that can’t be resolved as either rejection or appropriation of Freud. Her playful adoption of Freudian themes, overlaid with a fictive personal history that defies the diagnostic tools of psychoanalysis, creates one of the most powerful works in the history of artists’ interventions at the Freud Museum.

For the Freud Museum, its work with artists is driven by a need to attract new and more diverse audiences and critical attention as much as by exploring the artistic

\textsuperscript{118} Walker, pp. 57–60.
possibilities of the museum. Artists’ projects offer a cost-effective alternative to object-based displays, and have reciprocal benefits for artists, who gain physical and theoretical context for their work as well as inspiration from the house. The distinctiveness of artists’ work at the Freud Museum is that it carries the flavour of Freud’s environment as well as entering into dialogue with his work.

The ultimate territory of artists’ work at the Freud Museum is not Freud’s life or possessions but his ideas. Artists’ interventions here form a body of work that, despite its various and critical perspectives on Freud’s work, serves to reassert the relevance of that work through continual reconsideration and examination. Where the preserved study as mausoleum speaks of a man long dead, the work of artists in the same space speaks of a man whose ideas are still worth thinking about. If we are all living in the Freud Museum, these artists are our tour guides.
Between objects and engagement: The Science Museum

The Science Museum is large where the Freud Museum is small, old where the Freud Museum is young, and takes all of science as its subject; nevertheless its use of artists projects and interventions has been similarly formed by its particular institutional concerns. It was founded at the beginning of the 20th century on the premise of a separation between science and art, and yet by the beginning of the 21st century art was playing a significant role in the museum’s display and interpretation. Art and artists’ interventions have been shaped by the museum’s evolving context in which the meaning of scientific objects and the presentation of scientific knowledge have rarely been fixed.

The Science Museum’s origins lie in the South Kensington Museum, formed in 1857 under Prince Albert’s patronage to ‘extend the influence of Science and Art’ after the Great Exhibition of 1851.¹²⁰ The separation between art and science began in ‘art’ and ‘non-art’ collections, formalised when the Science Museum officially separated from the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1909 and became independent under the government’s Board of Education.¹²¹ The 1910 Bell Committee recommended that the museum should provide ‘illustration and exposition of the various branches of science’ as well as the ‘preservation of appliances’.¹²² The emphasis was on serving the ‘general public interest’ as much as recognising the ‘professional importance’ of the collections.¹²³

This administrative separation of art and science was confirmed in the Science Museum’s historical understanding of its own collections as having limited aesthetic appeal. In 1924 director Henry Lyons explained to the Museums Association that the science museum required different display strategies for objects which were ‘shown on account of their utility and not for their beauty or attractiveness, as are those in an art collection’.¹²⁴ In fact, artists as diverse as Eduardo Paolozzi, Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth have all taken inspiration from objects and displays in the

¹²¹ Follett, pp. 1–7.
¹²² Follett, p. 21.
¹²³ Follett, p. 21.
¹²⁴ Follett, p. 100.
The Science Museum also collects art objects: over 1,400 paintings are held and displayed in thematic science collections related to subject rather than artist. Jacob Epstein’s bust of Albert Einstein, for example, is held for its portrayal of the physicist rather than the reputation of the sculptor.

Robert Bud argues that the ‘unfashionable remnant’ of the V&A played a key role in establishing a scientific culture as well as demonstrating the achievements of industry. Object collections, subdivided into scientific and industrial themes, were selectively winnowed to provide evidence of the teleological advancement of scientific knowledge. In the 1920s the capacity of objects to adequately demonstrate contemporary science was already being undermined by advances in the understanding of phenomena invisible to the naked eye such as electromagnetism and particle physics. By the 1960s, the museum had begun telling the history of science as much as expounding its principles and achievements. At the same time it made pioneering steps in interpreting its themes and collections for a public and young audience, with the establishment of an activity-focused children’s gallery in the 1930s and an education service in the 1950s.

The interplay between collections and interactivity that Tim Boon calls a ‘continuing dialectic between history and science communication’ was also affected by political and structural changes during the 1980s. The National Heritage Act of 1983 made the Science Museum independent of government with its own board of Trustees, and in 1988 admission charges were introduced across the national museums sector.

126 ‘Collections Online’, *Science Museum Group* [http://collectionsonline.nmsi.ac.uk/]> [accessed 20 August 2012].
131 Follett, p. 113; Morris, pp. 1–10 (p. 2).
making from the curation of object collections. A combination of financial pressure to attract admission and Cossons’ restructuring led to a greater emphasis on visitor experiences. Where ‘whiggish’ gallery displays organised by collections curators had tended to present the state of the art as the end point of a historical evolution, under Cossons’ leadership a new Science Communications Division ran a separate adult-oriented programme presenting contemporary issues in science. Cossons’ plan for a comprehensive restructuring of the entire museum foundered on the constraints of funding, leaving the Science Museum with a ‘multi-museum’ framework that allowed for a variety of approaches to display and content within the museum and a menu of choices for visitors to the museum.

Changes within the science museum around the history and communication of science did not take place in isolation. An experiential and interactive approach to understanding science was the basis of San Francisco’s Exploratorium, established by Frank Oppenheimer in 1968. In the UK, Richard Gregory opened the Bristol Exploratory in 1984 where in contrast to ‘passive’ science museums, visitors could learn the principles of science ‘by their own initiative’, and the Science Museum followed suit in 1986 with the ‘hands on’ Launch Pad gallery. By the 1990s, in older science museums too, new displays were moving away from the presentation of historical objects. Meanwhile, the ‘deficit model’ of science communication, which assumed that the public started from a position of scientific ignorance was already being called into question and replaced with ideas of a public capable of ‘receiving as well as shaping science’. In the early 2000s, museums of all kinds began to move towards public participation in the creation of displays and events. In preparation for the opening of a new communications technology gallery in 2014, the museum is

135 Timothy Boon, ‘Parallax Error?’, pp. 111–135 (pp. 120–125).
136 Macdonald, *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*, p. 84.
137 Macdonald, ‘Exhibitions and the Public Understanding of Science Paradox’.
experimenting with the ‘co-creation’ of displays of the material culture of the history of science.142

Beyond museums, colourful scientific imagery rather than scientific objects now constitutes a significant and public element of the communication of scientific work.143 Direct collaboration between artists and scientists in the production of artworks has also been funded by a number of organisations including the Wellcome Trust, who began a ‘Sciart’ funding scheme in 1996 with the explicit aim of engaging the public on contemporary scientific issues, often through residencies working in scientific environments.144 A burgeoning role for contemporary art in science exhibitions themselves is now emerging, and artists like Karen Ingham propose artworks as a form of interpretation for difficult objects that can return agency and voice to depersonalised subjects.145

The Wellcome Trust’s Ken Arnold offers a more elaborate manifesto, proposing four strategies for the use of art in science exhibitions. Art can be a ‘user-friendly’ vehicle to introduce scientific ideas to the public; it can act as a ‘foil’ to the teleological and taxonomic display of scientific museum objects; it can be a means of creating new aesthetics for exhibitions; and through ‘visual experiments’ it can offer an understanding the scientific basis of aesthetic experiences.146 Arnold looks to temporary exhibitions in particular as capable of bearing curatorial risk-taking that permanent galleries are unable to, and his work takes place in the context of explicit efforts to draw together art and science. Nevertheless, his model is useful for looking at artists’ activities in the Science Museum because it recognises the same tensions between the communication of science and use of objects, and between artistic and scientific practices that have shaped the Science Museum’s development. It also

places them in context of a contemporary ‘intellectual multiculturalism’ that may ultimately better situate art in the Science Museum than Boon’s dialectic.\textsuperscript{147}

The Science Museum began a serious engagement with contemporary art in its 1996 Arts Policy, which committed the museum to working with artists on all major capital projects.\textsuperscript{148} The policy tied the use of art to both object collections and the communication of science as well as burgeoning art-science interactions and new media technologies. The policy’s objectives included using art to enable public exploration of science and technology, with an emphasis on art taking its place among a variety of educational tactics. Since then, Science Museum Arts Projects (SMAP) has worked with over 100 artists including Tacita Dean, Antony Gormley, Cornelia Parker and Marc Quinn.\textsuperscript{149}

Art commissioned and produced by SMAP is distributed throughout the science museum’s thematic galleries. SMAP has produced work in three main forms: directly commissioned works; research-based residencies resulting in exhibitions; and participatory projects involving existing or new museum audiences. Funding comes from outside operational budgets: commissions are paid for from capital budgets, and residencies and participatory projects are funded by grants from trusts and charities. Art is not expected to increase attendance but rather to offer interpretive value to an adult visit to the museum.\textsuperscript{150} Residencies, individual works and projects all address the social and cultural impacts of science in a way that is ‘not fundamentally illustrative’; art is used as it would be in an art gallery, not to demonstrate science.\textsuperscript{151}

A selection of projects from SMAP’s 15-year history, from an early residency to recent participative work, and across a breadth of practice from interactive digital work to research-based residencies, should illustrate the relationship of SMAP to the Science Museum’s particular institutional tensions and evolution.

One of the first projects following the 1996 Arts Policy was a two year residency by artist Martha Fleming, leading to a 1999 exhibition entitled \textit{Atomism and...
Animism. Fleming’s work deals extensively with the relationship between the arts and sciences, with an emphasis on looking as a form of investigation and shared methodologies between the two practices. Atomism and Animism took the form of a series of display cases containing 130 objects from the collections of the Science Museum and other museums, in 16 separate installations. There were no obvious connections made between the cases located in thematic galleries: the intention was serendipitous discovery by visitors. Fleming herself divided the installations into three categories: ‘isomorphic clusters’ drawing objects of similar shape and structure from across thematic collections to show visual parallels and encourage thought about form; ‘rupturing inserts’ that introduced politically and philosophically contentious objects into galleries of isomorphically similar objects; and ‘object scenarios’ creating ‘proto-narratives’ from moments of scientific history. The research and development process cast Fleming in the role of a temporary curator, working long hours in the museum, creating displays and borrowing objects from other museums.

Fleming’s ‘Cones’ display drew from audiology, optics and mathematics collections to focus on the similarity of the geometric cone form across a range of scientific uses and techniques from earplugs to timekeeping (Figure 4.1). ‘Cargo’ inserted a model of a slave ship used by the abolitionist William Wilberforce into the museum’s ships gallery, together with an interpretive panel asking ‘what exactly were all the ships in this room carrying and for whom?’ (Figure 4.2). ‘Gold Dust’ placed an ancient Greek gold foil votive in the from of a pair of eyes looking into a particle-detecting cloud chamber, referencing the use of gold in detecting subatomic particles and early occult associations of ‘invisible’ electromagnetic science (Figure 4.3).

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156 Martha Fleming, ‘From Le Musée Des Sciences to the Science Museum’ p. 44.
159 Martha Fleming, ‘Interpretive Panel for “Cargo” Display’ (Science Museum, 1999).
Fleming’s work has its roots in a desire to use taxonomy as a tool for its own critique and investigation; her placing of work in existing museum galleries shows a concern with the museum’s own display space. Her concentration on isomorphism has obvious parallels with contemporary interpretations of the *wunderkammer*, but foregoes the associated impetus to wonder, focusing rather on the act of looking as a form of research. The juxtaposition of objects to reveal uncomfortable historical truths has more in common with Fred Wilson’s work, a comparison Fleming herself draws.\(^{161}\) While some isomorphic installations could be seen in Arnold’s terms as ‘visual experiments’, *Atomism and Animism* as a whole works more like a ‘foil’ to the Science Museum’s own display strategies. Fleming’s use of the collections to ‘drive a wedge into the fault lines in the progressivist story of science’ told in the Museum is dependent on the visual power of objects themselves.\(^{162}\) Just look at the objects. They’ll show you everything you’re looking for’ declared the main interpretive panel for the exhibition.\(^{163}\) At the moment in which the Science Museum might have been losing faith in the power of objects to adequately communicate a master-narrative of science, *Atomism and Animism* demonstrates Fleming’s confidence in their ability to undermine and question that narrative. While Fleming may have intended the experience as a series of disconcerting interruptions, the actual effect on visitors is less certain. SMAP curator Hannah Redler recognises that art often goes unrecognised among the Science Museum’s ‘interpretive and iconic materials’; recent artists’ interventions in the Science Museum have been more clearly identified and interpreted than Fleming’s.\(^{164}\)

The following year saw the opening of *Digitopolis* (2000) as part of the new Wellcome Wing, an extension of the museum providing an interactive and experiential approach to issues in contemporary science. Focusing on identity and genetics, it drew comparisons to the Millennium Dome with its industry-sponsored displays of state-of-the-art technology.\(^{165}\) *Digitopolis* ‘invited visitors to question the ways in which new technologies are changing our experience of the world’ and the

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\(^{164}\) Redler, p. 3.

gallery included several interactive works by leading new media art practitioners.\textsuperscript{166} Christian Moeller’s \textit{Particles} (2000) used the viewer’s presence to trigger an animated silhouette accompanied by algorithmically-generated sounds.\textsuperscript{167} Tessa Elliott and Jonathan Jones-Morris’ \textit{Machination} (2000) translated its observations of visitors into images of similar domestic objects from its memory.\textsuperscript{168} David Rokeby’s \textit{Watched and Measured} (2000) observed and catalogued people moving through the Science Museum in a commentary on surveillance and voyeurism (Figure 4.4).\textsuperscript{169}

In a wing devoted to interactive experiences, however, interactive art had trouble differentiating itself. Rokeby argues that new media art brings the technological medium itself to the attention of the viewer.\textsuperscript{170} Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook see physical interaction with artworks as the beginning of opening up museums as spaces of participation and conversation.\textsuperscript{171} But as digital mediation strategies are increasingly used by curators across many different types of gallery and context, the critical and participatory role of new media artworks runs the risk of being seen as purely technological content.\textsuperscript{172} While broadsheet critics covering the opening of the Wellcome Wing noted the presence of individual artworks by artists such as David Shrigley and Marc Quinn, few distinguished the work of artists in Digitopolis as being distinct from the ‘latest whiz-bang interactive technology’.\textsuperscript{173} In Arnold’s framework, new media art offers the Science Museum a ‘user-friendly’ approach to complex issues around technology and society. Although not intended as an ‘intervention’ in the manner of Fleming’s work, the interactive artworks in \textit{Digitopolis} perhaps achieved the reverse effect: of being intended as artistic counterfoils to the narrative

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{171} Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, \textit{Rethinking Curating} (MIT Press, 2010), p. 113.
\bibitem{172} Bullivant, pp. 32–43 (p. 34).
\end{thebibliography}
of technology, but instead effectively absorbed into the overall ‘user-friendly’ pedagogy and display methods of the Wellcome Wing.

A standalone new media art work, Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen’s *Listening Post* (2003) was acquired by SMAP in 2008 with a grant from the Art Fund. Listening Post presents a sculptural and sonic interpretation of conversation online: fragments of chat gleaned in real time from the internet are displayed across a matrix of LED screens, while synthesised voices read the text (Figure 4.5). It is a participative work in that it takes its content from public conversations, but isn’t interactive as an installation. It was used, however, as the starting point for two participative projects. Tony White’s writer’s residency in 2008 involved a series of writing workshops and the creation of a short text by White, *Albertopolis Disparu*, using the avant-garde literary cut-up techniques suggested by *Listening Post*. Rubin and Hansen’s work was also at the centre of *Being Connected*, a series of events and workshops involving the London Tigers Youth Group. Working with four separate artists and organisations, the Tigers explored the implications of networks and anonymity through experimentation with hardware and software; the results of their work were displayed in a gallery next to *Listening Post*.

In some ways, White’s residency and *Being Connected* worked as interpretations of *Listening Post*, making the work accessible to a larger public through fiction, and meaningful to a small youth group through workshops. They formed part of a programme of activity around a major and innovative purchase of an art work for the Science Museum, both publicising and justifying it. However, they also fit into the bigger picture of co-creation and other participatory practices across the Science Museum. Where education-based participation may have informal learning outcomes and public history projects the enhancement of displays as a goal, the key output of participatory SMAP projects is that the participants are involved in making art of some kind.

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178 Boon, ‘Co-Curation and the Public History of Science and Technology’; Personal interview with Hannah Redler.
Superflex, an artists’ collective whose practice revolves around communities and participation were commissioned in 2010 to create *A Cockroach Tour of the Science Museum* in which participants donned cockroach costumes to be led by two cockroach tour guides (Figure 4.6). The tour was part of a series of events and activities accompanying the opening of the museum’s Climate Science gallery in 2010. It presented human achievements on display in the object-based Exploring Space and Making the Modern World galleries through the eyes of cockroaches whose perfect ecological adaptation has precluded the need for evolution for millions of years. Technology was interpreted by the guides as centring on humans’ need to master death by measuring and controlling time, taking in space travel, atomic weapons, Stephenson’s *Rocket* and even a euthanasia machine. The tour finished in the museum’s new Climate Science gallery with a warning about threats to earth’s future through the overuse of fossil fuels.

*A Cockroach Tour* was innovative in that it wasn’t in the form of object-based or even interactive art, but an ephemeral experience. Superflex are a ‘rhizomatic’ collective who describe their artistic outputs as ‘tools’ and generally work collaboratively with community groups, sponsors and funders. Charles Esche describes their practice as ‘engaged autonomy’ and their tools as existing ‘where institutional critique crosses with an individualistic, ironic and perhaps humorous detachment’. Their work has also been described as belonging to the field of ‘relational aesthetics’, a practice defined by Nicolas Bourriaud as ‘taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context’. In its use of a Superflex ‘tool’ as a form of interpretation SMAP is orienting itself towards a renewed focus on participation in contemporary art as much as in museums.

181 Personal participation in cockroach tour, 18 February 2012.
From 2009-2011, Conrad Shawcross’ residency at the Science Museum focused on the history of science and mathematics collections. Shawcross is an emerging and fashionable London-based artist, collected by Charles Saatchi, whose work is inspired by mathematical systems. The result of Shawcross’ residency was an exhibition entitled Protomodel: Five Interventions, dispersed throughout the mathematics gallery. Hyperbolic Swarf Drawings (2011) consisted of bright blue twisted and coiled wax forms, illustrating the difference in central and peripheral speed of a spinning disc (Figure 4.7). Time Rule (2011) was a brightly-coloured length of woven rope representing 352 minutes’ worth of the activity of a larger sculptural work, Chord (2009) that generated a stable rope from complex geometrical patterns.

The mathematics gallery is one of the Science Museum’s older galleries, presenting a large number of objects as evidence of mathematical principles, unconnected by any linking narrative. This makes ‘intervention’ easier, with less institutional commitment to the gallery’s message and presentation, and an additional attraction to visitors. Shawcross describes his installation as a ‘playful, questioning dialogue with the worldly conditions of mathematics’, and the installation most obviously belongs to Arnold’s category of foil. But Shawcross’ work lacks the political punch of Fleming’s; the exploration of mathematical principles may orient visitors towards the sensory implications of mathematics but does little with the stories about science itself that the objects tell.

Whether explorations are critical or playful, the Science Museum is a far from static territory into which to intervene. Where artists like Fleming offer critique, it is in a museum that constantly critiques and revises its own approaches. Where artists like Rokeby offer interactivity, it is in the context of interactivity as an existing display strategy. Where artists like Superflex bring a participatory practice, it is to a museum that has already embraced participation as a form of interpretation. In Arnold’s ‘intellectual multiculturalism’, art is one discipline among many deployed

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187 Stanford, ‘Shapes of Strings Before Your Eyes’.
188 Personal interview with Hannah Redler.
189 ‘Gallery Guide for “Protomodel”’. 
by the Science Museum. In Macdonald’s ‘multi-museum’ model, SMAP is essentially another museum within this framework. It also fits into a larger matrix of participatory activities, engaging youth and other groups with art as well as science. The museum supports this activity at little internal operational cost with a high level of autonomy while simultaneously effectively attaching it to the museum’s programme as a whole.

SMAP became active at the Science Museum alongside a major turn across the science museum sector away from object-based display and pedagogy and towards interactive experiences. Since then, the museum has also contended with changing ideas about public engagement with both science and museums. One of the ways in which the Science Museum has negotiated with and explored the implications of these turns and shifts is through collaborations with artists.

Martha Fleming’s work addressed the history of science through a critique of museum display at a time when the meaning of such displays was precarious. The artworks in Digitopolis attempted to add a dimension to public engagement with contemporary technology and science through a critical approach to interactive technology. Perhaps in reaction to the limited success of Digitopolis, Listening Post served public engagement in a different capacity, acting as a catalyst to direct activities with youth and other public groups. Conrad Shawcross came to the display of historical objects at a less crucial moment, using his residency with greater playfulness and concern with the subject of science itself. Only Superflex’s work has achieved a synthesis of Boon’s dialectic: public engagement with contemporary science through the history of science. Museum objects were rearranged and represented not through display but through a tour, calling them into play in a consideration of the effect humans have had on the planet.

The Science Museum has effectively added a fifth strategy to Arnold’s manifesto: art as a catalyst for engagement and participation with science and with the Science Museum. Art, however, hasn’t been instrumentalised in the service of science communication. Both residencies and individual works address the social and cultural impacts of science rather than supplanting exhibitions and displays as a means of communicating either contemporary or historical science. The particular circumstances of the Science Museum have produced a body of work that would be hard to characterise generically as ‘museum’ art. It addresses science and scientific concerns through the medium of the museum’s collections, knowledge and displays
and occupies a space between problematic scientific objects and the experience of interactivity that is unique to the Science Museum. Rather than expressing something that the Science Museum finds hard to say, SMAP is just one of many voices with which the Science Museum speaks.
Conclusion: The museum in particular

Over more than forty years, artists’ critique of museums has become a practice of collaboration with those institutions, driven by ever-greater engagement with collections and display environments. The shift of the focus of critique from the art gallery to the historical and object-based museum heralded by Wilson, Dion and Paolozzi has given fuel to artists who find productive tensions in the politics of taxonomic arrangement and playfully extend the methods of museum curators. While artists like these are finding depth rather than rigidity in museums, museums are finding many things that can be said through artists’ interventions. Case studies of the Freud Museum and Science Museum have shown the particular complexity and contingency of such collaborations during the past two decades.

Artists have brought their own ideas of the museum to the museum. The legacy of institutional critique visible in the work of Stuart Brisley, Susan Hiller and Martha Fleming is a response to the museum as an archetype, with a generically overarching ethos and structure. Actual museums themselves, however, cannot help but be particular, shaped by their subjects, moulded by their history and structured by their own institutional practices. These factors also influence the ongoing development of collaborations with artists and the interventions that they produce.

For the Freud Museum, attracting new and diverse audiences is an institutional priority while a Freudian approach to psychology and culture drives its curatorial agenda. The Science Museum has fewer requirements of art to drive attendance but needs new approaches to historical interpretation and communication of science. These imperatives have produced very different bodies of artists’ interventions for each museum. For the Freud Museum the sexualised sculptures of Sarah Lucas and Noble and Webster, and the complex, ambivalent work of Alice Anderson reassert Freud’s importance. For the Science Museum, new media and participative work exploring the role of technology, and the mathematically-engaged constructions of Conrad Shawcross add new dimensions that object-based display cannot.

Far from bringing autonomous artistic inspiration to dead and rigidly taxonomised museum spaces, artists find inspiration in museums themselves. The Freud Museum’s domestic interiors are rich in both content and context. In the Science Museum, extensive collections and the development of science offers
opportunities for artworks that explore alternatives to meta-narratives in both. It is only when art echoes too closely other display strategies, as with *Digitopolis*, that it fails to effectively add a dimension to the visitor’s experience.

Both the Science Museum and the Freud Museum have many things to say. For the Science Museum, a critical perspective on science and the history of science are key. For the Freud Museum the continuing relevance of Freud is important. It is not that they find these things hard to say *per se*, but that they sometimes find them hard to say through existing strategies for the curation of displays and objects. For the Freud Museum, Mark Dion’s dictum could more accurately be rephrased as ‘the artist can say things that the museum finds hard to say through existing means’. While at the Freud Museum art is an alternative form of display, at the Science Museum it has a found wider purpose in alternative views of existing displays and as a catalyst to participation. We might go so far as to assert that for the Science Museum ‘the artist helps the museum to listen to what other people have to say’.

The idea of the artist’s intervention has been turned inside out by collaborative practice. From an unwelcome intrusion into the museum by artists determined to expose the mechanisms of regulation, the intervention has become a curatorial practice of the museum itself. That some artists take as their foil the structure of collections and display can disguise the fact that far from being sepulchres constrained by institutional rigidity, museums are in fact highly aware of their own historical and cultural constraints, and actively use artists to investigate and overcome them. Institution and intervention are bound together in that awareness, constantly finding new ways to explore its tensions.

15,133 words including notes
Illustrations

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Figure 4.7. Conrad Shawcross, Protomodel (2011).
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