

THE PRODUCERS: CONTEMPORARY CURATORS IN CONVERSATION

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DEPARTMENT OF FINE ART

**JAMES PUTNAM AND
BARBARA LONDON IN CONVERSATION
CHAIRIED BY RICHARD DEACON**

SUSAN HILLER:

Hello and welcome to the fourteenth event in 'The Producers' series. Future 'Producers' sessions will be held at BALTIC rather than here at the University. I'd now like to introduce the participants in today's discussion. First of all, Barbara London, who is the associate curator in film and video at the Museum of Modern Art in New York where she has worked since the mid-seventies. Barbara founded the Museum's ongoing new media exhibition programme in which she has created a

platform for artists such as Laurie Anderson, Gary Hill, Joan Jonas and Nam June Paik. In addition to the ongoing exhibition programme, she also established the Video Study Center at MoMA, which documents and preserves work in this field and which holds a unique collection of independent artists' videos and related publications. Barbara is also a writer: she's written widely on video and media art, and you can read some of her curatorial dispatches on the MoMA website.

James Putnam is a curator at the British Museum in London. He has initiated a number of unusual and innovative contemporary art exhibitions starting, in 1994, with an exhibition called 'Time Machine: Ancient Egypt and Contemporary Art', where artists such as Marc Quinn and Andy Goldsworthy made work which was displayed within the British Museum's Egyptian Galleries. James has written both on ancient Egyptian art and contemporary art and his recent book, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, is a survey of the relationship between the artist and the museum, from the beginnings of what we now think of as museums in the cabinets of curiosity, to the portable museums of Marcel Duchamp, and on to contemporary artists.

The chair today is our first ever guest chair: Richard Deacon has been kind enough to assume this role today. Richard is one of Britain's best known and most significant contemporary sculptors and is also a member of the Board of Trustees of BALTIC. He's exhibited extensively abroad and in this country and has had major solo exhibitions at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Tate Liverpool and many other places. At the moment there's a work of Richard's on exhibit locally at the Laing Art Gallery, in 'Life is Beautiful' which some of you will undoubtedly be seeing this week. So, that's all from me and now over to Richard.

RICHARD DEACON:

Thank you Susan. This evening we have two curators from two very venerable and major institutions – the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the British Museum in London. They, of course, have different roles within those two institutions. The evening is going to run according to the usual format. I'll ask each of the speakers to make a presentation of about fifteen or twenty minutes and after that I'll put some questions to them both. Then I'll throw it open to the floor and hope that you also have questions. Undoubtedly there's an audience here who may well have seen fourteen out of fourteen 'Producers', and have significant comparative questions to ask. The decision as to who goes first and who goes second was really based on the antiquity of the institutions to which our two speakers belong. James is going to speak first since the British Museum does predate the Museum of Modern Art and Barbara is going to follow. So, it's over to you James.

JAMES PUTNAM:

Hi. I'm going to try something that's a bit of an experiment. Susan mentioned this book that I've just done called *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* and I have a selection of slides that go along with this. Obviously there's no time to talk about all of them, but I'll run through them continuously, without comment, on the left screen while I talk about a different selection, which I'll show simultaneously on the other screen. The slides I'll talk around will be curatorial projects that I've done which fit in more appropriately with this 'Producers' series, but on the other hand, the *Museum as Medium* slides give a kind of colour or character to what I believe in and what I do in the sense of combining contemporary art with the historical. So, it might work or it might not. If it doesn't, I'll stop it as you may be bombarded with too

many images at once. So let's see what happens.

First I'll give you a bit of background about myself. I started off by studying art history and I specialised in Renaissance art. Then I went on to do Egyptology at the British Museum and for many years was working within the Egyptian Department. For a long time I was immersed in, and carried away with, the whole history of the Museum and the fabulous sense of antiquity that it all had, and was studying Egyptian art. Familiarity with its great sculpture gallery – one of the finest rooms in the world displaying Egyptian sculpture – made me feel really inspired to do something there: inject a presence of the contemporary into the space, indirectly subverting the linear notion of time and history.

So, I did this exhibition that Susan mentioned, called 'Time Machine', where I worked with a dozen artists, international ones mainly, to bring in, to actually create projects, in that gallery. A lot of the artists really responded to the space and the dynamics of Egyptian sculpture. This is a work by Andy Goldsworthy (*Sandwork*). It involved thirty tons of sand which had to be brought into the gallery from basement level. In character with a lot of later things I've done there, it combined the site of the museum as an architectural space, and the artist bringing in something new to that space.

This was a work created specially by Marc Quinn, called *Rubber Soul*, which involved a frozen hibernating frog: a particular type of tree frog that goes to sleep in the winter and it is able to survive in sub-zero temperatures and then come to life again in the spring. So this tied in with the duration of the exhibition, which was on for about three months, and it also fitted well with the Egyptian concept of mummification. I went on to curate another version of that exhibition in the Museo Egizio in Turin a year later (1995) which involved a different selection of artists. This work is by Kiki Smith,

called *Southern Hemisphere Constellation* and we used most of the existing museum vitrines and it was very much, as I said before, a combination of the site with the artists' installations, thereby creating something different.

This slide is a work called *Tree Door* by Giuseppe Penone. He didn't actually make this work specially, but it was the first time it was shown and he completed it for the show. The nice thing about this is that it's made from the same cedar wood as the Egyptian mummy cases and other artifacts displayed with it in the gallery.

From 'Time Machine' I went on to work on a number of intervention projects also in the British Museum's Egyptian Gallery. This slide shows *Questions of Taste* by Richard Wentworth. It was part of a wider multi-site project in 1997 called 'Collected', which was curated by the artist Neil Cummings for the Photographer's Gallery, London. As part of that I worked directly with Richard Wentworth and Fred Wilson to create installations within the Egyptian Gallery. This was, in fact, a collection of drinks containers taken from all the rubbish bins in and around the British Museum which were juxtaposed with ancient Egyptian drinking vessels, some of them dating back to about 4,000 B.C. The nice thing about it was that Richard Wentworth took on board the whole notion of museum practice by labelling all the drinks containers in a totally museological way. For instance, the label might say something like, 'Seven Laminate Polycarbonate Bottles, Inscribed Oasis. Found on the British Museum Steps, 3rd June 1997'. And all these matched the conventional British Museum labels on the other side.

We really liked the idea that museum visitors could relate in some way to the ancient Egyptians more as people rather than as some far-removed ancient civilization. So we found a nice quote from an ancient Egyptian papyrus all about beer drinking which we translated and ran on a label on the other side. There are

other nice little connections we made: this was, as you can see, a plastic Coke bottle that we found in one of the basements of the museum that had been perforated to use as a sprinkler. There's a lot of dust in the museum and the cleaner went round and sprinkled water, so this was labelled accordingly by Richard Wentworth: 'Plastic Coke Bottle Adapted for use as a Sprinkler', or there was another one: 'Polystyrene Cup Adapted for use as an Ashtray'. All these little things actually told us a lot about contemporary culture, if you like, and the bottom line of it had various drinks containers that had been run over or flattened so they assumed an almost archaeological appearance. The interesting thing is, as soon as the glass was put on the vitrine, everything became more bona fide and authentic – otherwise it looked merely like a lot of old rubbish. People started looking at it in a totally different way and obviously that's the basis on which museum devices render objects more precious.

I've done some projects in other museum spaces, including an ongoing series at the Freud Museum. [Slide] This was a show with Sophie Calle in Freud's house which we called 'Appointment' (1999). This is her wedding dress on the famous couch and there were other objects belonging to her which, in a sense, constituted a collection – her own personal museum. If any of you know Sophie Calle's work, she usually writes very succinct texts that go alongside the objects that have narratives within them. We put a little pink label alongside each of the objects in her collection and it fitted in really well with a lot of Freud's psychoanalytical theories.

I've also done projects in non-museum spaces. This was a show at The Roundhouse, London, with the work of Mimmo Paladino and Brian Eno (*I Dormienti or The Sleepers*, 1999). It was the first time that the undercroft of the Roundhouse, which is a fantastic space, had ever

been used for an art show. It's a bit like a catacomb or a labyrinth and people could walk around in the space and hear this specially created music by Brian Eno which was his typical kind of ambient sound, but it was ever-evolving. There were twelve different CD players that were playing simultaneously on random/shuffle mode and all the tracks blended with each other in a montage of sound.

Another project I did at the Freud Museum in 2000 was with Sarah Lucas called 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', after Freud's book of the same name. There again it was a kind of combination of Sarah Lucas' work, and the mind and house of Freud. She made some new work specially for the show: this sculpture is actually called *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (2000) and it inspired her to go on and produce a whole new series of work after the show. This work was acquired by the Tate Gallery afterwards and it was actually the fruits of us driving around the weekend before, picking up various bits of old furniture and stuff like that and putting them together for the exhibition. When displayed in the Tate Gallery it will never have quite the same power as when installed in its original intended context of Freud's house.

What might be a bit different about the projects that I do is the fact that they often rely totally on historical material. The idea of the museum as a medium in itself is, I think, a fundamental part of what I do. At the British Museum I've started this Contemporary Arts and Cultures programme – as I call it – which is not actually limited to visual art. The first residency we had was with the dancer/choreographer Michael Clark, who worked with myself and other museum curators to study different pieces of sculpture in the museum. He was very interested in the idea of gesture and how that could be used and went on later to develop this theme as part of his subsequent work, although we didn't actually stage a performance at the museum. Then we did a residency

with João Penalva, funded by Sci-Art, which was based on the artist observing and documenting the conservation department at the Museum and the idea of the museum obsessively preserving things that weren't necessarily meant to be preserved by the culture that created them.

I've also worked a bit with the Henry Moore Institute taking selections from the British Museum Collection up to Leeds and installing them in a very different way than they would be shown at the British Museum. I've also organised artists' performances: we did one with Tracey Emin last year, in fact. I say she did a 'performance' – it was very much her not talking about her work but just being her. I think it was different having her do that in the British Museum, where she didn't feel as self-conscious as she might at the Tate Gallery, or somewhere where she had to talk about her work. We framed it around the theme of Cleopatra, the major British Museum exhibition on at the time, and Tracey had just returned from Egypt and showed slides of her Nile cruise. It was her being completely open with the audience and really enjoying the special atmosphere of the Museum.

My feeling generally is that the British Museum – and you can probably see this from some of the images I've shown – is a great working medium and a real inspiration for artists. More and more we've seen artists using the vitrine, the plinth and the label as an integral part of their work, but also as a way of examining the museum as an institution that presents an autonomous view of history. Also some artists have taken a more critical stance, mimicking or contesting this role. There is now a frequent tendency for artists to make installations or 'interventions' in museum spaces and artists being invited to curate exhibitions; artists actually re-hanging permanent collections and the whole idea that artists are coming in to somehow reanimate old collections and bring different audiences into the museum. I also found

this quite a challenge at the British Museum which, as you can imagine, is in some ways one of the most conservative institutions that you could find. It's been, I guess, a pretty difficult challenge to carry on this kind of work within an institution which is by its nature very fixed and rigid. It has all its different departments, its different agendas, which are very much part of its organisation. In 2003 we're celebrating 250 years of the British Museum as a great public museum, so my feeling about what I do there is also to revive the idea of the museum as a more philosophical institution like it was once intended to be. So it shouldn't necessarily be a place that only looks backwards but it's very much somewhere that should be addressing contemporary culture and representing what is going on in the present.

(Audience applause)

BARBARA LONDON:

Hi. I'm delighted to be here. I want to thank Susan Hiller, Vicki Lewis and Sune Nordgren for inviting me, and for creating a remarkable new venue for contemporary art at BALTIC. I look forward to seeing the opening show in the completed building.

First I'll give you a little anecdote about my background since James talked a bit about his. I was in graduate school studying Islamic art, interested in the trade route between China and the Near East. (Ideas can similarly be transmitted on the backs of camels and over the airwaves.) When I was ready to enter the museum profession, there weren't any curatorial positions open in Islamic art. At that point MoMA opened its doors to me, and I worked first with the International Programme on several exhibitions the Museum circulated abroad. I assisted Jennifer Licht, one of the pioneering MoMA curators who addressed

installation as an art form. With her I selected videotapes for the sculpture show 'Some Recent American Art', which went to Australia. Many of the sculptors in the show were working with video, including Lynda Benglis, Richard Serra and Bob Morris, among others.

Then I switched over to a curatorial position in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books, and from there I started an artists' book collection with works by Ed Ruscha, Sol LeWitt, Gilbert and George, among many others. I always like the hot potatoes!

There was a sort of synchronicity. When the Museum purchased its first video equipment – a playback deck and two monitors – and launched an ongoing video exhibition programme, I was this bright-eyed, bushy-tailed curator who ran with this lively new art form of video. In 1977 the Museum obtained a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to absolve me of all my Print Department responsibilities, and I started to work exclusively on video.

From my Print Department colleagues, I learned about archiving and paying attention to the details around a particular artwork. I understood how important it was to connect video to what was going on in the larger world of contemporary art. I also saw that individual videotapes would all turn to gummed up globs unless someone saved them and the related ephemera. The Museum started to acquire and preserve video art.

We also launched a monthly lecture series called 'Video Viewpoints' – a bit like 'The Producers', in a way – where artists come and show their work and talk about it. I've always been very dogged about these presentations – I've always told the artists they must discuss as well as show their work. We audiotaped and transcribed each presentation. It means we have an artist like Vito Aconcci speaking at the Museum right after he made *Red Tapes* (1977), which is the last video work he made. We also have Laurie Anderson speaking,

after I worked with her on a MoMA 'Projects' show in 1978. A very young Tony Oursler spoke in 1980 soon after he made one of his first tapes called *The Life of Phyllis*. This is a wicked little story spun simply with a TV set made of scrolling paper and a Barbie doll! Currently we're showing Tony's tape at MoMA in a show called 'First Decade'. Many of you are the students here, and you understand the work of your generation the best. But it's very important to consider the issues around work made decades before.

My first slide shows you where I work. This is the façade of MoMA, an iteration from 1939. In the upper right corner is a small sign that reads 'Art in our Time'. MoMA, like the British Museum, has a history, and is an institution with well-honed procedures, run by knowledgeable professionals. Alfred Barr, the first director of MoMA, knew we had to think not only about Picasso, which when we were founded in 1929 was new for New York. He knew that if you're going to be a museum of the 20th century, you must consider the art in our time and what that means historically. The way Barr envisioned fostering, assembling, promoting and exhibiting up-to-date art was to think about the institution as a moving torpedo: a torpedo that moves forward in time. In 1929 Barr and his associates thought we would lop off (give to the Metropolitan Museum) the oldest work as we moved into the future-present. But this strategy really didn't work, because if you're going to make way for the new by getting rid of the old – and of course by that time, these would have become the most valuable works – you've also got to get rid of the expertise of the people there. Do you get rid of your staff as well? Do you get rid of all the research archives that curators have built up and protect, too? We save every artist's bio, photo, catalogue, magazine article and interview! A museum is much more than its permanent collection on view. It's the people who are thinking about

the art and moving along with it into the future.

For those of you who are really young and weren't around in the sixties, artists were dealing with television before the portable video camera came onto the market in 1965. This is Nam June Paik's *TV with Candle* (1963). He replaced the insides of a TV set with a simple candle. He is asking the viewer to consider why this particular piece of furniture is so prominently placed in the living room. Why is TV a one-way form of communication? Is TV viewing akin to a meditation on light? Do we participate by putting our own content into it? Of course, the work also asks a lot about what art is, and what our relationship is to these mass media that are so prevalent, so much a part of our life.

When the portable video camera came out, many artists took to the streets and used the medium as a political tool. They thought they would replace television with video and take over the world. It was the anti-Vietnam War movement, it was the beginning of feminism and everything was kind of equal, except it wasn't equal. You could document a demonstration; you could document a sit-in. The equipment was called 'portable', but really the take-up deck weighed about 30lbs. The camera weighed at least 10lbs and you huffed and puffed as you carried the gear and shot.

Back then, the portable video cameras and recording gear generated black and white tapes. Some artists really wanted colour. Nam June manipulated the guts of the TV set and made *TV with Magnet* (1963), a kind of interactive piece. Move the magnet on the top of the set, and this changes the abstract colour pattern. Here was interactivity before there was a name for it.

In the late 1960s, artists were experimenting with new media. Bruce Nauman explored holography, making this *Artist as a Fountain*. He also made this sculpture, called *Hand to Mouth*, out of fiberglass. Of course, many artists live hand to mouth. But it's also about, 'what is

perception?' This was a time when artists were working a lot with their bodies, pointing a camera at themselves. Nauman did this brilliant installation in 1968-69 called *Corridor*. It was such a narrow space that when you walked down it, you felt awkward and became very conscious of your own body. At the far end of the corridor there are two stacked monitors, and both of their screens appear to depict images of the empty corridor. One monitor is a pre-recorded image of the space. You realise there's a camera above the entrance behind you, because after you have walked into the space a few steps, suddenly the back of your head appears on one of the monitors. The narcissist in all of us wants to see our face on the monitor. But when you turn around to look at the camera, the moment your head is turned, your face is on the monitor. But you can't flip around fast enough to see yourself. Forget it!

A piece that I showed at MoMA back in 1976 by Peter Campus is called *aen* (1977). You walked into a dark room and headed towards a large rectangle of light on the far wall. As you approached, you stood near a tiny red spotlight sitting on the floor. Suddenly your face was projected splat right on the wall, upside down. It was a very harsh image of yourself. No matter how much you interacted with the image, you couldn't make this dark brooding view of yourself more attractive. An unobtrusive live camera was installed nearby.

Peter was one of the first artists to be invited to produce a videotape at a U.S. public television station. He had begun his career as a filmmaker and was very literate with the tools. The producers knew he would be able to communicate with the engineers and not drive them crazy. He produced this classic tape called *Three Transitions* (1973), which is in the Museum's collection and is on view right now in the 'First Decade' show. Peter used a very simple technique called a soft dissolve. He has two cameras, one on either side of a

wall-sized sheet of brown paper, so it appears that he's slicing right through his back and then walking through himself.

William Wegman worked alone in his studio with his alter ego, a Weimaraner dog by the name of Man Ray. His *Selected Works: Reel #3* is so simple, the timing so perfect. The humour catches viewers off guard.

With *Vertical Roll* (1973), Joan Jonas caught viewers off guard in a different way. You might know that early television sets had 'vertical hold' buttons, because images often drifted vertically. As a young girl, I found it frustrating when the Ed Sullivan show with The Beatles drifted upwards endlessly. Today, television sets are more stable and you never see this 'rolling' flaw. In *Vertical Roll* Joan performs with a series of masks, as the frame constantly rolls to a percussive beat (actually, a spoon hitting a tabletop). Ultimately she deconstructs the process when, at the very end of the performance, she comes out in front of the rolling image. Throughout the making of the tape, Joan had one camera directed at her performing and a second camera on the TV set depicting her. Joan's exploration of video's processes related to Richard Serra's questioning of sculpture through his thrown lead pieces.

The next tape is a very short piece by Laurie Anderson, one of her Personal Service Announcements (1987), shot as she stood next to the short-order cook in a New York Greek coffee shop. Those of you from England know the political implications of 'Yankee doodle,' which is not simply a piece of pasta.

(Video plays)

Laurie Anderson: "Recently a lot of people have been talking about changing the national anthem to 'America The Beautiful'. Now I don't believe that's such a great idea. I mean, I really like the 'Star Spangled Banner'. It is

kind of hard to sing along with those arpeggios when you're out in the ball park and the bands are singing away and it's sort of pathetic really, watching everybody try to hang on to that melody. The words are great though. Just a lot of questions written during a fire. Things like 'Hey, do you see anything over there?' 'I don't know, there's sort of smoke.' 'Say, isn't that a flame?' 'Hmm, couldn't say really, it's pretty early in the morning.' 'Hey, do you smell something burning?' I mean, that's the whole song. It is a big improvement though over most national anthems which are 4:4 timing: 'We're number one, this is the best place.' I also like the B-side of the national anthem: 'Yankee doodle'. Truly a surrealist masterpiece!

(Background music)

Yankee doodle came to town
Riding on a pony.
Stuck a feather in his hat
And called it macaroni.

Now, if you can understand the words to this song, you can understand anything that's happening in the art world today."

Laurie made films and did performances before she got into music. When she was making a new record in 1987, Warner Brothers asked if she wanted to produce a new music video. Instead she allocated those monies towards these Personal Service Announcements. She was advocating for more federal support for the arts. Her PSAs were aired on cable stations across the U.S.

In 1985 I organised a show called 'Music Video: The Industry and its Fringes,' in which I dealt with the collaborations between musicians and visual artists. I knew that music companies rise and fall, the music

directors come and go, and work disappears. Bear in mind that MTV was founded several years before my show, and the field was hot. For the show I obtained a range of music videos, from the Beatles and Captain Beefheart, to Zbigniew Rybczynski and David Byrne. All of the works are now in the MoMA collection. The record companies allowed us to make an archival copy of each work. The 'Music Video' show represents an inventive artistic moment, and one day some of the work might have as much import as, say, the posters Toulouse-Lautrec designed for Paris cabarets. I'm prepared, if you want to argue with me!

Inasmuch as it is always already taking place is Gary Hill's installation that MoMA commissioned in 1991, and later acquired. The work exists as a shelf in a wall. Sixteen television sets have been taken apart and stripped down – exposed are just the picture tubes of varying sizes. Each screen depicts a life-size part of a man's body. It resembles a live still life or a memento mori. The level of the shelf is such that you actually have to bend or bow a little to look. The loop of each body part appears to be unending, so it resembles a live body with rearranged parts. Wires extend from the back of each tube and out the back of the shelf to the hidden chassis of each TV. The wires have the feeling of nerve endings.

What does it mean when an institution like MoMA acquires such an installation? What do I, as a curator, have to think about in terms of the aesthetics of this piece? The technology is fugitive, it's not going to be around for very much longer. Flat screens and small projectors have already replaced TV sets. Should my institution buy one or more sets of each of the various sized *Inasmuchas*.. TV tubes? A TV tube has a life like you and me. How should the Museum store the equipment? And the Museum needs to have Gary Hill define what the aesthetics are, so that when he's not

around, the Museum can make appropriate decisions about how to retrofit the piece.

Lovers (1995) is a major installation by Teiji Furuhashi, a Japanese artist I knew very well. He founded the Kyoto-based performance/media art group Dumb Type. I followed Teiji's work since he was in art school and tracked his career. This means that over time I accumulated bulging file folders on Teiji. (I have file folders on every artist I've seen. The ephemera is part of our Video Study Center archives, which is open by appointment to scholars.) *Lovers* is a remarkable work: you walk into a room 9 metres by 9 metres, with black walls and a white linoleum floor. A simple metal structure in the middle holds video and slide projectors. Life size, naked figures are projected onto the wall. The spectral figures run and leap very gracefully. Sometimes they merge or overlap in a virtual embrace, and then move on. There's a moment when one of the figures – it's actually the artist – finds you through a motion detector. He stands there, lifts his arms up and falls back into the void. It's called *Lovers* but I think the work is very much about love in the time of Aids. Canon, producers of the work, donated the installation to MoMA, for which we are very grateful. The piece was made with 1995 Mac software that's now obsolete. We need to go back to Teiji's collaborators and upgrade all the computers and the software. This requires preservation monies.

P.S.1 is now affiliated with MoMA and we have a productive relationship. Currently Richard Deacon has an important work in the P.S.1 courtyard. What does it mean for MoMA, a 75 year-old institution, to move forward? P.S.1 was founded in the mid-seventies and occupies a former school. With a small staff, P.S.1 can move very fast: often they put a show together in three months or less. At MoMA we take at least two years to organise a show.

The Museum has embarked on an expansion

programme. We are doubling our spaces. At the end of May we're closing our 53rd Street site for three years and will open a temporary facility in a former factory in Queens, around the corner from P.S.1. We will have 185,000 square feet (25,000 square feet devoted to gallery space). We will present a series of dynamic media shows, we'll organise more traditional shows, such as Matisse/Picasso, and we will give dynamic new views of our collection. At MoMA QNS we will be able to experiment and try out a lot of ideas before we get into our renovated Manhattan building. Our landmark sculpture garden will be back in place in 2005, and our spaces will be expanded two-fold. Like BALTIC, the renovated MoMA will be very accessible, with cafes, film theatres, and lively exhibition and education programming. Visitors will go through the contemporary part of the collection to get to the historical. Our library and study centres will be state-of-the-art.

I'll close by saying that I've been working with my P.S.1 colleagues on a show from Pam and Dick Kramlich's collection. This collector couple in San Francisco has acquired over forty video installations and a library of artists' videotapes. In the Napa Valley they are building a home designed by Herzog and De Meuron. This is a unique private collection. The Kramlichs are the Henry Frick of the 21st century. They think seriously about their collection as a whole, about the history of installation as an art form, and about preservation. In the future their home will probably become a museum, in the same way that we have the Frick Museum in Manhattan. Now I hope you have lots of questions.

(Audience applause)

RICHARD DEACON:

Thank you Barbara and James. Actually I'd like to start with a question to Barbara. When you started at MoMA you weren't employed as a video curator, presumably?

BARBARA LONDON:

No.

RICHARD DEACON:

And although you're interested in video, or you became interested in video...

BARBARA LONDON:

I became interested in video around the same time I assembled the artists' book collection in the Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. The Museum recognised video as an emerging area of contemporary activity. Everything was new and untried. Artists felt part of a transforming process, and I was exhilarated to participate too.

RICHARD DEACON:

At what point did it become a policy of the Museum to collect?

BARBARA LONDON:

Since 1974 I had been organising video shows for the new, ongoing video exhibition programme. Because I was in the Print Department, it was through that department's acquisition committee that the Museum acquired its first artists' videos in 1975.

RICHARD DEACON:

And at that point was the Museum collecting photographs?

BARBARA LONDON:

We started collecting photographs sometime in the thirties. Photography is an important part of the MoMA collection, which tracks the history of the medium.

RICHARD DEACON:

And so photographs have always been a part of the collection?

BARBARA LONDON:

Yes. Film entered the collection in 1935. The Museum was founded in 1929, and early on our first director, Alfred Barr, had the foresight of acquiring, not only painting and sculpture, prints and illustrated books, drawings, architecture and design, but also photography and film. The experimental film collection includes the work of Maya Deren, Andy Warhol, Michael Snow, Stan Brakhage, among many, many others

RICHARD DEACON (TO JAMES PUTNAM):

I'm not quite clear as to whether the post you have at the British Museum is a curatorial position or a temporary position – but it's a roving brief.

JAMES PUTNAM:

Can't it be a temporary curatorial position?

RICHARD DEACON:

As a kind of agitator within the museum?

JAMES PUTNAM:

Well it's funny. There was this *Evening Standard* article by Louisa Buck about me with the headline 'Maverick at the Museum'. I must say I was a bit ashamed of it at first, because it was the last thing I wanted to be called. But

then I kind of got used to it and I thought, 'Well, it's rather good isn't it?' and it is, after all, what I am – let's face it. It's not that I want to change things for the sake of it, but I do want to inject some new vitality into the Museum because I believe it's crucial for its image. So in that sense I do work from within the institution but I do have a lot of respect for it and all my museum colleagues. One of the joys of facilitating artists working in the Museum is to take its curatorial specialists out of their usual historical role and to stimulate their passion for their expertise, which provides enormous inspiration to the artists. I'm also aware that I can't go ahead and do things which are avant garde merely for the sake of it in the Museum. It is essential to respect our visitors, so that everything I do needs to communicate in some way to the general public and not interfere with their normal viewing of the collection. So I have to hit a fine line with what's truly appropriate and strive to achieve as much I can within the limitations of the context, which I find really challenging.

RICHARD DEACON:

But there is some overlap between, for example, that Richard Wentworth installation and the kind of objects that the British Museum would collect for an ethnographic display. You saw the Paolozzi show, 'Lost Magic Kingdoms' at the Museum of Mankind – a lot of the objects he had were not dissimilar from Richard Wentworth's objects although collected in the field, as it were, rather than on the street.

JAMES PUTNAM:

Sure. I mean, it may be interesting or not, but the thing that I particularly want to stress with the programme I'm doing is not about collecting at all, it's very much about

artists who want to create things or make things inspired by the Museum rather than for acquiring by the Museum.

RICHARD DEACON:

That was my next question: to what extent the things that you are curating would ever become a part of the collection of a museum?

JAMES PUTNAM:

The Andy Goldsworthy work (in 'Time Machine') was in fact an ephemeral piece, but the photo-work, the C-print, was acquired by the Museum. There was also a Marc Quinn drawing from that show and the colossal Igor Mitoraj bronze sculpture was actually donated by the artist to the museum and is still sited on the forecourt. But they were the only concessions to the work being collected and they were never specially commissioned. Richard Wentworth's work, for instance, was dismantled and dispersed after the show. He very much conceived it as a kind of display that he created and not necessarily as an artwork to be preserved intact: well, it couldn't be kept, obviously, because it incorporated objects from the British Museum's collection. This is all related to a fascinating and topical issue which is something I wanted to bring up in the discussion. I mean, Barbara mentioned the potential problems of collecting and where does it all end, and the whole thing that perhaps I was trying to get across in my book is that the museum and contemporary art are becoming increasingly interwoven. In general, before the sixties, you had to be dead to get your work in a museum and nowadays museum's collect work by young artists. They're striving to preserve the present and we now have works that are being, as it were, 'custom made' for museums. That's a situation that didn't happen before, so we're reaching a stage where are we getting completely overtaken by an

obsession to collect everything that a significant artist makes.

RICHARD DEACON:

Is this a moral issue? Are you saying it is immoral to make something for the museum, or is it an observation?

JAMES PUTNAM:

It's an observation. I'm not saying it's good or bad, but I guess it is a potential problem in terms of storage and conservation. Due to lack of exhibition space, do these works end up in packing cases never to be opened again, or as some installation with a little diagram that goes with it, of how to re-install it in years to come?

BARBARA LONDON:

There are many issues around the question. A Sol LeWitt wall drawing can be recreated following the artist's very careful notation. Each installer and each location affects the look of the particular LeWitt drawing. Certain kinds of works are site-specific. At MoMA we have our 'Projects' exhibition series, founded in 1971, and devoted to up-to-the-minute art. Some of that work has been very ephemeral, made more in relation to the architecture and site, and some of it has a physical object that's come out of it. With 'Projects', our mandate has not been to buy those works exhibited in the series – it's been liberating, without pressure. Once in a while we have acquired one of the works. But it's the exception.

RICHARD DEACON:

I didn't know that about moving the Museum to Queens, but it certainly looked like you were treating the museum as the contents – that blue building looked like a kind of

enormous vitrine. It certainly did look like you were, whether consciously or not, opening a new vitrine in Queens. There were lots of things I wondered about – whether this was a kind of agit-museum, because putting a museum in Queens would change that situation radically. At the same time you have this box which you are aware is full of contents – architecturally it's not particularly distinguishable from any other kind of store. There seemed to be a whole lot of things that were raised about the museum that were interesting.

BARBARA LONDON:

There are. This is a light industry/warehouse section of Queens. Twenty-five years ago you would have no reason to visit this neighborhood. Now there is MoMA QNS, the Sculpture Center, and P.S.1 around the corner. AMI (the American Museum of the Moving Image), the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park are nearby too. You can easily get from one to the other following a 'culture map'.

The MoMA QNS building was built as a stapler factory. A comparable museum space would be the Temporary/Contemporary, that MoCA in L.A. opened as they were putting up their new Arata Isozaki-designed museum. It is very possible that MoMA curators will be so happy with the large, dynamic MoMA QNS galleries that we won't forsake them. Originally the building was intended as storage after our 11 West 53rd Street building expansion is completed. While MoMA QNS might look like a big vitrine on the outside, inside it resembles BALTIC – we have these amazing high-ceilinged spaces, which are perfect for contemporary art. The dynamic entrance with curved walls swoops visitors up through specially selected new media artwork and into our shows. The highest ceiling in our old building was 12 feet – much too low for most contemporary

work. At MoMA QNS we will be experimenting with projections and up-to-date technology, sometimes commissioning a site-specific work. We will be getting into these questions: if a piece is commissioned and made just for MoMA QNS, and it is fantastic, then perhaps we would acquire the work for the collection.

RICHARD DEACON:

But it seems to me that the Museum of Modern Art in particular, through Alfred Barr's model, is this kind of iconic institution, this model of modernism. It's still hung according to Alfred Barr's model to a greater or lesser extent, although the introduction of new media does rock the boat a little bit. But in terms of its iconic status, if a model is shifted then that's an opportunity to shake the model as well.

BARBARA LONDON:

It's both. Our director Glenn Lowry really wants to shake the model too. We are still very deeply entrenched in modernism, but there's a bit of a shift going on right now.

RICHARD DEACON:

At this point I'm going to throw it open to the audience to find out if we've got any questions – if not, we'll just carry on talking amongst ourselves!

QUESTION:

Are there any plans to digitise the collection to allow works to be viewed on the internet?

BARBARA LONDON:

As you know this involves issues of copyright, and many rights holders see their collections/databases as

revenue producing. I work in an institution where my colleagues in the Department of Film and Media feel that film is film. To them, it should never be digitised. They're softening a little bit, just for study purposes. But whatever the millimetre of the film is, you'll always be able to see it the way it was supposed to be seen in our theatre. You'll also be able to see the new media work as well and you'll also be able to hear it the way it was meant to be heard. You won't have a popcorn machine popping when the door opens – you'll have a real state of the art sound, which is what we've always done.

RICHARD DEACON:

But with the Joan Jonas *Vertical Roll* for example, what's the point of showing that on a machine that doesn't have a vertical hold? What the *Vertical Roll* does, as a piece, is transparent: it's both about the medium and the point of transmission. If you transfer that to a display system that doesn't have a vertical hold, you lose that connection.

BARBARA LONDON:

Yes – that piece has a vertical roll built in, and it should be seen on a monitor. I think those works should not be shown on a flat screen because I think Joan, when she made it, was really thinking about the TV box, not a flat screen and not projected. The tape was meant to be on this intimate scale. Currently on view at MoMA we have a show entitled 'First Decade', and it really is the first decade of video. Amazing treasures are being shown. Because 'First Decade' is on while we are closing down our 53rd Street facility, I didn't have a gallery to put that show in. So most of the works are presented in our theatre, but works like Joan's are shown on a monitor in our Education Center.

RICHARD DEACON:

But on the other hand, the things that James has shown us are almost about doing the reverse. They are to do with undermining the display systems of the museum in order to, presumably, give you a way of looking which is non-habitual.

JAMES PUTNAM:

They are in a way. I saw the British Museum as a kind of fertile space for colonising, albeit temporarily with contemporary art, a site which didn't have to conform to the white space aesthetic – where art and artefacts could interact in a really exciting way. I found that many artists I involved in this practice were inspired by the new possibilities it opened up for them. Some of them remarked, 'It's really boring exhibiting in the proverbial white cube. It's really exciting and challenging to do something in this new kind of space and for a different audience than the minority initiated in contemporary art.' But like many of the best things in art it involves risk and could be a disaster both for the artist and the Museum. My point was that because the artists are using that space they have an understanding of it – art and artifact become an integral installation, like Sir John Soane's Museum.

BARBARA LONDON:

I'll just make a quick point that at MoMA we have done a little bit of that. We have an 'Artist's Choice' series, in which Scott Burton re-installed the Brancusi's in our collection, taking away the original plinths. It was quite amazing to see one of the Brancusi heads lying right on the carpeted floor. Chuck Close did an 'Artist's Choice' show of portraits from our collection. He had railing ledges, three rows of them, installed around the periphery of the gallery. The framed print and

photographic portraits were set chock-a-block right next to each other, so you saw all these works in a very different way. I think those different views are important, because they shake up the curatorial thinking and open things up.

JAMES PUTNAM:

It keeps a kind of fluidity within the space. I think that question of, does the work change when it gets museum-ified, does it lose some of its quality, maybe Richard, as an artist, can say something about that?

RICHARD DEACON (TO JAMES PUTNAM):

What I was going to say was that what you said seemed to be the artist's point of view, but actually the question would be, what does it do to the artifacts? Scott Burton was very heavily criticised and I've done things like that as well – I put a carpet under a David Smith sculpture, which was very heavily criticised at the time. I've just worked on the show at the Tate ('Image and Idol: Medieval Sculpture', Tate Britain, September – March 2002) where I brought things in and tried to work on the things you put underneath other objects as a means of trying to show them in a different way. But I guess the question would be, what does the Andy Goldsworthy do for the Egyptian objects? I mean, it works well with the space but what does it do for the Egyptian objects?

JAMES PUTNAM:

I think, visually, it did do something for the rest of the collection. Funnily enough, when we installed it some people reacted in horror saying, 'you can't bring sand into the Museum!' But the fact is that all these Egyptian sculptures were excavated from the sand so in a sense, it brought more context to them. After all, everything in a museum's out of context anyway. I think it did link the

ancient sculpture together in a really nice way, perhaps suggesting the serpentine form of the River Nile. But there again this work was only in there for about three days because some people would have complained about access to viewing the sculpture. It was also a through route so there were issues of health and safety, fire exits, etc. But in retrospect, its very ephemerality was its strength and completely in character with the artist's work. It also provided us with a dynamic image for our exhibition poster.

QUESTION:

I have a completely horrible question for Barbara. But actually it was James' use of the word 'colonising' that sort of struck up this chain of thought. As I'm sure you know, there are ways of looking at MoMA outside of the United States that are critical of the kind of track through the recent past that is created by this wonderful institution. Now I'm thinking of the problem in this country of the fact that there is no collection anywhere of the first decade of video art – absolutely nobody knows anything about it but, it happened here. So in this sense, this country is as unknown as Africa, the Middle East, Korea or all these places that are now very trendy for curating exhibitions and welcoming artists from. But isn't it ironic that Europe is so little known in terms of its own recent history? And I wondered, looking at that from your point of view, if you had anything that you could say to allow people here to contextualise their own work, not within an American history since it's only the American history that's known?

BARBARA LONDON:

Based upon the little bits I know, I would hope that a place like the Tate or some institution in Great Britain will accept some of these archives and start to deal with

preservation. Today I was at Locust+ and saw Jon Bewley and Simon Herbert and they were talking about their archives. At a certain point somebody trashed a lot of their ephemeral materials, which were thrown out accidentally – a real pity.

QUESTION:

But isn't it too late to go back and collect video tapes from the seventies?

BARBARA LONDON:

No, it's not too late. You'd be surprised. Often the most gummed up tapes retain their original information, which is revealed after cleaning.

QUESTION:

Well, do you think artists have kept their reel-to-reel videos?

BARBARA LONDON:

I think a lot of artists have.

RICHARD DEACON:

I have!

BARBARA LONDON:

This is something for the Arts Council to support. The community here has to lobby for funds. You don't have to take it all on at once. That's what we've done at MoMA – we have this collection of over a thousand titles, which we're adding to all the time. We have a long tradition at MoMA of film preservation. A year and a half ago we obtained an NEA grant for video preservation, and we bit off a manageable piece of the pie to preserve. The project is being completed this last year. I look at this

year's preservation as one chapter. At the same time, we went to a foundation to help Carolee Schneeman preserve several of her early films. You must begin somewhere, then you do the report and apply for another grant. I'm preparing a planning grant at MoMA to preserve the Gary Hill and Taiji Furuhashi works I just showed, because very few people are even thinking about the future of video installations.

RICHARD DEACON:

A part of the problem is that the format changes so fast that if you don't preserve it within a reasonable period of time, then the thing disappears. And if the thing disappears, you lose history. It's quite possible for Vermeer to fall foul of fashion, but the paintings don't disappear. And two hundred years later, the Vermeer's start to move up with people's interest in them. The problem, really, is to do with rapid turnover of formats and that where an institution has an active collecting, promoting, storing and archiving policy, that history becomes the only history – which to me is quite a serious issue.

QUESTION

Just on a point of information: these problems with regard to the history of British video are currently being very much discussed. My colleague as was – he's now gone to Central St. Martin's – Nick Curtis, has not only published a great deal on this but he's also running and has set up a research institute at Central St. Martin's to deal precisely with this area of practice. There are, of course, huge problems with a lot of work which is not in a public collection. A lot of it is copied and Central St. Martin's now has a growing archive and the Lux collection, of course, is being looked after. So the issues are very current and they are being discussed.

RICHARD DEACON:

And it's not just an art issue. It relates to the history of science and political history as well. If you can't actually access the protocols for nuclear response in the fifties, then a whole aspect of that history is lost.

COMMENT FROM AUDIENCE:

I am aware of all these things, truly I am, but it's not the same as the Museum of Modern Art providing a kind of basic history against which all other histories are inevitably measured. I don't know of a history of British video art that isn't full of holes because the material just isn't around any more for anyone to find. It probably isn't a great tragedy in any sense, but it creates a kind of imbalance for younger artists working now with the kind of models that they look at.

RICHARD DEACON:

But isn't that a part of what James has just been saying about the museumification of the world? We could preserve everything. Do we actually want to preserve everything? Aren't you happy to forget?

QUESTION:

Aren't things initially made to be temporary anyway? Some installations are about the ephemeral and the temporary and to try to preserve them or recreate them seems to be almost like a contradiction in terms – almost like you're trying to save something that wasn't meant to be, and cannot be, saved anyway.

BARBARA LONDON:

Some works are meant to be saved and can be. Perhaps some are meant to wither away and remain in the viewer's memory.

QUESTION:

It's like when you see a Joseph Beuys reconstructed, you know, you get the feeling that everything's slightly in the wrong place – the context of the symbolism is changed and there's all sorts of other readings going on.

BARBARA LONDON:

I agree. The line needs to be drawn somewhere. I've seen early Japanese Gutai performances recreated and it was dreadful. It's better that there be five written reports with five people's viewing experiences than to have that horrific reproduction, which gives the young generation a flawed view of what the work is about.

RICHARD DEACON:

Edward Allington always had a very nice fantasy on this theme to do with the Argonaut: that the Argonaut was only ever repaired with new parts and over the last two and a half millennia, the Argonaut had been continuously repaired and was now a tourist shop in Athens, which I always thought was very a beautiful idea! Another question you could ask – I put it out to people who are perhaps producers – do you want to remember everything or are you happy to forget? And can the museum also help you to forget as well as to remember? Actually that would be a good question to both of you!

QUESTION:

That question is relevant with regard to the show at MoMA of photographs of the streets of New York. Do we need to remember that, up to the moment that the twin towers were blown up – do we need to see those kinds of photos again – or can we move on and leave them forgotten? With the kind of work we're talking about here, if you digitise it, then you don't need to keep the physical artifacts.

BARBARA LONDON:

This is very complicated. Days after 9.11, a non-profit storefront was set up in Soho on Prince Street, where they accepted and put up images of the twin towers and the event. The photos were by very famous journalists, as well as the ordinary mortal. You could go in and buy a print for \$25, and the money went to the relief fund. My institution's show and the storefront show are part of the healing process. It is valid... then we move on with our lives.

JAMES PUTNAM:

I was going to say that, certainly as far as museums are concerned, the artifacts themselves do represent a kind of material evidence – the verification of facts via artifacts. Everything that a museum collects, however it's interpreted later on, is read as evidence and provides a basis for future research, subsequently published in academic papers. Therefore what has been collected is a form of cultural history of that time. Unfortunately – or fortunately, as the case may be – there's always this argument where people say, 'Some of these so-called important artists will be forgotten in years to come – they're merely flavour of the month'. But the fact is, they are represented in international collections and they have been acquired because they are believed by some to represent historically the culture of that time. They'll remain in public collections for posterity – in this country you can't de-accession anything that's in a public collection. In America I know it's different – you can sell off museum objects, can't you?

BARBARA LONDON:

Yes. There are different rules and regulations. Alfred Barr, our first director – he was quite an amazing man – created departments of painting and sculpture, prints

and illustrated books, and drawings, and then he added film and photography, as well as architecture and design departments before any other museum of modern art. But he also said, 'In the long run, if I am 2 per cent right in my acquisition decisions, I will have been a success.' (To James) And it really is your point: if it's in the collection, if there was a knowledgeable curator who went to bat for it, and it's not my speciality, well, who am I to say? So things get pulled out of the storeroom and get put on the wall and taken off the wall. This is taste, and the pressures of the time, and it will always, always happen.

RICHARD DEACON:

That's the benefit of the collection, you see: you put stuff in store and maybe someone else will want it. The Tate has stuff in store that's never going to come out and it has made mistakes as well as inspired guesses. My question was, can museums ever make you forget? The answer is yes, they can make you forget – and this is exactly Susan's point. For example, if it had only preserved non-paper artefacts then we'd have a very different view of history, or we'd construct a very different view of material history. But also the museum is not passive, it acts actively, which goes back to the question of MoMA's role in Queens: the museum is being proactive in Queens in a way that it hasn't been before and wasn't originally. The 'Art of Our Time' logo was a very proactive installation. Is it going to have 'Art of Our Time' on the new building?

BARBARA LONDON:

Not exactly in that way! We are planning a range of celebratory works for the opening in Queens. Later this spring, Francis Alÿs will orchestrate a pageant from Manhattan to Queens. And Tsai Quo Chan will to do one

of his firework pieces. It is important that New York has more than one museum presenting contemporary art. There's MoMA, the Guggenheim, the Whitney and there are smaller museums, such as the Grey Art Gallery and the New Museum – of course the latter doesn't have a collection. The different points of view mean a range of new work gets shown, and we need that dialogue.

JAMES PUTNAM:

I have to say one thing about that 'forgotten' question. There are some works of art that are forgotten, but there are some that have some kind of rumour about them that almost makes them more powerful in a sense – all these lost paintings that are then recovered, for example. So I think sometimes not having the artifact can be even more powerful.

QUESTION:

I think this question of forgetting is really interesting. (To Barbara) Even within your talk you had this slide of what was a Nam June Paik coloured piece, but from my memory there was an interactive colour organ done by another artist who was at the Museum of Modern Art but he's forgotten. So even within the Museum of Modern Art there are ways of killing off people who don't fit into the canon, which is exactly what Susan's question was.

BARBARA LONDON:

Many works from many different camps are made at one time. Some are in the limelight and some not, and a canon forms. It is important to consider what is in the shadows, outside the system. Some of these works are re-evaluated and moved to the centre, with the next generation or before.

At MoMA we had two important shows that included a lot of now obscure artists. 'The Machine as Seen at the

End of the Mechanical Age' (1968) show, organized by Pontus Hultén, began with a drawing by Leonardo of a 'flying machine' and concluded with a view into the future in the form of Nam June Paik's videos. Another show, 'Information' (1970) caught conceptual art at its start.

QUESTION:

It's a big question really that we might want to think about over a drink, but is there ever any argument for preserving a whole museum?

RICHARD DEACON:

Yes. Museums are preserved. I can give you one example straight off: the Natural History Museum in Dublin. The installation of the exhibits in the Natural History Museum in Dublin is preserved as an installation as well as a working natural history museum. The Sir John Soane (London) would be another example, as would the Pitt Rivers Museum (Oxford), which is a very important museum to have conserved.

QUESTION:

Is this argument going to arise at all in the future of MoMA? You were saying how deeply it was embedded in modernism. Quite apart from die-hard people refusing to change, is there an argument for saying, 'Just keep it and we'll start again in Queens on the riverbank'?

RICHARD DEACON:

That's not a bad idea!

BARBARA LONDON:

We are changing. At MoMA QNS a portion of the collection will be installed in a radically different way. It's a start.

RICHARD DEACON:

Another example is the Winckelmann Room in the British Museum, downstairs: the installation of the classical sculptures.

BARBARA LONDON:

When you come to New York, go to the Natural History Museum and look at the North Coast Indian room installed by the anthropologist Franz Boas in the early 20th century. It's unbelievable when you consider colonialism and anthropology; what anthropology is and what another culture is. Boas' wall labels make references to good and evil in ways we wouldn't today.

QUESTION (TO JAMES PUTNAM):

I'm trying to deal with museums being static but it seems that museums have changed quite a lot in the past two years. How has that affected the way you're thinking about curating now?

JAMES PUTNAM:

It's changed slightly for the worse from my point of view because I haven't been able to do any more intervention shows at the Museum. Actually, having used the word 'intervention', I didn't think the word intervention constituted an exhibition, but I have to put all my projects before an exhibitions committee and none of them have got accepted – so I've almost given up! I thought, 'Well I've got to try and do other things that don't involve that.' But interestingly enough, I have seen

that the Great Court, which is this new, Norman Foster-designed space within the British Museum, is somewhat different in that it's kind of a public space and it doesn't come under the remit of the curatorial control of the various keepers of the departments. There is a possibility to try and create interventions there. So, last week in fact, when we were doing this conference called 'From Material Things', we had a work by a young Canadian artist called Germaine Koh which was an 80-metre long knitwork that we just unravelled down the staircase of the Great Court. I had asked the permission of senior management and no one responded. So I wasn't sure whether we were allowed to do it or not: I think we were probably officially granted permission to install it for maybe two or three hours but no one complained, so we extended it as a performance for a few days. My colleagues seemed to like it and it was, after all, the first contemporary work in that space, so hopefully it's possible to do more.

RICHARD DEACON:

I went to the 'Unknown Amazon' show of recent excavations in the lower Amazon Delta of some very interesting objects. One of the curious aspects of that was that in the Great Court itself there were a group of ethnic Indians making and selling basketworks, which raised interesting questions about the place of vanishing communities within the Museum. (To James) You may have a comment on that, I don't know. They were not exhibits, but they were curiously picturesque in a way which is difficult, though the objects that they made were themselves materially very interesting. The Museum has pushed itself into an area where lots of significant questions are raised.

JAMES PUTNAM:

I must say there is a tendency for some of the British Museum departments to adopt a rather ethnographic approach to collecting contemporary art which is influenced by the restraints imposed by their historical collections. For instance, the Japanese Department might exhibit a lacquer screen or a wood-block print by a contemporary Japanese artist working within that tradition, but would be unlikely to exhibit a work by an artist like Tatsuo Miyajima using electronics or new media. Thus the existing collection often justifies acquisition of art that reflects continuity of tradition rather than major works of contemporary art. Sometimes the Museum will collect ethnographic objects that weren't necessarily meant to be preserved, because they have a remit to collect from disappearing cultures. Then it gets on to the question of how important or indeed appropriate is it to collect them? It's a very interesting question.

RICHARD DEACON:

And it brings us back to the question about British video art of the seventies.

QUESTION (SUSAN HILLER):

I admit to an obsession with museums these days, one I think most artists share. We do live within a culture that tends to museumify everything and I just think that one of the debates that must be relevant to all of this is, are we collecting ourselves in this kind of exercise and turning ourselves into exhibits?

JAMES PUTNAM:

But as an artist, do you aspire to have your work in a museum? Is that a reason for making work?

SUSAN HILLER:

Some work, but other work would be totally inappropriate to be preserved or documented. The tragedy of that approach is that if you look at the history of the past, we only know what sort of vessels and jewellery and weapons people had; we don't know anything about their songs or their conversation or much about their recipes or food. And it's the same thing – if a lot of artists are making work in those ephemeral areas that are inappropriate to document or collect, then again it doesn't get passed forward in any way. These are very interesting issues, I think, for artists to consider.

JAMES PUTNAM:

And would some artists like to have their work in museums – in an archive, for example – but not shown? I'd like to say that although the British Museum is not an art museum as such, it does have some art objects in there, but it's very much in order to represent the culture. They can be everyday objects or artifacts, all kinds of things, so it's not saying, 'this is the Museum of Fine Art.' In fact, some of its utilitarian artifacts are far more interesting than a lot of the artwork. Maybe they can be reappraised as being 'artwork'. I think if we looked at the 'Africa 95' exhibition, which covered thousands of years of African history, some of the most aesthetically appealing objects in there for me were those pre-dynastic ancient Egyptian flint knives and pre-dynastic pottery, which was absolutely incredible. By no stretch of the imagination would they be in the same class as a piece of Egyptian sculpture but they still had their own statement, their own power as great works, in a sense.

QUESTION:

In terms of your curatorial practice, you both talked a lot about how bringing artists into your museums has

caused you, as curators, to rethink the way you collect and archive, and to rethink taxonomies. For example, if you think about Richard Wentworth's coke bottles and how that has related to the writing of labels, or about how wanting to see Joan Jonas's work on a monitor has caused you rethink the taxonomy of the media. But I'd be interested to hear you say more about how bringing artists into your museums has caused, not only your curatorial colleagues, but your other colleagues in say, marketing or education, to rethink ideas of exhibition display.

BARBARA LONDON:

You used the words 'marketing' and 'education'. MoMA has always been curatorially driven, and when we did our website it was curatorially driven. It's not market driven. Certainly we need advertising and we need promotion to get the word out about shows and about work, but I really look at marketing as being something that works with us. My museum, whether we like it or not, is still curatorially driven. Unfortunately, in all North American museums, education is the low 'person' on the totem pole, although we do think a lot about our viewers, and always try to provide a context so that neophytes have a hook and feel comfortable about their own interpretations.

COMMENT FROM AUDIENCE:

It's just the sceptic in me who thinks about museums as always under this constant pressure to bring more people through the door. I specifically remember seeing the Pollock show at MoMA and as you stepped out of the exhibition you were confronted with a bank of computers that were displaying a virtual CD.

BARBARA LONDON:

This is an age old problem, that people are going to come for Picasso, they're going to come for Pollock, and now that Bill Viola has become more of a name, they might turn out in numbers for him.

JAMES PUTNAM:

I would think that, if one followed Alfred Barr's original mission statement, the whole of the Museum of Modern Art is completely market driven – it's like a production line, the torpedo through time thing. He saw everything as a means of production, whether it was the exhibition or the book in the shop. Wasn't that his whole philosophy?

BARBARA LONDON:

I think he saw it as a whole entity, yes. But he was really thinking about the collection, more than anything, when he used that model.

RICHARD DEACON:

Was his torpedo armed? In his imagination, was this torpedo destined to hit something? It's a strange analogy to use; it's an update of an arrow through time, but I always imagine that a torpedo is armed.

BARBARA LONDON:

He was aiming it at the future. It was right after World War 1 when he used the metaphor, but he wasn't thinking about warfare.

RICHARD DEACON:

OK. So we'll take one more question.

QUESTION (TO BARBARA LONDON):

Maybe it's a question that's been asked before, but I have the phrase 'entrenched in modernism' stuck in my head. I was just wondering if you foresee, or if the Museum foresees, a point when it becomes the Museum of Twentieth Century Art and how you somehow ascertain or guarantee your relationship to the contemporary as a museum. Or at some point do you say, 'OK, we're a museum of that period?'

BARBARA LONDON

The fact that my museum is expanding shows we're very committed to the 21st century. Our Department of Film and Media, which I'm in, is moving along, as are my colleagues in Painting and Sculpture. There's a really strong mandate to acquire contemporary work and to show it.

RICHARD DEACON

OK. I'd just like to thank Barbara and James for having come through this and thank you all for coming.

(Audience applause)

THE HISTORY OF THE

The history of the city of London, from the first settlement of the Britons, to the present time. The city of London, the metropolis of Great Britain, is situated on the banks of the River Thames, and is one of the most ancient and populous cities in the world. It was founded by the Britons, and was the capital of the kingdom of the Britons, until the conquest of the island by the Saxons. The city of London, the metropolis of Great Britain, is situated on the banks of the River Thames, and is one of the most ancient and populous cities in the world. It was founded by the Britons, and was the capital of the kingdom of the Britons, until the conquest of the island by the Saxons.

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SPEAKERS' BIOGRAPHIES

ANDREW BURTON

Andrew Burton is head of the Department of Fine Art and Lecturer in Sculpture at the University of Newcastle. He is a sculptor who has produced a number of major public commissions including *Annunciation*, commissioned by Sculpture at Goodwood (2000) and *Cycle*, commissioned by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council (2001). He has had solo exhibitions at venues including the Herbert Gallery, Coventry (2000) and the European Ceramics Work Centre in the Netherlands (1996).

SACHA CRADDOCK

Sacha Craddock, an independent art critic, teaches at numerous art colleges, writes articles and catalogue essays and gives public lectures. The chair of 'New Contemporaries', she is in the process of setting up *Monitor*, a publication that will establish a forum for critical writing, discussion and newly commissioned work. She is also involved in establishing the Brighton International Photo Biennial 2003 and co-curates, with three others, the new Bloomberg Space in the City of London.

RICHARD DEACON

Richard Deacon is one of Britain's most significant contemporary sculptors and a member of the Board of Trustees for BALTIC. He has exhibited extensively both in the UK and internationally. His work is represented in many public collections both in this country and elsewhere. He has made commissioned work in England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, China and New Zealand. Deacon has been Visiting Professor at Chelsea School of Art and the London Institute since 1992 and Professor at Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts, Paris, since 1999.

LAURA GODFREY-ISAACS

Laura Godfrey-Isaacs is an artist, curator and academic. She trained as a painter at the Slade School of Art and in New York, on a Fulbright Fellowship. In 1998 she ceased her practice as an artist and set up the art organisation HOME, which is based inside her own family house in Camberwell, London. HOME works collaboratively with a range of international artists who realise exhibitions, performances, events, talks and workshops from within the functioning spaces of her house. HOME is a major research project and consultancy, which investigates the relationship between contemporary art and the domestic.

SUSAN HILLER

Artist Susan Hiller holds the BALTIC Chair in Contemporary Art at the University of Newcastle. She uses cultural artefacts as basic materials to investigate themes such as language, belief, desire and the subconscious mind. Some of Susan Hiller's work can be seen currently in 'Self-Evident' at Tate Britain, 'Real Life' at Tate St. Ives. and 'Taster' at the DAAD Gallery, Berlin. A solo exhibition of her recent installations using sound, video and the internet is now at the Museet fur Samidskunst, Roskilde, Denmark. Other recent exhibitions in which she has participated include the Sydney Biennale (2002) and the Bienale de Habana (2001).

BARBARA LONDON

Barbara London is a curator in the Department of Film and Media at The Museum of Modern Art in New York. She founded the Museum's ongoing new media exhibition programme, creating a platform for artists such as Laurie Anderson, Gary Hill, Joan Jonas, Nam June Paik and Bill Viola, working in the then-emerging media of video and electronic art. She established the Video

Study Center at MoMA to document and preserve work in this field. As a curator at MoMA she has organised numerous exhibitions including 'Video Spaces: Eight Installations' (1995) and 'The First Decade: Video from the EAI Archives' (2002). Barbara London has written widely on video and media art, and her curatorial dispatches from Russia, Ukraine, China, and Japan have been published on the MoMA website. (www.moma.org/onlineprojects)

JOHN MILNER

John Milner is Professor of Art History at the University of Newcastle. His numerous publications include studies on the art of the early Soviet period (*Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*, 1996, and *A Dictionary of Russian and Soviet Artists*, 1993) and on late nineteenth-century Paris in *The Studios of Paris: The Capital of Art in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1988). More recently he has published *Art, War and Revolution: France 1870-1871* (2000).

JAMES PUTNAM

James Putnam is founder and curator of the Contemporary Arts & Cultures Programme at the British Museum, London, where he has staged a number of innovative exhibitions. In 1994 he curated the exhibition 'Time Machine: Ancient Egypt and Contemporary Art', in which works by contemporary artists such as Marc Quinn and Andy Goldsworthy were displayed within the Museum's Egyptian Galleries. He also acts as an independent curator and has been working on an ongoing series of exhibitions at the Freud Museum, London. James Putnam has written a number of publications on both the history of ancient Egypt and contemporary art, including *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (Thames and Hudson, 2001).

DR ANDREW RENTON

Dr Andrew Renton is the Slade Curator at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London, and an independent curator and writer. He has curated numerous international exhibitions and was co-curator for Manifesta 1, the first European Biennial in Rotterdam in 1996. He was also co-curator of 'Browser' (Vancouver, 1997), a project involving 350 artists, another version of which was made for the Tate Gallery, London, in 2000 ('Bankside Browser'). More recently, he curated the exhibition 'Total Object Complete with Missing Parts' at Tramway, Glasgow (2001). Dr Renton has published widely on contemporary art, including *Technique Anglaise: Current Trends in British Art* (Thames & Hudson, 1991), and writes a weekly column on contemporary art issues in the *Evening Standard* newspaper.

JONATHAN WATKINS

Jonathan Watkins joined Ikon in Birmingham as director in autumn 1999, following his appointment as artistic director of the 11th Sydney Biennale. Previously he worked for a number of years with major galleries in London, as curator of the Serpentine (1995-97) and director of Chisenhale Gallery (1990-95). As a guest curator, Jonathan Watkins has contributed to 'Quotidiana', Castello di Rivoli, Turin (1999-2000) and 'Europarte', La Biennale di Venezia (1997). He was British commissioner for 'Milano Europa 2000', Palazzo di Triennale, Milan and guest curator for 'Facts of Life': an exhibition of contemporary Japanese art at the Hayward Gallery, London (2001). He is also guest curator for the forthcoming Tate Triennial at Tate Britain (Spring 2003).