THE
ARTIST
AS
CURATOR

edited by Celina Jeffery

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Foreword

The importance of varying kinds of artist associations or groups—in all degrees of (in) formality—contributing to the development of the artist as curator continues today with a long and ongoing history.

In *With Practicality Comes a Practice: The Artist as Curator*, Sarah Pierce identifies a first instance when in France, in 1648, a group of court artists petitioned King Louis XIV, 'requesting the establishment of a Royal Academy of Painting, which would distinguish their work from the artisan trades'.[1] This arguably signals the first moment in which a professionalization of artists taking control of curation and presentation of their work takes place, sitting alongside academies established in England, the Netherlands and Italy at that time. In many ways it may be viewed as a parallel to current activities and for the existence of this book in and of itself, a contemporary moment to examine this phenomenon with an appropriate degree of distance through a careful analysis of differing case studies, articulating a range of methods, process, impulses and typologies.

Subsequent moments in history can be traced to equally pivotal actions such as the development of the *Salons des Refusés* in the late nineteenth century Paris, whereby artists again took control of what work was shown and where it was presented. The most infamous of these was in 1863 when the official Salon caused upheaval with its rejection of more than 3,000 works, the state stepping in to sponsor an exhibition of those rejected, including Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe.* In a quieter way, yet with reverberations that arguably created revolutionary change, eleven years later in 1874, Edgar Degas and a group of friends decided to no longer show with the Salon, instead forming the *Société anonyme des peintres, sculpteurs et graveurs* (the Cooperative Society of Painters, Sculptors and Printmakers) as a means to wrest control from the perceived corruption of vested interests. This first 'Impressionist' exhibition held weeks before the Salon opened, effectively set in motion a radical shift in the history of art, so positively was it received. From defined gallery spaces to informal domestic arenas to alternative artist associations or use of spaces, these models seem not so far away from more contemporary projects and histories of various artist-run initiatives.

Increasing numbers of publications and the recent mushrooming of curatorial courses in art schools discussing museum studies, exhibition histories and star curators make up a still burgeoning field of exhibition studies, but the role of artists in contributing to

our understanding of that thing we call the 'exhibition' is much less well discussed. And so with this publication further scholarship is added to the investigation and dialogue. Collective texts here focus in the main on the 1960s to the present, and it is not intended to be exhaustive or to present a survey of such a rich and diverse history. Rather, many essays oscillate around the 1980s, a moment in global political and economic history that had significant repercussions on the place of culture within society. In the United Kingdom in 1981 the then Employment Secretary of the Conservative government, Norman Tebbitt, made his notorious statement, often misquoted as 'Get on your bike!', which might be seen as a call to arms to a young generation of artists, while refuting such political and theoretical underpinnings. This era gave rise to key moments in artist-run projects as market forces took hold, in much the same way as the underground in Moscow or Prague galvanized artists to find alternative ways to give voice to their work during Communist times through conceptual interventions and informal gatherings in homes, clubs and bars. In London during the 1980s, the series of exhibitions such as *Freeze* or *Gambler* were initiated and organized by a group of Goldsmith's students including Damien Hirst, Angus Fairhurst, Angela Bulloch and others who became lumped together as the YBAs; other projects such as *Building One* and the *East Country Yard Show*, artist-run spaces and collectives such as City Racing, Factual Nonsense or BANK proliferated; and in Glasgow, exhibitions such as *Self Conscious State*, *Surface Tension*, *Windfall '91*(a group show of 26 artists from Scotland and elsewhere in Europe presented in the old Seamen's Mission, including now familiar names such as Douglas Gordon, Martin Boyce, Claire Barclay and Gerard Byrne) or the continuing legacy on successive generations of the inventive Transmission Gallery amongst many others, established flourishing scenes across the country connecting to others around the world.

In more recent times, edited and conceived by Elena Filipovic, the newly appointed Director of Kunsthalle Basel, Switzerland, *The Artist as Curator* is currently unfolding as a serial publication available through the magazine *Mousse*. Made possible by a collaboration between a group of art institutions and foundations as a two-year project, it is halfway through at the time of writing. Taking the form of a juxtaposition of newly commissioned essays and reprinted texts for each issue, it concerns itself with what is perceived to be a much understudied phenomenon, yet an influential history that has yet to be written, that of the eponymous artist as curator. Each edition addresses a combination of a historic and more contemporary exhibition from the post-war period to today, that have proved seminal in artists rethinking exactly what an 'exhibition' might be. These twenty artist-curated exhibitions include pairings of shows such as Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore's *an Exhibit* (1957) with John Cage's *'Rolywholyover, A Circus' for Museum by John Cage* (1993); Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée d'Art Moderne Département des Aigles, Section des Figures* (1972) with Philippe Thomas's *Feux Pâles* (1990); and Group Material's *AIDS Timeline* (1989) with Alice Creischer, Andreas Siekmann and Max Jorge Hinderer's *The Potosí Principle* (2010), for example.

A number of essays in this publication, and perhaps the impetus for the collection of texts in particular insofar as it reveals a myriad of strategies, take a cue from the 'Artist's Choice' series begun at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in the late 1980s, a version of the 'Artist's Eye' series established some years prior at the National Gallery in London, for which artists organize small shows based on works belonging to the museum. Such projects speak eloquently of the idea of exhibition-making, not only by retaining some kind of flavour, atmosphere or thematic present within the artist's practice per se, but by an interrogation of the institution's historically strict divisions and often systematic categorization of works and peoples in their collections. Such challenges reveal ideas, thoughts, opportunities, differing representations and questions via the benefits of a more idiosyncratic, less clinical approach than one conventionally seen to be dominated by historians or conventional curatorial staff. And so through the lens of such considerations, issues and the collection of texts herein, we might begin to gain a broader understanding of where we are and where we might go.

– Nigel Prince
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Note

1. Sarah Pierce, *With Practicality Comes a Practice: the Artist as Curator*, http://visualartists.ie/the-manual-a-survival-guide-for-visual-artists/the-trinity-of-the-artist-the-gallery-the-curator/with-practicality-comes-a-practice-the-artist-as-curator/. Accessed 14 October 2014.

Introduction

Celina Jeffery

This anthology offers a particular and discrete perspective on curatorial practice; it undertakes an investigation into the roles, functions and designations of the artist as curator in contemporary artistic practice. It does not present a historical survey of the artist-curator—a topic too extensive to treat in a single volume—but through a discussion of nine case studies it identifies specific motivations, methods and typologies. In doing so, it brings together practice-based research and museological, curatorial and archival research and theory to address a relatively overlooked topic. The case studies presented here reflect on the hybrid role of the artist-curator in multiple manifestations and give rise to new means of considering this nexus as a creative process, a research methodology and a critical strategy.

Essays in this work thus traverse multiple kinds of institutions—museums and galleries of art, ethnography and history; the aquarium; the virtual museum; and the biennale. Principal approaches, both discrete and overlapping, are discussed, beginning with museological 'interventions', in which artists are invited to select existing work from a museum or gallery collection and curate an exhibition structured around novel and innovative connections that may not have been possible within the context of the compartmentalized or historically structured institution. There is also the idea that curating can be an extension of artistic practice manifested in a multiplicity of ways: the curation of one's own work; the curation of objects outside the art museum; or curation as a means to explore a shared or collaborative process, idea or thematic central to the artist's own practice. In each case, the interconnection of the artist and curator manifests as a means of achieving a creative praxis of sorts and a purposeful transgression of the disciplinary boundaries of art, curation and institution. This is a theme that underscores all of the essays.

Subsequently, a key contextual issue of this book is the authorial nature of curating and the purported autonomy of, or interrelationship between, artist and curator. Several key questions emerge: what approaches do artist-curators employ that may be thought of as exclusive to this position? When does the artist's arrangement of his or her own work become a curatorial initiative and hence a form of artist-curating? What are the collaborative strategies and formations that allow for the contravention of art into curating and vice versa? Much revolves around the definition of curating in a field of expanded artistic production: in what capacity does the artwork or artistic site of practice and consumption become so porous as to render the divisions between art and curating indistinguishable?

The essays in this book consider these issues in part by assessing the remits that artists and curators are usually granted and how they are framed, mediated and appropriated through the artist-curator formation. Ostensibly, within exhibitions meaning is made by the artist and not by the curator; curator Suzanne Pagé describes the curator as a kind of facilitator or 'supplicant', 'a dervish who circles around the artworks' (Pagé in Obrist 2013: 236).

It was not until the 1960s that individual and independent curators assumed responsibility for organizing and 'making' an exhibition, often thematic in nature, creating an alternative perspective within which the curator assumed the role of artist, author and/or cultural producer. The most notable instance of this is arguably Harald Szeemann, curator of the renowned *Documenta 5* (1972), who reconceived the exhibition as a performative '100 Day Event', as opposed to a '100 Day Museum', and thereby established a contentious reputation as a meta artist-curator (Szeemann, in Obrist 2013: 91). Daniel Buren, a kind of artist-curator himself and forerunner of Institutional Critique, credited Szeemann with having developed the idea of 'the exhibition as a work of art and no longer as an exhibition of works of art' (Buren, quoted in Richter 2013). For Buren, Szeemann had assumed the position of 'master' artist of the exhibition, applying a didactic formula and 'trapping' artists in limiting, thematic categorizations (Buren, in O'Neill 2010: 221).

Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012) traces the rise of the independent curator and curatorial discourses and in so doing identifies the curator-as-artist model as engaging with the creative praxis. Terry Smith's essay 'Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists' is the most thorough historical and theoretical consideration of the subject in contemporary art. For the most part, Smith identifies conceptual art's anti-institutional impulse as resulting in artists such as Marcel Broodthaers's rearticulating assemblage and display as 'a work of art' in the likes of *Musee d'Art Moderne, Departement des Aigles,* 1971. Meanwhile, the idea of the artists' museum (the *faux-mus*ée*)*, including Claes Oldenburg's Mouse Museum (1965–77), with its inclusion of the everyday and 'low' culture, became an alternative challenge to established museums.[1] Other artist-curator initiatives followed this course of the 'anti-museum'. Joseph Kosuth, for example, presented 'a display that would be simultaneously an exhibition entirely of works by other artists *and* an exhibition of their own work, while at the same time an installation artwork *and* a reinstallation of (part of) a museum' (Smith 2012: 114). Inspired by the reconceptualization of the 'installation', many museums began to invite artists to curate exhibitions, beginning with the National Gallery's (London) *The Artist's Eye* in the late 1970s, followed by the MoMA's 'Artist's Choice' series in the 1980s (Smith 2012: 120–21).

The MoMA's 'Artist's Choice' series, motivated by a desire to revive and make relevant historical collections as well as to explore new methods and meanings of exhibition-making, pioneered and, later, dominated this approach. The idea of inviting artists to curate museum and gallery collections flourished in the late 1980s and became a kind of mainstay by the 1990s. A broad array and succession of significant artist-curated 'museum interventions' followed, including Fred Wilson's installation *Mining the Museum* (1992–93); Sonia Boyce's *Peep* (1995) at Brighton Museum; Hans Haacke's *Give & Take:*

Hans Haacke, Mixed Messages at the V&A in 2001 and John Baldessari's contribution as curator to the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden's initiative *Ways of Seeing* (*John Baldessari Explores the Collection*, 2006-7).[2] O'Neill has written about artists who curate from within their own practice and collaboratively, offering General Idea and Group Material as notable examples.[3] Art-curated exhibitions are now rather common place in contemporary gallery and museum settings with artists such as Mark Dion, Mark Wallinger, Cornelia Parker and Grayson Perry being prominent recent exponents.[4]

The essays in this anthology are written from numerous perspectives: by artist's who curate; by curators who, conversely, employ 'artistic' strategies; by art historians and anthropologists who curate and write about curatorial history and practice; and by artist-curators who see these approaches as indivisible.

Eduardo Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons of Nahuatl* (1985–89) was the first exhibition in the United Kingdom for which an artist was invited to collaborate with a museum to reconceptualize an ethnographic collection. Nicky Levell's essay on *Lost Magic Kingdoms* positions and re-evaluates this controversial 're-display' of the British Museum's ethnographic collection as an expression of an 'anthropological imagination' in which the artist's Brutalist artistic strategies merged with his desire to create curatorial juxtapositions that were particular, subjective and poised for postcolonial critique on both institutional and social levels. Significantly, what Levell also highlights is that far from positioning the artist as having automatic and autonomous capacity to critique the institution from within, Paolozzi's close collaboration with the commissioner, Malcolm McLeod, the Keeper of Ethnography at the Museum of Mankind (the Ethnography Department of the British Museum), presents a particular kind of cooperation in which the mutual aim was to reintroduce the 'poetic' into museum ethnography.

This book also includes two essays on the MoMA's 'Artist's Choice' series, established by Kirk Varnedoe in the late 1980s, for which a succession of contemporary artists were invited to curate exhibitions using the museum's collections. Lewis Kachur's essay, 'Remastering MoMA: Kirk Varnedoe's "Artist's Choice" Series', chronicles this groundbreaking approach and thereby defines some of the new typologies and ways of understanding exhibitions to which the series has contributed. Informed by a close reading of Varnedoe's intentions for initiating 'Artist's Choice', which reflected his desire to invigorate modernism rather than deconstruct it, Kachur identifies several imperative motivations and manifestations of the artist-as-curator arising from the series. First is the idea that artists can adopt the position of 'non-specialists' with the ability to revise and enliven art history in a unique manner; second, that subjective decisions in the selection and display of work based on forms and processes adherent in the artist's own practice are valid and result in potentially subversive types of (informal) display; and last, that the retrieval and 'excavation' of overlooked historical (predominately female) practitioners in the collection could have profound effects on our conception of the history of modernism.

Cher Krause Knight's essay 'Both Object and Subject: MoMA's Burton on Brancusi', considers artist Scott Burton's approach to bringing a new perspective to Brancusi in

part by exploring a self-reflexive examination on his own life and work. Knight positions Burton's blurring of the lines between art, curating and art history as an elision of the 'subject and object'. The essay thus also illustrates how such exhibitions served as an extension of the artist's practice manifested in numerous ways through the inclusion of their own work as points of affiliation, contrast and the unanticipated. Like Paolozzi's *Lost Magic*, Burton's pioneering exhibition is read more as a model of cooperation than an explicit form of critique, one that intended to rework transcendent explorations of Brancusi's practice in the context of his own terminal illness.

What these examples share is the idea that artists can pose essential 'interventions' into collections and display methods considered contrived, jaded or outmoded by their historical (and, often, imperial) lineage of institutional cultures of curating. These instances of artists curating exhibitions are, in part, premised on the notion that the museum is inherently stratified and duplicitous, neither objective nor truthful, while the contemporary artist can offer an inquisitive, subjective, at times playful, and ultimately critical mediation. In fact, each of these essays also notes the significant criticism received by the artist-curators from their contemporaries, a reaction caused, perhaps, by what Elena Filipovic describes as the breaking of the paradigm of exhibition history itself through the construction of the exhibition as form, which requires new ways of thinking through the very notion of what constitutes an exhibition.[5]

As the processes of the artist and curator continue to fold into one another, the concept of authorship and agency raises a central question: what informs the conscious distinction or elision of artist production and theoretically informed curatorial considerations? There are several instances demonstrated here in which this strategy of the artist-curating from within acts as a critique of the entire system of exhibition-making and reception. The second portion of the book thus considers the aesthetic and political processes at work within these instances of deconstructing histories to create alternative trajectories that are less *historically* significant as they are revealing of the pluralities of approach that reshape the boundaries of art, curating, exhibition space and their reception in the social sphere.

Dew Harrison's essay considers how her own computer-mediated practice, with its roots in Duchampian aesthetics, necessitates new and exploratory forms of curating and, reciprocally, how curating is an art practice. In chronicling her practice as a digital artist and curator from the early 1990s to the present, Harrison highlights the central role of collaboration in what she discusses as a particular kind of hybridization of artistic production and curating as well as the concept of the exhibition itself. Citing the significance of the history of conceptual art as an underpinning of digital art in the 1990s and 2000s, she examines how collaborative digital and virtual projects became a form of curating that is exploratory and 'unique' in its inherently social ambitions. It is the emphasis on the social platform, with its intrinsic use and consideration of interaction with audiences, that extends the idea of the curatorial in contemporary digital art to a highly cooperative model characterized by a flow of knowledge, creativity and experience that is immediate and multi-directional.

Bruce Checefsky, a film-maker and curator, creates a case for the artist *is* curator as a politicized counterpoint to the artist *as* curator. Checefsky cites key historical instances of the artist as curator, in particular Martha Rosler's *If You Lived Here* from 1989, to demonstrate the pivotal role of both activism and the political within the history of the artist as curator. From here, he takes a self-reflective stance on his own practice as a film-maker and curator of films from the 1920s and 1930s that have been lost or partially destroyed. Checefsky considers the delicate role of reimagining and remaking these films as a form of critical reappraisal that can fold back onto the meta-dynamics of curating: of how the artist *is* curator is in a unique position to create intertextual relations and appropriations of authorship that allow for more direct forms of political inquiry within the context of exhibition-making.

The ethical possibilities of the artist-curator paradigm are discussed in Brenda L. Croft's 'Say My Name', an autobiographical essay on the racialized politics of the art world. Croft, an artist from the Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra peoples of the Northern Territory of Australia, discusses the necessity of her becoming an artist-curator as a means of creating opportunities for under-represented Indigenous art and systems of knowledge and experience. The essay is written from the perspective of an 'auto-ethnographic, culturally immersive performative standpoint' (Croft). In this, she fluidly interweaves personal narrative, commentary on the commercialization of Aboriginal visual culture within Australia, her practice as a photographer within the context of cultural activism and her eventual role as an artist-curator highlighting the politicized representation of Indigenous contemporary art on a national and international level.

 With particular focus on her innovative *Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art* (2000)—the first biennial dedicated to Australian Indigenous art—she emphasizes the challenges of agency at work in the artist-curator, inclusion-exclusion, observer-participant trajectory. In the context of the scarcity of opportunities for Indigenous artists and curators and, at times, the outright rejection of Croft's position as an artist *and* curator, her essay serves as a significant undertaking of social and political activism.

Mieke Bal describes curating as a visual discourse involving 'a mix of acts of framing and being framed' (Bal 2012: 180). The curatorial act, she argues, involves the interrelationship of viewer, context and time and, in an ultimate sense, the primary engagement of audiences. Here, it is not only the creative and collaborative encouragement of the curator that acts as a catalyst for engagement but also the 'care' attributed to the event. Ideally, this results in an exhibition that enables affecting experiences (Bal 2012: 180–81). The essays by Minissale; Drobnick and Fisher; and myself are all concerned with the relationship between the curatorial act and the ethical imperative and affective potential of curating.

Gregory Minissale's essay extends the inquiry into contemporary art's curatorial impulse through a consideration of Marina Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), a seven-day performance in which the artist re-enacts canonical performances of the 1960s and 1970s by artists such as Joseph Beuys, Vito Acconci and Gina Pane, as well as herself. Minissale's essay investigates how curating is historically embedded within the desire to

care *('curare')* for people, places, objects and ideas, and makes a stimulating case for how Abramović's performances (of her own and others' work), opens up a fused artistic and curatorial space for empathy and multiplicity of meaning and agency. Here, Minissale argues that Abramović situates herself in an indefinite position that makes visible the blurring of the boundaries between artist, curator and audience. At the interstices of the contemporary and the historic, Abramović's own body is said to delineate, directly and indirectly, the ways in which these other performances have been curated and understood while giving them new and surprising meaning in the present. Undermining both the so-called objectivity of the curated object and of the archive, Minissale argues that *Seven Easy Pieces* offers an open-ended series of social, sensational and ethical experiences shared among artist, curator and audience.

Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher's 'Curating the City: *Collectioneering* and the Affects of Display' is an inquiry into the hybridization that occurs within the artist-curator dynamic through their theory of 'collectioneering'—a form of research and practice that envelops art, archiving, curating and cultural production. The essay considers the exhibition *Collectioneering* by DisplayCult (a collaboration of Drobnick and Fisher), composed of hundreds of distinct objects drawn from multiple institutions and exhibited in venues across the Canadian city of Kingston. DisplayCult utilizes collaborative artist-curator processes with the aim of exploring the possibilities of performative and affective exhibition experiences. The primary process and form in this exhibition was the idea of the radical juxtaposition inspired by *wunderkammern* and grouped as 'material constellations' creating highly pluralistic and open-ended possibilities of interaction with audiences, which diverted from the normative (educational) and narrative practices of material culture display. They describe their process as a 'post-medium curatorial initiative' that investigates the lines of inquiry into curatorial discourse, representation, affect and experience, radically blurring the boundaries of art and curating.

In 'Artists Curating the Expedition', I examine *Oceanomania* (2012), by Mark Dion, who bridges the forms of art and curating to investigate ideas of exploration, preservation and the ethical responsibility of museums. *Oceanomania* is read as a manifestation of Dion's practice, in which art and curating are indistinguishable and serve to explore trans-disciplinary and collaborative processes. Here, I consider how this merging makes a purposeful transgression of the disciplinary boundaries of art, curating, art history, geography and science, and, secondly, whether the artist-curator processes may offer a unique opportunity to re-frame the cultural and ethical discourses' emerging from climate change debates.

It is important to emphasize that this book is not a comprehensive survey of the histories, practices and conceptual dialogue between art and curating. What it does offer is a series of case studies that allow for a more detailed understanding of motivations, processes and methods. A continuum is that curating is characterized as an extension of artistic creation. These motivations include artists wanting to have more direct authorial control of their work, followed closely by a desire to address communities more

directly; conversely, there are those who pursue the curatorial as a collaborative conduit. Reciprocally, artists and institutions wish to rework, reinvent and enliven museum and gallery collections deemed outmoded. *The Artist as Curator* therefore explores the porosity between art and curating in its most nuanced forms: 'the artist *is* curator'; case studies of artists who have curated seminal 'interventionist' museum exhibitions; and the aesthetic and conceptual slippages between the artist and curator in some performative, socially engaged and site-specific projects.

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Notes

1. Roberta Crisci-Richardson has argued that Edgar Degas's dwelling on rue Victor-Massé in which he selected, arranged and displayed his own work in dialogue with that of his contemporaries, was both an artist's house and 'Maison-Musée', a home deliberately being used as both a dwelling and a 'disorderly' exhibition space (Crisci-Richardson 2012: 229). For Crisci-Richardson, this manifestation of the modernist artist-curator was a political positioning in which the artist's creation of his own

context was bound to both anti-bourgeois *and* anti-academy discourses. Although prominent examples of exhibition tactics by Der Blaue Reiter, Dada and Surrealism have been well covered in the history of art, there has been no systematic identification of the range of artist-curator approaches involved in these avant-garde projects and the inherently collaborative forms of these exhibitions.

2. There is currently no history of artists as curators; however, several case studies have been published including Miranda Stearn's 'Re-making utopia in the museum: artists as curators', *Museological Review*, 17, Museum Utopias Conference Issue, January 2013.

3. Paul O' Neill (2012: 106–10).

4. The Hayward's touring programme has had a propensity of artist-curator exhibitions led by Susan Hiller, Tacita Dean and Richard Wentworth to name a few.

5. Elena Filipovic, 'When Exhibitions Become Form: A Brief History of the Artist as Curator', *Afterall* 'Artist as Curator' Symposium 2012.

Chapter 1

Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms*: The Metamorphosis of Ordinary Things

Nicola Levell

Box 11: A photograph of three boys in uniform, a camera (Rank), a radio, one bicycle chain, two knives […] two plastic beetles, one wax snail, a plastic fly […] one metal hubcap, stripy multi-coloured umbrella, part of a road-works beacon, a plastic hand-grenade, a picture of Christ on the cross, bundle of 13 green feathers, a metal fitting, a toy plastic dagger, two plastic bananas, one toy handgun, one toy plastic space gun, one rubber toad, one rubber skeleton, ten rubber locusts, five [light] bulbs, and a small wooden box with metal clasp.

(http://www.huntsearch.gla.ac.uk/)

Exuding a romantic sensibility, John Keats (1994: 208) wrote of the loss of magic and the dissolution of poetry at 'the mere touch of cold philosophy'. He lamented the emergence of the empirical science of being that anatomizes mysteries; dissecting the rainbow, for instance, into a prismatic palette that is then entered into a 'dull catalogue of common things' (Keats 1994: 209). The opening citation, listing the contents of Box 11, is a museum catalogue entry for a portion of the Eduardo Paolozzi Collection that was gifted to the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery (Glasgow) in 2004. Before being catalogued and stored away, these mundane, partial and discarded objects were exhibited. They were juxtaposed with over 200 ethnographic objects from the British Museum's collections, archival photographs as well as artworks originated by the Scottish sculptor and visual artist, Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005). Configured as twelve idiosyncratic installations, they formed the touring exhibition, *Lost Magic Kingdoms and Six Paper Moons of Nahuatl* (1985–89).

Curated by Paolozzi, *Lost Magic Kingdoms* is acknowledged as the first exhibition in the United Kingdom that employed a contemporary artist as curator within the museological realm of ethnography (McLeod 1985, Malbert 1995; Pearce 1999; Shelton 2001; Schneider 2006). It marks the efflorescence of not only the ethnographic turn in contemporary art practice but also, I propose, a parallel artistic and performative turn in anthropology and ethnographic museum practice (Ames 1994; Phillips 1994; Marcus and Myers 1995; Gell 1998; Gonseth et al. 2005; Schneider and Wright 2006, 2010; González 2008; Marcus 2010). From the late 1980s onwards, contemporary artists have been intervening in and expanding the interpretative space of anthropology, its museums and ethnographic collections. Following Paolozzi, in the British context, artists include Faisal Abdu'Allah; Marina Abramović; Maria Amidu; Ansuman Biswas; Sonia Boyce;

Shirley Chubb; Godfried Donker; Chris Dorsett; Jane Grant; Romauld Hazoumé; Hew Locke; Rosanna Raymond; Joachim Schmid, amongst others (Arnold 1995; Dorsett 1995; Malbert 1995; Scruton 1995; Boyce 1995; Hilty et al. 1995; Edwards 2000; Putnam 2001; Salmond and Raymond 2008, 2010).

Despite the precedent set by Paolozzi's commission and the longevity of his exhibition, mentioned in the literature on museology, art and anthropology, *Lost Magic Kingdoms* has not been subject to detailed critical attention. Although its catalogue survives and provides a rich and incisive portrait of Paolozzi and his project, it clearly operates as an independent product rather than a documentary index to the exhibition concept, contents and displays. Like all catalogues, it is an eccentric space; a 'glamorizing' accessory that does not correspond to but rather proceeds and transcends the exhibitionary form, in both time and space (Harbison 2000: 153).

In this article, I examine the space between the exhibitionary form and the catalogues— the dull list, the guide and the glossy copy—and engage other agencies to explore and historicize *Lost Magic Kingdoms* as an idiosyncratic expression of an artist's passionate engagement as a maker and curator within the realm of anthropology. Although there has been a critical proclivity to subsume the exhibition under the interrelated categories and discourses of Primitivism and Surrealism, such a tendency overlooks its more expansive curatorial philosophy, ideas and intents. My intention, therefore, is to reveal some of the concealed or overlooked dimensions of Paolozzi's curatorial preoccupations and practice. I seek to offer another perspective on his curatorship that brings into focus his anthropological imagination; his fascination with other cultural epistemologies, values and practices; his political and ecological concerns; and his new brutalist ideals and aesthetics.

Opening: The Limits of Objectivity

Despite being attributed to Paolozzi, the conceptualization and contents of *Lost Magic Kingdoms* were expressions of the collaborative dynamic between the artist and Malcolm McLeod, the Keeper of Ethnography at the Museum of Mankind (the Ethnography Department of the British Museum), who commissioned the project. From the beginning of his directorship in 1974, McLeod – a passionate anthropologist and Africanist – had striven to revitalize and develop the ethnographic collections and temporary exhibitions of the Museum (Houtman 1987; Houtman 2009). He instigated an active collecting policy, largely contingent on staff area researches and field-working anthropologists. Through appointments and strategies, he nurtured the reintegration of museum work and anthropology: two practices that had grown symbiotically but radically fractured and diverged in the inter- and post-war periods in the western world (Frese 1960; Ames 1992; Shelton 1992, 2006; Bouquet 2001). With the institutionalization of anthropology in the universities and the de-privileging of material culture studies, the sub-field of museum anthropology and its objects and subjects—ethnographic collections—as well

as the institution of the museum were marginalized and much maligned. Museums with ethnographic holdings were vilified in print as 'colonialist, racist, maleficent, misogynist, and even irrelevant institutions' (Kaplan 2006: 166). As the politics and processes of decolonization intensified, indigenous peoples and other groups rose to challenge the museum's authority to represent their histories and narratives. From the early 1970s onwards, both anthropology and museums moved to reflect more critically on their histories, relations and representational practices, with a view to reimagining and transforming their roles in the present (Cameron 1971; Hymes 1972; Clifford 1986; Witcomb 2003).

While *Lost Magic Kingdoms* was on display in London, the British Museum hosted a three-day international, interdisciplinary symposium, which focused on the politics of representational practices, *Making Exhibitions of Ourselves: The Limits of Objectivity in the Representations of Other Cultures* (February 1986). Like its counterpart at the Smithsonian Institution, *The Poetics and Politics of Representation* (1988), discussions registered the impossibility of recording or displaying 'reality' in representational forms, like exhibitions (Durrans 1988; Karp 1991; Handler 1993). It was recognized that ethnographic collections were inescapably partial and incomplete, as much an expression of the desires of the West as the expression of the material culture of other peoples. Such rethinking fractured the previously assured 'scientific' objectivity of museum anthropology and created a discursive opening for contemporary artists to enter the museological realm of ethnography and curate exhibitions.

Commission: Metaphors and Objections

Paolozzi was initially commissioned to select a number of objects from the British Museum's ethnographic collections held in store and create an installation in one display case. This small-scale curatorial project began in early 1983. But as time progressed, with numerous visits to the Museum store, accompanied by McLeod, Paolozzi became increasingly engrossed in the project. He 'mined' the museum's material culture archive, selecting a larger number of objects and a more ambitious curatorial undertaking took form. Within a two-year period, his selection had expanded to over 200 objects from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. Although the exhibition was initially scheduled to run for a ten-month period, it remained at the Museum of Mankind in Burlington Gardens for two years (1985–87). Thereafter, it was toured by the South Bank Centre (January 1988–March 1989), remounted in art galleries in Swansea, Birmingham, Sheffield, York, Bolton and Leeds, in a modified form with the addition of a sixteen-page exhibition guide.

In contrast to the official catalogue, the exhibition guide provides a series of twelve numerically ordered descriptions of each installation, with a complementary black and white photographic image. These grainy images index the different genres of display and the diversity of object types, ranging from carved statues, puppets, plaster busts,

papier mâché masks and rubber skeletons; through to sculptors' tools, oil lamps, radio parts and musical instruments; to plastic fruit and hand grenades, toy snails, locusts and aeroplanes, which cross-reference those commonplace things contained in Box 11. The textual descriptions, which were written by Paolozzi, are sketchy and impressionistic. They offer an insight into the eclectic themes he defined for each case. His curatorial themes included the idea of the packing case and the traffic in material things; variations on the human form; variations on animal forms; the versatility of clay; types of tools used in sculpture; the image of Africa in the artist's imagination; the colonial idea (Part 2); lost magic kingdoms or traces of other worlds through images; the Mexican Day of the Dead; the aesthetic qualities and technical virtuosity of everyday things and musical instruments and creativity.

From these varied motifs, Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) identified the theme of the packing case as the dominant organizing trope: 'The first case is based on the idea of the packing case and it serves as a metaphor for the whole exhibition [...] There's a deliberate mixture of objects in this case.' Elaborating further on the concept of the packing case, he described the way in which such containers were utilized in the transatlantic traffic and flow of material goods in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Machinery and foodstuffs were packed in wooden cases and sent from Britain to colonial territories like Africa. On arrival, these cases were emptied, repacked with local products, including ethnographic 'curios' and objects, and returned to the imperial heartland. Looking at archival images of *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, the visual language of display does not convincingly convey the idea of the packing case.

The installation consisted of a subjective assemblage of ethnographic objects, from disparate geographical locations, including Africa, Oceania and the Americas, which encompassed mundane and marvellous items. There were commonplace things, like an 'ugly' hide scraper; a bright blue light-bulb repurposed as a kerosene lamp; a tin-can oil lamp and a hand-made mud brick, bearing 'the impressions of its maker's fingers' (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.). These were intermixed with the curious and the exotic: a wooden bird-man from Easter Island; a cast brass voice disguiser from Nigeria; a Plains Indian beaded buckskin charm, containing a section of umbilical cord. Juxtaposed with these museum artefacts were Paolozzi's additions and creations: artworks like the papier mâché head or 'paper moon'; found objects, like the plastic snail, as well as his props of plywood, plaster, clay and metal, which figured in most of the installations. This bizarre ensemble was 'packed' or displayed on Paolozzi's wooden framework, shelves and plinths. Yet, there was no attempt to 'contain' the ethnographic objects inside the frame, to convey the idea of the packing case and the traffic in culture, as in the case of *The World Mirrored: Ethnographic Collections Over The Last 150 Years* (2000, Copenhagen, Denmark) or *Nomads* (2006, Coimbra, Portugal), with its display of authentic packing crates (2007, Porto).

Despite its oblique metaphor and its incoherent system of exotic, recycled and everyday goods, Case 1 became the dominant image of the exhibition. It was reproduced on the publicity posters and on the front cover of the catalogue. This circulated image with its
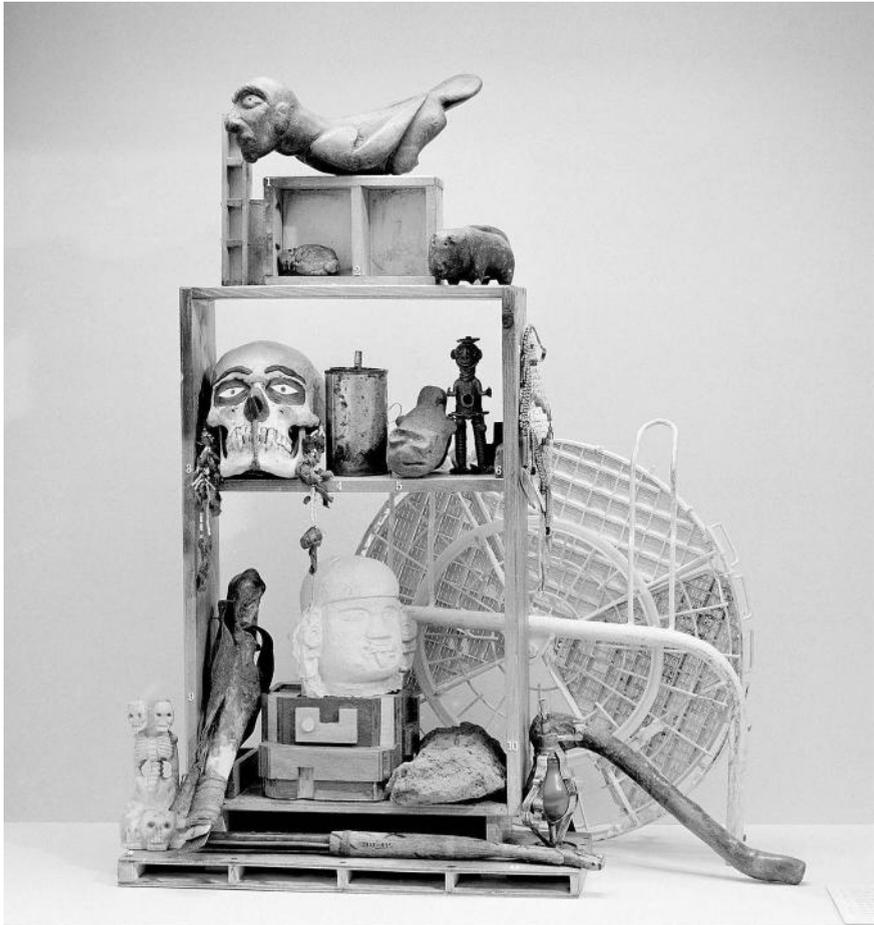
Figure 1. Installation view, Case One, *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, Museum of Mankind, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Primitivist and Surrealist accents has contributed to or at least complemented the negative criticisms that perceived the exhibition as an indulgent exercise in cultural appropriation and decontextualization at the hands of a western artist (Brant 1986; Platt 1987; Napier 1992). In *Foreign Bodies: Performance, Art, and Symbolic Anthropology*, for example, Napier (1992: 73) reproduces the cover of the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* catalogue, with an extended annotation stating, '…in this exhibition at England's leading ethnographic museum, artist Eduardo Paolozzi appropriated anonymous ethnographic artifacts in the

interest of creating his own collages and assemblages'. The anthropologist Tristan Platt articulated a similar criticism. In his damning review of the Museum of Mankind's *Bolivian Worlds* exhibition, Platt (1987: 13) scathingly refers to *Lost Magic Kingdoms* as 'Paolozzi's bricolage-games' commenting further that 'the aim appears to be the appropriation of mysterious meaning-fragments from afar for new aesthetic purposes defined in the metropolis'. While these accusations may have some validity, they are not supported by observations on the aesthetic form, the ethnographic and interpretative component or the curatorial intention. They merely conflate Paolozzi's curatorial and artistic practices, reducing the exhibition to an artwork or a series of collages, which precludes a discussion of the possibilities and limits of fostering interdisciplinary practices, developing different genres of exhibition and commissioning artists to curate the collections and spaces of anthropology. As Schneider (2006: 31) perceptively comments, such criticism of *Lost Magic Kingdoms* issuing from the academy was not only indicative of the growing self-reflexive critique of anthropology regarding its relationship with colonialism, museums and collecting, but also indicative of the discipline's 'uneasiness with contemporary art'. Equally, I would add, such negative reviews exposed the resilient antagonism between academic anthropology and applied museum-oriented anthropology (Collier and Tschopik 1954; Sturtevant 1969; Ames 1992).

Technologies and Time: Exhibition/Catalogue

In a recent move to reassess the relationship between contemporary art and anthropology, Schneider firmly locates *Lost Magic Kingdoms* within the discursive matrix of Primitivism. He views it as another example of a western artist appropriating and cannibalizing 'non-Western' ethnographic forms in the pursuit of their own practice (Root 1996; Flam and Deutch 2003). Schneider (2006: 31, 39) specifically singles out Paolozzi as an exemplary 'soft primitivist': an artist-curator who is above all interested in the aesthetic and 'formal affinities' of the objects, in 'emphasizing their "magic" rather than attempting any ethnographic contextualization' (Schneider 2006: 31). By invoking 'affinities' and 'magic', Schneider positions Paolozzi's exhibition in the same ideological frame as its contemporaries *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (New York, 1984) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (Paris, 1989). Yet, Paolozzi's curatorial project—his concepts, installations and texts for *Lost Magic Kingdoms*—was far more nebulous, eclectic, personalized and exploratory than those of William Rubin and Jean-Hubert Martin, with their respective master narratives of neo-Primitivism and universal aesthetics. Furthermore, the aesthetics and formal affinities of the ethnographic objects were not the pre-eminent criteria for Paolozzi's selection. Despite the title of his exhibition, Paolozzi was not intent on emphasizing the 'magical' properties of the objects; rather he was interested in harnessing the poetics of display to provoke critical reflections on wide-ranging issues, from cultural stereotyping, interculturality and the politics of recycling.

A significant clue to the fixing of *Lost Magic Kingdoms* within a soft Primitivist frame lies with the textual and visual encodings of the exhibition catalogue. In his introduction to the catalogue, Paolozzi briefly describes his early engagement with 'primitive art' in Paris and London in the 1940s, which can be readily construed as confirmation of his modern primitivist mindset. Such categorizing is to some extent reinforced by McLeod's contribution, 'Paolozzi and Identity'. McLeod (1985: 15) begins by historicizing and locating Paolozzi's work in relation to Primitivism. He aligns Paolozzi with other western artists, like Gaudier-Brzeska, Epstein, Moore, Matta and Underwood, who used the British Museum's ethnographic collection as a source of inspiration. He even mentions MoMA's *Primitivism* exhibition, to assert the distinctiveness of Paolozzi's project, which is the 'work in progress' of a major contemporary artist (McLeod 1985: 15). Although McLeod goes on to provide an erudite and reflexive insight into Paolozzi's critical engagement with anthropological issues and material culture (Pinney 1989), the preliminary framing of *Lost Magic Kingdoms* in relation to 'Primitivism' contributed to the biased view of it as another expression of modern Primitivism. A bias reinforced by the catalogue's visual register.

The exhibition catalogue was collated, as is the norm, in advance of the exhibition. Accordingly, it contains no images of the object installations, with the exception of the front cover, which was a staged construction of the imagined contents of Case 1: the packing case. Although the catalogue is richly illustrated, the new artwork, props and ephemera that Paolozzi contributed to the exhibition, which were essential to its multi-evocative visual encodings, are absent. The kitsch and the salvaged objects, like the plastic locusts, weapons and pieces of fruit; the broken wing mirrors, television, radio and bicycle parts; the geometric plaster forms and fretworks; as well as Paolozzi's composite constructions and scrapbooks, which punctuated the displays, lending them their mythic eclecticism, are missing. There is a marked focus on his earlier artworks, particularly sculptures and drawings, from the 1950s onwards. In certain sections, these are juxtaposed with ethnographic objects or archival photographs, thus offering a sub-text on aesthetics and stylistic affinity. A case in point is the illustration of *Diana as an Engine* (1953), a monumental cast aluminium sculpture, which is coupled with a sculpted wooden female figure, from the Azande (Central Africa). This dual image was reproduced by Schneider (2006: 31) to support his argument that Paolozzi was concerned with formalist aesthetic affinities rather than the ethnographic context or technologies of material culture. However, *Diana as an Engine* (1953), as well as the other brutalist sculptures, drawings and collages illustrated in the catalogue, were not included in *Lost Magic Kingdoms*.

The Azande figure—an archetypal 'Primitivist' form—rather than being collocated with brutalist sculptures, was displayed in an installation (Case 5) that expressly concentrated on the technologies of making. As Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) explained, 'here is a particularly moving set of objects—the actual tools used to make some of the sculptures […] A lot of these tools are very well worn, they've got the marks of their own history on them.'

Figure 2. Installation view, *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, Museum of Mankind, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

These artisanal tools—adzes from Africa, the Americas and Oceania—were displayed in relation to a number of other carved figures, as well as a stylized wooden mask (Dogon, Mali) and model hands, one holding a small awl-type tool (Cheetham 1987: 75). This strategy of display was similarly exploited in Case 4, which looked at the versatility of clay as a medium of expression, through potter's tools, images and sculptural forms, including musical instruments, such as Nazca and Moche (Peru) terracotta trumpets and panpipes.

Interspersed with the ethnographic artefacts and the wood-carving tools in Case 5 was a number of Paolozzi's creations: sculpted skeletons and skulls, made of defunct television parts, and the section of 'an electronic typewriter' that he had fashioned in wood. These interventions were intended as an ironic commentary on western society's separation from the technologies and modes of production. In addition to referencing Paolozzi's existential discontent with patterns of production, consumption and waste, the skeleton and the skulls indexed another of his preoccupations. He was fascinated by funerary practices in other cultures, as revealed in his description of the installation on the versatility of clay:

> At the time that this exhibition was being put together, I was doing my other work, which was making big cast iron objects in Munich. I've tried just to sprinkle through the exhibition the other obsessions that were going on at the time. I have been very moved about the notions of death in all the different cultures. There's a clay skull. And as you see I have been rather involved with the skull in other motifs in the exhibition. (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.)

While Paolozzi did not expand on his 'other obsessions' in his text, in addition to the numerous skulls, there was also a substantial number of heads in the exhibition that he had created using different media such as plaster, clay and papier mâché.

Obsessions: Heads and Images

In Paolozzi's curatorial assemblages, there were three striking 'psychotic' busts, representing a colonial explorer, a colonial official and the jazz-legend 'Count Basie'. These disturbing busts, with their deep scarifications and geometric incisions, indicated one of Paolozzi's ongoing creative projects. During the 1980s, he was exploring and experimenting with fracturing the human head, in a similar way to his earlier collage cut-outs but this time in three-dimensional form using plaster or clay as a medium. For these fractured constructions Paolozzi drew inspiration from child and psychotic art as well as the 'jazz strains of Mondrian's painting *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (Spencer 2000: 36). Notably, when *Lost Magic Kingdoms* was touring the United Kingdom, the exhibition *Paolozzi Portraits* (1988), which focused on the psychotic head series, opened at the National Portrait Gallery (London). It also included a bust of Count Basie whom Paolozzi had admired from childhood (Spencer 1988). Whereas Paolozzi cast the National Portrait Gallery bust in bronze, for *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, all the fragmented heads were executed in raw, unfinished plaster, indicating their work-in-progress status. Moreover, for the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* touring exhibition, their identities were further signified by the addition of accessories. The bust of the colonial official, for example, was decorated with the remnants of a collared shirt, a striped school tie and a military-style raw papier mâché cap; while the head of the colonial explorer was surmounted by a raw papier mâché helmet and the bust of Count Basie was customized with a pair of headphones and displayed in Case 12, the 'music case' (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.).

These three characters—the colonial official, the explorer and the black jazz musician—signified a colonial history of contact and cultural exchange. Their insertion in the exhibition challenged conventional forms of museum representation that tribalized African cultures; presenting them, through 'art' styles and specializations as ahistorical, hermetically sealed ethnicities. This widespread aesthetic or typological-cum-functional approach to displaying ethnographic collections failed to address the politics, impacts and strictures of colonialism (Shelton 1992). By contrast, in *Lost Magic Kingdoms* the ideas and implications

of colonialism were confronted. More specifically, Case 6 of the touring exhibition focused on Paolozzi's image of Africa and especially its colonial trappings. In this particular case, the bust of the colonial official was juxtaposed with Paolozzi's 'witchdoctor assemblage' and three mounted images: the photograph of the three African boys in uniform and the picture of the crucifixion (both contained in Box 11); plus, a reproduction of the Museum's photograph (*c.*1900) of a group of Europeans in southern Nigeria with uniformed African guards, depicting the social and spatial hierarchy enforced in the colonial period (McLeod 1985). Together this group of objects gestured to the complex colonial history of encounter, enforced acculturation and the confrontation between radically different belief systems. These subjects were recurrent motifs of the exhibition.

The idea of cultural encounter and the western subject's construction of images of Africa were also signified in the figure of the tourist, which Paolozzi also created in the 'psychotic' genre. Made of white plaster, the tourist is a standing figure; its face, like that of the busts, is scored horizontally and vertically and a small blue plaster rhinoceros is laced to its thighs, signifying African wildlife and safaris. The figure's disembodied hands with

Figure 3. Installation view, *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, Museum of Mankind, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

half-arms are strapped on the torso with wire and they hold a plaster-covered Plastikop camera. The positioning of the camera, plus Paolozzi's comment that the camera appears more important in this setting than the sketchbook, registers the artist's long-standing fascination with cameras, both on a mechanical-concrete as well as visual-imaginary level. With its embellishments, the tourist was positioned as an ironic comment on the West's encounter with Africa, as mediated through a camera lens or distorted by media.

Irony, Authenticity and the Stereotype

For Paolozzi, the creation of irony and metaphor, through unexpected combinations of images, materials and forms, was an essential part of his curatorial thinking. He was not alone. At this juncture, irony was emerging as a central operative employed by artists and curators as part of the process of critically excavating or 'decolonizing' disciplinary histories, epistemologies and methods (Cannizzo 1991; Schildkrout 1991; Wilson 1995; Karp and Wilson 2005). In describing his ideas for the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* installations, Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) repeatedly referred to his intent to create 'certain patterns of irony' throughout the exhibition, with every case possessing 'some kind of ironical idea' or 'ironical gesture' and there being 'all sorts of oblique metaphors […] about the overlapping of the West with different cultures'. Yet these relational patterns of meanings with their ironic accents were predicated solely on non-textual, visual and material cues. Paolozzi's approach to incorporating irony in his displays can be understood, from a certain perspective, as an inversion of the curatorial strategy adopted by Jeanne Cannizzo for her highly contested exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa* (Toronto, 1989–90). Cannizzo used irony in her text panels to critique colonialism, collecting and representational practices. But this ironic gesturing was neither paralleled nor iterated in the choice of exhibits and the visual language of display (Schildkrout 1991; Mackey 1995; Butler 1999). Rather than expose the symbolic violence of colonialism, her use of irony was interpreted as glorifying and reinforcing its racist discourse.

   Paolozzi's irony, being concentrated in the image, was also open to misinterpretation, an exemplar being his self-constructed 'witch doctor assemblage'. Described as 'a sort of homemade fetish object', the figure consisted of a realistic-looking plastic skull, with a wooden gag stick and stylized mandible, bound with string (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.). It was wearing a curled conical hat made of papier mâché and a large, wooden beaded necklace. In the centre of its carved wooden abdomen, there was a 'fetish' receptacle, redolent of those found on central African power figures or *minkisi*, which are said to contain magical materials and properties. In Paolozzi's creation, the receptacle contained defunct radio valves. Even though Paolozzi consciously formulated the 'fake' fetish as an ironic reflection on the construction of authenticity, value and stereotypes of Africa by the West, as a signifier, it could operate on a diametric scale. Although it had the potential to fracture colonial imaginaries, equally, through its appropriation, mimicry

and repetition of the fetish in Africa, it could reinforce colonial stereotypes (Bhabha 2004). Similarly, Paolozzi's images of colonialism, articulated through photographic and sculptural media, could generate conflicting interpretations. Indeed some critics viewed *Lost Magic Kingdoms* as 'an exercise in neo-colonialist nostalgia' (Malbert 1995: 25).

Memento Mori: Surrealism and Death

Paolozzi's preoccupation with the human head, as a multi-evocative image of the human condition, was expressed in the number of skulls on display. Either as discrete entities, part of skeleton figures or composite artworks, skulls figured in almost every installation. Paolozzi's own macabre artworks ranged from the witch doctor fetish, through the carved figures of skeletons to numerous decorated plaster and clay skulls, including a 'shamanistic' sheep's skull. Contained in the case devoted to animal forms, the modified sheep's skull, with its bulbous, opaque, light-bulb eyes and adorned with mechanical television parts, was a visual comment on the transformative relations between human and animal worlds. The idea of inter-species transformation was also embodied in Paolozzi's 'self-portrait', *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Dog* (1985), which was installed in the same case. Made of plaster with an antiquated finish, the self-portrait took the form of a seated canine figure with a psychotic human head. Complementing Paolozzi's artworks were decorated skulls and skeletons from the British Museum's collection, including a selection of papier mâché skeletons and paraphernalia from the Mexican Day of the Dead festival, which were distributed in different installations. Two Day of the Dead skeletons, for example, appeared in Case 11, which although dominated by Paolozzi's 'goddess of childbirth', focused on relatively small but aesthetically and culturally significant objects, such as Inuit sun goggles and toggles. But the most literal expression of Paolozzi's fascination with death, funerary practices and memento mori was indexed in Case 8:

> This is really rather a pure case, based on the Mexican Day of the Dead, the day on which people commemorate their dead in Mexico with festivities and offerings. The masked figure in the most formal dress comes from the same culture which produced the skeleton made of the most commonplace and inexpensive material – recycled paper […] I also put a few objects in which I thought would have pleased that great Surrealist Luis Buñuel, to create something like an imaginary wake. (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.)

The reference to the purity of the displays seems to point to the mono-cultural thematic focus of the case. However, as Paolozzi's final comment makes clear, this was not a typical geo-cultural contextualized ethnographic display (Putnam 2001: 136). In a dramatic and humorous gesture, Paolozzi staged the ethnographic material, creating a tableau of a funeral wake, with a supine mannequin holding a plastic cross, dressed in a tuxedo, with a realistic glossy wooden face-mask and top hat, a costume used in carnival masquerades in Tlaxcala.

Lying supine on a raised plinth, in front of the body, was the decorated papier mâché skeleton used in the Day of the Dead festival. In addition to the other traditional papier mâché forms, like the wall-mounted model church, there was a tin candelabrum, with candles and a crude crucifix. Paolozzi had made the candelabrum from recycled tin cans and decorated it with wooden beads and rivulets of red wax. To metamorphose this tableau into an extraordinary ethnographic display, Paolozzi incorporated a number of unexpected elements, including a couple of rubber cockroaches described as copulating near the 'corpse', a pistol, a defunct camera, a large plastic spider and the stripy multi-coloured umbrella (Cheetham 1987: 76; Paolozzi 2000d: 294). The inclusion of the umbrella, listed in Box 11, connects with the case's homage to Surrealism. It appears to reference the Surrealist poetic 'image' inspired by Lautréamont's expression, 'as beautiful as the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on a dissecting table' (Ades 1985: 62).

This Day of the Dead tableau, with its dark comedic narrative, gestures to the potential creative licence extended to the artist-as-curator working with ethnographic collections (McLeod 1985; Schildkrout 1991). The exhibition challenged the gravitas and orthodox methods of the museum, prompting different publics to adjust their expectations and perspectives. Reflecting on its ambivalent reception, McLeod mused,

> The Paolozzi exhibition was innovative in display […] I think many people have treated it much too seriously. It is meant to be a pleasure and an amusement as well as a stimulation. You see children laughing and people grinning and that's good. They are both aroused and shocked at having to focus on the material in new ways, see it in new conjunctions. Ten years ago it would certainly not have been possible to mount it, I suppose, but it was worthwhile. (Houtman 1987: 5)

Conversely, ten or even five years later, it might not have been possible to mount such an exhibition because of the highly-charged debates revolving around the politics of representation and the contested institutionalizations and intersections of contemporary art and ethnicities. These emotive debates, which interconnected with subaltern studies and postcolonial theory, are crystallized in the journal *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture*, which was established in 1987 and enacted as a primary site for the critical deconstruction of *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989).

An Anthropological Imagination

The idea of arousing and shocking the public into seeing materials in new configurations was central to Paolozzi's curatorial philosophy. This 'new way of seeing' was not a linear revisioning but rather the embrace of a form of 'afocalism' that forces the viewer to search, to scan, to constantly look for relations and meanings (Highmore 2011: 97). Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) made this point in describing the organizing concept for Case 9:

> This is what I would call part 2 of the colonial idea […] By placing a series of images […] you get a kind of counterpoint so that each image is affected by the others. This is part of what's meant by the notion of the artist as explorer: what seems rather banal in ordinary life gets a form of cohesion according to the different images placed in relation to it.

That Paolozzi utilizes the term 'artist as explorer', on more than one occasion (Frayling 1985), to describe his curatorial practice could be interpreted as a precursor to the 'artist-as-ethnographer' discourse that emerged in the 1990s and was especially applied to institutional critique (Foster 1996; Levell 2013). Like other forms of institutional critique, Paolozzi's curatorial practice was predicated on the philosophy that objects are signifiers that can be manipulated and encoded in different semantic, relational webs. Throughout his career, he referred to objects as images or signs. The 'images' he referred to in Case 9 included the bust of the explorer; a *nkisi* figure studded with nails; a model bomber; a radio; a plaster skull; a mannequin hand with wristwatch; two plastic toads and parts of a television set executed in wood. Their multiple meanings and interpretations were heavily contingent on a visual literacy. Paolozzi wanted to stimulate different ways of seeing objects without prescribing a critical or linear narrative path for the exhibition or providing typical 'in-context' graphic panels and museum labels (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 3). Such an unconventional, experimental approach within the authoritative and sensitized space of the ethnographic museum frustrated some visitors. As Cheetham (1987: 77) intimated: 'For the visitor interested in the ethnographic specimen (or for that matter the Paolozzi sculptures) with regard to their age, provenance, purpose or cultural significance, this is not a satisfactory exhibition.' But as an artist-curator, Paolozzi was not concerned with replicating practice as the exhibition guide made clear: '…his intention has not been to inform the visitor of the precise history and context of the objects he has chosen but to evoke multiple associations through the conjunction of diverse elements' (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.). In this respect, there are significant connections between *Lost Magic Kingdoms* and a number of Paolozzi's earlier curatorial projects, especially those he undertook as a prominent founding member of the Independent Group: a small group of artists, architects, curators and writers who met at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA, London), in the early 1950s. The Independent Group sought to push the boundaries of modernist art, discharging its high art canon to accommodate the proliferation of visual media in contemporary culture: as such their work is perceived as an early index of pop art.

In a 'Retrospective Statement' (1990), Paolozzi stated that *Lost Magic Kingdoms* was a 'kind of child of the Independent Group exhibitions', even though they were three decades apart, they were created on a 'shoestring' budget and 'entirely for ideological reasons' (Paolozzi 2000a: 72).[1] One of the Group's first exhibitions, *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953), held at the ICA warrants further discussion. Despite being group curated, sited in a contemporary art gallery, with the exhibits delimited to photographic images;

in ideological terms there are a number of commonalities between it and *Lost Magic Kingdoms*. Both exhibitions were concerned with imagining a new visual order, a new way of seeing and sensing the world that fractured the rigid compartmentalizations that limit our perceptive, creative and resourceful capacities. The 1953 exhibition took the form of an immersive, experiential environment. Photographic enlargements and abstractions were hung at different angles and heights from the ceiling and the walls of the gallery. In their exhibition statement, 'Parallel of Life and Art: Indications of a New Visual Order', the curators explained that there were no rigid, objective, scientific or philosophical criteria that governed their display concept. Rather, in their words, 'it forms a poetic-lyrical order where images create a series of cross-relationships' (Henderson et al. 2011: 7).

Throughout his life, Paolozzi resisted the pop art descriptor, preferring his collage works to be viewed as indexes of 'radical surrealism' and himself, 'an unfashionable surrealist' (Stonard 2011: 52; Spencer 1988: 11). He was pleased when a critic described *Lost Magic Kingdoms* as 'his largest, most personal and most Surreal sculpture' (The South Bank Centre 1988: n.p.). This labelling was substantiated by the British Museum's exhibition catalogue, especially Dawn Ades's contribution, 'Paolozzi, Surrealism, Ethnography'. Ades (1985: 66) concluded that while there are other ways of theorizing and understanding Paolozzi's curatorial practice, ultimately 'ethnographic Surrealism' is the most relevant because it historically contextualizes and explains his choices of material documents and their juxtapositions. While there were evidently Surrealist as well as Primitivist influences and striations evident in *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, the new visual regimes and significations Paolozzi strove to elicit in the exhibition were not predicated on his Surrealist identifications. Rather, I contend, they were more closely aligned with his new brutalist philosophy and practices. He was expressly interested in exposing and exploring the social and material conditions and challenges of being in the world. As the influential art critic, curator and fellow member of the Independent Group, Lawrence Alloway (2011: 30) asserted in 1956, in Paolozzi's artworks, his drawings and sculptures: 'The images are multi-evocative, not because of old-line Surrealist incongruities but because of a new way of seeing wholes.' This wider perception of art, which rejected established conceptual and social categories indicated a kind of anthropological sensibility:

> As an alternative to an aesthetic that isolated visual art from life and from the other arts, there has emerged (with Paolozzi) a new willingness to treat our whole culture as if it were art […] a move towards an anthropological view of our own society. Anthropologists define culture as all society. (Alloway in Frayling 1985: 158)

Moreover, Alloway stressed that whereas anthropology had been 'used by artists as a source of forms, as a fund of idols and totems' that was not his point: 'It is not a matter of taking picturesque motifs from other cultures, as Brancusi did, but of regarding our own, our present, society in a way analogous to anthropology […] the lesson of anthropology is one of the observation of usage from within society' (Alloway 2006: 173).

He specifically referred to the broad concept of culture put forward by the American cultural anthropologists Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn. In his popularized work, *Mirror for Man* (1944), Kluckhohn outlined his theory in which he argued that the comparative study of other cultures enables anthropologists to attain a relative distance from their own culture. This distancing provides a critical space or reflexive surface for them to critique their own cultural values and mores. These comparative and reflexive attributes of the anthropological imagination are glimpsed in Paolozzi's curatorial practice. Reaching a similar conclusion but from a different standpoint, Foster (2011: 185) argues that 'Brutalist collage transvalued Dadaist and Surrealist versions: rather than privilege either the social or the subjective, it explored the intermingling of the two'. This intertwined duality that rejects the Surrealist determiner while acknowledging the limits of objectivity lay at the core of *Lost Magic Kingdoms*. The installations constituted a subjective and personalized exploration of ethnographic media as sources of inspiration for the artist, as well as sites for social critique.

A Social Critique of Waste

This crucial interplay between the subjective and the social is manifest in Paolozzi's desire to explore cross-culturally the concept of recycling and waste. As the artist Tom Phillips (1986: 89) observed in his review of the exhibition: 'although at first the show may seem to be a prodigal rag-bag of personal tastes, themes and statements soon emerge. One phenomenon consistently celebrated is the creative use of other peoples' discarded junk; of the empty can or the blown tyre.' He went on to describe the three exhibits that incorporated spent light-bulbs – the oil lamp from Kumase (Ghana), with the bright blue light bulb functioning as its fuel reservoir; the mask from Latin America, with its dramatic light-bulb eyes; and the Gujarati wall decoration, which consisted of a series of light bulbs strung together, in necklace form, on a length of electric flex. The small oil lamp (one of McLeod's field-collecting acquisitions), which figured in Case 1, became one of the icons of the exhibition. It was reproduced as a full-page illustration in the catalogue. Paolozzi recalled first encountering this type of re-purposed object during his years in Paris (1946–47). A frequent visitor to the Musée de l'Homme, he remembered being 'enlightened' by their displays and photographs. He was particularly taken by objects like the oil lamp made out of an old tomato paste tin or the photograph of 'an African dancer wearing an imitation wrist-watch made of beadwork and […] old gym-shoes' (Paolozzi 1985: 10). Such hybridized expressions 'impressed' Paolozzi (1985: 10) because they fractured the dominant stereotypes and public imaginaries of authentic, tribal Africa, which denied its peoples a coeval and agentive position in modernity (Paolozzi 1985: 10).

Part of Paolozzi's curatorial intent was to provoke visitors to make connections and critically reflect on the creative potential of waste in the West. He elucidated,

I am especially concerned with how other societies make use of the sort of materials we use once and then discard. Materials which are commonplace to us are rare and valuable to others who, with the power of imagination, transform them into new creations. If we can only see it, our own cities offer us an abundance of discarded materials. (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.)

In his 'short bibliography' that followed his preface to the catalogue, Paolozzi listed five texts; all focused on art and aesthetics, with one exception: Michael Thompson's *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Values* (1979). This reference reflected Paolozzi's long-standing interest in salvaging and repurposing discarded matter. In his brutalist sculptures, he had developed a technique for imprinting found objects—the debris of modern urban life and its wasteful patterns of consumption. Paolozzi described his method in his 1958 lecture at the ICA. He made repeated reference to his artistic process as 'the metamorphosis of rubbish' in the creation of the 'multi-evocative image' (Kirkpatrick 1970: 120). He recited a list of objects that were used in his brutalist sculptures, including mechanical parts, rubber toys and broken goods, which resonate with the Hunterian's catalogue entry for Box 11.

The desire to catalyse a social awareness and creative approach to the reassessment of waste was embodied in the objects Paolozzi made for the exhibition, like the recycled tin toys or the collection of recycled tin instruments. Displayed in the 'music case' with Count Basie, the instruments included a saxophone, three horns and a bizarre electric guitar, with Coca-Cola can trim and a built-in cassette recorder. These creations were juxtaposed with musical instruments from the British Museum's collection, which were also constructed from repurposed items, such as the African *mbira* or the ornate Sudanese lyre, decorated with coins, beads, bells, cloth and cowrie shells. Possibly the most conspicuous recycled material exploited by Paolozzi in *Lost Magic Kingdoms* was papier mâché, which he used to create masks, hats and figurative works. Its usage was obliquely referenced in the subtitle of the exhibition: *Six Paper Moons of Nahuatl*. The biography of the paper moons exemplifies the exhibition's intermingling of subjective and social concerns, individual and collective memories and anthropological and psychic drives.

Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) had been captivated by the image of *Coyolxauhqui*: 'a stone carving of a "moon-god" from Mexico' that he had seen in the exhibition, *Mexican Art from 1500 BC to the Present Day* (1953), held at the Tate Gallery (Spencer 2000: 36). He made the papier mâché multiples for *Lost Magic Kingdoms* to make a statement on materiality, waste and recycling. By reusing paper, 'one of the most common of our discarded materials', Paolozzi (1988: n.p.) said he hoped to 'exorcize […] the idea of authenticity', or at least expose and problematize the art worlds' inclusion of certain styles and materials in their consecrated canon of 'primitive' art. The use of paper also evoked the archaeological 'squeezes' Paolozzi had encountered during his mining of the British Museum's stores. He had been emotionally moved by the series of paper casts of Mayan monuments made

by the Victorian archaeologist Alfred Maudslay from packaging materials. These rough papier mâché casts as well as their plaster facsimiles survived, while some of the original monuments have been destroyed or eroded and defaced.

The incorporation of recycled objects not only reflected Paolozzi's fascination with the creative repurposing of waste objects in other cultures but also indexed a change in the collecting criteria of ethnographic museums. With museum anthropology questioning the future of its representational practices, collections and collecting policies were re-evaluated with a view to making them more relevant and responsive to contemporary realities. Recycled works constituted a diverse category of art and everyday objects that became 'collectibles', especially from the mid-1980s onwards. They not only entered museums to become the stuff of exhibitions (Kratz 1995; Cerny and Seriff 1996; Coote et al. 2000), they also became part of the ethnic chic merchandise sold in museum shops, fair-trade and ethnic-trend outlets.

The British Museum's ethnography department was agentive in this process of reimagining the ethnographic 'object'. During McLeod's directorship, the Museum's collecting policy was partly orientated to collecting the commonplace: contemporary, 'modern, post-contact or culture-change material' that indexed interculturality and innovation in cultural production, rather than purity, authenticity and stasis (Houtman 1987: 5). During his fieldwork in West Africa, McLeod collected various types of recycled material for the Museum. He shared his field experiences and knowledge with Paolozzi, who was eager to learn more about African systems of value and visual culture (McLeod 1985). Their synergic working relationship fed into the exhibitionary content, which may explain why 'images' of Africa were prevalent in the exhibition, despite the subtitle, *Six Paper Moons of Nahuatl*, with its Meso-American overtones.

In explaining his decision to add the subtitle to the exhibition, Paolozzi noted that the lead title, *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, referred to worlds that have vanished and, for him, this 'seemed a sad idea' so he added *Six Paper Moons of Nahuatl* as a 'positive subtitle'. Moreover, the subtitle was a metaphor, he explained, for the way Aztec cosmology conceptualized the planetary and astral spheres through kinship relations, with the moon as the mother, the sun as the father and the stars, the children. For Paolozzi, the cosmic metaphor provided 'another direction of the exhibition—to look at the world as we know it with different eyes' (Paolozzi 1988: n.p.). In retrospect, *Lost Magic Kingdoms* may have been a misnomer, like the popular series of anthropological documentaries, *Disappearing Worlds,* produced by Granada Television in the 1970s, which resonated with Paolozzi. The romantic title of the documentary series was recognized as 'something of an albatross': it did not encapsulate the changing social landscapes and multifarious themes, like the issues of survival and cultural transformations, militaristic conflict, colonial tourism and culture-change shown in the series (Loizos 1980: 581, 590). Notably, contemporary issues, like those addressed in *Disappearing Worlds*, were also indexed in *Lost Magic Kingdoms*.

Images of Conflict and Combat

Interspersed throughout *Lost Magic Kingdoms* were images of combat, conflict and war, capable of rupturing visitor expectations and contemplations. These diverse expressions included, for example: the photograph of the three boys in army clothes; the wooden guns from Africa; the plastic hand-grenades; the model battleship and bomber and the cigarette card album depicting naval officers and their uniforms, which Paolozzi had collected as a child. These images of combat can be regarded as a form of politicization of the ethnographic display. Throughout his career, Paolozzi consistently made reference to political issues, like 'power and capitalist corruption, war and militarism, ecological issues and the venery of the art market' (Spencer 1988: 11). For his major 1971 retrospective at the Tate, he cast a number of 'ready-mades' including *Tim's Boot*, an enlarged Vietnam War serviceman's boot, with a snail attached to its heel and also included a number of bomb sculptures. His art was not escapist in content but rather it mediated his quasi-apocalyptic sensibility: he was interested in 'forcing people to look and […] preventing them from escaping from certain facts' (Paolozzi et al. 1971: 141). He said, 'I don't want to […] help people to escape from the terrible world. I want to remind them' (Paolozzi et al. 1971: 142).

According to his confidant and critic, Robin Spencer (1988: 11) the politicized dimension of Paolozzi's practice has been 'almost completely undiscussed' because 'most art critics prefer to omit mentioning such issues, particularly when they touch on the art world; they feel more comfortable reserving language for what they think are exclusively "artistic" concerns'. Yet, there was a subtlety or even ambiguity in Paolozzi's political posturing in *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, compared to the 'sharper' political commentary evinced in Fred Wilson's installations (Malbert 1995: 25). In many cases, ethnographic exhibitions have disavowed or overlooked the political context of cultural production (Harris and Gow 1985; Platt 1987). Evidently museums are wary of confronting politics, capitalism and violence in their exhibitions. Conflicts of interest in areas like governance, patronage and funding can complicate their position and perpetuate their myth of neutrality. This conflicted status facilitated the intervention of contemporary artists in ethnographic space to critique institutional histories, imaginaries and practices. Whereas curators are constrained by institutionalized matters, collections and public expectations; in contrast, artists can be accorded a wider scope for experimentation with the heuristic, visual and textual systems of display (Freed 1991; Malbert 1995).

A Cosmic Philosophy: Blueprints for a New Museum

Paolozzi's (2000b: 88) curatorial project embodied the utopian ideals he pursued as an artist: the desire 'to achieve a metamorphosis of quite ordinary things into something wonderful and extraordinary', with the aim of nurturing a reflexive mindfulness and

modification of public perceptions. Museums, the life-long haunts of Paolozzi, were exemplary spaces for fostering this ideal. He made this point in *Blueprints for a New Museum*: a set of five lithographs and screen prints originated for *My Cologne Cathedral: Contemporary Artists Look at Cologne Cathedral* (1980, Ludwig Museum) (Spencer 2005). In the exhibition text, Paolozzi explained that the blueprints constitute 'a cosmic view removed from the myopia of materialism and an unintentional glimpse of Utopia. It is a usage of technology for enlightenment and a return to a world of wonders.' A contemporary world of wonders, perhaps akin to a Wunderkammer or cabinet of curiosities, where 'the presentation of ideas may be drawn from combinations of thought transfers, memory traces, an ordered world, a destroyed universe, conditioned realms and the motor car triumph' (Paolozzi 2000c: 239). Insightfully, the first page of the *Lost Magic Kingdoms* catalogue is devoted to a full-page reproduction of a *Blueprint for a New Museum* (1980–81). This image is followed by a two-page handwritten, untitled preface by Paolozzi, dated 'London 1985', which details some of his reflections on the possibilities of refiguring visual systems through exhibitionary forms:

> To counter and perhaps contradict our tendency to isolate phenomena and impose a separateness of the object: I proposed in a series of prints an idea for a new museum: where in an old building, preferably an abandoned cathedral, even a gutted one, a selection from the history of things the choice of material being an art form. The arrangement and juxtaposition of the objects and sculptures suggesting another philosophy. Not only superb originals but fakes combined with distinguished reproduction copies of masterpieces both in painting and engineering, the radial engine and a Leger painting, Bugatti wheels, cinema prints, crocodile skulls, all parts movable: an endless set of combinations a new culture in which way problems give way to capabilities. (Paolozzi 1985: 7)

These ideas are referenced in the accompanying print. The background is part composed of the vertical Gothic symmetries of Cologne Cathedral, combined with the geometric intricacies of the Iron Bridge. Suspended in the foreground are a cross-sectioned American bomber, a satellite, a bicycle, three women riding on a bomb, printed circuitry, clocks and dials, a mechanical horse, a fish and the Hellenistic Laocoön group, which had inspired Paolozzi's monumental brutalist casting *Towards a New Lacoon* (1963) (Kirkpatrick 1970: 62; Frayling 1985: 160). In *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, the visual forms and ordering of certain installations gave material form to Paolozzi's *Blueprint for a New Museum*. The most explicit example, I suggest, was Case 9 of the touring exhibition: 'Part 2 of the colonial idea' in which a series of tall geometric wooden fretworks, incorporating imagery of mechanical components, was mounted as a backdrop to the case. The model bomber was obliquely suspended in front of the geometric forms. Positioned in the foreground were three African anthropomorphic objects: a small Tiv brass casting (Nigeria); a nail-studded *ninkisi* (Democratic Republic of the Congo);
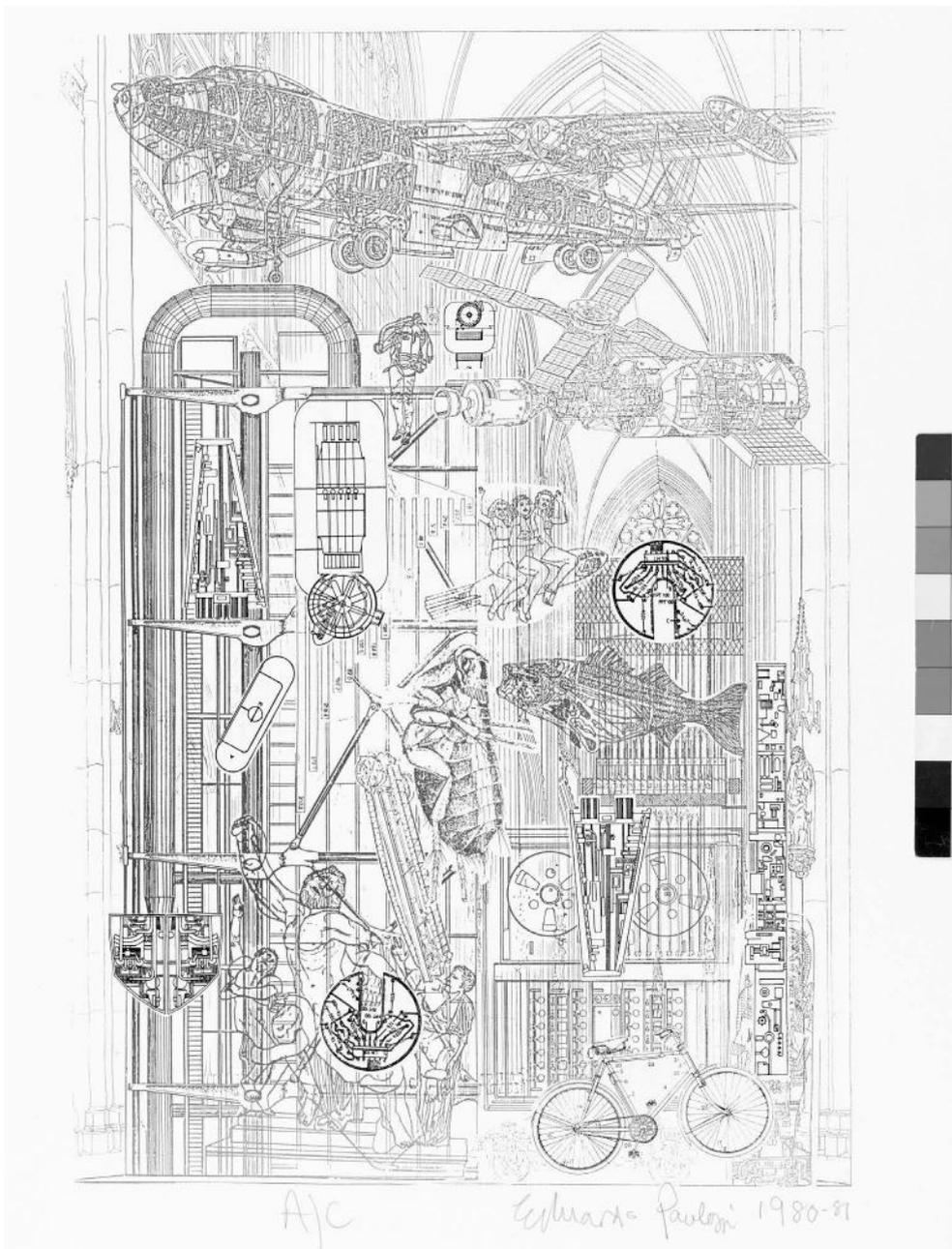
Figure 4. Eduardo Paolozzi, *Blueprint for a new museum* (1980). © Eduardo Paolozzi
Estate. Image supplied courtesy of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow, 2013.

and a recently carved standing figure from Ghana, which had been artificially aged to give it the 'aura' of authenticity. In addition, there were objects mounted on the rear and lateral walls of the case, including a large inverted u-shaped iron currency bar (Democratic Republic of the Congo); an abstract geometric relief, made of recycled tins and incorporating paperclips suspended with a red nylon rope; an abstract mechanical-looking plastic sculpture, with mesh, dials and cogs spray-painted silver and the string of light-bulbs from Gujarat. Juxtaposed with these were the fragmented head of the explorer, the plaster skull of the coal miner, a wooden radio, a carved wooden hand, with a wrist-watch and a couple of plastic frogs. These configurations offered a new way of seeing ethnographic matters and materialities.

To conclude, in this article, I have sought to historicize and expand the context, philosophies and passions that influenced Paolozzi in his role as an artist-curator. *Lost Magic Kingdoms* constituted a seminal exhibition in the realm of ethnography that provoked different reactions, from creating divided opinions among the British Museum staff, through delighting and surprising visitors, to offending other critics and publics. It challenged the orthodox practices and expectations of ethnographic exhibitions, rejecting their authoritative pedagogic formats, to offer a different poetic-lyrical order.

Through the visual orders and texts of *Lost Magic Kingdoms*, the existential doubts and utopian aspirations of Paolozzi's anthropological imagination were revealed. He clearly strove to offer a series of alternative, non-prescriptive ways of seeing and engaging the world, with a view to encouraging social awareness, criticality and curiosity. To foster a mindfulness of being, Paolozzi created a series of kaleidoscopic installations that intermingled mundane objects with marvellous things, drawing attention to their visual imagery, forms, textures and materiality. By means of his unique assemblages, Paolozzi invited viewers to reflect on an array of historical and cultural practices and stereotypes, from the legacies of colonialism, through conflict and death, to the technologies of production and the metamorphosis of waste.

However, the exhibition's alchemic formulations, with their multi-evocative signifiers and oblique metaphors that countered the cold philosophy of museum ethnography, were open to misconception, confusion and anxiety. Yet, uncertainty, discomfort and failure are a normative part of the experimental process that unfolds when artistic licence is brought into a creative dialogue with curatorial responsibility (Dorsett 1995: 32). 'Part of the thrill of artist-curated exhibitions is to do with the enjoyment, or, jolt, that they generate being something quite outside visitors' ordinary lives' (Arnold 1995: 39). Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdoms* enacted a number of metamorphoses: it transformed the ordinary into the extraordinary and lent a kind of poetry to museum ethnography.

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Note

1. Paolozzi co-curated the exhibition with members of the Independent Group: the documentary and experimental photographer Nigel Henderson, the architects Alison and Peter Smith and the engineer Ronald Jenkins. The budget for *Lost Magic Kingdoms* was four hundred pounds (Paolozzi 2000a: 72).

Chapter 2

Re-Mastering MoMA: Kirk Varnedoe's 'Artist's Choice' Series

Lewis Kachur

In the summer of 1988, Kirk Varnedoe became the controversial choice to head the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. As a handpicked successor to William Rubin, Varnedoe was an academic without much prior museum experience. That art history academic world was highly engaged with a post-structuralist focus on deconstructing meaning. Varnedoe seized the moment to facilitate artist-curators of his generation, and their collaborations opened up new narratives of the collection. These established a multivalence, perhaps unintentionally, parallel to post-structuralism, marking a turning point in the institution's history, which was no mean feat, inside modernism's museum of record.

One of Varnedoe's very first innovations on the job was to inaugurate the 'Artist's Choice' series, which were ongoing installations on aspects of the collection curated by artists. In interviews at the time, Varnedoe cited as a forerunner similar artist exhibitions at the National Gallery, London, which he had experienced on his travels in the 1970s. Part of the unspoken agenda, I believe, was also to signal a clear departure from the Rubin era, via a gesture of reaching out to artists.

This was an exemplary occasion of power sharing, based on the recognition of the variability of narratives implicit within the collection. This was a stretch for Varnedoe, who was still invested in a dominant narrative for modernism's history, and in fact sceptical of post-structuralist relativism and doubt. As an interviewer observed, 'In Varnedoe's version [of art from 1880 to 1960], the story continues. Varnedoe regards the "post" in "post-modernism" with some suspicion. "The 'modernism is dead' arguments want to construct a cardboard modernism," he says' (Conrad 1990). Yet Varnedoe truly put considerable stock in artists' views, to the point of privileging them. He started 'Artist's Choice', "Because I would really like the public to see the collection through the eyes of the people to whom it means the most" (Conrad 1990).[1]

Conrad's impression is confirmed by Varnedoe's assistant:

I recall that Artist's Choice was something he very much wanted to do from the very start (i.e. from when he became head of Painting & Sculpture back in August 1988), that it stemmed from his deep respect for artists, and their way of seeing, and of his wanting to involve contemporary artists with the museum, and the collection, in new and innovative ways. I believe the title for the series came out of a wonderfully lively series of conversations with Scott Burton. (Umland 2012)
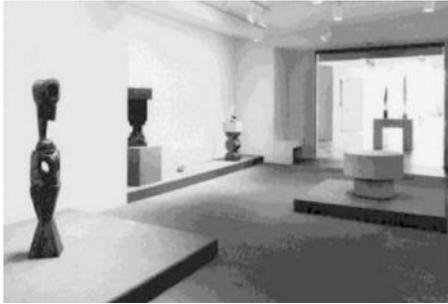
Figure 1. Installation view of the exhibition *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi.* 7 April–4 July 1989. Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo credit: Mali Olatunji.

Figure 2: Installation view of the exhibition *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi.* 7 April–4 July 1989. Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo credit: Mali Olatunji.

Similarly, during his art-history course lectures at Columbia University in the late 1970s, Varnedoe periodically invited artists like Alain Kirili to give mini-talks on their interpretations of modern master sculptors.

In one sense, the 'Artist's Choice' series was an extension of this practice into the Museum, via exhibition instead of lecture. Thus, it is not surprising that in the first two 'choices' from MoMA's vast collection, the artists functioned as quasi-historian guest curators. Their focus was on the modernist past, the historical avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century. Still, Varnedoe recognized from the outset that what the artist-curators did would reflect as much on them in the present as on their historical topic (MoMA Archive 1989).

Scott Burton was first, organizing an installation of Brancusi's works which opened in April 1989. In it, two of Brancusi's bases were exhibited on their own, as sculptures in their own right (Figure 1). This treatment clearly grew from the artist's own interests, notably the blurring of boundaries between functional seating and sculpture.

This element of self-interest in fashioning such a history was critiqued in what retrospectively seem like surprisingly hostile reviews of the exhibition. Jason Kaufman slammed, 'Burton's presentation of Brancusi is limited, fragmentary and self-serving. We

cannot cast aside the criteria that make for good curatorship simply because the curator is an artist, or celebrity' (Kaufman 1989). Of course, this is the crux of all artist-organized exhibits. Given that they usually seek to perpetuate an ideology, should they nonetheless receive a conceded degree of latitude as non-specialists?

Not to Hilton Kramer, who decried the exhibition as 'postmodernist revisionism', a 'deconstruction' of the Museum's great collection. This denunciation does underline the terms in which such an exhibition would be contextualized in the late 1980s. Kramer also made the accusation of a self-serving motive, seeing 'Brancusi [presented] as a sort of proto-Scott Burton', and labelled the result 'gruesome aesthetic vandalism' (Kramer 1989).

Most critics, including Kramer, spoke of Burton's two rock chairs installed downstairs in the sculpture garden as his part of the exhibition. Yet they usually passed over the bases that Burton designed for Brancusi's sculptures in the upstairs galleries, a reversal which we could call 'Brancusi on Burton'. They were plain, yet one, I believe, is worthy of the same scrutiny that Burton paid Brancusi's bases, and that is the largest, which stood at the entrance of the exhibition (Figure 2). On this table-socle were raised two avian pieces, *Bird in Space* and *Cock*. Burton's table-base is split; in other words it clearly has 'legs'. This creates a bodily suggestion, one which is amplified by the uprightness of these sculptures. On the linguistic level, the subjects are also united in slang, their English titles equally referring to the male genitals. Such a reading may seem risqué. Yet it only puts in play an erotics that could be called Brancusian, if we think of the master's *Princess X*, for instance: a phallic head given a twist of homoerotic desire in Charles Demuth's watercolour *Distinguished Air* of 1930. Burton's self-consciousness and sense of irony would be suited to slipping in such a corporeal allusion, perhaps as a puckish or even anti-authoritarian gesture. One might also interpret it as a response to Carl Andre's well-known aphorism: 'All I'm doing is putting Brancusi's *Endless Column* on the ground instead of in the sky. Most sculpture is priapic, with the male organ in the air. In my work, Priapus is down on the floor' (Bourdon 1968: 104). Andre's metaphor demonstrates that artists of this generation responded to Brancusi's eroticism.

Burton on Brancusi was funded by museum trustees. In June 1989, while it was on view, the Museum received a $500,000 grant from the Dana Foundation to continue the 'Artist's Choice' series for the next decade. Funding in hand, Varnedoe continued to act quickly. Even as Burton opened, he was reported to be in talks with both Cy Twombly and Chuck Close, to whom we will return.

Yet a year later it was Ellsworth Kelly's turn for 'Artist's Choice', with a show entitled *Fragmentation and the Single Form. Bird in Space* prominently reappears, now on its usual base, as an important example of Kelly's 'Single Form'. Corrected, as it were, in terms that would not incite Kramer, who indeed praised the show. In this formalist exercise, the tapered bird is in the same category as a Weston back or a Matisse shape. Like Burton, Kelly focuses on the historical avant-garde, and deploys a focus that buttresses his own position as an artist.

Kelly's installation is as pared down as his shaped monochrome painting, which was included. The left wall traces Cubist-type *Fragmentation* from Gaudi stonework to collage, including one of his own. The right wall is given to *Single Form*. These factors, Kelly freely confesses, are his own major concerns. Again, the 'self-interested' partisanship contributes to what is refreshing about these installations. While lacking in curatorial 'distance', the organizer's position as artist creates a critical space or licence to operate more freely than a curator would or could.

A mere four months after Kelly closed, an even broader-based 'choice' from MoMA's vast collection was organized by Chuck Close. In the same exhibition space where Kelly hung 25 works, Close crammed nearly seven times that amount. Like his predecessors, Close's *Head-On/The Modern Portrait* was a theme that historicized and buttressed his own position as an artist, with a focus on traditional figuration. Unlike them, however, Close was the first to include numerous examples by living artists, thus raising the art-world political stakes.

And, most significantly, Close rethought and reformulated the typical MoMA exhibition space itself. He abandoned the sparseness inside the modernist cube for the skied, frame-by-frame crowding of the nineteenth-century Salon. Even before the spectator could take in individual works, one was struck by a Rabelaisian excess, unusual if not unprecedented in MoMA's rarefied white cube galleries. With all that the nineteenth-century Salon represents as antagonistic to modernism, deploying its mode of exhibition installation amounted to a radical gesture. Or as Close said, 'In a funny way I try to subvert what I like about the Museum' (MoMA 1991).

In his Salon, Close corralled some 129 artists, from Berenice Abbott to Anton Zverev, including quite a few unfamiliar even to specialists. With six works, Picasso was the most extensively represented. Close claimed to have spent 24 eight-hour days combing the museum's storage and reserves in the paintings, photos, prints and drawings departments, and Museum staff members recall him working 'incredibly hard' in culling his choices, focusing on the head and shoulders portrait. A few sacred cows were allowed to pass with full-length renditions: Alice Neel and Balthus (Figure 3).

Close's brochure text, adapted from a conversation with Varnedoe, is quite open and detailed in spelling out his process and goals. He evolved from a first idea to pick fifteen of the best portraits, to these levelled stacks of heads. Close drily notes, 'Portraiture is not the Museum of Modern Art's strong point, nor modernism's,' even as he probes the richness of this vein. Of course it is his own strong point, but it was also a feature of Varnedoe's portfolio. As a Columbia professor, he had organized with students *Modern Portraits: the Self and Others*, an exhibition which opened at the prestigious Wildenstein Gallery in the fall of 1976. Once at the Museum, Varnedoe's most sensational early acquisition was Van Gogh's *Portrait of the Postman Roulin*. Interestingly, Close gave his seal of approval by prominently hanging this Van Gogh on a free-standing partition at the entry to his 'Artist's Choice', suggesting a kind of synergy with Varnedoe.

In the gallery, Close aimed for a look which incorporated two features: the curator in the study room, as well as the casual nature of the artist's collection at home, with works often leaning against the wall. Both 'behind the scenes' space, and domestic space, were of course sensibilities not usually evoked at the Modern. The 'behind the scenes' effect was accentuated by the fact that a large majority of these works were never on view at the Museum. This added to the sensation of exploring a 'hidden Modern', submerged holdings of figurative, sometimes anti-modernist, works, a factor which I believe contributed to the tremendous popularity of the installation. It became almost a 'Family of Man' type blockbuster for the 1990s.

The clever use of shelving combined these two modes, and sidestepped many works having to be hung on a nail. Frames and even mats overlapped, creating a rather tactile effect, as one wanted to handle the works. A possible hint may have come from Kiki Smith's *Projects* show the prior November, a time when Close was often visiting the museum. Smith stacked five similar heads on two shelves near the entry of her exhibit. If there is a connection, Close's expansion of this to a 360-degree surround was stunning, and utterly transformed the space into a kind of Wunderkammer of personalities.

Tripartite shelves lined two walls, and were mostly used for photos and drawings. In between, seven sculptures projected on shelves. Paintings, watercolours and colour photos lined one long wall, with Alice Neel and Balthus the largest works. In general, distinctions between media were liquidated, to the happy effect that holdings usually in different departmental galleries ended up cheek by jowl. Works were loosely grouped chronologically, though a number of striking juxtapositions emerge. The man with a hat theme tied Rodchenko's *Mayakovsky* and Alex Katz's glowering *Self-Portrait*. Frida Kahlo and her monkey were forerunners to *Fay and Ruscha* by William Wegman. Looking back towards the entry, smaller works were hung four high, with Miro's visionary *Self-Portrait* taking pride of place. Even the emergency exit door was not exempt. (To its left, a photographic portrait of Woodrow Wilson to which I shall return.) In the corner was a grouping of four portraits of Marcel Duchamp, surprising in that he is not an artist one would have thought Close appreciated. But his essay indicates that liking was not necessarily the prime factor. Close was bemused to include the late Alice Neel, as he recalled that she had not approved of his work.

Close took steps to represent Ray Johnson, a friend who rued not having an appropriate head in the collection. They jointly decided that Johnson would send mail art to Clive Phillpot, the MoMA librarian, whom Close then approached. Johnson's generic bunny icon, labelled *Portrait of de Kooning*, thus bypassed the curatorial departments and their acquisition procedures and became the most recent piece in the exhibit (dated 16 July 1990). As a photocopy costing only pennies to produce, Close noted, it also contrasted pointedly in value to its neighbours.

As with the other shows in the series, there were also a handful of loans, in this case from Close's own collection. These included some of his own works, which hung in the entry, and a Gianfranco Giorgoni photo of the painter. Close also sent a curiosity, a

Figure 3. Installation view of the exhibition *Artist's Choice: Chuck Close Head-On/ The Modern Portrait*, MoMA, 10 January–19 March 1991. Photographic Archive, The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo credit: Mali Olatunji. Photo courtesy of Pace Gallery.

World War I-era photographic portrait of Woodrow Wilson, whose image is composed of hundreds of soldiers in a field. This, of course, parallels the micro- and macro-cosmic levels in his own paintings. So, too, did the installation itself, as Varnedoe incisively wrote, encompassing both 'the teeming life of individual decision, and the confrontation of the whole' (MoMA 1991).

Indeed, the whole was something more than the sum of parts, whose individuality could be swamped in the overall impression of entering a crowded room. Thus Close, an easel painter, ventured into a kind of installation art, which was strongly emerging at the time. To take one example among many, there are interesting comparisons to the

prominent lobby gallery installation that Group Material hung for the 1985 Whitney biennial. Their *Americana* also used a Salon-style hanging, while also incorporating non-art objects and visual culture (Bishop 2005).

Close's installation was widely hailed, and even travelled to the West Coast by request of the Lannan Foundation. It set a high bar which has never been surpassed, and which was not even essayed for a time. Close's success became unrepeatable, and may have been a factor in the temporary fading of the whole series.

After this initial burst of three 'Artist's Choices' in less than two years, the pace slowed noticeably. There was a three-year gap before John Baldessari produced the next. It was a much more modest affair, the creation of essentially a new Baldessari collaged from details of images in the Museum collection. This was shortly followed by Elizabeth Murray's expansive show on women artists. The Museum was attempting to redress their historical shortcomings in this area, and for the first time multiple rooms were put at the guest curator's disposal. Murray mixed Close-like Salon hangings, usually of prints and drawings, with more conventional displays. Perhaps because attention to women artists had already been laid out by feminist art historians, this show pales somewhat in my personal recollection compared to *Head-On/The Modern Portrait*. Nonetheless, one can appreciate the symbolic significance of a woman curator, and the amount of female artists represented in the collection—some seventy, spanning the century. As Murray wrote in the brochure, 'I did not want the show to be political. But I realized soon enough that it is political.' Holland Cotter expanded on these terms, calling it

> …so logical and obvious in concept that it feels positively daring […] Even without the inclusion of any overtly polemical work, the show, titled 'Modern Women', is deeply political. A retrospective sweep of decades of accomplishment generally slighted by history could not be otherwise. More important, the show is so full of visual revelations and intellectual challenges that the revolutionary nature of its collective spirit is clear. (Cotter 1995)

New Museum director Marcia Tucker cited Murray's show over three years later as 'a dense, informative and highly charged exhibition' (Tucker 1999) of 130 works, most of which were in the Museum's permanent collection but rarely if ever shown. It continued to be evoked by later critics, and remains the most cited of the 'Artist's Choice' exhibitions. *Elles* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris essentially expanded Murray's premise on a scale three times larger. About 500 works by more than 200 women in the collection were installed for a year (May 2009–May 2010), only in this case more radically supplanting the male artists, who were put in storage.

Following Murray, 'Artist's Choice' essentially ground to a halt. It would be a full eight years before its next incarnation, by which time most had forgotten the series. Varnedoe's attention began to be directed to larger, multi-year projects, notably the Jasper Johns retrospective (20 October 1996–21 January 1997). Varnedoe's subsequent illness, the

'MoMA 2000' project and the Museum expansion all contributed to the atrophy of the series, as perhaps did the ebbing of the post-structuralist wave. 'Artist's Choice ' now continues sporadically yet promisingly on an inter-departmental basis, with the Vik Muniz project as the ninth, and the first sponsored by the photography department (*Rebus*, 11 December 2008–23 February 2009).

Yet if reshuffling the collection can be considered as a 'given', after the first five 'Artist's Choice' versions, entirely novel departures began to seem foreclosed. As Duchamp noted of ready-mades, one should limit the amount produced. And the deconstructive point had been made, that modernism's history is multiple, susceptible to diverse readings, no one of which is definitive. Kirk Varnedoe deserves credit for starting this play of multivalence that in part continues via a group curatorial team currently reinstalling the Museum's collection.

Nonetheless, the latest, tenth iteration of 'Artist's Choice' suggests that the format can still be productively tweaked. Trisha Donnelly (b. 1974) represents a younger-generation artist than most of her predecessors. She installed three rooms within two floors of the painting and sculpture collection galleries, as well as inserted a photo in another, the first time that 'Artist's Choice' has not been a self-contained mini-show in the Special Exhibitions Galleries. Her rooms are too separate to cohere as Donnelly's own vision; instead, they seem more a disruption or alternative to the usual flow of

Figure 4. *Trisha Donnelly,* 2 November 2012–28 July 2013, Fifth Floor, Gallery 11 of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. photo: © 2015 Lewis Kachur.

these galleries. In part this is done by mixing media—prints, photographs and design objects—contrasted with painting and sculpture. In part, she introduces artists normally not on view, especially an entire room of Eliot Porter photographs of birds. Coming after galleries of Cubism and Futurism, it blocks the flow of the modernist painting and sculpture story. Even more so, it functions via excess. Twenty-five Porter photographs of the same subject are too many for a collection display, making him and not Picasso or Matisse the artist with the most works on view at the Museum. By choosing not to be selective, Donnelly foregrounds the repetitive, day-to-day working life of a photographer. Likewise, in another room, there is a selection of large, computer-generated diagrams of integrated circuitry for microchips from the mid-1980s. Donnelly views the diagrams as 'artifacts of the origin of a universe'; they also seem comparable to the 'neo-Geo' art of the period. Again, curatorial excess: one or two would have made the point, but fully ten take up most of the linear space of the room. At the other, spare extreme, a single photo by George Platt Lynes inserted in the gallery of later Surrealism in the United States is startlingly effective. Its black-and-white medium contrasts with the colourful canvases around it and in its bold depiction of homoerotic desire also opposes Surrealism's usual heterosexual tilt. Specifically, Lynes shares wall space with paired heterosexual couples: Dorothea Tanning and Max Ernst, Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy. Playing this sexuality card is intriguing, and evokes the performative aspect of the artist-provocateur let loose in the collection.

In terms of installation, the most unusual is the close hanging of Gallery 11 on the fifth floor, like a horizontal film strip around the room. Modestly sized Posada prints, early Redon oils and six Berenice Abbott light-wave photographs commingle in a way that recalls Chuck Close's crowded salon. To Donnelly each is 'an epic entity' urgently needing to be seen. Yet she also gestures towards invisible aspects of the Museum, and its archives, in resurrecting three audio tours taped by Robert Rosenblum for the massive 1980 Picasso retrospective. Most viewers miss the label for this, and some who punch in the numbers on their handsets must find it puzzling to hear a description of Picasso's not before their eyes. Stripped of its utilitarian function and context, is Rosenblum's tape now 'sound art', which Donnelly was searching for? Or does it become an elegy for the passing spectacle of exhibitions, critics and curators of shows? Donnelly herself claims only the direct appeal of Rosenblum's enthusiasm (Hoptman and Manes 2013). Donnelly presented an 'Artist Talk' as part of her intervention, introducing an early Gertrude Käsebier photo album of Edward Steichen portraits. She recounted aspects of her selection process. She attempted to look at a digital image of everything in the collection, and at first considered a focus on anonymous glassware (Donnelly 2013). An ambitious task, even in the digital age, yet the Museum's electronic cataloguing system makes departmental divisions porous. Her initial idea of anonymous glass hints at novelty, as well as a desire to bypass the history of authorship.

Artists continue to largely float above criticism in their selections, indeed reviewers still welcome 'Artist's Choice' as a breath of fresh air, expecting 'flashes of imagination,

excavations of neglected artworks and subversions of the curatorial status quo' (Smith 2013). Not surprisingly, a collection as vast as MoMA's (some 25,000 photographs alone) has rich veins of works that are interesting to display, as long as it is not proposed they go on permanent view. The artist's carte blanche becomes a lever to open or even ignore the art-historical framework more than a permanent curator could or perhaps even would want to do. Thus a primary audience is the museum staff itself, intrigued to experience a reshuffle without having to advocate it.

Donnelly is planning a documentary artist's book, boding that also for the first time the 'Artist's Choice' intervention will become a work in its own right, an oeuvre within her 'practice'. Varnedoe's original mandate has morphed into self-consciously treating the collection as art material, the arrangement itself in our era inescapably becomes an instance of institutional commentary. Donnelly's freewheeling, diverse installation reminds one of the inter-departmental promise of the millennial shows *ModernStarts*, but not followed up until now. Her intervention provided not only another dive into the hidden MoMA iceberg of the collection in storage, as Close and Murray had done, but also puts on the table a fruitful inter-departmental model for Artist's Choices of the future.

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Note

1. Varnedoe was also married to an artist, environmental sculptor Elyn Zimmerman.

Chapter 3

'Both Object and Subject': MoMA's *Burton on Brancusi*

Cher Krause Knight

Artists-as-curators are increasingly common fixtures on today's museum terrain, as witnessed by the Hirshhorn Museum's 'Ways of Seeing' project, for which conceptual artist John Baldessari served as the first guest curator in 2006. Yet such shows were more novel in 1989 when *Burton on Brancusi* opened at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Scott Burton had largely set aside his former life as a curator and critic to focus on his own art practice when he was presented with the opportunity to organize this show. Furthermore he knew he was gravely ill (he would succumb to AIDS in December of that year), and so it might be surprising that he chose to devote what he knew to be his limited time and energies to a curatorial project rather than art-making. Yet his enthusiasm for Rumanian sculptor Constantin Brancusi prompted him to accept Kirk Varnedoe's invitation to participate in the 'Artist's Choice' series. Varnedoe, then still new to his post as Chief Curator of MoMA's Department of Painting and Sculpture, established the series as an opportunity for contemporary artists to 'select, juxtapose, and comment on works from the Museum's permanent collection'. In Burton's particular case, the exhibition would focus 'especially on the innovative way Brancusi dealt with bases and pedestals, and on the representational aspect of Brancusi's formal vocabulary'.[1] The resulting show, *Burton on Brancusi*, was both celebrated and controversial. Displaying, among other things, some of Brancusi's pedestals as independent artworks, Burton plumbed the slippages between aesthetics and functionality that marked Brancusi's artistic practice—and his own. The exhibition offered not only a fresh perspective on Brancusi's work, but also new insight into Burton's art and introspection for a man whose life would end shortly. In actuality Burton, alongside Brancusi, was 'both object and subject' of the show.

Scott Burton was born in Greensboro, Alabama in 1939, and had an early interest in art, taking painting classes as a teen. By the late 1950s he studied briefly with Leon Berkowitz in Washington DC, and then with the legendary painter Hans Hofmann in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Hofmann was encouraging and supportive though not very critical of the young Burton, and the celebrated master's influence upon his student seems to have been limited to the placement and relationship of geometric masses. After a year at Goddard, a small college in Vermont, then a year at home, Burton moved to New York City in the fall of 1959, where he remained for the rest of his life. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in literature from Columbia University in 1962, indicating that he wanted to 'get a liberal education rather than go to art school' (Burton 1987a: 42, 47; Baker 1990: 163). The following year Burton graduated from New York University with

a Masters degree in literature. By 1966 he was writing for *ARTnews*, describing himself as a 'reviewer' not an 'art critic', with a straightforward writing style that presaged the lucid function and architectonic form of his later sculpture (Burton 1987a: 47, 60). In 1969 Burton wrote the catalogue essay for *When Attitude Becomes Form*, an exhibition held at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland, in which he suggested that art and ideas were becoming indistinguishable from one another. Later, between 1973 and 1976, he worked as an editor—eventually becoming senior editor—at *Art in America*. Although Burton sometimes downplayed such experiences, they greatly informed both his art and curatorial practices, and set him apart from other would-be artist-curators.

Before turning to sculpture, Burton was a performance artist. In the late 1960s he staged some 'street works' in urban settings, characterizing these as 'just gropings […] a rejection of the gallery and museum context' (Burton 1987a: 68). As early as the summer of 1970 Burton began using furniture in his art, shifting contextual expectations through gestures such as creating outdoor 'rooms'. The 'Furniture Tableaux' of the mid 1970s remain the best known of his performance works, and those that relate most directly to his sculpture. For example, in his *Pastoral Chair Tableau* (1975) he 'used scavenged chairs to stand in for human protagonists' (Baker 1990: 163), their anthropomorphic, empty forms and evocative groupings suggesting both companionship and loneliness. In other pieces, such as *Group Behavior Tableau* (1972, Whitney Museum of American Art) and *Pair Behavior Tableau* (1976, Guggenheim Museum) his robotic, mute actors moved through short, stark and vigorously choreographed scenes, their silent encounters proceeding at an exaggeratedly slow pace. Burton conceived these not as narrative but as 'thematic' works, which signalled a 'turning point' in his career. Grounded as they were in the 'proximics' of body language—the 'relation of body to body'—Burton drew direct correlatives between these early pieces and his later work 'in the plazas and the parks, and the design of furniture', all of which paid careful attention to our physical and social interactions. As Burton observed of the nearly simultaneous development and merging of these two paths, 'the behavior tableaus [sic] are very serious. And the design of furniture is very serious' (Burton 1987a: 70, 72; Burton 1987b: 3, 8, 13).

Around 1977 Burton embarked on the creation of his one-of-a-kind furniture pieces, which he exhibited as sculptural works in art venues such as Philadelphia's Institute of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago and New York's Guggenheim Museum. Although his 'mature' phase was relatively short (about fifteen years), these later works comprise a complex oeuvre that interrogated the persistent, though often muddled, polarities between art and design, private and public, 'sculpture' and 'furniture'. As critic Roberta Smith asserted, 'Burton produced pieces with their own "charisma" […] each […] has a distinct, often demanding personality' (Smith 1978: 138–39). His works are spare exercises in minimalist rhetoric but rendered as sensuous forms, fabricated with meticulous workmanship and often in luxurious materials. Even his egalitarian-spirited public projects that were intended for broad and varied audiences are intimate and private: to be experienced through direct bodily contact on a personal basis.

They are completely utilitarian objects—supposedly banal furniture—and simultaneously, sculptural representations of such—decidedly elevated artworks. As Elizabeth Baker comments: 'Such apparently prosaic subject matter would seem to presuppose a certain modesty in intention […].Yet these are ambitious works of great visual and expressive complexity that yoke stylistic rigor with extravagant formal invention.' But Burton also insisted on his work's 'identity as furniture […] despite his intense involvement with his art historical sources, despite the fact that his works were known primarily in the art world as sculptures and sold to such collectors of art' (Baker 1990: 163, 199).

Certainly Burton's knowledge of furniture design, and admiration for designers such as Marcel Breuer, directly impacted the structure and utility of his own sculpture. Like Breuer, who wished to bring good design to the masses, Burton's populist impulses led him to envision 'mass manufacture and commercial application for his work' (Richardson 1986: 45). Architect and critic Peter Blake commended the practical functionality of Burton's work, noting '[h]is granite chairs are entirely sittable-on (and surprisingly comfortable) and his tables are entirely eatable-from' (Blake 1987: 287). Burton conceived his pieces as 'pragmatic structures', and asserted that success came when he designed a space and 'people enjoyed sitting there', including 'non-art people'. The resulting work could be 'deceptively artless' and perhaps escape notice as sculpture altogether (Johnson 1990: 161), which seemed to matter little to Burton, who reasoned, 'you have to give up some ego things' (Burton 1987b: 35–36). According to the artist:

> Visual art is moving away from the hermetic, the hieratic, the self-directed, toward more civic, more outer-directed, less self-important relationships with social history […] it will place itself not in front of but around, behind, underneath (literally) the audience in an *operational* capacity. (Foote 1980: 23–24)

As Burton told Lewis Kachur in a 1987 interview, he aimed to make works that were 'poetic or reverberate', but were 'also accessible in their language because it's functional'. For him there was an inherent irony here: 'I still expect art to be significantly different from life, but I also want it to make [it] exactly the same as life. There's an ambivalence and a contradiction' (Burton 1987b: 53–54).

More than a decade before *Burton on Brancusi* opened at MoMA, critics were already emphasizing the spare, architectonic quality of Burton's work, though sometimes overlooking its rich historical allusions. Writing in 1978, John Perreault described Burton as being concerned with 'ideal forms' often 'in pursuit of un-furniture', producing pieces that were 'blatantly Minimal, in content if not always in form' (Perreault 1978: 26). Likewise, Roberta Smith aligned Burton with artists such as Donald Judd, Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt, but identified an essential difference between them, too: 'It might be said that it is Scott Burton's ambition to take the taut assertive muteness that is minimalist form and make it talk […]. Burton's original sin, vis-à-vis minimalism, is that his objects are literally furniture—sculptural works of art intended to be, when they're not on exhibit,

functioning tables and chairs' (Smith 1978: 138). Here Smith misses the mark when she claims that Burton's pieces perform different functions in different settings: that they are aesthetic objects only in the museum, and furniture only at home. The point of Burton's work was that it was both art *and* furniture, in all venues and all contexts, at all times. This impulse towards an inherent duality of form and function, object and subject, certainly drew him to the work of Brancusi (Balas 1978; Tillim 1958).

Although Burton had sworn off writing and criticism 'forever', he could not resist a few tempting projects on artists whose sensibilities were much like his own. In 1980 he wrote an article for *Art in America* on the furniture designs of Dutch architect Gerrit Rietveld, whom he deeply admired and respected. In particular, Burton praised Rietveld's 'furniture-approaching sculpture' as combining 'the most abstruse modernist researches with the most social minded intentions' (Burton 1980: 103). The following year Burton gave what he characterized as an informal lecture on 'My Brancusi' that provided the conceptual foundation for *Burton on Brancusi*; here he conceived of the bases as 'a fascinating study of themselves' (Burton 1987b: 19; Burton 1989b), a notion he would take up several years later in the exhibition. Despite Burton's ailing health—he was already critically ill with AIDS and would be dead by the end of 1989—and having shied away from critical practice, he accepted Varnedoe's invitation to curate the inaugural show of the 'Artist's Choice' series and also authored its accompanying pamphlet text. In *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi*, Burton offered his idol reverential treatment, displaying not only great affection for but also a deep understanding of one of the major figures in twentieth-century art. In Brancusi's work Burton seemed to sense a progression towards and continuity with his own.

MoMA hosted *Burton on Brancusi* beginning on 7 April 1989 (the exhibition was originally scheduled to close on 28 June, but Varnedoe requested extensions from lenders to keep the show open through to 4 July).[2] A smaller-sized gallery contained a sampling of Brancusi's work, installed according to Burton's instructions and under his supervision. A seventeen-minute video (made with the assistance of Manhattan Media) was also available for viewing in the Education Centre on the ground floor. This chronicled the exhibition's installation as Burton shared his knowledge of and thoughts on Brancusi's work, which was meant to assure the audience that he was a competent and insightful choice to curate the show. Confidence in Burton was likely to grow further if one wandered out to MoMA's sculpture garden, where several of Burton's pieces were also on display. Seeing the works of Brancusi and Burton in tandem underscored the connections between them: architectonic forms; regard for materials; interest in spatial relationships; and blurred boundaries between utilitarian object and *objet d'art*.

In the lengthy brochure essay, *My Brancusi*, which he authored to accompany the exhibition, Burton focused on the architectural qualities and furniture elements of Brancusi's work, rather than its human or animal subjects. Brancusi sought to rethink the relationships that exist between furniture, pedestals and sculpture. This utilitarian emphasis also led to his use of modular systems, as seen in several versions for the *Endless*

Figure 1. Constantin Brancusi. *The Sorceress* (*La sorcière*). 1916–24. Walnut, on limestone base. 44 3/4 x 19 1/2 x 25 1/2 inches (113.7 x 49.5 x 64.8 cm) overall. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY, USA. 56.1448. Photograph by David Heald © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP Paris.

Column, in which series of truncated pyramidal forms were piled atop one another, alternating base and crown up. Burton, too, utilized modules in works such as his *Urban Plaza South,* commissioned by the Equitable Life Assurance Society for its New York City headquarters. Instead of applied ornament each artist relied on the inherent properties, careful workmanship and serviceability of their chosen materials to engage the senses. In *My Brancusi* Burton writes:

Figure 2. Constantin Brancusi. *The Fish*. 1930. Blue-grey marble 21 x 71 x 5 1/2 inches (53.3 x 180.3 x 14 cm), on a three-part pedestal of one marble 5 1/8 inches (13 cm) high, and two limestone cylinders 13 inches (33 cm) high and 11 inches (27.9 cm) high x 32 1/8 inches (81.5 cm) diameter at widest point. Acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York. © 2013 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP Paris.

> I think […] that some of Brancusi's pedestal-tables are of the same conceptual order as any of his busts or torsos. His best pieces of furniture are not only functional objects but also representations of functional objects. We have here sculptures of tables, close in character to Brancusi's other sculptures. They are both object and subject. (Burton 1989e: 2)

Entering what was then Gallery 23, the entrance to the Painting and Sculpture galleries on the third floor of the museum, one would immediately encounter *Burton on Brancusi*. Though the 'Artist's Choice' series was meant to recontextualize pieces already in MoMA's collection, Burton was permitted to include some works from other institutions. As described by Varnedoe: 'In principle, this show, like the others envisioned in the series, will be about our own collection. However, if a few select additions will help make the artist's point, without violating the basic principle, they should be accommodated' (Varnedoe, undated notes). Among the works shown were Brancusi's *Chimera*, on loan from the Philadelphia Museum of Art; *Caryatid* from Harvard University's Fogg Museum; and *Adam and Eve* and the pedestal for *The Sorceress* (Figure 1), both of which were borrowed from the Guggenheim Museum. Gleaned from MoMA's own collection were *Young Bird, Magic Bird, Bird in Space, The Newborn, The Cock, The Fish* (Figure 2), and *Version I* of the *Endless Column*. Burton's tentative checklist also included *Cup* from the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (to be paired with the base for *The Sorceress*); the Philadelphia Museum of Art's *Endless Column*; and MoMA's *Blond Negress II* and *Double Caryatid* (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514).

Burton fussed over the exhibition's details for many months, making changes and substitutions to best communicate his vision, and altering the layout as he continued to plan it. In the selection and presentation of works he also laboured to capture Brancusi's intentions when known. For instance, Burton planned to recreate a yellow satin pillow Brancusi had originally conceived for *The Newborn*, though it did not appear in the final exhibition. In a speculative gallery plan dated 22 February 1989, *Endless Column* was located directly behind the base for *The Fish* with *Chimera* to the *Column*'s left, and the placement of the pedestal from *Blond Negress* noted with a question mark at the *Column*'s right. Also in this tentative plan *Adam and Eve* and *Magic Bird* shared the left wall, while *The Newborn* and the pedestal for *The Sorceress* were against the right wall. A Brancusi gouache of his studio was planned for the outer foyer, to the left of several 'bird' works as the viewer entered the gallery (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514). A month later, Burton indicated to Varnedoe that he was rethinking this installation 'a bit', and considered putting all of the taller pieces on one side of the gallery and grouping the shorter ones on the other (Umland 1989b). Eventually *The Cock* was added, and while Burton initially intended to show *Young Bird* without its wooden pedestal, he ultimately displayed the work in its entirety. The cylinder base for *Bird in Space* was not executed by Brancusi, which may explain why only the pedestal's bottom portion was shown (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514).

As noted above, the tentative proposal for *Burton on Brancusi* specified the inclusion of Brancusi's *Cup* from the collection of the Centre Pompidou. Burton even made a personal plea to Jean-Hubert Martin, then director of the Pompidou, to secure a loan of either *Cup* or *Vase*, which he wanted to position on top of a Brancusi base as an example of 'two sculptures of <u>things</u>'. He considered such a pairing 'the very most important element of my show', though in the end *Cup* and *Vase* were reproduced in the brochure but not lent for the exhibition (Burton 1989b). Burton elaborated in his letter to Martin as follows, making a case to revisit Brancusi's work in the context of 'furniture art' and a new 'public art':

> I want to demonstrate that Brancusi, radically, rejected the distinction between the 'sculptures' and his other created objects (the seats, the tables and bases, and the architectural elements). This complex thinker did not give any less of his powerful imagination to his furniture works than he did to his animals and heads […] I can contribute one idea of my own: that Brancusi's tables and seats are not only functional objects <u>but also representations of functional objects</u>. This is of course clearest in *Table of Silence* but it is also true of the simplest base. As well as being a specialized form of table, a Brancusi base is <u>a sculpture of a table</u>. In art shorthand, 'table' is both object and subject here. (Burton 1989b)

In the show's final arrangement, *The Cock*'s wood form seemed rustic in comparison to the gleaming bronze of *Bird in Space*, with which it shared a plinth in the entry foyer. Once inside the gallery, on the left wall one first encountered *Magic Bird* and then *Adam and Eve*, paired together as examples of 'figurative pedestals'. The right wall hosted *Young Bird* (both its base and figure), *The Newborn* (shown on a very low plinth covered by a vitrine), and the pedestal of *The Sorceress*. On the left side of the back wall stood *Endless Column*, which found a clever visual pendent in *Chimera*, a work that has the *Column*'s module as its base, each of which Burton conceived as a sort of table. These two works stood like sentinels guarding the centrepiece of the room: the base for *The Fish*, which was in the middle of the gallery so that it could be viewed from all sides (Figure 3). Along this central axis with *The Fish*'s pedestal, hanging against the back wall, was the gouache of Brancusi's studio, which Burton characterized as a 'mirror' in the absence of the studio itself (MoMA Archives: VR 89-4). This work served as a reference to several pieces in the room, and anchored the gallery with an emphatic terminal viewpoint.

Brancusi's economy of form and duality of aesthetic and functional purposes recall Burton's own elegantly reductive and human-scaled forms, which invite interactions ranging from art connoisseurs' studied consideration to the weary bodies of anyone passing by. Burton strove to make pieces that were equally at home within the museum as in the street. Though he remained 'skeptical' of 'art for art's sake'—a scepticism that motivated his emphasis on functionality—Burton realized that people might still treat his works as 'precious objects'. He concluded, '…there's still an aura to a piece of furniture if it's wonderful,' and that it was necessary to elevate a work beyond 'just some commonplace

Figure 3. Installation view of the exhibition, *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi*, 7 April through to 4 July 1989. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo: Mali Olatunji. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

landscape designer's thing for people'. The trick for Burton was to avoid making a work that seemed temporary or aloof (a mere 'spectacle'), and instead to create one that 'is necessarily part of people's lives'. Such a piece 'wants to integrate itself into the normal fabric of life and stand out subliminally or peripherally or subconsciously or after-the-fact, retrospectively' (Burton 1987b: 17–18, 61–63). Significantly, several of Burton's own works were on view on the West Terrace of MoMA's Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden as part of the show, furthering the stylistic and ideological connections between Burton and Brancusi (Alexander Calder's *Spider* was subsequently 'repositioned' to accommodate the Burton pieces). In addition to Burton's *Pair of Rock Chairs* (in MoMA's collection), which he requested be placed closer together and thus made 'more conversational', his *Three-Quarter-Cube Bench* and *Pair of Two-Parallelogram Chairs* were also displayed. Appraising *Bench* in the video, Burton quipped that he was indeed 'happy to say I removed the right

quarter' (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514; MoMA Archives: VR 89-4). Ultimately Burton saw such pieces 'in the tradition of geometric abstraction. I can't deny it. I just got fed up with formalist art, although I'm deeply formalist.' As he had once observed of his work: '…it's not about taking shapes and putting them together; it's about taking a mass and removing things. That's formalist too—not just optical space' (Burton 1987b: 51, 53).

Brancusi's furniture-sculptures—and by extension, those by Burton—are resolutely utilitarian objects. Yet these are also theoretical studies grounded in furniture design, ruminations on the history of art, and explorations of possible meanings attached to a given object or subject. A chair is not just a chair but also a representation of such, an elusive notion that somehow confounds our sense of what is and what seems. Such multivalent interpretations become exceptionally fertile when one considers each man's work as manifested in public space. Though Brancusi unlikely conceived of himself as a 'public artist' in the way that term is understood today, the works he produced for public settings and his intent in doing so was undeniably egalitarian and notably similar to Burton's attitude. For example, a strong parallel can be drawn between Brancusi's *Table of Silence* (1937–38), and Burton's *Picnic Table and Benches (Inverted Pyramids)* of 1983. Each work is sited outdoors, sensitive to its respective environment and comprised of architectonic forms massed to produce functional furniture groupings. In both cases the artists designed purposeful places for human congregation and interaction. As Burton perceived it, 'art as furniture or design' was 'not overtly political but it's somehow social' (Burton 1987b: 19, 20). Though Burton utilized fewer seating elements than Brancusi, his *Picnic Table and Benches* is obviously indebted to *Table of Silence*. Burton's low, square forms hint at nature's underlying geometric order. They also recall *Table of Silence*'s sense of reverent quietude, creating a space that seems fit for intimate social gatherings rather than noisy bacchanalia. This point is reconfirmed by Burton's request for a 'non-obscured' photograph of *Table of Silence* for the exhibition brochure: he was intent on capturing the meditative clarity of Brancusi's work (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514). *Table of Silence* is 'sculpture-approaching-furniture', related to but still distinct from Rietveld's 'furniture-approaching-sculpture' cited earlier. In Burton's art we find the reconciliation of these overlapping practices: his work is every bit as much utilitarian object as it is art object, and vice versa. For Burton, fullness of experience came from an object's double life, and he found the challenge of his pieces to be 'figuring out how to make them look good as sculptures, but how to make them make sense as chairs and tables' (Burton 1987b: 22). With this goal in mind, we can better appreciate Burton's veneration of *Table of Silence* as 'both a functional work and a moving and elevated work of art' (Burton 1989e: 7).

In Brancusi's work there is a sense of focused restraint, which relies upon a pared-down vocabulary of forms. For Brancusi a base was not merely a physical foundation for another—supposedly more important—sculptural form, but an integral part of the total work. Though he did not always design a pedestal with a specific sculpture in mind, often experimenting with it and pairing it with a variety of different works (Nauman 1984: 54), Brancusi did not view bases as interchangeable objects or silent hosts.[3] As seen in photos of his studio, *The Fish* was originally situated atop a large slab of plaster, but when it was sent

to MoMA Brancusi designed a smaller pedestal for it,[4] understanding that a base could offer evocative echoes and contrasts of shape and material. As conceived by Burton, the pedestal is 'a specialized form of table', and Brancusi's achievement was in enriching it and insisting on its significance (Burton 1987b: 57). By displaying Brancusi's bases independently in his exhibition, Burton advocated for their validity as discrete sculptural objects, whose art status was not dependent upon any other gesture. Burton even designed the plinth that supported Brancusi's 'bird' works in the elevator lobby, as well as several other pedestals (though he allowed these to be disposed of after the show closed) (Umland 1989d).

Although the exhibition was clearly under Burton's curatorial purview, Varnedoe did provide input regarding what would be shown and where; project description notes identify the show as organized by Burton 'in collaboration with' Varnedoe (Varnedoe, undated notes). Regardless, it is clear that both men were heavily invested in the joint venture. For Varnedoe, it was the inauguration of his brainchild exhibition series, and no detail was too small as he personally fretted over matters such as restocking the brochures. The truth was that Varnedoe had a lot to prove, having arrived at MoMA only the year before as William Rubin's personally selected successor to head up the Department of Painting and Sculpture. After *Burton on Brancusi*, Varnedoe succeeded in securing funding for subsequent 'Artist's Choice' shows with a half-million-dollar grant from the Dana Foundation (Varnedoe 1989d). For Burton it would be his final act as a curator, his last chance to give critical voice to Brancusi, and he wanted to get everything just 'right'. He attended to all kinds of minutia, including every phase of the pamphlet's planning and production (Umland 1989a), as well as design of the brochure holders and exhibition seating. Sometimes this perfectionist desire gave way to bouts of self-doubt, as when Burton contacted Varnedoe to make sure that there was not 'anything really stupid' in his text for the pamphlet, which he had honed through several careful drafts. The logistics of the installation were also meticulously planned and carried out under Burton's direct supervision, as is evidenced in the video accompanying the show. Here we find Varnedoe in a suit and Burton in a sweatshirt and jeans, the two of them chatting during the installation. Burton does most of the talking and most of the supervision, smiling most of the time; no detail escapes his notice and no discovery is too insignificant to celebrate. He scrutinizes the placement and orientation of each piece as it is installed. Burton studies *Adam and Eve*, describing it as one of Brancusi's 'most outrageous' works with the force of Eve crushing Adam into the ground. He chooses not to position *Chimera* 'face-forward', so that one can concentrate on the form of the base. Burton also indicates that the 'authority' for his project comes from Brancusi himself, in particular, from Brancusi's photographs of his own studio picturing the bases independently. Thus he gushes over the opportunity to make new pairings between Brancusi's works and emancipate the pedestals. Commending Brancusi's reductive power to 'take elements away to arrive at the subject', Burton insists that if *The Newborn* is a 'legitimate' aesthetic entity without any base, then the pedestals too are 'legitimate' in their isolation. In the case of *The Fish* he displays only its base and marvels at how it looks like a stout table that has been tightly squeezed. Burton delights in having put the pedestal

for *The Sorceress* at eye level where it has never been seen before (he stands beside it on the advert for the video [Figure 4]), making it not a supporting foundation but the object of our attention. All the while Varnedoe rarely interjects in the conversation, but at one point aptly notes that Burton has succeeded in bringing recognition to what is usually overlooked as, quite literally, 'part of the furniture' (MoMA Archives: VR 89-4; Varnedoe 1989c). Here not only do Burton's ambitions become clear, but Varnedoe's as well. The 'Artist's Choice' series set a mandate to take more risks and chart new territory for the museum: Varnedoe wanted to wake up MoMA.

Burton on Brancusi garnered media and critical attention, and surely benefited from the foot traffic of an Andy Warhol retrospective that was up at MoMA until the beginning of May 1989. But while the innovations of Varnedoe's artist-curated initiative and of Burton's curatorial practice were lauded, the show drew its fair share of criticism, too. In particular, the choice to present several of Brancusi's pedestals as autonomous works of art proved to be controversial, though it seems that neither Burton nor Varnedoe was entirely surprised by this reaction. Likely anticipating the criticism while revelling in the experimental spirit of his curatorial vision, Burton left Varnedoe a message about three months before *Burton on Brancusi* was to open. Asserting that he had found a 'manageable scheme' for the show, Burton jokingly proposed that *Endless Column* be 'suspended from the ceiling and the other pedestals installed perpendicular to the walls' (Burton 1989a). But any genuinely extremist impulses were reined in by Burton himself, who proclaimed: 'I'm not a radical, and I don't say, "Burn the museums". I say, "Preserve the museums". I even have a taste for ongoing traditions of painting and sculpture' (Burton 1987a: 67).

Not surprisingly, lenders to the show offered praise. Arthur B. Shands, who had loaned Burton's *Two-Parallelogram Chairs*, exclaimed: '…how fresh and energetic the Brancusi material looked as seen through Scott's eyes' (Shands 1989). In his thank you letter to the Guggenheim's Diane Waldman, then its deputy director, Varnedoe observed: 'I hardly expected [critic] Hilton Kramer to like the idea; but, him aside, I've been heartened by the response' (Varnedoe 1989a). Waldman responded that she found Burton's installation of Brancusi's works to be 'very stimulating and provocative' (Waldman 1989). Writing also to Anne d'Harnoncourt, then Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, to thank her for lending *Chimera*, Varnedoe reflected on the unanticipated controversies that ensued from the show:

> Aside from those of Hilton Kramer, the most vehement objections only reach me second or third hand. I gather, though, that one coterie I would have thought would have liked the idea—artists—are hardly uniform on this score. Discounting an inevitable quotient of simple jealousy and competitiveness (the generation of Serra, Andre, et al., believe they own exclusive rights to Brancusi), there also seems to be a revulsion at the idea "supposed somebody did this [meaning, I presume, the temporary separation of the *Fish* from its base] to my work!?" All this was quite educational. (Varnedoe 1989c)
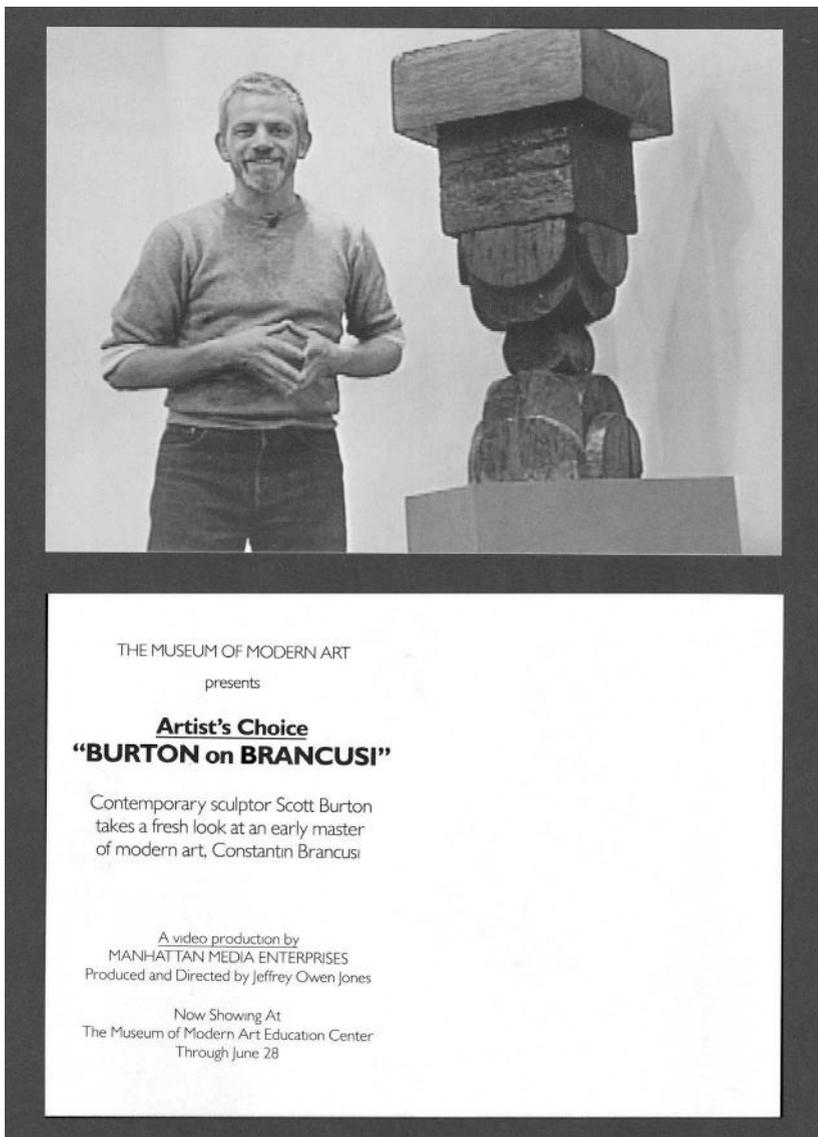
Figure 4. Announcement for 'The Museum of Modern Art presents *Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi*'. A video production by Manhattan Media Enterprises, produced and directed by Jeffrey Owen Jones, shown at the Museum of Modern Art Education Center. Produced in conjunction with the exhibition, 'Artist's Choice: Burton on Brancusi'. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA. Curatorial Exhibition Files, Exh. # 1514. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (MA1454). Digital image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, New York.

Ultimately Varnedoe concluded that the venture was a success: he described the exhibition as 'very handsome', the brochure text as 'punchy and provocative', and found Burton 'terrific to work with' (Varnedoe 1989c). Varnedoe's assistant, Anne Umland, shared this enthusiasm as she wrote to Burton: '…thanks to you, I shall never look at Brancusi's work, and Burton's too, in the same way again. The entire experience was enlightening, inspirational and great fun and I thank you for making it so' (Umland 1989c). The admiration was mutual and Burton commended the Museum and many members of its staff whom would have usually remained an invisible workforce, including the electricians and carpenters. The artist proclaimed that he was grateful for an experience 'wonderful for me in every respect' (Burton 1989d). In a charming handwritten note, Burton acknowledged Varnedoe's bravery in supporting his vision for the show:

Dear Kirk:

I want to thank you again (and again) for the opportunity to work with both Brancusi and Varnedoe—from the conservative reactions, I now realize that you stuck your neck out a bit. And you're very videogenic.

With warmest feelings, Scott (Burton 1989c)

Burton on Brancusi was more than a curatorial outing for Burton, in which he could pay tribute to an artist he had long admired. It was a lens through which Burton could examine his own artistic practice, a meditation upon the duality of function and form as manifested in his work as well as Brancusi's. Burton's attempts to illuminate Brancusi's thought and working processes also made us privy to his own.

Commenting upon Burton's sculpture-furniture group, *The Last Tableau* (conceived during the last two years of his life, and thus overlapping with his curatorship of *Burton on Brancusi*), Robert Rosenblum emphasized the anthropomorphic nature of Burton's entire oeuvre:

But even from the beginning, Burton's furniture has evoked, as in a séance, the human aura that […] we often see hovering over an empty couch or dining room table […]. Burton always extract[ed] from his furniture-sculpture the anatomy, the psychology, and even the sociology of the human species. (Rosenblum 1991: 3)

To Rosenblum's observations I would add that a sense of mortality pervades Burton's work, an acknowledgment of our physical states of being and their constant flux, held in tension with the quiet stoicism and still grandeur of his sculptures. *Burton on Brancusi* was very meaningful for him: Burton saw Brancusi as the origin for his own work claiming 'I didn't start from Brancusi, I came from Brancusi' (MoMA Archives: VR 89-4).[5] Engaged in a long battle with a debilitating illness, curating *Burton on Brancusi* became an act of

faith in which he focused on the depth and originality of Brancusi's art, apprehending its spiritual capacities as well as the aesthetic ones.

In turn, his ability to recontextualize Brancusi (especially for those who thought they already knew that work so well) confirmed Burton's own innovative sensibilities. Of course others would follow in the 'Artist's Choice' series, including Chuck Close, Mona Hatoum, Ellsworth Kelly, Elizabeth Murray, John Baldessari, Vik Muniz and composer Stephen Sondheim. But it was Burton who set the bar for inquisitiveness and experimentation. In his show's accompanying video, Burton insisted: 'I don't feel, as American, as a late modern artist, I have the resource of the sublime as did Brancusi. But I am very big on the ordinary' (MoMA Archives: VR 89-4). Yet Burton was possessed of his own sense of the sublime as he could divine the extraordinary from the supposedly mundane. In *Burton on Brancusi* he did just that—what was once overlooked, he made fresh and engaging.

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Notes

1. Varnedoe thought the series could become a 'prototype or model for other museums' (Varnedoe, undated notes).

2. The opening reception was held Friday, 7 April 1989. The exhibition was sponsored by grants from Agnes Gund and Daniel Shapiro, and the Contemporary Arts Council of MoMA. Varnedoe's extension request was prompted by an unexpected trip out of the country, as he wanted to oversee the de-installation and also thought it beneficial to have the show up through the Independence Day holiday (Varnedoe 1989b).

3. For more on Brancusi's bases see Sidney Tillim, 'The Pedestals of Brancusi', *Kenyon Review*, 20: 4 (Autumn 1958), pp. 617–27; and Edith Balas, 'Object-Sculpture, Base and Assemblage in the Art of Constantin Brancusi', *Art Journal*, 38: 1 (Fall 1978), pp. 36–46.

4. Alexandre Istrati executed this according to Brancusi's measurements in 1948 (MoMA Archives: CUR, Exh. #1514).

5. Burton noted that he had not thought much about Brancusi since he was a teen, until he started making his own furniture works.

Chapter 4

Curating Between Worlds: How Digital Collaborations
Become Curative Projects

Dew Harrison

In his book *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012) Paul O'Neill gives an account of the rise of the curator as a globally connected auteur within the art world. Within this he positions a blurring of the distinction between artist and curator as taking place in the 1990s when curating and artistic practice converged (O'Neill 2012). O'Neill is referring to real-world exhibitions such as the biennials in Venice, Paris, Istanbul and Kassel where the curator has become an important cultural producer. This essay suggests that there is a further dimension to that convergence, overlooked by O'Neill and others, which is specific to digital media work and, in this case, gained through my own experience as a practising artist. I have come to realize that curating is an integral element of online or inWorld art-making where it is the medium itself that instructs a form of curatorial process that emerges from an art practice.

Within my practice I explore the extent to which the relationship between technology and consciousness can be played out through art concerns in a digital practice when aligned with the orthodox art world. My specific form of practice-led research has progressed from the initial insight that there are commonalities between hypertext/media technologies and concept-based art practice. I continue to be engaged in a critical practice where earlier works have involved digital media explorations into the complex creative thinking of Marcel Duchamp as the initiator of Conceptual Art, in order to achieve a closer understanding of its origins. These re-readings of Duchamp concerned the cross-referencing of his ideas and outcomes into a semantic multimedia web of his thinking. Duchamp's body of artwork and understandings were encompassed in his 'Large Glass' entitled *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* or *The Bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even*. This piece, together with the accompanying green and white boxes of notes, and the later work Étant *Donnes,* is generally regarded to be both the culmination and the summation of his work, occupying his thoughts between 1912 and 1923 when he abandoned it as finally unfinished and leaving us with an open work.

The Large Glass ensemble completes a corpus of non-linear, semantically associated ideas; it is the encasement of a plethora of non-sequentially interconnected ideas that could be readily transferred into a hypermedia system. This transference might then enable new readings of this work. Hypermedia is capable of supporting complex webs of related multimedia data. When experienced as a whole entity Duchamp's work is riddled with cross-references and complex meanings generating different interpretations through its blatant ambiguity. *The Large Glass* and its semantic key, the two boxes, altogether contain a wealth of associated links proffering the conjunction of images and text. The *Green Box*

consists of 93 documents, sketches, calculations and notes; the white box, *a l'infinitif,* attempts to conceptually place his 'Bride' in the fourth dimension and mostly refers to his thoughts derived not as one would expect from the new understandings of space-time and Einstein's relativity theory but from a strange reading of Poincaré's geometry. Duchamp's body of work is full of playfulness, chance, wit and acute intelligence, and in hypermedia form could be presented as a richly endowed semantic network to further inform contemporary conceptual artists.

In the late 1990s, I constructed a number of hypermedia systems of *The Large Glass* built on the semantic associations apparent between its abstract items, notes from the 'boxes', paintings, objects, 'ready-mades', texts and the interviews informing and surrounding it. The (relatively new) Internet offered a ready-made and global hypermedia system and I initiated the ongoing project *Deconstructing Duchamp* in 1996 with the first, and online, outcome being *4D Duchamp* (1998). This work developed through the process of an online collaboration with 25 artists; a project where each constructed a website in response to one of the items named in *The Large Glass* (e.g. Nine Malic Moulds, the Chocolate Grinder, the Bride, etc.) This included the missing items from the actual artefact to make the system function (Harrison 1997). The sites varied according to each artist's original new work but most contained Duchampian ideas, theories, quotes, diagrams, illustrations, sounds, images... in some form whether poetic, abstract or literal. *The Large Glass* was therefore dematerialized and re-woven electronically across the planet, it worked conceptually as a fully interconnected circular system, something that could never happen with the incomplete material object frozen in time in Philadelphia. The artist websites were interlinked to provide a complete holistic version of this complex
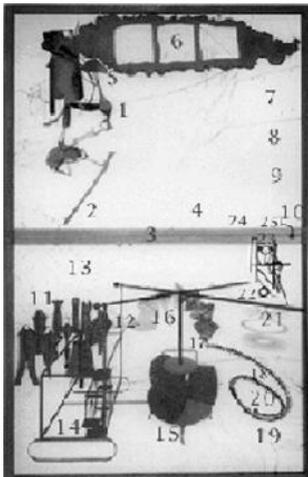
Figure 1. The Internet doorway to *4D Duchamp* (Harrison 1997).

work, but the result could also be effectively understood as a collaborative project 'curated' to the theme of *The Large Glass*. *4D Duchamp* is still slowly deconstructing with less than 50 per cent of the sites still up.

The notion that this was an online set of global works curated through the Internet into one show, fired an interest into considering curating as an art practice. Further online collaborations and two exhibitions followed to explore this position through the same dialogic form of digital media art practice. One was small with twelve artists gathered under the aegis of *Exchange Online*, the other large with over 70 international artists exploring the practice of networking (Harrison and Worden 2005), both themes concerned my interest in connecting web works to augment understandings of new digital forms of art practice. These online exhibitions were held on dedicated servers and became archives of artworks, time slices of evolving media articulating arts concerns. More collaborative projects were managed with live online text interventions and a performative approach, using the same methods as for the earlier curatorial projects of rarely (or indeed never) physically meeting the contributing artists. All communication was online through e-mail and chat forums with, initially, no concerns for real-world gallery spaces. As technologies developed and my practice evolved, research interests moved towards cross-curating, where artists in physical spaces converged to work with those online in real-time events.

An established working partnership with the Watershed Media Centre in Bristol, UK provided this research with an arena for promoting and evaluating new media events, work-in-progress and online exhibitions. In 2000 we created a Digital Café as a physical space for showing interactive multimedia on a large screen, together with six Apple Mac computers in an informal setting. This new space enabled artists and curators to enter into a direct dialogue with the public, this dialogue informed the analysis and evaluation of the working processes involved in new media creativity. The Digital Café space evolved to better fit both audience needs and working practice with the focus directed to experiment and process rather than outcomes and exhibition. However, the Digital Café also showed new digital online artworks on the large screen and the first virtual gallery of work exhibited there was the *Exchange Online* exhibition on 20–28 November 2000. It constituted a constellation of twelve websites selected from eighteen international submissions, a response to a 'call' for artwork put out across the World Wide Web and e-mailed to artist's lists. The selection panel consisted of Sean Cubitt, Jill Scott, Victoria Vesna and myself, and the exhibiting artists included Wilfried Agricola de Cologne, 0100101110101101.ORG, Helen Thorington (Turbulence) and the art collectives low-fi and Newmediaman Art Group.

The second exhibition *Net_Working* followed suite and was an exhibition of web works by national and international artists available to view online and on the large screen in the Digital Café on 2–28 November 2001. This exhibition showed over 300 web works covering all forms of artistic practice on the web with submissions coming from places as far flung as Latvia, Thailand, Brazil and California. *Net_Working* also had online chat forums with live link-ups to its UK and European artists at an event held at the Digital Café and with Asian artists at a similar event in Bangkok.

In each case, the 'calls' acted as the 'themes' for artists to work under, there was massive interest in the *Deconstructing/4D Duchamp* project, due mostly to its content which brought in Duchampian scholars as well as artists, the Internet being new and difficult to use as a medium for creative practice. There was less interest in *Exchange Online 2000*, but the *Net_Working* call just one year later drew in hundreds of takers perhaps because it hit the zeitgeist of the times.

The *Net_Working* call for artworks:

"Net_Working – Online but non-linear meshed and inter-linked net works for the Net. Collaborated clusters of single entities, caught in the Web where medium is content.

   Trawling for content with Net works which are: collaborative, co-operative, interlinked, conversational, human, supportive, interdependent, organic, inclusive, expansive, joining, connecting, uniting, enriching…"

The work submitted covered a vast range of Internet art from all over the world. There were URLs coming from places as far afield as Latvia and Estonia, Argentina and California, covering artistic practice from documentary and web narratives to sound-led sites and hacktivism. Artists sending in work to the call included those now well established in the new media art world for example: JODI, 0100101110101101.ORG, Mongrel, Craighead and Atkinson, Brad Brace, Andy Deck, David Crawford, Heath Bunting, Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Patrick Lichty, Sonia Rapoport, Trebor Sholz, Stanza, soundtoys; and once again art collectives such as Turbulence, Newmediaman and Furtherfield. The issues involved with an online show of this scale led to further research concerning the curating, production and exhibition of online art. The large number of the *Net_Working* submissions (over 300 artworks) indicated that the Internet itself could now be understood as a living archive of digital art where curating is the creation of a search engine hunting for an artist's name, title of work or content-led keyword (Harrison 2002).

The increased use of the Internet as a curatorial domain, and for the creation of software environments rather than discrete objects, has broadened the traditional curatorial model, which has to be concerned with audience, solid forms and buildings. For the digital artist/curator there is no physical boundary to prevent the creation, distribution and contextualization of a piece of art. These concerns are implicit in the medium itself, although according to Ron Goldin (2002), online curators (usually artists) create a set of restrictions on the creative process both aesthetically and conceptually which results in a collaboration between artist and curator:

- Aesthetically – by limiting art to a particular medium i.e. the Internet (a particularly modernist practice).
- Conceptually – by forcing a work to recognize its place within the context created by the author/curator.

Goldin understands 'curator' (the semantic space creator) as the initiator of a project who is, therefore, attributed a part-authorship in any resulting artefact.

> By describing a set of rules in which creation must take place and simultaneously describing a context for the project, the semantic space creator has embedded an idea in each resulting object. The participants, micro-authors, provide diversity in the creative process, adding another authorial stamp to the final product. (Goldin 2002)

Collaboration can be understood as an essential element of the Internet online society. Patrick Lichty (2002) sees the online community as a framework for cultural collaboration, and the collaborative model of curating exhibitions as prominent in net art, following the model of interaction implied by the distributed network itself. Artists using the Internet are adept at contributing to online forums, chat arenas and open debate in a public space related to the creation and exhibition of work online, as exampled in the success of the chat arena set in place for the *Net_Working* exhibition.

The curatorial process for *Net_Working* was a procedural approach allowing for participation within a theme as a shaping metaphor. Without institutional legitimization the curatorial role relied on the artistic quantification of works, the resulting exhibition being more a 'survey' of artwork on the Internet. This survey was exhibited in the form of a website or single screen access point to a database. According to Lichty (2002), the curatorial impulse is 'a parametric/algorithmic guidance of a general process' where the database is in the position of a meta-narrative artwork. Manovich (1998) considers whether there can, in fact, be an 'art of the database' in his paper 'Database as a Symbolic Form' where he asserts that all website designers, and therefore curators, are actually designing databases.

> The rise of the Web, this gigantic and always changing data corpus, gave millions of people a new hobby or profession: data indexing. There is hardly a website which does not feature at least a dozen links to other sites, therefore every site is a type of database. (Manovich 1998)

In her paper 'Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice', Christiane Paul (2006) writes that curatorial online practice began to flourish in the late 1990s with web projects being created not only by independent curators but through websites affiliated with museums such as Benjamin Weil's 'ada'web' which was adopted by Minneapolis' Walker Art Center's 'Gallery 9' initiative, San Francisco's MoMA's 'e-space' and her own 'artport' at the Whitney Museum, New York. Virtual online exhibitions such as these, become databases where the curator or curatorial team decides on the search mechanisms and methods of access. Paul's paper refers to Anne-Marie Schleiner's suggestion (Schleiner 2003) that this is the nature of online work, the connecting to other websites, so that the website owner assumes the role of curator and cultural critic and creates chains of meaning through association, comparison and

juxtaposition. Schleiner calls these online curators 'filter feeders' and sets out the differences between them and the traditional real-world curator as:

Curator	Filter Feeder
Museum or gallery exhibition space	Space peripheral, in tandem
Art History education	Pop culture criticism, tech history
Ties to wealthy patrons of art	Ties to other filter feeders and artists
Urban metropolis-located	Dispersed locations
Navigates bureaucracy and institutions well	Flows around and avoids institutions
Art as commodity	Ephemera, extreme preservation challenges
Stays within Art community	Infiltrates, subverts other communities

Digital Art History now exists to counter pop culture criticism and align with tech history, but the 'extreme preservation challenges' persist when servers go down, and software and hardware platforms change within a relatively short time frame. However, the most difficult obstacle here concerns the nature of the database content. Curators of online shows can gather clusters of sites/work together into an online database for a space of time but then have to archive the exhibition as a data maze in another format for longevity. *Net_Working* became an online database with a retrieval interface screen for the data collated. A server at the Watershed Media Centre holds an archive of the exhibition but this has not been accessible since 2011 as the Internet cannot offer digital preservation for long.

Many artists choose the medium of the Internet for their work because of the durational, ephemeral and ambiguous characteristics involved. They prefer not to be categorized and classified, their sites are restricted to a life span which they have set and which is integral to the work. The work may consist of patches of generative algorithms, which are triggered by the viewer logging on, and it is therefore only alive when this interaction takes place (*4D Duchamp* is a prime example of all of the above). According to new media curator Yukiko Shikata (2010), the issue of preserving media art is still pertinent in that some works are stored physically while other pieces exist only as data: she sees video/sound documentation as the current optimal way of archiving such ephemeral and durational artworks. Shikata also suggests that the notion of archiving will need to change to encompass a digital and decentralized networked archive with multi-perspective approaches and social tagging by people's participation.

Benjamin Weil (2002) asserts that any artist working in new media and particularly those using the Internet are faced with the problem of 'formal instability'. He defines 'instable' media as technology primarily developed for other uses than art and relates this to Duchamp's Ready-made and other established practices where artists use mass-produced objects and perishable materials. Formal instability is problematic where technology and context are fast changing, resulting in the accelerated obsolescence of a given form. This, according to Weil, leaves the artist/curator with two options:

Figure 2. Screengrab of *Net_Working* interface, Watershed Media Centre, 2002.

- To let the work 'die' and preserve nothing.
- To think of a model by which they can design a solution to transmit the 'essence' of the art project beyond its original incarnation.

Weil suggests example models as being those of music and theatre where systems of notation and sets of instructions allow an event to be restaged and reinterpreted in order to be kept alive through time. 'In order to preserve the artistic intent, one must start thinking beyond the constraints of obsolescence, while trying to "frame" the various dimension of an artistic proposition' (Weil 2002).

Peter Weibel (2000) also considers the curator as an impresario or producer studying theory and commissioning new works in the same way as a film producer. However, he differs slightly in stating that a curator does not necessarily take care of an existing work, but is more concerned with producing/commissioning new work, and that this is the most interesting aspect of curatorial practice in new media. Weibel's approach is more in tune with the digital artist-as-curator who may not be so interested in the re-showing of their complex multi-linked art piece, but wishes to begin with the next. For Paul (2006), a curator may play a role closer to that of film producer in arranging for the public presentation of a work through overseeing a team of creators. She sees the flexibility in the digital aspect of new media works allowing for varied ways of presentation scenarios, and for work to be resited for specific venues—as with music and theatre productions. This is not so different from traditional curatorial challenges but online works bring extra considerations of contextualization as suggested by Paul,

> While some aspects of the curatorial role—such as selection of works, organization of exhibits and their art-historical framing—still apply to the process of online curating, transformations occur in the process of filtering, 'describing' and classifying within online environments. (Paul 2006: 90)
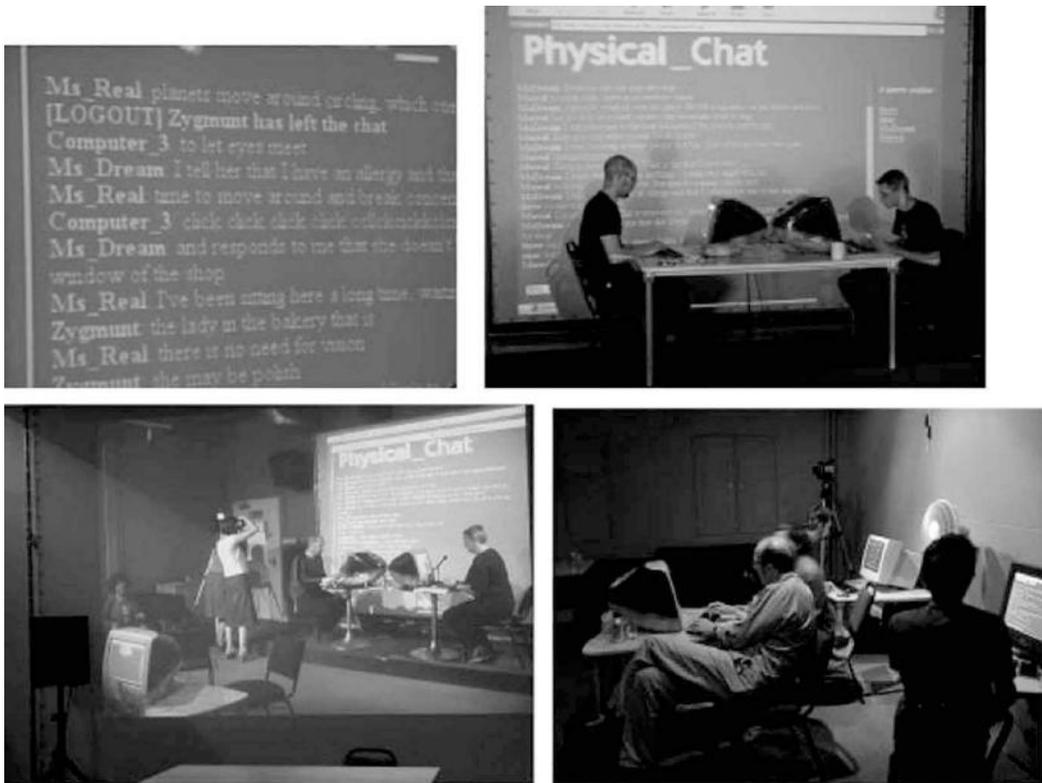
Figure 3. *Physical_Chat_1*, Harrison and Rauch,
Watershed Media Centre, 2002.

She extends this line of thought to where networked environments enable the filtering and selection process to be undertaken by curators, artists, audiences as well as processes automated by software.

For the *Net_Working* project, the lead curator (myself) supervising four co-curators and over 70 artists, constructed a set of periphery or metadata by collating the different forms of supporting material which would help to inform the viewer's choice. This included the title of work, name of artist(s) involved, country of origin, 200-word statement, descriptive sentence and a 100-pixel square 72 dpi jpeg image. The artists also supplied an appropriate 'category' for their work (e.g. documentary). Further documentation contained artist interviews, an archived chat arena, technical data etc. This information together with the original versions of the curated works produced what Weil terms a 'data maze'. He states that, where instable media is concerned, a data maze is an inherent part of an artwork and is produced by curators who enter into a dialogue with their exhibiting

artists. This collaborative process is an essential ingredient for creating good conditions for the transmission of artworks for future generations. While *4D Duchamp* is slowly disintegrating online, *Net_Working* is still archived on a server sitting in the Watershed Media Centre, exampling two different agendas for the transmission of artworks.

To further explore online collaborations for a dialogic and curatorial form of art practice I then worked on a number of projects with fellow artist Dr Barbara Rauch (Ontario College of Art and Design). *Physical_Chat_1* was our first digital performance, an offline but non-linear event at the Digital Café (Harrison and Rauch 2003). It was a real-space event with eight participating artists involved in the weaving of two narratives (dream + real take) into one consciousness. Ms Dream and Ms Real had been crossing over fragments of e-mailed thoughts to be connected into whole stories as the core confrontation area for activity in a chatroom focus. The texts were typed into the chatroom by human avatars piece-by-piece with or without any interruptions in their robotic conversation. Anarchic interlopers provided diverse intervention within a set of rules defined in collaboration with the participating artists. The physical space allowed for interruptive input by text, sound and body movement as a response to the emerging on-screen narrative, which attempted to meld the real and unreflective strands of the two original texts. Where *Physical_Chat_1* focused on physical intimacy, the later *Physical_Chat_2* was played out live across the Internet for totally unpredictable global interventions and anonymity. The interwoven chatroom text appeared top-down but is read bottom-up in the same way as a sleeper awakes to make sense of her dream, working backwards from the end of it. For these works Barbara and I curated texts from artist collaborators across the globe, knitting them together into one work.

Over the last decade there has been a huge investment in digital and Internet work and we are now at the stage where artists socialize, create, debate and display their digital-born work online through the image, video and texts of the social media platforms available to them. Among these is the relatively new Second Life (SL) platform under development since 2003, but with a growing number of artists beginning to explore the possibilities of this virtual world outside its commercial premise. The *Kritical Works in SL* curatorial project set out to harness creative activity inWorld to further explore the collaborative nature of the online art-making process as a discursive form of themed curating, and produced two exhibitions for the Inter-Society of Electronic Art (ISEA) events of 2008 and 2009 (Harrison and Doyle 2010).

Kritical Works in SL I incorporated the work of ten SL artists as part of ISEA 2008 in Singapore. The project aimed to bring together a range of artworks from the SL community to explore whether common themes were emerging for creative practice on the platform: were there perhaps certain characteristics of the virtual fabric of the SL space? Was there a possible maturing of the languages and spaces within SL? Was there a commonality of approach to creativity and aesthetic values? The confusion of real and virtual is hotly debated within the SL platform itself and forces us to re-evaluate our perceptions and registers of what is real. The artists were largely concerned with place

and identity when situated in a virtual world and the resulting pieces were created with a particular focus on the agency of the avatar, as bridging the two worlds, the real and the virtual, for the art viewer. Artists and their artist/curator only conversed inWorld avatar-to-avatar without their real-world counterparts ever needing to meet physically. The discussions were held on the island, inWorld, where the spaces for showing could be debated and the immediacy of these real-time meetings deemed e-mails as unnecessary. Visitors can only visit SL in avatar forms themselves and would sometimes meet the artists for open debate.

The second exhibition, *Kritical Works in SL II* for ISEA 2009 in Belfast, proved to be more complex in that practice had developed its reach beyond the virtual and into the real world. Two of these artists created physical objects, which responded directly to their virtual counterparts. The materialized objects were exhibited in a white cube gallery and necessitated a cross-curatorial challenge of dialogue between the physical gallery and the virtual island spaces. With a focus on artistic and inWorld collaboration a selection of artists were invited to explore the physical space of the Golden Thread Gallery and the virtual space of Kriti island through their artworks: four of the artists, including the curator, were also to be physically present at the ISEA conference this time. The exhibition included three existing pieces by real-world artists, Paul Sermon's *Liberate your Avatar*, Lynn Hershman-Leeson's *Dante Hotel* and Joseph DeLappe's small Gandhi figure from his *Tourists and Travelers* show in 2008. Sermon's work extends his existing telematic explorations and is re-presented in this group exhibition. The inclusion of Hershman's *Dante Hotel* from her 'L2' project and DeLappe's 8" Gandhi figure were intended to draw out the potential themes of emerging languages of artistic and creative practices in virtual worlds. The remaining five pieces were new and adapted works, and two projects had physical statues built from code, as counterparts to their avatars, on display in the Gallery.

To further interrogate this new curatorial process, a panel of experts—a mix of gallery, online and SL curators—were brought to Belfast for ISEA 2009. Under the theme of 'Transformative Creativity—Participatory Practice' the 'Dialogic Exchanges for Virtual Curation' panel was asked to consider, debate and reflect upon *Kritical Works in SL II* as presented online and in the Golden Thread gallery space, with respect to digital and real-world curatorial practice. The panel comprised of Professor Lizbeth Goodman (SMARTlab Digital Media Institute) who provided information on creating collaborative platforms; Professor Beryl Graham (CRUMB) who offered current research into online and new media curation; Kate Pryor-Williams, a real-world curator (Wolverhampton Art Gallery) contributed the established curatorial perspective; Annabeth Robinson gave her experience as a virtual-world artist exhibiting in both of the *Kritical Works* shows; Denise Doyle, the artist/curator of *Kritical Works in SL I and II,* provided an overview of the process of SL curating. The panel were asked to discuss a number of issues concerning online and offline curating in response to the main question: 'Are virtual spaces and digital technologies enabling us to re-evaluate the relationship

Figure 4. *MGandhi 1* and *Wandering Fictions Story*, Joseph deLappe
and Denise Doyle, Golden Thread Gallery, 2009.

between curator and artist; between artist, curator and the process of creative practice? Or do they force challenges to the established templates of creative practice and agency? (Harrison and Doyle 2010).

The panel discussion defined an absolute split in approaches to practice between the new-media gallery curators and the online SL curators, where 'audience' was concerned. Both Graham and Pryor-Williams understood curating to be 'audience centred' in that it is weighted towards the consideration of audience access to artworks in a specific space/environment, whether virtual or real. Graham also sees curators as control freaks, uninterested in collaborative curating. Doyle's practice of SL curating is 'artist centred', a process of mapping sites for island installations in an avatar-to-avatar collaboration for creating events rather than spaces. This positions the practice of curating as a concern for the artists involved and was exampled by Angrybeth Shortbread's work where four avatars need to participate simultaneously to make her piece happen. But how does the artist orchestrate four avatars to view the work, where do you find the SL audiences? Do SL exhibitions rely only on other artist visits as an audience? DeLappe's work is a performance where he walks through a plethora of SL islands meeting the public as he goes and is not reliant on other artists to act as an audience for this. For Doyle, the audience was already set in place in that it was provided via ISEA with provision for the delegates to access Kriti island, her concern was therefore centred on supporting her artists.

There was also an issue of SL curating relying heavily on real-world curatorial practice and real 'art world' systems and structures, which suggests that new forms of curatorial activity need to be developed to more fully engage an audience with work on the grid. In this particular case, for instance, there was a catalogue published and available in paper form to accompany the Belfast exhibition, as in any physical gallery. However, *Kritical Works II* had an investment in the artists' bridging of the virtual and the real through their artworks, and the ISEA delegates were directed to the Golden Thread Gallery to visit the materialized objects from the exhibition as well as to access the virtual space. The materialized catalogue was in keeping with this curatorial 'bridging' decision and had an SL counterpart on the island, which many considered as more appropriate and informative, when the space and layout of the works was seminal to a viewing of them.

Graham argued that SL work is a matter of 'copying' for artists as well as curators, in that it is representative of the real world, but results in a sanitized aesthetic, as exampled by Hershman-Leeson's *Dante Hotel* project, which in its original real-world state was a place for down-and-outs, a scruffy dog-eared building. According to Graham, SL doesn't facilitate 'messy' in that it is a heavily controlled public space with limitations and restrictions, it is therefore not capable of supporting such works as Robert Morris's *Assault Course*, shown at the Tate Gallery in April 1971. However Doyle's avatar, materialized from code as an exact replica in lifeless solid form of its 'living' animated double, turns this view upside down—the real-world object being representative of the virtual world. In defence of SL as an art platform, Goodman considered the SL curator as advantaged in being able to enable social responsibility and inclusion within a social and easily

accessible virtual world space. Finally, Pryor-Williams considered that as established art museums and galleries were investing in user-generated content to further contextualize their exhibits, and also in there being a general move towards understanding the art museum as providing democratic exhibition spaces, then the inclusion of access to the social virtual-world platform of SL would be a positive enhancement to the real-world curator's programme (Harrison and Doyle 2010).

The findings of the somewhat polarized panel discussion can be summed up below:

Real-world curating: Curating is 'audience centred'; curators are uninterested in collaboration; SL artwork copies and can only ever be representative of the real world; SL artwork is restricted by a sanitized aesthetic.

Online/InWorld curating: Curating is 'artist centred'; materialized avatars/objects in the white cube gallery are representative of the SL world; SL curating allows for social inclusion in a democratic exhibition space.

Panel summation: Artists will continue to push the limits of the SL platform; artists will continue to communicate and collaborate through virtual social platforms; SL curators will develop new forms to accommodate artists but will need to consider 'audience' access and engagement, to accompany the needs of the artists; dialogue should continue between audience-centred and artist-centred curators to eliminate misunderstandings and bring new social art forms to shared public spaces.

This led us to the conclusion: that artists will continue to explore the SL platform and push its limitations to further their own practice; that SL curators will develop new forms to accommodate artists working on the grid; that continued dialogue between the audience-centred real-world curator and the artist-centred SL curator will eliminate misunderstandings and bring new social art forms to our shared public spaces, and finally; that artists will continue to communicate and collaborate through the virtual social platforms, as these become easier to access. They will therefore continue to curate their combined works into clusters of meaning, but perhaps they will need to consider the inclusion of a real-world curator within their collaborations if they are to deliver to an audience other than artists.

Online inherently means a social communication platform with easy access, built for immediate response and now offering expansive new space for creative practice. As artists experiment with new media forms and push boundaries of code to materialize the virtual, curatorial methods will be challenged to support their evolving practices. However, the online artist/curatorial projects outlined in this chapter suggest that it is the artists themselves who are driving this exploratory approach to curating when it can be understood as part of their discursive collaborative methods for creating complex digital work.

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Chapter 5

Erasure: ~~Curator~~ as Artist

Bruce Checefsky

Morning. My room. A knock at the door.
I: Come in. (*The door opens, slowly and timidly. Enter a Pretty Creature of eighteen. She looks at me with wide-open, frightened eyes and crushes her hand bag violently*)
The Creature: I…I…I hear that you teach dramatic art.
I: No! I am sorry. Art cannot be taught. To possess an art means to possess talent. This is something one has or has not.

(Richard Boleslavsky, *Acting, The First Six Lessons, 1933*)

As a young artist in 1953, Robert Rauschenberg erased a drawing given to him by William de Kooning in a theatrical performance of the Oedipal complex (Stevens and Swan 2004: 359–60). He took it a step further by exhibiting *Erased de Kooning* as his own work of art. De Kooning felt betrayed at the appropriation of his work by another artist. A single act of defiance, fuelled by generational differences, complicated the relationship between the two men because of what literally and figuratively vanished. Rauschenberg erased de Kooning in order to replace him.

In 1966, British artist Richard Hamilton[1] organized an exhibition for the Tate Gallery in London titled *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*,[2] a typographic translation of the notes surrounding Duchamp's influential masterpiece, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors (The Large Glass)* (1915–23). The result was an intimate reading of the artist's oeuvre, a methodical interpretation of a complex set of configurations, an interrogation of Duchamp's concept of the ready-made. Hamilton signed the reconstruction as if it were his own creation.

In a radio interview with John Tusa[3] from the BBC on 13 April 2006 Hamilton explains his fascination with Duchamp:

John Tusa (JT): Why did you reconstruct *The Large Glass*? Was there some very deep act of homage that you wanted to do to Duchamp?

Richard Hamilton (RH): No. It was in a way inevitable, because far more important than doing *The Large Glass* was the process of working with Duchamp for three years. From 1957 to '60, I worked on the notes of the Green Box as a translator, in a sense.

JT: Did Duchamp help you?

RH: …the great thing about my venture into these notes was to realize that the words aren't the whole story. It is the writing, the erasures, the corrections, the way the mind of the artist is revealed by his rethinking and doubts. All of these were expressed in his handwriting.

Hamilton's successful staging of the Duchamp exhibition depended largely on an interventionist's strategy: one artist interprets another thus making it his own. Hamilton and Rauschenberg hardly thought of themselves as curators. But does curating exist on the same level as an art practice? Who can be an arbitrator of quality when it comes to exhibitions? Who is the author of an exhibition?

In 'What is an Author?' (1969), Michel Foucault suggests that we need to consider the function of an author 'to characterize the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within a society' (Foucault 1977: 124). The author gathers a collection of texts or discourses, placing them under the author's name, and offers advice on how to read and appreciate the text as an important cultural artefact.

Whether working as an artist or curator, exhibition makers face many choices. The exhibition space is a narrative space; the curated exhibition is the story. Juxtaposing objects of different categories reveals intriguing relationships and blurs the boundaries of traditional museological classification and interpretations. However, artists and curators working within the context of a museum collection run the risk of emptying objects of their intrinsic meaning in order to satisfy the urge to breathe new life into them. Exhausting history for museological reappraisal and reform does not challenge us to reimagine and rethink what we already know as art. Curators must move beyond pursuit of political and aesthetic correctness, and clientelism. Artists should follow suit and take more risks with their work. The artist *is* curator provides an alternative to the artist *as* curator. This shift is perhaps more fitting when discussing the complex relationship between artist and curator.

Michael Asher, Andrea Fraser, David Hammons, Martha Rosler, Mark Dion and Fred Wilson engage in curatorial practice as public critique. These artists engage in a practice that de-fetishizes the art object in an attempt to engage with everyday life. Their work has advanced the understanding that civic discourse is enhanced when standard curatorial practice is applied to general art production.

Fred Wilson questions how a museum affects the artwork and artists. His elaborate process involves interviewing everybody in the museum from the maintenance people through to the executive director. For Wilson, '[t]he process of making, appreciating, and exhibiting art, particularly in the kind of institutions we call museums, is itself an intensely political process' (Karp and Wilson 1996: 260). *Cabinet of Curiosity* (2001), Mark Dion's project for the Frederick R. Weisman Museum at the University of Minnesota, demonstrates the potential for creating new meaning for collections by exposing underlying biases in museums.[4] The project involved selecting objects from the university collection and arranging them into nine compartments or collections:

The Underworld, The Sea, The Air, The Earth, Humans, Knowledge, Time, Vision and History. He guides the viewer to examine the politics of representation, emphasizing the relationship between collecting and making art.

Few events over the past 25 years have demonstrated the political benefits of the artist *as* curator more effectively than Martha Rosler's three-part exhibition and action project, *If You Lived Here...* from 1989.[5] *If You Lived Here…* delved into American urban housing policies and portrayed how artists fought against government neglect, thoughtless housing policies and unregulated real-estate speculation. Rosler examined public space as politically charged, where according to French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (1995: 256-258) social status is defined largely by the social space we occupy.

Rosler never assigned herself the title of curator for *If You Lived Here…*, despite producing a socially meaningful, widely seen exhibition:

> I had been dwelling on these issues as an artist and a curator for so long because I was always intrigued by ideological power and wanted to excavate its very mechanism. Capitalism's current phase is redefining the world territory and producing certain kinds of abstract space that are linked to information flow. Those who are lowest down in that 'new world order' and who cannot find an actual physical space for their bodies, are treated like garbage. What can artists do when they are deeply bothered by situations like these? Artists can try to dispel stereotypical 'specters' that inhibit our societies, occupy our minds, and support other people's suffering. Artists can remove the laments of myth making from potent images that are signifiers manipulated by political figures, and ruling ideologies, and integrate them into the larger context of social life. A crucial aspect of my 1989 project—even though it took place in a gallery—was interaction with the general public. (Pachmanova 2006: 102–03)

At the same time that Rosler was developing her project for Dia Center for the Arts in New York City, Detroit's Urban Center for Photography (UCP) outraged officials and city boosters by using a publicly funded grant to produce a project called *Demolished by Neglect*.[6] The Detroit Council of Arts provided $3,000 in funding for the project. UCP artists posted enlarged photos of burned-out abandoned homes and decaying theatres and other grand spaces on outdoor sites, some with an accompanying text on democracy. Rosler recognized the significance of the UCP intervention in Detroit, and parts of this project appeared in *Home Front*, the first exhibition in the cycle of *If You Lived Here…*[7]

As a member of the UCP at the time of the controversy, I took part in redirecting grant funds to activity clearly outside the range of projects usually funded by Detroit Council of Arts, thus laundering capital to redistribute cultural assets (Franklin 1987). The results were surprisingly effective in gaining national attention. *TIME Magazine, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post* and other major newspapers published articles reporting the action taken by the City of Detroit politicians to rescind the grant;
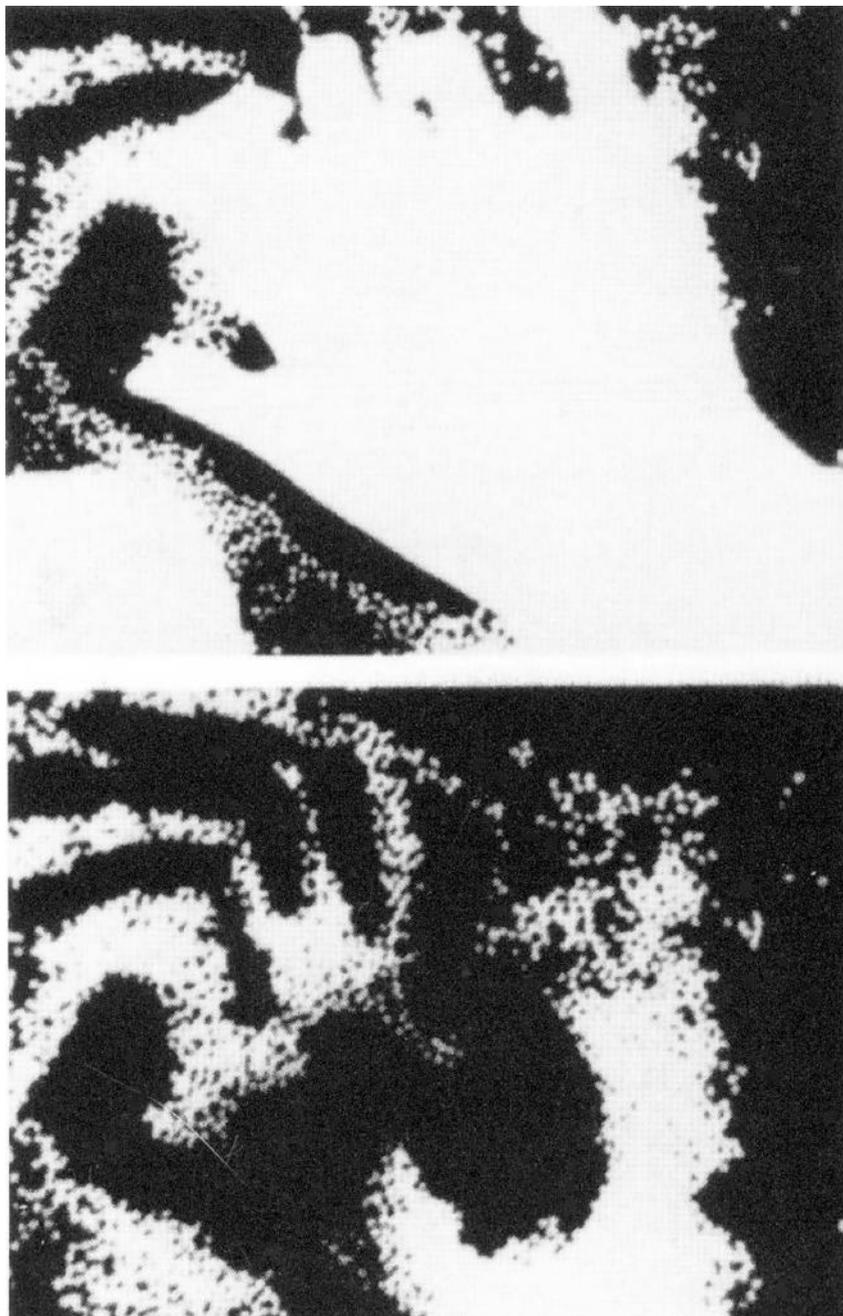
Figure 1. *APTEKA (Pharmacy)* by F. & S. Themerson, photogram in motion, b/w, silent, 35 mm, 3 minutes, Warsaw, 1930.

NPR's *Morning Report* interviewed several photographers from UCP. Media attention eventually forced the Detroit Council of Arts to drop their lawsuit. Artist *as* curator activism in the public space of Detroit by members of the UCP brought much needed attention to the housing policies and rampant homelessness that had undermined the city and which continues today.

In 2001 I directed a remake of *Apteka* (1930), an experimental film by Polish artists Stefan Themerson (1910–88) and Franciszka Themerson (1907–88). Whether an authentic reproduction or not, my remake asserted its own ideology as a curatorial project; it acquired new meaning by its intertextuality, a product not simply of the original film-makers but of a relationship to other films and to the structures of film itself, a type of *doublement* – an adverb used to describe a doubling, or 'in two ways'. I was both artist *and* curator. But problems arose before a single frame of film was exposed: do I reconstruct the original film from found footage or displace the historical narrative with a fictional remake?

Recycling histories, in the sense that I use historical artefacts, suggests that even in the trace or absence of history there is a truth worth discovering. Remaking a film differs vastly from its reconstruction and neither is the primary force that gives shape to the archival materials. Analogous to a write-and-erase practice, my film remake is a trace of writing, a mark of the absence of a presence, where, according to Deleuze, 'the copy is an image endowed with resemblance'. The archive of the original serves to relocate a reading of the historical narrative, drawing further parallels between the idea of 'one's memory' and 'memorials assigned to memory' (Deleuze 1990).

Stefan Themerson and Franciszka Themerson produced five films in Warsaw from 1930 to 1937 that rank with the greatest of the European avant-garde: *Apteka, Europa, Moment Musical, Short Circuit* and *The Adventure of a Good Citizen*. Equally noteworthy in their own way, as political statements, were *Calling Mr. Smith* and *The Eye and the Ear*, filmed in England during World War II for the film unit of the Polish Ministry of Information and Documentation in Exile. Sadly, only the last three films survived the war.

Poland was faced with extensive war damage and a ravaged economy following World War I. These circumstances, combined with the commonly held opinion that the problem in Poland was due in large part to Jewish separatism, provided a unique political and cultural environment for the Themersons whose personal attachment to the Jewish community was very strong. Stefan was Jewish by descent; Franciszka's father, Jacob Weinles, was a well-known painter of large-scale, tragic-heroic scenes from the life of the Jewish community, and surely saw his role as political.

In 1937, the Themersons left Poland to work in Paris among an international community of artists. Two years later, the German invasion of Poland shattered their plans. Stefan joined the French Resistance, while Franciszka escaped to London in 1940. In 1942, they were reunited after the Battle of Britain. While the Germans occupied Poland, the Themersons worked for the Polish government in exile. They produced

Calling Mr. Smith (1944) to protest against the destruction of Polish culture by the Nazis, but Britain's government censors refused to release the explicitly anti-war film.

Apteka (1930) was an expression of political and historical Polish *maladie* during the 1920s with rising social problems and anti-Semitism, until its disappearance or—as some have suggested—its destruction by the Nazis—its death. Stefan Themerson described *Apteka* as the first attempt to adapt the photogram technique to film:

> The method was simple; in normal photograms objects were placed on light-sensitive paper. We arranged them on semi-transparent paper, using a sheet of glass for support; the camera (an old-fashioned case with a crank) was placed underneath and pointed upwards with the light source situated above the glass. Usually, but not always, by moving the lights (frame after frame) we obtained movement of the shadows and their deformations. (Themerson 1977)

Figure 2. *MOMENT MUSICAL* by Bruce Checefsky, photogram
in motion, b/w, sound, 16 mm, 5:43 min, Cleveland, 2006.
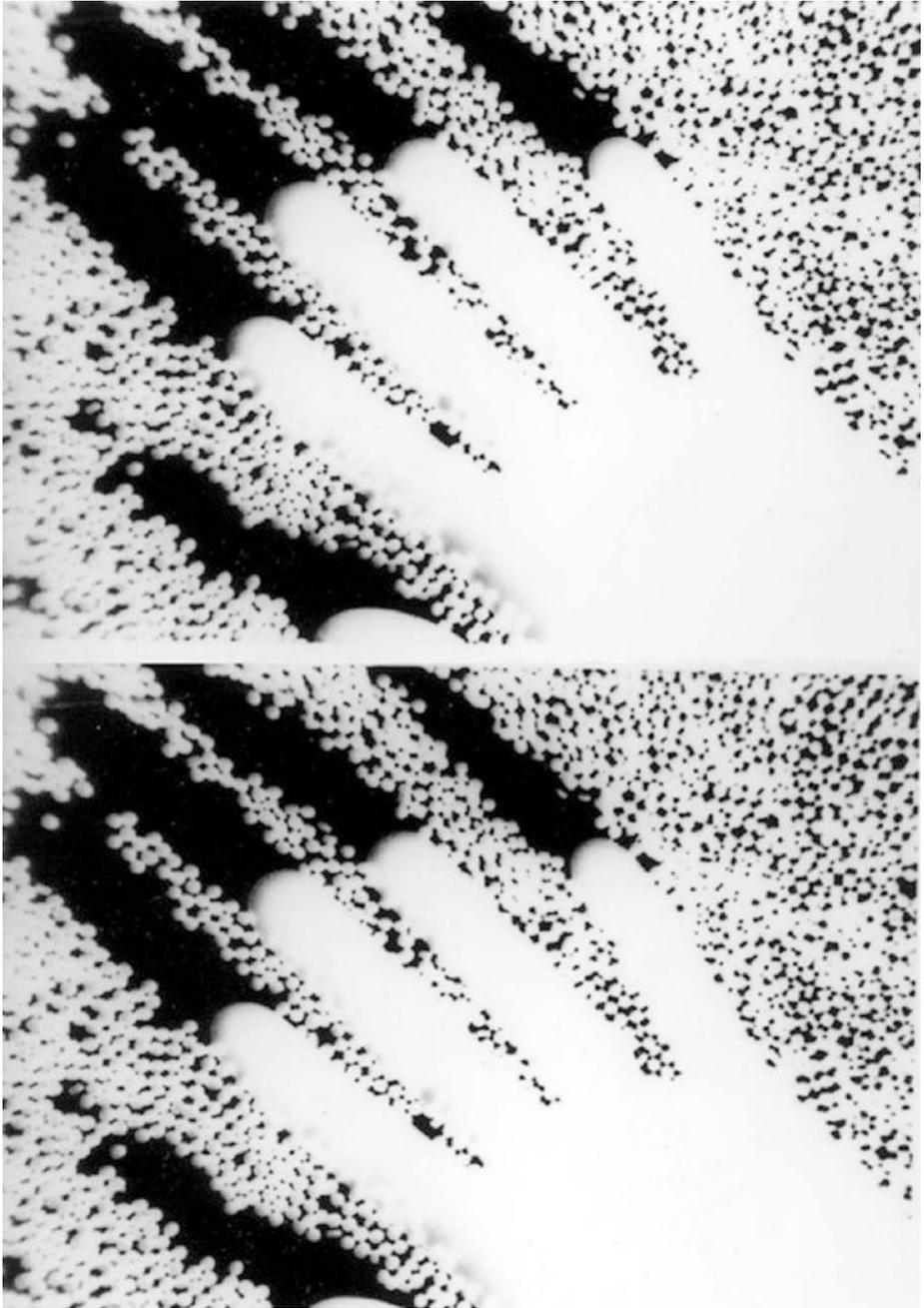
Figure 3. *PHARMACY* by Bruce Checefsky, photogram in
motion, b/w, silent, 35 mm, 4:36 min, Budapest, 2001.

Seweryn Tross, a writer for the Polish journal *Czas* who sympathized with the avant-garde, wrote in 1932:

> Escapism from content into the area of pure art form in *Apteka* was for us a new and interesting experiment. It showed the Polish public, which did not know of foreign avant-garde films, the emotional value of cinematic image itself, irrespective of the content. (Tross 1933)

My remake *Pharmacy* (2001) gives speech to the silence of the missing film *Apteka* (1930) (Dempsey, Matteson and Karimi 2011). In 'Conquering "The Fear of Influence" on the Films of Bruce Checefsky', Lukasz Ronduda, curator of the Archive of Polish Experimental Film, Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw, explains:

> Checefsky takes allegorical strategies to a new level: while employing 'ready-made' ideas and aesthetics, repeating in a way the works of others, he allows them to retain their original meaning, their entire historical and aesthetic context. For himself, he reserves the 'opportunity' to create meaning through the second allegorical layer of the work. This conservative-revolutionary strategy grants Checefsky's films the dual status characteristic of allegorical works. On the one hand, we may look at them as original works that examine contemporary issues. On the other, they are perceived as works of Themerson, Brzekowski or Pawlowski (and others), and are frequently included in exhibitions or screenings of these artists' works. In this context, the products of Checefsky's 'creative repetition' of the film ideas and concepts of great Modernist artists might serve as educational tools that assist the interpretation of examination of works by Brzekowski, the Themersons and Pawlowski. The fact that these artists' films do not exist (were never produced and exist solely as scripts, or have been lost) provides Checefsky with considerable room for creativity, rendering his activity similar to Bloom's Clinamen, in which the poet admits the influence of his precursor, but only to negotiate something for himself. (Ronduda 2005)

My next film, *A Woman and Circles* (2003), was made from an unrealized film scenario by Polish avant-garde poet Jan Brzekowski (1903–83), first published in 1930 in the French magazine *Cercle et Carré*, and later published in the Polish journal *Linia*. In Brzekowski's poetry, dreams are important as subject but even more important as a source of metaphor and compositional principle. The words 'dream' and 'sleep' are present in an overwhelming number of his poems along with eroticism and, like surrealist poetry, frequent Freudian symbolism. He was attracted to film because of the accumulated effect and simultaneity of facts, impressions and emotions. Brzekowski never produced his scenario or any film for that matter.

Serbian author, translator and scriptwriter Branko Vucicevic, a foremost critic of the early twentieth-century avant-garde, calls these scenarios 'paper movies'. A paper movie

Figure 4. *A WOMAN AND CIRCLES* by Bruce Checefsky,
b/w, colour, sound, 35 mm, 9:38 min, Cleveland, 2003.

is a film on paper intended to be read, a type of literary experiment situated between cinema and literature. Vucicevic questions whether paper movies were strictly literary cinema of the mind or written for film production.[8]

Art and film historian, critic, photographer and film-maker Marcin Gizycki describes my adaptation of Brzekowski's scenario 'A Woman and Circles', into a film from a critical point of view:

'A Woman and Circles' was a project of a different kind. Brzekowski's fantastic, poetic script, published in the French magazine *Cercle et Carré* in 1930 and later reprinted in the periodical *Linia /Line*, was never produced. In making his film based on this text, Checefsky had two paths to choose from: to produce this trick-filled vision as

perfectly as today's technology would allow, or to attempt its filmic re-creation in the form it would have acquired if it had been made when it was written (using the modest production means available to avant-garde filmmakers at the time). Chececfsky adopted the second approach and created a stylish, one might say post-modernistic parody of early experimental cinema, in which miniatures on strings replaced 'real' flying heads. This solution proved highly poetic in a manner that would have been lost if all the special effects that had been realized with the perfection of the Wachowsky brothers (of *Matrix* fame). (Gizycki 2005)

Figure 5. *A WOMAN AND CIRCLES* by Bruce Checefsky,
b/w, colour, sound, 35 mm, 9:38 min, Cleveland, 2003.

As an artist that is *also* a curator, I maintain a balance between being creative and scholarly pursuits. I've produced and directed other lost experimental films from Central and Eastern Europe, and unrealized scenarios written by poets and novelists published in literary and avant-garde magazines of the 1920s and 1930s. In 2014, I also remade Maya Deren's missing 1943 experimental film *Witch's Cradle*. A key figure in the development of the 'New American Cinema', Deren inspired early works by Kenneth Anger, Stan Brakhage and other major experimental film-makers. Originally filmed in Peggy Guggenheim's 'Art of This Century Gallery' at 30 West 57th Street in New York City, Deren collaborated with Marcel Duchamp on a choreographed set of movements between the figure (played by Duchamp) and the camera. The film was intended to be an exploration of the magical qualities of objects in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of this Century Gallery. *Witch's Cradle* (1943) remains unfinished and is considered lost.

Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space by Brian O'Doherty examines the social, historical and ideological framework of an exhibition.[9] Since the publication of this essay in *Artforum* in 1976, critical analysis has expanded and the field of exhibition theory has become an accepted field of study. Exhibition theory examines the complex language of conventions, codes and symbols. An exhibition can be a fiction that invites us to imagine the events it depicts. Specific techniques and aesthetic materials employed in exhibit design carry meaning. The range of aesthetic effects and cultural meanings associated with certain materials or techniques in different cultural, geographical and historical contexts vary with each exhibition. From the curator's point of view exhibitions are almost always influenced by budget restrictions but cultural identity, historical context and art-market sustainability further complicate the process. Artists have limitations of their own. Both strive for cultural and economic territory while each is fettered by historical claims to sovereignty. The artist *as* critic is an indirect way to gain access to cultural capital denied to them by conventional status. They take part in a legitimate struggle for recognition, to influence the distribution and value of art. Artists curating exhibitions for other artists, an unflattering form of artist *as* curator, adds little significant dialogue to the debate on cultural inclusiveness if the artist does not demonstrate critical analysis of the selection and contextualization of objects during and after the process of producing an exhibition. *In Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, James Putnam, curator of Contemporary Arts and Culture Programmes at the British Museum, further elaborates:

> Artists' selective criteria reveal the diversity of their individual interests, which help to break down the more formal standard classification system, and their frequent preoccupation with the self also works well in helping to deconstruct the impersonal nature of museum displays. Drawing frequently on reserve collections, artists tend to choose objects which may be of less significance in the eyes of the museum curator, and the groupings and juxtapositions that result are not restricted or regulated by historical conventions and ordering systems. (Putnam 2009: 132)

The artist *as* curator faces a dilemma of identity when organizing an exhibition, a struggle to become the specialist; curator *as* artist lacks certain credibility among artists. Without debate on authorship rights and conversely, ownership rights to the exhibition, many artists will remain outsiders to the flourishing art economy they help create. Artist *is* curator offers an alternative.

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Notes

1. Richard Hamilton (born in London in 1922) studied at the Royal Academy Schools and Slade School of Fine Art and taught at King's College, University of Durham, from 1953 to 1966. In the 1950s Hamilton devised the exhibitions *Growth and Form* and *Man, Machine & Motion*' for the ICA in London. He collaborated on *This is Tomorrow*, for which he produced his seminal image: *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956). Throughout his career Hamilton has exhibited internationally. Hamilton is also credited with coining the phrase 'pop art' in a note to some architects who were considering putting on an exhibition with him along similar lines to the 1956 *This is Tomorrow* show. He died in 2011.

2. *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp: Catalogue of an Exhibition* at the Tate Gallery 18 June–31 July 1966 (Arts Council of Great Britain). 242 items and the Richard Hamilton replica of *The Large Glass* were on display at this first major retrospective of Duchamp's works in Europe.

3. Sir John Tusa (born 2 March 1936) is a British arts administrator and radio and television journalist. From 1980 to 1986 he was a main presenter of BBC 2's *Newsnight* programme. From 1995 until 2007 he was managing director of the City of London's Barbican Arts Centre. From 1986 to 1993 he was managing director of the BBC World Service.

4. *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation.* This is a catalogue and companion to Dion's exhibition at the Weisman Art Museum in 2001, which assembled objects from the University of Minnesota's various museum collections into thematic cabinets. Student curators who participated in the project and others comment on the exhibition.

5. From *e-flux* press release, New York, 12 August 2009: 'Part research-based artwork, part curated group show (with three discrete exhibitions, four public meetings, and numerous auxiliary events), part discursive series on and around the subject of homelessness and housing in America, 'If You Lived Here…' took place at a Dia Art Foundation building in Soho, in New York City, in 1989. In structuring her project, Rosler worked with the young artist and student of urbanism Dan Wiley as well as with a self-organized group of homeless people calling itself Homeward Bound, and with such groups as the Mad Housers, a Southern architecture collective building huts for the homeless. She also worked with numerous advocacy and activist groups in the city, as well as with architects and urbanists.'

6. *Demolished by Neglect* (Urban Center for Photography) other facets of the project installed at exterior north wall of Tuller Hotel, Detroit, Michigan.

7. Parts of this project were included in the exhibition *Home Front*, the first exhibition of the cycle *If You Lived Here…* that Martha Rosler organized at the Dia Art Foundation in New York in 1989.

8. Branko Vučićević is an author, translator and scriptwriter. He wrote the screenplay for the Yugoslavian productions *Rani radovi/Early Work* (1969), *Splav Meduze/Medusa Raft* (1980) and *Umetni raj/Artificial Paradise* (1990), which was awarded the Golden Bear. In addition, Vučićević is the author of various publications on film and art, such as *Avangardni film/Avantgarde Film 1895–1939* (1984/1990), *Imitacija života/Imitation of Life* (1992), *Paper Movies* (1998) and *Srpske lepe umetnosti/Serbian Beaux Arts* (2007).

9. When these essays first appeared in *Artforum* in 1976, they were discussed, annotated, cited, collected and translated. The three issues of *Artforum* in which they appeared have become nearly impossible to obtain.

Chapter 6

Say My Name

Brenda L. Croft

For Christmas 1974, I was given my first camera, a Box Brownie owned by my mother as a teenager. I can still place myself back then, holding that little instrument, taking my first photograph in our front yard. The setting was quite formally staged with the subjects standing on the footpath in front of our verandah. Those portrayed in that little black-and-white image are my maternal grandparents, parents and two brothers, with the central figure of my older cousin, Rhonda, her dark skin in stark contrast to the lighter-toned people around her. All peer intently at the lens and the vantage point is that of a ten year old with the lens tilted slightly skewed up towards the adults.[1]

Rhonda was only three years older than me but seemed like an otherworldly creature. Naturally beautiful, elegantly long-legged, she was a gifted swimmer whose effortless style I so wanted to emulate. I was pudgy and awkward, in between a child and a teenager. The daughter of my dad's younger sister, Mena, Rhonda had returned to our little country town with my parents after my paternal grandmother's funeral—held far away in the tropical north. Meant to stay a fortnight, Cyclone Tracy's devastation of Rhonda's hometown—Darwin—on Christmas Eve changed that. With no home to return to in a city that no longer existed, whose residents were swiftly sent to all points of the country as refugees, Rhonda had little choice but to remain with my family for four months.

Rhonda eventually returned home to Darwin in the Northern Territory and my family moved far south to Canberra where my father was already working with the recently established Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). For Indigenous people in Australia, these years were full of optimism and a collective belief that positive, lasting change had finally arrived and that equality for all was being championed by the majority of Australians having arisen in the exhilarating period following the 1967 referendum when Australian Indigenous people were finally counted in the national census alongside every other citizen of Australia.

Indigenous people from all over Australia moved to Canberra, the seat of federal government, eager to contribute to and direct change for our peoples' collective benefit. It was a moment of great personal growth for my father, finally surrounded by his true peers. Here he discovered more family and made life-long friends with people—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—who held the same beliefs and worldviews.

However, while Dad no longer felt isolated, my mother felt neglected as his work took him away for extended periods travelling around the country. Cultural events were constant weekend features and my father was in the thick of it: establishing sports and recreation clubs, social clubs, managing traditional performance groups, speaking at
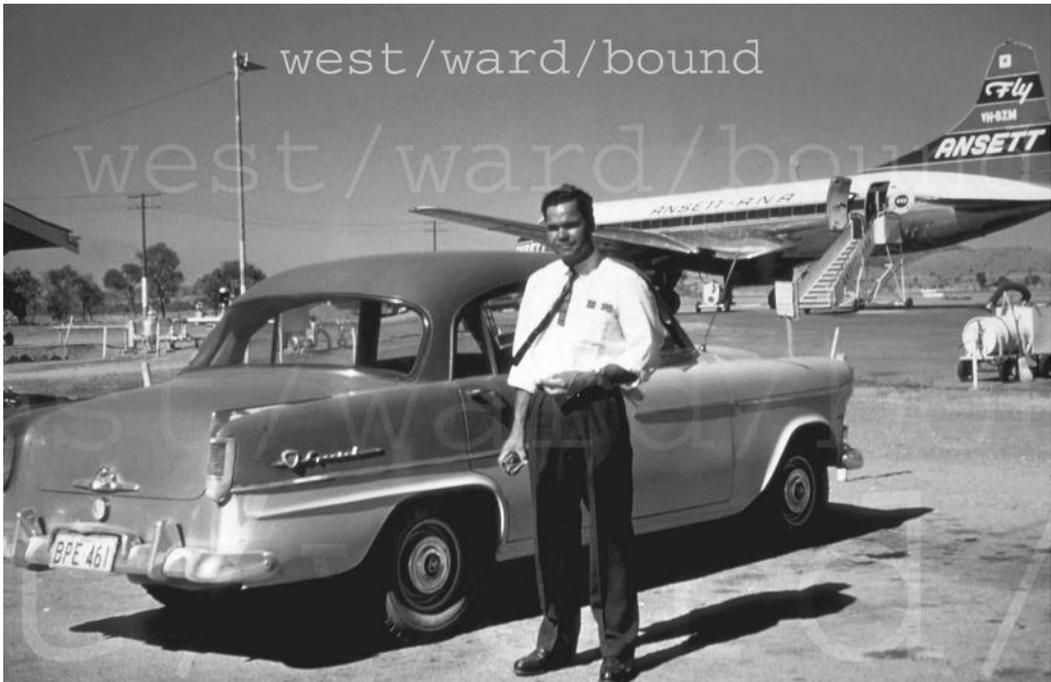
Figure 1. Brenda L. Croft, *west/ward/bound* from the series *west/ward/bound*,
1959–2009. © Brenda L. Croft, image courtesy of the artist.

schools and universities and mentoring young Indigenous people. He seemed to grow into his *true* self, standing tall and full of life.

My father's role as a cultural officer with the DAA saw him working with many of Australia's leading contemporary and traditional artists and performers and he took great pride in introducing them to my brothers and me, and vice versa. During the annual celebration of Indigenous culture, NADOC (National Aboriginal Day Observance Committee) Week, my father was responsible for organizing 'cultural displays' of bark paintings and objects by artists from regions across Arnhem Land. He enlisted my 'help', limited as it was for these temporary shows of museum-quality paintings and objects positioned in the unsympathetic environs of the local shopping mall.

People on their weekly grocery trips would walk past some of Australia's most supremely gifted traditional singers and performers from Arnhem Land, including David Gulpilil, the startling young actor from Nicholas Roeg's 1971 film *Walkabout*—usually without a second glance. Gulpilil would lead his compatriots from Ramingining, central

Arnhem Land, in astonishing ceremonial song and performance, wearing only their customary *nagas* (red loincloths) and with ochre clan designs painted on their bodies, they contorted their bodies into evocative totemic representations to the accompanying descant of *yidaki* and *bilma*.[2] This occurred in Canberra's bitter southern winter, a very long metaphorical and geographical distance from their tropical jungle homelands.

My father also organized displays elsewhere in venues generally associated with anthropology, such as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. This was the standard of that time—most public fine art galleries did not have a dedicated department for Indigenous art, nor committed curatorial positions overseeing Indigenous collections. If there were such positions, they were usually a combination of Asian, Oceanic and/or Melanesian art with Aboriginal art tacked on as an apparent afterthought. Natural and social history museums were considered the 'true' homes for Aboriginal material culture.

By the mid-1980s my father had retired from the public service, taken his long service leave and relocated to Sydney to go into business with a colleague at a boutique outlet in up-market Paddington selling eclectic Australiana items. The arrival of my dad saw an expansion into exhibitions of Aboriginal paintings, carvings and woven objects from Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands, acrylic paintings on canvas from central Australia, the Great Sandy Desert and east Kimberley, works on paper and high-end textiles printed with designs by Indigenous artists. This extended into contemporary works by urban-based artists from around Australia.

In early 1985 I moved to Sydney to attend art school full-time, lasting only a year majoring in photography, before immersing myself in the wealth of experiences to be had in the inner-city arts and cultural communities, which were engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike. The 1970s had seen the establishment of the Black Theatre in Redfern, the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre in Glebe and the Aboriginal Arts Board under the Australian Council for the Arts, and Indigenous visual artists were exhibiting at artist-run initiatives throughout the city. Arts and cultural activism were considered fundamental to the burgeoning self-determination movement, which was all very low rent and affordable, stimulating and supportive, with few boundaries and rules.

In the 1980s a group of Indigenous artists, some from interstate, others from regional New South Wales, began to exhibit together regularly leading to the establishment of Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in late 1987. It was a case of right place right time as I was swept up in an invigorating learning curve, being invited to participate in seminal exhibitions alongside some of the period's most influential cultural activists: Bronwyn Bancroft, Mervyn Bishop, Euphemia Bostock, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quaill, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels. Visual and performing artists, playwrights and actors, musicians, writers and poets and political activists all worked together, cross-pollinating across media and disciplines.

At the end of 1985 while on a rally protesting against Black Deaths in Custody in Redfern I took photographs and a selection of these images were shown in my first significant

Figure 2. *Michael Watson, Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, 26 January 1988, Redfern, Sydney, Australia.* © Brenda L. Croft, 1988, image courtesy of the artist.

exhibition, *NADOC '86 Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery in Kent Street, Sydney. Curated by Tracey Moffatt, also a participating artist, this exhibition was the first dedicated to Indigenous photographers, with many momentous images shown by artists such as Moffatt, Mervyn Bishop, Ellen José and Michael Riley,[3] now held in major public collections.

The following year Boomalli was launched and its highly successful inaugural exhibition, *Boomalli-au-go-go* was at capacity attendance by people involved in the Indigenous arts, activist and cultural scene of the time, as portrayed in Michael Riley's film *Boomalli: Five Koorie Artists* (1988). An oft-reproduced image of all the members taken at the opening reflects the collective exhilaration and optimism.

In the lead-up to and during Australia's bicentennial in 1988 there was no shortage of events to attend and document with national protests challenging the generally whitewashed representation of Australia's history. During this time I was working in a social documentary format and my work was represented in numerous groups' exhibitions. In 1988 the Australian National Gallery (now the National Gallery of Australia) acquired a number of my works from *Eurobla*, a Boomalli members group exhibition held at the Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney—the first works I had ever sold.

In conjunction with social documentary work I was also beginning to mine personal and public archives in my work, creating screen-printed, mixed-media collages. Nineteen eighty seven was a formative year—I was invited to join Boomalli as the last of ten founding members and I also returned home to the Northern Territory, drawn by a powerful desire to understand my place in a displaced existence, seeking out close and extended family, researching my father's experience as a member of the Stolen Generations.

Also during this period, I was fortunate to combine my art practice with voluntary work at Radio Redfern, the local Indigenous community radio station; Metro TV, a local community television and broadcast production organization; and the Indigenous programmes units of ABC TV and SBS TV, which in turn led to documenting the Second Black Playwrights Conference (1989) and working with the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust—all of which provided great hands-on opportunities to hone creative research and development skills. However, I was just one of many young, eager Indigenous artists, performers, writers, actors and activists drawn to the creative flame of inner-city Sydney and many of my friends and peers continue to contribute to Australia's cultural fabric, playing key roles across multiple sectors.

Boomalli, as an artists-run initiative that was operated on an unpaid, voluntary basis, provided hands-on-the-job development in all aspects of art administration and presentation, not just in the making of art. Members had no option but to learn to write funding applications; design invitations, catalogues and exhibition wall texts and take part in marketing and promotion before, during and after each exhibition; as well as install multimedia exhibitions; liaise with state and federal art gallery and museum curatorial staff; document exhibitions and the list went on. I thrived in this DIY atmosphere and in 1990 I was accepted into a Graduate Diploma of Gallery Management course at the

College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, even though my BA was incomplete. By the time I finally graduated in 1995 the course had been upgraded to a Master of Art Administration.

In 1990, a significant trip involved travelling to the United Kingdom to attend *Tagari Lia: My Family,* an Australian Indigenous cultural festival held at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, with Indigenous artists, actors, musicians, performers from across Australia participating, including a band on a meteoric rise from Arnhem Land, Yothu Yindi, on one of their first international forays.

It was during this trip that I met colleagues such as Eddie Chambers, then Director of AAVAA (African and Asian Visual Artists Archives), based in Bristol, who in turn recommended visiting Panchayat, a South-East Asian artists collective based at Spitalfields, London. Chambers introduced me to Mark Sealy, Director of Autograph: Association of Black Photographers, who introduced me to artists. I sought out these people for their fight for recognition within the country they lived in, as the second and third generations of immigrant parents from former British colonies, which seemed a more closely related experience to that of my own and my peers living in the cities and towns of Australia. We were all considered outsiders.

Throughout this time, I continued making art, travelled around Australia and overseas and headed home time and again, seeking my place, documenting, collating, creating new work and honing arts administration skills all the while. From 1990 to 1996 I held the position of General Manager at Boomalli and through another instance of right place, right time, had the great fortune to work alongside Hetti Perkins as Exhibitions Coordinator/Curator from 1992 to 1995. Perkins has been long acknowledged as one of Australia's leading curators of Indigenous visual art and culture and Boomalli was where we collectively made our mark. I learned a huge amount from Perkins and we remain close colleagues.

In 1991 I took a significant journey back to my father's traditional homelands in the Northern Territory, creating new work for the *Family Album* series, shown later that year in *Kudjeris (Women): Lisa Bellear, Brenda L. Croft & Destiny Deacon*, curated by Fiona Foley and held at Boomalli.

Another right place, right time moment saw me invited to collaborate with renowned international conceptual artist Adrian Piper for the 1992 Biennale of Sydney. Anthony Bond, Curator of International Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, approached me with the opportunity to work with Piper, which opened my eyes to an entirely unknown world. Piper's encouragement and support for my artistic practice meant a huge amount to me in that I finally felt that I could call myself an artist. Our collaboration *Conference call* was later exhibited at Camerawork, London in 1994, and the images were selected for inclusion in the inaugural Johannesburg Biennale in 1995. One of the subjects of the large-scale images was my father and seeing his portrait installed in the reconfigured Museum Afrika, formerly the Afrikaner Museum, in a newly post-apartheid South Africa was a personal and professional high point.

Figure 3. *Conference call*, Adrian Piper and Brenda L. Croft, 1992, Biennale of Sydney: The Boundary Rider (installation detail), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia. © Adrian Piper and Brenda L. Croft, image courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

During the early 1990s, a series of solo exhibitions involved collaborations with women, family and friends, expanding on social documentary to conceptual themes of identity, the body and representation: *The Big Deal is Black* (1993) at the Australian Centre for Photography and *Strange Fruit* (1994) at The Performance Space, both sponsored by Boomalli and held in Sydney. A selection of works from *Strange Fruit* was included in *Abstracts: New Aboriginalities*, organized by the South West Aboriginal Print Project (SWAPP) in Bristol, UK in 1996. In the midst of all this wonderful professional experience my personal life collapsed in a series of episodes from August 1994 to July 1996, which tore the security net from under my feet, emotionally and physically setting me adrift for the next decade.

My younger brother—depicted in that long ago first photograph I took on my mum's Box Brownie, the little kid with the knobbly knees, wearing hitched-too-high towelling shorts, squinting into the lens, his forehead strangely bare having shaved off his eyebrows imitating our cousin Rhonda—was killed in a car accident in Texas, USA three days short of his twenty-seventh birthday, having just celebrated his first wedding anniversary. The instant of my brother's death was the cause of my father's withdrawal from life. Bereft at his son dying before him, my father turned away from the world, shrinking inwards upon himself. Reviewing photographs of this time he appears almost transparent, fading before my eyes, although I don't remember thinking that at the time. Diminished, a shadow hovered over him and a year later a cold that he couldn't seem to shake was diagnosed as advanced acute myeloid leukaemia. Less than two months later he was gone.

After our father's funeral my youngest brother and I took our first adult road trip together, taking our father's ashes on the long journey home to his traditional country, where a memorial service overseen by our family was held in the little Baptist Church at the remote community of Kalkarindji. It was my brother's first trip to our paternal homelands and after we returned to Sydney I followed a strong desire to be away from everything and everyone, so I packed up my things and headed overseas for a year.

The first five months were spent in the United States on a series of cultural exchanges and residencies where I relished the chance to disappear inside myself, having no expectations, as I tried to work out whether I was artist, curator or writer, or none of these. After a brief sojourn in Sydney I travelled to Venice where I spent the next five months as Manager of the Australian Pavilion at the forty-seventh Venice Biennale. As part of the curatorial team for the Australian Pavilion I relished the chance to live in the fantasy that is Venice. For almost half that year I walked everywhere, stepping out of my sorrow; traversing the cobblestones; striding up and over bridges, stone and wooden; following narrow, twisting pathways; passing over or beside the lapping water in the canals, large and small, upon which the ancient city settled.

A decade on from 1987 I had travelled a vast landscape, literal and metaphorical, from an un(in)formed, anxious member of an artist-run initiative to being part of a curatorial team at the world's oldest contemporary arts event, the Venice Biennale. I had travelled home to my country but had lost half of my immediate family, so what now? Returning to Australia at the end of 1997 I settled back in Sydney for a short time.

Early 1998 brought another journey across the country from east to west, undertaking an artist's residency at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University, where I extended my artistic practice into digital media. I continued to draw on personal and public archives and melded these elements, which culminated in the creation of two major new bodies of work, both exhibited as solo exhibitions in late 1998.

The first, *In My Father's House*, was shown at the Australian Centre for Photography, in conjunction with my friend and fellow artist, Destiny Deacon's *Postcards from Mummy*. Long-time friends, these were separate tributes to our respective family members: my father and brother; and Destiny's mother who died the same year as my father. The

second, *In My Mother's Garden* was shown at a commercial art space in Melbourne[4], in conjunction with Michael Riley's elegiac series *Flyblown*.

The following year our Melbourne gallerist, Gabrielle Pizzi, curated a satellite exhibition at the 1999 Venice Biennale, *Oltre il mito/Beyond Myth*, which included work by Destiny, Michael and myself. Michael was too ill to travel, as he dealt with the effects of renal failure, needing to be close to thrice-weekly dialysis treatment in Sydney. Destiny and I had been overseas together previously, when we were both represented in *Africus*, the Johannesburg Biennale in 1995.[5] Our works were projected large-scale on the façade of the Palazzo Papadopoli, creating a silent cinematic effect each night of the exhibition.

By the time I returned to Venice, I had relocated to Perth in early 1999 to take up the position of Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, where I remained until the end of 2001. While curator at the state gallery I juggled consecutive commitments, including project managing a national Indigenous school in new media art for the Australian Network for Art and Technology in Darwin mid-year, but most pressingly, I had been engaged to guest curate the 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia for the 2000 Adelaide Festival of the Arts.

My approach to curatorial work was conducted in a similar manner to how I made art. I curated exhibitions of work that I considered was not well represented in existing exhibitions and much of my artwork could be considered as abstract self-portraits, in that I attempted to represent Indigenous people and their environs as a reflection of my own experience of exclusion or invisibility.

Indigenous people in Australia have often been expected to conform to one of two restrictive expectations—that of the 'authentic', 'pure', 'unsullied' Indigenous person of the desert/bush/remote location, or the 'imitation', 'tainted', 'ruined' Indigenous person of the city or rural regions. Since the earliest days of colonization the latter has been displaced to exist on the metaphorical and literal fringes of society: metaphorical as in dismissed, overlooked and ignored by most of non-Indigenous society; literal as in moved to the outskirts of town, onto shrinking Aboriginal reserves and missions—out of sight, out of mind.

As a curator, I did not want to merely push against the existing boundaries but to overturn existing expectations of contemporary Indigenous art as only being created from the desert or tropical regions of the country. Visitors to state and federal public galleries would usually find a binary paradigm echoed through collection displays or temporary exhibitions, with exhibition titles reiterating an acceptable curatorial position—*land, power, country, spirit, colour and tradition* in opposition to *urban* or *contemporary* representation.

An invisible, but distinct divide was created between *them* and/or *us*, with cultural authority (i.e. authenticity) bestowed upon Indigenous artists who were often represented as exotic in their own lands, whereas Indigenous artists living and working in towns and cities were marginalized to surviving in a cultural void, no person's land, in between, neither one nor the other, displaced and fighting for acknowledgement of our very existence.

Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art in 2000 was the first time the biennial had been dedicated solely to contemporary Indigenous artists—twenty, representing each state and territory—and the first time that an Indigenous curator had been selected. It was also my first time curating a major exhibition solo and I was terrified, but to my great relief the exhibition received positive critical and popular acclaim in print, electronic and digital media. The catalogue sold out within three weeks, which had not occurred previously and, surprisingly, second-hand copies continue to fetch high prices online. Most of the works represented were acquired by state and federal galleries and are on regular display, which is incredibly rewarding, personally and professionally.

The title 'Beyond the pale' was a multiple *entendre*, playing upon the idea of being forced and/or choosing to operate outside acceptable social conventions, of being forced to exist on the fringes of conventional (mainstream) societal mores, of challenging mainstream society's defining/confining racial construct relating to skin colour being the only means of *true* cultural identification.

A key thematic context for the biennial was cultural collaboration: between husband and wife, parent and child, where two or more people contributed to the creation of a single work of art. A number of key works were provocatively political, intended to cause discomfort, generate dialogue and encourage analysis of the contemporary sense of statehood and national identity at the beginning of the new millennium—a western construct of time, dwarfed by the timelessness of Indigenous cosmology and knowledge. The artists' participation and engagement with audiences was essential to the curatorial intent of *Beyond the Pale*. Responses to individual works and the exhibition in its entirety enabled a performative, immersive element that streamed between the artists, through their engagement with each other's work and among the diverse audiences—art connoisseurs, artists (and their friends and families), arts professionals, students and the general public. The biennial was intended to encourage viewers' and participants' critical engagement of one's place in a country that purported to offer a 'fair go' to all its citizens, not just (re)present Indigenous visual culture as a didactic 'show and tell' display.

The reception of *Beyond the Pale* guided the next decade of my professional capacity. From 2002 to 2009 I was employed as Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra and being the first Indigenous person to hold this prestigious position brought considerable responsibilities. I was not simply caretaking and building upon an extensive collection, but significantly, I had a duty to the artists who had created these works, and by extension their families and communities. This was quite separate from the selection criteria in the duty statement for the position where it was expected that my priority would be to the institution first and the object created by the artist/community second, whereas I saw my role in reverse. If I was not accountable to the artist/community in relation to caring for their work, then what was the purpose of my being an Indigenous person in such a privileged situation?

A priority in the early days was to develop areas of the collection that had been neglected, specifically the increasing impact of many urban-based contemporary artists

whose rising profiles were poorly represented, and had been for a decade. There were clashes with some long-term staff that liked the status quo, the easy/lazy categorization of 'urban' vs. 'traditional' but luckily I worked with a great team who supported my position of challenging our audiences, treating them as capable of dealing with tough political and conceptual issues as well as aesthetic concerns.

It was incredibly fulfilling working with some of the country's most inspirational and learned cultural practitioners, acquiring significant works for the national collection, conducting research and producing publications encompassing our multifaceted worldviews, our diverse visual expression. This was tempered by feeling complicit in leading the chase for the next 'big thing/art star', swept along in a tidal wave of acquisition, driven by outside market forces—collectors, some unscrupulous commercial dealers and the secondary market of the auction houses. It is unreasonable to portray all involved in the sector in an unfavourable light as there are so many dedicated, ethical, long-time supporters and patrons of Indigenous artists and communities. For decades such individuals have contributed much more than mere financial investment: academics, cultural activists, arts professionals and others of their ilk have promoted key aspects of this evolving sector as the foundation of Australian culture and identity.

Unfortunately, during the 2000s a pack mentality emanated from elements of the industry, with some private collectors doing 'FIFO'[6] hits on remote communities, be it the deserts of central Australia, the tropical climes of Arnhem Land, Tiwi Islands, far north Queensland and the Torres Strait or the vastness of the Kimberley in the north-west. The intent was to acquire the *biggest*, the *best*, the *premium* works by that year's anointed art stars. This was a more insidious form of obtaining 'trophies of empire', neo-colonialism through procurement, exemplified by an exchange between private collectors overheard at the annual acquirement festival that the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award had become in the mid 2000s.

Collector #1: 'Who do you have? I have Judy Watson.'[7] Collector #2: 'Oh, I prefer Eubena Nampitjin.'[8] A competition of who owned who, not a particular work of art, but the actual artist(s). Art was eating its young *and* its elders, with recently acquired works appearing on the secondary market with increasing regularity. Trading Indigenous art became the new high-risk investment, but, until very recently, none of the secondary sales achieved were distributed to the artists, most of whom lived well below the poverty line.

A chronic chorus by so-called experts—who all seemed to be non-Indigenous—prophesied the imminent bursting of the Aboriginal art industry bubble, which eventually came to pass in the wake of the global financial meltdown. The pleasure of working with, and most importantly *for* the artists was eroded by the approaches from people proposing to donate their collections of inferior objects to the institutions. Occasionally these offers leaned more towards demands that I accept their collection, as the outcome was more for their personal gain than from any philanthropic intent. Throughout this period I worked on other projects, including co-curating the Australian Indigenous Art Commission (with Hetti Perkins) for the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, France, opening in June 2006.[9]

During this period I was also developing and establishing the National Indigenous Arts Triennial, which was a direct outcome of *Beyond the Pale*. Curatorial opportunities for my Indigenous peers appeared fairly erratic, with the usual suspects—myself among them—always being invited to organize the limited events on offer, such as the Australian International Academic Centre (AIAC). There seemed to be minimal opportunities for the next generation of Indigenous curators and arts professionals. Hoping to secure an event that would offer Indigenous curators similar opportunities that had been afforded to me, I sought guidance from colleagues in the sector as to whether there was 'room' for a regular Indigenous visual arts event on the national cultural calendar, not an award but a significant curated, contextual exhibition.

There was derision from some non-Indigenous peers that such an event would 'ghettoize' selected artists, in that surely everyone aspired to the nominated 'centre', to be mainstream (i.e. not considered only as an 'Indigenous' artist) as if this were an insult, an inferiority to be avoided at all costs. Perversely, such feedback only intensified my resolve and support was (thankfully) positive. In October 2007 *Culture Warriors* was launched at the National Gallery of Australia, the flagship event celebrating the NGA's twenty-fifth anniversary, coinciding with the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 referendum (Aboriginals).

A corresponding wish list of 40 artists was whittled down to 30 with representation from every Australian state and territory. Media encompassed bark paintings and customary objects and classical imagery alongside incredibly innovative uses of natural ochres, fibre and feathers. Substantial canvases played optical tricks on viewer's eyes, in palettes muted and iridescent. Other canvases' subject matter addressed revisionist history and Indigenous identity, fusing international contemporary art historical references with visual declarations of sorrow, satire, rage and determination; poignant photographic portraits and innovative moving image works, reinventing cultural fortitude and connections, irrespective of locale; works on paper and multimedia installations.

Twenty-seven of the thirty artists—whose ages ranged from early 20s to mid 90s—attended the opening weekend, visited by thousands. A condensed version of NIAT 2007 toured to a number of state venues before travelling to Washington DC, in the United States in September 2009. By then I had resigned from the National Gallery of Australia to return to academia, commencing as a lecturer at the University of South Australia in Adelaide in early 2009. In April 2009, the University of Sydney awarded me an honorary doctorate in visual arts, an unexpected honour that seemed incongruous since I had never finished my BA at its affiliated institution, Sydney College of the Arts. The award, conferred in recognition of contributing to contemporary Indigenous visual arts and culture, highlighted that there are many pathways to the same destination.

Nonetheless, I had to fight for my right to attend the Washington staging of *Culture Warriors* at the Katzen Art Center, American University, later that year as my former employer stated that my presence was considered not only unnecessary, but problematic. I was bluntly told that the curator's presence was not required; instead a non-Indigenous junior exhibitions management staff member would be present to elaborate on the

Figure 4. *Culture Warriors*: National Indigenous Art Triennial, opening event, artists and curator, National Gallery of Australia, 2007. L–r, front row: Richard Bell, Peter Minygululu (cultural manager for Philip Gudthaykudthay), Philip Gudthaykudthay, J Baptist Apuatimi, D. Reid Nakamarra. L–r, back row: Christine Christophersen, Brenda L. Croft, Christopher Pease, Owen Yalandja, Dennis Nona, Christian Thompson, S. Pickett, Gordon Hookey, Destiny Deacon, Virginia Fraser, Vernon Ah Kee. Artwork details l–r: *Yarwarr* (detail) 2007, © Dennis Nona; *not an animal or a plant* (detail) 2006, © Vernon Ah Kee. Image courtesy of National Gallery of Australia.

context of the exhibition. My former colleague's professionalism was not in question but I enquired as to how someone with no curatorial, let alone Indigenous experience/ knowledge could convey the cultural intent in the expected public programmes.

Fortunately, my workplace supported my request to travel as part of my research outcomes. On arrival I learned that text I had written for the catalogue and wall panels had been revised without any consultation, which is an infringement of intellectual property. Again, fortunately Jack Rassmussen, the Washington venue's director offered full support and insisted that my text be returned to its original intent, not the bland (dare I say) white-washed version that had been offered as its replacement.

These issues reflected an unfounded fear held by my former employer that the palpable political context of the exhibition may drive visitors away, and heaven forbid, offend the Australian Embassy, which was sponsoring the exhibition. They had not reckoned on the then Australian Ambassador, Dennis Richardson, embracing this viewpoint, immediately espousing the obvious cultural connections as well as the shared inequities experienced by First Nations communities in the northern and southern hemispheres.

The epiphany had arrived in early 2007 in a dismissive comment from a mentor and my senior supervisor. During a one-on-one conversation I was told that I was 'hiding behind [my] Aboriginality', whatever that meant. Whether it was a question of my conflicting commitment to the institution or the community of artists to whom I was responsible, the decision was made for me and I handed in my resignation. I can only surmise that I was expected to reject my Indigeneity and be like everyone else—white and intent on moving up the career ladder.

It was a similar argument levelled earlier in my professional career that I could not be an artist *and* a curator; it had to be one or the other. One could not be Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or, as contemporary Indigenous artist Judy Watson once stated, 'I am Country *and* Western.'

The choice of returning to academia (I had been a lecturer at the Canberra School of Art a decade earlier) also enabled me—after a stint teaching—to commence my Ph.D. and determine to undertake practice-led, experimental research from an Indigenous viewpoint, working closely with my own community, something I had long wanted but could not facilitate with then work commitments.

I was able to continue with curatorial projects and my artistic practice throughout my tenure as these areas were included as part of my research. Long-term connections with international Indigenous artists and arts professionals were also realized in *Stop (the) Gap: International Indigenous Art in Motion*,[10] the major visual arts component of the 2011 Adelaide International Film Festival.

Working with Indigenous curatorial colleagues Kathleen Ash-Milby (Navajo, USA), David Garneau (Métis, Canada) and Megan Tamati-Quennell (Te Ātiawa, Ngāi Tahu), this exhibition brought together diverse new media and moving image work by Indigenous artists from Australia, Canada, New Zealand/Aotearoa and the United States of America, held over two sites, indoor and outdoor, in Adelaide in 2011. Again, this was an area I was not really encouraged to develop during my tenure at the National Gallery of Australia, that of working across continents and hemispheres in relation to Indigenous visual culture.

Employed in the academy with my specific research focus also enabled my involvement with a major cultural event in my traditional country, the forty-fifth anniversary of the Gurindji Walk Off from Wave Hill Station. This occasion was commemorating an action undertaken by my family and community in 1966, when they collectively walked off one of the world's largest cattle stations, Wave Hill, owned by wealthy British Lord Vestey. Initiated as a group action seeking equal pay and conditions, it swiftly segued into a stand

demanding the return of our traditional homelands and sparked the birth of the national land rights movement.

Held over one week in late August 2011 in the remote[11] communities of Kalkarindji and Daguragu in the Northern Territory, a series of cultural events were staged, with people attending from all over the country. For so many of us present, the personal and the political are intertwined. Such events allow a shared cultural pride to come to the fore, even while people are forced to live in the shadow of federal government restrictions through the form of the NT Intervention,[12] which exercised a stranglehold on every individual in the isolated community.

In December that year I was awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous grant, enabling me to commit to full-time research until the end of 2014, working with my family and community, up *home*. Following my mother's sudden passing a year earlier I wanted to be closer to my remaining brother and his family; for when it comes down to it, family is everything to Indigenous people, especially those who have experienced the grief of dislocation and dispossession. I was able to transfer the ARC DI grant to my alma mater, the University of New South Wales, consecutively commencing my Ph.D. at the National Institute of Experimental Art, College of Fine Arts, where I had received my MA in 1995.

Since 2012, I have returned *home* a number of times, to a place of many, multifaceted sites—metaphorical, emotional and literal. Each visit reveals more layers, like an ongoing archaeological dig that will never end. The solo elements of my research have morphed into organic, expanding, communally-driven outcomes—unexpected, but truly exhilarating. In Indigenous argot, this is just *deadly* (meaning 'solid', 'substantial' or 'true'). Somewhat unsure of what my professional future holds I am content that my personal growth is a given, and I remain enthusiastic—and, yes, scared about the next stages of my journey, while feeling slightly scarred about what is already complete. Scars are welcome though, as they reveal the efforts of the journey.

My practice-led research entails elements of all that I have been, all that I am—creative and visual, observant and literary, representational and analytical. Whatever may await me, it *must* involve engagement with, and for, my community/ies, whether in my traditional homelands, or as part of the Indigenous diaspora that lives in every part of Australia—be it metropolitan, pastoral or remote. Where I fit within this landscape, figuratively and factually, will be signposted as the journey is undertaken. What remains indelible and irrefutable is this: Aboriginal land, always was, always will be.

Notes

1. This image would resurface in my earliest conceptual work, a multimedia series *Love letters/white wedding* (1987), exhibited at the inaugural exhibition at Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative, Sydney, November 1987.

2.   *Yidaki* is the Yolngu (northeast Arnhem Land people) term for didjeridu, a termite-hollowed wooden drone, or musical instrument. *Bilma* are special ceremonial wooden clapsticks, which are used to accompany the playing of the *yidaki.*

3.   The full line-up of artists included Mervyn Bishop, Brenda L. Croft, Tony Davis, Darren Kemp, Tracey Moffatt, Michael Riley, Christopher Robinson, Terry Shewring and Ros Sultan.

4.   Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, then in Flinders Lane, Melbourne.

5.   Artists included Brook Andrew, myself, Destiny Deacon, Leah King-Smith and Michael Riley.

6.   'Fly-in Fly-out', abbreviated to FIFO, is common terminology relating to the transporting of employees to remote areas associated with Australia's mining industry.

7.   Watson, Waanyi people, is a renowned contemporary artist whose work is held in every major national public collection, private collections and numerous international collections. In 1997, she represented Australia in *fluent* for the forty-seventh Venice Biennale, with Yvonne Koolmatrie and Emily Kame Kngwarreye—contemporary spelling used. Watson's career dates from the late 1980s and she has travelled extensively, undertaking numerous international residencies.

8.   The name of the artist mentioned has been forgotten: however, this author recalls that the artist mentioned was from a region/community deemed 'traditional', with the inference being that this artist's work was superior to that of Watson's by stint of being 'traditional'.

9.   For further reading see: http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/6502/artery_1.pdf .

10. For some further reading on this project see: http://w3.unisa.edu.au/samstagmuseum/exhibitions/2011/stopthegap.asp.

11. 'Remote' refers to communities that are a considerable distance from major metropolitan centres.

12. The Northern Territory Intervention, also known as the NT Emergency Response, was enacted by the conservative federal Liberal Government in 2007. Allegations of sexual abuse, domestic violence and paedophile rings being rife in Indigenous communities were the impetus for restrictive policies being implemented and sustained through conformist and supposedly left-leaning governments. Indigenous people had welfare provisions, law enforcement, land tenure and other measures placed upon them, with large signs banning alcohol and pornography a daily reminder of their demeaned and debasing existence as second-class citizens in their own country.

Chapter 7

Performing the Curator, Curating the Performer:
Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces*

Gregory Minissale

In 2005, Marina Abramović performed *Seven Easy Pieces* at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. It consisted of seven performances, one each day, for seven consecutive days. The artist 're-enacted' historically famous performance pieces, many of which involved humiliating acts, acts of self-harm and feats of endurance and psychological stress. These are the performances of *Seven Easy Pieces*:

Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974)
Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed* (1972)
VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants, Genital Panic* (1969)
Gina Pane's *The Conditioning, First Action of Self Portrait(s)* (1973)
Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965)
Abramović's own *Lips of Thomas*, first performed in 1975
Entering the Other Side, a new work

In this essay, I want to suggest that *Seven Easy Pieces* is a kind of archive of performance works for which Abramović *performs* the role of curator and, conversely, *curates* the performances of other artists' works. Although the official curators of *Seven Easy Pieces* were Nancy Spector and Jennifer Blessing, in *Seven Easy Pieces* Abramović stages and deconstructs the traditional relationship between curator and artist in creative ways. I intend to show how Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* embodies and actualizes important transformations in traditional definitions of what it means to curate, archive and perform.

The Curator

The word 'curator' has its roots in the Latin *cūrā*: 'care' and *cūrāre*: 'to care for' (Soanes and Stevenson 2008). Related to this is the modern English, 'cure'. The role of a curator or caregiver was also extended to 'overseer' and 'guardian' originally of minors, lunatics, criminals and the sick, groups that form an unsaid absence within or outside of mainstream society, occupying an indeterminate space which Michel Foucault called heterotopias.[1] The medieval Latin, *cūrātus* was also meant to denote a spiritual role as carer of lost souls, which developed into the modern 'curate' (noun)—an ecclesiastical authority. Many of these etymological subtleties can be brought into play in interpretations of *Seven Easy Pieces*: performances that transform from inside a civic space (such as a gallery) with its

rational semiotic order, where normative sanity, decorum and cleanliness are displayed, into a ludic, violent, obsessive or neurotic carnival. The temple of art is transformed into a place where, as Roger Callois (1958: 130) writes, the stability of perception is destroyed in order to 'inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind'. Abramović 'plays' a 'curate' (a priest whose traditional role is to repeat ritual performances), bringing them back into circulation as a 'restored behaviour' (Schechner 1985: 35). Such public acts in traditional interpretations also have 'restorative' or 'curative' dimensions, not only 'restoring' archetypes or traumas of the past but also suggesting cathartic possibilities.

This brings into focus another term related to 'cure': the *pharmakon*. In Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates retells the myth of Oreithyia, taken away by the wind Boreas while playing with Pharmacia. Derrida remarks that the Greek word *pharmacia* refers also to *pharmakon* (the imagery of which is applied throughout *Phaedrus* by Plato), which signifies 'recipe', 'drug' and, paradoxically, both 'poison' and 'antidote' (Derrida 1981: 70–84). The equivocal meaning of this word is exploited by Plato and used as a metaphor for the relationship between the truth and various 'representations' of it. Writing (and by extension, rhetoric) are representations of the truth but they can also, dangerously, lead to a diversion from the path of truth (given that they are devices which describe reality by using fictional scenarios, metaphors, tropes and allegories), and Derrida notes that at the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates is led away from the city and into the country by the lure of the written texts in the possession of Phaedrus. Writing and rhetoric are necessary evils by which the truth may be known, a dialectic process through which truth emerges, a *pharmakon*, which can be both a poison and a cure (both true and untrue).

In this essay, I want to suggest that Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* is both antidote and poison: the performer commits acts of self-harm for what can be understood as a 'higher' purpose (but which remains polysemous), as does the ancient figure of the scapegoat in traditional societies whose sacrifice (poison) must be endured to expiate the sins of society. Importantly the *pharmakon* is a symbol for the transformation (of the body, of mental states, of situations). In psychotherapy, the therapist can play the role of *pharmakon* as a devil's advocate to aid the return of repressed memories that make the patient 'feel bad'. And, most importantly, there is much uncertainty as to whether *Seven Easy Pieces* attempts a cyclical return to archetypes or reveals this as impossible. As a kind of *pharmakon*, Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* is undecided: it may be seen to question naïve notions of a reified present in performance, yet it also complicates the notion of a return of archetypes. The result is that immanence and transcendence are brought into a continual play of *différance*, Derrida's neologism (1978) for maintaining a vacillation or indeterminacy between presence and absence rather than forcing a choice between them. It is this play that *Seven Easy Pieces* sustains that undermines what it means to be a curator *either* 'caring for' the present *or* 'restoring' the past. In fact, what I want to suggest is that *Seven Easy Pieces* also undermines the difference between creating anew and curating the past.

The Archive

Seven Easy Pieces also manages to suggest a certain undermining of the dualism insinuated by the concept of the archive. In Greek, *arkheion* means 'public records, town hall, residence or office of chief magistrates', and *arkhē*, 'magistracy, office, government' deriving from *arkhō*, 'to begin, rule, govern' (Soanes and Stevenson 2008). As a starting point or origin of order and the rule of law and record keeping, the archive is a system of order against its opposite, (an)*arkhē* or anarchy. As with the archive, *Seven Easy Pieces* imposes order in several ways. It suggests a series of absences (as the archive is a series of signs of previous times, absent events and persons), and in its alignment of performances into the semblance of narrative, it also creates a series of rational constraints and intervals. These delays order the (an)archy of sensations of pain, abjection and trauma, which threaten to rupture this order. An assignifying flux—*chaosmos*—is created by the dual pressure of each force. It is this governing system of the archive that creates the possibilities of control and endurance, registering pain as inchoate sensation within a conceptual, organizing formula of repeats. The performances are organized into an archive but also an archive of days, myths and performances, as well as etymologies. Abramović has chosen the semiotics of the creation myth in six days, the seventh for rest (nesting this further with seven-hour sessions each day), and recoded it as a public ritual and with a vital recoding: here woman takes centre stage within the creation myth. *Archon* in Greek means 'ruler' or 'lord' related to the verb stem, meaning 'to rule': monarch and hierarchy also share this common root.

Sven Spieker traces back the archive in German to *Akten* from the Latin *agere* to act, so that archives are 'that which has been acted upon' (Spieker 2008: 24). He further goes on to explain that the significance of the archive lies not in its individual components but in their interrelationship in a group and explores the traditions of nineteenth-century archiving as a metaphor for unearthing archaeologies in Freud, and in Foucault. A brief excursus into how these thinkers used the notion of the archive provides us with some critical purchase on what is happening to some extent with *Seven Easy Pieces* as an archiving process. For Freud, archival materials are the subconscious withdrawn from circulation and their normal place (consciousness) by recoding, and are accessible through the techniques of retrieval, access codes and indexes. Yet, retrieval is never about past moments brought back with their full presence as they once were. As in memory, they are subject to a whole network of different meanings, interpretations and contexts that fundamentally alter the significance of these retrieved moments. This means that the archive is never objective in and for itself, for its component parts are subject to the wholes they find themselves in and dependent on these wholes for meaning. This lies at the root of syntactical arguments regarding language: it is not the meaning of a word that is significant so much as where it is placed in a sentence, context or situation: meaning is spread over the system. All of these considerations are relevant for an understanding of *Seven Easy Pieces*. Each performance piece is not retrieved and relived anew, but rather,

is repeated *as a difference* in a context that adds to its difference. This fundamental point about difference and repetition is made most forcibly by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who build up a philosophy of immanence (difference in the 'here and now' not repeat cycles of identical moments) against the metaphysics of an assumed presence continually repeated by subsequent performances. In psychoanalytic terms, the patient is released from the syndrome or trauma that is a repeatedly repressed presence by retrieving and confronting it and transforming it into new possibilities.

With rather more indeterminacy, Derrida's 'trace' points to the unsaid assumption of a transcendental presence behind the *sign*, *representation* or, in Abramović's case, *performance*, and reveals that this assumed presence is only, really, the signifier of yet another signifier and so on, a series of so-called 'originals' that multiply like simulacra. The individual performances in *Seven Easy Pieces* seem to retrieve an archival presence, an 'architrace', Gina Pane's or VALIE EXPORT's performance, for example. Yet each of these works, when they were performed, were also traces of prior acts and motivations which also trail off into the obscurities of time, and are further complicated by their retrieval in the present. Derrida suggests that the archi- or originary is deferred in a constant play between signifiers.

What Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* suggests, as an important counterfactual to the logic of the archive organized by the archivist or curator and her set of cultural and psychological structures, is that curating does not have to be thought of as conserving object-based art—as there are traces suggested in this work. Although the works 'survive' as images on the Internet and are far from the performance ideal of a totally ephemeral art, these photographs and films are 'traces': what Derrida would like to suggest are anomalies enunciating the indeterminacy of absence/presence rather than tacitly assuming a presence or an absence.

For Foucault, the archive is a set of '[d]iscourses that have just ceased to be ours', helping us to realize 'that we are difference, that our reason is the difference of discourses, our history the difference of times, our selves the difference of masks' (Foucault 2002: 131). For both Foucault and Freud, excavating the archive reveals the hidden organization of discipline and control, an organizing and structured series of differences and relations. Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* reveals that curating has a similar implicit presence (the organizing mind of the curator and/or the gallery system), disguised as an explicit absence ('all we see' are the objects in the exhibition). In curating several ephemeral (that is, dematerialized) artworks through her own performance of them, Abramović's foregrounds sensations, pain, discipline, memories, duration and gestures all as a series of structured relations and intervals, protocols and durations lived through and in the body. These, usually invisible, forces are *embodied* by Abramović who does not stand behind the work, as the hidden curator.[2]

This fact can be placed into the wider critique of object-based museological value systems. For, although one could say that re-performing older performance works uproots them from their 'original' contexts, Abramović provides each of them with

new, lived contexts that create unforeseen social, emotional and embodied situations with viewers; performances that have just as much direct access to urgency, pain and discomfort as the older performances. To adopt Deleuzian terminology, Abramović spatializes these aggregates of sensation along the lines of the organizing formulas of the historic performances, yet with subtle changes and disturbances.

Other artists are interested in similarly disturbing the logic of the archive in order to explore hidden systems of categorization and models of the mind. In Susan Hiller's work, for example, *From the Freud Museum* (1991–97), the artist collected a number of objects in display boxes, resembling photographs, notes and memorabilia that create the atmosphere of a museum dedicated to Freud. The objects are linked together using various Freudian theories on psychoanalysis but their 'scientific' objectivity is subverted by fictional, personal and irrelevant fragments supplied by the artist in order to reveal hidden patriarchal motivations under claims to reveal the truth.

Related to this is Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum* where the artist rearranged objects from the Maryland Historical Society suggesting a history of exclusion of African-American history (plinths with names but no busts) or created disturbing juxtapositions such as displaying iron slave shackles next to antique silver goblets and tableware. Meanwhile, Joseph Kosuth's *Play of the Unmentionable (*1990) involved curating many objects from the Brooklyn Museum that were controversial in their time for explicit sexual content, political non-correctness or irreligiousness. This was seen as a veiled attack on the various US senators who had vilified artists such as Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe for being immoral and obscene. In sum, it was an exhibition showing historically distinct periods of censorship. In all of these cases, these artists attempted a similar strategy: rather than persisting in the notion that the archive is an object-based collection to which the museum has an objective and scientific duty of care and conservation, instead these artist-as-curator works revealed that it is the selection or omission, framing and sequencing of objects in displays of collections, the syntactical organization, that create and influence meaning. Arrangements are not simply neutral and diaphanous displays of an arte*fact*'s facticity, they are 'already-always' part of a system of values and exclusions, power systems and hidden cultural assumptions and prejudices. Visitors are not only encouraged to become aware of the controlled environment of the gallery space, but they are also encouraged to think about the underlying logic of display and categorization. And this is also the case with *Seven Easy Pieces* which does not create an archive of performance objects, so much as the rearrangement of the syntax of performance art. Rather than assuming that the gallery or the archive is a neutral or invisible stage (which in fact creates a schism between art and life) we are invited to consider the gallery as part of a system which is both economic, cultural, scientific and psychological. It was in the light of disassembling the fait accompli of the 'grammar' of controlling meaning through display that was the reason behind Allan Kaprow's staging of *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hofman* in 1963. The artist invited gallery visitors to rearrange the furniture and objects in the gallery space in order to transgress

traditional gallery practices that hold the system and order of arrangement of objects to be inviolable and paramount. In *SILENCE* (1988) curator Michael Fehr emptied out a gallery completely in order to make visitors aware of the gallery as an institution that stages art, rather than persisting in seeing the institution as a 'neutral' background force. In this example, there were, in fact, no objects to curate.

These artist-as-curator works share synergies with *Seven Easy Pieces* in the sense that they all undermine faith in the curated object and the archive as a material collection of objective facts. In *Seven Easy Pieces* the 'collection' may be seen as a series of differences: actions, spatial practices, durations, intervals, pressures, resistances, sensations, memories and subjectivities. The arrangement plays with the image of an objective, excavating archaeology; if anything, the semiotics are ambiguous. These artist-as-curator strategies form a context and underlying discursivity—a virtual archive—within which *Seven Easy Pieces* could fruitfully be placed. These works tacitly or explicitly deal with systematicity as an explicit theme or problem in art, rather than ignoring it as ideologically neutral.

Performance

This brings into focus the traditional definitions of performance which, along with the preceding terms, I would like to suggest *Seven Easy Pieces* recodes. On the one hand, the verb 'to perform' has its roots in the Middle English *parformen* (associated with 'form'), 'to perform' is said also to have roots in the Old French *fournir*: to furnish (playfully acknowledged by Kaprow's *Furniture Comedy*), and *parfournir*: to accomplish or carry out to completion, and Old High German *frummen*: to carry out (Soanes and Stephenson 2008). In all senses, whether 'giving form' to something, or equipping, furnishing or providing something, the requirement is that one is changing, supplementing or finishing something: x, and one performs x which is always a prior presence, or pre-existent deferred. This could be a plan, concept, practice, specified standard, blueprint, aim, schema, memory or archetype any of which Derrida would, no doubt, identify as continuing the tradition of the metaphysics of presence as always prior to the act of enunciation, performance or representation. As I have stated, for Derrida (1978) the trace is always implicit—assumed to lie just outside what is explicit—a hidden transcendental signified 'always-already' secreted inside language and its definitions. As Derrida (1978: 393) writes: the trace is a 'mark of the absence of a presence, an always-already absent present'. It is deconstruction, however, which transforms the trace from a given into a problem, and this is what *Seven Easy Pieces* achieves: foregrounding the problematics of the trace by performing the trace, as part of a revision of what it means to furnish, to accomplish, to perform. For Abramović does not present us with clear answers, only problems that undermine our faith in curating the past, and our commitment to the present, inviting us to engage in the possibilities of creativity, ethics and our tolerance of pain.

The multiplication of actual differences, broken skin, acts of endurance, face-to-face contact with gallery visitors are centred on *Abramović*'s body—not Nauman's, Gina Pane's or Acconci's—although their 'presences' linger in the mind. Abramović is the difference. Yet, the uncertainty unleashed upon consciousness is that the pure presence of the performer is never achieved. The best that Abramović may be said to achieve by staging the archive is to thematize the problem of reading a prior presence into the live performance, whereas in earlier performances this prior presence is assumed to be the condition of all performance works (see for example the notion of Schechner's 'restored behaviour' mentioned earlier). In other words, Abramović deconstructs performance, revealing its hidden assumptions regarding how one is to abstract away from its live unpredictability and directness in favour of a prior plan, programme, standard, principle or meaning.

In doing so, *Seven Easy Pieces* appears to be a series of performances or traces but are, actually, immanent events in the intangible flux of a present which need not signify an already given or a fixed event. Other meanings associated with performance suggest discharging a duty or carrying out an obligation; or completing a prescribed course of action implying a regular, methodical or prolonged application or work: to perform an exacting task that tests endurance or thresholds of pain, commitment and determination. Performance is also a challenge and an ordeal. All of these meanings are evident in our interpretations of what is happening in *Seven Easy Pieces* and bring us closer to the notion that performance is not expression (of something prior) but a subversion of representation in the sense of a 'performative': 'A kind of utterance that performs with language the deed to which it refers […] instead of describing some state of affairs' (Soanes and Stephenson 2008). It is notable that this particular understanding of performance is at loggerheads with the very notion of the artist as curator: for what is there to curate in a process of subversion, where the signs to be curated are undermined and plunged into a plethora of ungraspable possibilities?

> What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious […] The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification […] A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 12)

Performing as a curator and curating a series of performances involves striking out new routes along sensations centred on the body, but which are by no means limited by it, creating ripples, consequences and repercussions beyond the event, where unexpected ruptures and connections occur in both performer, witnesses and narrators. This is not a reified present but a duration of multiplying differences. While I agree with Amelia Jones: 'There is no singular, authentic "original" act we can refer to in order to confirm the true meaning of an event, an act, a performance, or a body presented in the art

realm or otherwise' (Jones 2011: 43), a statement that Jones suggests is contrary to the ambitions of Abramović's *Seven Easy Pieces* and *The Artist is Present* (2010), I believe that these works are pivotal in helping us to realize or problematize these facts, and that *Seven Easy Pieces* should be seen as an active deconstruction of these claims to have easy access to the truth of presence and an original. Even in *The Artist is Present*, where Abramović sits and stares into the eyes of one gallery visitor, similarly seated, several times a day for a whole week, the title, *The Artist is Present*, is either extremely obvious and therefore rather flat, or it is meant to be ironic. This would mean a play either on the proposition the unsaid: '(non-)artist is (also) present' (the gallery visitor who is also doing the same thing as the artist); or the artist is not present (depending on whether we believe she is an artist or acting as one, after all; or whether artist or gallery visitor can be said to be 'present' at all or mind wandering. So in the viewer's domain, the Derridean play of (non-)presence is more than possible. Importantly we do not need an artistically stated motive for this indeterminacy to occur as it seems to be the unsaid of the performance. *Seven Easy Pieces* also undermines any simple definition of a present event, act or performance. This is because it is extended over a longer 'configural' process of durations. *Seven Easy Pieces* (pieces of what, exactly?) does not re-enact older, discrete, fixed acts but folds them into broader conceptual movement and development over one week. As I have stated, the context makes each lexical unit acquire a different stress from its supposed 'origin'. It is not each unit that carries the presence of meaning, but the company it keeps, and the contingencies of its reception in many different contexts that allows for a play of meanings. And this, I think, has repercussions for how we understand what it means to curate.

By the very logic of positing an originary, we claim to know the artist's intentions as if the intentions make the work. Artworks are always in excess of intentions and artistic statements. Abramović's works could be viewed as discrepancies in a set of parameters that it may or may not have posited in the first place, or they can be seen hypothetically as a set of possibilities, problems and questions. The following descriptions attempt to interpret some of the play of meanings suggested by the configural movement of *Seven Easy Pieces*.

Seven Easy Pieces

On day one, Abramović adapted Bruce Nauman's *Body Pressure* (1974). Abramović pushed her body against a thick sheet of the glass fixed upright on a stage in the centre of the Guggenheim Museum. This act was repeated after intervals of five minutes, intervals from 5-12 p.m. Nauman is not known to have actually performed this piece, as it appeared as a set of instructions on a gallery wall which some visitors dutifully enacted. Thus, ironically, Abramović 're-enacts' a non-performance, which further suggests that rather than literally curating/excavating an act, Abramović is problem-making, gently undermining our faith in originary acts whether in the past or the present.

Abramović simulated Vito Acconci's *Seed Bed* (1972) on day two, which consisted of the artist hiding beneath floorboards in a gallery, verbalizing masturbation as visitors walk by. The texts for each performance were different; does this, in fact, make them distinctly different, further emphasizing that contingencies and contexts are about transformations and differences but not sameness? Abramović causes a cascade of ambiguities referencing not only Acconci who was similarly concealed and 'absent' under the floorboards like an unruly id. Yet like him, she is also 'present', as he is also 'present' as a memory, but the memory of an absence/presence. Acconci stressed that gallery visitors were in his mental space, as he was in theirs (him imagining their presence and the visitors imagining his). A similar absence/presence is played out in the Guggenheim with the added complication that we could understand that Abramović is 'fantasizing' Acconci. Again, a plethora of instances of *différance* multiplies. Abramović transforms the male space suggested by the memory of Acconci's voice, within which the visitor steps, into a female spatialization of the voice. This is quite a complex channelling concept. The removal of the sight of the body in both cases raises questions concerning authenticity ('Were they really masturbating?'), and while this deliberate challenge to the faith in the authenticity of the performance is also evident in Abramović's case, the layered transgression here is supplemented by the withdrawal from view of a woman's body as an object for scopic desire, a well-known feminist artistic strategy. In addition to these quite complex transpositions of absence/presence, Acconci achieved a transformation of the gallery into emptiness, yet he also made it highly evident and visible in ways comparable to the artist-as-curator strategies, particularly Fehr's, described earlier. This interpretation is also possible for Abramović's reworking of this piece, a curating of various absences/presences that destabilize the sign.

An interpretation of VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants, Genital Panic* (1969) occurred on day three, as a blatant 'outing' of the concealment of the body from view the day before. Was this a play on return? But Abramović's or EXPORT'S? The artist staged this by sitting on a chair with a gun, legs astride, with the crotch of her trousers cut out making herself invisible as a *subject*, dissolved in the objectification of her body which her exposure entails. Clearly, this is quite different from VALIE EXPORT's *Action Pants, Genital Panic*, where the story goes that she wore pants with the crotch removed walking through an art cinema, offering the spectators visual contact with a real female body. Walking up and down the aisles, she was supposed to have challenged the audience to look at reality instead of passively enjoying images of women on the screen. In the Guggenheim, there was no movie and Abramović's act was not one of walking but one of waiting. Abramović instead, sat for several hours in face-to-face encounters with the audience exchanging the roles of playing passive object (revealed genitals) with viewing subject (Abramović holding a gun looking at passers-by).[3]

Abramović interpreted Gina Pane's *The Conditioning, First Action of Self Portrait(s)* (1973), a gruelling seven hours on day four, consisting of the artist lying on a metal frame with candles burning underneath her. The title of Gina Pane's work creates the ambiguity that Abramović may be seen to stage a self-portrait through another's self-portrait,

contrasting this again with the duration, itself a parody of the Christian mortification rituals, the night of soul and sacrificial rites. Conditioning may refer to religious rites and ceremonies, as well as gender conditioning. The performance thus suggests the scapegoat/ *pharmakon*, a consistent model of performance art. But also, enacted here are alchemical archetypes, the ordeal by fire purifies the soul and transforms base matter (signifying the soul of the novice), to more refined substances (the soul of the adept).

Gold is one of the key features of the following performance. On day five, Abramović staged Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965). At the beginning of the performance in 1965 Beuys locked the gallery doors from the inside, leaving the gallery-goers outside. Viewers could observe the scene within only through the windows. This was not repeated in the Guggenheim Museum. Beuys, coated in honey with gold leaf, began to 'explain pictures' to a dead hare that he held in his hands. Beuys's model of performance is based on the model of channelling a prior act or wisdom tradition, the hare is a mystical symbol of reincarnation, a metaphor for his own performance as an incarnation of myth and a threshold to the imaginary.

It is interesting that Abramović, who again inserts a gender transgression into the model of patriarchal wisdom traditions and the diagram of the (male) shaman, also carried a dead hare in her arms. I understand this as yet another play on the notion of an originary that can never be relived, for if it were, the hare would be, illogically, doubly dead. The other interesting ambiguity here is the impossibility of knowing what Beuys actually said to the hare, or what Abramović said. Abramović yet again stages the failure of mimesis, and inserts into the model of the eternal return important differences and displacements. Curating in this performance, and in the others contained in *Seven Easy Pieces*, consists of questioning claims to original order or archive in ways that suggests the illusion of an originary: is this an example of mimesis pointing to itself as a construct, as an indexical device? We cannot be sure.

Lips of Thomas is a piece Abramović first performed in 1975, with another interpretation in 1993, and included as yet another performance in *Seven Easy Pieces* on day six (the last day of the creation of Adam and Eve in Judeo-Christian traditions). As part of a series of performances or 'self-performances', of prior selves, the work further problematizes presence/absence. The work actualizes a crisis of the self that cannot be retrieved even if attempts to repeat it are staged; Abramović herself suggests a scission between earlier and later versions of the performance as a change of consciousness (Jones 2011: 19). Recast as 'regress', the work, freshly ensconced within the new context of *Seven Easy Pieces*, can be read as the problem of trying to imitate even oneself, placed at an awkward juncture with the suggestion of an obsessive compulsive disorder or a trauma: is this an act of fresh violence or the same one that is repeated in different ways and contexts? The artist consumed a kilo of honey (which is itself a reference to Beuys), followed by a litre of red wine (the Christian blood and wine of the sacrament). She then shatters her glass and, with a shard taken from the fragments, carves a star onto her abdomen. The performance then requires that she lie down on ice blocks in the shape of a crucifix, with a heater

blowing hot air onto her stomach to keep the wound open. The performance lasts for seven hours. *Lips of Thomas* refers to the memory of one of the artist's past relationships but also brings to mind Christ's disciple, Thomas, 'doubting Thomas', who would not believe in Christ's resurrection until he could see with his own eyes and feel with his own fingers the wounds of Christ. Within *Seven Easy Pieces*, this aspect of the work betrays an interest in the crisis of representation of selfhood as an originary *en abyme* (the performer playing the performer, etc.) As a series of iterations of earlier performances that are interwoven with them, *Seven Easy Pieces* is an ongoing differentiation that has no inside or outside.

As the description of *Lips of Thomas* reveals perhaps more dramatically, *Seven Easy Pieces* helps us to redefine concepts not as detached, intellectual phenomena but as lived experiences that involve not represented but actual sensations of pain, discomfort and abjection. The archive: the conceptual organization of this complex work over seven days spatializes and disciplines the body and is cut into it. This methodical conceptual thought, with its delays and ritual repeats exercised over sensations involve the complicity of an accomplice or viewer, features that, as Deleuze (1991) reminds us, are found in masochism.

In *Seven Easy Pieces*, Abramović uses visibility and invisibility to signify presence and absence, respectively, and this signification raises ethical issues attached to each state of being absent or present. Simply put, the 'presence' of the performers in the past, referencing them as landmarks in the history of art, makes her 'absent' as a site, stage or body, occupied by their 'presence', however momentarily. She is reduced to functioning as a sign for their 'originary' acts. But this may also be a parody of such a process of objectification. To think in this way is to ignore her ongoing discomfort, which undermines any ethical responsibility we might owe to her as a witness or observer of these acts of self-harm. One of the traditional defining features of performance is that it needs an audience, a witness and accomplice to help realize the delay, denial, exposure. In acknowledging the facticity of Abramović's pain and discomfort, we are brought back to the reality of her body and our witnessing body, making the past performers and their 'acts', and our memory of them, absent, along with the abstract notion of pain as a trans-historical phenomenon. Abramović reminds us that we must ask, 'Whose pain?' visibility (presence) and invisibility (absence) continually change places and defer each other.

We sometimes disarm the threat of pain if we are able to convince ourselves that it is justified, just as we might justify going through a surgical procedure by considering its benefits, and this reasoning is often built on a system of concepts, a system that is implied in the structures of *Seven Easy Pieces* itself. Another way of containing the fear of pain, or the feeling of degradation that *Seven Easy Pieces* may produce, is to question the verity of the acts, or to invest in the notion of representation or theatre, or to remain sceptical of the underlying motives for such a display. These responses allow us to disbelieve that any discomfort or pain occurs at all. We might reason that Abramović is at liberty to halt the performance if she so desires. Yet, in such a case, we are still testing the limits of *her*

endurance, which casts us in the role of voyeur. Abramović's acts transform our looking into complicity or self-inspection. However we filter out brute reality or transform it into something intelligible, Abramović succeeds in spatializing, indeed, embodying and reflecting back our structuration of concepts to do with ethical engagement, modulation of emotion and self-identity. And continually, through all this, there is a nagging pain that must be mastered or made absent, or disseminated through a play of signs in order to divert attention for the relative comfort of the performer, viewer or commentator years removed from the performance.

I would like to believe that if I were there witnessing Abramović cutting a star into her abdomen with a piece of broken glass, the archive would vanish in favour of my feeling appalled and overcome with spreading empathy, but I cannot be sure that this is how I would react. My conviction is that it *should* become an ethical decision to avoid reducing *Seven Easy Pieces* (whether witnessed first-hand or viewed as digital images ordered by curators) into an abstract and aesthetically organized archive, or a marketing ploy, while ignoring the brute facts of pain and incidents of self-harm extended into a seven-hour or seven-day duration. The concept of the archive and its intricacies helps me to make sense, order and delay raw sensations, as it could do for the artist herself during these ordeals, not only because the archive always points to a provenance outside itself, as Derrida believes, but also, as a concept the archive enables a distancing from and an abstracting away. Discerning a curatorial motive could help viewers to defer ethical decisions. Perhaps, after all, these acts should not make sense, not be effortlessly folded into representations of the reasonable, normal or successful. As *pharmakon*, the scapegoat that assures the passage from violence to the sacred, Abramović places herself at the centre of the age-old battle between those who favour a distanced or detached viewing of art, easily allied to cynicism, and others who urge a direct involvement in it, transforming a hitherto largely aesthetic, curatorial concern into an issue of the duty of care.

On day seven (the day of 'rest') Abramović performed *Entering the Other Side* (a title which reminds one of the Ouroboros, the serpent swallowing its tail enacted also by Vito Acconci in his *Trademarks (*1970). The performance demonstrated yet another category of performance to do with transforming the body into an idol or mandala, standing on the apex of a high structure with her arms held out forming a cross with a dress that falls to the ground in a large circle, nesting inside the Guggenheim's spiralling form. For Jung, a transforming archetype is not necessarily about channelling a prior reality or personality into a reified present, but is about the transformational process itself. Transformational archetypes:

> …include typical situations, geometric figures, places, and other means that emerge when the personality is moving toward change, and particularly that balancing sort of transformation which will result in the experience of 'wholeness' or 'totality', the archetype of the self. The main archetypes of transformation discussed by Jung are the mandala, a Sanskrit word meaning magic circle whose symbolism includes all

concentrically arranged figures, all radial or spherical arrangements, and all circles or squares with a central point […] and the quaternity, which has to do with geometrical figures being divisible by four, having four sides, or four directions. (Fischer 2010: 31)

One does not have to commit to Jungian psychology and mysticism to see that *Seven Easy Pieces* uses archetypal imagery, as did Gina Pane, Joseph Beuys and Carolee Schneemann, while Abramović and Ulay's early works explored the anima/animus archetypes. It seems questionable to insist on gauging Abramović's level of commitment to these traditions as a critical method, or to speculate on her motivations as an originary that circumscribes and limits interpretation of *Seven Easy Pieces*. Instead, we could understand *Seven Easy Pieces* not as a return but as a departure, an écart,[4] within signifying systems, or even as a staging of a crisis in representation. This is one of the conditions of performance: the pure impossibility of deciding what is serious and what is 'play'.

With *Seven Easy Pieces*, we can see a coding and a recoding of traditions and domains. As with Matthew Barney's hierarchical levels of initiation, in his *Cremaster Cycle*, where he linked the semiotics of the body with architecture by scaling the levels of the same spiralling form of the Guggenheim Museum years before, Abramović disciplines the docile body into the diagram of the mandala, nested into the architectural spiral of the Guggenheim. Consistent with the underlying logic of the mandala, she becomes not a symbol of fixity, but of the transformation of self to a higher plane. As Barney imaginatively transformed the spiral form into a hierarchy of levels of initiation, from novice below to adept above, the building is turned into a cult sanctuary by attendance of the circling visitors below. According to Jungian archetypes, a sacred space is created not by the structure itself but by the act of circumambulation by visitors, creating a scission: a round monument is 'set apart' from the profane. The performance manages to implicate the spiral architectural form that leads the eye up further around the monument as a symbol of vertiginous transformation. As with traditional cosmologies, *Entering the Other Side* is a series of analogies that traverse micro- and macro-cosmic dimensions. Seven pieces, seven hours, seven days, the seven levels of the Guggenheim Museum[5] are implicated in the tradition of the artist-creator coming full circle and emerging, as an epiphany, from a series of seven tests: *Entering the Other Side*, the last act, suggests the threshold that joins an end to a new beginning, a rite of passage. In Derridean parlance, both linear progression and cyclical repeat are put into a continual spiral of *différance* where the play of the ordinary and the imaginary is sustained. I am not claiming that these suggestions as to how we can organize the material of *Seven Easy Pieces* are definitive; I am merely showing an aspect of its polysemy, an open work that I believe is the aim of many artists.

It is interesting that in 2010 Tino Seghal extended the mythical tradition associated with the spiral as a kind of 'interpretation' of Barney and Abramović's examples. The idea of using the ascending levels of the spiral of the Guggenheim's architecture, a spatial and visual facticity, to make concrete, and to situate, the structure of myth, not only as something that returns, but which has many levels of progressively more expert

knowledge, was also used in Sehgal's 2010 show, *This Progress*, also at the Guggenheim Museum. A child meets visitors at the base of the spiral and asks them the meaning of progress. Visitors ascend the spiral discussing progress with the child, and at a higher level, a high-school student continues the conversation. At the next level, the conversation progresses with a teenager, until they meet an adult and then, eventually, they meet a much older adult in her later years at the upper-most level of the spiral.

Seen as a transformation of myth and art, including the myth of performance art, *Seven Easy Pieces* is a configural totality, a conceptual system or archive that is ritually acted out by performer and audience over seven days in order for various transformations to arise, whether these are Jungian and mythical, psychological, phenomenological, biological, art historical, cultural and social, feminist or as a post-structuralist play of signs and an unravelling of sign systems. One of these important transformations is turning the archive into performance not as retrieval but as heterotopia, where any or all of these different ways of interpreting and transforming the work may come into play. Rather than discrete lexical units that signify a unique etymology traced back to an original, the overall performance within which are nested other performances, provides an ever-varying context and system of relations that are open-ended. We are constantly citing the previous speech of others, but no citation is ever a repeat because of the ever-changing context of social exchanges, sensations, spatializations and durations it finds itself in. The newness of the seventh day gives hope to the disillusioned who see only the abyss of repeats, or the failure to repeat.

Seven Easy Pieces suggests embodied metaphors of transformation with woman at the cosmic centre of art as both creator and curator in a domain where, traditionally, she has been considered only a novice or muse. This last performance within a performance is a work that reveals the ancient representational codes and conventions of myth and ritual centred on the body—by *performing* these very codes—along with destabilizing the logic of curating, suggesting an unsettled and unsettling flux of signification. *Seven Easy Pieces* could be described using Josette Féral's description of performance, that it offers 'nothing to grasp, project, introject, except for flows, networks, and system. Everything appears and disappears like a galaxy of "transitional objects" representing only the failures of representation' (Féral 1982: 179).

What I would like to suggest is that, as with Hamlet and the play within a play, *Seven Easy Pieces* raises the question of whether it is possible at all to have such a thing as 'meta-performance': a performance that, within its performing, inherently unravels its own codes *as performance*. I do not think that this is regress: on the contrary, if we leave behind interpretations that seek to close the work into ever-tightening springs of narrow interest, we are free to expand into other possibilities, particularly because art's 'effects and meanings are not anticipated' (Rancière 2009: 103); *Seven Easy Pieces* provides an 'emancipation of the viewer'. This is because it opens up to ethical, sensory and emotional exploration, in addition to providing access to an imaginary that has the power to transform what we expect of performance, curating and the archive. Art history should

not narrow down interpretative possibilities into a catalogue (*katalogue* = *kata* (down); *logue* = word) but should show us the possibilities of analogical thought (*ana* = (up); *logue* = word).

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Notes

1. *Des Espace Autres*, March 1967, http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/foucault1.pdf. Accessed 12 September 2014.

2. Of course, this does not detract from the collaboration, reciprocity and creativity that can occur between artists and curators.

3. In an interview with Amelia Jones, Abramović stated quite clearly that she was quite interested in the ambiguities of an 'originary' act, EXPORT'S *Genital Panic* was 'a great contradiction [in terms of the issue of "live" versus documented performance] because she also made the photograph in her studio and there are lots of different images of that poster. And she wouldn't give me any clear answers when I asked her

about it' (Jones, 2011: 28). Clearly, Abramović was interested in contradictions while Jones merely condemns them. And later on, Abramović stated that she was happy only to 'create an image' of *Genital Panic* (quoted in Jones 2011: 29), which reveals the artist's awareness of the representational problem of simulacra. The fact that *Genital Panic* was shown not to have happened in the way it was subsequently portrayed (the artist only performed the piece before a photographer) could underline the fact that Abramović's performance was concerned with the futility of retrieval, not trying to restore an originary in a naïve way. The futility of repeated actions, the unsuccessful scratching of an itch, has always been a central concern in Abramović's work.

4. In Derrida, écart (gap, distance, difference) is a reverse anagram of 'trace'. The trace does not simply duplicate an originary but complicates this equivalence by showing itself somehow as a difference. Simply put, we can either see something as a repeat or see that it is a slight difference.

5. The number seven was obviously chosen because of how it features in so many myths from the descent of Venus into the underworld to the myth of Ariadne, the seven sages, heavenly bodies, sins etc.

Chapter 8

Curating the City: *Collectioneering* and the Affects of Display

Jim Drobnick and Jennifer Fisher

The projects of DisplayCult explore curatorial methodology by combining a critical manner of working with an interest in the mediating aspects of exhibitions. Our approach is influenced by a studio art formation in conceptual art from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and from subsequent academic engagement with cultural studies, affect theory and media analysis. The name 'DisplayCult' alludes to the etymological link between 'culture' and 'cult'. On the one hand, our intent is to interrogate the cultural politics of exhibition practices, while at the same time mobilizing the collectively charged energies endemic to live aesthetic experiences.[1] Considering exhibitions as performative events, we acknowledge that the curatorial endeavour entails what Michael Hardt (1999) has labelled 'affective labour', which we understand in terms of our efforts to *make space feel* by creating installations that impel affective experience. As well as configuring artefacts, then, our curatorial approach attempts to engage the often invisible, yet powerful energies emergent in art, objects and contexts.

Collectioneering originated when DisplayCult was invited by the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (AEAC) to curate a multi-venue project throughout the city of Kingston, Ontario.[2] We had just completed a museum intervention at Eldon House, a historical museum in London, Ontario, and were keen to work on a larger scale.[3] *Collectioneering* comprised one facet of our tripartite exhibition project. The two other facets were *Museopathy*, a series of ten commissioned interventions by artists in specialist museums and historical sites throughout the city,[4] and *Empathology*, four site-specific performances.[5] We configured all three components within a reciprocating dynamic: just as artworks and performance artists were installed in non-art museums, artefacts from those same historical sites and museums were exhibited in the AEAC's contemporary art space. The dynamics and tensions of these exhibition events together performed a catalytic role in re-conceptualizing the sweep of material culture across the city's historical institutions.

Kingston is regularly listed as one of the most livable cities in Canada. With a population of 120,000, above-average income and a stable economy, it possesses the advantages of a city without the challenging social and infrastructural issues that can hamper major urban centres such as Toronto or Montreal.[6] Citizens take pride in the region's historical significance, especially its prominence in the nineteenth century when it was the residence of Canada's first prime minister and served as the country's capital (1841–44). Since then, the erosion of its role as a seat of government has been offset by the establishment of sizable public service institutions for health, corrections, education and the military, which now dominate the civic landscape. Home to nine prisons, three

Figure 1. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view of vitrine with fossilized lizard in amber, collection of the Miller Museum of Geology, Queen's University (*c*.35 million years old); tobacco case (Japanese) (n.d.), wooden gall and wood, collection of Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University; and Joseph Towne, *Baby's Arm* (*c*.1890), oil-painted wax, glass jar, metal lid and painted parchment, model showing vaccination vesicle on tenth day, Faculty of Medicine Collection at the Museum of Health Care at Kingston. Photo: Paul Litherland.

hospitals, three universities and one of Canada's primary military bases, Kingston in 2001 had the somewhat dubious distinction of housing the largest number of incarcerated in the country, along with sustaining the nation's biggest student population per capita (Hracs 2009: 48).

Given the significance of such substantial and long-standing institutions of power and knowledge, Kingston exemplified what we called 'a Foucauldian dream' readily evident in the organizations of surveillance, punishment and regulation that suffuse the civic environment.[7] What is distinctive about Kingston is that many of these institutions are funded and directed by officials located elsewhere—prisons and the military are the responsibility of the federal government in Ottawa, while hospitals and universities are overseen by the province in Toronto. Yet, even as these institutions impress formidable edifices upon the urban landscape and comprise the city's main employers, they stand somewhat detached from the local community.[8] The result is a 'silo' effect whereby each institution functions for, and answers to, governing bodies external to Kingston, thus disengaging them from the immediacy of the city's concerns (Hracs 2009: 48, 52; Bedore and Donald 2011: 191–99).

One of our goals in curating *Collectioneering* centred on transforming Kingston's evident institutional isolation by provisionally connecting its disparate museums through their collections. In our initial research we were struck by the number and diversity of museums and historical sites in such a medium-sized city, made all the more remarkable for their apparent insularity. Each category of institution—hospital, prison, university, military—had established at least one museum or designated heritage site, and each supported an ongoing collection to document and animate its history. Through extensive site visits we developed a network of participating museums from across the city and sought to link the diverse material culture of Kingston's institutions within one project.[9] In many ways, the relationships we established in curating *Collectioneering* resulted in a show that drew from both formal and historical narratives to curatorially re-examine the artefacts, settings, relationships and governing discourses of the city's museological heritage.

Collectioneering presented over 400 artefacts that we borrowed from the city's collections and then arranged in non-inferential, or primarily affective, juxtapositions in the manner of a post-medium *wunderkammer*. Like the artists' interventions situated at the sites themselves, *Collectioneering* engaged the neologism 'museopathy': our term for the peregrination of the 'paths' that linked the collections of the city as well as the 'pathic' or affective modalities of collection triggered by the configurations of objects from disparate institutions.[10] While all of the components of *Museopathy* pertained to the affective qualities of objects and spaces, each engaged affect quite differently. The interventions by artists into museums and heritage sites were immersive and involved installing works within highly charged contexts. *Collectioneering*, by contrast, reconfigured museum objects into ludic and compelling relationships intensified by their links to multiple sources, patinas and tales of provenance.

Displaying the objects of *Collectioneering* in the white cube of the AEAC had the effect of strengthening the aesthetic gaze upon non-art artefacts: the objects would be temporarily viewed as art before returning to the locations (and meanings) of their originating collections. By reconfiguring the ways in which objects could be posed in a city's self-representation, *Collectioneering* proposed a meta-museological display within *Museopathy*'s overall exhibition context. Merging art and artefacts in mutual relationships, the project spanned disciplinary boundaries to posit uncustomary linkages between aesthetics, history, popular culture, science and art. These temporary configurations in turn generated discussion about the conventional meanings and practices of collecting, display and museal experience.

Resulting from a two-year-long material trek through the vitrines and storerooms of a dozen Kingston museums and historical sites,[11] the titling of *Collectioneering* intentionally called to mind the activities of orienteering and mountaineering, pursuits that match physical endeavour with focus, patience, intuition and endurance. On a civic level, *Collectioneering* tracked how a community collects itself and constructs a historical, geographic and public identity; on a museological level, it proposed a dialectical display practice that posed the affect of patina against the discourses of provenance; on a curatorial level, it presented objects in heuristic constellations that invited viewers into present engagement, rather than into a museological past. Our curatorial concept expressly sought to focus the exhibition as a sequence of affectively charged moments that intensified the relations between agents, objects and museums.[12]

The three projects of *Museopathy*, *Empathology* and *Collectioneering* entailed different curatorial modalities. While *Museopathy* and *Empathology* involved a centrifugal logic, whereby contemporary art interventions were commissioned in specialist museums across the city, *Collectioneering* was premised on a centripetal logic, whereby objects from those same museums were drawn into the AEAC's white cube. Selecting and working with artists to intervene into compelling sites is standard curatorial practice. For *Collectioneering*, however, we adopted the agency of working with ready-made objects that were de- and re-contextualized in the manner of conceptual art. In the sections below, we elaborate on some of the key aspects of our curatorial approach to *Collectioneering*.

Tempting Provenance

While museum artefacts are customarily obtained by the means of donation or purchase, many of the objects from Kingston museums featured in *Collectioneering* entered their respective museums by highly uncommon means. Artefacts had been acquired by being seized, abandoned, decommissioned, rendered obsolete, salvaged, won in a competition, lived with, excavated or surgically removed. Likewise, *Collectioneering* featured objects that had been created, selected or found by individuals not usually associated with
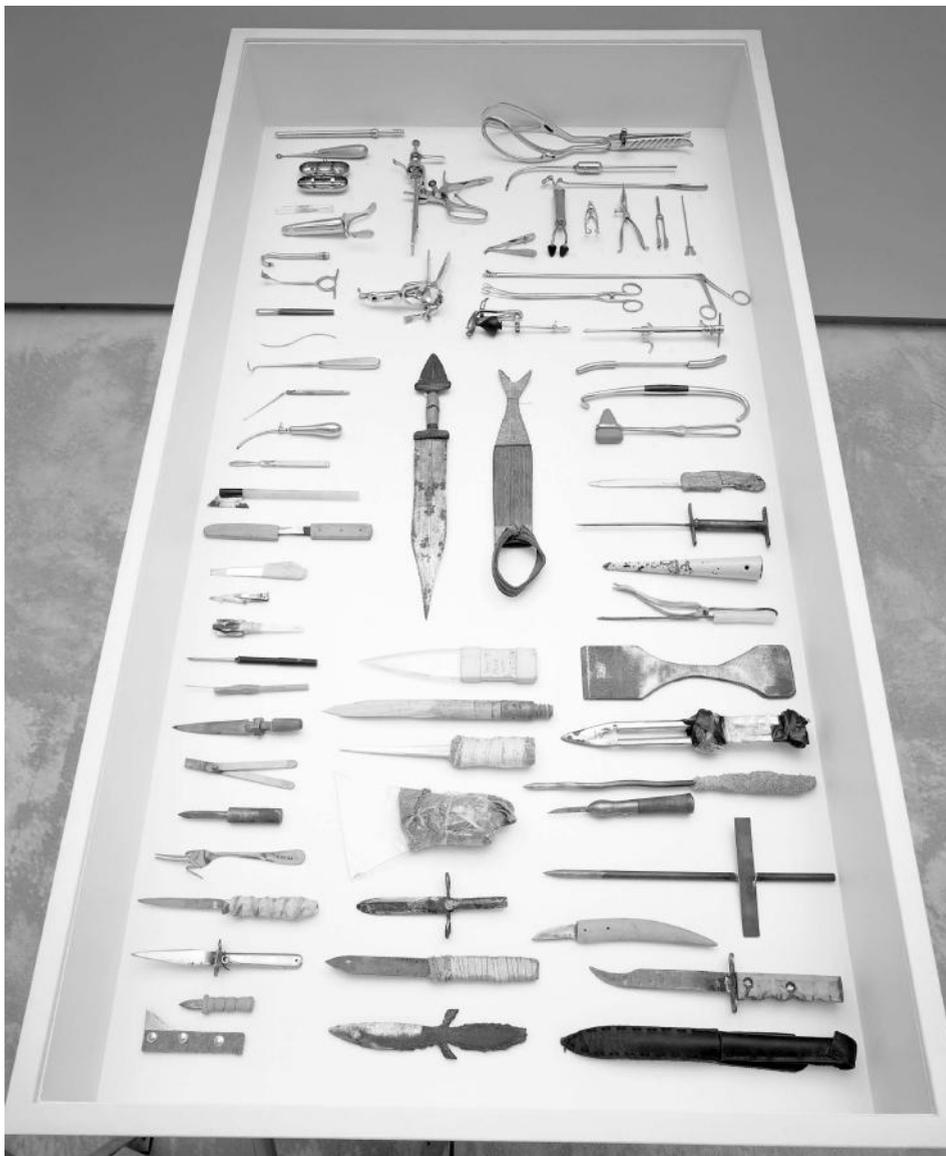
Figure 2. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view of vitrine with confiscated inmate shivs (1950s–1980s), mixed media, including metal, glass, plastic, wood, tape, string, leather and paint, collection of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum; executioner's knife (Ashanti) (*c.*1890), metal and fish-skin, collection of the Royal Military College of Canada Museum (gift of RMC #162 Major-General Sir Casmir Van Straubenzee); and surgical instruments (nineteenth–twentieth century), mixed media, including stainless steel, nickel, chrome, rubber and plastic, collection of the Museum of Health Care at Kingston. Photo: Paul Litherland.

artistic production: prisoners and their guards; doctors, nurses and patients; sailors and boat-builders; hockey players, coaches and fans; university students and professors; cadets and soldiers. The eccentric and sometimes mysterious provenance of many of the extraordinary objects in *Collectioneering* contributed to their affective significance.

Besides being gathered by professional curators in various fields, artefacts held in Kingston's museums also found their way into collections by chance and serendipity. At one extreme, objects arrived embellished with sensational or dramatic anecdotes, such as those handed down by adventurous world travellers and overseas military personnel. At the other extreme, objects appeared anonymously and unannounced. Divers and treasure hunters sometimes furtively (and one supposes remorsefully) dropped off boxes outside the Marine Museum of the Great Lake's doors containing illegally scavenged goods from untraceable shipwrecks—unexpected presents known in-house as 'the guilts'. Still other objects carried little knowledge of the maker or specific context. At the Correctional Service of Canada Museum, for instance, the mode of acquiring shivs and shanks would be *confiscation* (as distinct from purchase or donation crucial to establishing provenance) as they were among the many contraband items taken from prisoners so regularly that few, if any, records were kept. As well, *Collectioneering* presented a number of these items rescued from storeroom oblivion. Without definite provenance the objects became blank slates for the imagination to sketch in and define. The unspecified heritage left artefacts temptingly open to the projection of meanings and interpretations—and both the risk and poetry this activity implies.[13]

Material Constellations

The installation of *Collectioneering* at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre comprised twenty-three material groupings composed of objects of vastly different origins. Our intention was to experiment with display prototypes through placing affectively resonant objects in material groupings—what we called 'constellations'. While the term 'constellation' has surfaced in curatorial discourse in recent years, in 2001 we envisioned our exhibitionary arrangements as a materialist version of Walter Benjamin's notion of a constellatory epistemology (Benjamin 1977: 34–35). In the same way that a constellation is formed of a number of stars, we configured the thematic concept of each display by taking into consideration the gravitational force of its proximal artefacts. Like the relative force of planetary bodies, *Collectioneering*'s clusters of objects signified according to a range of conjunctural, harmonic, intensifying or polarizing mimetic and auratic aspects. Each arrangement retained the integrity of the individual objects, yet at the same time revealed the polysemy that can result from the mutual influence of other objects. The engagements produced were provisional, peripherally experienced, semically open and intentionally intuitive like philosophical contemplations or Zen koans that elicit intense engagement but defy singular, concrete interpretations.

Figure 3. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view and details of classical bust portrait (*c.*nineteenth century), plaster, collection of Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University; dummy heads from the Kingston Penitentiary, intended to resemble sleeping inmates, mop, hair and masking tape (1950s–1980s), mixed media, collection of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum. Photos: Paul Litherland.

It was important to us that an ethics of equivalence was maintained between museum genres of art and other forms of material culture. Precedence was given to neither art nor history, beauty nor provenance, craftsmanship nor uniqueness. As art objects gained new meanings by being placed alongside artefacts, everyday and atypical objects were reframed in terms of aesthetic experience. This display strategy deliberately foregrounded a mutuality between objects of dissimilar discursive formations, as distinct from exhibitions that position and evaluate objects within monological disciplines. Staged with neither interpretative texts nor governing thematic narratives, the objects in the exhibition encompassed both the strengths and anomalies of the nine host collections. Labels identified the lending museum for each object, serving as an essential thread to the originating disciplinary context, even as it was being dramatically rearticulated. Yet any sense of irreverence in our acts of re-contextualization was not oriented to the objects themselves, but rather towards unsettling exhibition conventions that confine multivalent objects within authoritative habits and singular disciplinary truths.[14]

Rhetorics of Display

After our process of researching collections, the objects in *Collectioneering*—many long obscured in storerooms—were emphatically exposed in the modernist crispness of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre's paradigmatic white cube. Such an architecture both foregrounded the visual and amplified the formal qualities of the exhibited objects. Of particular significance to *Collectioneering* was how its rhetoric of display underscored the revealing of objects. The Greek word *deiktikis*, meaning 'to exhibit', 'to show forth', or 'to make known' is the opposite of the verb 'to conceal' (Prelli 2006: 2–3). The exhibition plan was contrived deliberately to bring the objects to light—to *emanate* as affectively luminous elements within their constellations—thereby temporarily freeing them from functioning within normative, and often pedagogical, museum narratives.

In theorizing exhibition rhetorics in their specificity, Stephen Bann (1984) has provided a useful model for adapting forms of textual rhetoric—metonymy and synecdoche—into the spatial aspects of exhibition. Metonymic displays, he writes, pose objects as specimens dislocated from their originating discourse; an overarching display framework then imposes classification and significance. The practice of inserting non-art objects into an aesthetic milieu, thus making them 'art', then, can be understood as a metonymic impulse (e.g. Duchamp's ready-mades). Synecdochic displays, in turn, consider objects as relics, as fragments of a whole that, like puzzle pieces, fit together to form a greater reconstituted totality (Bann 1984: 85–91).

The constellations of *Collectioneering* shared some aspects of metonymy and synecdoche, but in general their repositioning of objects involved neither a new, cogent classificatory scheme nor a larger, illusionistic *mise-en-scène*. A key distinction is that the objects were arranged in groups rather than as discrete objects. *Collectioneering*'s

constellatory arrangements shared more with the partiality of assemblage, as well as with other rhetorical strategies, such as irony (dual or contradictory meaning), or syntactical ploys usually considered faults or errors, such as catachresis (misapplication of words, i.e. mixed metaphors) and malapropism (inappropriate use of words). By carefully cultivating overdeterminations and deliberate disjunctures of genre, historical era and typology, the object arrangements generated double and triple meanings.[15] The improper (and sometimes impertinent) display techniques yielded irresolvable contradictions, humorous and poignant contrasts, aesthetic and politicized readings, all contingently and provisionally uttered within the display forum of a temporary exhibition.

By juxtaposing curiosities and masterpieces, trophies and specimens, fetishes and contraband, *Collectioneering* mobilized energetic tensions between incompatible objects, emphasizing alternative ways of ruminating upon their artful and auratic capacities. No authoritative interpretations or systematic narratives were presented; no titles were given to the groupings; what remained was a provocative heterogeneity aligned to generate diverse insights that were conspicuously open to audience negotiation. Rather than closure, we sought to construct constellations that would invite poetic, idiosyncratic, critical and interdisciplinary acts of reflection.

A Post-Medium *Wunderkammer*

Reflecting on *Collectioneering* a decade later, we now describe it as a post-medium curatorial initiative. In this post-medium approach, curatorial agency assumes a distinctly catalytic role as the stakes of curatorship encompass not only questions of discourse and representation, but also the non-discursive aspects of affect, proximity, contingency and experience. Acknowledging that the exhibition experience is necessarily performative brings questions of choreography to curatorship as both presentation and enactment are integrated within the exhibition's realms of sensation and possibility (Fisher 2006: 33).

In this sense, the eccentric arrangements central to *Collectioneering* required enactment continuous with the idiosyncratic apprehension of the pre-modern *wunderkammer*. *Wunderkammern*, or 'cabinets of curiosities', cached a wide-ranging assortment of artisanal objects, relics, travel souvenirs and wondrous items of natural history, an accumulation that would only cohere through the passionate whims and testimony of its collector. Access to these collections was limited to the intimate circles of the owner, who tended to reveal the objects first-hand to others. Each object became a touchstone for tales of acquisition and significance. As such, the *wunderkammer* created a juncture of empirical objects and eccentric theologies as highly personalized readings of reality (see Bann 1995: 24).

Despite the eclipse of the *wunderkammer* by the rise of state museums and the professionalization of collecting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the cabinet of curiosity remains an unruly exhibition type that sustains the reputedly dark

remnants of irrationality cast aside and repressed by the project of the Enlightenment. What is fascinating about the *wunderkammer* as a display form is that it eludes logical explanation, bears hybridized identities and inspires reverie, and thus resists both taxonomic mastery and categorizing imperatives.

If curiosity was the overriding sentiment pertaining to the collection and appreciation of the original *wunderkammer*, what purposes can it serve in the contemporary realm when science has purportedly explained many of life's mysteries? The objects chosen by us during our months of curatorial *flânerie* extended the etymological root shared by both 'curate' and 'curious' (Fisher 1996: 211–13). Admittedly, our curiosity was a governing impulse as we found ourselves drawn to intriguing objects. To some extent our personal proclivities and recognitions formed the trajectory of assimilation and arrangement that deliberately blurred disciplines, genres and styles. Our stance was patently self-conscious in selecting and juxtaposing artefacts. *Collectioneering* rearticulated the significance of objects both *contiguous to* and *in-between* their collections, to configure objects of the exhibitionary complex of Kingston in a nexus of temporary interconnections.

Typologies of Heterogeneity

Collectioneering explicitly emphasized the contingent and extra-discursive impact of the configurations of artefacts. Rather than a didactic panel, we decided to disperse the 200 words that had been allotted to us onto two walls of the gallery to create *glossary murals* positioned at the entry points of the exhibition. Arranged as entities (rather than as prose), the words hinted at the numerous ways objects are defined, evaluated and codified. Atomized terms such as 'artifact', 'collectible', 'evidence', 'fetish', 'masterpiece' or 'tchotchke', stood with many others, intimating that the contents of the gallery would be diverse and semantically open. This deliberately non-expository compendium suggested the wide range of valences resulting from the conjunctions of objects from vastly divergent governing discourses.

Collectioneering's constellations could be roughly grouped into four display typologies: arrangements based on (1) the *wunderkammer*, and those that were (2) dialectical, (3) indexical and (4) humanist. Each typology acted as a conjunctural form, in which coherence was provisional and temporary. The form of connection we utilized was modelled after Stuart Hall's theory of 'articulation', his term for conducting theoretical work by drawing upon differing approaches and bringing them into fresh relationships. For Hall, the articulation model describes two simultaneous ac-

Collectioneering drew from nine Kingston-based museums and historical sites:

Agnes Etherington Art Centre (AEAC)

The AEAC holds one of the largest and most varied collections for a Canadian university art gallery. Formed from the bequest of its namesake patron, Agnes Etherington, in 1957, the gallery incorporates her neo-Georgian mansion within a sleek modern art museum on the campus of Queen's University. Notable strengths include

tions: to 'utter' or to 'speak forth' a rhetorical procla-mation that is simultaneously an event and a product; and 'to link in the matter of the connection between two trains', that is, to form a conditional unity of dis-courses, social groups, political events and structures of social power. Such a link is impermanent, and can dissolve, be 'disarticulated' or 'rearticulated' in a dif-ferent manner (Hall, quoted in Grossberg 1986: 53). Adopting the theory of articulation within the field of curating, we understand *Collectioneering*'s constella-tions in the performative sense of spatial presentation; and the provisional linkages applying to three-dimen-sional installation arrangements. The articulations, or the grouping of objects into constellations, did not mean that the objects became equivalent, but rather that they maintained their specificity even within groupings. In *Collectioneering*, then, the objects sus-tained the histories and discourses of their originary museums, while gaining new, though temporary, con-notations as they performed within our constellatory arrangements.

Several constellations directly referenced the *wunderkammer* and its two main affective volitions: enigma and idiosyncrasy. The enigmatic constella-tions featured objects that problematically confused categories (evaporating distinctions between hu-man, animal, botanical and mineral) and created un-canny connections (between beauty and grotesque-ness, banality and mystery). 'Unstable' artefacts were grouped together in an arrangement of *emergent objects*, things immersed in, or erupting from, some-thing else—such as a lizard fossilized in amber, a face appearing in a tobacco case fashioned out of a tree knot, an inflamed smallpox pustule on a wax model of a baby's arm (Figure 1). These items existed in a precarious stasis, as if caught in the midst of apparent but unfinished metamorphosis, unstably arrested in states of becoming or decomposition. The idiosyn-cratic juxtapositions of the *wunderkammer* placed disparate objects into amalgamations so stretched that attempts to rationalize them could only rest

contemporary art, Renaissance and baroque drawings and prints, Inuit art, West African art and the Bader Collection, a group of over 100 Euro-pean old master paintings. *Collection-eering* borrowed objects from each of the collection's notable areas, such as baroque paintings, ethnographic shields and poison arrows, modern sculpture and a classical bust portrait.

Bellevue House National Historic Site

Bellevue House commemorates Can-ada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, who lived with his family here in 1848–49. The elegant interi-ors and scenic gardens represent the picturesque style and exemplify the Italianate Villa movement in Cana-dian architecture. While only a few objects in the collection can actually be traced to Macdonald, the build-ing was restored in 1967 to evoke the 1840s through the installation of pe-riod furnishings, lamps, china, wall-paper, quilts, kitchenware and other objects. Two choice objects found their way into *Collectioneering*'s con-stellatory groupings: a concave, in-verting mirror and a commemorative ribbon from Sir John A.'s funeral.

Correctional Service of Canada Museum

The Victorian limestone building of the Correctional Services of Canada (CSC) Museum was built by Kingston Penitentiary prisoners and originally served as the warden's residence. It contains an abundance of confiscated objects from Canada's oldest peniten-tiary that attest to the stark conditions of incarceration and the ingenuity of inmates. The threat of violence is con-veyed by numerous varieties of shivs

and shanks, the desire for escape shown by dummy heads crafted from papier mâché and mops, and the reality of punishment by the physical devices used to restrain and discipline. At times, the museum is staffed by former Kingston Penitentiary guards. The CSC loaned a number of items to *Collectioneering*, among them a series of mug shots, escape ladders and prisoners' artwork.

International Hockey Hall of Fame

The two-storey museum of green cinderblock walls and polished concrete floors, sited adjacent to a community arena and sports complex, features vitrines of Canadian and international hockey relics, photographs, jerseys, trading cards, banners and souvenirs. Founded in 1943 by the National Hockey League and the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, the museum enshrines a hall of fame featuring over 200 oak-framed photos of Canadian players such as Gordie Howe, and was sited in Kingston to celebrate what was at one time believed to be the birthplace of hockey. A souvenir figure of Wayne Gretzky and a set of Matryoshka dolls were featured in *Collectioneering*.

Marine Museum of the Great Lakes at Kingston

The Marine Museum signals Kingston's past as an important naval base during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when Britain and France struggled over the possession of North America. Once a centre of shipbuilding, Kingston is now known for its shipwrecks and underwater diving. Founded in 1975, the Museum preserves an abundance of Great Lakes heritage, and the adja-

upon notions of playfulness, lyricism, humour or unabashed contrivance. A stuffed chamois practice baby, used to rehearse delivery room procedures, was the centrepiece of an explicitly peculiar intersection of medical, military and marine navigational aids. Surrounded by a theodolite, sextant and telescope, the ET-like post-partum model (with placenta) suggested an alien meeting of the technological and the human. Here ships and foetuses bore associational and geographic similarities: both manoeuvre through fluid media and, historically, in Kingston, the launch of a ship and hospital birthing procedures occurred within a few hundred metres of each other.[16]

The second constellation type of *dialectical arrangements* was premised upon the relationships between artefacts. Objects of diverse origins abut and dynamically played off each other to create tensions and stressed meanings. The tensions generated in these juxtapositions unleashed an interstitial mode of display signification through their proxemic associations that challenged conventionally held assumptions and interpretations of the individual objects. These constellations tended to accentuate conflicts pertaining to class difference, the power of institutions and industries or the constructions of history. For example, one dialectical arrangement contrasted items designed to penetrate the human body—to either injure or save a life (Figure 2). Shivs (prisoners' weapons), surgical tools and an Ashanti executioner's knife signalled extreme differences in technological sophistication and artisanal skill. Despite the differences between a dagger created from melting a razor blade into a toothbrush, an ergonomic stainless steel scalpel or an intricately decorated ritual blade with fish-skin sheath, all revealed remarkable ingenuity. This presentation of artefacts evoked comparisons between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence, whether through the lethal inventiveness of inmates, the visceral intensity of medical procedures or lawful technologies of capital punishment. In another example of dialectical configuration a plaster-cast

Figure 4. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view and details of escape ropes and ladders, confiscated from Kingston Penitentiary and the Prison for Women (1970s–1990s), bedsheets, leather, blankets, rope, clamps, grappling hook and other media, collection of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum; Paolo de Matteis (attributed to) (Italian, 1662–1728), *Jacob's Dream* (*c*.1700), oil on canvas, collection of Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University; and 'F.T.W. Towers', untitled (*c*.1985), oil on canvas board, found in former Kingston Penitentiary hobby-craft storage area, collection of the Correctional Service of Canada Museum. Photos: Paul Litherland.

Figure 5. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view of Lambert Jacobsz (attributed to) (Dutch, *c.*1598–1636), *The Good Samaritan* (1640), oil on canvas, collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University, Gift of Drs Alfred and Isabel Bader, 1988; and stretcher (1890s), canvas and wood, collection of the Museum of Health Care at Kingston, Bird Collection. Photo: Paul Litherland.

Greco-Roman bust of a heroic male figure found in the AEAC's in-house art studio was juxtaposed with seven fake heads confiscated from prisoners' cells (Figure 3). When placed on a prison cot, these heads served as decoys during nightly head counts, fabricated skilfully out of toilet paper papier mâché and hair from the prison barbershop, with features rendered in shoe polish. Both the sculpture and the escape heads suggested a kind of bravado occurring at polarities of the class divide. The oversized Hellenic bust, idealizing the pinnacle of classical civilization, hovered above crude bricolaged decoys. While the studio cast was oriented to education, the prisoners' heads were geared to deception. Yet these contrary uses of portraiture divulged similarities despite the apparent polarity of aesthetic edification and desperate functionality—art is often utilized as a form of escape, and inmates can gain renown as escape 'artists'.[17]

A third display type, *indexical allegory*, paired paintings and objects to compare pictorial representations against material things. The dialogical relationship of artworks with real objects brought together the metaphorical with the literal, the iconic with things that had been physically used, in some cases for many years. In this third rhetoric of display a mutual transference occurred between the elements of the constellation: artefacts gained the semiological and auratic power of art, while painted representations gained grounding in tangible lives and events. For example, one display invoked escape fantasy on multiple registers (Figure 4). A painting attributed to Paolo de Matteis, *Jacob's Dream* (*c.*1700), was hung alongside of five ladders cunningly fashioned from ropes, blankets and curtains confiscated after over-the-wall escape attempts by penitentiary inmates. Also positioned as a counterpoint to the canvas was a prisoner's acrylic painting, signed F.T.W. Towers (FTW is prison vernacular for 'Fuck The World'). Its composition of a sunset and grotto was strikingly similar to that of the baroque painting, with the ex-

cent dry dock, designated a National Historic Site, maintains a link to the city's era of nautical prominence. Its largest artefact, the 210-foot Coast Guard icebreaker *Alexander Henry*, also serves as a bed & breakfast hotel. The Marine Museum contributed to *Collectioneering* such seagoing items as a sextant, life rings and scuba gear.

Miller Museum of Geology
Located in the Department of Geological Sciences on the main campus of Queen's University, the museum features an exquisite array of antique oak display cabinets that systematically present thousands of mineral specimens, fossils and crystals. Opened in 1931, it houses educational dioramas delineating the evolution of the earth and its life forms, a showcase focuses on the geology of the Kingston region, and the re-creation of an early geologist's laboratory provides visitors with a sense of how the science was practised. *Collectioneering* displayed several of the Miller Museum's most rare and ancient items—a lizard fossilized in amber; an example of Baby's Hair silver; and a 2.3 billion-year-old boulder of tillite.

Murney Tower National Historic Site
One of four Martello towers built in the 1840s during the Oregon Crisis to defend Kingston from naval bombardment, this heavily walled, circular fortification was rendered obsolete by advances in military technology. Since then, it served as a military outpost and barracks for the soldiers and families of the Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (1848–90), becoming a museum in 1925. Its collection includes a 32-pounder cannon and nu-

merous military artefacts, along with the recreated environments of a typical soldier's room and a gunpowder magazine. For *Museopathy*, we initially considered a proposal by Chris Burden to fire the tower's cannon, but such an act would have inevitably destroyed the historical site.

Museum of Health Care at Kingston

Housed in a former nurses' residence associated with the Kingston General Hospital complex, the oldest continuously operating public hospital in Canada, the Museum of Health Care documents the history of medical technology and practices over the past 150 years. It contains a noteworthy collection of 18,000 items of medical and surgical instruments, laboratory equipment, medicines and patient care items. Since 1988, its exhibitions have charted the development of medical milestones such as x-rays, anaesthesia and dialysis, along with focusing on nursing and health education. Pacemakers, surgical tools, patent medicines, wax somatotypes and a foetal skull were some of the objects borrowed for *Collectioneering*.

Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) Museum

The RMC Museum resides within a Martello tower on the point at Fort Frederick, the training grounds for the military officers of Canada's unified forces. The location, where Lake Ontario and the St Lawrence River conjoin, is strategic. Although never fired upon, the tower was built in the 1840s to counter the threat of war with the United States. After serving as a fortification and barracks, its rooms were converted in 1962 to

ception of an additional element—two Hell's Angel's choppers. The biblical story of Jacob's reverie, a ladder that would deliver him to heaven and away from life's afflictions, when refracted through actual escape devices fabricated by prisoners (among them is Tyrone Conn's infamous ladder),[18] attested to the compelling interlinkages between emancipatory fantasies in both corporeal and spiritual domains. Another pairing comprising an indexical allegory display rhetoric posed a painting attributed to Lambert Jacobz, *The Good Samaritan* (1640), against a medical stretcher from the Museum of Health Care used during the First World War (Figure 5). While the oil paint on canvas depicted a representation of the virtuous act of caring for a vulnerable stranger, the canvas stretcher leaning on the gallery wall beside it exhibited the stains of body fluids from injured bodies, along with wooden handles showing the patina of countless assisting hands. The stretcher's travails in the dark horror and inclement conditions of combat rescue efforts palpably exemplified the compassion and suffering symbolized in the biblical tale.[19]

The fourth type of arrangement aligned iconic values traditionally presumed to be shared by people regardless of time, geography or social situation. We termed these 'humanistic constellations' because they expressed through their productive diversity of representation and fabrication gripping commonalities despite the diverse cultural formations of their makers. Rather than ascribing some totalizing version of universalism, this curatorial rationale was concerned with interrogating how similarity and difference can be provoked and negotiated in the artefactual domain. One constellation premised on the idea of protective technologies presented prisoners' riot armour improvised from furnishings from the Kingston Penitentiary; hockey pads from the Hockey Hall of Fame; nineteenth-century lead nipple shields from the Museum of Health Care; and museum-standard preparator's gloves from the Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Figure 6). The concern with aegis—militarily

Figure 6. *Collectioneering* (2001), installation view of vitrine with hard hat (2001), plastic, collection of the Miller Museum of Geology, Queen's University; radiology safety goggles (*c.*1940–60), plastic and elastic, collection of the Museum of Health Care at Kingston; respirator and combat helmet (Canadian) (1939–40), steel, mask, cannister and carrying case, issued to Lt. (later Col.) C. F. Way, collection of the Royal Military College of Canada Museum; and preparator's gloves (2001), cloth, collection of the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Queen's University. Photo: Paul Litherland.

exhibit RMC memorabilia including uniforms, orders and decorations of senior military officials, an eccentric array of war booty and a renowned collection of firearms and swords. For *Collectioneering*, RMC donated a diverse range of items, including a Zulu shield, an Ashanti executioner's knife, an elephant tooth, toy soldiers, a meerschaum pipe, a suit of armour and numerous tin soldiers.

and otherwise—is a predominant theme in Kingston area museums. Behind the diversity of originary cultures, styles, craftsmanship and intended purposes lay a preoccupation with defence as a common end. Another humanistic display featured miniature figures that render the body symbolically controllable. Contrasting modes of corporeal figuration in popular, artistic and professional cultures reflected the variety of ends such representations mobilize. One display case grouped wax medical somatotypes—models of female physiological pathologies—with hockey dolls from Russia, Romania and Canada. The dissimilarity of nude wax figures (sculpted by Marjorie Winslow in the 1940s),[20] sport memorabilia and a Wayne Gretzky doll evoked compellingly different affects of proportion, texture and facial countenance. Together they demonstrated the distinctions between skilled artisanship, mass merchandizing and folkloric production in human representations of analogous scale.[21]

Whether the configurations described above presented wondrous, dialectical, indexical or humanistic display typologies, the constellations of *Collectioneering* asked audiences to take part in oblique linkages that combined pathic and epistemological modes, curiosity and incongruity, rhetoric and perception. The constellations articulated the elements of display in terms of the temporary exhibition's dynamics of collection and presentation, while interrogating the degree to which auratic traces could be carried by objects. The shifts we introduced through our conceptual work served to blur the distinction between curatorial and artistic activity. By decentring normative ways of reading embedded in traditional museum display practices, *Collectioneering* forged unusual connections between objects, institutions and histories and, even if only for summer's duration, played a catalytic role in rearticulating the exhibitionary culture of Kingston.

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Notes

1. Many of DisplayCult's projects expressly engage an aspect of living display, such as *CounterPoses* (1998), where twelve performance installations populated an entire building in Montreal for three days and enacted contemporary versions of *tableaux vivants* (Drobnick and Fisher 2002a). Most of our curating involves commissioning artists to produce new works, generally performances or site-specific installations. *Collectioneering* was one of the few dealing with pre-existing objects and artefacts, though we would argue that in the new arrangements these objects were made to perform.

2. We are grateful to Jan Allen, curator at the AEAC, for her institutional and administrative support during the project. This text expands upon our writing originally published in the *Museopathy* catalogue, see Drobnick and Fisher (2002b) and http://www.displaycult.com/exhibitions/museopathy.html.

3. *The Servant Problem* (1999) involved a series of performative interventions into the nineteenth-century period rooms of Eldon House. By adopting the roles of a scullery maid and a security guard, we utilized historical and contemporary *tableaux vivants* to examine class politics and the under-recognized role of servants in this heritage home/museum (Drobnick and Fisher 1999).

4. *Museopathy* featured ten artists stationed at different museums and heritage sites: John Dickson (Marine Museum of the Great Lakes), FASTWÜRMS (Miller Museum of Geology), Jamelie Hassan (Museum of Health Care), Barb Hunt (Royal Military College of Canada Museum), Brian Jungen (Correctional Service of Canada Museum), Komar & Melamid (with William McClelland) (Grant Hall Tower, Queen's University), Anne Ramsden (Murney Tower National Historic Site), Mitch Robertson (International Hockey Hall of Fame), Joyce Wieland (Museum Ship *Alexander Henry* at the Marine Museum) and Mel Ziegler (Bellevue House National Historic Site). See the sidebar for a brief description of the sites.

5. *Empathology* artists included Diane Borsato (at the Royal Military College of Canada Museum), Peter Hobbs (at the Bellevue House National Historic Site), Linda M. Montano (at the Museum Ship *Alexander Henry* at the Marine Museum) and Clive Robertson (all ten *Museopathy* sites).

6. This is not to say that the city does not have its own set of problems. Hracs (2009) articulates several that are specific to Kingston: a lack of cultural diversity and

tolerance; social and economic polarization; distance from other urban centres; and an ethos of a garrison town.

7. On the 'Foucauldian dream', see Fisher (2006: 30) and Foucault (1979).

8. This detachment of the local community carries an aspect of social traditionalism and privileged exclusion. Local lore states that to be considered one of Kingston's 'old stones' (i.e. a respected and influential member of the community), one's family must have resided in the city for three generations (Downie and Thompson 1993: 11).

9. *Collectioneering* was in part facilitated by an informal organization, the Kingston Association of Museums, Art Galleries and Historic Sites, which was formed in the early 1980s to promote the city's culture and history (http://www.kingstonmuseums.ca/).

10. The 'pathy' in *Museopathy* could also be said to refer to the curative logic of homeopathy (rather than of pathology) in which 'like treats like'. Each artist installing an intervention to some degree mimicked aspects of museum display present at the site itself. Interestingly, the term 'museopathy' has been taken up in a similar fashion by museum professionals working in conjunction with hospitals to facilitate patients' well-being. See Chatterjee et al. (2009).

11. As newcomers to Kingston, we were indebted to the expertise of the curators and directors of the museums, especially their patient behind-the-scenes tours, in-depth knowledge and endless delight in sharing their objects.

12. While an affective turn has certainly occurred in the past decade, the sources on affect that we drew upon in 2001 were Deleuze (1986), Massumi (1988), Joyrich (1991), Dyer (1992), Mellencamp (1992) and Seigworth (1999), among others.

13. Not all objects from the sites and museums were available for borrowing. Besides ones that were too fragile to move, others were too highly revered to be re-contextualized. Our curatorial process thus had to respect the sensibilities of the loaning institutions. Even the baroque paintings from the AEAC might not have been available had the position of Bader Curator of European Art not been vacant at the time of the exhibition.

14. While the traditional placement of artefacts in museum displays tend to serve as evidence of disciplinary truths (such as authenticity, excellence or rarity), the constellations of *Collectioneering* intensified the contradictions that these placements contain or gloss over.

15. Anachrony and incongruity have long formed the basic logics of montage, collage and assemblage. Two watershed museum interventions likewise operated via underacknowledged rhetorical tropes. Fred Wilson (1994) discussed his *Mining the Museum* (1992) in terms of mixed metaphors, and Joseph Kosuth's *Play of the Unmentionable* (1992) utilized ironic contrasts between text and art to deconstruct the supposed verities espoused by art's censors over the past several centuries.

16. Three other *wunderkammer*-type constellations were presented. One displayed mysterious objects (medical, geological, biological and cultural anomalies). A second staged a contest between two sculptures and toy soldiers arranged in formations of

attacking and defending modern art. A third–pacemakers and life rings–featured circular life preservers that either surround or are implanted into the body.

17. A third dialectical constellation contrasted poisons and remedies—and their shifting legal status—in the form of patent medicines, pharmaceuticals, contraband drugs and other substances. A fourth arrangement featured inmate admission photographs juxtaposed with a convex mirror. As viewers contemplated the array of frontal and profile mugshots, their own reflection in the mirror was inverted—an allusion to how dramatically one's social standing can be overturned.

18. On the night of 7 May 1999, Tyrone Conn escaped from the Kingston Penitentiary, the first over-the-wall escape in 41 years. Conn had assembled a ladder and an extension from shelving materials in the prison's industrial shop. The escape gained national attention. He fled to Toronto where he died at his own hand before being apprehended.

19. Four other constellations utilized the AEAC's noteworthy baroque paintings from the Alfred Bader collection. *Ecce Homo* (*c.*1630), attributed to Anthony Van Dyke and showing Christ bound and bearing the lance that will eventually pierce his flesh during the Crucifixion, was framed by poison-tipped arrows from Papua New Guinea. The pairing instantiated the physical threat to both Christ and the beholder, and collapsed the museal distinction between masterpieces and artefacts. Other painting/object juxtapositions demonstrated a continuity of interests across time and geography. Nicolaes Verkolje's *Susanna and the Elders* (*c.*1720) was set against an inmate-manufactured jewellery box decoupaged with *Playboy*-style nude figures. Despite the differences between a biblically inspired cabinet picture and explicit pornography, formal and carnal resonances bridged the gap separating sophistication from commercialism. Additional pairings were based on responses to actions and items in the paintings. In front of Jacob Pynas's *The Stoning of St Stephen* (1617) specimens of metamorphic, volcanic and glaciated rocks teasingly challenged spectators to join in the mayhem and reflect on how landscape can be used as a weapon. The nineteenth-century key to the doors of the Kingston Penitentiary was aligned to a similar key in a seventeenth-century painting of St Peter, contrasting the notions of gatekeeping in both physical and otherworldly realms.

20. Marjorie Winslow was a Kingston sculptor commissioned by Dr Edwin Robertson, Chairman of the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Queen's University, to sculpt obstetric models, gynecologic pathologies and miniature representations of female somatotypes. She used moulage, a wax casting technique utilizing beeswax, talc and oil paint originating in the eighteenth century. Her anatomical specimens are reportedly one of the last major groups of medical moulages to be produced in the world. See Mattatall and Rustige (2001).

21. Other humanist constellations included a series of group photographs of the communities associated with each *Museopathy* site, a vitrine contemplating the infant in medical, artistic and popular cultures, and a display that pivoted around threshold moments in the lives of notable individuals in Canadian history.

Chapter 9

Artists Curating the Expedition

Celina Jeffery

Mark Dion belongs to a lineage of artists such as Fred Wilson and Renee Green who most often work with the idea of the museum as object or the placement of objects outside of art museum and gallery settings; not simply as a method of appropriation but as a discourse in which art and curating are indistinguishable. Dion is an installation artist who uses processes of collecting and taxonomic paradigms to investigate histories and cultural representations of nature and, more recently, the ethical imperatives of our contemporary ecological crises.

Dion's practice as an artist-curator resides at the intersection of archaeologist, traveller-explorer, and naturalist. In turn, he has mimicked the expeditionary explorer, collector and archaeologist in recreating the desks of scientific researchers in *Desk of the Paleontologist* (2001) and re-displaying expeditionary regalia in *The Natural History of the Museum* (2011) at the Carré d'Art, Nîmes (Shaw 2007: 490–91). In other notable site-specific, expeditionary-inspired installations such as *Phantoms of the Clark Expedition* (2012), commissioned by the Clark Art Institute for The Explorers Club, NYC, Dion remakes and appropriates objects associated with the labour, provisions and equipment of the 1908–09 Clark Expedition to North China. These white papier mâché objects are part Surrealist intervention and part subtle interference into an otherwise highly celebrated period of 'heroic' expeditionary exploration. In what he has described as a history of natural history, then, Dion draws from the visuality and aesthetics of science to examine social and cultural constructions of nature.

Oceanomania: Souvenirs of Mysterious Seas, From the Expedition to the Aquarium, A Mark Dion Project comprises exhibitions at the Musée Océanographique and the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco (NMNM) at Villa Paloma (12 April–30 September 2011). The exhibition featured Dion as artist and curator and Sarina Basta and Cristiano Raimondi (NMNM) as co-curators with the scientific support of Patrick Piguet (Musée Océanographique) and Nathalie Rosticher Giordano (NMNM).

Inspired, in part, by the recently completed 'Census of Marine Life' (2010), by the *Deepwater Horizon* spill, and reinforced by two decades of research, production and curation on ocean life, *Oceanomania* is a major culmination of the artists' engagement with seas and their protection (Dion, Basta and Raimondi 2011: 149). Here, Dion drew upon the roles of the artist, curator and catalogue author to create new connections in a historically structured institution.

Dion's method as an artist and curator seeks to question the incompatible meanings inherent in our casual construction of nature and considers that which is beyond natural

positioning. He investigates the cultural and historical representation of natural history itself and how the history of ideas defining nature play a role in manifesting the current ecological crises (Dion, Basta and Raimondi 2011) *Oceanomania* could be described as part installation and part exhibition in form. It comprises three components that collectively consider cultural mythologies of the sea, historical maritime expeditions and contemporary issues of ecology. Dion conceived of the two museums as a kind of expeditionary inquiry itself in which historical collections of maritime art, objects and specimens of an aquatic orientation, combined with contemporary art, were configured, ultimately, to consider current issues of environmental degradation.

At the NMNM, Dion curated an exhibition consisting of predominantly contemporary artists, including Matthew Barney, Allan Sekula and Katharina Fritsch, whose works reflect on sea exploration, journeying and ecocide. In the Villa Paloma, Dion also used aspects of the collection at the NMNM to produce an exhibition of historical representations of the sea with works by J. M. W. Turner amongst them. At the Musée Océanographique, Dion produced a massive *wunderkammer* (or wonder room), now on permanent display, based in part on the museum's oceanographic collections and specimens originally collated or used during maritime expeditions.

Dion worked with curators over an eighteen-month period to reconceive a hugely diverse collection of aquatic objects, paraphernalia and oceanic-inspired art and artefacts. The resultant *wunderkammer* is an immense 11 by 18 metres, the largest cabinet of aquatic curiosities in the world. Dion's *wunderkammer* is to all intents and purposes of such a grand and elaborate scale that it is almost impossible to take in at one glance; indeed, it intentionally fractures the myriad histories of individual objects and encourages a kind of sorting to make connections between things. Moreover, it intentionally parallels the enormity of the ocean itself and our continuing inability to identify major aspects of underwater life at a moment in history when the ocean is under threat by human intervention.

The resultant installation is gathered from traditional classifications of *morte*, *artificialia* and *naturalia*; yet, rather than being displayed according to the organization of particular typologies and classification established by scientific and anthropological thought, there is no major separation of history, science, art and nature. Indeed, revealing the fusion of the 'artificial' and 'natural' is central to its framework, which allows Dion to repurpose, resituate and reimagine the meaning of the 'aquatic' within the contemporary imagination.

Wunderkammern, popular from the sixteenth century through to the Enlightenment, comprised non-specialized collections of rare objects (natural, artificial, 'divine' and human-made) when 'man' was at the centre of a new world of exploration, seeking to own its mystery (Olalquiaga 2005/06). These repositories of knowledge and wonder began largely as collections for royalty, clergy and later the mercantile classes, and were situated in private locations such as palaces and coffers.

Many *wunderkammern*, such as the Museum Wormianum (1655), (recreated by artist Rosamond Purcell at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in 2003), were procured during

Figure 1. Mark Dion, Installation view, *Oceanomania,* Musée Océanographique, Monaco. Crédit © M. Dagnino / Musée océanographique de Monaco.

a period of increasing trade and travel, especially to the 'New World'. In this regard, it is perhaps fitting that Dion's elaborate *wunderkammer* has the bust of Prince Albert I of Monaco (1848–1922), the original founder of the museum, explorer and innovator of modern oceanography, situated high in the cabinet. Albert I founded the Musée Océanographique as a 'Temple of the Sea' and dedicated the institution to discovery of the underwater life through art and science; he also led 28 expeditions to the North Atlantic and Mediterranean between 1885 and 1915 and collected an extensive range of flora and fauna that are represented in the collection (Abbot 2011).

Dion adapts the taxonomic principles and aims of the *wunderkammer* to the new visual and ethical concerns of the contemporary. Although the left portion of the cabinet comprises nature-based objects and the right draws from culture and human intervention, the overall aesthetic disposition for surface, exteriority and symbolic presence remains invested in the concept of the marvellous that governs the tradition of

the *wunderkammern*. In this regard, the groupings are far from systematic; but there are aspects that are quite formal in their concern: a group of teeth and a cluster of objects arranged by colour, while the cabinet as a whole is arranged by size, with the largest at the top of the case and the smallest at the base.

Dion's *wunderkammer* consists largely of objects and 'specimens' gathered or used in maritime expeditions: Klingert's 'diving suit' from 1797, models of ships, maritime paintings and nineteenth-century drawings of fish, as well as a Yoruban Ibeji figure covered in shells and a fictitious mermaid skeleton amongst them. The white polar bear, which originates from the west coast of Greenland, is the most dominant visually and of course doubles as an iconic image of a 'disappearing' and endangered species. There are also displays of dead, dried coral, a curio favourite that once defied and mystified categorization (plant? mineral? shell? and only in the eighteenth century confirmed as animal) (Olalquiaga 2008).

Here, they retain their identity as objects of beauty and marvel, but, equally, when read in dialogue with the wider context of the exhibition and catalogue, in which Dion points to the imminent demise of coral reefs, they also act as potent symbols of 'oceanocide' (Dion, Basta and Raimondi 2011:175). Thus, Dion's *wunderkammer* considers multiple histories of oceanography—from the Renaissance fascination with the curious through to the emerging engagement with global exploration and trade in the eighteenth century, to the intertwined histories of natural philosophy and contemporary perceptions of ecological crises.

Dion's practice as an artist-curator negotiates the origins of collecting, the museum's institutionalization and the emergence of the modern keeper or curator. The first known instance of a natural history *wunderkammer* is illustrated in Ferrante Imperato's *Dell'Historia Naturale* (1599), in which open cases present a symmetrical display of exceptional objects and specimens considered the product of divine, human and natural realms. Such cabinets were the spaces within and through which knowledge of nature was materially constructed and philosophically produced, one that was often bound to the elegiac, to the inevitable loss and mourning of existence (Zytaruk 2011). Therefore, the notion of a classificatory system is present but the idea of a *wunderkammer* is perhaps more aptly considered speculative, exploratory and poetic.

Wonder was thought to reside in the objects themselves and reciprocally in the viewer who marvelled at 'the decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference' (Greenblatt quoted by Weschler 1996: 77). James Delbourgo has described the collections of aquatic curiosities in early modern *wunderkammern* as having 'derived spiritual significance by association with the Flood'; in Hans Sloane's era, the idea of the power, unknowability and catastrophic potential of the underwater world remained associated with the 'Creator' and with moral and divine judgement (Delbourgo 2011: 6). In the seventeenth century, curiosity and wonder about the natural realm was informed by the colonial context, the desire to control and own the sea, which in turn was premised on the seemingly contradictory idea that observation was considered 'morally and epistemologically sure' while nature was a work of art (Delbourgo 2007: 4).[1]

From the late eighteenth century through to the mid-nineteenth century, scientific interest in the ocean, fuelled by colonial expansion, increased dramatically; meanwhile, the mingling of exploration, science, technology and the aesthetic imagination gave rise to a significant body of oceanic literature, Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* being perhaps the most famous instance. However, while 'oceanomania' dominated this era, the 'exhibitionary complex' of the modern museum presented a new kind of mapped, taxonomic space that sought to represent the world in an encyclopaedic and evolutionary manner—governed by national narratives of colonial expansion as well as acting as harbingers of taste and value and thus agents of social change (Bennett 1995). There was limited consideration of wonder here: the concept had become outmoded and interest in the *wunderkammer* waned.

Rather than being a historical reappraisal of the colonial collection, Dion's artist-curated *wunderkammer* may be considered more archaeological in kind, akin to ideas of the Foucauldian episteme: of historical difference, contingencies and disjunctions. Here, curator and creator fuse—the subjectivity of the selection and display is emphasized, bypassing the 'facilitatory' role between the art and the public that the contemporary curator often assumes. Dion, on the other hand, uses the collation, juxtaposition and assemblage of cultural material as the point at which art, curating and exhibition-making merge. It is a self-reflexive position that garners the range of approaches conventionally attributed to artist, keeper and curator.

In part, Dion's *wunderkammer* sought to refute the positioning of nature as a non-human object of human wonder per se and thereby collapse the boundaries of the natural and the culturally constructed to reveal possibilities of negotiating both the crises of the natural and the inherent paradox of using wonder to reinscribe consideration of contemporary threats to the ocean. Dion shares this strategy of employing the wonder cabinet with previous artist-curators such as Peter Greenaway, whose *Some Organising Principles* (1993), at the Glynn Vivian Museum, Wales, also used the form and method of the *wunderkammern* and thus offers a notable point of contextualization. Greenaway described wanting to retain the open-ended nature of the *wunderkammern* by using systems of juxtaposition and inversions (including displaying paintings in reverse) as well as an elaborate system of lighting to de-familiarize and reignite a kind of marvel that has otherwise been lost through over familiarity (Greenaway 1993).

The exhibition involved three kinds of collections: artefacts from thirteen Welsh museums; a series of fake books made for his film *Prospero's Books;* and a selection of his own paintings, which he describes using as a guide to selecting the objects (Greenaway 1993: 24). Greenaway used Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia* to frame the exhibition's concept: 'contemplation of infinity without order' (Greenaway 1993: 6), with a large number of objects on display exploring mathesis and the relative value, accuracy and inaccuracy of measuring devices with the visual appearance of the grid being a formal matrix of this filmic exhibition (Greenaway 1993: 18). Oscillation of the micro and macro were dominant visual markers throughout the exhibition, guiding a kind of experience that

is only partially based on knowledge. Much like Dion's *wunderkammer*, the exhibition is performative: 'the exhibition can be likened to a film-set. The props are the objects on display. The visitors provide the extras. The plot is the exhibition content. Its architectural organisation is its structure' (Greenaway 1993: 14), and seeks to undermine the rationality and empirical systematization of the museum through exploration of the uncertainty of relations.

Greenaway's exhibition provides an important context for understanding the relationship between practice and curation.

> There has been much talk of curators as *artists*, how about thinking of artists as curators? In the contemporary exhibition, all manner of sophisticated cultural languages can be successfully integrated, making is a form of three dimensional cinema with stimulus for all five senses where the viewer is not passively seated, can create his or her own time-frame of attention, and can (as good as) touch the objects he is viewing and certainly have a more physical-visual relationship with them. (Greenaway 1993: 4)

Greenaway's approach frames the exhibition as a material, a concept and a strategy that is at once artistic and curatorial. In the early 1990s this strategy was still relatively novel and served to highlight an avenue of the artistic premise in curating: one that elevates the subversion and mixing of classification of art and objects that could include archival documents, ephemera and vernacular artefacts in dialogue with 'fine' art; an emphasis on materiality; spatial interaction; and an overarching desire to reactivate the potential of the museum to be a harbinger of wonder and curiosity.[2] It thus challenged the traditional boundaries of classification for its period as well as theoretical and interpretative frameworks by elevating a series of relations amongst its exhibitionary constituents, resulting in a rethinking of the function of the museum itself.

Both Dion and Greenaway are interested in reflexive examinations of history, which the *wunderkammer* allows, in constructing time as non-narrative and unstable, producing something more akin to an open-ended series of situations and questions that are speculative in kind. Works such as Dion's *A Tale of Two Seas: An Account of Stephan Dillemuth's and Mark Dion's Journey Along the Shores of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea and What They Found There* (1996), comprise sculptural reproductions of the systems of research: tools of observation, cataloguing and archiving that were essential to the early explorer. *Oceanomania* is integrated into the two main exhibition wings adjacent to the *wunderkammer*, which display large aquatic skeletons. In addition, Dion inserts a series of characters—threatened species and significations of their territories that follow the procession of skeletons: *Iceberg & Palm Trees* (2007), a diorama of a plush toy bear with a plastic palm tree strapped to its back; while a taxidermic heron covered in tar, forbodes their imminent demise.

Dion's remaining exhibitionary contributions adopt a distinctly literal approach in exploring perceptions of the ocean, from the Flood to contemporary disasters, in which,

like the *wunderkammer*, the conversions between 'nature' and 'art' are in constant dialogue. Questions as to the geopolitical ownership of the sea versus the vast expanse of unknown territories remain an aspect of Dion's exhibition at the NMNM, which presented a group of twenty artists ranging from the work of ecological founder Ernst Heackel to Surrealist Man Ray, through to contemporary artists such as Matthew Barney.

The idea of the ocean as a social space, of depleting resources and ecological demise is in constant dialogue with the cultural perceptions of the unknown and wonder in the likes of Katharina Fritsch's *Oktopus/Octopus* (2006/2009), an orange polyester toy/monster sculpture of an octopus that wraps a tentacle around a diver; and Ashley Bickerton's *Orange Shark* (2008), of a suspended hammerhead shark wearing a strange kind of life vest. Meanwhile, Pam Longobardi's *Consumption Drift Web (self proclaiming material snare)* (2011), consisting of found ocean plastic and driftnet, signifies a more direct engagement with the ecological crises of the ocean: of plastics, pollution, over fishing and warming amongst them.

An exhibition featuring monumental expressionist paintings by Bernard Buffet (1928–89), which depict epic events of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea,* provide the most overtly literary and existentialist perspective. *The Fight with the Shark* (1989), is perhaps the most violent and pertinent image in the exhibition as such. Buffet's seven paintings are situated as a kind of exhibition within an exhibition that incorporates a series from the museum's collection in an installation called 'Davey Jones's Locker'. The locker is a veritable underwater treasure trove, which extends the aesthetic and taxonomic principles of the *wunderkammer* once more in its eclectic and contrasting array of material on display: paintings by Claude Monet and J. M. W. Turner; a vitrine of shell artefacts, including a nineteenth-century figure of Napoleon covered in shells, coral and sequins; ballet costumes; and a Korean sawfish rostrum all occupy the locker.

The literary aspects of Dion's fictional-based journey through the archives of the museum are echoed in the accompanying catalogue, which in itself is a kind of cabinet of curiosity in book form. The exhibition catalogue is designed like a Victorian encyclopaedia, replete with gold-embossed edges and parchment paper, espousing a particular kind of nostalgia that is paralleled by the chandeliers and neo-classical ornamentation of the dark blue room that the *wunderkammer* occupies. It is part catalogue, part cultural history and part log book, a parallel curatorial site to the main exhibition: wonder at the marvels of the ocean and fear of its ecological demise.

It is also intentionally playful, disorienting and fascinating in its design and conception, beginning with essays about the cultural legacies of the ocean in literary figures such as Captain Nemo and ending with Dion's only textual contribution. Dion's text contains two lists, 'Oceanophilia' and 'Oceanocide'*,* which create conceptual counterpoints to the intent of the exhibition. Number four of 'Oceanophilia' reads as follows: 'The oceans contain 170 times more space for living things than all the land and freshwater habitats combined', whereas number six of 'Oceanocide' states: '…almost one-third of the oceans' tropical reefs have vanished since 1980. At this rate all coral reefs could be extinct by the end of this century' (Dion, Basta and Raimondi 2011: 174–75).

In total, *Oceanomania* included 20 artists, 13 writers and a huge array of objects from the collection displayed in a *wunderkammer*, curated by Dion to encapsulate a cultural history of expeditionary practices, maritime exploration as read through visual culture, and their potential for investigating contemporary ecological concerns. For Dion, the museum's collection is governed by an episteme in which natural history collections are the repository of both colonial narratives of the ocean as well as a means to deconstruct these same anthropocentric subjects. This partly plays out in the displays' reflexive inquisitiveness in which disciplinary organization of the museum's collection is subverted, or declassified, and then repurposed in its own classification—one that seeks to address the ultimate consequences of anthropocentric exploration and empire. It relies heavily on an oscillation between the counterpoints of wonder and the knowing truth of climate change.

Artistic and curatorial practices, histories and theories of art are currently in the process of a major paradigmatic shift that not only recognizes the necessity for globalized perspectives but also situates climate change as a major ethical concern. Much of the debate, which has flourished in the last few years, revolves around the aesthetics of the anthropocene and the problems of naming it as such. Jill Bennett has described this shift as creating a 'revolution' in the visual arts that necessitates a move to transdisciplinarity to meet its challenges (Bennett 2012: 6).[3] The question of what 'eco-centric' art practices are, how they function within and outside of galleries, and how they address new ethical imperatives are subsequently at the heart of this 'revolution'.

There have been a distinct number of artist-curated exhibitions on the theme of climate change, several of which curiously use maritime expedition as a site of investigation. Cape Farewell's *Sea Change* initiative (2010–present), led by artist David Buckland; *Memory Flows: Rivers, Creeks and the Great Artesian Basin* (2010, Newington Armory Gallery), curated by artist Norie Neumark, Sophia Kouyoumdjian and Deborah Turnbull; and exhibitions by the collective Artport Making Waves—amongst others—are important curatorial precursors specifically addressing ecologies of the coast and sea. It is interesting to note too that the 2012 Sydney Biennale *All Our Relations,* curated by Gerald McMaster (an artist and curator) and Catherine de Zegher, featured 'In Finite Blue Planet' as a major and innovatory inquiry into global challenges to water and our oceans. What is perhaps unique about these particular instances of artist-curation, then, is the ethical urgency within and through which the global challenges of climate change are being considered.

Whereas Dion used the museum itself as a kind of expeditionary platform, there have been several instances of the expedition as a process in which creative research and practice fuses with the curatorial in dynamic ways. *Kermadec—Nine Artists Explore the South Pacific*, curated by artist Greg O'Brien, in association with the environmental group PEW, serves to query how these artist-led voyages engage with processes of social transformation that both produce and disseminate distinct forms of exhibition-making. The exhibition comprised the work of artists who had voyaged to the remote Kermadec Islands in May 2011. It toured extensively in New Zealand; at the City Art Gallery in

Wellington a version of the show was co-curated by artist and curator of Māori and Pacific arts Reuben Friend.

Kermadec—Nine Artists Explore the South Pacific was composed of three aspects: the work of nine artists from New Zealand and Australia who took part in the expedition; documentary photographs of previous colonial voyages such as W. R. B. Oliver's 1908 seminal expedition (which provided the first records of the ecology of the region); and an 'informational' section on the endangered and vulnerable species in the Kermadecs, which is critical to understanding the conservationist impulse behind the exhibition.[4]

The expedition was organized under the auspices of the Pew Environment Group's 'Global Ocean Legacy' campaign and lasted for a week. Artists Phil Dadson, Bruce Foster, Fiona Hall, Gregory O'Brien, Jason O'Hara, John Pule, John Reynolds, Elizabeth Thomson and Robin White participated in the expedition on the HMNZS *Otago,* which journeyed from Devonport Naval Base, Auckland, to Nuku'alofa, Tonga; they were accompanied by a broadcaster, the Minister for Conservation, Department of Conservation staff, volunteers and representatives from the Pew Environment Group. The artists were given available scientific knowledge of the region—which is surprisingly little given its significance—but the essential purpose of the journey was to allow them to experience this expanse of ocean with a view to their producing work to inspire respect and preservation of this unique region.

They produced studies on deck during their journey—photography, film and so on, which feature strongly in the catalogue—affirming the sense that the voyage was as much the subject and content of the exhibition as the region itself. They stopped for 48 hours on Raoul Island, a location inhabited for 35 years by the Bell family, but recently infested with rats and other invasive species—including consumer debris—but still home to a magnificent ecology of sea-enveloping volcanic terrain.

Bruce Foster's film *Voyage to the Kermadecs* (2011), situated adjacent to the endangered species exhibit, drew out the sensitivity and lyricism of the movement of the crew through the oceans. A scene showing the artists jumping off the ship and swimming in the ocean suggests that the expedition was as much an exploration of the self as it was a 'study' of the marine culture of the region. The film is exhibited in the *Kermadec* exhibition alongside 'informational' text and images about the marine biology of the area and historical photographs of previous (colonial) expeditions.

The exhibition catalogue details the voyage through documentary photographs, acting as an extension of the curatorial premise to foreground the expedition. This emphasis on the artist's journeying, sense of discovery and reverie distinguishes and seems to represent the artist's take on curating the expedition. Within the catalogue is a 'mini' exhibition of nine images, one by each artist, called *Voyage to the Kermadecs.* Also curated by O'Brien, the 'catalogue exhibition' considers exploration and seeks to act as a 'record of the expedition' (Golder and O'Brien 2011: 34–37). The exhibition comprised of an extensive number of O'Brien's works—drawings, paintings, prints and poetry, some of which are produced with the Niuean artist, poet and novelist John Pule.

Water itself is a major theme of these collaborative works: as a carrier, a sacred space and a scarce resource. *Star Navigators (Towards the Kermadecs)* (2011) engages with alternative cartographic territories and spaces by employing a kind of lateral scope infused with a deep sense of marvel and concern. Here, territory is largely imaginary, infused with concerns about Pacific Island consciousness and interrogating nature as a colonized subject.

The kind of bio-discovery that motivated scientific expeditions of the early half of the twentieth century, communicated largely through text and some photography, is of course fundamentally different in language and tenor to an artist's response. Yet, the sense of discovery and wonder is most likely shared. Indeed, this was part of O'Brien's curatorial assessment of the voyage, in which he viewed the Kermadecs as a 'wonderland': unspoiled, far and teeming with uncharted life, while the subsequent goal of the artists was to 'humanize' the experience (Golder and O'Brien 2011: 40).

During the expedition, however, there was no definite exhibition in mind, and so artists such as Elizabeth Thomson felt the experience to be open-ended, rather than politically motivated. She writes: 'When I was floating in/on the Tropic of Capricorn, I thought, "This feels pure, a blessing, baptismal even." I felt a connectedness to something greater than myself' (Thomson, quoted in Harvey 2012: 30). In Thomson's work, including *Kermadec* (2011), an optically charged surface appears in one sense, as if you are viewing undulations of water from beneath, suggesting microscopic inner and 'under' water vision. There is something ethereal about them too, capturing what O'Brien described as the unexpected and irrational quality, the microscopic and macroscopic dynamics of the ecology itself (Golder and O'Brien 2011: 50).

There is no doubt as well that the largely uncharted area inspired the lure of the untouched and unspoiled, yet the emphasis on journeying, of movement and flux, speaks more of a convergence of art, ecology and self-discovery than it does of the remnants of Enlightenment encounters. In many senses, the resultant artworks and exhibition reinstate the idea that we no longer command the sea, and there is no sense of the conquest in discovery; the Kermadecs thus become a transitory and transitional space in which the poetics of visual representation largely fail. In its place, the exhibition attempts to create an alternative curatorial cartography produced by artists who, although in a highly privileged position to experience the journey, duly acknowledge this space as an ever-changing and challenged ecological and cultural system.

Fiona Hall, an Australian artist with a long-term relationship with the ecology of New Zealand, described the expeditionary experience of looking out to the sea as the 'intoxicant' of the voyage (Golder and O'Brien 2011: 76). Hall's work engages equally with the poetics of oceanic transformations and the politics of environmental crises: much of her sculptural work employs consumer detritus such as sardine tins, which are reworked into anthropomorphic objects. In *Split Infinitive* (2011), a tin is rolled half-way down, organic matter emerges, and a tree sprouts from the top, creating a new 'flow' of objects from the detritus of mainland waste. Her large Tongan tapa-dyed canvases, which depict

Figure 2. 'Hands to Bathe' artists and navy sailors swimming at the Tropic of
Capricorn. Copyright courtesy of the Pew Charitable Trust.

ocean wildlife converging and clashing with fishing and military vessels, re-scale and re-
orient the ocean so that the Kermadec's huge 10,000-metre trench is evoked to envelop
the scene. It is a form of deep mapping, of rewriting the known atlas of the world to
acknowledge a changing and threatened environment.

In *Kermadec* there is a purposeful shift away from the concept of nature towards
cultural and historical constructs of the sea as a real and metaphorical space. We are
not so far removed from Timothy Morton's idea of 'dark ecology' here, which similarly
rests on the need to debunk the myth of nature and redefine it in terms of the ecological
as abject, defiled and, at present, in crisis (Morton 2009). Moreover, the significance of
journeying to a remote and pristine location localizes the globalizing forces of ecological
demise in interesting ways.

Figure 3. Works by Greg O'Brien and Fiona Hall, in *Kermadec—Nine Artists in the South Pacific* at City Gallery, Wellington. Photographer: Kate Whitley. Copyright courtesy of the Pew Charitable Trust.

Mieke Bal describes the curatorial 'act' as having the capacity to attribute 'care', resulting in exhibitions that enable affecting experiences (Bal, 2012: 180–81). The concept of the curator as a caretaker has deep historical roots; in the Roman Empire it was largely attributed to those in charge of public works, transportation, supplies and even provinces; in the Middle Ages it signified the enacting of spiritual care and cure by the clergy (Strauss 2007; Fowle 2007). For David Levi Strauss, then, the curator has 'always been a curious mixture of bureaucrat and priest' (Strauss 2007: 15). The curator as an implementer of the affecting and social roles of art has been persistent in its legacy, but arguably this has become less of an aim.

The hybridization of art and curating through research and enactment of expeditionary practices has proven to be an interesting model for Dion, O'Brien and others to re-engage with this concept of care. Here, the affective potential of curating is structured around a fluid dialogue between response, perception and action. Using the expedition as a curatorial process and method of artistic inquiry, *Oceanomania* and *Kermadec* sought to create dynamic, unpredictable and empathic relationships. They refute the positioning of nature as a non-human object of human wonder per se, and

thereby collapse the boundaries of the natural and the culturally constructed to reveal possibilities of negotiating both the crises of the natural and the inherent paradox of using wonder to reinscribe contemplation of and responsibility towards the ocean's demise.

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Notes

1. As the *wunderkammern* entered the Enlightenment, the flowering of rational, systematic attempts to order the world with their inherent desire to create systems grew and overtook the desire for wonder. Comparison becomes the function of order in 'Cabinets of Curiosity' in which the simple to the complex is revealed. Most of these collections were dispersed into museums themselves, the British Museum being the most notable instance and hence the *wunderkammer* is a specific precursor to the modern museum. Hans Sloane (1660–1753), the scholar, physician and collector amassed some 71,000 'curious' objects from around the world. They were bequeathed to the British nation in 1753 and became the founding collection of the British Museum. His cabinets of curiosity, which occupied his private museum, were based partly on his own travels to Jamaica and revealed the imperial underscore of collecting in which collecting, slavery and empire intertwined (Delbourgo 2007).

2. There have been a flurry of recent artist creations of cabinets of curiosity: Jane Wildgoose's *Promiscuous Assemblage, Friendship, and the Order of Things* at the Yale Center for British Art, 2009–10), a site-specific installation that uses the form of the *wunderkammern*, is an example.

3. Jill Bennett's *Curating Cities,* (National Institute of Experimental Arts, Sydney), which uses 'art and design to curate—literally, to care for—public space' by curating works, often public, throughout city spaces (http://curatingcities.org/about-us/), is a major example of a recent curatorial project concerning ecology.

4. The Kermadecs are highly contested: a pristine and largely unspoiled area whose ecological 'wealth' is now of interest to mining and mass fishing industries. With less than one per cent of New Zealand's coastal waters being protected, the Kermadecs—a 620,000-kilometre region located between the North Island and Tonga—is considered to be one of the world's most 'pristine' ocean wilderness areas (Golder and O'Brien 2011: 4). The Kermadecs have both a renowned whaling territory with a great diversity of whale species (that, historically, migrated there before swimming to Antarctica) as well as an exceptional ecosystem of coral enveloped by tiers of underwater volcanoes (Priestley in Golder and O'Brien 2011: 28–32). The Kermadec exhibition, then, which toured widely and to popular and critical success, sought to bring a conservationist perspective to the region and created a space for the Kermadecs, previously absent from New Zealand's art history.

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Italic numbers denote reference to illustrations

This anthology offers a unique perspective into the roles, functions, and designations of the artist as curator in contemporary artistic practice. Through a discussion of case studies, it identifies specific motivations, methods, and typologies of the artist-curator and in doing so, brings together practice-based research, museological, curatorial, archival research and theory to address a relatively under-researched topic. The case studies presented here reflect on the artist-curator in multiple manifestations and explore this phenomenon as a creative process, a research methodology and a critical strategy.

Celina Jeffery is a curator, writer, and associate professor of art history and theory at the University of Ottawa. Her new project, *Ephemeral Coast* brings together artists, writers and climate change experts to explore how curating can advance consideration of climate change.