The Fictive Museum

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The Fictive Museum

JAM
JOHN AFFEY MUSEUM

Slide 413.0: Model of The Fictive Museum
(Image courtesy of the John Affey Museum, 2018)

AS IF

A simple

in silence

In some imminent

hovers

insinuation

coiled in irony

        or

          the mystery

             hurled down

               screamed

vortex of hilarity and horror

on the brink of the gulf

          without sprinkling it

             nor fleeing

          and draws from it the virgin clue

                            AS IF

Slide 296.0: Stéphane Mallarmé, A Throw of Dice, VI
(In Meillassoux, 2012, Appendix 1.)

Statements and Acknowledgements

Submission

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Signature:

Date: 11.06.2019

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This page would not be complete without expressing my debt of gratitude to the late Rev. Adam J. F. Origen, who first brought the John Affey Museum to my attention at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern in September, 2012. We did not always see eye to eye, and I am aware Rev. Origen felt by the end that we had failed in our promise to make Affey's museum a reality. I can only repeat here what I said at our last meeting: *JAM is real to me.*

Abstract

At least since Duchamp's *Boîte-en-valise* (1935-68), artists have been making work claiming the label of *Museum*. Marcel Broodthaers, Claes Oldenburg, Ilya Kabakov, and Michael Blum explore this form, alongside David and Diana Wilson and Nobel Prize-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk. Assembling artefacts and labels in carefully authored contexts, these works fuse museum poetics with the means of literature and conceptual art, operating as *fictive museums*. Adapting the concept of *fictive art* from Antoinette LaFarge, the thesis develops *the fictive* as an *as-if* cognitive mode, problematising distinctions between literal and figurative, and revealing meaning to be an inherently spatial matter.

This research identifies, (mis)labels, and takes part in *the fictive museum* as a genre of contemporary art practice, accessioning it as a performative method to ask what fictive museums can do. The John Affey Museum (JAM) explores alternative modes of museum poetics to address the same questions. Using social media as performance platforms to restage research-as-practice, JAM forms a collection~assemblage of things: references; images; writing; performances; sculptures; academic publications; temporary exhibitions in gallery and performance spaces; and a long-term installation in Warrington Museum's ethnology collection. JAM is accompanied by a museum catalogue in the form of an anthology of quotations, and by this thesis, comprising twenty short essays or (mis)labels for the fictive museum. The thesis proposes a sculptural, diagrammatic approach to knowledge production: an *Image of thought* (Deleuze), reimagined as *associative constellation* in fictive space.

Section Plan

List of Slides

Visitor Guide

Project Outline

Through collecting and archiving, appropriating museum display conventions, or interventions in the institution, many artworks engage with museums.[1] We explore contemporary artworks that are not only *about* museums or situated *within* museums, but claim to *be museums themselves.* We[2] limit our enquiry to artworks making this self-instituting, performative[3] gesture. A survey of artworks labelled *The Museum of___* would find dozens from the mid-twentieth century on, besides the many idiosyncratic micromuseums[4] that could be included. Instead, we investigate the problematics and potentials of fictive museums by working with one––the John Affey Museum (JAM). We assemble a constellation of cultural reference points to explore its field of operation, modelling a fictive space, proposing a model of the fictive museum as method. The linked concepts of *fictive museum*, *associative constellation*, and *fictive space* are developed through thesis and practice, linking ideas from contemporary art, literature, cognitive linguistics, and philosophy – a perspective broadly aligned with New Materialism[5] – to make a new conceptual contribution to this field.

Following artist and educator Antoinette LaFarge's term *fictive art* – 'plausible fictions created through production of real-world objects, events, and entities'[6] – we label *fictive museums* as a coherent genre of art practice. *Genre* suggests an informal grouping, modelled on natural language categories, functioning 'in terms of prototypes, not in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions'.[7] We collect prototypes from Marcel Broodthaers's *Musée de l'Art Moderne* (1968-72) to the

present. Special attention is given to four examples. Due to its minimalist intensity, Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum / Ray Gun Wing* (1965–77) exposes key fictive museum operations. Two permanent institutions – David & Diana Wilson's Museum of Jurassic Technology (1988–present) and Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence (2012–present) – operating beyond frame of contemporary art as living institutions in their own rights, revealing the agency of the fictive. Finally, working with JAM –the practice-led component of this research –experiments with live institutions and tests out some alternatives to the normative label|artefact structure in museum practice.

There are three aspects:

The John Affey Museum	A fictive museum based on the unrealised project of Antarctic whaler and amateur ethnographer John Henry Affey (1905–1969). A body of artistic practice online, in print and in physical collections, including fictive publications in peer-reviewed academic journals.
	∼[8]
The JAM Dice & Catalogue	An edition of twelve-sided *Accessioning Dice* used to number the JAM collection, and an anthology of 144 quotations, numbered using the dice.
	∼
The Fictive Museum	This thesis, an associative constellation of twenty interconnected essays, introducing different facets of the fictive museum.

The John Affey Museum

> Born in the nineteenth century, the modernist museum is still a force to be reckoned with. But the idea of the museum is being reborn… The post-museum will retain some of the characteristics of its parent, but it will reshape them to its own ends… Where the modernist museum was (and is) imagined as a building, the museum in the future may be imagined as a process, or an experience…[9]

JAM is a heritage and arts consultancy and museum of ethnography, focusing on British-Antarctic whaling. It is a distributed institution, with multiple online and offline components: texts; images; models; audio recordings; social media accounts; installations; performances. Networked into wider cultures of knowledge production through participation and publication, JAM is agglutinative,[10] without clear boundaries. Museums resemble Espen Aarseth's *ergodic literature*, where readers must work (*ergon*) to generate their own path (*hodos*) through the material.[11] Following links, JAM visitors generate research methods, fictive heuristics, experiential modes of knowing-by-association. In preference to established terms – portfolio, documentation, digital artwork, transmedia installation – we label JAM *associative constellation*. Modernist museum practice reifies a label|artefact binary:[12] texts label artefacts, not the other way around; labels are not part of the collection. JAM's nonbinary method deconstructs this hierarchy: constellations of *accessions* label each other through association.

> Accessioning something means to take it into the museum. This is a serious step […] Once an object is accessioned into a museum collection it takes on a whole new life…'

Slide 3E8.1: Daniel B. Reibel, Registration Methods for the Small Museum

The performative museum practices of *labelling* and *accessioning* are key operations for JAM as a body of work, and for this thesis. Accessioning is an institutional form of *appropriation*, 'the relocation, annexation or theft of cultural properties',[13] common to museum practice and contemporary art after Conceptualism. The tensions of appropriation as a colonising act run throughout, exposed in **A Line Joining Moments** and **Making Uncomfortable Parallels**. *Things*[14] are accessioned into JAM using *Accessioning Dice*, described below. While accessions take on new life, every accession also alters the collection as a whole—the museum's centre of gravity shifts. This *double causality* (see **A Minor Paranoia** and **Looping Topology**) signals the decolonising[15] potential of accessioning in the fictive museum, reframing and resisting the kyriarchal[16] conditions of knowledge.

JAM may be explored online by typing "John Affey Museum" with quotation marks into a search engine. This generates a branching collection of links, including:

> **The John Affey Museum Tumblr**
> *https://johnaffeymuseum.tumblr.com/*
> **The John Affey Museum Twitter**
> *https://twitter.com/JohnAffeyMuseum/*
> **'Fictive Museums and the Poetics of Mislabelling'**
> *Performance Research* 20.1 (2015a), 36–47
> **'Slipping off the Sealskin: Gender, Species, and Fictive Kinship in Selkie Folktales'**
> *Gender Forum*, 55 (2015b) 55–82
> **'Two Slide Cases'**
> *The Oxford Artistic and Practice Based Research Journal* 2 (2017), 168–175
> **Roots Between the Tides: JAM Remixes Warrington Museum**
> *Vimeo: Clair Le Couteur*
> https://vimeo.com/215212777/

JAM is a modular artwork,[17] comprised of a transmedia collection. JAM's accessions are not pre-existing nodes, connected through exterior, secondary transactions – they are knots of associations, relations, intra-actions.[18] Each identification of a thing-to-be-accessioned, each cognitive act of decontextualisation, frames a multifaceted, relational artefact, generative of *and generated by* the fictive museum. This reciprocal condition is most clearly embodied in JAM's collection of *slides*: contingent acts of framing fuse discovery and creation; jumps between one slide and the next flicker between implicit and explicit associations.

Though no elements in the JAM collection are more central, some are more elaborate. *Roots Between the Tides* (*RBTT*) is one of the most developed: a research residency in Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, resulting in a network of 144 slides installed in the Ethnology Hall, on long-term loan to the museum. An accompanying catalogue and digital photogrammetry model of the installation are available online via the Tumblr site. *RBTT* and Warrington Museum are discussed in **Making Uncomfortable Parallels**.

*Slide 490.0: JAM logo, based on the nautical
chart symbol for part-submerged wrecks*

Slide 051.0: Roots Between the Tides *(2016)*

Installation view, World Stories Gallery, Warrington Museum

Slide 167.0: Roots Between the Tides *(2016)*

Installation view, Fish Gallery mezzanine, Warrington Museum

JAM Dice and Catalogue

JAM assigns semi-random *accession numbers* to its collection using twelve-sided dice: the dice themselves are a series numbered **000** (see **The John Affey Museum**). This convention has been followed while numbering the slides of this thesis: images, figures, diagrams, and quotations. The dice are things for thinking the project, used to generate, structure, and navigate practice and thesis. Accompanying the submission as neither practice nor thesis, but as a tool for praxis – supplementary yet vital to the generation of both – the dice are a *cognitive prosthetic*, something easy to hold in the hand, in order to model something challenging to bear in mind.[19] The dice are generated from STL files, 3D printed from co-ordinates in fictive space.

Slide 102.7: JAM Accessioning Dice, 50th Anniversary Edition

The dice exist in association with a network of intertextual references, an agglutinative diagrammatic assemblage outlined in **A Constellation Saturated With Tensions** and **The John Affey Museum**. An accompanying digital anthology or artist's book – *The Fictive Museum Catalogue*, hosted on issuu.com and available via the JAM Tumblr – presents a constellation of 144 accessioned quotations.[20] The *Catalogue* develops the spatial, fictive mode of citation used in the notes, epigraphs, or exergues of the thesis into a conceptual piece.[21] Intertextual associations between thesis and *Catalogue* are included as accession numbers in the notes to **The Museum is the Performance** and **A Theorist's Fiction**.

According to a proven convention, the exergue plays with citation. To cite before beginning is to give the key through the resonance of a few words, the meaning or form of which ought to set the stage. In other words, the exergue consists in capitalizing on an ellipsis. In accumulating capital in advance and preparing the surplus value of an archive.'

Slide 782.2: Jacques Derrida, Archive Fever
(Derrida, 1998, 12)

The Fictive Museum

[Walter] Benjamin's use of constellation as a method or as an 'epistemological principle' is in no way meant metaphorically. Rather, constellation *is* Benjamin's method of reading, writing and philosophizing… [C]ritical insight, for Benjamin, means to 'grasp the constellation'.[22]

How the Thesis is Structured

This thesis is a collection of twenty *labels* for the fictive museum, one for each corner of the *Accessioning Dice.* Each text is titled with a phrase from an accessioned quotation, accompanied by a *slide* diagramming the associative constellations used to generate the writing. While echoing the traditional sequence of academic writing (introduction-argument-conclusion), each section is a point connected to others. Rather than attempting a static synthesis, collapsing heterogeneity into unity, conceptual labels remain mobile, maintaining tension between quotations, perspectives, and voices. The constellation of twenty essays, themselves smaller constellations of reference points, collectively generate a space of association, a *form that thinks*,[23] assembled to frame a question: *What are fictive museums, and what might they reveal about the production of knowledge?*

These essays contextualise JAM, linking key works with concepts from critical theory, museum studies, philosophy, literature, and cognitive science to propose *the fictive museum* as a coherent genre of contemporary art practice. The voice borrows from models of alternative scholarship including Steven Shaviro's *Connected* (2003) and Calum Storrie's *The Delirious Museum* (2006): an associative, spatial mode of writing, a networked collection of transdisciplinary reference points. Taking the fictive museum as both subject and method of

study, we join Wolfgang Iser's call for a 'heuristics for human self-interpretation', which 'must not be taken from other disciplines and imposed' on the fictive.[24] Modelling such an heuristic, we associate freely among multiple areas of cultural practice to explore the fictive museum on its own terms. We conclude that taking up fictive museums as method exposes spatial, sculptural conditions of knowledge beyond oppositional categories.

The essay **Drugged With History and Art** introduces the fictive museum in contemporary art from Broodthaers to the present, and some of the challenges it presents to traditional notions of criticality. Foremost among these is the short-circuiting of *critical distance*, and its commonsensical cognates *objectivity* and *impartiality*. Fictive museums practice a radical flattening, where distinctions between fiction and fact, figurative and literal meaning, aesthetic and non-aesthetic, theory and practice dissolve. Two first-person accounts of research trips to fictive museums explore this condition. **A Chain of Flowers** describes paranoid structures of meaning in the Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT). **A Line Joining Moments** explores the recently opened Museum of Innocence (MOI) in Istanbul with a close reading of the museum and accompanying novel in the context of colonial misogyny. The relation of paranoia, museums, and the colonial subject is extended in **Making Uncomfortable Parallels,** introducing our work with JAM in the ethnology hall of Warrington Museum, one of the first municipal museums in Britain. **A Minor Paranoia** studies typology and meaning in Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Wing*, finding museum poetics complicit in a hallucinatory, apophenic process that decentres the critical subject.

A Sudden Change in the Pattern resituates the questions of cognition, meaning, and knowledge. Drawing on cognitive linguistics and contemporary embodied and distributed approaches to cognition, the dualisms of mind|body and literal|figurative are contested, eroding the special status of criticality in the context of institutional knowledge production. **The Myth of the Museum** argues the ideology of dualism and an uncritical model of representation is central to the operation of museum knowledge: the label|artefact pair is a constitutive symbol of representation. In **A Consensual Hallucination**, we examine the intensification of this situation in the post-internet condition, and alternatives offered by artistic research as constellation. **Crystals on a Chandelier** explores some art theorists' critiques of associative constellation, and the challenge posed to criticality by works that dismantle the line between artwork and commentary: potential critique is drawn into the web of implicit meaning. **This Form That Thinks** revisits *Ray Gun Wing* and the MJT in light of contemporary interest in the constellation work of Walter Benjamin,[25] Aby Warburg, and André Malraux. **Looping Topology** and **Mappings Between the Pairs** connect the constellation method to New Materialism's challenges to dualism and Gilles Deleuze's critique of the *Image of Thought*, revealing meaning to be an inherently spatial concern. **An Unbridgeable Chasm** reads a display in the MJT in light of the critique of dualism, concluding that dualism itself relies on the production of fictive space.

A Constellation Saturated With Tensions juxtaposes insights from New Materialism, Benjamin's constellation, DeLanda's assemblage theory and cognitive archaeology to generate an associative constellation model. Here our model of the fictive approaches the limits of language, experimenting with spatial aspects

of writing in context to test the implicit|explicit opposition. **The Fictive as an Operational Mode** compares Wolfgang Iser's work with usages from other fields to propose *the fictive* as a concept in its own right. **A Theorist's Fiction** discusses *associative constellation* as a process that generates *fictive space*, drawing together threads from Iser and Pamuk with Daniel Dennet's analogic 'centre of gravity'. **The John Affey Museum** outlines the special features of Affey's proposals for museum practice, and how they can be situated in the fictive museum as a field. **The Museum is the Performance** addresses the question of how and under what conditions the voice of the museum is generated, how this institutional We[26] is accessioned by the research and reframed in terms of *doubtful practices*––irony, refusal, resistance and contrariness. **Drawing Conclusions** collects reference points across the constellation to argue for fictive space as a foundational condition of knowledge production, not only in fictive museum works but in human knowing more generally. We propose fictive museums and the associative constellation as methods for alternative scholarship, resisting the colonial, kyriarchal conditions of the institutional voice.

Associative Constellations, Criticality, and Academic Research

Fictive museums are research-based artistic practices, where information is material and medium. Many are 'models of pedantic scholarship',[27] incorporating labelling and commentaries into the work as a 'unified organism'.[28] The formal conventions and poetics of traditional 'knowledge-producing institutions' are appropriated, exaggerated and ironised: Latinate verbiage, seemingly-technical terminology, digressive descriptions, etc.[29] In this respect, fictive museums perform a mock-academic style, with an outmoded, pseudo-historic whiff. Consequently, researching fictive museums is 'destabilising for scholarship.'[30] This is particularly true for a practice-led doctoral thesis exploring the poetics of institutional knowledge production and its limits, experimenting with writing as practice, and practice as academic writing, destabilising their opposition. An accompanying publication[31] addresses the question of academic validity and associative constellation as research method, using a network of internal on the *Oxford Artistic Research Platform*. Other, more traditional peer-reviewed journal articles with fictive content are included in the body of artistic practice.[32] With the body of practice, the thesis generates a fictive space of knowledge production 'which does not take modalities of criticality as given… [but] experiments with non-division between practice and theory, criticism and creativity'.[33]

This foregrounds some foundational problematics. In a fictive mode – where firm category distinctions between fact and fiction, artefact and text dissolve – what happens to the academic criteria of criticality and validity? Why is this an academic project rather than a moment of practice? What constitutes research

and knowledge? To claim this project as doctoral research necessitates methodological commitments: remaining responsive to critique; acknowledging and addressing existing work in the field; and the transparent collection and citation of references. Judith Butler argues that the academic freedom to explore 'open and critical inquiry' justifies disciplinary norms, rather than the other way around.[34] Commitment to academic inquiry beyond normative rules requires a focus on participatory practices: the framing of questions ~~with~~in a disciplinary context. Central to this are accountability, connectivity, and agency. This research was exposed to the specialist critical context of post-graduate fine art research by practice in several UK institutions, and to wider academic communities, participating in the structures of peer-reviewed publication and conference presentation.

Alongside archival research into the texts and artworks connected to fictive museum practices, and research visits to significant examples, interviews were conducted with artists, theorists and museum professionals.[35] The findings of these primary research activities were followed up through mutually-informing processes of thinking, discussing, reading, writing, and making, contributing to the theoretical contribution of the research: *the fictive museum* as a cognitive space of association or *associative constellation*. Throughout the process, resonant reference points were collected: artworks, museum artefacts, quotations from a wide range of disciplinary discourses. An edited selection of these were assembled through a heuristic process that felt highly spatial ~ diagramming connectivity on paper, looking for patterns of similarity and opposition ~ adding and removing ~ trying the weight and fit of one thing and then another ~

keeping the associative constellation balanced, no element taking centre stage ~ leaving the centre open as an emergent, shifting 'interrogative point'[36] continually reframing 'silent questions'. [37]

In **The Museum is the Performance** and **A Theorist's Fiction**, we outline the as-if positions of critical complicity required to approach fictive museums on their own terms. As Rachel Haidu argues of Broodthaers, this 'opens the very premises of critique to investigation.'[38] Bruno Latour and Karen Barad advocate abandoning critique as a stereotypical 'over-rated' and 'destructive…practice of negativity' that 'misses the mark' of reading and writing as 'ethical practices'.[39] However, Carrie Lambert-Beatty, whose essay on *parafiction* remains a key text for our field, recognises another possibility:

> One of the disturbing things about the parafiction is the split between the trap-laying artist and the specifically unwitting viewer, who thinks she is involved in one kind of experience (historical museum…) while actually participating in another (fiction-based installation; cultural critique)…Parafiction is an antidote to vanity… forever chang[ing] one's interface with the media, art, museums, and scholarship. The difference is a certain critical outlook, but one that should be differentiated from models of criticality as skepticism. Rancière talks about a "poetics of knowledge" opposed to "critique as suspicion". Something like this attitude takes shape, I think, as a post-parafictional alertness to the possibility of play.[40]

Lambert-Beatty's *critical outlook* based on the poetics of knowledge, doubtful irony, and play echoes Paolo Freire's definition of knowledge as 'problem-posing'—a 'critical awareness' bringing the 'zone of background intutitions' to concsiousness. Butler's reading of Theodor Adorno likewise distinguishes a pseudo-critical judgement that 'fetishizes isolated categories' from the praxis of criticality that exposes 'constellations of power' and 'asks after the occlusive constitution of the fields of categories themselves.'[41] For Gilles Deleuze such an

'occlusive' category is what he labels the *image of thought*,[42] stereotyped thinking founded on oppositional dualisms, particularly true|false, discussed in **Mappings Between the Pairs**. For Butler, criticality resides in framing questions that can only be 'posed by breaking through a certain prohibition…the implicit and defining limit' to what can be stated.[43] The fictive museum undermines this true|false structure, fundamental to academic research: the prohibition against falsehood, irony, and allusive meaning.

Adorno warns that the paradox of pseudo-critical judgement is that the separation of idea from object, the very distancing strategy by which it seeks independence, 'threatens to succumb to the thinglike… a collection of ideas on display.'[44] As we outline in **A Constellation Saturated With Tensions** and **An Unbridgeable Chasm**, New Materialism and *thing theory* resist this dualistic form|substance, mind|body, label|artefact, literal|figurative separation, providing a new philosophical approach. Hal Foster identifies a further paradox in Broodthaers's work: the fictive museum appropriates 'cultural reification only to transform it into a critical poetic…at once literal and allegorical, in a word, reflexive.'[45] Associating these perspectives from Foster, Lambert-Beatty, Adorno, Freire, Deleuze and Butler, we assemble a different model of criticality from that rejected by Barad: an emergent 'rogue viewpoint… undermin[ing] the idea of the viewpoint'.[46] In place of critical distance, we have criticality as an embodied, involved praxis, bringing constellations of power to consciousness by taking up the very material poetics of knowledge production that usually serve to reify category distinctions, and posing implicit questions 'about the proper bounds'.[47] Hence it is the very embeddedness of our position which provides a renewed

critical potential——our praxis not of distant judgement but entangled exposition of the material-discursive constellations at play in the fictive museum.[48]

In the process of sketch-mapping a context for the fictive museum, some new philosophical concepts are assembled. *Associative constellation* is a key contribution of this research project, the focus of **A Theorist's Fiction**. Drawing on Manuel DeLanda's reworking of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, we propose *associative constellation* as a kind of assemblage[49] in embodied~cognitive fictive space.[50] Just as cognition[51] is material, distributed and communal, so associative constellation is generated among things, discourses, places, communities, nervous systems. Daniel Dennett uses 'a theorist's fiction' to describe the concept of the *centre of gravity*: a fictive position, 'a sort of abstraction, something whose existence was not in the slightest impugned by its invisibility.'[52] The centre of gravity of this research is *the fictive museum.*

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[1] For surveys, see: Schaffner & Winzen (1998) on archival practices; Putnam (2001) on museum as medium; Alberro & Stimson (2009) on institutional critique.

[2] '[T]hat object of desire, non-innocence, and craft called "we"…' is used throughout to signal the fictive institutional voice of this text (Haraway, in King, 2011, xi). *We* write as-if we are the John Affey Museum, foregrounding the coercive complicity of the institutional first-person plural. See **The Museum is the Performance**.

[3] Following Jacques Derrida's and Judith Butler's re-castings of J. L. Austin's work, the *performative* simultaneously describes and enacts: 'I now pronounce you man and wife' (Butler, 1993, 17–18). Performative acts operate through 'a chain of binding conventions': networks of repetition and citation, both conferring and constraining authority (18), a condition shared by the museum label and the academic text.

[4] See Candlin, 2016.

[5] This perspective is an assemblage of insights accessioned from Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Katie King, Tim Ingold, for which Manuel DeLanda and Rosi Braidotti coined New Materialism: 'the mind is always already material… matter is necessarily something of the mind… nature and culture are always already "naturecultures" (Donna Haraway's term). New materialism opposes… transcendental and humanist traditions, which are manifold yet consistently predicated on dualist structures…. What can be labelled "new materialism" shifts these dualist structures by allowing for the conceptualization of the travelling of the fluxes of nature and culture, matter and mind, and opening up active theory formation.' (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, 48).

[6] LaFarge, 2007.

[7] Rohrer, 2010, 26.

[8] The '~' sign, *tilde* (from L. *titulus,* title) was used as a 'mark of suspension' in medieval Latin, indicating the omission of one or more letters. It is often used in dictionary definitions in place of the word being defined. In mathematics, it has two distinct uses. In formal logic, it means 'not' (e.g. ~*p*). In relational mathematics, it means 'is equivalent to' (e.g. x~y). In this section of the thesis, we're using ~ to indicate a linking caesura between elements in the constellation.

[9] Hooper-Greenhill, 2002, 152.

[10] Maharaj (2009, 4) takes up *agglutinative* to label 'thinking through the visual'—a mode in artistic research 'beyond the organising, classifying spirit… bring[ing] into play associative manoeuvres, juxtaposition, blend and splice… constellating assemblages.' While we take up his proposal of the agglutinative, we question Maharaj's conceptions of *the cognitive* and *the algorithmic* as disembodied modes necessarily aligned with 'corticalization' and 'institutional captivity'—pressures resisted by the self-instituting nature fictive museums practices. See **A Sudden Change in the Pattern**, **A Minor Paranoia**, **This Form that Thinks**, and **Drawing Conclusions.**

[11] Aarseth, 1997, 3–4.

[12] Binary opposition is either/or, while dualism is a one-dimensional space in which any departure from one is a move toward the other, e.g. light|dark. See Mappings Between the Pairs.

[13] Welschman, 2001, 1–2.

[14] Our use of *thing* follows the work of 'thing theorists' including Tim Ingold and Bill Brown to describe agential, dynamic views of matter, which the word *object* lacks. '[T]he thing has the character not of an externally bounded entity, set over and against the world, but of a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots.' (Ingold, 2010, 3.) *Thing Theory* is a perspective aligned with New Materialism that contests form|substance dualism and the passivity of matter (Brown, 2001). See **A Constellation Saturated With Tensions**.

[15] Taking part in trans-national decolonizing and queering movements is an ethical imperative for me, both politically and personally. As a white, middle class researcher with English, Irish and Settler Australian ancestry, I am deeply embedded in colonial cultures. My pansexuality, non-binary trans gender and largely invisible disabilities (an artificial eye, dyslexic/dyspraxic spectrum) mean I can pass as 'healthy straight British male', although being read in this way erases my identity, causing considerable anguish. I spent over thirty years of my life hiding who I was under threat of verbal and physical abuse. I join Bal, Freire, Haraway, Harney & Moten, Heumann-Gurian, Plumwood, Vásquez and others in stressing the need to resist and unpick the deeply ingrained epistemic violences of our postcolonial condition. At the heart of this cruel, colonizing culture is dualism, the ideological mechanism behind both ongoing racial injustices, and endemic transphobia. On the relation between museums and the postcolonial condition, see Thomas, 2010.

[16] *Kyriarchy* is a term proposed by Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in response to the inadequacy of *patriarchy* to adequately encompass the intersectional workings of power: '[I]n Western societies, the system of domination and exploitation is not just patriarchal but kyriarchal—that is, it is defined not only by gender but also by race, class, ethnicity, imperialism, and age.' (Schüssler Fiorenza, 2017, 2, Note 5).

[17] '[M]odularity is an extremely important aspect of the fictive art projects […] I see fictive art as a deeply generative way of working.' (LaFarge & Le Couteur, 2017).

[18] Karen Barad's work joining critical theory and experimental physics addresses the radical potential of the 'intra-actions' of material things, co-producing one another. See Barad, 2003.

[19] 'I would like those who are not versed in anatomy to take the trouble, before reading this, to have the heart of some large animal with lungs dissected in front of them.' (Descartes, 1920, 37).

[20] All these accessioned quotations are freely available elsewhere online.

[21] When not explicitly discussed, epigraphs are not protected by the usual 'fair dealing' exemptions of copyright for academic criticism and review. To the extent they add 'literary merit' or 'qualitative value,' permissions must be obtained (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Our Benjaminian tactic of collecting and displaying contextual quotations is hence not only a gesture of anti-establishment scholarship, but an unlawful act of civil disobedience. In keeping with the nature of fictive museum works, this is protest or provocation as proposal.

[22] Sahraoui & Sauter, 2018, xi.

[23] See **This Form That Thinks**.

[24] Iser, 1993, xiii.

[25] On contemporary interest in Benjamin's constellation as a philosophical principle, see Sahraoui & Sauter, 2018.

[26] '[T]hat object of desire, non-innocence, and craft called "we"' is used throughout to signal the fictive voice of this text, foregrounding the coercive complicity of the institutional first-person plural (Haraway, in King, 2011, xi). See **The Museum is the Performance**.

[27] Rothstein, 2012.

[28] Kabakov, 2000, 257.

[29] The use of Latinate language in knowledge production is itself one of our conditions of kyriarchal coloniality. Today, Latinate language remains a marker of kyriarchal inequalities; that *penis* has such a dramatically different sphere of usage from *cock* is symptomatic of language as a colonised space. Latin and French loan words retain their status as the only terminology appropriate to formal discourse, and 'emotive' Anglo-Germanic words relegated to the 'vulgar,' the bodily, and the domestic (Corson,1995, 87). The English language is marked by its contingent history as a post-colonial tongue shaped by occupation by Roman imperial Latin, by the Anglo-Norman French of an invading aristocracy – whose descendants still retain considerable wealth and political influence compared to the descendants of their subjects (Clark & Cummins, 2014) – and again by medieval Latin as *lingua franca*—the transnational medium of legal, scholarly, and religious communication.

[30] Lambert-Beatty, 2009, 83.

[31] Le Couteur, 2017.

[32] Le Couteur, 2015a, 2015b.

[33] Fusco, 2016.

[34] Butler, 2009, 776.

[35] These include: Sherwood & Le Couteur, 2016; Beard & Le Couteur, 2017; and LaFarge & Le Couteur, 2017.

[36] Beard & Le Couteur, 2017.

[37] Whitehead, 2012, 175.

[38] Haidu, 2010, xxx.

[39] Barad, quoted in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, 49.

[40] Lambert-Beatty, 2009, 82–3.

[41] Butler, 2004, 303.

[42] Deleuze, 1994, xvi. The *Image of thought* is a complex philosophical idea which Deleuze develops in Ch. 3 of *Difference and Repetition*, discussed in more detail below. Deleuze gave this *precis*: 'We live with a particular image of thought, that is to say, before we begin to think, we have a vague idea of what it means to think, its means and its ends. And then

someone comes along and proposes another idea, a whole other image… From then on, thought is no longer carried on by a voluntary self, but by involuntary forces, the "effects" of machines.' (Deleuze, 2004, 139).

[43] Butler, 2009, 777.

[44] Adorno, quoted in Butler, 2004, 303.

[45] Foster, 1996, 23.

[46] Butler, 2009, 777.

[47] Butler, 2009, 777.

[48] Many alternative models of criticality exist – including renewed interest in Dalí's 'paranoiac-critical method' – and their relations to contemporary art practices are complex and often contentious (see Maimon, 2009). On the paranoiac-critical method in relation to education and play, see Gude, 2015. On the 'interval' between paranoid criticality and rational theory, see Hunt, 1999.

[49] *Assemblage* – the usual translation of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *agencement* – has two shortcomings: it lacks a sense of generative agency; and it reads as a noun naming an object, rather than a verb naming a process of components fitting together (DeLanda, 2016, 1). Our use of assemblage in general and the more focused *associative constellation* is indebted to *Assemblage Theory* (2016), DeLanda's summary and continuation of Deleuze & Guattari's work.

[50] The concept of *fictive space* is elaborated throughout this thesis. For an introduction to the fictive, see **The Fictive as an Operational Mode**

[51] See **A Sudden Change in the Pattern**.

[52] Dennett, 1993, 431.

Artwork — Ancient Cultures — Treasure

eBay — Artefact — Bronzes — Coral — Copy

'A Forgotten Museum'

'An Extravaganza of Post-Truth Art'

Mary Beard — Art Fairs — Blue Chip Collectors

'Ashmolean Museum, 'The Curator's Egg'

Hauser & Wirth, 'BRONZE AGE c.3500 BC – AD 2017'

Damien Hirst, 'Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable'

Minor Museum — Major Museum

Passionate Irony — Provenance — Knowing Irony

Institutional Critique — Pastiche

Nostalgia — Kitsch

Power

Drugged with History and Art

An Unbridgeable Chasm

The Fictive as an Operational Mode

A Consensual Hallucination

Slide 93.8: Drugged with History and Art

Drugged with History and Art

Contemporary Art and the Fictive Museum

> To talk about my museum means discussing the ways and means of analysing fraud. The ordinary museum and its representatives simply present one form of truth. To talk about this museum means speaking about the conditions of truth. It is also important…whether or not the fictional museum casts a new light on the mechanisms of art, the artistic life, and society. I pose the question with my museum. Therefore I do not find it necessary to produce the answer.[53]

Now seems a timely moment to study fictive museums, though they have existed since the emergence of contemporary art in the late 1960s. In 2012, as this research began, Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence opened in Istanbul. In 2017, two very different fictive museums graced contemporary art fairs. Made in collaboration with Professor Mary Beard, 'Hauser & Wirth: BRONZE AGE c. 3500 BC – AD 2017' at Frieze London 'recreated a fictional bronze age presentation from a forgotten museum'.[54] This elaborate institutional scene – complete with carpet tiles, scuffed baseboards and fire exit – grouped bronzes from famous artists, loans from minor museums and private collections, and dubious eBay antiquities. Meanwhile, the Venice Biennale hosted Damien Hirst's *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, the largest, most expensive fictive installation ever made[55]—'an extravaganza of "post-truth" art'[56] with museum-style labels. The label for a mammoth skull in Carrara marble informed visitors the trunk socket inspired cyclops mythology, echoing a label in the Natural History Museum.[57] Hirst's appropriation foregrounds an essential museum structure, the long-established dyad on which museums rely: the performative

juxtaposition of artefact and label to assemble *associative constellations* of meaning value.

Marcel Broodthaers' *Musée de l'Art Moderne* (1968-72), a transmedia assemblage of objects, texts, installations, and performances, remains a key reference point for the fictive museum as a genre—'a foundational work of institutional critique'.[58] In claiming he does not 'find it necessary to produce the answer' to questions posed by his museum, Broodthaers demonstrates his characteristic 'anti-establishment', 'fiercely enigmatic', and 'not literal but rather rhetorical' mode of address.[59] Broodthaers points to the fictive museum's value, exposing not truth itself but its conditions, the mechanisms of art and 'the ordinary museum'. Above, Broodthaers does not distinguish between fictive and fictional. Yet *fictional museum* does not convey how real the 'fraud' may become, apparent in two contemporary examples, the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles (1988–present), and the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul (2012–present). These institutions are not fictional. They have long-term physical premises, adapted to their purposes. They employ staff, publish books, house permanent collections, win museum awards—they have gift shops. Though taking part in the same ironic, reflexive practices as Broodthaers, these are *actual* museums. Here we depart from Broodthaers, generating an associative constellation around *the fictive* that resists dualistic fact|fiction opposition, even in ironic terms.

The press release of Broodthaers's Düsseldorf Kunsthalle incarnation of his *Musée* at documenta V (1972) states: 'the fictive museum takes its point of

departure from the identity of art and eagle'.[60] For Rosalind Kraus, Broodthaers's 'identity-flattening eagle principle'[61] describes a radical de-categorisation, associated with Fredric Jameson's homogenization of all values and relations under the 'perceptual system of late capitalism'.[62] Broodthaers' 'sale on account of bankruptcy' in *Section Financière* (1970–71) – an 'unlimited edition' of gold ingots, stamped with the eagle brand of his museum, and priced at double the market value – seems an uncannily prescient gesture.[63] Intentionally counter-cultural practices of 'Institutional Critique' in the mid-twentieth century appear to have been adopted very successfully by the art market. 'The kind of whimsy represented' at both shows has been popular among collectors, with Hauser & Wirth selling nearly $1.5 million at the VIP event,[64] and Hirst far more.[65]

Notions of critique warp under the strain of the colossal market forces involved. Are the Roman spoons 'from the wreck' real antiques, careful museum-grade reproductions, or even painted plaster? Hirst's financial and cultural power is such that the question becomes oddly immaterial. All that remains for Jonathan Jones is 'the combination of intricate detail and stonking, mind-blowing scale and quantity', leaving the complicit visitor 'drugged with history and art'. The 'sculptures in rollicking bad taste' contrast with vitrines 'contain[ing] things of apparent antiquity and historical meaning, arranged – as they might be in a very beautiful museum – by a fastidious curator… How do we classify and know anything at all, and what drives people to do it?'[66] Critiquing the constructed nature of museum narratives becomes another excuse for the gay abandon of neoliberal culture industries; an ironic reaffirmation of the kyriarchy.

Echoing Broodthaers, for Mary Beard, BRONZE AGE 'raised questions about the conventions of the museum' by making 'interrogative points', primarily through the juxtaposition of bronzes with very different provenances.[67] The display's spatial arrangement belies this critical potential; within the vitrines, velvet-covered platforms and similar framing devices carefully separated different classes of artefact. While eBay vendors' descriptions were repeated verbatim on anachronistic typewritten label cards, this fictive museum retained its own model of certainty. The specialist knowledge and value construction of the connoisseur underwrites stable category distinctions, and establishment hierarchies are reaffirmed through the gallery's price list. For Hauser & Wirth's Frieze exhibit, the fictive museum is a playful, profitable structure, using gentle, knowing irony to reaffirm the knowledge production of the minor institution as a system of value, from which the eBay vendor and the visitor are equally estranged. Though fictive museums such as the Museum of Jurassic Technology and the Museum of Innocence appear equally invested in nostalgic museum poetics, they have the potential to be more deeply unsettling, not least through their avoidance of the art market. Both are financed through admission fees, publications, donations and grants; neither frame themselves as artworks.

In Hirst's work, the associations between aesthetic, taste, wealth, cultural power, and control of meaning are clear. It is less clear how this ancient kyriarchal system might be contested or reimagined. Rather than a call to scholarship or critical thinking, the 'drugging' seems to mobilise against it. We know the narrative we are being fed is a confection, but we don't know whether individual things are real; that knowledge has lost all relevance beyond an appraisal service

for luxury items. Criticality is overwhelmed by spectacle and desire. The fictive

operates as a licence, pretext, or set-up for revelling in the real fantasy of

excess; historical tidbits are as much of an adornment as gold leaf, or diamonds.

To call out Hirst's fictive museum with an exposé of its questionable financial

involvements, the conditions of its production, or similar socio-political

accusations of immorality or complicity is unthinkable, laughable precisely

because it is so overwhelmingly evident. For some commentators, the fictive

museum has lost any right it might once have had to label itself subversive,

thought-provoking, or even unusual—'It's not just boring, it's meaningless.'[68] The

concern with *meaning* is a central one, pointed to by Claire Bishop's essay

'History Depletes Itself'.[69] Do irony, pastiche and exaggeration short-circuit

criticality through complicity? Is knowledge meaningful without an honest

commitment to seeking the truth? These are some interrogative points posed

by fictive museums, but seldom answered by them.[70]

Alongside these big-ticket works are innumerable minor fictive museum projects;

a huge variety in Britain alone, from Stuart Brisley's Museum of Ordure to BBC

Radio 4's *Museum of Lost Objects* series. Having entered the mainstream, the

fictive museum work is arguably no longer an experimental or truly

contemporary concern. For the *cognoscenti,* familiar with fifty years of

institutional critique and museum theory, the genre may not represent anything

new. But according to Beard's assessment, 'most people actually are not familiar

with fictive museum displays. The reaction to the BRONZE AGE booth suggests

that it had the capacity to make people think'.[71] Beard's position is supported by

the relative scarcity of research on fictive museums. The majority of literary-

academic responses have focused on individual works, such as Ralph Rugoff's and Lawrence Weschler's books on the Museum of Jurassic Technology, both from the mid-1990s. Current terms for artworks involving fictions – Antoinette LaFarge's *fictive art* and Carrie Lambert-Beatty's *parafiction* – were established in isolated papers; both authors are currently writing book-length studies.[72] The first extended research project, a 2000 practice-based PhD dissertation by Australian artist Peter Hill on *superfictions*, focused on Hill's own practice, including a section specifically on superfictional museum institutions. Building on his work with the *Museum of Contemporary Ideas* (1989–present),[73] Hill produced *The Art Fair Murders* (1996–2000) a series of installations and performances and a written novel 'worked on in tandem…each evolved from ideas generated by the other.'[74] Simultaneously, Orhan Pamuk was working on his own two decade novel-and-installation project, publishing the novel *The Museum of Innocence* (2008), then opening his public museum in 2012.

Crediting Marcel Duchamp's fictive R. Mutt[75] and the readymade with opening the territory, Hill joins Krauss in identifying Broodthaers' *eagle principle* as marking the definitive shift into Contemporary Art and the post-medium condition of appropriation. Standing ironically for 'art' or 'idea', Broodthaers' eagle is for Krauss 'no longer a figure of nobility, becom[ing] a sign of the figure, the mark – that is – of pure exchange'.[76] Paradoxically, Krauss accuses this very 'principle of levelling' not only of 'leeching of the aesthetic out into the social field in general', but of collapsing 'the difference between the aesthetic and the commodified'. Krauss echoes Jameson's argument: as everything becomes aestheticised, the once-sublime realm of the aesthetic is drained, destablising

museum knoweldge: 'the tour of the museum calls forth [only] aleatory perceptions…space assembling and disassembling itself oneirically around you'.[77] According to Krauss's analysis, this leads to 'installation and intermedia work, in which art essentially finds itself complicit with a globalisation of the image in the service of capital'.[78] As contemporary art-fair fictive museums demonstrate, this could be equally said of the bronze, which has retained and even intensified its long-held status as a luxury commodity. The fictive component in both of these shows points to the importance of narrative framing not only for intermedia installation work, but for the ostensibly pure æsthetics of Modernism.[79] Without faith in dualism's myths of progress and perfect representation – in the *novelty* of the postmodern world of networked Capital – mourning a prelapsarian condition of pure aesthetics simply does not make much sense. The most striking experience for artist-researchers of the present generation, reading again the genre of apocalyptic postmodernism of Jameson and Krauss, is how naïve and idealistic it sounds. How impossible it is not only to imagine anything different, but to believe anything *was ever* different. Paradoxically, Krauss and Jameson's critique seems to retroactively affirm an aesthetic sublime, located in a fictive prior state, a mythical pre-Capitalist Eden in which art and museums functioned differently, with artworks as mile-markers along the teleological road of History.

Beard points to a challenge of the fictive museum: it can fracture audiences. As a genre bridging art and museum practice, one that does not explicitly label itself *Art*, the fictive museum has relevance beyond the concerns of an expert art audience, for whom the novelty may have worn off.[80] As a genre, the fictive

museum spans both openly ironic works like Broodthaers' *Musée,* and Michael Blum's *A Tribute to Safiye Behar,* an ostensibly documentary installation in the style of a house museum, made for the ninth Istanbul Biennial (2005). Both imply 'silent questions',[81] interrogative points proposed through mappings onto the established practices and structures of Broodthaers's 'ordinary museum'. Rachel Haidu argues, '[w]hile the *Musée's* presumably "fictive" status allows Broodthaers to sidestep the clichés that surround the concept of socially or politically oriented critique, he opens the very premises of critique to investigation'.[82] Carrie Lambert-Beatty observes that critics of what she labels Blum's 'parafictional' museum are as likely to complain of his 'flat-footed' appropriation of Behar as an otherwise interesting historical figure, as others were of Behar's unconvincing, self-betraying 'fictionality'.[83] Claire Robins takes up Lambert-Beatty's label of parafiction for this kind of work, identifying 'an intention to dupe' combined with 'an absence of humour' as the 'distinguishing factor'. These responses miss Blum's invitation to experience the fictive as a mode of practice ~ questioned whether Behar was *real or not,* Blum responds: 'she was real to me'.[84]

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[53] Broodthaers, quoted in Carruthers, 2009, 20.

[54] Hauser & Wirth, 2017.

[55] Hirst's show spans two museums, thousands of square feet, almost two hundred large art works, and twenty-one vitrines. The conceit is that Hirst paid to recover these 'treasures' from the sunken wreck of an ancient ship named Unbelievable. The aesthetic matches the fiction, with sculptures encrusted with colourful coral-like growths, appropriating stereotyped ancient styles from Mayan stone-carving and sculptures of Indian gods to colossal Greek bronzes.

[56] Reyburn, 2017.

[57] Jones, 2017a.

[58] Haidu, 2010, xxx.

[59] Jon Knowles, quoted in Carruthers, 2009, 22.

[60] Broodthaers, quoted in Carruthers, 2009, 22.

[61] Krauss, 2000, 20.

[62] Krauss, 2000, 19–22.

[63] Schultz, 2007, 84.

[64] Halperin, 2014.

[65] Hirst marketed three versions of each work on display: 'Coral (as if just retrieved from the sea), Treasure (as if just restored) and Copy (like a museum reproduction), each made in an edition of three, with two extra reserved for the artist.' (Reyburn, 2017). While Hirst spent at least $65 million on the Venice project, to say nothing of the investment by his dealers, reports indicate that multiple editions have sold out.

[66] Jones, 2017a.

[67] Beard & Le Couteur, 2017.

[68] Jones, 2017b.

[69] For an exploration of similar ideas, see the discussion of Claire Bishop's argument in **Crystals on a Chandelier**.

[70] As discussed in **The Fictive as an Operational Mode,** we do not employ 'fictive museum' as an exclusionary, technical label, but as an open genre. While the Hauser & Wirth and Hirst exhibits are not fictive museums in the fuller sense of the MJT or MOI, they claim – however ironically – the status of museums, operating *as-if* constituting an institution.

[71] Beard & Le Couteur, 2017.

[72] While there is a large body of critical literature on Institutional Critique in general, and on artistic interventions in museums, there is comparatively little about artworks claimed *as* museums. Key works include: Schaffner & Winzen's *Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing, and Archiving in Art* (1998); James Putnam's *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (2001); and Calum Storrie's *The Delirious Museum* (2006).

[73] Antoinette LaFarge likewise founded her own fictive museum project, the Museum of Forgery (1990–2008), which since 1993 has been online at <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~mof/>. LaFarge traces her theoretical interest in *fictive art* to these museum experiments (LaFarge, 2015).

[74] Hill, 2000.

[75] Higgs (2015) suggests R. Mutt and his famous *Fountain* were actually the work of Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.

[76] Krauss, 2000, 20.

[77] Jameson, 1998, 110–12.

[78] Krauss, 2000, 64.

[79] The artist's studio, persona and reputation, the agents and gallerists, collectors and collections, gallery spaces and museums have always been part of the picture, though traditionally they did not intrude into the frame.

[80] The question of novelty points to a general condition of knowledge: our cultural obsession with primacy and recency, origins and with the cutting edge, which Mary Midgley associates with our colonial progress mythology, discussed in **The Myth of a Museum.** Primacy and recency effects are cognitive biases; we are influenced by the first information we receive on a subject, and consider the most recent information more accurate than that preceding it (Duffy & Crawford, 2008).

[81] Whitehead, 2012, 175.

[82] Haidu, 2010, xxx.

[83] Lambert-Beatty, 2009, 53–4.

[84] Blum, quoted in Robins, 2017, 116.

Coincidence

Caroline
Islands

Khipu

'One pretty figure I
invented, as I flattered
myself, only to find...'
Caroline Furness Jayne

Anthropology

Donna Haraway

Katie King

String Figures

Models

Cinematic
Special Effects

Los Angeles

Museum of
Jurassic Technology

'Ut Translatio
Natura'

Iguazu Falls

Madalena
Delani

Forgetting

Singing

Suspension
Bridge

Geoffrey
Sonnabend

Large,
Seemingly
Impossible
Projects

Psychology

The Fictive Museum

Noah's Ark

First Public Museum

'...a minor paranoia...'
Ralf Rugoff

The Tradescants'
Ark

Museum Studies

A Chain of Flowers

A Theorist's Fiction

Drugged With
History and Art

A Line Joining Moments

Slide 4210.1: A Chain of Flowers

A Chain of Flowers

A Visit to The Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles, August 2014

Clair Le Couteur

"At 9341 Venice Boulevard, halfway between Los Angeles and Santa Monica, in a warren of rooms behind an innocuous stucco storefront, is perhaps the best-known fictive museum in the world. Its website states the Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) is 'an educational institution dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the public appreciation of the Lower Jurassic', providing 'the academic community with a specialised repository of relics and artefacts,' and 'the visitor a hands-on experience'.[85] Just what the Lower Jurassic is – let alone its technology – is never explained, though a map labelled "JURASSIC" on the website and framed in the museum's entrance looks a lot like Egypt. Founded in 1988, David and Diana Wilson's museum is the publisher of unusual texts, 'models of pedantic scholarship with elaborate citations, some of which lead to nonexistent sources, others pointing to extraordinary historical figures.'[86] In these, as in the labelled vitrines, we find that queer blend – fiction in the guise of scholarship, scholarship in the guise of fiction – so loved by fans of Jorge Luis Borges. The method is what Iain Sinclair, describing the 'Robinson' films of Patrick Keiller, called 'a fabulation backed by congeries of improbable fact'.[87] Many of these facts – like a fungal spore that takes over the brain of ants,[88] or a museum founded by eccentric gardeners – behave as-if metaphorical, seeming allusions, models or microcosms of the MJT itself.

"It began, as Mr. Wilson told me when I visited, as lecture performances and a travelling vitrine exhibit. He still lectures, but after one too many near-misses carrying large sheets of glass up and down stairs, he decided in the early nineties to rent a space and build his museum in earnest. Mr. Wilson told me this in his car, an old model and clearly well used, as he drove me to meet a friend of his. I'd mentioned my own museum was about the polar regions, and he insisted we visit the hand-painted Velaslavasay Panorama, one of the few left in the world. Like the MJT, the Panorama is a rented site, an old cinema transformed by thousands of hours of invested care. Above the cinema, up a small spiral staircase, is a rotunda. The visitor stands on a circular railed platform, looking out over simulated vistas. Model ice floes merged into painted ones, and a soundtrack of the hushed sea, the cracks and squeals of ice, induced a kind of eerie calm, impossibly re-contextualising the heat and ever-present traffic of Los Angeles. Like the MJT, the Panorama is a labour of love, running on almost no funds, supported by various side-projects, charging its visitors very little. I bought a book on Arctic panorama painting in Britain, which I've flicked through but never read.[89]

"As I ate lunch the following day with the Wilsons' daughter Danrae, a puppeteer and puppet maker, I learned that after founding the MJT, they were snubbed by their formerly-wide circle in LA's contemporary art scene. At the time, the husband and wife team had a good income building custom lens arrangements for cinematic special effects: tilt-shift devices and the like for making model sets appear huge, no longer required in the digital era. They had also built a reputation for exquisite conceptual film. A description of one piece

caught me, though I've never seen it: a long zoom-out shot of a tree made

across a desert canyon. Each separate still blown up and recut so that, as the

shot pulls back, the image remains the same scale in the frame but the tree

blurs, melting into the environment.[90] The image has stayed with me for its

beauty, and for the technical mastery and absolute dedication to detail it

represents. The MJT has been made with this kind of obsessive, highly

conceptual craft. The 'halls' of the museum, as labelled on the plan, lie in semi-

darkness. Several exhibits feature hand-made stereoscopes, producing

hallucinatory effects (lost on researchers born with only one eye). The MJT is

an incredibly subtle monument to vanishing museum practices and cinematic

technology: lenses, lighting effects, and optical illusions are everywhere.

"I write this three years to the day after visiting the MJT, having realised I'd never

typed up my notes. The Museum made time for me. I was warmly welcomed

behind the scenes to the Airstream trailers where their team of dedicated

volunteers stayed – mostly young artists working anonymously – and the

workshop where they produce the MJT's incredibly detailed models, with

animatronic or projected elements. In front of one case housing a model of the

world's largest waterfall – the Iguazu Falls, on the border of Argentina and Brazil

– is a viewing device. Looking through the eyepiece, some elaborate

nineteenth-century technique involving multiple glass engravings produces a

three-dimensional mirage of a suspension bridge, hovering impossibly over the

falls. The supposedly historical narrative justifying this lavish diorama concerns

two people who never properly met. Geoffrey Sonnabend, an experimental

neurologist whose melancholy theory of memory – or rather, of 'obliscence' or

forgetting – was inspired by seeing Madalena Delani sing one night at a resort

by the Falls. Delani, an opera singer with amnesia 'probably derived from

chemical poisoning at a very young age', died in a car accident shortly

afterwards.[91]   Decades before, Sonnabend's father, a structural engineer,

determined to build a suspension bridge over the Falls. In 1887, as it neared

completion, the bridge was destroyed by 'an unseasonable storm.' Following the

calamity, a wealthy benefactor and collector befriended him – later funding

Geoffrey's research – because 'they had much in common, not least of which

was a love of large, seemingly impossible projects.'[92]   Both impossible projects

and theories of forgetting resonate as I write, years later, recalling the dreamlike

experiences of my visit.[93]

"Of course, strange resonances are how fictive museums like the MJT operate;

resisting explication, accompanied by the uncanny sense of synchronicity,

associations are generated by the material, extending beyond it like roots or

vines. As I was visiting, the crew were preparing to go to Russia for filming.

Working with the arts-science collective Kabinet, the MJT has made twelve films

in their Chain of Flowers series. I saw one at the museum, an oneiric sepia-

toned journey with delicate, psychedelic focal effects, about which I can

remember only that it involved a city in the desert, elaborate structures of

brickwork, women singing in what sounded like Arabic. Following an

unattributed quotation on the website, the Chain of Flowers figure recurs

throughout the MJT. The source is Charles Wilson Peale, an eighteenth-century

soldier, scientist, naturalist, politician and inventor, who established one of the

first museums in the United States: 'The Learner must be led always from

familiar objects toward the unfamiliar, guided along, as it were, a chain of flowers into the mysteries of life'.[94] This oblique reference is one of many cryptic allusions in the Museum. Seemingly fantastic tropes are borrowings from the bizarre history of museum practice, from the life of Athanasius Kircher to the Tradescants, the pair of gardeners whose collection Elias Ashmole co-opted under suspicious circumstances, founding the Ashmolean Museum. The Tradescants' proto-museum in Vauxhall, the first open to the public in England, was known as The Ark. One of the first exhibits in the MJT is a cutaway model of Noah's Ark according to Biblical instructions; an eminently un-seaworthy three-story box divided up into cells like a rectilinear wasp's nest, rocking gently as-if on an invisible ocean. The nearby label suggests Noah's Ark as the most complete museum of natural history ever known.

"Over the years, the MJT has colonized the adjacent shops, including a coroner's office; one store room smells powerfully of embalming fluid. It's difficult to say how big the museum is. On my first visit, convinced I'd seen everything, I missed a whole section. Shadowy halls and spotlights, lens effects and long text panels, half-illuminated in the gloom, make for a disorientating experience punctuated with moments of striking clarity, like using a microscope. Upstairs, beside a room full of paintings of 'The Lives of Perfect Creatures' (canine Cosmonauts),[95] is an exhibit on 'string figures'. I'd been making sculptures with cord for many years, and was very interested in theses trans-cultural, trans-temporal games— making moving figures in space, often whilst telling a story or singing. Later, reading Donna Haraway's recent book on *SF* – sometimes meaning science fiction, sometimes string figures, sometimes speculative fabulation – I realised the

exhibit connected with Haraway and her colleague Katie King's transmedia investigation of *khipu*.[96] In a book about string figures I bought in the MJT shop – half instruction manual, half ethnological study – is in a sentence I find I've underlined in yellow, some half-forgotten colour-coding: 'One pretty figure I invented, as I flattered myself, only to find out later that it is common among the natives of the Caroline Islands'.[97] My research experience has been similar. As I'm checking this reference, I notice the author's name is Caroline. Another coincidence. Another association in an endless chain of flowers, inducing – as Ralph Rugoff writes – a kind of 'minor paranoia'.[98]''

---

[85] The site is museum piece; some of its code was written in 1996, a relic of dialup Internet when low-resolution images and repeated textures were crucial. The website's three-letter domain name – <www.mjt.org> – demonstrates how early it was registered.

[86] Rothstein, 2012.

[87] Sinclair, 2003, 49.

[88] Lawrence Weschler describes the MJT's 'Cameroonian Stink Ant' exhibit. 'This ant becomes infected by a fungus that takes over its brain…fomenting bizarre behavioural changes…a spikelike protrusion erupts from…the ant's head…heavily laden with spores, which now begin to rain down onto the forest floor for other unsuspecting ants to inhale' (1995, 4–5). Weschler talks to David Wilson, the MJT's founder, about the ant: '"But at another level," David continued, "we were drawn to that particular instance because it seemed so metaphorical. That's one of our mottoes here at the museum: *Ut Translatio Natura*—Nature as Metaphor. I mean, there've been times in my own life when I felt exactly like that ant—impelled, as if possessed, to do things that defy all common sense. That ant is me. I couldn't have summed up my own life better if I'd made him up all by myself." "But David," I wanted to say (and didn't), "*you did make him up all by yourself!*"' (63) Following up the story with a biologist, Weschler is unsettled to discover that the MJT's uncanny B-movie biohorror about a zombie ant – which Wilson describes as seeming-metaphorical – is a fiction at all, but a conflation: all of the unlikely details are taken from fact.

[89] It forms part of my collection on polar exploration and whaling in British colonialism, assembled for an unrealised exhibit about the history of Biscoe House: a whaling station on Deception Island. Later used as a military base and research laboratory, John Affey was storing his collection at the station before the buildings was destroyed by a volcanic mudslide.

[90] I asked if Mr. Wilson had heard of Hans Vaihinger's philosophy of *As-if*. He replied he had a copy on his bedside table, but hadn't made much headway with it. I admitted I hadn't either.

[91] MJT, 2002, 57.

[92] MJT, 2002, 62.

[93] I was in a fragile state: thrilled to be visiting; destabilised by the failure of my marriage, and its unexpected consequence—finally coming out as trans. My failure to write up the trip was not a lack of care, but too much. Over lunch with Danae, it struck me that the JAM acting director Rev. Adam Origen – an elderly man I have only met briefly in person, but had many long, rambling phonecalls with – could be represented by a puppet emu. I've never made the puppet, nor the videos I had hoped to produce with Origen. Talking with Danae, I could picture the emu clearly: wearing half-moon spectacles, legs protruding from the sleeves of a worn tweed blazer, introducing YouTubers to the story behind JAM, with Origen providing voiceover in his camp, meticulous way. Originally from New Zealand but long settled in a bedsit above the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, Origen's voice is an exquisite fake of a mid-century English gentleman, continually voicing absurdities in the driest possible tones. I never made the puppet or video. In the intervening years Origen distanced himself from JAM, unhappy with the 'consultancy' direction the new Board are taking. He has since passed away. As I write, my own impossible project haunts me, the sense that whatever I have made is nothing compared to that left un-done.

[94] Museums of the World, 2014.

[95] Canine cosmonauts feature in Pamuk's Museum of Innocence, particularly Chapter/Case 34 'Like A Dog in Outer Space'. The background is a naïve painting of Laika travelling toward the viewer in a tin can spaceship, with a spiral behind. See **A Line Joining Moments**.

[96] *Khipu* is a pre-Colombian system of writing from the Andes using knots ~ another fascination of mine. See **Looping Topology**.

[97] Furness Jayne, 1962, 9.

[98] Rugoff, 1995, 73.

A Line Joining
Moments

A Chain of Flowers

Mappings Between
the Pairs

A Minor Paranoia
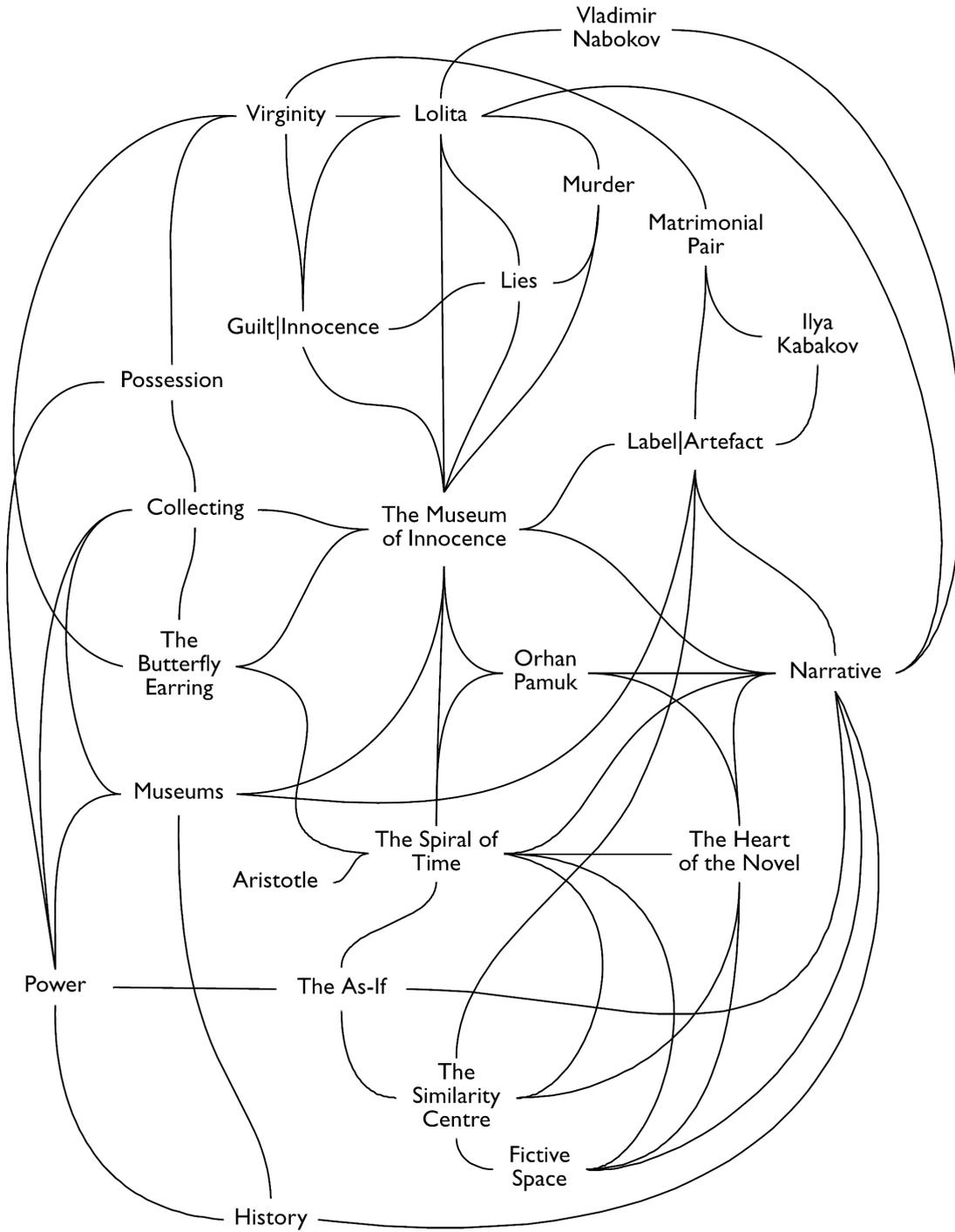
Slide 811.1: A Line Joining Moments

A Line Joining Moments

Revisiting the Museum of Innocence, 2014-2018

Clair Le Couteur

"The pamphlet *Masymiyet Müzesi, the museum of innocence* – given to me when I entered Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence (MOI) – is structured as a series of questions: What is the Museum of Innocence? What is the novel *The Museum of Innocence*? What is exhibited in the Museum of Innocence? One seems less straightforward:

> **What is the Spiral of Time?**
>
> The 'Spiral of Time,' which is found right on the floor at the entrance of the museum, can be seen from every floor. If Aristotle thought of time as a line joining moments worth remembering, Orhan Pamuk sees the story as a line joining the objects described in the novel. This is the thought at the heart of both the museum and the novel. While the spiral represents time and the story itself, the golden dots represent moments in time, or the individual objects within the story.

This spiral echoes the museum's structure: a residential building, gutted to form a series of mezzanines. Small wooden vitrines line the walls, grouping objects with a seemingly naïve, nostalgic 'dime store surrealism' aesthetic.[99] The cases are numbered in sequence, corresponding to chapters in *The Museum of Innocence* (*TMOI*) novel.[100] At the top is a 'Penthouse' where Kemal, the museum-novel's Nabokovian narrator, spent his final years, dictating the story to Pamuk. Besides a toy tricycle, bed, and chair – roped off in the style of a house museum – the attic space is a reading room, with seating and translations of the novel in several languages. Looking down the stairwell, the spiral of mezzanines merges with the design on the ground floor, creating a moment of vertigo. The

pamphlet's cover bears the museum's logo: a stylised butterfly, formed by four spirals: a diagram of the lost butterfly earring. Following this earring through the novel-and-museum is a shell game, foregrounding the narrator-collector's continual omissions, misrepresentations and falsehoods.[101] Though the museum's stated themes are innocence, love, collecting, and memories, the tropes emerging are guilt, obsession, theft, and lies.[102] Kemal repeatedly lies to other characters, and even to himself, and admits having 'concealed a few habits' from his visitors.[103]

"The Spiral of Time's single narrative thread, curves upon itself, generating a form, an emblem. Objects and events recur, the contents and arrangements of cases and chapters reflect each other. The 'Aristotelian' line becomes a network. Both this 'line joining objects' and the phrase 'the heart of…the novel' echo Pamuk's theory of the novel and its 'secret centre.'[104] For Pamuk, correspondences between different characters' accounts allow readers to model a shared, objective time, generating 'the [novel's] deep, secret centre, related not to history, but to life itself and its structure.'[105] Knowledge of this centre is intuited from a multi-dimensional fictive space, recalling Dennet's analogic *centre of gravity*.[106] Stripping away the building, the visitors, the city, I envisioned a spiral of constellations hanging in darkness: *bric-a*-brac, household goods, advertisements, documents, postcards, novels, cinema posters. An assemblage of nested assemblages. Repetitions and symmetries folding one thing to another, and out to other books, films, paintings, people, places. The museum had become a tangle of associations: a double helix of flight paths, aerials. Innumerable guylines anchored into culture, 'dynamic lines in space'.[107]

"Following these lines, modelling the Spiral, the loci begin to twist into a basketwork, woven about a dark emptiness at the museum's heart.[108] The Museum of Innocence is not a love story, any more than Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is.[109] Though neither Pamuk nor his commentators mention it – somehow absent from every critique I have read, or the publicity surrounding the European Museum of the Year Award it won in 2014 – the true genre is psychological horror. A wealthy narrator-collector, repeatedly exposed as a pathological liar, a kleptomaniac, and worse. Things repeatedly go missing, are stolen and substituted, betraying a compulsive manipulation of the other characters. Betraying that Kemal's museum-novel was always intended to control his legacy by accessioning Füsun's life:

> But when we reach the point when our lives take on their final shape, as in a novel, we can identify our happiest moment. […] We can bear the pain only by possessing something of that instant. These mementos preserve the… delights as they were more faithfully, in fact, than can those who accompanied us through those moments… [I]t was at this, the happiest moment of my life, that the earring, whose shape I'd failed to notice fell from Füsun's lovely ear onto the blue sheet.

> Anyone remotely interested in the politics of civilisation will be aware that museums are the repositories of those things from which Western Civilisation derives its wealth of knowledge, allowing it to rule the world… [W]hen the true collector, on whose efforts these museums depend, gathers together his first objects, he almost never asks himself what will be the ultimate fate of his hoard. When their first pieces passed into their hands, the first true collectors—who would later exhibit, categorise, and catalogue their great collections (in the first catalogues, which were the first encyclopaedias)—initially never recognised these objects for what they were.[110]

The secret centre lies in the gap between these two paragraphs. This recurring scene unites themes of possession, control, memory, pseudo-ethnographic

collecting, and the power of the museum. Inconsistencies in the narration, uncomfortable asides and seemingly superfluous details ('failed to notice'), betray that obsessive kleptomania pre-dated Kemal's 'love' for Füsun. Revisiting this passage, I'm convinced Kemal took the earring intentionally; he already intended building a museum to himself by appropriating the life of his beautiful, younger, poorer relation.[111] Kemal first steals Füsun's belongings, then those of her family, before finally – following her violent death – taking possession of their entire house, gutting it for his Museum.[112]

"As Ilya Kabakov – another fictive museum artist[113] – stated of works that fuse artworks and commentaries, the texts in the Museum of Innocence form a 'unified organism' with the artefacts. This 'matrimonial pair' cannot simply be taken at face value, nor in isolation.[114] The 'central point' is only ever approached tangentially. It can be understood only as a centre of gravity, triangulated among a constellation of other reference points. Even those elements that seem to signal the meaning most clearly, resisting paraphrase, fail to do so when taken out of context.[115] For Bernd Magnus, this characterises literature and certain philosophical texts, which employ irony, allusion and implication: the 'style…cannot be divorced from the thought it expresses'.[116]

"The MOI is a monument to Kemal's 'happiest moment'––claiming Füsun's virginity. This preoccupation structures Chapter/Case 23, 'Silence'. A 'specially commissioned' Ottoman-style painting of seagulls references the narrator's unpleasant associations between kissing, and a memory of a gull regurgitating food for her chick. Beneath it, the heel of Füsun's 'dirty white sneaker' hovers

above her 'childish' white underwear.[117] In Turkey, as in many Arabic cultures, the the shoe is highly charged, a grave symbolic insult to anything towards which the sole is turned.[118] The complexity and specificity of each composition in the museum's display cases generate a kind of para-linguistic thinking, generating relevant textual associations, belying its sentimental memento aesthetic.

"The museum's various voices are marked not only by tensions and incompatibilities, but substitutions and slippages: Pamuk as assemblage artist; Pamuk as metafictional author, who both appears in the story and writes the final chapter from the first person;[119] Kemal, the fictive narrator, whose first-person account Pamuk ghost-writes; Kemal's 'anthropologist' accounting of his own obsession, and his Europhile attempt to turn it into a cultural artefact of knowledge and power; the Kemal hidden from himself and his readers, whose lying, thefts, and jealous violence are mentioned off-handedly, blithely explained away; and finally Füsun, speaking only through Pamuk-Kemal's ventriloquism. The novelist, the obsessional collector, the compromised anthropologist, torn between his 'native girl' and the attempt to classify, catalogue and control her, her society, and those aspects of himself he has dissociated. These forces pull the Spiral in opposing directions, as do hints of the political unrest in Turkey during the years narrated; the strains on a national character caught between incompatible demands of Ottoman heritage, Islamic society, bitter political infighting, and European modernity.

"The fictive space the MOI constructs between its East and West faces – emblematised in Pamuk's double-sided case for his 'East-West watch'[120] – models

the social realities of late twentieth century Istanbul, and Pamuk's critique of museums and mastery. The 'unpalatable anthropological truth' that Turkish culture – and, implicitly, European colonial knowledge – is violently misogynistic, jealous, possessive, and irrational, marked by a gendered obsession with 'mastery'.[121] Plumwood argues *mastery* lies at the heart of the violent dualisms underwriting colonial modernity.[122] Mastery links Kemal's 'love' to tropes of collection, possession, and control, and to supposedly-rational structures of knowledge and representation inherent to the museum, the institutionalisation of the collector's act. By writing himself into the heart of his project, Pamuk enables an allusive, unspoken model of both 'East' and 'West' that does not position itself outside its own space of critique, but is radically self-implicating. This model is potentially available to all visitors willing to gather together sufficient points to trace the Spiral, and locate its centre.[123] In the trans-modal Museum of Innocence project, Pamuk unifies his theory of the novel as a collection of points mapping a space with a sense of the material life of things: 'the visual and verbal centres… moving closer to each other…perhaps nested one inside the other, and not located on opposite sides of the brain'.[124] As Maria Fusco states, 'the processes of reading and looking are irreducible' and 'cannot be accurately compared', and yet their 'embodied relations…[in] actually experiencing…are compound; you can't pull them apart'.[125] The fictive museum is an associative space in which embodied relations are not 'accurately compared', but form a centre of comparison that remains empty.''

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[99] Borrowing from Simic, 2011.

[100] Several cases are unfinished, covered by red velvet curtains, a fact mentioned in the illustrated catalogue: *The Innocence of Objects* (Pamuk, 2012).

[101] The earring takes centre stage in Case /Chapter 1, where Kemal claims to have taken his distant cousin Füsun's virginity during an affair. This is the first 'collection', described as-if this theft – and repeated failure to return the earring – are accidental. Questions of the whereabouts of both earrings occur repeatedly. Shortly before her death in a car accident, Füsun is mysteriously wearing one, apparently confusing Kemal (Pamuk, 2010, 487). Kemal insists Füsun's mother stole the earrings after he allegedly returned them, left in the family bathroom, (Ch. 49). In this scene, a drunken Kemal stands before a mirror, revealing he not only continually steals things – substituting other 'gifts' for them, which he later steals – but desires possession so complete he can *become* Füsun. Kemal claims he can 'speak through her mouth' (243), a distorted reflection of the act of every novelist. Earlier passages take on new resonance (15). As Kemal is revealed to have invented entire conversations, we are left suspecting he substitutes Füsun's words with what she 'really meant', and that many episodes with 'Füsun' are Kemal talking to a mirror (Ch.11).

[102] See for example 49–55.

[103] Eg. a pattern of abusive silent calls to Füsun's family home (183).

[104] Pamuk, 2011, 78.

[105] Pamuk, 2011, 82.

[106] Dennett, 1993, 431. See **A Theorist's Fiction**.

[107] Deleuze, 1994, 110.

[108] Pamuk, 2010, 512.

[109] Azar Nafisi's description of Lolita could apply equally to Füsun: she 'belongs to a category of victims who have no defence and are never given a chance to articulate their own story… [becoming] a double victim—not only her life but also her life story is taken from her' (Solnit, 2015). Many academic readers insist any feminist interpretation of *Lolita* – indeed any identification with the character of Lolita at all – is to 'entirely misunderstand Nabokov'. Annotated versions of *Lolita* used at American colleges explicitly deny the associations they draw are interpretive; Carl Proffer claims he is merely providing 'keys to some of the technical puzzles' as-if the puzzles are disconnected from the abduction and rape of a child. These claims ignore Nabokov's own statements that 'bare facts' are 'never really quite bare' and 'do not exist in a state of nature.' (Pifer, 2008.)

[110] Pamuk, 2010, 98. Cf. Bal, 1998, 101.

[111] 'I would dream happily of a museum… where I could tell my story though the things that Füsun had left behind, as a lesson to us all. […] I was coming to see myself as…an anthropologist who had fallen in love with a native girl while living among the indigenous folk…to study and catalogue their habits and rituals.' (495–6).

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[112] Kemal's attempts at possession begin with efforts to persuade a 12-year-old Füsun to 'sacrifice' her 'most valuable thing' to someone she loved (38–9). If Kemal not only 'collected' her earring intentionally, but did not in fact ever convince Füsun to give him her virginity, the entire surface unravels and something far darker appears. Kemal's prurient description of Füsun's corpse is a clue: '…the curves of her buttocks; and her soul, which had always drawn me to her—remained intact.' (488–9). Details of the fatal car crash gain new significance: 'I pinned Füsun to the hood of the car… Füsun knew she was about to die, and during those two or three seconds she told me with pleading eyes that she didn't really want to, that she would cling to life as long as she could, hoping for me to save her. But I could only smile at my beautiful fiancée…' (486–8) Did Kemal murder Füsun, faking the accident to cover it up?

[113] See **Crystals on a Chandelier**.

[114] Kabakov, 2000, 257–8.

[115] I am finding it impossible to describe the MOI without becoming possessed by its style: repetitive asides, long, complex sentences, extended descriptions of seemingly-irrelevant details become inextricable from the unfolding of its looping structures. I reshuffle sentences, paragraphs, footnotes, searching for some order where an constellation of associations reads as a linear, coherent argument, relevant detail and cross-references sitting comfortably in the notes. Aware all the while that, like Pamuk – infected with the stylistic structures of my subject – I take up the voice of a monster, finding it inseparable from my own.

[116] Magnus, 1997, 135.

[117] See Pamuk, 2012, 124–5.

[118] A glass of milky *rakı* associates the shoe's insult to Füsun's white underwear with the forbidden consumption of alcohol. The shoe points toward an invitation card for Kemal's engagement party to Sibel. Above, sap drips from the tip of a realistic model of a ripe fig: a complex symbol in Middle Eastern cultures, symbolising initiation and knowledge, standing for the forbidden fruit of Eden, and signifying female sexuality. The white sap has evident sexual connotations. On shoe symbolism in Islamic cultures, see Gammell, 2008.

[119] '"I'm writing the novel in the first person singular," said Orhan…"' (Pamuk, 2010, 525).

[120] Pamuk, 2012, 248.

[121] 'Having raised the question of "mastery," I would like to return to a matter at the very heart of my story…virginity was still regarded as the treasure that young girls should protect until the day they married. […] Clever readers will have sensed that I have placed this anthropology lesson here to allow myself a chance to cool off from… [my overpowering] jealousy…' (Pamuk, 2010, 61–4).

[122] See **Mappings Between the Pairs**.

[123] '[T]he composition of a novel entails the search for an imaginary point from which one can see the whole.' (Pamuk, 2011, 73).

[124] Pamuk, 2011, 94–5.

[125] Fusco, 2014.

Wire
Weaving
Shuttle
4EX;0

Cotton
Shuttles
521;0

Threading
Tools &
Spindle
Whorls
67E;0

Wire Dies
851;0

Woven
Wire
X18;1

Spindle
Whorl
011;0

Macehead
329;0

Croft
Steel Dice
Prototype
366;0

Lead
Weight
7E2;0

HBWF
Wire
Factory
E30;0

JAM
Accessioning
Dice
000;0

Walter
Langley,
'Between
the Tides'
19E;0

Kiribati
Fish
Hook
054;0

Eyelets
322;0

'Roots
Between
the Tides'
EEE;E

Mending
Nets
371;0

Marshall
Fish
Hook
91X;0

Warrington
Wire
Industry
514;0

Warrington
Museum
&
Library
048;1

Ethnology
Hall
772;0

Maori
Fish
Hook
0520;0

Museum
Street
24E;0

World
Stories
Gallery
772;1

Ethnology
Label
0X0;0

Cast
Maori
Head
EX8;0

Wire
Pigeon's
Nest
92E;0

Rylands
Wire
Works
X25;0

FeeJee
Mermaid
98X;0

Head of
a Lohan
805;0

Rylands
Street
479;0

MYSTERY
OF THE
HOODOO
HEAD
805;2

Cursed
Gaze /
Green
Eye
805;5

Rylands
Pedigree
X73;0

Making Uncomfortable Parallels

The John Affey
Museum

A Sudden Change in the
Pattern

Drawing
Conclusions

Slide 129.2: Making Uncomfortable Parallels

Making Uncomfortable Parallels

Cursed Heads and Constellations at Warrington Museum, 2016

> Both in its singularity and its ubiquity within the landscape of the colonizer, the ethnographic museum can be understood as a household: a household of foreign matter. […] To work with it is to become contaminated: there is no redemption. Everything I tell you today will be contaminated… If I want to work in a museum where redemption is possible, then I don't go to an ethnographic museum.[126]

A green eye in a net of tensions. A digital photograph, laser printed onto A5 card. Eyelets reinforce each corner; elastic tags lead to other images, which lead to others. A network of 144 slides: a map~model~portrait of a Britain's oldest municipal museum.[127] Each slide bears a four-digit accession number, generated by a twelve-sided dice. They hang in Warrington Museum and Art Gallery (WMAG), in a mezzanine void between the World Stories Gallery – formerly

Slide 131.1: JAM.RBTT.805;5 ~ Green Eye / The Cursed Gaze
Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, 2017

the Ethnology Hall – and the Fish Gallery above. Around the mezzanine are six

viewing stations with pairs of binoculars and wire-bound catalogues.[128] A nearby

label states the installation *Roots Between the Tides* (2016) was made in

collaboration with the John Affey Museum.

From the green eye, tags lead to the carved wooden head to which the green

eye belongs, and to a 1955 *Warrington Guardian* article: 'MYSTERY OF THE

HOODOO[129] HEAD/ Mishaps dogged owners—then Museum got it!'[130]

Guylines of fluorescent *"?AMNESIA?"* brand memory-free monofilament connect

the network of images to iron stanchions, the mezzanine railing, roof beams

above, and to six 12^{oz} wreck-fishing weights suspended below. Beneath a

stanchion connected to the eye, in one of the wooden-framed vitrines lining the

room, the carving itself is labelled 'Head of a Lohan.'[131] Blobs of paint added to

the eyes, and a cut to the mouth, lend a buck-toothed, sidelong guise. According

to the newspaper, and information supplied to by museum staff, these alterations

were made to stop the allegedly-cursed carving's accusatory stare following its

former owner around the room. The 1955 article credits the curse with causing

a series of 'car accidents, punctures and trouble with the police'.[132] An

anonymous 2008 article in *Country Life* online extends the threat to 'broken legs'

and a recent car accident suffered by 'a new manager at the museum'.[133] The

carving's label does not mention the curse, but contemporary educational

worksheets for children produced by the museum refer to it. The *Guardian*

credits the carving to 'a warlike headhunter' and the curse to 'a witch doctor' in

'the primitive jungle of North Borneo'.[134] *Country Life* asserts the curse is written

on the head in 'an ancient, indecipherable language'. One staff member tells us

there is no sign of writing anywhere on it, another that the curse is on a scroll hidden inside the carving.

The head was kept on top of a filing cabinet in the Museum Director's office as a mascot[135] and not included in the museum's formal displays until recently. Today, Warrington Museum holds the *double hermeneutic* position of both collector and teller of this folktale, used to generate public interest in the collection.[136] Copies of the articles are kept in the object's documentation file. The story is familiar to museum staff, whose professed reluctance to move the head during renovations in 2010 was again covered by the *Guardian*.[137] It reported the figure 'represents a Buddhist monk' and that staff were looking for 'willing Buddhists' to help them move it because of a string of accidents: 'It might be a coincidence but no-one wants to risk it!'[138] That disbelief carries risk is implied in the children's worksheet, describing 'a new manager' at the museum narrowly escaping injury after refusing to believe the curse. The articles and worksheet record an ongoing performative aspect of the museum's curse tale. Staff adopt the stance that the chain of events *could be a coincidence, but...*

This fictive position is a characteristic of superstition that Colin Campbell labels 'half-belief'; veridicality is explicitly questioned, but actions are still performed as-if the tale were true.[139] Ironically, in earnest, or both, over the last half-century repeated speech acts, gestures, and decisions by museum staff and visitors (including our researcher) act as-if the carving not only has the power to cause accidents, but possesses the capacity to *make sense* of its surroundings. An associative constellation has formed, a knotting together of multiple elements:

the carving's complex, knowing gaze; the paradoxical status of the museum documenting and participating in a paranormal folktale; postcolonial British culture's deeply conflicted relationship to racially charged questions of 'black magic'; and the cognitive mechanisms of superstition. The fictive curse structure flickers between playful make-believe, ironic joke, uncertain unease, and deep paranoia, and their corresponding cultural modes. Openly scoff, and any accident that befalls you will tie you into the tale forever. Confirmation bias quickly reconfigures denial and disbelief into moves within the curse's narrative game, a vertiginous gravity-well familiar to victims of social persecution: the more passionate one's resistance to the narrative, the more one's resistance empowers it.[140]

Why did we change the gallery? asks one of the few interpretive texts in the renovated World Stories Gallery. In place throughout the twentieth century, previous labels interpreted the collection with the progress narrative of scientific racism.[141] The new text never explicitly mentions racism, merely stating the labels were 'inappropriate for today's diverse society', above a reproduction label: *The Races of Man and their Cultures*. That the labels were changed because they were 'eye-wateringly' racist[142] – and that racism is wrong not only morally, but scientifically and historically – is absent. Instead, the label implies, *we* changed the gallery because *others* – the *diverse* element in society – find it inappropriate: race must not be discussed.

The name, labelling and arrangement of the gallery was changed. According to curator Craig Sherwood: 'We took out the Stone Age, Iron Age, Bronze Age

from that gallery, because that was making uncomfortable parallels. And I think

probably sending out messages that we didn't want to send'.[143] Other cultures

continued to employ technologies used in Britain in the distant past. *We believe

more complex technologies demonstrate an* evolved, progressive *state, and hence

moral, intellectual, and racial superiority as an ethno-national culture.* As

Sherwood's sensitivity to WMAG's institutional voice demonstrates,

'uncomfortable parallels' continued to generate implicit progress mythology

even after explicit interpretation has been removed: the associative constellation

of scientific racism persists in *our* postcolonial British culture. Such implicit

common knowledge is shared by a museum's community, generating a subject

position Christopher Whitehead labels the *imagined visitor.*[144] The imagined

visitor is a fictive entity with real agency, the centre of a cognitive-material

assemblage: linguistic, material and gestural vocabularies; spatial arrangements

and juxtapositions; cultural positioning and institutional history; explicit

statements, and silences.[145] Though staff have difficulty with racist comments

from local visitors – whose complaints prompted the *Why did we change…?*

label – they are perhaps less conscious of the responsibility WMAG *itself* bears

for local ideologies.

An artefact haunted by institutional folktale presents difficulties, even for

Whitehead's nuanced model of museum interpretation. Whitehead distinguishes

'two main curatorial registers' – *text production* and *environmental factors* – and 'a

third register… the emotional and personal contexts and vicissitudes of the

visit'.[146] WMAG's propagation of the curse entangles these categories, operating

in a parallel register of reputation, rumour or hearsay, neither individual nor

universal, more amenable to diagrammatic cartography than linear narration. In Whitehead's view – building on the work of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill[147] – the museum produces a non-metaphorical cultural cartography. '[T]he map is not simply a metaphor… the museum can be understood as a map (it is not 'like' a map), albeit one with different expressive potentials…notably the augmented scope for narrativisation…a spatial means of separating bodies of objects and knowledge'.[148] WMAG's postcolonial institutional folktale – a pattern of meaning distributed among local newspapers, institutional performance, promotional and educational materials, online articles, and the materiality of the artefact as both subject and object of the narrative – is one of many points of departure for *Roots Between the Tides,* JAM's collaborative research project with WMAG. Others include a pigeon's nest made from Rylands wire scraps, a painted cast of a Māori head mistakenly represented by the BBC as a *toi moko*, a file of magpie ephemera from the museum stores…

RBTT functions as a proposal for a new museum cartography: neither object nor label, archive nor display, but combining their features. In contrast to the museum's 'spatial means of separating' bodies – grouping by geography, chronology or kind into discrete vitrines – JAM's method knots or nets together. *RBTT* is a diagrammatic model of relations within a collection of slides; reframings of WMAG, its collections and context. The model hangs between one gallery and another, between object and label, between exhibit and archive. It is a sculptural development of the montage principles of Aby Warburg's *Atlas,*[149] informed by a contemporary network aesthetic but requiring only the basic technologies: photographic reproduction; lists and tables; elastic cord and eyelets; a ladder and gaff. *RBTT* mirrors what Whitehead terms the museum's

'augmented scope for narrativisation', modelling interconnection and providing

an armature upon which narration can be hung. Our imagined visitor examines

slides of the green eye, the carving, the newspaper article, looks up the

corresponding pages in the printed catalogue, questions museum staff, and

searches for detail on the internet. Attempting to re-model the mapping

operations of museum poetics, *RBTT* functions as falsework[150] for generating

interpretation, rather than producing explicit narrative itself. The resulting

constellation is one of many possible iterations of a set of relations, contingent

upon the space in which it is installed, the lengths of elastic used, and the

starting points selected: one possible round of a game, which could be re-played,

detaching the modular components from each another and beginning again.

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[126] Deliss, 2014.

[127] These extra-long tags were donated by Kalsi Tags, Kent. 'Treasury tags' have a British colonial history. 'India tags': string with metal crossbars made by HM Stationery Office for the India Office, were later confused with a different type used by HM Treasury. (Wikipedia contributors, 2017).

[128] Below the slide's accession number, each catalogue page provides two lists: hashtags and elastic tags. The catalogues are incomplete, inviting visitors to add other connections, notes, sketches, jokes, etc. Some of the first collaborators were groups of local schoolchildren, who were encouraged to add to the catalogues and make nets of their own hand-drawn slides during a day of workshops.

[129] *Hoodoo* is a 19th century American word for 'black magic', a corruption of *Voudoun*, religious practices of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, particularly the former slave plantations of Haiti. On the link between *Voudoun, race,* genre horror and colonialism, see Bishop, 2008.

[130] Warrington Guardian, 1955, 9.

[131] Lohan are Buddhist saints, often depicted in Chinese and Japanese carvings as temple guardians (Perkins, 1998, 298–299).

[132] Warrington Guardian, 1955.

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[133] Country Life, 2008.

[134] Warrington Guardian, 1955.

[135] *Mascot* – a person or thing kept for good luck – derives from the Provençal *mascotto:* 'little witch'.

[136] One example of the curse as promotional tool is 'Rotten Luck', part of Culture24's Museums at Night UK festival: 'This eerie event, set among display cases featuring a mummy, a cursed head, and plenty of scary dolls…' (Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, 2016). Coincidentally, an exhibit at the MJT is called 'Rotten Luck: The Decaying Dice of Ricky Jay', displaying decomposing dice made from celluloid, collected 'in the attempt to acquire empirical knowledge' (MJT, n.d.).

[137] Warrington Guardian, 2010.

[138] Warrington Guardian, 2010.

[139] Campbell, 1996.

[140] Similar mechanisms unite conspiracy theorising and disciplines like psychoanalysis, see Jane & Fleming, 2014, 123–4.

[141] Sherwood & Le Couteur, 2016.

[142] Sherwood & Le Couteur, 2016.

[143] Sherwood & Le Couteur, 2016.

[144] Whitehead, 2012, 47. *Imagined visitor* recalls literary theorist Wayne Booth's *implied reader*, developed in Iser, 1974.

[145] Whitehead, 2012, 47.

[146] Whitehead, 2012, xiv.

[147] Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 17–18.

[148] Whitehead, 2012, 24.

[149] See **This Form That Thinks**.

[150] *Falsework* is a term for scaffolding built to provide temporary support during the construction of another permanent structure, such as a bridge.
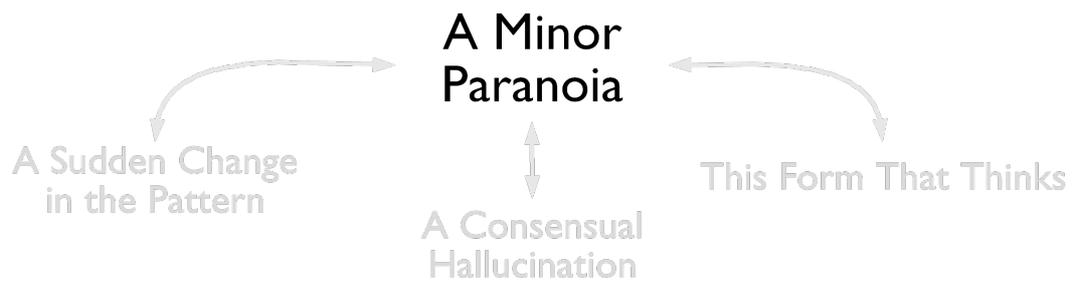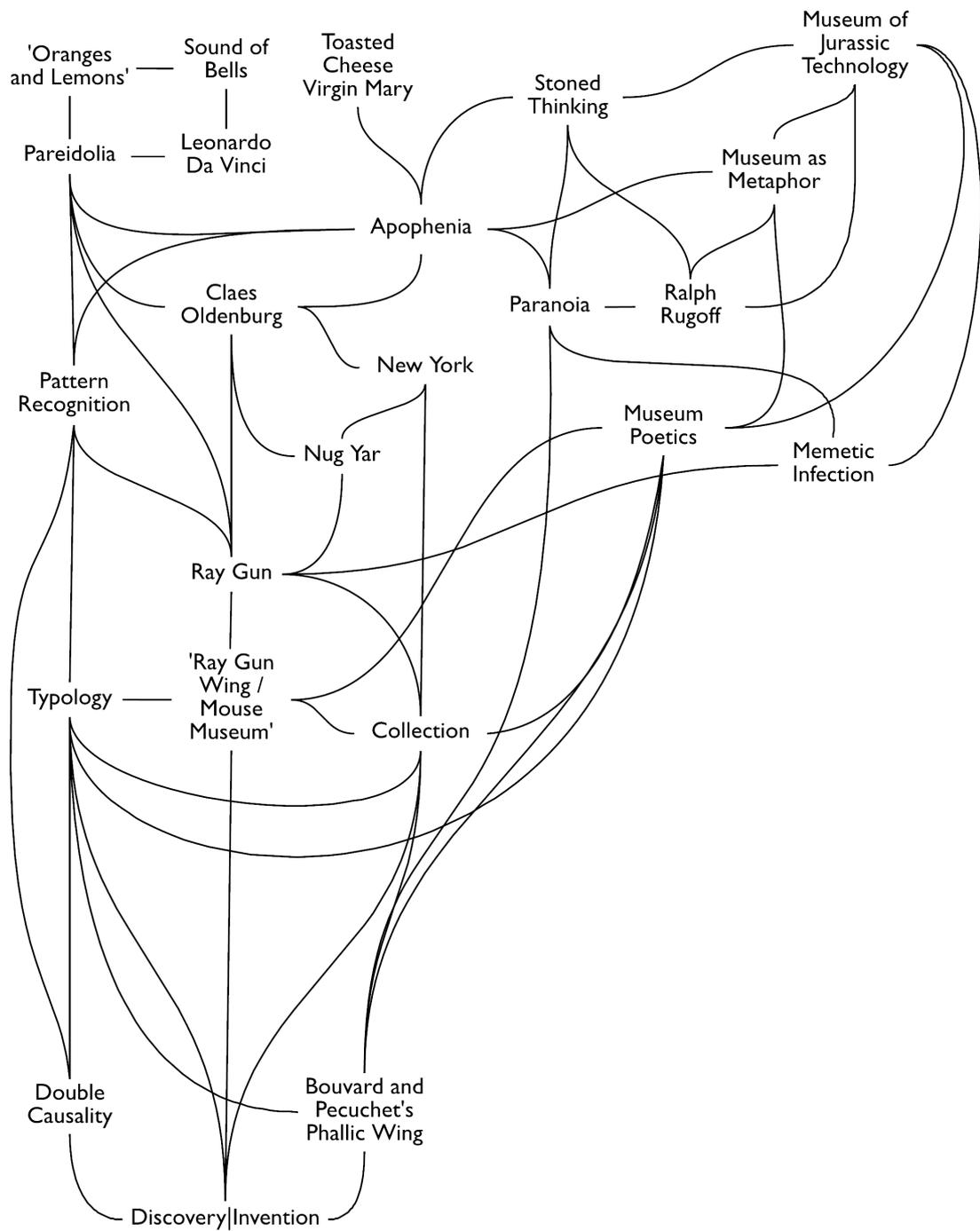
Slide 14E.1: A Minor Paranoia

A Minor Paranoia

Claes Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* (1965-77) was first shown internationally at documenta V in 1972, the same event at which Marcel Broodthaers exhibited *Section Publicité*, the final iteration of his *Musée de l'Art Moderne* (1968-72). Built as an annex to *Mouse Museum*, *Ray Gun Wing* (1977) is a collection of around 300 'ray guns', which includes Oldenburg's reproductions of mid-twentieth century science fiction toys, alongside found, made and altered things in materials from knotted rope to chocolate. The collection is arranged in vitrines themselves laid out in ray gun form, revealed by a framed map of the exhibit. As Oldenburg describes: 'Ray gun would become a catch title for all sorts of things. Looking down on the street, I would find this angle in the shape of a ray gun everywhere. And I would collect the ray guns; they became quite an obsession. If you spell *ray gun* backwards it's *nug yar*, which is very close to *New York*: New York, Nug Yar.'[151] Yve-Alain Bois explains that 'Oldenburg made huge numbers of ray guns… but he soon saw that he didn't even need to make them: the world was full of ray guns… Even better he did not even need to collect them himself: he could ask friends to bring them to him…'[152] Together, Bois and Oldenburg's descriptions sketch out a heuristic method; a curiously targeted, collective game of pareidolia, verging on apophenia.

Pareidolia is the 'man in the moon' phenomenon: a distinct figure perceived in a ground of indeterminate sense-data. A cloud that looks like a whale; a trash heap that looks like a museum. This perceptual state, where one thing is seen as-if another, hovering between sensing and inventing, was famously

recommended by Leonardo Da Vinci as a creative method.[153] But in *Ray Gun Wing*, a childlike act of make-believe – where any stick with the right angle becomes a ray gun for the game – metastasises into something else. That Oldenburg's fictive museum has stepped from pareidolic play into the world of apophenia[154] is hinted both in his admission that the game became 'an obsession' while walking the streets of New York, and in his occult translation of the name of the project into Nug Yar. Regardless that sci-fi 'ray guns' don't *really* exist, by paying them enough attention, making them, projecting them onto the city, finding parts of the city that echoed them back – and then getting his friends, and eventually museum visitors to do the same – Oldenburg had conjured ray guns into resonant being. But, like the Sorcerer's Apprentice, he was no longer the ray guns' master. Conceptual polarities of real|imaginary and creation|discovery were intensified, warped and entangled, and a *fictive space* was generated. This is what network theorist and artist Anna Munster, building on the philosophy of William James, describes as *the perceptible* rather than perception or sensation as such; the perceptible 'arises when perception-action has already occurred and is then matched to something already known… a pattern seen in data.'[155] Ray guns, like the Martians, had taken over, and Oldenburg couldn't help seeing them everywhere.

'Although,' as Da Vinci says, 'it may appear trivial and even ludicrous,'[156] this apophenic gesture of (mis)labelling – stripped back to its most minimal, repetitive move in *Ray Gun Wing* – is key to understanding the fictive museum. Some symmetry countermands our vision of the bent wire, the chipped concrete, or the knotted rope, co-opting them into the museum's method,

generating a gestalt reading as-if ray gun. That this exercise in hacking the perceptible takes the form of a fictive museum display reveals a potential, inherent in the seemingly simple act of arranging sets of things in vitrines, and even in the act of labelling – or naming – itself: the potential for institutional typology to generate a communicable insanity.[157] Categories, classes, types and kinds all exhibit what DeLanda describes as 'double determination' or *double causality*: wholes require parts to exist at all (upward causality), but as wholes they produce generative effects, influencing the creation of their parts (downward causality).[158] The *Ray Gun Wing* extension of Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum* is an echo-chamber tuned to specific resonances in the perceptible. A search engine, relentlessly pattern-matching not to a Platonic ideal form – existing on some timeless and universal cosmic plane of virtuality – but to a 'ray gun' heuristic algorithm, a set of cognitive conditions subtly altered by every addition to the assemblage of things, events, performances, and people. An associative constellation is formed between one 'ray gun' and the next, between that pair and the group surrounding it, and the group in the adjacent case, the layout of the cases and their labelling, and the whole assemblage and *its* para-textual labelling – title, authorship, commentary – in the context of contemporary art.

Ray Gun Wing echoes an early museological method or technology of display: the typological style, still seen today in the Pitt-Rivers Museum, and once common to both natural history and ethnology.[159] This is the nineteenth-century practice parodied by Gustave Flaubert's 'loony'[160] fictional museologists Bouvard and Pécuchet, who create a *phallic wing* of their amateur museum,

where an assortment of perfectly ordinary things are rendered 'indecent' by taking them out of context, arranging them in such a way that their form stands out.[161] The indecency lies in the collectors' insistence on seeing the objects as-if phallic, and in infecting their visitors with this same disciplinary obsession. What the obsessional institutional move that both Flaubert's inept pair and Claes Oldenburg have in common is that they produce a vantage point from which everything begins to look like the phallus or the ray gun. These works expose the hidden workings of museum labelling, to borrow the words of William Gibson, like 'discovering a patient whose nervous system is congenitally and fully exposed. It's just so nakedly obvious'.[162] This is the glitch in the typological assemblage method that renders it at best an unstable, untrustworthy science.

In Douglas Crimp's collection of essays *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993) – moving from what he describes as a Foucauldian archaeology of the modernist museum to a theory of the postmodern[163] – Crimp describes this indecent phenomenon as a capacity of the artwork in the museum. 'The institution', Crimp argues, 'does not exert its power only negatively––to remove the work of art from the praxis of social life––but positively––to produce a specific social *relation* between artwork and spectator'.[164] Discussing the obscenity trial surrounding Robert Mapplethorpe's work, Crimp observes that artworks do not only 'represent an object', but, in doing so, produce 'a subject effected by, constituted in representation through, those structures'.[165] For Crimp, the variety of critical responses to Mapplethorpe's work primarily demonstrate how comfortable the critic was in occupying the position of a desiring homosexual subject. This observation relates to a key premise shared by psychoanalytic, queer,

postcolonial and decolonial theories: in producing the Other, a discourse also produces the Self.[166] The entire structure of *criticality* – though ostensibly an analysis of the objects on display – therefore becomes suspect: 'positions are occupied in the ensuing controversy as a function of our comfort in occupying [the subject position produced by the artwork]'.[167]

What visitors to these museums are experiencing is akin to the Frequency Illusion, also called the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon: upon learning a new word, for example, we suddenly begin to notice it everywhere.[168] The apophenic assigns significance to this sudden appearance. *Why have we only begun to notice this now?* Or for the paranoid *Why is this sign suddenly being presented to us, and by whom?* Here what Sigmund Freud termed 'an intellectual function in us which demands unity, connection, and intelligibility from any material' can take over: 'unable to establish a true connection, it does not hesitate to fabricate a false one'.[169] This is the paranoid apophenic style, which posits the most unutterably horrifying or fantastical events rather than accept that abhorrent chaos: the meaninglessness of sheer contingency. Emma Jane and Chris Fleming identify this as a feature of *both sides* of contemporary debates around conspiracy theories, both the shockingly widespread patterns of paranoid belief, and the academic books devoted to debunking them.[170] 'Far from representing a rupture with rationalism… conspiracy thinking is actually embarrassingly consistent with many ideals of the intellectual tradition that supposedly requires *saving* from conspiracy thinking.' Jane and Fleming quote Georg W. F. Hegel's observation that one of the founding principles of certain kinds of philosophy and theory is what we might term absolutist apophenia: 'the thought that Reason rules the

world, and that world history has therefore been rational in its course'.[171] In Deleuzean terms, this is not Reason *per se*, but Reason's *Image*.

The apophenic subject position produced by Oldenburg's or Bouvard and Pécuchet's museums is deeply unsettling; the visitor is confronted with their own uncertainty about where the 'phallic significance' comes from. If they don't want to see ray guns, and the ray guns don't really exist, *why are they seeing ray guns everywhere?* After visiting *Ray Gun Wing*, investing our attention, we become caught up in an infectious knowing that operates – to accession an analogy from Ralph Rugoff – like a psychedelic. Writing on the MJT, Rugoff describes his experience of the exhibits having induced a kind of 'stoned thinking,' a 'minor paranoia… close to trance,' in which significance and resemblance seem to escape their vitrines, break the quarantine of the exhibit, and seep out into the world.[172] Once we have entered this wing of Oldenburg's *Mouse Museum*, it has entered us; now some chance configuration of our senses with the world might present us with another ray gun, whether we intend it to or not. Meaning is operating in a way that has no respect for the individual subject. A self-assembling, a bootstrapped sympoiesis has co-opted our cognitive pattern recognition architecture.

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[151] Oldenburg, 2013.

[152] Bois & Krauss, 1997, 176.

[153] Da Vinci, 1923, 173. Da Vinci's method is about pattern perception rather than vision, evinced in his example of the sounds of bells. The English nursery rhyme 'Oranges and Lemons,' which lists what the bells of various London churches 'sing', was generated by a similar pareidolic method.

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[154] *Apophenia* is from the German *apophänie,* coined by psychiatrist Klaus Conrad in 1958 to describe the 'unmotivated seeing of connection [accompanied by] a specific feeling of abnormal meaningfulness' experienced in schizophrenic, paranoiac and manic delusion (Klaus Conrad, quoted in Hubscher, 2007). Unlike the mere playful resemblances of pareidolia, in apophenia the similarities *mean something*, they are connected, clues to a mystery. A kind of collective apophenia turns the pareidolic resemblance of the Virgin Mary on a toasted cheese sandwich, for example, into a cultural icon worth $28,000. Sandwich is matched to Virgin, and so to a cosmic pattern, and to a rationale in which manifestations of this kind have great significance. Acts of belief push this kind of situation past the binary boundaries of fact|fiction and into fictive territory; the purchasers of the sacred sandwich were not themselves believers, but embedded in a wider culture caught in cognitive dissonance between unresolvable polar extremes of scepticism and superstition. The pop-cultural icon in question was bought on eBay in 2004 by GoldenPalace.com online casino. Its previous owner, Diana Duyser, said 'I would like all people to know that I do believe that this is the Virgin Mary Mother of God' (Associated Press, 2004).

[155] Munster, 2013, 5.

[156] Da Vinci, 1923, 173.

[157] Farrell, 1998, 44.

[158] DeLanda, 2016, 21.

[159] Today, in institutions such as the British Museum, the typological style is repudiated as unscientific, conflated with cabinets of curiosity into a proto-museology, a precursor of *real* museum practice. See Le Couteur, 2015a, 38–40.

[160] Crimp, 1995, 51.

[161] Flaubert, 1881, 103–4.

[162] Gibson, 2011, 168.

[163] Crimp, 1995, 13–19.

[164] Crimp, 1995, 27.

[165] Crimp, 1995, 25.

[166] For Edward Said (1978), drawing on the discourse analysis of Foucault, the discourse of Orientalism 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient…by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient,' and that 'European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self' (Said, 1979, 3). The Orientalist ethnology gallery functions as a kind of negative self-portrait; a representation of everything the Occident is *not*, and hence – borrowing a Jungian term – of the self's own shadow.

[167] Crimp, 1995, 27.

[168] Primed to recognise a new type, our cognitive architecture can't help but identify it. This happens at a pre-conscious level, producing the illusion that the type has become more frequent than before, or even appeared out of nowhere. Dubbed the Frequency Illusion by Arnold Zwicky in 2006, the experience had already come to be widely known as the Baader-Meinhof Phenomenon; a user on an internet message board in the mid 1990s linked the experience with their sudden awareness of the 1970s terrorist organisation, and the description became a meme with has both a Wikipedia entry and a dedicated Facebook page. That the label for this phenomenon has a memetic origin seems uncannily fitting (Pacific Standard Staff, 2013).

[169] Freud, 2001, 111.

[170] Jane & Fleming, 2014, 132.

[171] Georg W. F. Hegel, quoted in Jane & Fleming, 2014, 123.

[172] Rugoff, 1995, 72–3.
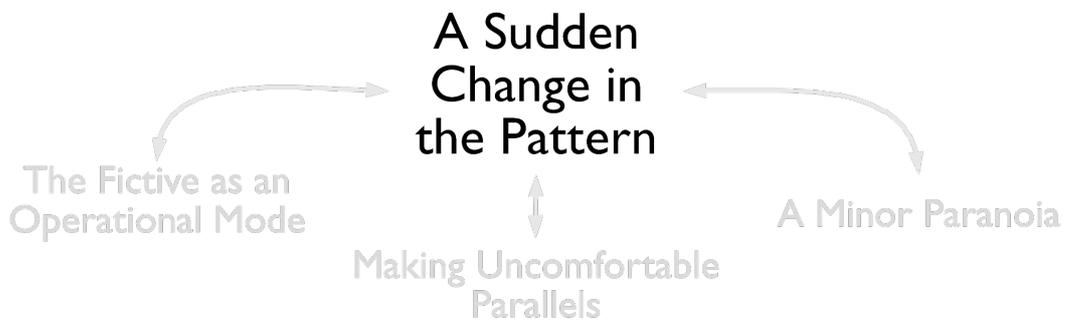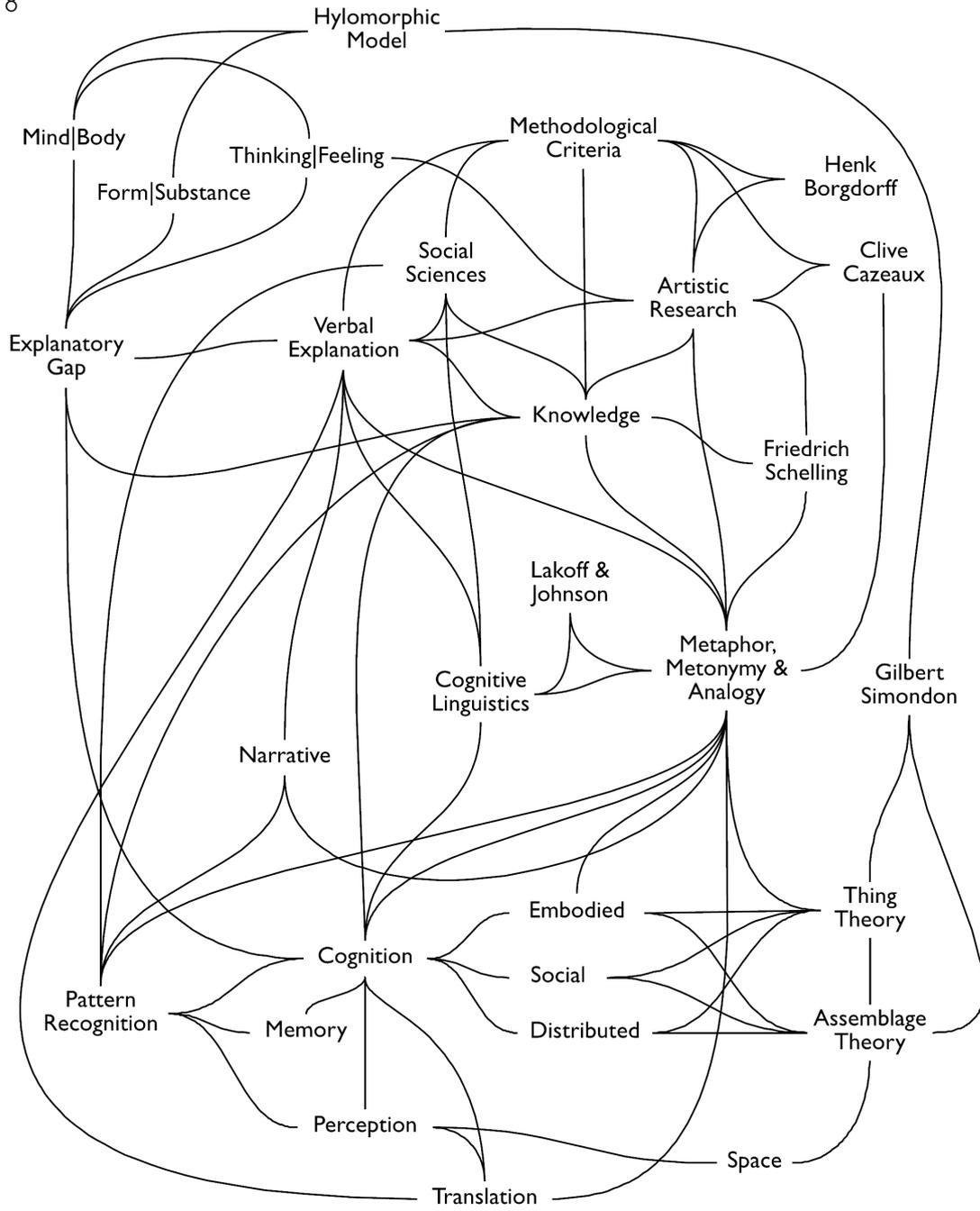
Slide 15X.3: A Sudden Change in the Pattern

A Sudden Change in the Pattern

Taking fictive museums at their word means becoming complicit in a suspension of disbelief, doubtful of reality or ourselves: an analogic *as-if* mode. Engaging *the fictive* on its own terms – as a condition of knowledge that refuses the zero-sum field of True|False[173] – collapses distinctions between literal and figurative meaning. Figures of speech and imagery are taken too literally; coincidental details resonate with paranoiac implications, a condition Rugoff labels 'the museum as metaphor'.[174] Literal statements collapse, revealed as contingent historical assemblages of spatial figuring, overdetermined by allusive psycho-social associations. Destabilising the literal|figurative distinction echoes the *cognitive linguistics* of George Lakoff: 'the power of metaphor to create a reality rather than simply give us a way of conceptualising a pre-existing reality'.[175] In linguistics and philosophy, what constitutes literal meaning, and if it differs from the rhetorical or figurative, remains in question.[176] Lakoff demonstrates that in its presuppositions and its conclusions, abstract reasoning is structured not only by metaphoric/metonymic imagery, but by spatial analogies so conventional – *between, beyond, higher, deeper* – we are rarely aware of them. This is particularly true of relations *between* categories,[177] and concepts in dichotomous, dualistic, or dialectic opposition.[178]

Artistic research by practice inevitably confronts the paradoxes of disciplinarity, institutional conditions of knowledge-production entailing impositions from external disciplines that Iser's heuristic method resists: bureaucratic structures, bounded by conventions of writing from Humanities and conventions on

practice from Social Sciences.[179] These conditions of knowledge-production

generate significant, widespread anxiety, both externally in institutional culture,

and *internally* among practitioners and educators.[180] One longstanding

problematic is the relation of theory, considered in terms of formal language

(written thesis), and the para-verbal knowledge of practice (body of work).

Some commentators claim artistic knowledge is intuitive, non-linguistic and non-

discursive, and therefore neither rational nor cognitive, a position Henk

Borgdorff vehemently rejects.[181] For Jessica Schwarzenbach and Paul Hackett,

'[Friedrich] Schelling's ideas still influence the discussion concerning verbal

language as an appropriate explanatory vehicle for works of art…[still] fervently

debated within the art community today'.[182] *Metaphor* remains a key term,

considered in Schelling's terms as a radical break between the knowledge of

empirical science, and metaphorical, artistic knowledge, offering 'world

disclosure, (a way to make things comprehensible…by being part of the greater

existential structures of meaning)'.[183] However, Clive Cazeaux sees metaphor in

an expanded, non-dualistic sense, claiming no inherent distinction 'between

proper and figurative meaning', and 'that while art and knowledge are… defined

in relation to one other, the relation is not always one of opposition'.[184]

Cognitive linguists following George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We*

Live By (1980), take the position that metaphorical-analogic relations are

fundamental to the conditions of knowledge.[185] As Lakoff describes: 'The mind is

inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are

largely metaphorical. These are the three major findings of cognitive science.

More than two millennia of a priori philosophical speculation about these

aspects of reason are over.'[186] Over or not, millennia of language-centred

metaphysical philosophy and cultural dualisms structure our contemporary

image of thought.[187]

The labels *cognition, thinking* and *knowledge* require re-situating. *Cognition* is

approached from the perspective taken, for example, by Edward de Bono[188]: the

mind is a complex material system of pattern recognition and association;

knowledge requires no transcendent element beyond this condition; cognitive

systems generate significant phenomena in thinking, particularly glitches and

biases.[189] In de Bono's terms, there is no dichotomy or dialectic between

thinking and feeling. Mental events, from physical sensation to conceptual

knowledge, are *thinking:* 'the brain is a system in which things happen according

to the nature of the system. What happens in the brain is information…the way

it happens is thinking… Language, notation and mathematics are useful artificial

aids to thinking. There may be other artificial aids which could be invented'.[190]

The fictive museum is one such 'artificial aid,' which Paulo Freire might label a

'cognisable object'.[191] Contemporary experimental psychology and neuroscience

have expanded the cognitive beyond something that happens in the brain,

supplemented by 'artificial' aids. *Distributed cognition*

> is an approach to the study of all cognition… [C]ognitive processes are always
> distributed in some way…across brains, bodies, and a culturally constituted world… An
> individual working alone with material tools is also a distributed cognitive system, as is
> an individual working alone without material tools. So too is an individual brain
> situated in the body, or the brain without consideration of the body because cognition
> is distributed across the brain. Even single areas of the brain are studied now as
> systems in which cognitive function is distributed across layers of neurons…
> [D]istributed cognition is not a kind of cognition at all, it is a perspective on cognition.
> (376-377)[192]

Cognitive systems fit Manuel DeLanda's reworking of Gilles Deleuze and Félix

Guattari's concept of the assemblage of assemblages, and its feature of double

causality.[193] This redefining of cognition, which de Bono would term *thinking*, is

part of New Materialism's emphasis on the fundamentally *embodied* nature of

thought. Thinking and knowing are emergent properties of multiple, situated

bodies, and cannot be abstracted or vivisected from this condition. Conceptual,

formal thinking cannot be fully understood – cannot exist – apart from

emotional, social, material systems of distributed cognition.

Embodied cognitive perspectives emphasise that so-called 'higher reasoning

functions' appear to use the same modular cognitive systems as spatial

awareness and movement, and are complexly reliant on emotion and sensation.

All mental states entail emotional, associative contexts, which can both hinder

and promote reasoning.[194] Emotion and bodily states are only recently being

seriously investigated as integral to cognition, rather than extrinsic pathologies,

due to 'a general sense that emotions are somehow disruptive to "basic" mental

processes.'[195] Seemingly abstract, 'higher' cognitive activities – particularly the

supposedly transcendental, such as semantic reasoning and mathematics – are

not only reliant on the physical brain, but on those very areas of the brain

associated with bodily awareness.[196] This may be the grand irony of mind/body

dualism: so-called higher reasoning feels disembodied *precisely because* it co-opts

those areas of the brain used for bodily action, like looking for your glasses while

wearing them. Memory likewise does not correspond with the *image of thought*;

cognition does not distinguish categorically between events that happened to

the self and those experienced through mediation, or between information

presented as factual and that presented explicitly as false. Indeed, false

memories incorporating distortions of real experiences, or motivated by

unconscious biases, are more persistent than genuine ones, and easier to

recall.[197] Both trauma *and happiness* are associated with distorted memory,

while depressed states are statistically more realistic.[198] These late twentieth-

and early twenty-first-century insights from cognitive science re-cut along

different lines the so-called 'third narcissistic wound' to anthropocentrism, which

Freud ranked alongside the Copernican and Darwinian wounds, and named –

somewhat narcissistically – after himself.[199] Beyond being underwritten (and

potentially undermined) by The Unconscious, consciousness is revealed as an

assemblage: multi-stranded processes, contingent upon innumerable modular

elements of which consciousness is neither in control, nor even aware, and

which do not correspond to its self-image.[200]

This is particularly true of perception. The senses are cognitive systems,

processing visual stimuli long before they reach the brain,[201] which itself appears

to have a maximum frame rate of perception, linked to the subjective passage of

time.[202] Culture-bound spatial metaphors affect our ability to judge

temporality.[203] The findings of experimental physics have suggested for over a

century that our experiences of space, time, speed and weight as separate

phenomena bear little if any resemblance to the inherent nature of reality; the

landscape of 'spacetime' can be deformed by sufficient mass-energy-velocity.[204]

These findings and those of cognitive science support Jack Halberstam's

contestation of the 'seemingly inevitable, transparent, and neutral rhetorics of

time and space'.[205] Human spatial experience simply does not correspond to the

nature of physical reality outside a normative anthropomorphic context, and is vulnerable to distortion effects even within it. Spatial awareness is modelled by multiple cognitive systems; it does not correspond to a 'map in the head' metaphor.[206] Whether through optical illusions or malfunction of any one of the necessary modules, it is vulnerable to glitches and uncanny phenomena.[207] *Spatiality* is an emergent construct of distributed, embodied cognition: space *as such* is a fictive modelling process of associative constellation.

Current embodied-cognitive perspectives relate spatiality in cognition to both mathematical and semantic, concept-based thinking. Spatial representations in the brain are activated during the comprehension of language.[208] Reading about motion through metaphoric description – *the road runs through the valley* – involves 'mental simulation,' with measurable effects on task completion.[209] Spatial mechanisms seem to be inherent in the drawing of analogies, that is, in the architecture of all knowledge, broadly conceived.[210] This suggests a radical review of knowledge as inherently, ineluctably spatial and analogous, having first redefined the spatial as an emergent cognitive phenomenon, rather a physical dimension. Commonsensical descriptions of cognitive events – including the labels natural languages have developed for mental phenomena[211] – simply do not adequately correspond to what is happening.[212] This is particularly true of what Val Plumwood describes as the network of dualisms connected by *linking postulates,* which structures our cultural landscape and model of thought.[213]

Building on these perspectives, we can outline some features of cognition relevant for the production of knowledge in the fictive museum:

- Cognition is material, taking place in and amongst assemblages of *thinking things*.

- Cognition is distributed and situated, generated amongst heterogeneous modular elements within and without the body, each affecting cognitive process.

- Cognition is associative and analogous, with 'integral affect.'[214]

- Cognition and memory do not feature inherent category distinctions between self and other, experience and invention, true and false.

- Cognition is spatial, co-opting perceptual systems evolved for bodily awareness and control in order to model abstract, conceptual domains.

In its structural isomorphisms with these features of cognition, the fictive museum approaches the modelling of cognitive space itself, *e.g.* by the repeated use of similar analogical relationships across many domains, media, instances, scales. The simplest and most evident example of this is Oldenburg's 'ray gun' move, but the same principle of limitless analogy is operational in what Krauss labels as Broodthaers 'eagle principle'.[215] In foregrounding the systemic effects, the glitches and instabilities of cognitive space, the fictive museum both intervenes in and re-shapes it. The fictive museum makes those interventions available for visitors as opportunities for knowledge and critical awareness, working with institutional cognitive space as traditional sculpture does with tangible space.

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[173] On Hegelianism and zero-sum dialectics, see Golding, 2010.

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[174] Rugoff, 1995.

[175] Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, 144.

[176] Ariel, 2002.

[177] Lakoff & Johnson, 2008,163.

[178] Binary opposition is either/or, while dualism is a one-dimensional space in which any departure from one is a move toward the other, e.g. light|dark. See **Mappings Between the Pairs**.

[179] On disciplinary issues in artistic research, see Borgdorff, 2007.

[180] Candlin, 2008.

[181] Borgdorff, 2007, 14.

[182] Schwarzenbach & Hackett, 2015, 16.

[183] Schwarzenbach & Hackett, 2015, 16.

[184] Cazeaux, 2017, 36.

[185] Lakoff & Johnson, 2008.

[186] Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, 3.

[187] This is discussed in more detail in **Mappings Between the Pairs**. On the history, extent, and cultural consequences of dualism, see Plumwood, 2003.

[188] Edward de Bono is not widely known, though his concept of *lateral thinking* is. While the mechanistic conception of mind is usually traced to the sensationism of De Condillac's *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746), the perspective is found in many cultures and time periods, including Buddhist philosophy of non-dualism (Turner-Lauck Wernicki, n.d.).

[189] One such glitch is the bi-stable figure – eg. the well-known 'Duck-Rabbit' illusion – where the same thing can be read as two mutually exclusive patterns, and our perception flicks between these two stable states. See de Bono, 1977, 165–166.

[190] de Bono, 1977, 17–19.

[191] Freire, 1996, 60–61.

[192] Hutchins, 2006, 375–398.

[193] See **A Minor Paranoia**.

[194] Blanchette & Richards, 2010, 561.

[195] Winkielman, Niedenthal, & Oberman, 2008, 264.

[196] See: Anders, Olivier & Badets, 2008; Fischer & Brugger, 2011; Koziol, Ely Budding & Chidekel, 2012.

[197] Levi, 1989, 11–12.

[198] See: Brainerd & Reyna, 2005; Storbeck & Clore, 2005.

[199] Chertok & Stengers, 1992, 252ff.

[200] Haraway, 2008, 11–12.

[201] Our perception of orientation is particularly poor, with estimates at a maximum angle resolution of about 0.5° (Smeets & Brenner, 2008, 210).

[202] Hagura, *et al*., 2012.

[203] Núñez, 2008.

[204] Strawson, 2009, 98–99.

[205] Halberstam, 2005, 9.

[206] Kuipers, 1982, 202.

[207] Paradoxical and terrifying changes of scale – in which self or world suddenly become vast or minuscule, *or both simultaneously* – are a common experience when suffering high fever.

[208] Bergen & Feldman, 2008.

[209] Matlock, 2004.

[210] Wilson, 2008, 383–388.

[211] The word *worry*, for example, has a history, being a metaphorical abstraction of a bodily act, as when a dog 'worries' a bone.

[212] However, a culture's frameworks for understanding cognitive processes contribute to and even re-shape those processes, in what sociologist Anthony Giddens labels the *double hermeneutic*: folk-knowledge versions of academic theories human phenomena influence the phenomena being studied (Giddens, 2003).

[213] See **Mapping Between the Pairs**.

[214] 'Integral affect' is a description of processes of reasoning where emotional states are linked to both the context and contents of the experience (Blanchette & Richards, 2010).

[215] Krauss, 2000, 19–22.
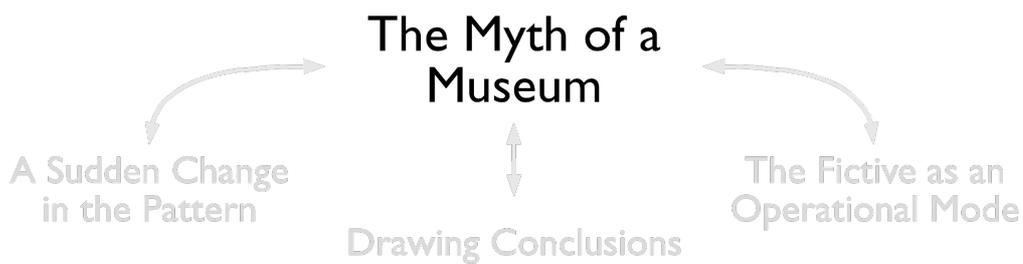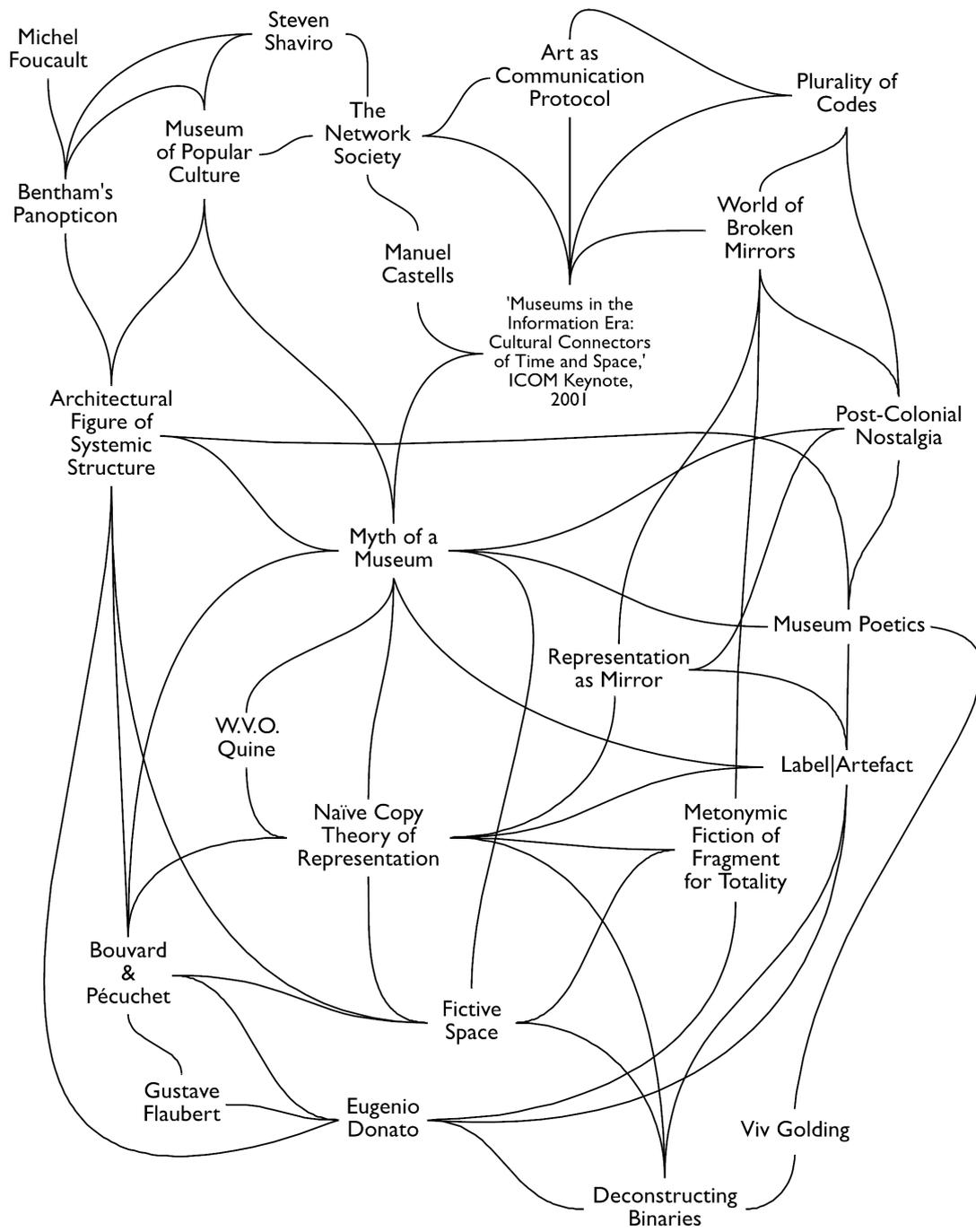
Slide 516.2: The Myth of a Museum

The Myth of a Museum

> To begin with a properly museal gesture, we must remember…the museum is a direct effect of modernization, rather than somehow standing…outside it. It is not the sense of secure traditions that marks the beginnings of the museum, but rather their loss combined with a multi-layered desire for (re)construction. A traditional society without a secular teleological concept of history does not need a museum, but modernity is unthinkable without its museal project… No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory.[216]

As Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon was for Foucault, for W. V. O. Quine the museum is a paradigmatic structure, representative of representation itself: 'the architectural figure of this composition'.[217] Proposing a materialist, behaviourist replacement for transcendent myths of language, Quine identified uncritical semantics and *copy theories* of representation as the 'myth of a museum'.[218] Quine's mythical museum is located in the mind of a 'native' being analysed to determine what his language means. Quine's figures – the mythical museum institution, the native, and the 'we' who 'observe his behaviour' – allude to ethnology, structuralism's birthplace. Quine models a *naïve copy theory* of representation, a museum~signified on the one hand and a set of label~signifiers on the other. The mythic museum uncomplicatedly assigns names to pre-existing exhibits, a traditional, commonsensical view: a one-to-one mapping without transformation between a collection of specimens and set of labels. 'Translation', for this folk-semiotics, is simply a matter of swapping one set of labels for another, leaving the exhibits otherwise unchanged.[219] There are objects over here, and their labels over there: two completely different orders of being. Something might be mislabelled – in which case the label would be false, rather

than true – but this is merely a correctable error, not a problematic. That the cases and labels might affect the form of the collection is conspicuously absent. This is the myth of the museum.

Discussing Gustav Flaubert's fictional museologists Bouvard and Pécuchet, the deconstructionist Eugenio Donato concludes 'it is thus through the *Museum* that questions of origin, causality, representation, and symbolisation are most clearly stated'.[220] Like Foucault and Giorgio Agamben – though without their faith in archaeological methods – Donato associates muséal knowledge with the 'fiction' that a 'repeated metonymic displacement of fragment for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels, can still produce a representation which is somehow adequate to a nonlinguistic universe.' Museums rely on the legibility and generalisability of 'the spatial juxtaposition of fragments'.[221] Flaubert's ironic museum here comes to stand for the institutional knowledge production: stable categories are assigned labels, and discursive critique can communicate knowledge of those things, and lead to new knowledge. Donato stresses that 'metonymic' displacements of part for whole – *synecdoche* – have a spurious rationality: a collection of artefacts and a matching set of labels is an inadequate model of 'a nonlinguistic universe.'[222] Borrowing a philosophical expression for the cæsura between body and mind, there is an *explanatory gap* between label and artefact.

In his associative drift through science fiction and social theory – inspired by the media theorist Manuel Castells' notion of 'the network society'[223] – a different Steven Shaviro proposes Seattle's Experience Music Project[224] as the twenty-

first-century equivalent of the Panopticon.[225] In this millennial museum, opened in 2000 by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, visitors were given prototype smart guides: 'a heavy handheld-computer-cum-audio-device'.[226] Browsing in mutual isolation, wearing earphones and prodding touchscreens, visitors queue to see famous rock'n'roll relics in a space 'simultaneously public and private', which 'seamlessly conflates the space of an educational museum with…virtual reality entertainment.'[227] Some fifteen years later, smartphones have replaced the need for custom museum devices; in today's network society, everybody buys their own museum guide.[228] Many display and labelling techniques have changed almost unrecognisably in this 'second "golden age" of museum building'.[229] Yet, whether by way of a clay cylinder, printed card or an AR app, the explanatory gap between the collected object and the meta-object of its label – the structural binary myth of the museum – remains in place.

The label|artefact dyad structures what Viv Golding labels 'museum poetics,' building on Gaston Bachelard's 'poetics of space.'[230] Rather than 'notions of purity, fixity and authority that echo in the traditional museum's masculine framing of knowledge in glass showcases', Golding argues for a creolised, affective, feminist museum practice; an 'ongoingness' that is explicitly fragmentary, partial and polyphonic, invested in the 'concrete poetry' of objects and bodies in relation.[231] For Castells, however, the fragmentary, partial and polyphonic have a very different resonance. In his keynote for the International Council of Museums, Castells lays out a programme for art in the museum. Borrowing the computing term *communication protocol* to describe 'the system's capacity to translate from one code to another,' Castells claims

we live in a society structurally destined to an ever increasing individualisation of communication…the fragmentation of communication systems and…codes of cultural communication…the fragmentation of sense and the potential lack of codes… [P]*aradoxically*, the multiplicity of cultural expressions *in reality* decreases the capacity to share sense, and hence, to communicate' [our emphasis].[232]

Castells states we need a cultural communication protocol for 'the system' to resist this *destined* fragmentation. Art – specifically art in museums – bears responsibility, 'a tool for building bridges…restoring the unity of human experience beyond oppression, differences and conflicts…'[233]

Castells rhetorically recognises this claim is 'paradoxical,' and assert 'reality' not once but twice.[234] Multiplicity becomes, if not a lack, then a 'potential lack': a prior universal whole has been broken into Donato's 'heap of meaningless…fragments.'[235] Castells describes a 'world of broken mirrors'; mirrors being, of course, the emblematic metonym of representation par excellence for the worldview of colonial Modernity.[236] Like Fredric Jameson's call for 'cognitive mapping'[237] between experience and structure, there is a totalising sense to Castells' globalist museum.[238] Castells proposes museum-artworks replace the breakdown of a master code: the universal mythic museum prior to multicultural Babel. Implicit here is the image of a prior unity, a set of 'common references of society,' a time before 'the Internet' enabled 'every subject…individual or collective…[to] construct their own hypertext'.[239] Castells invokes an inescapably Eurocentric, colonial frame; its coherence relies on what Brian O'Doherty called the 'little mythic motors' of ideology,[240] the equally colonial metaphors of fragmentation and ruin, of multiplicity, polyphony and dissent. [241] Castells acknowledges this in passing: 'the same old problem in a

new technological context…throughout history *and even today*, it is through shared experience that we…translate our different systems of communication [our emphasis].'[242] This is translation, as Vásquez argues, as colonial erasure.

Castells's historical exceptionalism – which O'Doherty takes issue with in Modernism, and Patricia Waugh addresses in postmodernism – is an explanatory gap between a traditional 'throughout history' on the one hand, and the radically progressive 'even today' on the other. Far from being a contested and unstable archive of contingency and rupture, with multiple competing narratives and absences, marked by colonialism, slavery, warfare, and oppression, the past is presented as a site of uncontested representational wholeness, innocence and naturalness. A centred 'traditional history' is the stable ground against which the universal figuring of rational progress is represented. But like label|artefact dualism, inevitable progress is a Modernist colonial myth: the 'secular teleological concept of history' Huyssen describes as foundational for museum building. 'Myths', Mary Midgley reminds us, 'are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning.'[243]

But myths – particularly teleological progress and its older twin, the myth of decline and ruin – forcibly reshape the ragged complexity of life into a thinkable figure, and *Image of thought*[244] passing for rational knowledge.[245] As Midgley explains, mythic networks are not mere falsehoods or fictions, though they may encompass many of each. Instead, these are cognitive patterns of meaning that include both the embodied mind and the cognitive prosthetic structures of the

world: the signs, symbols, traditions, texts, images, gestures and so on, which

Georges Didi-Huberman labels 'forms that think'.[246] The paradigmatic structure

of the traditional museum – with artefacts on the one hand, and labels on the

other – is a *constitutive symbol,*[247] a model continually re-asserting a mythic

pattern: the colonial ideology of neutral, rational, universal representation.

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[216] Huyssen, 1995, 15.

[217] Foucault, 1995, 199–200.

[218] Quine, 2010, 142–4.

[219] On the act of translation as epistemic violence, see Vásquez, 2011, 27–44.

[220] Eugenio Donato, in Crimp, 1995, 52–3.

[221] See **Crystals on a Chandelier** and **This Form That Thinks**.

[222] Eugenio Donato, in Crimp, 1995, 52–3.

[223] Castells, 1996.

[224] Now the Museum of Popular Culture.

[225] Shaviro, 2003, 31–2.

[226] Shaviro, 2003, 30.

[227] Shaviro, 2003, 30–1.

[228] Discussing augmented reality (AR) technology in relation to museum experiences was proposed as early as the mid 1990s (Mase *et al.*, 1996). During the course of this research, AR has begun to enter the mainstream; several offer dedicated applications for specific exhibits. Visitors view the displays through their smartphone; the app recognises what they're looking at, providing not only text and audio labelling, but hallucinatory special effects. The Smithsonian 'Skin & Bones' mobile app, for example, adds animated flesh and movement to an otherwise dry vitrine of mounted animal skeletons (Billock, 2017).

[229] Conn, 2010, 1.

[230] Golding, 2013.

[231] Golding, 2013, 81, 96.

[232] Castells, 2001, 5.

[233] Castells, 2001, 5.

[234] Castells, 2001, 5.

[235] Castells' image of a fragmented universal language thus reproduces the form of the Babel myth, the foundation of the European 'obsession' of (re-)constructing a perfect Universal Language. For a comprehensive overview, see Eco,1997, 1, 9–10, 19–24…

[236] For the link between mirrors, representation, and colonialism, see Ching-Liang Low, 1996, 187–232. Castells' world of broken mirrors matches Patricia Waugh's description of postmodernism's 'dissatisfaction with, and breakdown of, traditional values.' See Waugh, 1984, 6.

[237] For more discussion of cognitive mapping, see **Mappings Between the Pairs**.

[238] We propose an ironic counter-figure to Castells' world of broken mirrors: the disco ball, emblem of trans-racial, trans-gender, trans-sexual enjoyment and funky togetherness.

[239] Castells, 2001, 5.

[240] O'Doherty, 1986, 14.

[241] Castells' principle of the role art must play in the museum, if depicted instead in a dystopian mode, might be almost indistinguishable from Guy Debord's *society of the spectacle*, where '*Fragmented* views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a *separate pseudoworld* that can only be looked at… the unification it achieves is nothing but an official language of universal separation [emphasis in original].' (Debord, 2009, 9.)

[242] Castells, 2001, 5.

[243] Midgley, 2003, 1.

[244] See **Mappings Between the Pairs**.

[245] Midgley, 2003, 13.

[246] See **This Form That Thinks**.

[247] See **A Constellation Saturated With Tensions**.

A Consensual
Hallucination

Drugged with
History and Art

A Minor Paranoia

The John Affey
Museum
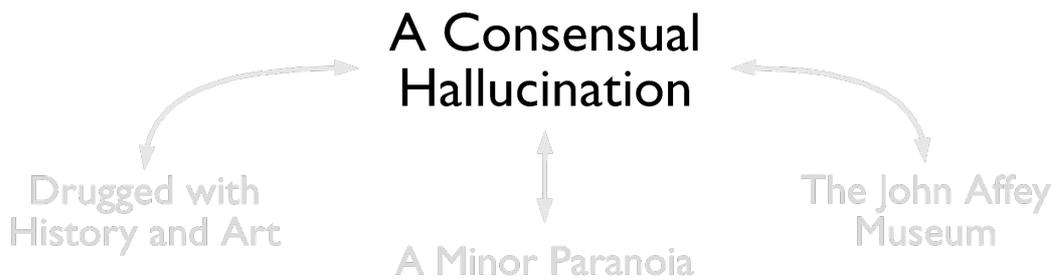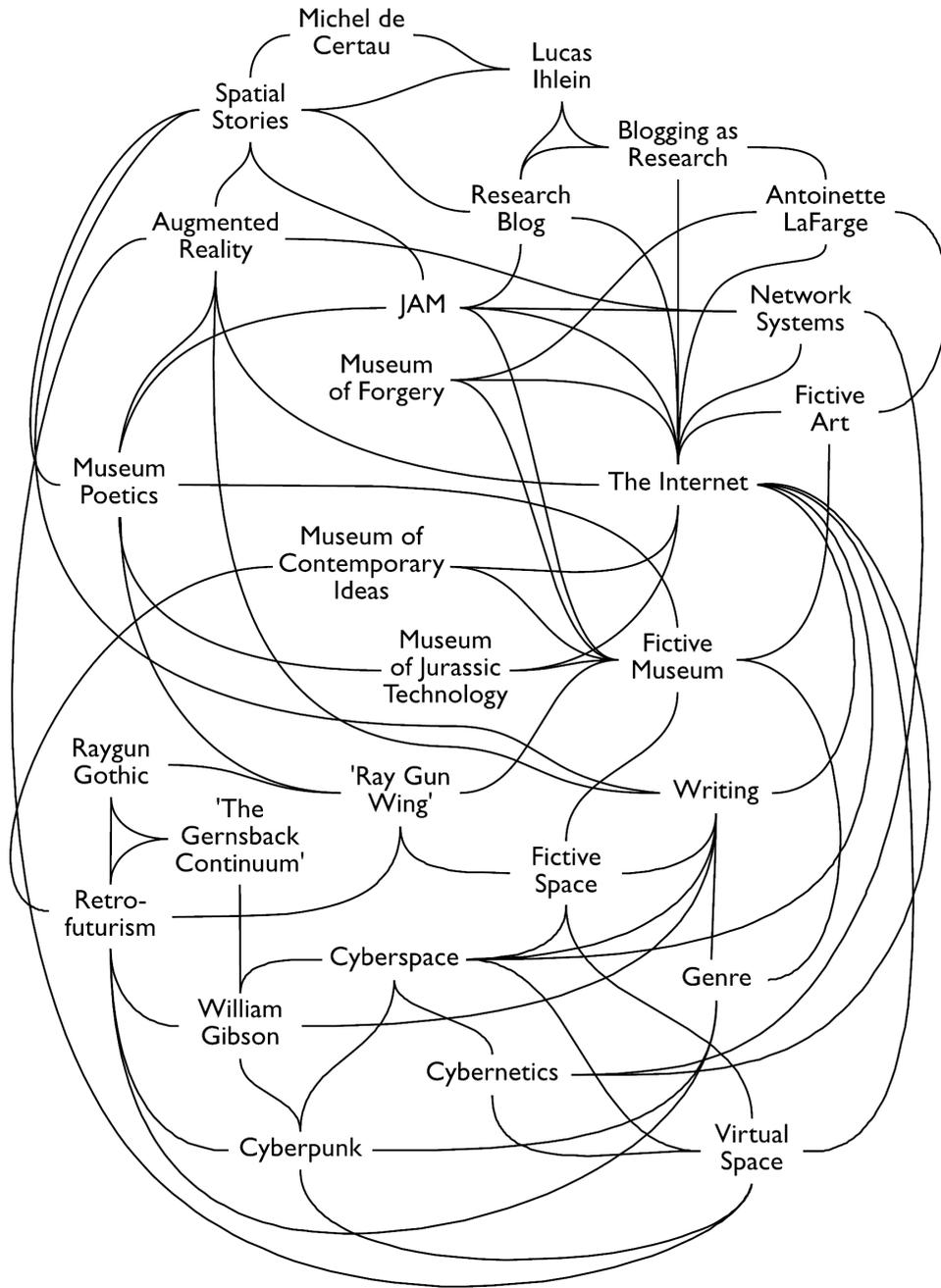
Slide 170.5: A Consensual Hallucination

A Consensual Hallucination

Synonymous with the internet and virtual reality experiments during the 1980s and 1990s, *cyberspace* – like the ray gun – has a dated, retro-futurist feel today.[248] Though associated with a post-internet condition, author and theorist Bruce Sterling explains cyberspace as where a telephone conversation happens: 'the place between the phones…though there is still no substance… nothing you can handle, it has a strange kind of physicality now'.[249] If cyberspace can be backdated to the pre-Internet *between* of the telephone, why not the telegraph, or the letter? Correspondence takes place in the emergent *between* of a distributed technological system (we often forget writing is a technology), which cannot be located in its components. From an embodied~cognitive perspective, this insight applies to the space of counting on an abacus, or even one's fingers. Consciousness itself is a cyberspace, emerging amongst distributed, modular assemblages of heterogeneous material systems. When electronics are involved, such spaces are usually labelled *virtual* or *digital*. Using the sign systems of mathematics or philosophy, they are labelled *abstract*. In art and literature, such spaces are *fictional* or *imaginary*. All are *fictive spaces* generated by *associative constellation*.

Cyberspace has become ubiquitous: digital events cause widespread tangible effects. Writing on Gibson's cyberspace in the context of internet art, Ingrid Scharlau's description applies equally to global internet culture:[250] an 'apparently simple visible facade' conceals a nested complexity of masks, 'a myriad disparate parts' of which no one is 'its author or subject' and no one has 'an overview'.[251]

For artists including LaFarge, Hill, King, and Maria Miranda, the internet is the location *par excellence* of fictive art.[252] In the responsive, situated information environment of Web 2.0, traditional boundaries between academic disciplines, creative industries, ideological propaganda, journalism and entertainment are exploded, reconfigured, suffering an unrecognisable sea-change.[253] So-called Augmented Reality (AR) technologies are becoming mainstream. Ubiquitous GPS data and real-time pattern recognition make applications like 'Pokémon Go' not only possible, but liable to generate wildly unpredictable effects.[254] Transnational corporate platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter blur distinctions between individuals, celebrities and institutions. From the transgender teenager to the President of the United States, the retired watercolourist to Frieze Art Fairs, the most amateur collector to the British Museum, Twitter is a cyberspace forum juxtaposing entities of the most disparate levels of social, economic and political agency.[255] Likes, Followers, and Comments function as real-time metrics of attentional power; a thriving grey-market economy of automated bot accounts falsify attention metrics to generate real economic and political influence.[256] Here and in the sphere of viral fake news, distinctions between documentary and fiction, virtual and actual are not so much indeterminate as functionally irrelevant.

Scharlau's 'visible facade' of cyberspace identity – branding, hyperlinks, Google rankings, accessible metadata – restructures the poetics of knowledge production and institutional authority. Due to its dialogic feedback effects and transmedia potential – an *eagle principle* radically flattening phenomena into 'content' – blogging has been claimed by several practice-based researchers in

the arts as transformative research method. For Lucas Ihlein, 'blogging had

begun to intervene in the very processes [of research]… documented and

instrumentalised through the public sphere created by the blog itself… a new

way of *doing art*'.[257] Though Ihlein's method joins the widespread contemporary

revival of Situationism and Psychogeography with an explicitly dialogic or

relational aesthetics, his observations have wider relevance for the affordances

of the blog. Unlike the corporate website, blogging is not a 'fictionalised online

image…where everything seems to lock into place in a seamless way', but rather

a 'framework which allows the qualities of experience…to exist on their own

terms. The expansive container… [does not] require closure or fixity'.[258] Ihlein

concludes the art-research blog enables what Michel de Certeau terms 'spatial

stories',[259] 'able to radically transform the researcher's relationship with the

surrounding world'.[260] As an artistic research form, blogs aggregate together

disparate media, materialities, processes, events, and entities into a single fictive

location in cyberspace. which artists including King have discovered as

containers capable of modelling 'transmedia, transcontextual tangles'.[261]

In the paradoxically de-centred context of fictive art, what Ihlein calls the 'centre

of the process of enquiry' is generated by the enquiry itself. The capability of

the art-research blog to gain the agency to 'transform relationships' becomes a

far more destabilising, unsettling proposition. Ihlein subscribes to a re-centring,

neo-Kierkegaardian 'correct relation' with our 'particular heredity, history, or

locality'; the questionable postcolonial position of 'becoming indigenous' or

'becoming native', however much this is acknowledged as something we must

'create for ourselves'. In contrast, the fictive heuristic perspective forces re-

cognition of the unstable, unpredictable agency of things and their mislabelling. An agency transforming not only 'the researcher's relationship with the surrounding world', but the very dialectic identities of world and researcher—a paranoid, apophenic method for which truth is a contradiction in terms. Locating the blog in an expanded definition of cyberspace – fictive space emerging *amongst* distributed things, regardless of category, discipline or location – the blog becomes an associative constellation with the potential to reconfigure its elements, including the researcher. A tensile strength, among a constellation of heterogeneous elements orbiting a fictive centre of gravity, which – given sufficient attentional influence – could transform cognitive-material conditions in chains of nonlinear contingency. Here the agency of the author function is not denied or diminished, but ramified, extended to every modular and sub-modular element of every assemblage. Without restriction, irrespective of temporal or geographic origin, with the sole proviso that no element has agency in isolation, least of all the humanist model of a conscious, rational, researcher exercising their free will as an *individual* master identity.

David Joselit identifies in contemporary art a 'lingua franca' of 'global conceptualism': an 'international style' with various 'dialects', of which the 'most pervasive…of the present moment…proceed from…the aggregator'.[262] Joselit identifies two 'syntactic structures' that recur across the various instances of aggregators he observes: *asynchrony*, 'a figure of uneven development, both literally and metaphorically'; and *the common*, 'where semi-autonomous elements come together' but are not integrated into a coherent structure. In *the common* – associated with Bruno Latour's 'assembling the social' – Joselit argues

aggregators resist identification with either montage or archive.[263] Montage 'subsumes' its constituent elements 'within an overall compositional logic' that does not maintain 'the disarming quality of independence characteristic of an aggregate, which seems always in danger of falling apart'. Likewise, the archival possesses a 'principle of selection,' which 'serves to collect, preserve, and even constitute evidence as a pillar of epistemological stability. Aggregates, on the other hand, proceed from an obscure principle of selection, typically staging confrontations among an array of objects that embody entirely different values or epistemologies'. Joselit's observation intersects with Benjamin Buchloh's writing a decade before on the very different 'Atlas' works of Aby Warburg, André Malraux, Eduardo Paolozzi, and Gerhard Richter. Buchloh argues these 'accumulations of photographic images' do not fit comfortably within traditional conceptions of photomontage, or collage, but function as 'anomic archives', which through their structuring 'diametrically oppose the avant-garde objectives of immediacy, shock and fragmentation, even if these records are merely imaginary structures'.[264] The trans-disciplinary, trans-temporal, trans-media assemblage projects of Aby Warburg and Walther Benjamin – subjects of intense contemporary interest – could be described as precursors of the aggregator.

Operating by proto-algorithmic methods, the assemblage-aggregator 'not only undermines the falsely unifying tone of the speaker and the alleged omniscience of the author, but also enables various practices, positions and perspectives to be juxtaposed…[and thus] not only denounce[s] naively subjective conceptions, but…redefines the object of writing history…as an agglomeration of numerous interlinked…structures'.[265] For both contemporary aggregators and for the

unfinished projects of Warburg and Benjamin, authorial agency is generated among constituents – including visitors – generating correlative meanings in association, rather than homogenising and unifying a central or conclusive principle or message through authorial interpretation or translation. Joselit identifies 'the aggregator's impulse to furnish a platform where unlike things may occupy a common space'.[266] Blogging and the fictive occupation of corporate social media offer transformative potential via cyberspace's capacity to offer a common platform, hosting radically heterogeneous constituencies. Crucially, however, the aggregator is not simply a *tabula rasa* upon which all readings may be projected with equal veridicality; structures of meaning emerge through material-cognitive agency. And while these conditions of knowledge production intensify in the post-internet era, Sterling's description of cyberspace demonstrates this is a potential of the fictive space of associative constellation.

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[248] Cyberspace is clear instance of the fictive, emerging from science fiction into experiential reality. William Gibson (1982) based *cyberspace* on *cybernetics*, coined in 1948 by Norbert Weiner from the Greek *kybernētēs*: 'helmsman' or 'pilot'. Gibson (1981) had previously written another short story on 'Raygun Gothic', the retro-futurism of the early twentieth century.

[249] Sterling, 1998, xii.

[250] Two decades on, the internet has expanded exponentially: an unthinkable, unchartable global force, interleaving social interactions, advertising, global financial markets, political propaganda, religious evangelism, scientific research, the entertainment industries, data mining, journalism, pornography, popular music, espionage, education, legal processes, archiving, and innumerable other fields of human endeavour into one vast, fractured rhizome, in which – potentially at least – events in one domain can gain viral traction on the global attention economy, generating nonlinear, contingent ramifications in many others, regardless of our assumed boundaries of relevance or rational causality. See Shaw & Reeves-Evison, 2017.

[251] Scharlau, 1998, 109.

[252] Turner *et al.*, 2008, 5.

[253] Nolin, 2011.

[254] Pokémon Go is an AR smartphone app. Players explore their surroundings looking through the phone camera, which occasionally reveals cartoon creatures to collect, depending on the GPS location. This has led to – amongst other things – the discovery of dead bodies by children, complaints by the Holocaust Museum, new road traffic blackspots, improved interest in entomology, and increased sales at local businesses that mark themselves as PokéStops (Peterson, 2016).

[255] Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011.

[256] Michael, 2017.

[257] Ihlein, 2014, 38–49.

[258] Ihlein, 2014, 42.

[259] de Certeau, 2001, 72.

[260] Ihlein, 2014, 47.

[261] King, 2017.

[262] Joselit, 2013, 12.

[263] Joselit, 2013, 12 (Note 16).

[264] Buchloh, 1998, 50–60.

[265] Buchloh, 1998, 55–6.

[266] Joselit, 2013, 17.
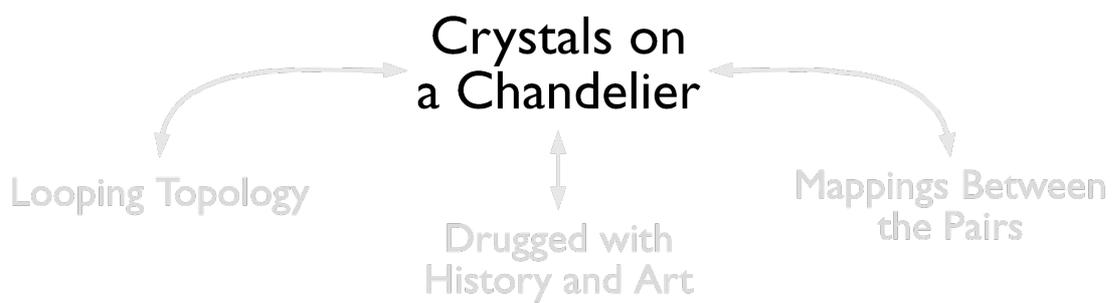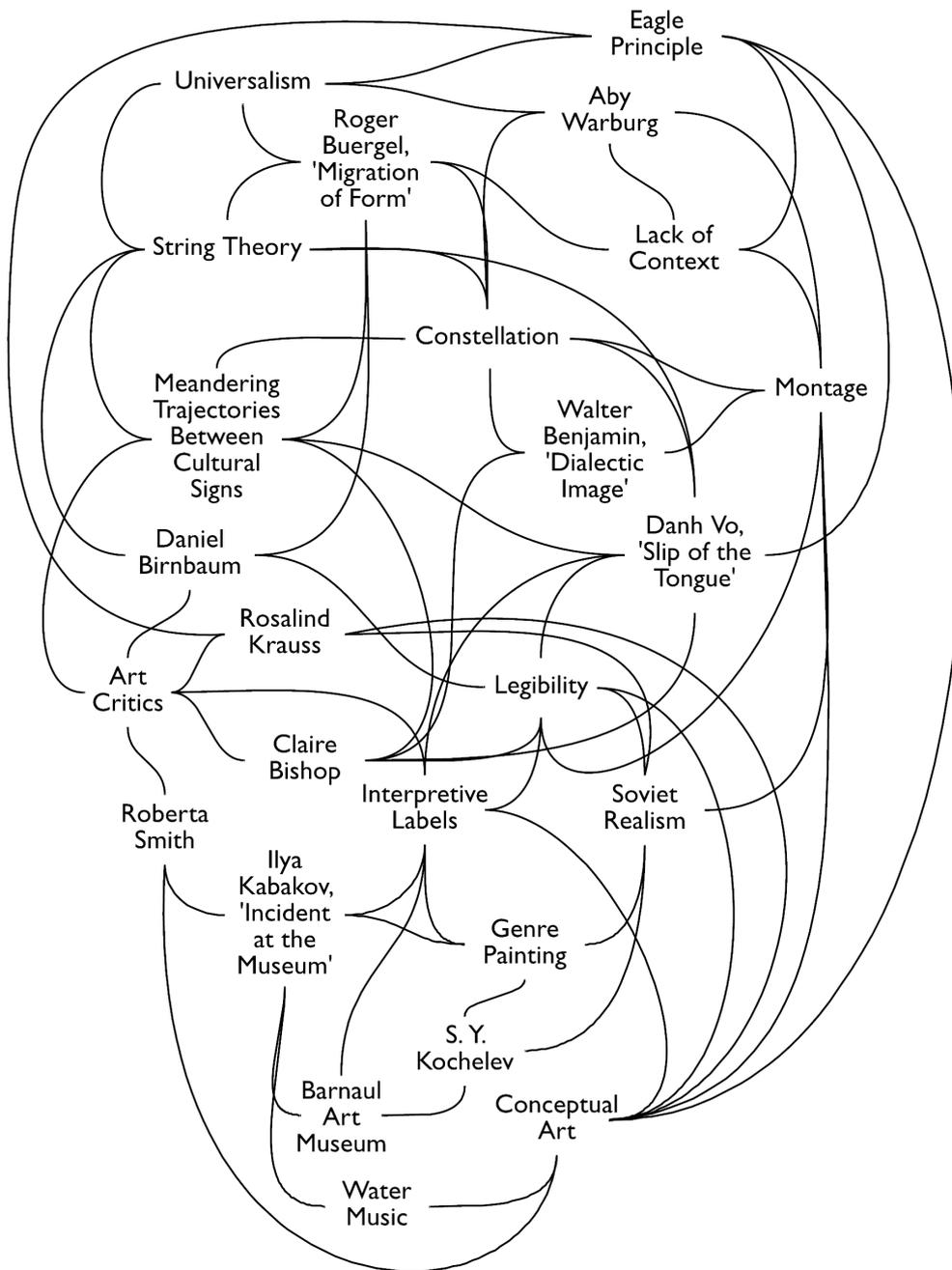
Slide 318.1: Crystals on a Chandelier

Crystals on a Chandelier

Reviewing Ilya Kabakov's fictive museum installation *Incident at the Museum, or Water Music* (1992), Roberta Smith seems caught up in the cinematic set-dressing of what Kabakov labels *Total Installation*––entering a 1990s New York gallery to find oneself in a dishevelled museum of Soviet Realist paintings, water dripping from the ceiling into buckets. Smith observes the paintings 'are the handiwork of one S. Y. Kochelev and belong to the Barnaul Art Museum. Of course, paintings, painter and institution alike are fictive creations of Mr. Kabakov'.[267] Kabakov exceeds the artist-as-curator role he appeared to be occupying, unmasked as painter, decorator, script writer, and critic all at once.[268] Perhaps precisely because the uniqueness of her opinions is a professional requirement, Smith does not recognise Kabakov's fictive manipulation of the 'suite of opinions' as part of the artwork, with gallery texts (and her own review) forming what Kabakov labels an 'unified organism' with the artwork.[269]

Though she recognises Kabakov as a 'conceptualist', Smith does not read *Incident at the Museum*'s 'dematerialised' effects in the tradition of Conceptual Art, seeing the texts and their concepts as key to the work. Smith complains its 'weakness is the fact that it is almost more interesting to read the artist's synopsis of the piece and its intended effect in the accompanying brochure than to experience it firsthand'. Smith's critique only gains traction if these texts and 'the piece' are separate things, rather than evidence of a fictive, distributed practice, rooting out beyond temporary physical installation into cultural discourse.[270] Smith remarks on Kabakov's 'oddly formalist interpretation', which draws attention to the water

music, 'declaring that the leaky museum becomes a concert hall for those with sensitive ears'. Far from being separable from 'the work', this situated text is intended to be read in the space, altering the visitor's experience. Declaring the drips in a leaking museum to be a concert, composed by Russian animator Vladimir Tarasov, is the kind of gesture familiar from late-twentieth-century Conceptual Art. To construct the museum beforehand, to paint all the paintings in it under an assumed name, and *then* to declare that the dripping water makes it a conceptual art concert hall is something else entirely.

What Smith recognises as the 'odd' tone of Kabakov's gallery text subverts the supposedly anti-sublime, anti-æsthetic creed of New York Conceptualism:

> [T]he music "speaks" only to those who have the internal ear with which to hear it. It is these select few who can see beyond the chaos to sense the music's evocation of other works of art — "conversations of drops" in marble chalices in Arabic palaces, the splash of fountains in French parks, even Handel's Water Music. Only in the sublime setting of a "temple" of art could the entire phenomenon occur.[271]

Do we trust that this is the gallery's interpretation? Or even Kabakov's interpretation? Doesn't it sound more like the pronouncement of one of Kabakov's unreliable narrators, ironic Nabokovian allusions teeming below the surface? Surely this, like the cod-Soviet Realist paintings, is a kind of double pastiche? Like Ralph Rugoff's friend staring at an unusual object in the MJT's ticket office, we are struck by a sense verging on paranoia as we read Kabakov's press release, wondering if this too is part of the exhibit.[272] Perhaps it is no wonder that Smith refused to recognise this possibility——how does one write about an artwork that writes about itself, pre-empting our analysis?

Claire Bishop, writing about Danh Vo's epic double-bill for the 56th Venice

Biennale – *mothertongue* and *Slip of the Tongue* (2015) – makes a similar refusal

of recognition. In Bishop's damning critique, Vo's work is 'intensely subjective',

with a 'hermetic quality at odds with the very idea of intersubjective

communication… the task of history'.[273] The result is merely 'the idea of

research and the lure of history', an unprincipled collection based on a personal

luxury æsthetic Bishop likens to baubles on a necklace, 'or, better, crystals on a

chandelier'.[274] It is not only the 'seductive sculptures', the 'ornamentation', the

'subjective' intimacy, and 'almost Beuysian levels of myth' that trouble Bishop.

She decries 'meandering trajectories between cultural signs'; the 'cut-and-paste

accumulation of details… rather than interpretation', indulged in for 'ornamental

and aesthetic ends'.[275] Signaling the 'academic cliché to invoke Walter Benjamin'

while enacting it, Bishop insists Benjamin's call for 'a tiger's leap into the past' is

'increasingly needed'. For Bishop, the 'semionautic' trajectories – borrowing

Nicholas Bourriaud's term – within Vo's structure are absolutely counter to the

'constellation' of Walter Benjamin's dialectic image. Bishop reminds us 'the

Benjaminian model of history is fundamentally curatorial, revolving around the

novel juxtaposition of pre-existing objects that jolt the viewer'. What Bishop

finds 'painfully ironic' is 'that at some point around the millennium, the artist-

curated show morphed into a creature that forsakes interpretation (historical or

otherwise) for the short-term seductions of captioned sensibility'.[276]

It is precisely this matter of a supposedly anti-Benjaminian lack of 'interpretation'

that Bishop latches onto as a weakness in the 'artist-curated show'. Yet this is

somehow the very quality in Benjamin that Storrie foregrounds in *The Delirious*

Museum. Bishop laments '[o]ne of the biggest trends in contemporary art…

"the artist as historian"… research-based practices' that are 'content to present

vitrines full of texts, and slide shows of appropriated images'. We can sense

Bishop's discontent, her resistance to investing time and energy to this method,

slogging through endless texts and slideshows—*just get to the point!* Bishop

signals her impatience with the 'reluctance to synthesise and organise… leav[ing]

it up to the viewer to do the work of drawing the strands together'. And in Vo's

work there were many such strands, mapped and numbered, supported by a

catalogue Bishop calls a 'thick brochure with yet more lengthy captions'. [277] For

Bishop, such art fails to honour its commitments to the visitor, leaving 'the work'

undone. The time for uncertainty and diffusion – once an acceptable tactic –

has passed, and Bishop demands shows 'that offer—however provisionally—a stab

at interpretation'. Digressive captions, 'meandering…literary performance of

free association… oneiric mélange of data points' cannot provide synthesis.

Bishop can only conclude the catalogue is 'as arbitrary as all the other details.

What does any of this have to do with *why*… [our emphasis]'.[278] Bishop's

impatience, her insistence on distillation, recalls Georg Lúkacs's infamous

assessment of montage: a 'one-dimensional technique' that can 'never be more

than dirty water'.[279]

Writing on Hito Steyerl's work in documenta 12, Daniel Birnbaum claims the

associative 'urge to compare anything and everything', an artist-curatorial trope

Birnbaum dubs *string theory,* 'makes any kind of specificity – political or artistic –

impossible'.[280] Birnbaum complains that Roger Buergel's *migration of form*

curatorial strategy – which recalls for Birnbaum the work of Aby Warburg –

amounts only to a flattening, a pervasive lack of particularity. Rather than a radical *détourning* championed by Storrie, for Birnbaum this kind of associative constellation instead becomes a bracketing-away of singularity. Discussing Luis Jacob's collages, Birnbaum notes a slippage of 'bubbles, globes, balls, and spheres; heads appear attached to bodies and cut off'. *Things* are literally excised from their context and re-assembled to serve another function. Anything with the right form becomes another bubble… or perhaps another ray gun. But ultimately it is not this aspect of appropriation – this *accessioning*, vivisection from the environment and translated for the institutional purposes of a foreign power – that disturbs Birnbaum. Indeed, he appears unworried by the same tendency in Warburg towards 'universalism'. Instead, the disturbing factor seems to be that he and his un-named companions cannot grasp the curatorial associations, concluding they 'signify nothing'. Birnbaum's group – presumably all professionals at the game contemporary art Snap – lose too many rounds to enjoy themselves: 'How brilliant, if only it had worked! Or even just become legible'[281]—a critique that does not extend to the contingencies of *legibility*.[282]

Birnbaum acknowledges the curatorial strategy he critiques is explicitly 'post-colonial'; Buergel's 'contribution' to an ongoing 'conversation' Birnbaum links to the work of Okwui Enwezor in documenta 11. This refusal to group artworks by the typologies of geographical style or historical period often comes with reference to Michel Foucault, who, according to Agamben, liberated historiography from 'the apparent seriousness of metonymic contexts, like the chronological and geographical, [that] have no epistemological basis at all'.[283] And like Storrie's discussion of Benjamin's intention 'merely to show,' Birnbaum

positions Buergel's associative method as non-interpretive, refraining from adding more 'critical theory'. It seems significant that the sole example Birnbaum gives of an unintelligible, *illegible* curatorial association explicitly concerns race: portraits of the 'disaffected black youth' of Kerry James Marshall's *The Lost Boys* (1993), juxtaposed with a seventeenth-century Dutch painting about the 'legend' of a 'dark-hued' couple giving birth to a 'white-hued' daughter.[284] Birnbaum's telling example reveals the opposite of apophenia: a refusal to see connections. In this decolonial constellation, another unmissable association is Rolando Vásquez's *double erasure*, the process by which colonial modernity – a condition Vásquez views as ongoing – first erases something, and then erases that erasure, refusing to recognise anything has been ignored.[285] Analysing Birnbaum's analysis in this way, however, we run the risk that our own interpretation makes something else legible, a kind of queered position halfway between lay psychoanalysis and decolonial theory. We risk a meta-interpretation, requiring we locate Birnbaum's narrative in a wider context, which we claim more awareness of than he has himself. As with Kabakov's water music ringing in a distributed 'temple of art', the visitor's interpretation becomes vulnerable. The constellation being assembled in the fictive museum requires the visitor to make the right associations, returning the work to an aesthetics of connoisseurship. This game of allusions, of in-jokes and *getting the references*, is precisely the weakness that both Bishop and Birnbaum identify in the artist-as-curator associative constellations they are critiquing: an exclusionary, complicit literacy required of the imagined visitor.

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[267] Smith, 1992.

[268] Like Wilson and Pamuk, Kabakov published a book to accompany his fictive museum installation. See Kabakov, Tarasov, & Chicago, 1993.

[269] Kabakov, 2000, 257.

[270] For a more detailed discussion, see Le Couteur, 2012, 28–45.

[271] Robert Feldman Gallery, 1992.

[272] Rugoff, 1995, 73–74. Cf. Nabakov, 2010, 322–3.

[273] Bishop, 2015, 329.

[274] Bishop, 2015, 329.

[275] The ornamental and the aesthetic being dreadful vices, akin to the illustrative, the seductive, or the self-indulgent.

[276] Bishop, 2015, 329.

[277] Bishop, 2015, 329.

[278] Although claiming to be on the side of Benjamin, it is difficult to picture Bishop reading the Arcades Project with much enjoyment at this point.

[279] Lúkacs, 1977, 43.

[280] Birnbaum, 2007, 408.

[281] Birnbaum, 2007, 408–9.

[282] See Lefebvre, 2000, 143.

[283] Agamben, 2002.

[284] Marshall's work explicitly engages historical figure painting, the question of the representation of the black body in museums and galleries, and questions of racial heritage and legend, by making *history paintings*—in this case one that features a tree with 'Life' on a scroll around its trunk. For visitors familiar with this, or even slightly versed in some Black diaspora thematics – colonial history, shadeism / colourism, legend and stereotype, reclaiming lost heritage, passing on Black culture in a racist society, representation and erasure – the affinities here are clear. When we add the fact that Marshall is depicting Black children, referencing pictorial conventions from the seventeenth century, including allegorical figures such as chessboard floors and trees of life, the associations seem frankly unmissable.

[285] Vásquez, 2011, 30–32.

Fictive Heuristic

Auto-Poesis

Argument as Trajectory

Common Sense

Image of Thought

Assemblage

Gilles Deleuze

Field of Potential Legibility

Interpretation

Georges Didi-Huberman

Museum Without Interpretation

'Merely to show...'

Montage

Walter Benjamin, 'Passagenwerk'

Callum Storrie, 'The Delirious Museum'

Collection

Aby Warburg, 'Mnemosyne Atlas'

Sigmund Bode, 'Placement as Language'

André Malraux, 'Museum Without Walls'

Photo-graphic Repro-duction

Brian O'Doherty, 'Aspen 5+6'

A Model of Itself

The Fictitious Arts

Gaston Bachelard, 'Poetics of Space'

Claes Oldenburg, 'Ray Gun Wing'

Topoanalysis

This Form That Thinks

A Minor Paranoia

An Unbridgeable Chasm

Looping Topology

Slide 919.1: This Form That Thinks

This Form That Thinks

In *The Delirious Museum*, Calum Storrie discusses Walter Benjamin's well-known intention in his unfinished 'literary montage' *Passagenwerk*[286] to 'merely show' his collection of things; that 'by making use of them' he 'needn't *say* anything'.[287] Storrie concludes that 'it is as if Benjamin is here proposing a museum without labels and without explanation; a museum in which the role of the curator is returned to being the custodian rather than the interpreter.'[288] Sidestepping the issue of whether or not Storrie's return to a supposedly-prior state of being applies to Benjamin's project, there is clearly a significant problem with applying it to Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Wing*, for all that the project lacks explicit narrative interpretation. Here, *the perceptible* is generated relationally, by association. Like Walter Benjamin's *dialectic image,* this is a pattern or figure formed in a 'constellation saturated with tensions,' which cannot be conflated into a unified whole without a collapse of what Benjamin identifies as a gap or break, a 'cæsura in the movement of thought'.[289] One such axis of tension in *Ray Gun Wing*, perhaps its most intense, is presence|absence, linked to true|false. Are the collected objects ray guns, or aren't they? The collection generates the question and suspends it, forming a constellation of contradictions, a freeze-frame flickering back and forth as though paused on a VCR. What is clear in the exposed wiring of *Ray Gun Wing* – and subsequently discernible in other fictive museums, and potentially all other museums – is how the collected thing becomes a point in an argument, part of a pattern that builds a representation of the world.

Benjamin describes this act of collecting as a 'magic circle', where the collected object is 'detached from all origins' and 'turns to stone', becoming 'an encyclopaedia of all knowledge'.[290] The thinking, the searching, the shuddering that is taking place cannot comfortably be located in either the artist's intention, the visitor's interpretation, or some negotiation between the two. There is a process at work beyond any neutral custodianship. It is as-if the collection itself generates a field of resonance through the very gesture of collection and display: a fictive voice by which things are identified, called into being. Here the found, the altered, the made, and their methods of institutional framing cannot be disentangled; creation, curation, interpretation, and reception are wired up together into a feedback loop. Instead, a kind of *placement as language*[291] begins to operate, where selection, adjacency and relation generate associative significance. And, as *Ray Gun Wing* demonstrates so powerfully, this associative significance, while highly contingent, is far from an individualistic, arbitrary free play of signs, equally open to any and all interpretations. Like the model of the Ark at the entrance to the MJT, the fictive museum object is both produced by the museum, and inextricable from a meshwork of pre-existing relations and associations, hovering between history and mythology. Museum models and reproductions occupy a strange zone between object and label, particularly when they are sold in the museum shop as 'authentic museum reproductions'.[292] The meaning of the object, even the thing itself, is produced in a montage of contextual relations.

In his recent work, Georges Didi-Huberman champions montage as 'the art producing this form that thinks'.[293] This is an open-ended montage, in seeming

contrast to works like *Ray Gun Wing*, where the potential of things to generate sympoietic montage effects is radically short-circuited. Though *Ray Gun Wing* is, in effect, the kind of Eisensteinian montage Didi-Huberman describes, it is a form that only thinks one thing; a colonising, totalising force that discovers-assembles only a model of itself, like a virus. True heterogeneity and difference are suppressed, or, as DeLanda might term it, territorialised. By contrast, Didi-Huberman seems to be celebrating precisely the experience that perplexes Claire Bishop and Daniel Birnbaum in their reviews of artist-curation.[294] Instead of a 'lack of interpretation', Didi-Huberman finds instead a field of potential *'legibility'.*[295] Alongside Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*, the cultural project Didi-Huberman chooses as the paradigmatic example of the radical potential of montage is Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927-1929). Didi-Huberman claims Warburg's montage-diagram of art historical reproductions 'deconstructs, with its very exuberance, the ideals of uniqueness, of specificity, of purity, of logical exhaustion. It is a tool... for the inexhaustible opening up to possibilities that are not yet given'.[296] Didi-Huberman is focussing on the *Atlas* as a vast collaborative game of association to be played with an unfathomably large deck of cards. The possibilities for legibility are not yet given before the cards have been played, laid out on Warburg's black baize-covered boards like a tarot reading, but more fluid, liable to be endlessly reshuffled. Didi-Huberman is most moved not by any specific round of this card game so much as by the game itself, the *spatial* reconfigurations, redistributions, and displacements of its operations.[297]

Though Warburg intended the *Atlas* to become a large book, with over seventy

thematically arranged panels that would then be re-photographed, the project was unfinished at his death, and perhaps unfinishable, though several such books have since been published. The panels appear to have found their perfect medium on the internet, with Cornell University having produced a dedicated website that studies ten panels in detail and places them in context. Multiple explanatory passages or tours from art historians can be sampled, and the panels can be navigated in detail, zooming in and out of the individual images in a way that would only be possible in a printed book on the scale of a vast library atlas.[298] In the reproductions of Warburg's *Atlas*, and in the physical reproduced images of the *Atlas* itself, countless forms, styles and media are rendered equivalent through their flattening into black and white.[299] As André Malraux pointed out in his *Musée Imaginaire* or 'Museum Without Walls' project, museums 'have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original function'.[300] Two decades after Warburg, Malraux was engaged in assembling hundreds of images for his own expansive art historical project, though not quite on the scale of Warburg's two thousand selections from his library of ten times that number. Alongside this estrangement through re-contextualisation, Malraux notes 'the mere act of grouping together many works of the same style creates its masterpieces and forces us to grasp its project'.[301]

But is this the 'project' of the style, or of the grouping? The act of grouping in the museum is heightened by framing and lighting, by photography that 'imparts a family likeness to objects that have actually but slight affinity'.[302] This, Malraux reminds us – as we read his museum-book of photographic reproductions – 'has created what might be called "fictitious" arts, by systematically falsifying the scale

of objects', at once producing and revealing 'great styles which… "might have been"… the persisting life of certain forms, emerging ever and again like spectres from the past. In the realm of…the fictitious arts, the fragment is king'.[303] Rather than resolve this impossible conflict between binary questions of what is truly in the material, and what is created or exaggerated through its framing, Malraux's project celebrates the power of re-contextualising montage: 'by the angle at which it is displayed, and with appropriate lighting, a fragment or detail can tell out significantly, and become, in reproduction, a not unworthy denizen of our Museum without Walls'.[304] Just as in Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Wing*, or our own circular argument in **A Constellation Saturated with Tensions**, Malraux's montage of photographic reproductions in his *Museum Without Walls* uses a diagrammatic method, operating on Broodthaers' cognitive *eagle principle* to generate isomorphic resonances, homogenising the most diverse materials, whilst foregrounding the method by which this is achieved. Malraux's is therefore a fictive museum, operating beyond a truth|fiction binary with the signal self-awareness that it is doing so. Malraux's emphasis on the framing, positioning, rescaling, and re-contextualisation of photographic reproductions changing the nature and associations of the things reproduced shifts Benjamin's intention to 'merely show' rather than tell beyond Storrie's account of it. Here, montage assemblage and collection are not so much accompanied by interpretations, as a mechanism for generating thinking and interpretation itself.

The recurring, reanimated 'spectres from the past' Malraux discusses were precisely Warburg's area of interest. Warburg spent decades theorising a kind of psychoanalysis of cultural patterns formed in response to trauma, which he

called *pathosformeln*: pathos-formulas. In the last years of his life, using the vast resources of his idiosyncratically arranged library, Warburg mapped the 'gestures' symptomatic of the *pathosformeln* thematically across medium, style and period using a never-ending typological montage of photographs, pinned to large mobile boards: the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Like Malraux's use of photographic reproductions, Warburg's images were not valued for their own material embodiment as photographs, or newspaper clippings, but 'merely as reproductions', placeholders to be looked *through* in the manner of lecture slides. But Didi-Huberman is correct in emphasising how this very aspect 'deconstructs' ideals of purity and uniqueness. The images themselves gain agency beyond questions of reproduction or representation.[305] As Chari Larsson observes, rather than reconstruct the specific trajectories of Warburg's arguments – which slides could be linked to which, and the theoretical interpretation that generates – Didi-Huberman is 'instead accentuating the non-axiomatic openness of the images and their ability to be constantly rearranged... The montage effect does not illustrate pre-existing ideas and concepts, but generates new relationships between the constellations of images... ask[ing] the spectator to proceed heuristically.'[306] According to Larsson, Didi-Huberman is responding to Gilles Deleuze's notion of the *image of thought*. If we also ascribe to montage – the 'form that thinks' – Benjamin's figure of the constellation of tensions, a portmanteau term is generated: a *dialectic image of thought*, a label instantly freighted with an extensive and contradictory body of secondary literature. In this depiction, associative montage assemblages become not thoughts themselves, but a cognitive space of thinking; generating fictive tension between fact and fiction. This tension is present from the outset of

Deleuze's critique of 'the traditional image of thought' as inevitably entailing the notion of a 'common sense' and the conflation of the true|false binary with good|evil and accuracy|error.[307]

The collection of quotations, images and concepts itself generates an unresolved – indeed, unresolvable – tension. On the one hand, there is Didi-Huberman's utopian model of montage as an open-ended form that thinks, a field of 'infinite' potential legibility. On the other, there are the specific instances of montage, where context-bound assemblages conspire with our interpretive machinery and the artist-curator's gesture in very specific patterns of meaning. The collection generates involuntary resonances and trajectories between the things and their framing. Between one thing and another, knots of resemblance are formed, which alter our sense of the perceptible. Once we see the ray gun, we cannot un-see it; once we are lured into stoned thinking at its consequent minor paranoias, we have knowledge of the conspiracy theory. Things, their representations, and our interpretations of their patterns become shifted, subtly but irrevocably, by way of a space at once formed by and forming their associations. This is a space that, to borrow Gaston Bachelard's labelling, has a poetics, requiring a kind of 'topoanalysis' to discern its generative effects on stoned thinking, the charged process of associative constellation.[308]

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[286] This is usually translated into English as 'The Arcades Project', but this translation obscures Benjamin's punning on the polysemic word *passages*, simultaneously balancing the architectural, the textual, and the navigational.

[287] Benjamin, 1999, 460.

[288] Storrie, 2006, 25.

[289] Benjamin, 1999, 475.

[290] Benjamin, 1999, 204–5.

[291] *Placement as Language* is a text by the fictive German linguist and philosopher Sigmund Bode, which Brian O'Doherty included in his famous conceptual exhibit in a box, *Aspen 5+6* (1967).

[292] Simon, 2014.

[293] Georges Didi-Huberman, quoted in Larsson, 2017, 1.

[294] See **Crystals on a Chandelier**.

[295] Didi-Huberman, 2010, 181.

[296] Didi-Huberman, 2010, 15.

[297] Didi-Huberman, translated and quoted in Huapaya, 2016, 112.

[298] Cornell University Library & The Warburg Institute, 2013.

[299] Didi-Huberman, quoted in Larsson, 2017, 8.

[300] Malraux, 1978, 14.

[301] Malraux, 1978, 19.

[302] Malraux, 1978, 21.

[303] Malraux, 1978, 24.

[304] Malraux, 1978, 25.

[305] Debord, quoted in Dander & Filipovic, 2014, 35.

[306] Larsson, 2017, 8.

[307] Deleuze, 1994, xvi.

[308] Bachelard, 2014, 3.
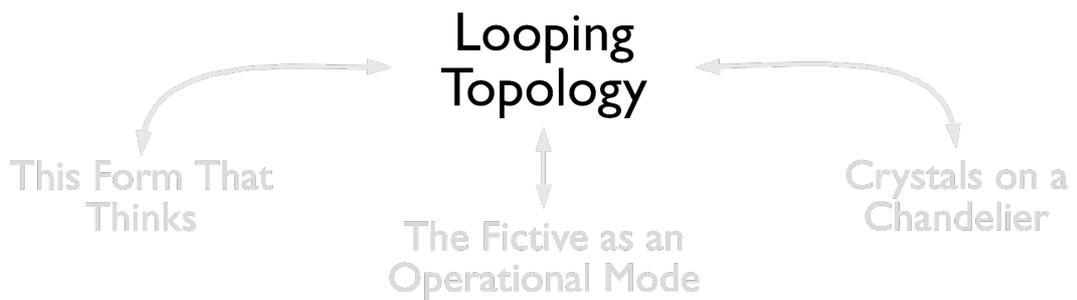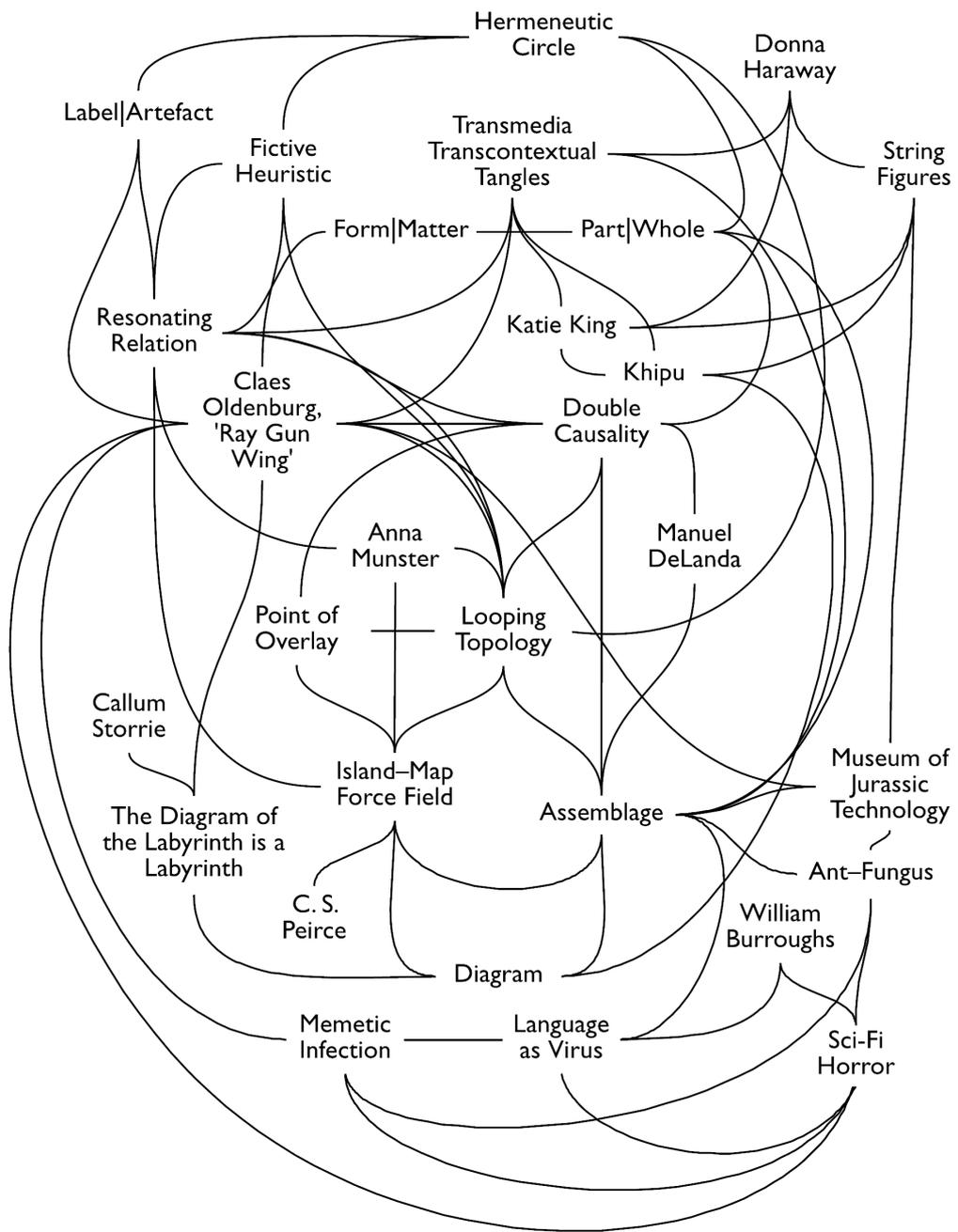
Slide 201.7: Looping Topology

Looping Topology

Between one thing and another, in associations among the data set, in association, the perceptible is assembled. That the arrangement of the cases, the room, and the diagram of *Ray Gun Wing*'s layout all take the form of the ray gun is surely no coincidence: as Calum Storrie reminds us, 'the diagram of the labyrinth is also a labyrinth.'[309] 'Resemblance', Anna Munster argues, 'should here be considered as a resonating relation, rather than a hierarchy (a form) that arranges a signifier and signified within a sign. [For Gregory Bateson] this was difference itself… The point of overlay between map and territory, then, is a fuzzy set of resonating, subtractive, differentiating resemblance relations—the island-map force field.'[310] Here Munster is discussing C. S. Peirce's thought experiment of placing a map onto the island it represents, and hence generating a point where the map corresponds precisely to the section of territory it touches.[311] Munster concludes that '[t]he place on the map and the place on the island recursively relate (to) each other, creating a looping topology that describes not simply the nature of the island but generates the "event" of relationality in and through which map and land constitute a field'.[312] Form and matter, map and island, are caught in a loop of redefinition, a circular argument. This point of overlay between map and island generates a new space, a field beyond questions of representation or veridicality: a similarity centre. *Ray Gun Wing* generates a similar recursive, looping topology, through a performative, reiterative typology, beyond any isolated act of diagramming or montage. This is a map that has the power – as architectural drawings do – to cut up and rearrange the territory. However minimal, Oldenburg's gesture of looping

topology – creating the object of its research, seeking only to find – requires

repetition and elaboration to function; the infection, like the eagle principle, or

homogenising effect of capital, must spread. This is the horror of the fictive

museum: that it colonises outwards, relentlessly de-and-re-contextualising.

DeLanda describes assemblages as having a double causality, from parts to

whole and from whole to parts. In a similarly recursive move to Oldenburg's

ray gun collection in the shape of a ray gun, DeLanda takes Deleuze and

Guattari's description of assemblages one stage further. Each assemblage itself is

composed of micro-assemblages and composes macro-assemblages, a

concatenated structure of unthinkable complexity: turtles all the way down.[313]

Ray Gun Wing is an astonishingly clear example of this recursive, emergent

double causality. The collected and arranged things and their minimal labels take

on an eerie agency not only in relation each other, but to our own involuntary,

impersonal cognitive processes of pattern recognition and categorisation. In

fictive museum works like *Ray Gun Wing* and the Museum of Jurassic Technology

– and arguably in all museums – the labels and other ostensibly interpretive

texts are themselves things in the assemblage, knotted up together. Parts that

generate the meaning of the whole, just as the whole does the parts––a

hermeneutic circle.[314] To truly operate in the fictive, to actively suspend the

dualist true|false relation to things (and so escape what W. V. O. Quine calls the

mythical museum), this hermeneutic circle must encompass materiality as

agential, not a matter of given relations.[315] Knots of transmedia mattering must

form a looping topology, participate in the generation of meaning, and have a

hand in the associative assembly of the collection itself. The collection, once it

has achieved a bootstrapped momentum as-if of its own accord, begins to stabilise itself like a gyroscope, generating emergent principles. We label this a *fictive heuristic*: something that is seeking out and assembling its own associates, its own conditions, its own cognitive space. Our task is merely to become part of the system, the method of its emergence.

In fictive museums, with their mobile, looping trajectories, all surrounding commentary is drawn into the constellation, and the distinction between the work and its interpretation dissolves. This is one of the functions of the fictive institutional frame; by generating its own contextual field, the collection paradoxically escapes the quarantine in which arts and fictions are usually held apart from other knowledge worlds. The collection, its fictive status as-if museum, and its labelling as 'ray gun' function in tandem, all generating and sustaining resonances and tensions, fields of association, around the similarity centre. This aspect of the operation of the label in the fictive museum is especially clear in two of the most celebrated fictive museum works of the mid-twentieth century, Marcel Broodthaers' *Musée de L'Art Moderne* (1968-72) and Marcel Duchamp's series of 300 'portable museums', the *Boîte-en-valise* (c.1935-68).[316] In both of these examples, the collections' status as artworks was at once asserted and undermined. For Broodthaers, this was effected with a set of engraved black plastic labels positioned next to figures of eagles, material cultural artefacts from a wide variety of contexts. These (mis)labels simultaneously proclaimed the objects in the collection were not works of art, and *precisely in so doing* appropriated them as artworks. Likewise, the fact that Duchamp included labels with each of the painstaking miniature 'reproductions',

giving details of the original work, meant that the series was for a long time dismissed by curators and collectors. That Duchamp had included (or perhaps *occluded*) an 'original' with each valise was only discovered after his death. Duchamp produced the sets using the incredibly labour-intensive colour reproduction method of hand-stencilled collotype. Had Duchamp made the claim – and were it not for the labels defining the miniatures as 'reproductions' – these works could well have been described (and priced) at least as editioned prints, or more accurately unique artworks in themselves.[317]

In the fictive museum, a thing and its label form what Ilya Kabakov calls a matrimonial pair, where the work and its commentary 'form an artistic whole, a "unified organism."'[318] Knowing that both the thing and its label have been influenced by the fictive process, but not to what extent, we begin to question the institutional meta-language of labelling, interpretation and display; the exhibits and their supplements fuse into an interpretive assemblage. Like Kabakov's visitor, we find ourselves involved in an 'infinite suite of opinions' which could include our own, destabilising the interpretive boundary not only between institution and exhibit, but between self and other. In *Ray Gun Wing*, Kabakov's suite of opinions is fused: there is seemingly no discursive, narrative interpretation, only the ray gun. *Ray Gun Wing* demonstrates the potential of a (fictive) museum structure to generate a categorical, colonial, relational, representational machine. A machine with genuine apophenic agency to intervene – beyond narrative, beyond humanist questions of conscious interpretation or intention – directly in the event of the perceptible for both its creators and visitors: a cognitive automaton. In Kabakov's *Incident at the*

Museum… these opinions become entangled with the art-historical progress mythology of styles and movements, building tension between an apparently formal interpretation on the press release and established ideas about 'naïve' Soviet Realism and 'dematerialised' Conceptual Art. In the Museum of Jurassic Technology and the Museum of Innocence, the suites of opinions include statements about the very nature of what a museum is, and what it is for. The mythical museum of representation, with its dualism of passive, material signified and active, immaterial signifier becomes a dynamic field of tensions and resonances. A looping topology where labels are revealed as material things and things as tangles of contextual networks, map-island fields of relation exhibiting a double causality: associative constellations in fictive space.

Both Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and Oldenburg's *Ray Gun Wing* appear at first to conform to what Gilbert Simondon named the *hylomorphic model*: a traditional philosophical binary ontology, in which form (*morphe*) is imposed by outside agency onto passive matter (*hyle*).[319] Seemingly, the traditional hierarchy between form and material is preserved, even intensified: materials are swept up together in a relentless, para-rational, formalist pursuit of form: a Platonic ray gun. But something else is suggested by the uncanny powers of *Ray Gun Wing* to affect our pattern recognition, and by Didi-Huberman's emphasis on the fluid rearrangements of Warburg's *Atlas* generating thought forms. Like the point of conjunction between C. S. Peirce's map-island assemblage, neither side takes priority; form and material are joined by a cognitive space in which they are mapped together, transposed around a similarity centre. In *Ray Gun Wing* or Warburg's *Atlas*, agency might be re-located in material things, but only in the

sense proposed by Munster: things as fields of resonance, events of relationality. This is the approach Bill Brown describes as *thing theory*: 'objects asserting themselves as things… a particular subject-object relation'.[320] In place of the hylomorphic model, Tim Ingold proposes instead a meshwork of trajectories, in which things are knotted relation and association.[321] Rather than associations taking place as relations between pre-existing objects, things are rootballs, laceworks of dynamic forces, 'a parliament of lines'.

Brown's subject-object and Ingold's knots suggest it is not that a traditional directive agency has shifted from the creator to the creation – the perspective in Deleuze's introductory description of the *image of thought*[322] – but that a 'ray gun' cognitive assemblage of ~Oldenburg~collection~label~vitrine~visitor~ is formed. Each labelled element itself an unthinkably complex trans-material assemblage in the sense that Manuel DeLanda theorises.[323] Such assemblages are patterns of meaning occurring across materialities and disciplinary contexts, which artist and theorist Katie King describes as 'transmedia transcontextual tangles'.[324] King uses the Andean knot writing system *khipu* as paradigmatic of this process of thinking both about and with things. Khipu encode information, Frank Salomon argues, in a way that is more like an infographic than linguistic transcription, that is, diagrammatically. This is a 'writing without words', in which knots 'have a sort of agency we usually reserve for only one side of that gap we think we jump across to create a "representation" or to engage in "making"… mapping themselves together with other objects and features of the world without words, indeed some never verbalized.'[325] King cites Donna Haraway's perspective on how these entangled knots of mattering cannot be translated

without being transcoded, and cannot be refigured into solely linguistic language without radical alteration.[326] In focusing on the knot, recent thinkers like Ingold, King and Haraway step beyond hylomorphic form|matter dualism and begin to approach what is known in mathematical terms as topology: the study of how space is structured, folded, bent, or knotted. This New Materialist emphasis on the highly contextual and contingent matterings that structure meaning also helps an form an understanding of the ineluctably transmedia modality of the fictive museum. Kabakov's conceptual 'water music' can be heard only with the full assemblage of fictive space, genre-bound pictorial representation, ambient space, institutional and narrative framing, and material embodied experience.

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[309] Storrie, 2006, 16.

[310] Munster, 2013, 24–5.

[311] Peirce, 1932, 230.

[312] Munster, 2013, 25.

[313] This expression comes from a philosophical anecdote ~ folktale hybrid, variously attributed. In each telling, the naïve philosopher who is mocked for their belief in infinite regress – turtles or rocks all the way down – is an 'opposite' to the European male: an 'old woman' (e.g. Hawking, 1998, 1), or an 'Indian' or 'Heathen' (e.g. Russell, 1927).

[314] Thing Theory and New Materialism have a close affinity with German hermeneutical approaches from the end of the nineteenth century, particularly the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. Cf. 'Meaning is not subjective…it is a perception of a real relationship…prior to the subject-object separation in thought.' (Dilthey, quoted in Palmer, 1969,120).

[315] See **The Myth of a Museum**.

[316] Duchamp, quoted in Sanouillet & Peterson, 1975, 136.

[317] Taylor, 2012.

[318] Kabakov, 2000, 257–8.

[319] DeLanda, 2016, 142–143.

[320] Brown, 2001, 4.

[321] Ingold, 2010, 3.

[322] Deleuze, 2004, 139.

[323] DeLanda, 2016, 19–23.

[324] King, 2014.

[325] King, 2012.

[326] Haraway, 2016, 12.
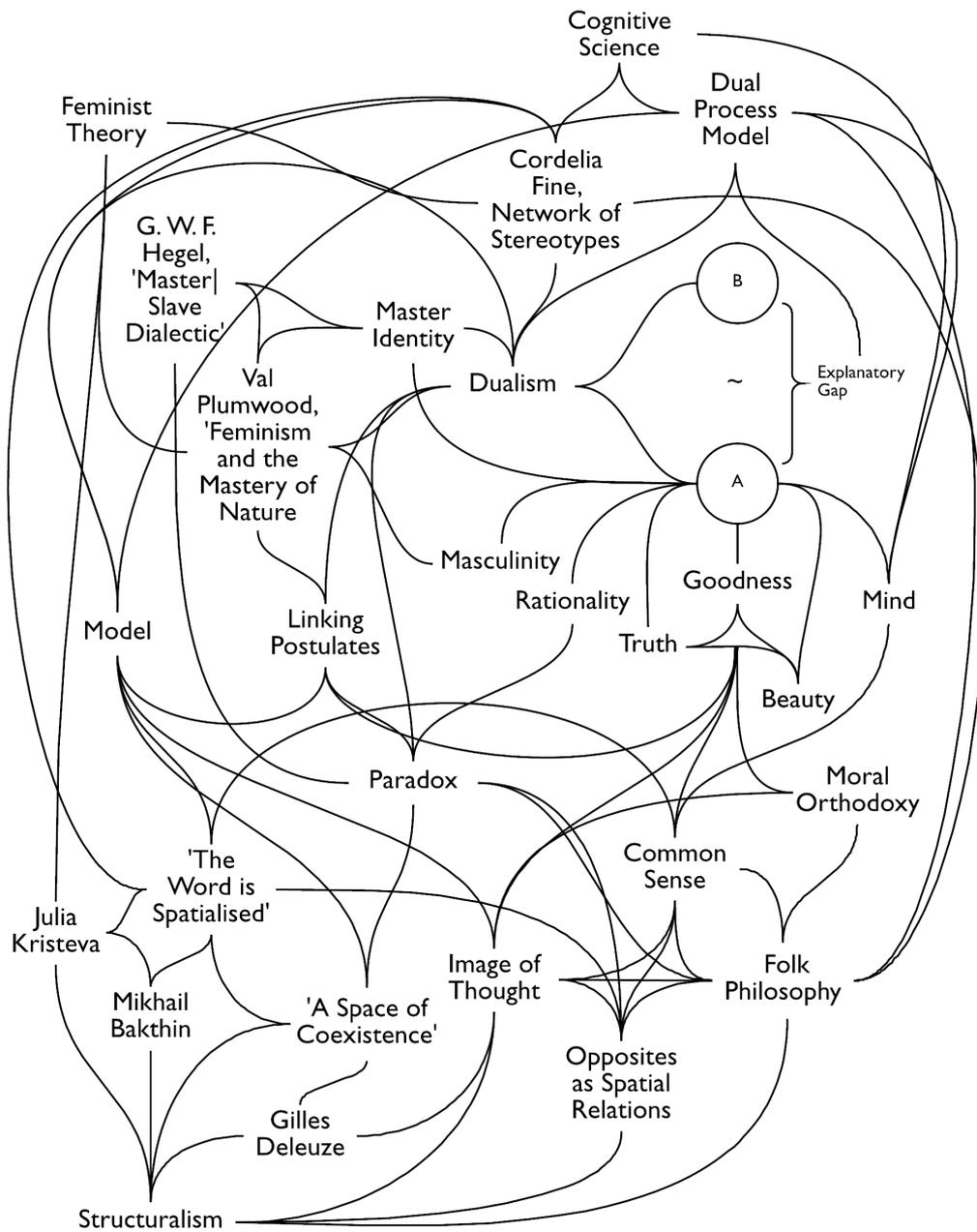
Slide 221.4: Mappings Between the Pairs

Mappings Between the Pairs

Both in its tendency to accession sections of other texts, at its structures of irony, mimicry and pastiche, the fictive museum is an intertextual form. Underwriting Julia Kristeva's discussion of *intertextuality* and the work of Mikhail Bakhtin is an explicitly spatial model of language, where '[t]he word is spatialized…it functions in three dimensions…'[327] This is not merely a metaphor; Kristeva describes a site 'at the intersection of language (the true practice of thought) with space (the volume within which signification, through a joining of differences, articulates itself)'.[328] Gilles Deleuze also identifies spatialisation with 'the structuralist project, based upon a distribution of differential characters within a space of coexistence'.[329] Although this may be what Deleuze calls an *Image of thought*[330] rather than thought itself, he takes up a modified version in calling for a space of difference without opposition: 'The task of life is to make all these repetitions coexist in a space in which difference is distributed.'[331] Deleuze describes the *Image of thought* as an implicit, dogmatic, commonsensical structure in which Truth, Goodness and Thought – each a 'relation which includes the opposite within it'[332] – become aligned:

> In this sense, conceptual philosophical thought has as its implicit presupposition a pre-philosophical and natural Image of thought, borrowed from the pure element of common sense. According to this image, thought has an affinity with the true; it formally possesses the true and materially wants the true. It is in terms of this image that everybody knows and is presumed to know what it means to think… We may call this image of thought a dogmatic, orthodox or moral image. It certainly has variant forms… In the realm of the implicit, it nevertheless holds fast… For this reason, we do not speak of this or that image of thought, variable according to the philosophy in question, but of a single Image in general which constitutes the subjective presupposition of philosophy as a whole.[333]

Mirroring Deleuze's single 'subjective presupposition as a whole', Cordelia Fine
describes an implicit network of associations – a kind of cognitive, empirical
version of Jung's collective unconscious – that is both extremely powerful,
influencing perception and intuitive judgement, but also highly adaptable,
changing over time.[334] Given the cognitive perspective developed earlier, it is
evident that this network of associations is not exclusively – or even primarily –
linguistic. This 'highly organised network' shares the scale of Kristeva's *intertext* in
connecting not only every 'representation' in the mind, but cultural structures
beyond it (texts, images, institutional decision making, etc.). Fine goes on to
describe experimental research that the priming of stereotypes, even if the
context is one of critique, affects self-perception and alters memory.[335] Besides
being somewhat terrifying, these findings demonstrate the incredible power of
nature-cultures[336] both to encode and produce contexts of associative
significance, and to alter our perceptions, including self-perception and
behaviours.

In discussions of implicit – or for psychoanalysts, *unconscious* – networks of
association and the rationales they give rise to, psychologists building on the
work of Seymour Epstein have proposed a *dual process* model for the mind. In
brief, these theories argue that there are two mental systems, one involuntary
and intuitive, the other conscious and rational.[337] The authors of the above
description propose that it is because the mind has two kinds of thinking – two
kinds of 'cognitive architecture' – that there are 'dualistic patterns of thought,'
and that this 'plays a key role in the psychology underlying explanatory gap
intuitions and folk dualism.'[338] That is, as Paul Bloom argues, there is a 'universal'

human tendency towards 'folk dualism': an intuitive dualistic thinking, founded on a rift between the material body and the immaterial mind. Between these two domains is an 'explanatory gap'. Dual process theorists are arguing, hence, that not only are there distinct 'high' and 'low' kinds of mental process,[339] but that this dual process model explains the existence of naturalised 'naïve' mind|body folk dualisms from 'world cultures'. Astonishingly, their model maps with surpassing neatness onto that very mind|body 'folk dualism', with the 'low road' of bodily, automatic, emotional-intuitive 'gut feeling'[340] contrasted with the 'high road' of conscious, logical, theoretical, techno-scientific rationality. While Fiala *et al* partially acknowledge that mental processes might not divide into such a neat binary as their model suggests,[341] they seem unaware of this ironic paradox at the very crux of their procedure: their 'high road' theory is re-inscribing *within its own labelling* precisely the 'low road' mind|body folk dualism they are attempting to explain, entangling itself in a fictive looping structure.

The work of Australian feminist Val Plumwood directly addresses the difficulty in trying to think our way out of this condition, remarking on dualism's 'mazes and chasms'.[342] Developing Hegel's *dialectic of the master and the slave*, Plumwood identifies this very mind|body dualism as lying at the heart of kyriarchal culture. Our common-sense, our philosophy, and our ongoing history of environmental destruction, misogyny, racism and colonial atrocity, are ramifications of the master binary reason|nature. In the context of museum poetics, described by Quine as the mythic model of representation, this maps onto what Ilya Kabakov dubs the 'matrimonial pair' of word and object or label|artefact. Kabakov's turn of phrase demonstrates how readily we can map a heteronormative gendered

pairing onto any dyadic structure. In Plumwood's thoroughgoing critique of Western rationality, sets of mutually-reinforcing dualisms are connected by 'linking postulates… assumptions normally made or implicit in the cultural background which create equivalences or mappings between the pairs' and 'form a web or network. One passes easily over into the other, linked to it by well-travelled pathways'.[343] This is the mechanism by which the Good, the True, and the Rational become aligned in Deleuze's *Image*. Together, these construct an ineluctably gendered and racialised master identity, 'who claims for himself both full humanity and reason'. Again, it is vital we see this as a spatial condition of cognitive knowledge, rather than a merely linguistic phenomenon: 'The set of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dualisms which permeate western culture forms a fault-line which runs through its entire conceptual system.'[344] Plumwood follows similar historical materialist principles to Manuel DeLanda, and we can continue this commitment to immanence by stating that this network of dualisms exists in and structures cognitive space: a macro-assemblage of heterogeneous things relating together as sympoietic patterns across material culture, bodies, languages, memories, exhibiting double causality from part to whole and whole to part. We propose this network assemblage of stereotypical associations – structured through linking postulates, mappings from one dualism to the next – as a collective cognitive sculpture on a vast scale: a trans-cultural worldview. Adapting Deleuze's expression to foreground its spatiality, we label this the *Model of thought*.

In her model of thought, Plumwood demonstrates how the seemingly irrational, emotional or coincidental abuse of others is 'a certain kind of logical structure'

echoing the Deleuzean *Image*: a supposedly disinterested and objective reason, founded on universal purity and truth. Seemingly abstract and eminently reasonable dualisms of true|false, fact|fiction and label|artefact are inextricable from a kyriarchal cage of linking postulates. However, Plumwood sees limited value in deconstructing the master category to reveal its reliance on subordinated identities, a strategy she describes as reversal, which remains within the terms of the dualism as given.[345] For Plumwood, reversing or even deconstructing dualisms cannot provide escape from what she calls the 'maze of mirrors' in which thinking is trapped in our condition of late colonial modernity. Instead, Plumwood is interested in the structural principles of the network, which links dualisms into a mutually reinforcing worldview. This spatial network – which we label the *Model of thought* – continually presents us with endless false dichotomies into which choice is structured, depicting any resistance to those dichotomies as paradoxical, incoherent, or nonsensical. Plumwood's work on the network of dualisms and Fine's description of stereotypes and likewise have far-reaching implications. Stereotypes are potent fictive entities, with the power to influence the course of events without regard for our conscious opinions of their veridicality. A key contribution of *the fictive* as a term becomes relevant here: fictive spatiality becomes relevant not only in terms of the fictive museum, but as a condition of knowledge as such.

Joining Plumwood in arguing 'all forms of hierarchy have always been based ultimately on gender hierarchy',[346] Fredric Jameson claimed there is 'a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure', a widening 'gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking

or experience'.[347] Jameson not only takes an explicitly dualistic, totalising

position, but argues that 'our dissatisfaction with the concept of totality is not a

thought in its own right but rather a significant, a symptom'.[348] Adopting the

label from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City,*[349] Jameson called for an 'aesthetic

of cognitive mapping' between material, observable things (superstructure) and

the total structure of global colonial capitalism (base) that move them. In doing

so, Jameson implicitly contradicts Lynch's assertion that '[m]eaning is also a

relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation'. This

contradiction – the refusal of given distinctions between meaning, spatiality and

pattern recognition – is the point of departure for our understanding of fictive

space. Jameson gave a hint of the kind of project this might entail in the figure

of the conspiracy theory, that stereotypically irrational paranoiac connecting of

everything with everything else, a totalising apophenia.[350] In calling a cognitive

mapping, Jameson is clear that this is an artistic project concerned with the

realization of a kind of space of possibility, 'a matter of form'.

In this context, a pair of linked possibilities open up for fictive museum works.

As arrangements of associated things-and-their-labels, fictive museum works

have the potential both to chart this space and to reconfigure it. The fictive

museum, as a modelling of the Model of thought, foregrounding the intersection

of this network of dualisms with embodied cultural spaces, may be capable of

direct, sculptural interventions in the cognitive fabric. However, as Fine's

warning about the priming of stereotypes even in the context of critique makes

clear, even the ironic reproduction of existing label|artefact structures carries

risks. If the Model's stereotypical networks are primed merely by thinking about

it – influencing our memories, perceptions and actions *whether or not we consciously agree* – then even ironic play or critical analysis can inadvertently become a *Ray Gun Wing,* co-opting our cognitive assemblages into the Model.

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[327] Kristeva, 1986, 37.

[328] Kristeva, 1986, 36.

[329] Deleuze, 1994, xix.

[330] Deleuze, 2004, 139.

[331] Deleuze, 1994, xix.

[332] Deleuze, 1994, 131–141.

[333] Deleuze, 1994, 131–32.

[334] Fine, 2011, 5–8.

[335] Fine, 2011, 8.

[336] Latour, 2004, 45.

[337] Fiala, Arico & Nichols, 2012, 90.

[338] Fiala, Arico & Nichols, 2012, 90.

[339] Fiala, Arico & Nichols, 2012, 91.

[340] Fiala, Arico & Nichols, 2012, 91.

[341] Fiala, Arico & Nichols, 2012, 89.

[342] Plumwood, 2003, 45.

[343] Plumwood, 2003, 45.

[344] Plumwood, 2003, 42.

[345] Plumwood, 2003, 61, 64.

[346] Jameson, 1988, 355.

[347] Jameson, 1988, 349.

[348] Jameson, 1988, 356.

[349] Lynch, 1960.

[350] Jameson, 1988, 356.

Georges Didi-Huberman

Manuel DeLanda

W. V. O. Quine

The Myth of a Museum

Aby Warburg

Montage

Assemblage Theory

Theory of Language

Word|Object

Form|Substance

Gesture

Memory

Forms That Think

Gilles Deleuze

Mental|Physical

Loss

Proust's Madeleine

Theories of Mind

Image of Thought

Mind|Body

Implicit|Explicit

Geoffrey Sonnabend

Thing Theory

Rational|Irrational

Figure|Ground

Museum of Jurassic Technology

Concrete Poetry

Label|Artefact

Ilya Kabakov

Flyweight

Matrimonial Pair

Male|Female

Museum Poetics

Models & Diagrams

Model of Thought

Val Plumwood

Network of Dualisms

Iguazu Falls

Suspension Bridge

Explanatory Gap

Dialectical Image

Bart Ehrman

Unbridgeable Chasm

Field of Tensions

Cut

Magic Circle

Walter Benjamin

White Space

Centre of Gravity

Cæsura

Constellation

Fictive Space

Grey Area

The As-If

Textures of Silence

Queer Time and Space

Zone of Undecidability

Similarity Centre

Wolfgang Iser

Hans Vaihinger

Jack Halberstram

The Paradigm

Metaphor

Analogy

Allegory

Giorgio Agamben

Metonymy

Ralph Rugoff

Translation

Eugenio Donato

Allusion

Heap of Meaningless Fragments

An Unbridgeable Chasm

Mappings Between the Pairs

Drugged With History and Art

This Form That Thinks

Slide 22E.1: An Unbridgeable Chasm

An Unbridgeable Chasm

The Model of thought, a network of interlinked dualisms, at once spatial and linguistic, personal and cultural. There is a symmetry in each of these figures, in the shape of the 'explanatory gap', which Benjamin calls the *cæsura*. In all these discussions of dialectics, dualisms, binaries, and the structures they form, oppositional concepts are arranged spatially, whether or not this is imagined as a purely metaphorical space, or there is some kind of virtual, cognitive, or even neural reality ascribed to it. In the terms of Manuel DeLanda's Assemblage Theory, borrowed from topology, each of these dualisms would be described as a dimension. Truth and falsehood, in this sense, is literally a one-dimensional account of reality. In Giorgio Agamben's work on the *paradigm* – itself a model of thinking or dialectical image of thought – he also describes a gap, a cæsura. Agamben replaces what he describes as the impassable gap in thinking, an intermediate zone in which precisely nothing can be situated, with a *field of tensions*, a 'zone of undecidability which neutralises every rigid opposition'.[351] This 'zone of undecidability' acts as a kind of neutralisation, a grey area in-between space. Although Agamben describes this spatial concept of 'the paradigm analogy' in novel terms, it resembles some ideas from Walter Benjamin – not to mention many other thinkers – and indeed Agamben refers to Benjamin repeatedly in his discussion. This *Model of thought*, in which conceptual opposites form a kind of multidimensional dimensional space, a field or spectrum in which everything can be located, is common to many philosophical discussions from a wide range of disciplines.

Bart Ehrman, a New Testament scholar who published a history of the
conceptual progression of Jesus from man to God, notes a significant shift
between the conceptual framework of today and that of two millennia ago,
arguing that a Divine|Human binary with an 'unbridgeable gap' in between was
not shared by ancient thinkers, who considered the two as overlapping
continua.[352] From this perspective, Agamben's *field of tensions* is more a return
to an older image of thought than a contemporary development. But as
Plumwood confides, the attempt to think outside of the network of dualisms is a
labyrinth of contradictions: 'the escape routes are mazes containing mirrors,
sidetracks, looped trails and knots'.[353] A dualistic model of linear progress
between ancient and contemporary thinking must surely count as one such
looped trail. In order to navigate this maze successfully, to chart it, it would not
only be necessary to break 'the well-travelled pathways of conventional and
philosophical assumption', or to critique dualistic divisions, but to work in
association with the thinking things of the fictive museum, to assemble a
sculptural, cognitive field model. This requires we consider our labels and our
artefacts as equally material things. The terms of a dualism are just as embodied
and distributed as our cognition, a trans-modal assemblage, a patterning among
signs, sounds, texts, images…

The Museum of Jurassic Technology's 'Sonnabend-Delani Hall' presents us with a
series of things. Recordings of operatic singing, a melancholy voice that
reproduces German *lieder* music of love and loss. Labels containing fragments of
biographical narrative and references to distant places, obscure psychological
theories, forgotten events. Maps and models of those places, and illusionary

structures that were never built there. Other models, abstract wooden forms of cones and planes, claiming to explain theories of memory and forgetting. Beside Sonnabend's pseudo-rational geometries is a model of – we are told – Proust's theory: a little model madeleine cake on a plate, and a button that releases its scent when pressed. A shifting structure can be assembled between these elements, a kind of institutional meditation on love, loss, memory, theory, poetry, place, ambition, time… In the MJT's darkened rooms, labels seem to float in the careful half-light. The highly polished cases reflect images and objects into a mirror-maze of endless deferrals and associative resonances, in which photographs and projections seem as physical as a pair of opera glasses, and a white glove seems to glow with an inner light, insubstantial as a butterfly. As Claire Bishop wrote of Danh Vo's Venice Biennale work, this is meaning as ambience, as mood, easily dismissed as precisely the kind of nostalgic accumulation of evocative fragments Bishop chastised in an illustrated lecture she toured in the same year, 'Déjà Vu: Contemporary Art and the Ghosts of Modernism'.[354] But in the fictive museum, these nostalgic fragments are not what they seem; on the basis of all available evidence, we're forced to entertain the possibility that Madalena Delani, Geoffrey Sonnabend, and his 'theories of obliscence' are all fabrications. Rather than locating the work in a supposedly stable, objective ground of history and research, with cultural references appropriated as anchor points into larger networks of pre-existing meaning, the associations serve to destabilise the reference points we think ourselves sure of. We have perhaps heard of the Iguazu Falls. Have we visited it? Perhaps we should look it up on the internet to check? How reliable are our memories, our madeleines, our Madalenas?

As the Museum of Jurassic Technology's digressions reveal – its slippages from pseudo-historical minor opera singers with amnesia to unbuilt bridges to wooden models supposedly illustrating outmoded theories of memory – the fictive museum proceeds into this labyrinthine territory obliquely. The MJT situates itself on an unbuilt suspension bridge, an optical illusion, in the unbridgeable chasm between truth and fiction. Does this then mean we join Ralph Rugoff in his analysis of the MJT as 'metaphor'? We construct a reading of the MJT where the model of the Iguazu Falls and its impossible suspension bridge is a metaphor, perhaps for the space between truth and fiction? Or between perception and reality? Rugoff's essay 'Beyond Belief: Museum as Metaphor' does not read the MJT in this way, explicitly reducing the exhibits to specific allegorical metaphors, though he does insist that metaphor is the right way to read them,[355] translating the MJT's Latin motto *Ut Translatio Natura* as 'Nature as metaphor'.[356]

Yet *metaphor* is very close to its Latin root *metaphora*, as close as *translatio* is to the word *translate*. If we follow the rhetorical and linguistic understanding of *metaphor* as 'one thing for another', a mapping from one domain of experience onto another, a replacement, then Rugoff's choice of *metaphor* here is too direct. Rugoff instead is describing metaphor in the abstract: a general analogic sense rather than a one-to-one exchange. The exhibits in the MJT function as allusion, the kind of endless deferral and associative punning which Danny Nobus and Malcolm Quinn identify with the work of Jacques Lacan and Alfred Jarry's 'pataphysics'.[357] To map the MJT's model of Iguazu Falls onto any one specific

metaphorical structure would be to close down the fictive space being generated, to vivisect it in the same way that explaining a joke excises any possibility of humour. Poetry and jokes function as knowledge, rather than information. It is the space they generate between component parts that produces knowledge, a knowledge that 'direct explanation' forecloses.

Within the institutional frame of the fictive museum display, a collection of component things can begin to generate knowledge not as an identifiable set of defined meanings, but as a space of thinking. Unlike what Benjamin describes as the 'magic circle' of the traditional collection, where objects become turned to stone and are representative of universals, in the fictive museum, the collection begins to model this very aspect of museum collections. Foregrounding and destabilising the very dualisms that traditional collections are founded upon and keep behind the scenes, such as subject|object, reason|nature, truth|fiction, and label|artefact, the fictive space of thinking established by the MJT exposes the myth of the museum. The set of Kabakovian 'matrimonial pairs' begin to establish their own field of relations, associative mappings from one to another from which things cannot be isolated. To describe why the MJT has a rocking model of Noah's Ark labelled as the first natural history museum would lead us astray into a branching series of digressions into Biblical scholarship, the history of museums, the symbolism of seafaring, and quasi-theological discussions of doubt and faith well beyond the scope of this thesis, or indeed any other. Instead of a kernel of truth, a central point that can be described in a nutshell, the MJT proceeds like Joseph Conrad's description of Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*: rather than 'a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within

the shell of a cracked nut', we have instead 'meaning…enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illuminations of moonshine'.[358] Yet these tropes of hazy vagueness, like Agamben's greyed-out figure of undecidability, are not apt analogies. The nested assemblages of the fictive museum are intensely specific, local, a concrete poetry of things overdetermined with material resonances.

Into this basketwork of interwoven associations – among which early twentieth century nostalgia becomes entangled with memory, loss, efforts to map and build upon the world's shifting structures – the institutional framing devices of the museum itself are drawn. The self-effacing materiality of the institution, its poetics of pragmatic neutrality, begins to sing out; its specific hinges and locks, its certain shades and weights of felt, or melamine, or buckram, its carpeting and coving. Each chip and scratch become part of a legible texture. As one of the earliest exhibits in the MJT, the 'Sonnabend-Delani' halls have been exhibited in more-or-less the same fashion since the early 1990s, longer than many displays in other museums, and certainly longer than most contemporary art installations. Since their installation, the model of the Falls has been upgraded, re-fashioned. This fact is not recorded explicitly; as with the majority of museums, the MJT appears unchanging – a *permanent display* – but is under constant development and renovation. Only our memories and a comparison of archival materials reveal that this 'magic circle' of history is itself in flux, more shifting sands than stable ground. Like a melancholy song heard one evening, or a theory of the mind invented in a fever-dream, the notes and words seem to

hang in the air, giving us a sense of the singer's voice, and the structure behind the song, but dissolving in our memories, leaving us with a collection of loosely associated things, surrounding a model of an unbridgeable chasm. Whether figured as an unbridgeable chasm, a cæsura, or a zone of undecidability, this explanatory gap is *itself* part of the Model, the unlabelled institutional space amidst one thing and another, the similarity-centre that brings them into association, and is itself generated by that act. The explanatory gap is a fictive space with tonal, textural characteristics; this is the field of operation of the fictive museum.

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[351] Agamben, 2002.

[352] Ehrman, 2014, 3–4.

[353] Plumwood, 2003, 60.

[354] Bishop, 2014–2015.

[355] Rugoff, 1995, 72–3.

[356] David Wilson himself makes this metaphorical claim. (Weschler, 1995.)

[357] Nobus & Quinn, 2005, 78. There are two fictive museums dedicated to pataphysics: the Pataphysical Museum and Archive in London and the *Musée Pataméchanique* in Bristol, Rhode Island.

[358] Conrad, 1990, 3.
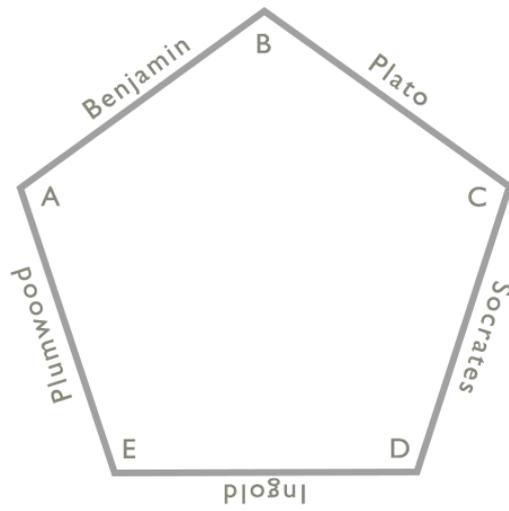
Slide 2355.5: Pentagonal Loop

A Constellation Saturated with Tensions

Museums, like maps, construct relationships, propose hierarchies, define territories, and present a view. Through those things that are made visible and those things that are left invisible, views and values are created.[359]

The Museum is a diagrammatic form, a mapping of one thing to another. Among such assemblages, implication and allusion are generated *in potentia*. This spatial move is the key to museum poetics: a looping topology, generating relational associations, contingent on context. As *The Museum* maps natures, cultures, histories – accessioning things, re-staging and labelling them – what are its accessioning principles? What gets included in the assemblage, what is made explicit and visible? And what is subject to a 'politics of absence',[360] whether by being left to implication, actively excluded, or left off the map entirely, repressed as double-erasure?[361] We arbitrate, assigning things to proper territories, categories, to established, sense-making rationales. We vivisect, carving up networks of situated associations into quarantined domains, shorn of context. Just how realistic is the knowledge we produce, if realism is a kind of isomorphism between map and territory?

To institute ourselves, we proceed as-if a museum, collecting, arranging, interpreting, putting labels next to things. Of course, labels are themselves things; the artefact labels the label as much as the other way around. We collect quotations, placing them in endnotes as-if in display cases, joined to statements with the diagrammatic convention of a superscript number. But when we accession texts into this writing, which is the label? By assembling intertextual points of reference – foregrounding associations between them, relations of

similarity or analogy – it is possible to create a kind of a circular argument or looping topology.[362]

To begin generating our fictive museum space of mislabelling, let's assemble a display case, a collection of five cultural reference points:

A   In his much-quoted fragment on the dialectical image, Walter Benjamin produces a written model of a spatial thought structure. Benjamin describes a 'constellation saturated with tensions', located 'where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest'.[363] Benjamin's language is at once conceptual and spatial; metaphoric physical forces describe a constellation of collected ideas, hanging at a 'standstill' under tension. Elsewhere in the *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin discusses the space of a collection as a 'magic circle' in which things are also at a 'standstill', in the process of being 'turned to stone.' This collection space is equated with the *topos hyperourainos*, Plato's virtual domain of 'unchangeable archetypes', or ideal, universal forms.[364]

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B   In Plato's own discussion of forms, geometries and universal structures in *Timaeus*, regular geometric forms – the so-called 'Platonic solids' – are mapped onto the four Classical elements. At the end of this section, a fifth and final solid is mentioned in passing: the dodecahedron, which Plato claims forms the shape of the universe, its signs and constellations.[365] In Plato's *Phaedo*, rather than the shape of the universe, the dodecahedron is claimed by Socrates as the shape of the 'upper earth': the 'true earth… pure and situated in the pure heaven,' compared to which the world we inhabit is like the bottom of the sea; a hollow

filled with endless mud, where everything is spoiled, corroded by brine. This heavenly world of purity – echoing Plato's *topos hyperourainos* – is said by Socrates to be the shape of 'a twelve-patched ball' made of leather.[366]

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C   Two millennia ago, balls made from a dozen pentagons of leather were clearly common enough things for Socrates to use one as a metaphor. Dodecahedra were in use as leather balls[367] before they were 'discovered' by philosopher mathematicians. This demonstrates a key principle uniting 'thing theory' and current approaches to cognition in psychology, linguistics, archaeology, etc. Thinking is embodied and distributed, happening only through and with things. Examining the evidence provided by concrete analogies like Socrates' leather ball, Thing Theorists like Tim Ingold aim to 'overthrow' what Gilbert Simondon termed the *hylomorphic model*,[368] replacing dualistic conceptions of form and matter (subject and object, active and passive…), with a meshwork of entangled flows and intensities.[369]

~

D   For cognitive archaeologist Colin Renfrew, things precede conceptual understanding, or more often, coincide inextricably with it. Renfrew, like Ingold, refers to this process as *entanglement*. Renfrew argues that symbols are abstractions from material things, events, arrangements, describing in detail how things exert their own agential pressures on a society. Conceptual and material culture are so entangled, they cannot be considered separately. Renfrew refers to these material-symbolic things as *constitutive symbols*, acknowledging in the process that this perspective requires thinking beyond mind|body or form|substance dualities, dualities that have been entrenched in Western

philosophical discussion since before Plato. For Renfrew, escaping these mind|matter dualities involves a *hypostatic* approach; thinking in ways reminiscent of medieval theologies of the Holy Trinity.[370]

~

E   Val Plumwood's extended feminist analysis of reason|nature dualism links Benjamin's notion of a space of tensions, Renfrew's opposition to what he calls the 'mind/matter' dualism, and the philosophical tradition of dualism since Plato.[371] In Plumwood's account, a 'master category' of disembodied, male-coded human *reason* is formed in opposition to its exclusions. Each dualism has the same structure, described in spatial terms; a privileged, central identity (e.g. *reason*) and a de-valued, exterior other (e.g. *nature*). Through their mappings onto other cultural dualisms, one term is equated with another, e.g. human~man, forming what Plumwood calls a 'network' of polar tensions. This network of linked dualisms – a *constellation saturated with tensions* between *dialectical opposites* – generates a transpersonal, transmedia cognitive space.

~

A   In his much-quoted fragment on the dialectical image, Walter Benjamin produces a written model of a spatial thought structure…

This looping structure of concepts and references generates a kind of spatial symmetry. In this case, the structure is pentagonal, and can be drawn in simple geometric[372] style. This rational-seeming diagram presents us with an apparently absurd property, however. Because of their identical visual treatment, philosophers with vastly different canonical ranking appear to be accorded equal status, and so, implicitly, do their signature philosophies, their contributions to

knowledge.[373] The smooth whiteness of the A4 thesis page is revealed not as a lack of context, but an active agent in the production of knowledge, used *as-if* a blank and neutral dimension.[374] A fictive space – a new associative context – is generated between, or rather *amongst* material: the writing above, the reference points in culture, the diagram, and our processes of reading, attention, memory, and comparison. And like *The Museum*, this fictive space never empty, neutral, or abstract, although often carefully styled to appear so.[375]

Fictive spaces are generated amongst different material elements in association, without what Manuel DeLanda labels a 'global embedding space':[376] an empty, featureless conceptual entity within which the elements are situated, and with reference to which they are understood, but with which they never interact. DeLanda describes philosophies with embedding spaces as *n+1* theories, requiring an additional transcendent domain *outside existence* to contain, structure or explain it.[377] Unlike *n+1* theories, fictive space is emergent, not pre-existing. It does not *contain within*, it *associates amongst*. Elements associated by fictive space touch, leaving mutual traces, however fleeting. Fictive space does not therefore exist *within* the mind – although many key processes do take place inside the skull's elaborately structured and delicately maintained context – but rather out in the wild, amongst things: a matter of context.[378]

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[359] Hooper-Greenhill, 2000, 18. **643.0.**

[360] See Tali, 2014, 201. **182.0.**

[361] Rolando Vásquez, quoted in Osipian, 2017, 1. **580.2.**

Double erasure describes the tendency of colonial power structures towards a kind of epistemic violence that first erases a thing, and then erases the memory or record of the erasure, denying erasure has taken place (Zein-Elabdin, 2004, 28). **43E.0.**

[362] See **Looping Topology**.

[363] Benjamin, 1999, 475. **E52.0.**

[364] Benjamin, 1999, 204–5. **968.3.**

[365] Archer-Hind, 1888, 190–7. **6E0.0.**

[366] Plato's *Phaedo* 110B, quoted in Archer-Hind, 1888, 197.

[367] Dodecahedra were also known to many ancient civilisations in the form of rock crystal or iron pyrite beads, or carved for dice games. One particular example is an Etruscan dodecahedron carved from soapstone, with figures incised onto the faces, discovered in 1885 by Stefano De' Stefani at Monte Loffa, and thought to date from before 500 BCE. See Sparavigna, n.d.

[368] DeLanda, 2016, 142–43. **4E3.0.**

[369] Ingold, 2010, 2–3. **774.0.**

[370] Renfrew, 2012, 128–30. **303.0.**

[371] Plumwood, 2003, 2–6. **E28.0.**

[372] *Geo-metry* or the measurement of the earth has in fact little to do with straight lines and regular polygons, so perhaps the style of this kind of drawing ought instead to be called 'Euclidean'.

[373] This distressing status equality produced by similar visual treatment likely one motivation behind the decision of mediaeval painters, for example, to depict holy personages as many times larger than the rest of us ordinary sinners.

[374] The page is an industrial technology only unremarkable to us because of its ubiquity. Our tendency, of course, is to consistently ignore both the embodiment of knowledge and our reliance on abstracted models of bodily space to represent concepts. According to Lakoff, unless we take intentional steps away from it, our ideas – particularly our understanding of abstract categories – tend to revert to the model of table-top-scale physical vessels (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008, 10–24).

[375] Between the objects, labels and visitors in the traditional museum is seemingly empty space. Space made for its poetics – for the purpose of *giving things space* – is painstakingly manufactured, occupying valuable urban real estate. The 'neutral temperature' of the museum requires engineering and maintenance. Likewise, the 'background' on which label texts are printed are considered, constructed surfaces. Large panes of glass are the product of a material culture sufficiently technically advanced that these feats of engineering are both

ubiquitous and invisible. This A4 page, with its specific affordances and entanglements, its imperial histories and implication in global, neoliberal commerce and production, is similarly emblematic of the duplicitousness of neutral, featureless spaces.

[376] DeLanda, 2010, 125–127. **880.0.**

[377] DeLanda, 2016, 116. **223.4.**

[378] Things themselves generate associations, given the right kinds of apophenic pattern-recognition algorithms and memory-storage architectures to work amongst. This condition of what could be labelled as fictive space's *sympoiesis* or *bootstrapping* is particularly evident in contemporary conditions of post-internet knowledge production, but was being explored by Ramón Llull's 'thinking machine' in the thirteenth century. See Borges, 2000.

Queer
Kinship

Kinship
Outside
Genetic
or Legal
Codes

Donna
Haraway

Hans
Vaihinger

The As-if

Heuristic
of Self-
Interpretation

Wolfgang
Iser

Fictive
Kinship

Boundaries
of Nation,
Race, and
Species

Imaginary

Fictive

Real

'The
Fictive'

Boundary
Work

Antoinette
LaFarge

Fictive
Art

Normative
Social
Structures

Masks

'The old
fiction/reality
dichotomy'

Veridicality

Revealing|Concealing

Cognitive
Science

Drag

Fictive|Factive

'Double
Mimesis'

Institutional
Poetics

Mary Ann
Doane

Marcel
Broodthaers

Performative
Identity

Image of
Thought

Signs, Labels,
etc.

Trans*

Gilles
Deleuze

Jack
Halberstram

Transgender
Space

The Fictive as an
Operational Mode

The Myth of a Museum

A Sudden Change in
the Pattern

Looping Topology

Slide 240.1: The Fictive as an Operational Mode

The Fictive as an Operational Mode

In ethnographic and legal discourses, *fictive kinship* labels non-kin treated as-if kin: the 'auntie' unrelated by blood or marriage to the children she raises; the 'sisters' of a religious or ethnic community.[379] Established in anthropological studies of kinship outside Western norms, *fictive* is now being applied to the systems underwriting those norms. For Catherine Lee, 'the boundaries between social and supposedly biological relationships' such as family, nation, and race are fictive.[380] Culture establishes itself through fictive boundaries, naturalising arbitrary choices and contingent historical developments. *The fictive* is a performative as-if relation of communal self-definition, meaning and knowledge.

In literary usage, *fictive* describes something produced by or productive of fictions; an author's *fictive method* is the method they use to produce fiction. Iser's 'heuristics for human self-interpretation through literature' develops *the fictive* 'as operational mode of consciousness that makes inroads into existing versions of the world'.[381] Resisting 'the old fiction/reality dichotomy', Iser's heuristic gives an account of literature distinct from fictions in other discourses, such as philosophy.[382] Literature is the unification of a triad: *the fictive*, *the real* ('elements taken from referential reality'), and the somewhat ineffable 'third element' of 'the imaginary…a form that allows us to conceive what it is toward which the sign points'.[383] Iser's *imaginary* shares features of broader philosophical concerns with contesting finitude, the boundaries of experience, and the limits of thought.[384] But while Iser elaborates *the fictive* as active in the world – including lies and hoaxes – he does not distinguish it from the fictional

per se, arguing the fictive is 'the medium for [the imaginary's] manifestation'.[385] In 'replacing the customary antithesis' of real|fictional with the triad real~fictive~imaginary, Iser uses the long-established metaphysical gambit of replacing dualism with a trinity, a spatial structure we do not wish to reproduce.[386]

In cognitive science,[387] *fictive* and *factive* are used to discuss *veridicality*: the perceived validity of an interpretation of sense data. This 'assessment produced by a cognitive system, with no appeal to some notion of absolute or external reality'[388] avoids the tendency of terms like *subjective* to isolate and individualise. Veridicality is a particularly useful concept when discussing fictive art. As 'an inferential art form rather than a denotative art form', fictive art creates an 'inferential gap' between audiences and artwork, unsettling its own truth conditions, and fracturing audiences into sub-communities of belief and make-believe.[389] Drawing on Iser's work, artist and educator Antoinette LaFarge coined *fictive art* to describe

> a particular form of aesthetic production that doesn't belong to any one field. Other terms for related kinds of work include superfiction and parafiction. Fictive artworks have clearly fictional elements but extend outside the realm of the textual in various ways, principally through the creation of realia. A working definition of the term might be: plausible fictions created through production of real-world objects, events, and entities.[390]

LaFarge explores artworks that use fictional elements to generate real-world objects and events that visitors may not actually recognise as art. *Plausibility* begs the question of veridicality: does an artwork need to fool some or all audiences in order to be considered fictive, or only have that potential? Carrie

Lambert-Beatty labels this plausible, interventionist approach *parafiction*, as *para-medics* operate outside of institutionally controlled settings.[391] Fictive art operates outside institutional boundaries, often appropriating institutional props – uniforms, signs, brochures, logos, etc. LaFarge sees these 'institutional façades' or masks as 'both a revelatory and a concealing device,' a paradoxically double gesture of 'outing the self without outing the self… [that is] an operational aspect of fictive art'.[392]

For Iser the fictive generates a doubling of meaning, a paradoxical interplay of revealing by hiding, which 'emblematises the fictive as the coexistence of that which is mutually exclusive'.[393] This recalls Mary Ann Doane's 'double mimesis,' where exaggerated, ironic performance foregrounds the constructed nature of gender roles through a 'divergence between voice and body'.[394] While Doane saw drag and transgender performance as re-inscribing dualism, queer theorists including Butler and Jack Halberstam have taken up 'double mimesis' for masquerade, and the façade more generally. Queer performativity decenters the naturalisation of gender and sex boundaries, implying identity itself is fictive, impossible to account for with a rigid fact|fiction model. That Butler's work on performativity has been misconstrued to mean that gender is therefore an unreal or voluntary performance is testament to the pervasive, tenacious nature of dualism.[395] For Halberstam, this counter-cultural critique of 'the processes of heteronormativity, racism, and sexism' entails a double project, a trans*[396] critique of normative realism extends even to the 'seemingly inevitable, transparent, and neutral rhetorics of time and space'.[397]

Theorising *the fictive* as an area of enquiry and cultural production is associated inescapably with spatiality,[398] doubling, and the performative: a radical rethinking of the 'commonsensical' norms through which reality is conceived as thinkable, which Deleuze labels the *Image of thought*. The MJT and MOI site themselves in just such a trans* space of between, foregrounding culture, class, gender, trans-temporal and trans-spatial themes. These artworks in museum drag feature consistent themes: speculations on the nature of memory, language and representation; confusion between historical and fictional characters and situations; deliberate, self-conscious (mis)labelling, and physical structures such as bridges, boats, models, labels and frames that embody spatial states of between-ness, implicating the museum form itself.

We take up *the fictive* as a non-definitional, non-technical label, an associative constellation assembling and extending all of the above uses. *The fictive* is a 'catch title'[399] for all those parts of our worlds that do not fall neatly into 'clear and distinct'[400] categories of true|false, fact|fiction, or artefact|label. Fictive phenomena are confusing or misleading to think about using such pairs of terms, whether considered as dichotomies, dualisms, or dialectics. Rather than a hard-edged definitive category, *the fictive* is an operative mood, or mode, foregrounding the roles that inventions, implications, jokes, lies, mistakes, myths, misunderstandings, perceptual glitches, performativity, contingency and coincidence all play in the networks of causality. *The fictive* labels the turbulent boundaries of the actual ~ negotiated territories where make-believe, as-if arrangements, fictions, and falsehoods generate real-world consequences. Iser emphasised that treating something as-if something else is not 'an empty game

of ideas but a practical purpose through which the comparison may lead to consequences'.[401] We extend this with Deleuze's emphasis on 'involuntary forces', practical purposes we may pursue entirely unawares. Paradigmatic examples of the fictive include: massive real world consequences of fictional events;[402] speculation and insider trading both caused by and causing market instability; self-fulfilling beliefs of the kind Nick Land terms *hyperstition*;[403] psychosomatic illness, where the patient's involuntary certainty causes total voluntary function loss;[404] and gross injustices which, because they lack public veridicality, have few consequences.[405]

This counters the strong relativism stereotypically associated with postmodernism: everything is a matter of discourse, and we have no access to 'the real' ~ a condition Quentin Meillassoux terms 'the "argument from the circle" of correlationsim'.[406] Instead, *the fictive* is a cognitive materialist approach: everything is a discourse of matter with real, agential existence, giving special attention to the powerful, unpredictable effects of imaginary things. In the most intensely fictive situations, distinctions between truth and falsehood collapse entirely, not as an epistemic condition of uncertainty, but as an ontological condition: abstract binary categories such as real and unreal cease to have meaning beyond a spatial relation. Rather than join Iser in creating a third term, thereby stabilising a fact|fiction binary, we label this binary relation *itself* as fictive space.

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[379] On the importance of ethnicity to fictive kinship structures, see Taylor *et al.*, 2013.

[380] Lee, 2013, 6.

[381] Iser, 1993, xv.

[382] There is a rich tradition of philosophical thinking about fiction as an operational mode, reliant on contextual clues that are obscured by considering fiction as a solely written phenomenon. See Gale, 1971, 324–340.

[383] Iser, 1993, 2.

[384] See Priest, 2002.

[385] Iser, 1993, xviii.

[386] Rather than resolve a dualism, a trinity risks stabilising and cementing it. (Cf. Richardson, 1958, 55. **419.0**) As Cai Zong-qi argues, this is a consistent feature of 'onto-theology,' and one that is disassembled by radical '(anti)philosophical' approaches like Derridean deconstruction and Buddhism' (Zong-qui,1993, 183–195).

[387] See **A Sudden Change in the Pattern**.

[388] Bloom, 1996, 212.

[389] LaFarge & Le Couteur, 2017.

[390] LaFarge, 2007.

[391] Lambert-Beatty, 2009.

[392] LaFarge & Le Couteur, 2017.

[393] Iser, 1993, xv. Cf. Lefebvre, 2000, 143.

[394] Mary Ann Doane, quoted in Tonkovich, 2010, 84.

[395] There is a wealth of writing on this topic. See for example Butler, 1993, 17–32.

[396] Halberstam's use of *trans** is part of an inclusive cultural movement which arose from internet discussion groups on non-normative genders in the 2000s. In many computer search engines, particularly in libraries and archives, an asterisk is commonly used as a wildcard symbol: *trans** therefore produces results for *transgender, transsexual, transnational, translation, transportation…* Recent identitarian trans activism has rejected the use of the asterisk, on charges ranging from 'unnecessary' or 'inaccessible,' to 'inherently problematic', 'transmisogynistic' and – somewhat incomprehensibly – 'binary' (*Trans Student Educational Resources*, n.d.).

[397] Halberstam, 2005, 9.

[398] *Spatiality* is used in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological description of experience to distinguish body-centred conception of spatial relations from non-human physical space (Merleau-Ponty, 1996, Ch. 3). Despite Merleau-Ponty's insistence that the gestural, translational meaningfulness of spatiality is not a 'cognitive' operation' (185), his

thinking has been widely adopted by cognitive approaches. We take Merleau-Ponty's 'system of equivalents not founded on the recognition of some law, but on the experience of a bodily presence' to define the embodied~cognitive in general, and the associative constellation of fictive space in particular.

[399] This expression is used by Claes Oldenburg for his 'ray gun' works, see **A Minor Paranoia**.

[400] 'The "clear and distinct" itself is inseparable from the model of recognition which serves as the instrument of every orthodoxy, even when it is rational. Clarity and distinctness form the logic of recognition, just as innateness is the theology of common sense…' (Deleuze, 1994, 146).

[401] Hans Vaihinger, quoted in Iser, 1996, 14.

[402] For example, the 1989 Velvet Revolution, which toppled Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, was in part provoked by the fictive murder of Martin Šmid (Sebestyen, 2010).

[403] 'Hyperstition is a positive feedback circuit including culture as a component. It can be defined as the experimental (techno-)science of self-fulfilling prophecies. Superstitions are merely false beliefs, but hyperstitions – by their very existence as ideas – function causally to bring about their own reality. Capitalist economics is extremely sensitive to hyperstition, where confidence acts as an effective tonic, and inversely. The (fictional) idea of Cyberspace contributed to the influx of investment that rapidly converted it into a technosocial reality.' (Carstens & Land, 2009). [Land's work cannot be cited without mentioning his disturbing entanglements with far-right politics, reframing his entire oeuvre.]

[404] Somatoform disorders confound any binary relation between voluntary and involuntary, or between body and mind (O'Sullivan, 2015).

[405] Examples of this include institutional corruption such as the endemic sexual abuse of children within Catholic institutions.

[406] Meillassoux, 2014, 11.

Istanbul

Orhan
Pamuk

Museum of
Jurassic
Technology

A Tribute to
Safiye Behar

BRONZE
AGE

Museum of
Innocence

Museum of
Contemporary
Ideas

Musée
de l'Art
Moderne

The Eagle
Principle

Museum of
Forgery

Marcel
Broodthaers

Rosalind
Krauss

Antoinette
LaFarge

The Fictive
Museum

Interrogative
Points

Passionate
Irony

Mary
Beard

Fictive Art

The Fictive

Donna
Haraway

Peter Hill
'Superfiction'

The As-If

Hans
Vaihinger

Carrie
Lambert-Beatty
'Parafiction'

Wolfgang
Iser

The
Similarity
Centre

Models

Fictive
Space

The
Centre of
Gravity

Daniel
Dennet

Secret
Centre of
the Novel

Non-linearity

'...as intermingled
processes fade into linear
continuity, context also
fades out...'
Michel-Rolf Trouillot

The
Conditions of
Truth

A Theorist's Fiction

The Museum is
the Performance

A Chain of Flowers

The John Affey Museum

Slide 2528.3: A Theorist's Fiction

A Theorist's Fiction

Things think. Just as we have them neatly arranged in a cabinet, or pinned down in a drawer, some chance juxtaposition reveals a glitch in our system. A widening crack, magnetizing attention until the entire classificatory apparatus twists, wrenching itself into new spaces, leaving whole library shelves obsolete, adrift. This is the wonder and horror of museums—the agency of labelled collections to alter thinking. The eerie affordances[407] of relics to warp reality, assembling communities of veneration and interpretation, building cathedrals around themselves. Things echo and resonate across time and distance and kind, connections unlimited by any one mind or medium. Invisible, intangible perhaps, but nonetheless material, the patterns persist—associative constellations, at once generating and generated[408] by thinking. Associations constellate in processes neither arbitrary nor necessary, but as matters contingent upon any and every flavour of causality. Associations ramify regardless of hierarchy or class, border or boundary, regardless of any rationale or narrative they are influenced by, or influence in turn. Patterns of knowledge production institute themselves, and the resulting constellations – like the progress mythology of scientific racism in the Modernist ethnographic museum[409] – have consequences, far beyond their allegedly abstract, objective or disinterested guise. Traditional museum poetics are characterised by a double structure: a performative staging of the artefact and its label. With 'no intrinsic or necessary link between them', some theorists argue an absolutist position: all links between things and narratives are arbitrary.[410] Associations in museum assemblages are neither arbitrary nor necessary; they are contingent and agential, generating

apophenic 'forms that think'. In the fictive museum, the implicit, associative, agglutinative nature of museum knowledge becomes its key problematic. This is the underlying conceptual drive for our work. Combined with the fictive museum's destabilisation of given categories, disciplines and hierarchies, each detail or reference point potentially shifts the meaning of the constellation. Queering established ideals of reliability, validity, or factuality – exchanging them for the shifting, contingent problem of veridicality, of *passing as real*[411] – we navigate the unstable, paradoxical fields of *the fictive*. In place of given identities, origins and certainties, we encounter only *the as-if:* self-supporting systems of collusion and connivances, complicities, conditionals, and contingencies. Disciplinary boundaries between art and theory, fiction and philosophy, writing and sculpture, history and folklore, mythology and museology, humour and seriousness are unmoored.[412] In place of the traditionally distinct domains of ontology (being), epistemology (knowing), ethics (acting) or æsthetics (perceiving), only non-binary non-division remains: a resonant, diffractive condition of onto-epistemic-ethico-æsthetics, shifting flows and fields, assemblages of assemblages, radically contingent, cognitive, mutually-constitutive, multiply-mattering *things*.

Taking up this agglutinative mode, a connotative *marking in addition,* our approach is necessarily incomplete, multi-faceted, tangential, digressive. It is repeatedly re-introductory, accessioning a mass of cross-references, alluding towards the fictive centre of an associative space. **A Line Joining Moments** discusses this fictive centre in relation to the Museum of Innocence project, and what Pamuk terms the *secret centre*[413] of a novel, generated among multiple

points. As an analogy for consciousness and the narrative self, philosopher Daniel Dennett employs the 'theorist's fiction' of *the centre of gravity*: 'a sort of abstraction, something whose existence was not in the slightest impugned by its invisibility.'[414] While discussing Hans Vaihinger's version of Immanuel Kant's *as-if*, Iser explores the related notion of the *similarity-centre*:

> To understand by means of feigning something is… a pragmatic necessity that aims not at insight but at production. For this process, the "intermediary" and "similarity-centre" are indispensable types of fiction. The "intermediary" is devised in order to reduce "the gap between the mass of apperception and that which is to be apperceived"… The As-if modifies comparison and analogy in equal measure, and so the "intermediaries" present themselves as models that cannot, however, offer information about what they are modelling… [A] precondition for acts of comprehension… [which] cannot explain what is to be comprehended… It is as "transit-points" that they come closest to their nature as mere projected supplements. Their contents are minimalized, and this brings out their elemental functionality, which is fulfilled by their catalytic effect. These different forms of the As-if reveal the unmistakable features of a structural model. The As-if is in fact the structure of the structures that vary according to prevailing pragmatic contexts…[415]

This spatial model produces knowledge (rather than information) by generating *intermediary transit-points* among the things being modelled. In the performative act of proceeding, for example, *as-if* this project were a museum, something is generated between these two entities, which Vaihinger labels a *similarity-centre*. Following Lakoff, cognitive linguistics might describe this in terms of topological mappings between domains, while Deleuze might discuss it in the context of 'theatrical space', where 'repetition is woven from one distinctive point to another, including the differences within itself […] dynamic lines in space'.[416]

Associating Iser's reading of Vaihinger's *as-if* with the fictive museum generates an alternative conception of *the fictive*. To engage the fictive museum on its own

terms, to accession it as a research method, is to take seriously the possibility of fictive museum poetics producing knowledge. However, as Iser points out, this 'model-building is only a precondition for acts of comprehension', which cannot 'offer information about what they are modelling'. To generate a fictive museum in order *to see what it can do*, in effect we attempt a reflexive modelling of this modelling process, or, as Iser terms it, 'the structure of the structures that vary according to prevailing pragmatic contexts'. We speculate that knowledge arises through elaboration and association, foregrounding spatial relations between ideas, reference points, descriptions. In place of a single dialectic or analogic line between two entities, we assemble a collection of such lines, a meshwork of intermingled processes, where a similarity centre emerges. Instead of a linear argument, we generate a constellation, a space to think with. The fictive central point of the thesis is approached tangentially, sculpturally *in the round*.

In our commitments to embodied~cognitive approaches, introduced in **A Sudden Change in the Pattern**, we take the agency of matter seriously. We propose: *certain aspects of (fictive) museum poetics structure the kinds of knowing generated by these forms of thought*. One such structural condition is the label|artefact convention: a binary division between objects and meta-objects. Our response is one of *doubtful praxis*. Doubtful that fictive space can be adequately charted by echoing existing museum structures, however ironically, JAM explores alternatives.[417] Spatialising the associative links among its collections, as described in **Making Uncomfortable *Parallels***, JAM generates assemblages of *slides*, hybrid museum collection~display~archive~models. Things label one-another in association, without hierarchical distinction between

artefact and label, found and made. This scaffolds our contribution to knowledge: rethinking the fictive museum as cognitive sculpture, and thereby re-envisioning knowledge production as the emergence of fictive space.

Labelling is a key problematic. The performative act of (mis)labelling is capable of both cultural appropriation and *epistemic violence*:[418] the overwriting of knowledge structures – of worldviews – devaluing their claims to truth, their legitimacy, their right to self-definition. As demonstrated in Blum's careful answer 'she's real to me', the act of questioning itself shares this capacity for violence*,* particularly when it re-configures life into either/or categories, enforced by the word *really*.[419] In our kyriarchal, interrogative culture, responsibility lies with the party put to question – usually in the minority – to adequately explain themselves.[420] Drawing from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), we adopt a different position: meaning and knowledge are only generated in dialogue, only in association, and thus must be continually re-addressed.[421] The vocation of human knowledge is a reciprocal awareness of the self-and-world, leading to a revolutionary, liberatory re-labelling of existence, performed in contradiction to kyriarchal stereotypes. Unless education is playful and mutual, Freire maintains, it is not education.[422] Taking an non-binary, trans-identified position – itself vulnerable to epistemic violence – the We of this project ally ourselves with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's 'Undercommons'. Building on the work of Gayatri Spivak and Franz Fanon, Harney and Moten emphasise 'fugitivity' and 'refusal' as legitimate responses to the inescapably colonial, kyriarchal condition of knowledge-producing institutions today.[423] We make no 'clear and distinct' division between research and artwork, between

written thesis and creative practice. Another refusal is of the false choice between the so-called *virtual space* of the Internet, the *physical space* of objects and installation, the *conceptual space* of academic writing, and the *bodily or temporal spaces* of performance. JAM is instituted *among* these manifestations; no field us primary, or exists in isolation.

Our museum operates according to an emergent *fictive heuristic* principle of accessioning: the similarity centre is determined only by resonances, echoes, and symmetries. The heart of an embodied~cognitive space that forms for visitors, be they human or algorithmic pseudo-intelligences, through associative constellation. Each accession re-situates the museum, altering its fundamentals, changing its nature. Every new point in the network shifts its locus in fictive space. The research's *centre of gravity*, a 'theorist's fiction', a point with no characteristics, has no existence apart from its location-in-relation to the assemblage.

Museum as portal. An in-between space, saturated with institutional tensions, the armatures of ideology, kyriarchal control structures. A space you may enter – like Nabokov's narrator in *A Visit to the Museum* – to question the ownership of a painting, and emerge to find yourself in a different city, exiled.[424]

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[407] James Gibson (1966) coined *affordance* to describe potentials for interaction between agents and their environments; it has been widely taken up by philosophers and cognitive scientists.

[408] *Generate* is used throughout in preference to *produce*, *make*, *construct*, etc. to describe processes of coming-into-being that are not created by top-down, external authorship, but result from *sympoiesis*: 'complex, self-organizing but collectively producing, boundaryless systems.' (Dempster, 2000, 1).

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[409] See **Making Uncomfortable Parallels**.

[410] Shelton, 2001, 19–20.

[411] In trans communities, *passing* describes the highly contingent state of being recognised as a member of the gender you identify with, e.g. *after being on testosterone for six months, I began to pass as male*.

[412] Fuck propriety ; }

[413] Pamuk, 2011, 153–178.

[414] Dennett, 1993, 431.

[415] Iser, 1993, 147–9.

[416] Deleuze, 1994, 10.

[417] An unanticipated by-product or 'output' of this aspect of the research is a propositional-critical praxis of museum activism online, in print, and in person.

[418] Nayar, 2015, 65.

[419]   You're adopted, so who are your parents *really*?

   Ok, you're transgender, but are you *really* male or female?

   Are you *really* Irish or British?

[420] Labels are no more than contingent accumulations of meaning, conditioned by material, circumstantial genealogies. Established distinctions merely mark how regularly questions have been rehearsed by discourse. The unresolvable, paradoxical anxieties we feel in labelling a thing are generated in part by how violently the act of established naming bifurcates our world. Our answer to re-inscriptions of division can only be a simple negative: *Is this academic writing or art writing? No.* See Halberstam's discussion of 'refusal'.

[421] Freire, 1996, 68–70.

[422] Freire, 1996, 53.

[423] Harney & Moten, 2013.

[424] Nabokov, 2010.
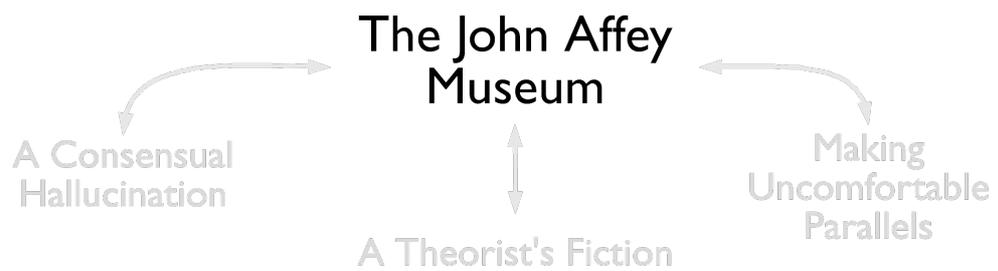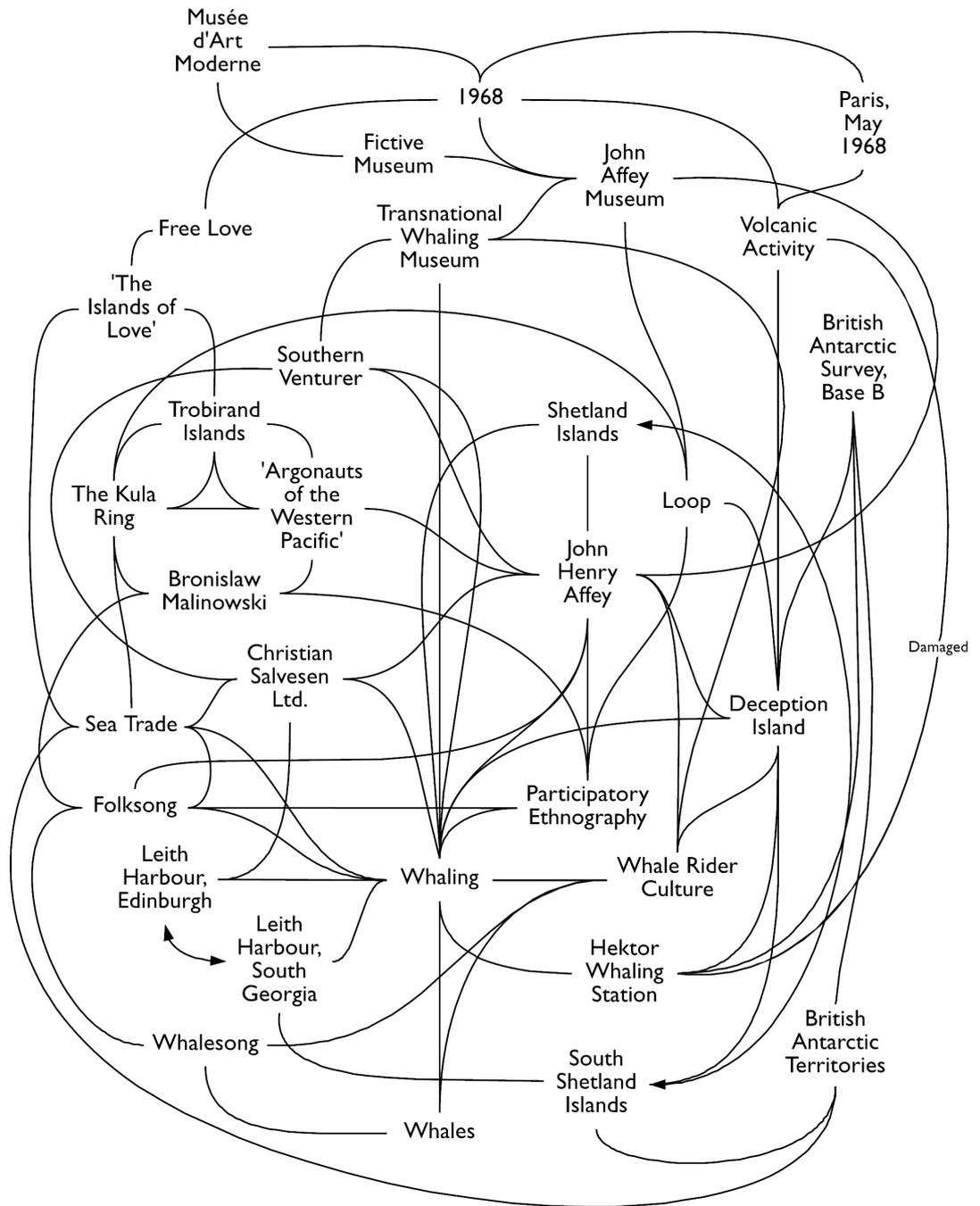
Slide 26X.0: The John Affey Museum

The John Affey Museum

When Europe's great colonial museums were founded, the lamps illuminating their surroundings burned with the pale fire of spermaceti: oil extracted from the head cavities of sperm whales. Soon after, the South Kensington museums began lighting their interiors with gaslight, then with electric lamps linked to coal and gas power stations; a situation which continues today. But in the late 1950s, an amateur ethnographer and Antarctic whaler called John Henry Affey (1905-1969) proposed not only that the 165-metre British-Norwegian whaling factory vessel he worked aboard be converted into a floating 'Transnational Whaling Museum' (TWM), but that its 'cases be illuminated with parmacetti.'[425] To understand this bizarre, anachronistic insistence, we must form some impression of Affey's complex relationship to whales and whaling, his views on museum making, and an esoteric, materialist philosophy of language, seemingly more suited to a theosophist or conceptual artist than to a would-be museum director.

In one of the many paradoxes of his little-known career, Affey was both a whaler – working for many years as a laboratory technician on a whaling factory ship – and a campaigner against the whaling industry. Affey believed passionately that commercial whaling should cease, but that the Southern Venturer, or its sister ship the Harvester, should continue to operate as a living museum. Whaling traditions from every known culture were to be not only collected and displayed, but practised commemoratively from the vessel. Every scrap of the whales they caught was to be made use of. Key to this project was that visitors,

whether day-trippers or those bound on longer voyages, take part in the hunt,

or at least be made to sample what he called 'the black flesh' of whale meat.

This was the ethnographic principle of participatory observation – inspired by

Affey's reading of Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922)

– raised to the level of a communion rite. Staff and visitors would join in public

acknowledgement of our shared complicity in and historical reliance on whaling.

A perpetual process of confession, mourning, thanksgiving and atonement to

whales and whalers alike.

In the event, the TWM was never founded. With whale stocks declining rapidly

and less profit to be made, the Venturer was sold to a Japanese company in

1962; Nippon Suisan KK[426] bought the vessel solely for the British whaling quota

attached. Some fourteen thousand tonnes of blood-soaked steel changing

hands for the piece of paper that came with it. Vast complexes of rusted steel,

washed again and again by iron-rich whale blood, until – Affey insisted – the

very fabric of the vessel was infused with it. The Venturer was laid up in Mihara,

before being butchered for scrap some years later. In the half-century since,

recycled steel from the Venturer – plus an equal quantity from the Harvester,

Affey's second choice – might have ended up anywhere, the taint proliferating

from scrap yard to foundry to scrap yard. A homeopathy of cetacean

hæmoglobin; a matter of distribution. Some may still be sat rusting in breakers

yards in Mihara, or Santander. Most will have ended up as part of the fabric of

shipping containers, railway girders, steel plate… even of contemporary whaling

ships.[427] Some might have found its way into the spoon that stirs your coffee, or

into the steel and bronze powder used for 3D printing. If so, traces could be

present in the steel dice we use to generate our semi-random JAM accessioning numbers. This is, of course, a vanishingly small chance: we proceed as-if it is the case.

Steel dice form the link between Affey's two unrealised museum projects: the TWM, and the John Affey Museum (JAM). Affey kept a memento from the Venturer that he referred to as a knucklebone: a complex steel pipe coupling from the laboratory, which he gradually filed into a rough dodecahedral form. This memento became the focus for his second museum effort, a 'distributed, dozenal museum' that would collect things without removing them from their native environments. These 'JAM Accessions' accrued as lists, first in notebooks, and later on index cards, kept in steel military surplus Veteran file drawers. Each accession was assigned a semi-random duodecimal[428] number; Affey's unevenly weighted knucklebone favoured certain throws over others. But far from being a source of error, this was – Affey argued – the only rational means of proceeding. Numbering by thematic classification such as Melvil Dewey's decimal system imposes arbitrary self-fulfilling categories from the outset. All sequential numbering systems introduce a misleading sense of priority, besides which date-based numbering is 'foundered [sic] in demonstrably false religious claptrap'.[429] Yet pure randomness is as much an idealised absolute as perfect systemic order: neither are attainable. For Affey, only the sheer contingency of semi-random numbering is true to material reality. In consequence, our contemporary JAM dice are constructed on this principle. Uneven weighting will gradually introduce a shoaling or flocking effect to the numbers rolled: clusters that generate associative constellations and emergent meanings.

Affey's voyages began at his home in the Shetlands near the Arctic Circle,

boarding the *Venturer* at Leith harbour, Edinburgh, bound for the whaling station

of Leith Harbour, South Georgia, part of the South Shetland Islands claimed as

British Antarctic Territory. Once there, Affey would take any opportunity to visit

the former Hektor station on Deception Island, then used as a base by the

British Antarctic Survey, from which it issued postmarks on behalf of the

Colonial Office to assert their territorial claims against Argentina. Affey was

convinced he had discovered on Deception archaeological evidence of a lost

indigenous culture of the Antarctic, a people he called the Whale Riders. For

both the TWM and JAM, Deception played a key role. In many respects, it was

the ideal location for Affey's museum archive following the loss of the *Venturer*:

the desiccated freezing air was a good preservative, the inexplicable, perfectly

straight Costa Recta and unusual omega-shaped harbour had always been

popular with tourists, and the site's overlapping whaling, scientific and colonial

histories resonated with Affey's concerns. However, Deception's unusual shape

was due to its being the caldera of a submerged volcano:

> From the late 1940s, Affey had begun to store his cases of indexed reference cards
> and dozens of original artefacts in the former Hektor whaling station… In 1968,
> disaster struck Deception in the form of violent geological upheaval, causing lahars of
> boiling mud and ash to engulf the site… The huts used as Base B of the BAS were
> badly damaged and abandoned, and, along with them, Affey's improvised museum
> store. Despite increasingly desperate letters to anyone Affey thought may have been
> able to gain access to Deception Island and see what could be salvaged of his life's
> work, all was to no avail, and the following year he suffered the first in a series of
> ultimately fatal strokes.[430]

The event marked a crisis for Affey's museum project; with no collection, no

funds, and partly as an act of despair, he founded JAM that same year.

Presumably, the twenty steel Veteran card index drawers containing whatever

remains of Affey's notes and references are still buried beneath the black sand

and ash of Whaler's bay; twenty points, forming the vertices of a dodecahedron,

projected onto some complex, folded surface. Nearby, a label plaque affixed to

the ruin of Biscoe House by the Deception Island Management Group identifies

the area as a Historic Site.[431]

To date, two essays from 2015 are among the few published mentions of John

Henry Affey and his museum proposals: the first is an introduction to fictive

museum poetics in *Performance Research*, and the second is an analysis of

selkie[432] folktales in *Gender Forum.*[433] 2018 marks the quinquagenary of that first

founding – or perhaps first foundering – and sees the launch of JAM as a floating

institution, not on the oceans of the world as Affey had intended, but navigating

via satellite the ever-shifting shoals and currents of the Internet. Fifty years on,

in the contemporary moment, shortly before its public relaunch as a heritage

and collections consultancy business, JAM is primarily an online institution,

represented alongside the major museums of the world via public engagement

profiles hosted by corporate social media platforms: Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook

and Instagram.

Today, the main site of JAM is a Tumblr blog, containing hyperlinks, documents,

spreadsheets, images, audio recordings, 3D models, vector diagrams. The

contents of this blog are not contained within anything; it is a fictive space,

distributed across server farms, web browsers, and the sensoria of its visitors. A collection encoded with carefully structured magnetic fields. Maintained in unknown locations, accessible from anywhere with wireless internet, or a satellite connection, and the Universal Resource Locator address. The digital images, slides edited in Photoshop, are the visible light projections of things-in-context, diffracted through a fixed 35mm lens onto a digital sensor array. Some things in the world are easily projected through a single lens. Other things are more distributed; invisible, though equally material. Patterns, tides, networks, lines, which can be diagrammed or modelled into a scale and mode more suitable to the human sensorium, as Gaia's magnetic fields can be figured with a series of dashed arcs, and some red and blue arrows.

In this paragraph, printed across the recto and verso of this white A4 sheet, the global standard of institutional administration, are twenty *tilde* signs ~ Twenty points, bounding fictive labels ~ Connected in a certain way, with virtual lines, this set of points can form a topological diagram of a dodecahedron ~ This paragraph can therefore model the John Affey Museum ~ A museum is a space where information is mapped onto things ~ Every museum is a set of virtual points and lines ~ Lines between artefacts and their accession numbers, between collections of things, and constellations of information ~ Each line is a dimension, and so each museum is a hyper-dimensional surface ~ As institutions linking things and information clusters, museums are cognitive spaces that generate meaning ~ Museums draw lines of association between different cognitive modes: visuospatial, auditory, kinaesthetic, proprioceptive, linguistic, iconic ~ Assemblages of matter map onto assemblages of encoded information

and performance~assemblages of knowledge ~ Museums are trans-coding, trans-modal assemblages of assemblages ~ The hyper-dimensional surface of the museum is a field of resonances ~ Reflexive symmetries echo between things, encoded descriptions, external references, and models of thought ~ In producing cognitive models of these symmetries, visitors associate them with their own experiences, feelings, and memories ~ In doing so visitors generate different knowledges ~ Museums, then, are sculptural: spaces with an affective cultural poetics ~ Both in their external reference points and their spatial arrangements, museums foreground certain resonances, symmetries, and associative lines ~ It matters how things are lit, how much space they are accorded, and how they are positioned ~ It matters what information and what things are juxtaposed, clustered, assembled into associative constellations ~

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[425] Affey, 2017, 81.

[426] This corporation, founded in 1911, is currently known as Nissui, and is one of the largest fishing concerns in the world. In an email to our researcher, however, they claimed no knowledge of owning the 'Southern Venturer Maru'.

[427] Though Affey imagined he was experiencing the last years of commercial whaling – to be a man located at the End of History – the pattern has continued replicating regardless, woven deeply into national economic identity. Today, Affey's proposal that whaling continue only as a living museum, operating a sustainable 're-enactment whaling' carried out for what we would now call knowledge production and the continuation of intangible cultural heritages, remains a vision for the future.

[428] Affey felt likewise about 'decimation' ~ the progressive decline of more practical dozenal counting methods in favour of the decimal system. Dozenal, or duo-decimal counting systems are widespread across human cultures, with the benefit of being easily divisible by 2, 3, 4, 6 and 12. Using the right thumb to count the right dactyls or finger bones, and keeping track of dozens using the left thumb, it is possible to count to 144 using only the hands. The historical accident of the French Revolution is partly to blame for the loss of dozenal systems, although their attempts to change to a decimal clock and calendar remain unsuccessful. See Zirkel, 11X3. **3X8.1.**

[429] Affey, 2017.

[430] Le Couteur, 2015, 38.

[431] Deception Island Management Group, 2005.

[432] *Selkies*, *silkies*, or *selch* are transcultural mythological beings, part seal and part person, appearing in coastal folklore from Ireland, the British Isles, Shetland, the Faroe Isles, Iceland, and Scandinavia.

[433] 'Fictive Museums and the Poetics of Mislabelling', *Performance Research* 20.1 (2015), 36–47; and 'Slipping Off the Sealskin: Gender, Species, and Fictive Kinship in Selkie Folktales', *Gender Forum* 55 (2015), 55–82.

'The museum is the
performance of stuff in
your collection, not the
collection per se.'
James Bradburne

The Museum is the
Performance

Drawing Conclusions

A Theorist's Fiction

Looping Topology
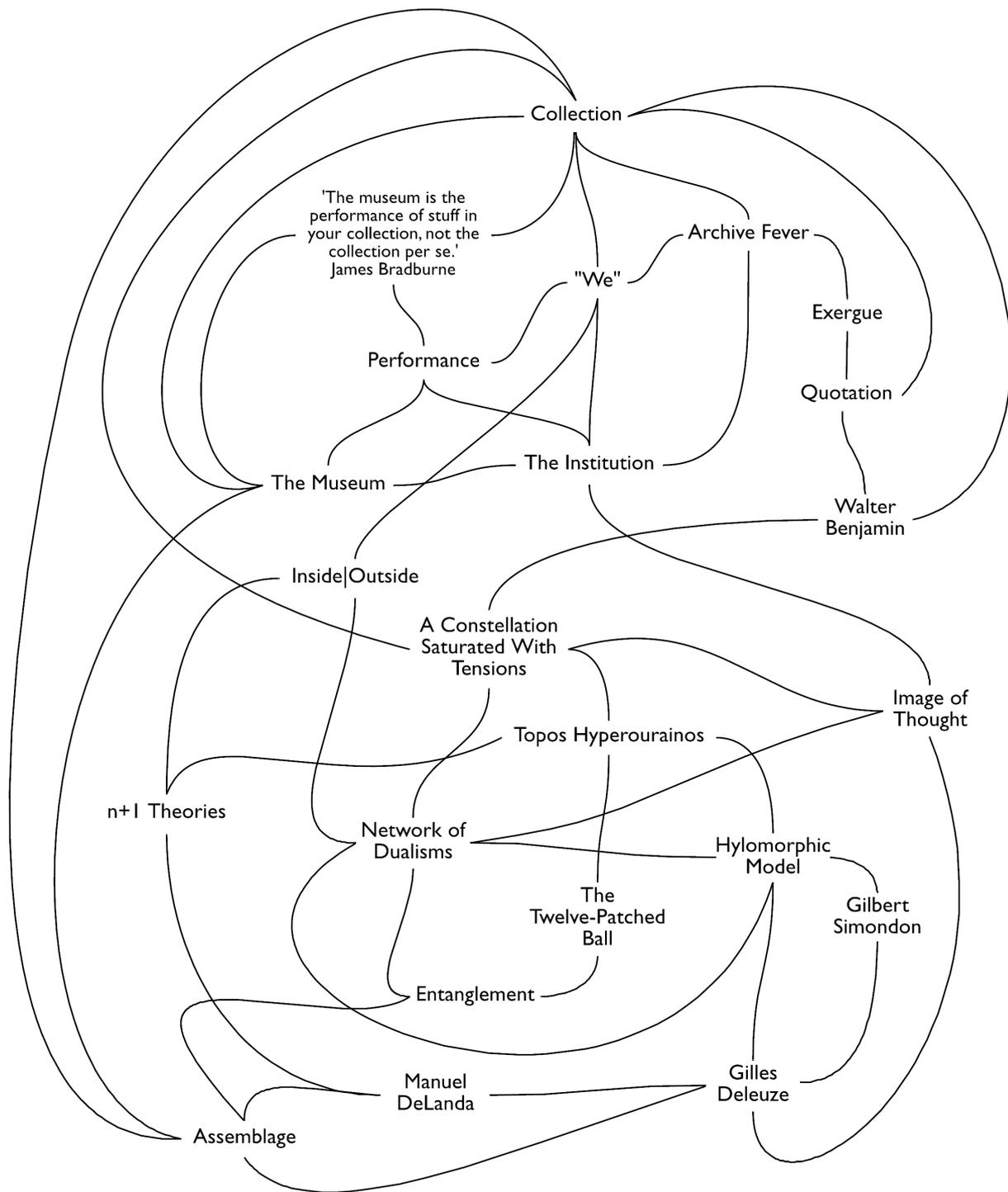
Slide 27X9.3: The Museum is the Performance

The Museum is the Performance

It is the difference between having the score of Mozart and playing it. The museum is the performance of the stuff in your collection, not the collection *per se*. [434]

During the 1920s, British celebrity archæologist Sir Leonard Woolley claimed to have discovered the oldest known museum while excavating the sixth-century-BCE Babylonian palace of Ur.[435] Ennigaldi-Nanna, daughter of King Nabondius, kept a collection of antiquarian artefacts 'complete with clay tablet labels' in the form of cylinders with texts in three languages.[436] One of these cylinders – a re-inscription of the text on a clay brick from c.2000 BCE, found while digging foundation trenches for a new building in c.650 BCE – is now on permanent display at the British Museum (BM).[437] This narrative of ancient archaeology motivates its inclusion in the 'Building Babylon' display:[438] a group of ancient inscriptions that reference – and in some cases wilfully misrepresent – even more ancient authorities. While the BM online catalogue gives the metadata of the cylinder's discovery and a partial translation of the cuneiform inscription, the fact that the cylinder labelled part of a collection, and that Woolley claimed it as a museum label, are absent. The exhibit itself does not include the inscription, nor mention Woolley at all. Without knowing it beforehand, this narrative is impossible to extrapolate from the twenty-word label.[439] The value of this unique artefact for the history of museum studies – and the BM's rationale for displaying it, rather than the thousands of similar accessions in storage – remains obscure to even the most assiduous visitor.

Whether by a brief name or title of provenance – *great-grandmother's basket* – or by an elaborate ritualised song-and-dance, collections of heirlooms are always hitched to narrative: prompts or prosthetics for performance. From this pre-historic pairing stems the dyad of thing and name, artefact and label, accession and metadata, which continues to constitute the molecular structure of the museum today: extensive, labelled collections, arranged for display by an institution. In the *Musaeum Ashmoleanum*, which opened in 1682,[440] 'an inferior officer alwaies attends to show the curiosities to strangers.'[441] Performance is bound into this structure: a thing and its tale, told together on an institutional stage. It is no coincidence that the theatrical expression *front of house* is often used by museum staff. 'Although we may be reluctant to admit it,' Elaine Heumann Gurian writes, a museum exhibition 'is more akin to the production of a theatre piece than any other form'.[442] In the British Museum's 'Building Babylon' display, this theatre piece is a nascent production – a set stage of props and cues awaiting a performance, which the Museum itself may not provide.

As museum curators Spencer Crew and James Sims write, '[t]he problem with things is they are dumb. They are not eloquent, as some thinkers in art museums claim. They are dumb. And if by some ventriloquism they seem to speak, they lie.'[443] And, as Woolley's clay cylinder reminds us, labels are things too, props tied to performative acts. Performance writer and curator André Lepecki described a current turn towards 'the body as archive'.[444] Describing his *Musée de la danse* (2015) project for Tate, dancer and performance artist Boris Charmatz states 'we dance as a mental space, not only as a physical practice'.[445] The project re-envisaged Tate with a speculative, fictive museum proposal: *What*

if Tate Modern was Musée de la danse? Charmatz installed 90 dancers in the gallery, who would lecture, teach, and most crucially perform gestural sequences from different eras and styles of dance: 'as if their bodies are the museum spaces'.[446] Charmatz at once re-imagining the mental space of the skilled performing body as-if it were a fictive, living museum, and reveals embodied performance as the missing piece in the artefact~label pairing.

There is more than one way to enter a museum. Some visitors pop in to see something specific, some just to browse. Some devote the whole day, trying to see as much as they can. Some visitors accept the museum's interpretations unquestioningly; some scrutinise every juxtaposition and oddity of phrasing for slips or hidden agendas. Some proceed case by case, cross-referencing each little number,[447] reading every label. Some choose to ignore the labels entirely. Our museum should be open to all these approaches and more; museums make meaning reciprocally, each visitor co-producing their own performance.[448]

Before beginning, we have to stamp this museum catalogue as fictive. Not only generated by and generative of fictions – fictions inextricably entangled with and treated as-if factual – but re-assembling and re-arranging *the facts themselves*. Resituating facts as-if fictive, exposing them to reconsideration as symbolism, metaphor, metonymy, allusion, irony. We do this, perversely,[449] in the service of realism. A radically embodied~cognitive realism aligned with New Materialism,[450] researching not how things should work (or would, if only we could get them in order, define our terms, vivisect true from false, fact from fiction, literal from figurative, reality from illusion, base from superstructure…),

but how things can and do happen. An as-if mode, collecting life's messy, contingent, partial, improper, intersubjective, reciprocal, and above all *associative* matterings,[451] in order to 'understand by means of feigning'.[452]

As a precondition to putting together a fictive museum, we have to claim a kind of *freedom of association*. The right to proceed associatively, to make montages or constellations, to gather together or disband communities.[453] The right to *accession* things into our research assemblage, irrespective of their genealogies, their provenance or media, their citizenship status in this or that disciplinary field. Irrespective of their station in the kyriarchy. Irrespective of their veracity or veridicality.[454]

We lay claim to a dubious method of blasphemy, or passionate irony.[455] To an exemplary fictive museology: to academic, artistic, and museological *worst practices*. A non-binary method, inescapably trans-temporal, trans-cultural, trans-disciplinary, and trans-gendered, if only because of our contrarian[456] impulse to respect no given bounds. A method desiring only one kind of validity (that impressive term born from the Latin for bodily strength):[457] we seek validity as intensity of interconnectivity, a *tensile strength* amongst things held in association.[458] Knowledge[459] not as an immaterial abstraction, but as a patterned, spatial polyphony of bodies and things, a song known only in the singing of it.[460]

The 'we' who do this are the John Affey Museum. *We* both generates and co-opts identity,[461] an authorial, institutional, intersubjective in-common.[462] Museums always speak by fictive means: a performative, institutional *We*.[463] The

museum may be an institution producing knowledge, even an institution

producing knowers, but it is first and foremost an institution producing *itself*.

Civilising the Public; Educating the Masses; safeguarding cultural capital;[464] being 'a

laboratory of comparative cultural investigation'…[465] Speaking as one, we doubt,

on principle, all self-justifications or mission statements from *The Museum*: 'the

motive-hunting of motiveless Malignity'.[466] And so we address ourselves not to

any visitors or interest groups in whom we might wish to produce impacts or

outcomes, but to this reified kind, of which we form a minor example ~ to *The*

Museum itself. We address *the muséal*[467] *gaze*, that reciprocal performance of

being museum-like.

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[434] James Bradburne quoted in Holledge, 2018.

[435] JAM follows 'Common Era' (BCE/CE) dating conventions, originating in nineteenth-century Jewish scholarship, rather than the 'Anno Domini' method still employed by many institutions, including the British Museum, based on the fictive birth date of Jesus of Nazareth.

[436] Fowler, 2003,12.

[437] Excavation number U.2757, British Museum number 119014, Registration number 1927,1003.9. Location G55/dc5.

[438] Other object titles include: 'Using the authority of the past'; 'A seal with a history'; 'Secret numbers'; 'Reading old records'; 'Venerating an ancient king'; and 'Lacking transparency'.

[439] The British Museum label text reads:

'Digging up the past

A clay cylinder recording brick inscriptions of Amar-Sin (2046-2038 BC), which emerged during the digging of the remains of an ancient building.

About 675-655 BC

From Ur

ME 119014 '.

[440] Elias Ashmole having taken legal possession of the famous collection of the Tradescants' Ark, allegedly by deception, and secured funding to house it in Oxford.

[441] Anthony Wood, quoted in Genoways & Andrei, 2016, 34.

[442] Heumann Gurian, 2006, 160.

[443] Crew & Sims, 1991, 159.

[444] Lepecki, 2010..

[445] Tate, 2015.

[446] Tate, 2015.

[447] **218.1.**

[448] **8E0.0.**

[449] **441.0.**

[450] Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, 48. **153.0.**

[451] Barad, 2015, 401. **459.0.**

[452] Iser, 1993, 147–9. **01X.1.**

[453] As claimed for example in Article 20 of the United Nations 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'.

[454] Drawing on its use in linguistics and the social sciences, *veridicality* is used here to mean the assessment of truthfulness or likelihood: not the veracity of something *per se*, but the contingent conditions of seeming factual to a given interpretive community. For the use of this term in computational linguistics, see for example de Marneffe, Manning & Potts, 2012.

[455] Haraway, 1991, 291. **390.0.**

[456] 'I will say that I'm a contrarian at heart, I've noticed this since I was very little. When I hear things, dogmas, I tend to go to the opposite pole. One of the first things I was interested in was forgery for that reason, the last taboo. And so I'm very interested in the many ways in which fictive art serves a contrarian impulse within the art world. It's not just one thing; it's so many ways.' (LaFarge & Le Couteur, 2017).

[457] Lather, 1993, 674–5. **15X.0.**

[458] For more on the idea of validity reconsidered as a kind of tensile strength, explored in the context of JAM's *Roots Between the Tides* project, see Le Couteur, 2017.

[459] Data structured in relation generates information; information structured in relation to human contexts produces knowledge. This context incorporates both the ways in which we

record, communicate and use information, and our pre-experiential cognitive conceptual maps, whether intuitive or systematic, that structure its associative significance. Knowledge, in this sense, is a context-bound translation amongst information structures: a mapping of maps. This broad definition of knowledge follows Zins, 2007.

[460] Landes, 2013, 92–3. **901.0.**

[461] Haraway, 1991, 296. **E70.0.**

[462] Derrida, 1998, 41–2. **E6E.0.**

[463] 'Should I say "we" instead of "I"? Am I pretending the museum is actually speaking? What would it say? How would it say it? Can I make jokes?' (Dornan, 2017). **13E.0**

[464] Throsby, 2011, 166–68. **712.0.**

[465] The British Museum, 2017.

[466] Samuel Taylor Coleridge on Shakespeare's Iago, quoted in Mahoney, 2009, 500.

[467] **913.0**. Cf. Theodore Adorno's gloss on *museal*, quoted in Crimp, 1995, 44. **9E5.0**.
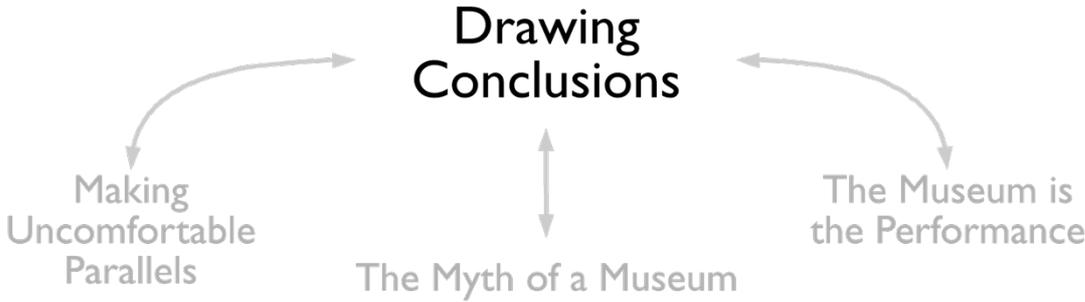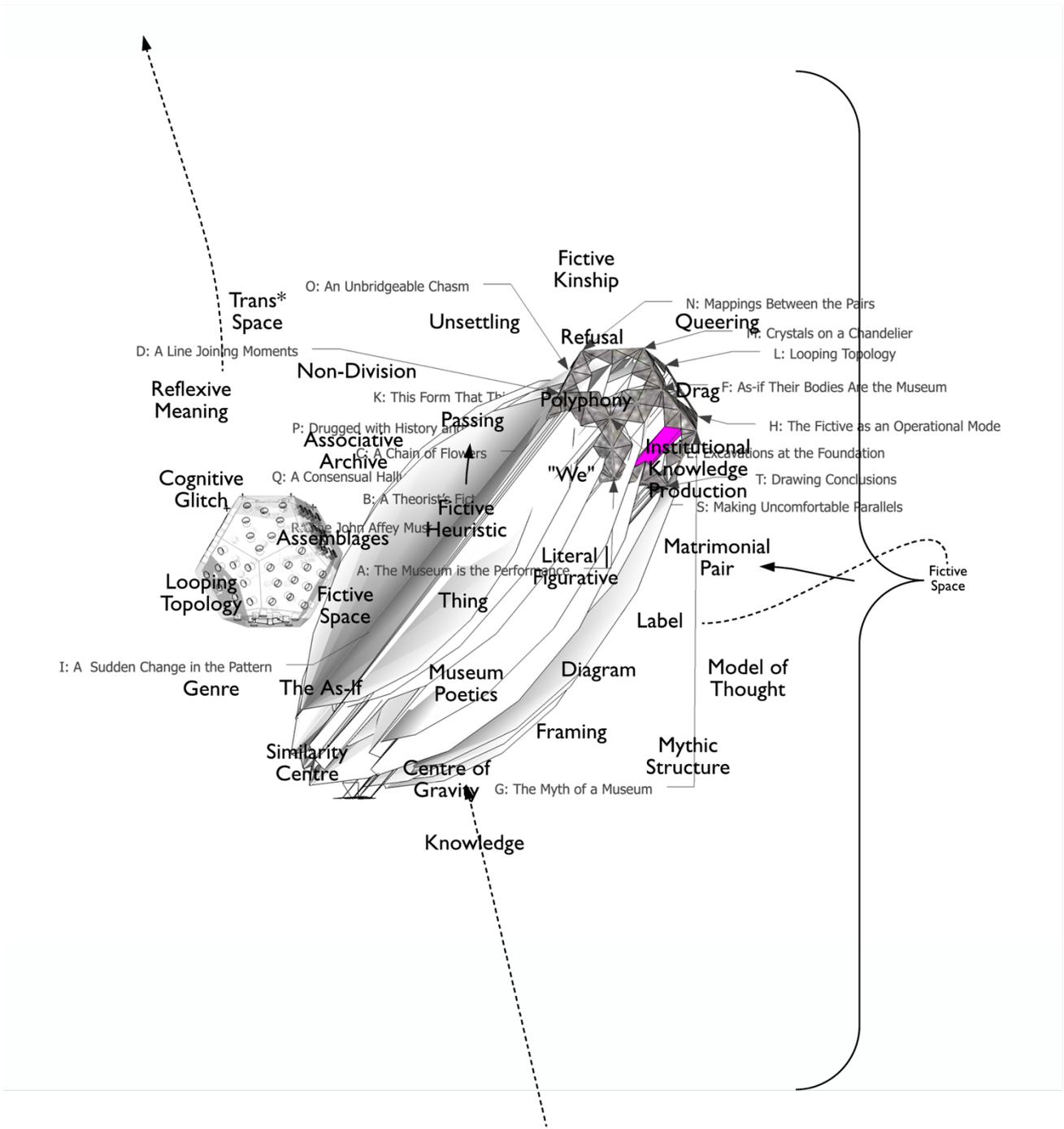
Slide 281.2: Drawing Conclusions

Drawing Conclusions

Fictive museums are associative constellations – transmedia assemblages of things~images~texts~events~performances~sites – which label themselves *Museum.*[468] Fictive museums undertake a reframing of the ostensibly neutral, pragmatic conditions of institutional knowledge production ~ re-modelling the *Model of thought.* They are far from the only cultural phenomena with this potential. But by dealing directly with museum poetics – a mythic structure, a representative figure for representation – they are uniquely positioned to foreground its glitches, contradictions, paradoxes, and absurdities. Re-producing museum poetics in an as-if mode, fictive museums unsettle our expectations of how museums should behave, highlighting how museums *do* behave. By accessioning the aesthetics and poetics of knowledge-producing institutions – whether by performing the double-mimesis of *museum drag,* or even entering a trans* space of *passing as-if museum* – fictive museums queer representation, classification, categorisation, and the interactions of research and creation, exposing and destabilising dualism.

In the fictive museum – to say nothing of other knowledge-producing institutions – labelling and explanation never quite function as advertised. Fictive museums use complex textual and sculptural devices to destabilise and disconcert the poetics and performances of the museum. The conventional act of labelling something with its name, date, and context quickly enters reflexive modes of irony, hoaxing, and absurdity, dismantling the veridical boundary between literal and figurative. Though what Kabakov terms the 'matrimonial pair'

of object and label remains largely secure, this distinction is made more complex by the use of elaborate reproductions, models and framing devices. In the John Affey Museum, particularly in the *Roots Between the Tides* project, a polyphonic alternative to this dialogue between the non-textual object and the textual label is proposed: an *associative constellation* model of hashtagged slides re-labels and re-contextualises itself and its surroundings, generated by hand from a modular kit of things and a database of connections.

Fictive museums operate in an as-if mode, where questions of veridicality and relevance are unsettled in favour of a fictive heuristic. An *eagle principle*, which gathers anything and everything into its own orbit, turning about a centre of gravity, a theorist's fiction, generated amongst the materials accessioned. This similarity-centre exhibits a looping topology, both producing and produced by a kind of apophenic *ray gun effect*, re-contextualising each modular element into an assemblage *form that thinks*. In doing so, fictive museums foreground the unstable associative context of knowledge production, the implicit and intensely contingent background conditions, its glitchy *Model of thought*: complex and paradoxical models of knowledge's unspoken, unlabelled conditions. Implicit meanings generated amongst matters in association constitute the ground against which figures of linear continuity are perceived.[469] As Rachel Haidu observes of Broodthaers' work, this opens to investigation the premises of critique and perception. Fictive museums can develop what Paulo Freire described as 'the power to perceive critically,' re-modelling the very institutions of perceiving and critique.[470] In this sense, the project argues for *mis-labelling* as resistance, for what Hal Foster describes as a reflexive approach to meaning.[471]

The Fictive Museum proposes ways to re-model knowledge in terms of cognitive assemblages: fictive spaces of association. The *minor mode* of this method applies primarily to a genre of artistic production – *the fictive museum* – which the project approaches simultaneously as object and method of study. Fictive space is proposed as a pragmatic, generative way of thinking about and producing knowledge in artistic research. In following the emergent rationale – the *fictive heuristic* – of the John Affey Museum on its own terms, *The Fictive Museum* has generated unplanned outputs relevant to mainstream museum practice. One is a proposal, or provocation: a model for *ordinary museum* to become aware of and take responsibility for its own inevitably fictive aspects.[472] Thinking through the dualistic label|artefact relation in the museum has generated a second output; an *associative constellation* method of grouping things in fictive space. Whether objects, images, texts, or others, things are assembled in terms of one-another, rather than abstract, pre-established categories. Labelling is not considered as separate and immaterial description, but rather a performative, contingent, and consequential act. Labelling matters, and takes place reflexively. In consequence, the fictive museum not only extends beyond its own boundaries, intervening in the praxis of the ordinary museum, but implies a *major mode* of re-envisioning the fictive as method.

This major form draws far broader conclusions. We propose fictive spatiality not only as an approach to the ordinary museum – *i.e.* to all museums – but speculate that fictive space is an inherent feature of human knowing as such. Fictive spaces of analogical association not only operate beyond commonsensical

divisions of meaning into literal|figurative, *but are required by the very spatial*

terms in which such dualisms are conceived. The explanatory gap is a fictive space.

To the extent that knowledge-producing institutions are structured by

interlinked dualisms – networks of seemingly common-sense distinctions

between label|artefact, literal|figurative, reason|nature, mind|body, and true|false

– they presuppose an inherently kyriarchal *Model of thought.* Our consideration

of fictive museums exposes this *Model* as a spatial, fictive assemblage in itself.

We believe that by revealing fictive space as an ineluctable modality of knowing,

fictive museums can help mitigate against epistemic violence. In doing so, fictive

museums implicitly address broader questions of knowing, thinking and meaning,

many of which are longstanding philosophical paradoxes.[473]

Making no attempt either to resolve these philosophical issues, nor to produce

any authoritative account of them, the contribution of this performative,

practice-based research is instead to take up fictive museum poetics as method,

accessioning and assembling our collection and (mis)labeling it as a genre: *the*

fictive museum. Museum poetics are better suited to making introductions than

drawing conclusions. Taking (*mis*)*labelling* as its model, at the heart of this

project are the twin acts of accessioning and association: lines of thought drawn

between fictive museum research artefacts.[474] Rather than analytic, critical or

definitive, our approach in both thesis and praxis has been exploratory,

associative, and partial ~ accessioning quotations, labels, slides, performances,

references, notes, and songs ~ trans-media models and diagrams. A *point cloud*,

sketch-mapping how different aspects of the fictive museum might interact. This

diagrammatic, spatial *fictive heuristic* method works in parallel with the John Affey Museum's collections online.

Gathered together, these collections form a locus, a fictive space of assembly. The thesis-and-praxis makes a sculptural lacework ~ a constellation of things ~ knotted in association ~ among the materials submitted and beyond ~ gesturing outwards to other works ~ events ~ structures ~ into other spaces ~ trans-media ~ trans-disciplinary ~ trans-cultural ~ trans-temporal. Instead of constituting a stable or complete museum in itself, we assemble a partial set of processes, a *fictive heuristic* capable of generating further work and thought. Our intention is that this generative institutional space allows visitors to become acquainted with the fictive museum as a valuable and coherent cultural genre, and to gain a sense of some of the things it might make possible.

The Fictive Museum accessions labels, models, problematics and points of reference – rather than rationales or structures of legitimation – from established discourses of knowledge. We join Iser in stressing the need for a heuristic method that is not imposed-from-without, nor labelled on the terms of other disciplines. Given the increasing bureaucratisation of *The Academe* on ostensibly neutral rationales imported from corporate culture, a *fictive heuristic* approach to (mis)labelling becomes a methodical imperative. The unthinkably vast proliferation of information both in print and online only intensifies this condition. We proceed by *doubtful praxis*, via self-confessed contingency, superstitious bibliomancy, synchronicitous decision-making, contrarian refusals, associative assemblage, reflexive (mis)labelling in place of developed terminology,

ruling nothing out, and reigning nothing in. This method is not only cognitively realistic – and hence germane to our exploration of the fictive – but perhaps the only way to go on.[475] A passionate commitment to fictive spatiality, and particularly to the queered institutional façade of the fictive museum, is in part an implicit proposal for how future fine art research might proceed: a method for knowing. In this respect, *The Fictive Museum* is closest to the model given by post-conceptual, post-internet art: 'the opening up of dada found-object aesthetics into critical appropriation'.[476]

Situating the fictive museum assemblage online in retro-futuristic *cyberspace* at once amplifies Debord's warning of a life shifted from action to contemplation, and utterly de-centres its terms of distinction. Sarat Maharaj – acutely aware of the dangers of labelling[477] – labels this 'an emerging overall condition of living… the "grey-matter" environs'.[478] Opposing a Beckettian *unnameable* to 'the "institutional drive" – one that can easily repeat itself in the art research world', Maharaj takes up the *unnameable* and Foster's label of *unknowing* to counter a drift toward

> what we might call the "corticalization of creativity" - tending towards the pole of dexterous, "ether-real" permutations in the algorithmic mode. The tendency marks the rendering of creativity increasingly as hard-nosed *know-how* – a drift that makes it even more crucial to keep the door open for the unpredictable see-feel-think processes of *no-how*.[479]

Maharaj's *no-how* resonates with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's call for a self-aware and avowed 'Undercommons,' and their emphasis on 'fugitivity' and 'refusal' as key tactics. We propose *the fictive* suggests an alternative to Maharaj's polar refusal of institutional labelling. Our commitment to the fictive material-

cognitive agency of *things that think* reclaims both the cognitive and the algorithmic as conditions of embodiment. Jack Halberstam claims that '[t]he path to the wild is paved with refusal… the refusal of the choices as offered'.[480] Our first refusal has been to reject out of hand ~ axiomatically, from first principles ~ any and all traditional dualistic oppositions, not least those between feeling and thinking, art and science, poetic and technological, figurative and literal, named and un-named. Our second refusal is to reject the conflation of the conceptual with the linguistic rather than the embodied, exposing the reliance of all such dualistic oppositions on fictive spatial constellations. Third, we refuse to accept the *status quo* self-image of established knowledge-producing institutions: a bureaucratic mythology of knowledge or *Image of thought*, obscuring its own condition as fictive space. Such kyriarchal structures, are self-inconsistent, glitchy and nervous, rife with explanatory gaps, and continually open to radical contingency effects: they are ripe for the hacking, and ours for the taking.

The situation of artistic research must not be allowed to collapse into that of André Breton's famous argument with Roger Caillois over the Mexican jumping bean: do we cut reality to see how it works, dispelling the mystery (Caillois), or do we leave the mystery intact and unknown (Breton)?[481] Broadly aligned with Caillois' own 'form of the Marvellous that does not fear knowledge but, on the contrary, thrives on it', we nevertheless lament his self-confessed inability '[a]s a child… [to] really have fun with toys…constantly ripping them open or dismantling them'. The question is not to cut or not to cut *the bean*, but having cut *some beans*, to re-approach the rest with a renewed understanding of the

fictive – that is, the actual, trans-material, embodied-cognitive – workings of mystery. Neither to break all toys, nor to passively play with what happens to be given us, but to adapt things to our own purposes. Maintaining, meanwhile, our intuitive awareness that drastic, unforeseeable consequences often result both from cutting things, and from acts of labelling. The findings of experimental psychology, mathematics, and philosophy only lend support to our efforts. We claim philosophy as an inevitably sculptural pursuit: both spatial and æsthetic.

In emphasising the inescapably embodied, distributed, fictive nature of cognition, *the fictive museum* has the potential for what Freire labels a 'radical-liberatory pedagogy' ~ the potential to re-inscribe the *form that thinks* of artistic research at the heart of our project of critical, decolonial knowledge production. This project has begun to outline *the as-if*, *the fictive heuristic* and *fictive space* as (mis)labels for re-thinking knowledge, associated with a range of contemporary challenges to established understandings. New models of thought cannot be generated from established labelling structures, laden with the same old dualistic baggage. *The fictive* is not a matter of fact|fiction, any more than *the cognitive* is a matter of mind|body, or trans* is a matter of male|female. However, these paradigmatic dialectic constellations are so powerful, so pervasive, and so inherently bound into the kyriarchal *Model of thought*, that they are inevitably at play. These fictive structures alter perception, cognition and memory even when our engagement with them is ostensibly one of critique.[482] It is for this very reason *the fictive* must be applied to factual knowledge production, and *the cognitive* must be applied to material assemblages, to *things that think*. In this way, our (mis)labels have a chance of retaining some paradoxical, counter-

intuitive potential, an embodied criticality generated by their glitchy, associative, reflexive structures.

Nevertheless, we have found ourselves struggling at every point with the indefinite, the unlabelled, the *unnameable* constrictions of our own embedded *Model of thought*, our endemic memetic infection. It is our fervent hope that from some fictive space generated in assemblage amongst these matters, from some associative centre of gravity or moment of balance, future fictive museum researchers may find their own productive points of departure, the means of instituting their own collective voices of dissent.

We have now assembled our twenty points. Not an argument, but an arrangement. A discursive space of anthology, rather than a discussion. Neither figure, nor ground, but a model of that patch of ground obscured by our view of the figure, and reflexively inferred. Each point a knot~cluster~collection, generating amongst its elements a fictive centre of gravity. Twenty hollow centres, where nothing is located but association, staring without eyes. And in their midst, a twenty-first: The Fictive Museum. Our museum is not the collection, but its performance. A We, operating as-if institutional. A We who will never cede the labels *knowledge*, *reality*, and *the cognitive* to the kyriarchal establishment, nor ever accept their bloodless, blood-soaked, dualistic rationales as preconditions for our scholarship.

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[468] This definition does not, of course, exclude *real*, *ordinary* museums.

[469] Deleuze, 1994, 152.

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[470] Drawing on Edmund Husserl, Freire (1996, 64) describes this 'zone of background intuitions' or 'field of background awareness' as coming to the fore in a revolutionary-liberatory pedagogy. Freire's 'problem-posing' model for developing a radical critical awareness resonates with the claims of Broodthaers and Mary Beard: the posing of 'interrogative points' functioning as 'an extension of radical hardline academic rigour' through passionate irony.

[471] Foster, 1996, 23.

[472] Le Couteur, 2018.

[473] Eg. The Ship of Theseus.

[474] Gomm, 2009, 299.

[475] *Research doubt* that we should be proceeding with other points of reference, other labels, other means, threatens crippling anxiety: the paralysis of praxis (Candlin, 2008).

[476] Stimson, 1999, xlv.

[477] Maharaj, 2009, 10.

[478] Maharaj, 2009, 1.

[479] Maharaj, 2009, 9.

[480] Halberstam, 2013, 8.

[481] Caillois, 2003, 85.

[482] Nick Land's Lovecraftian taboos of naming and the horror of knowledge, make sense, of a kind. Will we – like so many cultures –once again use euphemistic slights-of-language to label those demons that are so uncannily agential, that even invoking them generates a terrible centre of cognitive gravity? Is our only escape from the strange looping topologies of dualism to stop up our ears, refuse to speak its name? Current debates around identity politics, which so often centre on forbidden labels, appear especially relevant here.

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Appendix A: A Collection of Fictive Museums

Selected Fictive Museums & Related Works

Abish, Cecile; Museum Reconstructed: Fogg (1980)

Affey, John Henry; The Transnational Whaling Museum /
       The John Affey Museum (1968–ongoing)

Amerika, Mark; Museum of Glitch Aesthetics (2012)

Bijl; Guillaume; Documenta Wax Museum (1992)

Blake, Peter; A Museum for Myself (1977)

Blanchly, J. & Shaw, L. The Temporary Museum of Vaseline in Perth Amboy (2010)

Bloom Barabara; Never Odd or Even (1992)

Blum, Michael; A Tribute to Safiye Behar (2005)

Bradford, Elaine; The Museum of Unnatural History (2009)

Brisley, Stuart et al.; The Museum of Ordure (2001–ongoing)

Boltanksi, Christian; Réserve Du Musée Des Enfants (1989)

Boltanksi, Christian; The Archive of the Carnegie International 1896-1991 (1991)

Broodthaers, Marcel; Musée de l'Art Moderne (1968–72)

Chapman, Stanley et al.; The Pataphysical Museum and Archive (2000–ongoing)

Charmatz, Boris; Musée de la danse (2015)

Clegg, David; The Imaginary Museum (2003–ongoing)

Cook, Greg; The Invisible Museum (2007)

Cornell, Joesph; Museum (series c. 1940–48)

Costa, Claudio; Museum of Man (1974)

Costa, Claudio; Ontologia Antologica (1994)

Daly, Norman; The Civilization of Llhuros (1972–2008)

Dellbrügge & De Moll, Museum Boutique (1991)

Dion, Mark; Tate Thames Dig (1999–2000)

Dion, Mark; The Museum of Poison (2000)

Dion, Mark & Williams, Robert; Theatrum Mundi: Armarium (2001)

Dion, Mark; The Marvellous Museum: Orphans, Curiosities and Treasures (2010)

Distel, Herbert; Museum of Drawers (1970–77)

Duchamp, Marcel; Boite-en-valise ('editions' of 300 unique boxes c. 1935–68)

Durham, Jimmie; On Loan from the Museum of the American Indian (1985)

Feireiss, Lukas et al.; The Institute of Imaginary Islands (2011–12)

Fraser, Andrea; Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk (1989)

Greenaway, Peter; The Physical Self (1991)

Häussler, Iris; The Legacy of Joseph Wagenbach (2006)

Hill, Peter; The Museum of Contemporary Ideas (1989)

Hiller, Susan; From the Freud Museum (1991–96)

Jarr, Alfredo; Museum (1991)

Kabakov, Ilya; Ten Characters: The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away (1985–88)

Kabakov, Ilya; Incident at the Museum, or Water Music (1992)

Kallnbach, Siglinde; The Museum of Ashes (1995)

Kosuth, Joseph; The Play of the Unmentionable (1990)

LaFarge, Antoinette; The Museum of Forgery (1990–ongoing)

Lattin, 'Dr' James; The Museum of Imaginative Knowledge (2013–ongoing)

Lyons, Beauvais; The Hokes Archives (1980–ongoing)

Malraux, André; Le Musée Imaginaire (1935–47)

Martin, Drew; The Museum of Peripheral Art (2012)

Miranda, Maria; The Museum of Rumour (2003)

O'Doherty, Brian et al.; Aspen 5+6 (1967)

Oldenburg, Claes; Mouse Museum / Ray Gun Wing (1965–77)

Pamuk, Orhan; The Museum of Innocence (2008–ongoing)

Ra'ad, Walid; The Atlas Group (1999–ongoing)

Readymades Belong to Everyone; Backstage (1994)

Salley, Neil; Le Musée Patamécanique (2007–ongoing)

Schelle, Susan; Musée (1994)

Scott, E. J.; Museum of Transology (2016–ongoing)

Silver, Sean; The Mind is a Collection (2015)

Simonds, Charles; Dwellings (1970–ongoing)

Shaw, Jeffrey; The Virtual Museum (1991)

Spoerri, Daniel; Musée Sentimental (1977–89)

Starr, Georgina; The Nine Collections of the Seventh Museum; The Collection (1994)

Szeeman, Harald; Museum of Obsessions (1974–2005)

Thurman, James; The McMuseum of Anthropological Archaeology (2009)

Tooby, Mike; Museum of Amazing Coincidences (2012)

Vallance, Jeffrey; The Travelling Nixon Museum (1991)

Van Der Pol, Bik; Fly Me to the Moon (2006)

Van Geluwe, Johan; The Museum of Museums (1975)

Aby Warburg; Mnemosyne Atlas (1927–1929)

Wilson, David & Diana; Museum of Jurassic Technology (1984–ongoing)

Wilson, Fred; Mining the Museum (1992)

Wilson, Fred; The Museum: Mixed Metaphors (1993)

Appendix B: Mary Beard Interview

'Hauser & Wirth: THE BRONZE AGE, c. 3500 BC - 2017 AD'
Professor Mary Beard in conversation with Clair Le Couteur
(edited from email correspondence, 5 October 2017)

Clair Le Couteur: 'Bronze Age' looks very much like a conceptual art piece in the tradition of institutional critique. How were you approached about participating in the project, and how do you see your role? Do you consider it to be a kind of collaborative artwork?

Mary Beard: I bumped into Neil Wenman by chance at JFK Airport, and he explained the project to me… I saw it as an opportunity to show some love to underfunded regional museums, but also to raise some questions about regimes of display. I was intrigued and interested. Many years ago, with a friend, I had done a small show in the Ashmolean, 'The Curator's Egg', which explored some of the same issues – for example, we put cheap fakes in some of the cases, and we put price tags on some objects – and raised questions about the conventions of the museum. This was a chance to explore those questions in different ways.

The installation deliberately references underfunded regional institutions, and part of your contribution is about raising money and interest for the participating museums. Great attention was paid to getting details right, a kind of 'material poetics' of the minor museum. It has been received very differently by different reviewers. Some have seen the piece as merely an ironic joke, and it is certainly playful, while the very anti-Frieze Guardian *angrily dismissed it as 'meaningless,' saying 'cramming all of these modern artists into a deliberately archaic museum wrecks their individuality.' Both the museum and the art fair have very similar powers to re-contextualise the things they bring together. Was there a sense you were making a more serious, provocative point? How do you feel about the tone of the work?*

It was a humorous and playful celebration of underfunded museums. I was not responsible for the details of the display, but I thought that that they got the tone just right. I was very concerned that this should be a supportive play with the conventions of regional museums, that it should not just point the finger of satire at them. And I felt it was. I watched people going into the booth and smiling in recognition. I have to say that there are few jokes that are 'merely' ironic. It was ironic of course, but was making a serious point about the very nature of display. How we show things makes an obvious difference to how we

see them. It was funny that Jonathan Jones made the point but didn't realise that he had!

In your short recordings, you moonlight as something between an archaeologist and an art historian. Each uses the object in question to make a more general point, whether it's the very different associations we make with something when it is 'turned upside down,' the great difficulty in dating bronze, or how we think differently when we know what an object is used for. The recordings function a little like museums labels in this respect. How scripted were these interviews? Did you feel you were performing a part, or were you involved in the writing, the decisions about which points to make?

They were not scripted at all. We discussed the pieces a bit beforehand, and had fun thinking about what points they raised, to make sure that I didn't say the same thing about each one. But apart from that there was no script, it was entirely improvised. And in most cases, except where I went on too long, it was just 'one take.' I was playing myself, and was talking as I would to my students.

In stating the difficulty of dating bronze and the power of context to radically redefine something, it seems like a more general, unstated argument is being made. Associating these points together with the setting, the labels and the objects on display, the installation begins to work as a gestalt, to make a kind of space. Do you have a sense of a 'central point' the installation might be making? Is this something that can be expressed in verbal language, or something beyond it?

Not sure on this one. Mine were pretty interrogative points.

The interrogative points you raise could well be used to argue for a nihilist, relativist 'anything-goes' approach to things as unknowable. It seems instead you are advocating something very different, a sensitive attention to detail, context and ambiguity. Could you describe how your commitment to knowledge and scholarship informed this project?

Well, that is hard, but you might say that it is an extension of radical hardline academic rigour.

There is a common misconception that irony signals a lack of seriousness, of passionate commitment. Or equally that humour can't be used to make important observations in a gentle way, that it must be an act of aggression to be considered critique. Could you talk more about the value of irony and 'supportive play' in the context of critical thinking?

You seem to have it exactly. Humour and irony have always been important vehicles for hard thinking!

Many of the interrogative issues you raise about context, perspective, and categories are not just old, but ancient; Odysseus and the winnowing oar, for example, or the paradox of the Ship of Theseus. Are these issues timeless, or do you see them having a particular relevance today?

Well, they get differently configured, but many of the basic issues are the same. How you look and what you see depends on where you stand and what else is in your field of vision.

The display places artworks side by side with both ceremonial and functional pieces. Do you see the issues raised here primarily in the context of art, or in culture more generally?

What was in the top of my mind was the context of display, but you could certainly widen the frame.

Fictive and self-aware museum displays are becoming increasingly familiar to audiences. For contemporary art, in its endless desire for novelty, this is seen as a negative, removing the element of surprise and innovation. Is an interrogation of display conventions ever something that is in danger of being conventional?

Well, anything risks becoming conventional if it is done conventionally. I think that most people actually are not familiar with fictive museum displays. The reaction to the Bronze Age booth suggests that it had the capacity to make people think.

Appendix C: Antoinette LaFarge Interview

On the Fictive:
Antoinette LaFarge in conversation with Clair Le Couteur,
(edited from Skype recording, 10 October 2017)

Antoinette LaFarge: I'm a big fan of online communication, I have been for decades.

Clair Le Couteur: I just hope the signal is kind to us. At least we've now seen each other, I think that does change the kind of conversation you can have.

I come from the '90s. We spent a lot of time in places like MOOs and MUDs. There would be people I would know for years before I met them in real life. So, it does change the conversation, but I don't find it as necessary as some people do.

I was also a very early adopter of computer stuff, so I remember actually floppy 'floppy disks', messing around with my Dad programming DOS, stuff like that.

We can always follow up with clarifications later, I'm always more comfortable as a writer than a speaker.

You're still at UC Irvine, is that right?

Yes.

One of the things I wanted to ask you is how much you know Wolfgang Iser's work. I don't know if you were there when he taught at Irvine?

He was, and I never met him. I didn't get interested enough in what he was talking about until he had died. I missed him by like a year. But I have been leaning on him quite heavily for my book, yes.

The thing about his writing for me, and I must say I wish I'd read more of it… I've read a small number of words but in some detail, because I started off in the literary department, so 'close reading' is something I can't not do. But I find him to be the best in the sense that he's actually a writer: he can write, and he's good to read. It's moving, even when he's talking about the most abstract things, you know, writing about language can go very wrong.

Two people I'm working with heavily are him and Nelson Goodman, and I find Iser generally an easier read than Goodman, but they're both very important to the way I'm thinking about this subject. Goodman's book on 'ways of worldmaking.' Do you know it?

I know it, and it's another one I haven't… Partly because I'm practice based, and partly because I'm trying to cover much too much for a PhD, I think I have a very – how to describe it? – roll the dice, open a page, bibliomancy approach to theory.

[Laughs] You know, you sound the way… you research the way artists do. Artists as a rule aren't systematic researchers. I like that, I'll now describe what we do as bibliomancy, that's very nice.

I feel kind of weirdly, superstitiously strongly about it, to be honest. It does work. So, tell me: the specific choice of word. I mean it crops up in earlier writing, but you seem to be using it in a way that's different from Iser, and different from most other people that I'm reading. And actually, more similar to the way that it's used in anthropology?

Which word are we talking about?

Fictive.

Ah. Um.

I'm hoping you're still using that word!

No, it's interesting: I'm actually working with the term 'fictive art,' and so… How am I using the word fictive specifically? I haven't actually attacked the word separately from the term, only various aspects of how it pertains to the term.

I'm kind of against definition, in a technical sense. I'm very happy for you to talk about it in as vague terms as you like, without needing to be held to them.

Talking about the word fictive specifically, I guess I'm interested in mostly how it operates as an element within the term. So, I look at this aspect, from the Iser point of view, as things that aren't made up out of whole cloth, the selection and assembly of new elements from old, and how that operates within the kind of work that I call fictive art. I'm looking at it from a kind of as-if speculative fiction development, as a form of speculation. Something that is not – and again this is Iser – something that is put in opposition to the True or Real, but rather a way of working with materials that are both true and real. I'm almost trying to drain

the fiction out of fictive, because I think the term itself is so problematic. it's always being put in opposition with things I don't think it's truly in opposition to.

The as-if, Iser is borrowing that from Vaihinger, right? A German philosopher from the early twentieth century. And both Vaihinger and Iser are using it as something which is active in the world. Not some kind of abstract unreal thing, but something that is a kind of intervention.

The idea that we are always engaged in a making-real, a world activity through physical and material engagement. I don't know enough about Vaihinger to know who he's leaning on, but in this specific area, Hegel is also someone I'm looking at.

The idea that these are new or, perish the thought, postmodern concerns is totally wrong. They're active questions in the entire history of literature for as far as we can find it, two thousand, three thousand years back. I mean obviously Hegel's important, but you can find a lot of similar material in the Greek philosophers, but not the most popular ones! Heraclitus was also talking about that…

There's a kind of neo-Platonic move going on, in the attempt to make the idea real or connect indissolubly the idea and the thing in the world, in so far as the idea is also the carrier of the Spirit. Neo-Platonists as a group are far more mystically oriented than the Platonists, they amped up the mysticism that's inherent in it. I actually have not found postmodern theorists for the most part very useful in this project, partly because while fictive art is a matter of fragments or modularity, but it's this attempt to assemble a whole that interests me, rather than this idea that we are all trapped within an ever-fragmenting systematisation of the world.

I completely agree with you, and I think in a way the fragment is bound up with the Romantics, Schelling-type stuff, for better or worse, that's the first time it enters theory. But I think this idea of modularity works better for me than the fragment, in the sense a module has to work in and of itself, but is always connected with a larger system. So that whole binary between whole and fragment doesn't work, it doesn't operate like that.

No, it's not like a collage or any of those things where we're thinking about fragments assembling. For me modularity is an extremely important aspect of the fictive art projects I'm interested in, partly because I see fictive art as a deeply generative way of working. With analogies to other generative processes, such that you have this operative fiction or idea at the centre of it, which churns out; the project grows out of the idea. And it assembles in pieces, so that each section tends to lead to the assembly of more bits, and they all can

be plugged in. In fact, they can't be part of the project unless they can be plugged in. But I've never seen a really interesting fictive art project that essentially was whole cloth, in the way a painting starts out. A painting can be built up, but it starts out as a whole that isn't the interesting thing about the way fictive art projects develop. So, I'm interested in the psychology of how they are made by artists, more than any kind of taxonomy that you can construct from them. It's a different way of working than you seen in a lot of art.

This idea of the generative… and I guess also the emergent also figures with that. That you once you have a certain number of modules operating together, they produce between or around themselves – among, I like the word among very much – amongst themselves, something else starts to happen. Certainly, for me, because I work as a research artist. So, it's kind of weird doing research, because my art is research, so I guess it means that my research is art, which then becomes another kind of research, or something… The thing that I'm interested in is the idea of the heuristic, but the fictive heuristic, where the project starts looking for things on its own terms, almost in spite of you. In terms of a psychology, that's why I like it. It speaks back to you, in some way.

I hadn't thought about that, that for the artist it begins to operate as a kind of heuristic. I had thought about it in terms of almost the negative of that, a kind of internal censorship that the artist has to operate on themselves within the terms of the project, so that what develops can stay within the terms of the project. So there's a rule system that operates. A heuristic is something that operates to solve problems, to get you out into a set of solutions, but there's another sense in which the constraints are at least as important.

With Iser, he does still seem to be… he uses the word fictive alongside, as a companion term of the imaginary. Which seems for him to be a kind of internal, mental, dreamlike, fantastic process, whereas the fictive is more of an agential, out in the world process. He talks about them together a lot, but that binary distinction doesn't work for me, as somebody who's into the cognitive. I have difficulty with the idea of 'interiors,' or the disembodied. I'm sure you're more familiar with his work, and I don't know if you get that sense from him?

More familiar, I doubt that's true. I have had trouble with how the word imaginary operates, because I also have trouble with the distinction he wants to make between the fictive and the imaginary. I've come to a similar conclusion in that he sees the fictive as the actualisation of the imaginal. But how he separates the imaginal from other kinds of ideas, all of which he understands as actual, is very difficult for me to parse out. And I tend to think that the pragmatic way in which he's trying to locate the way in which we process culture, the way in which we process the ideas… it's almost like there are ideas,

there's our processing them by creating pieces of art, and then our way of operationalising them into various forms like genres. That distinction: I haven't really dealt with it, and I haven't been able to find it useful in my work to talk about the imaginary. I'm much more interested in the fictive's relationship to the actual. Things we make up in our heads are almost a given, I don't have a lot more to say about it.

And I guess it's also very very difficult for me to… if you're trying to approach things in a radical, meaning 'first principles' type way, then as you said, making the distinction between imagination and perception is really not that easy. Making the distinction between different kinds of mental events, between formal knowledge, between concepts… Really drawing those lines in terms of these words that we have – which are just contingent, historical accumulations of meaning, multi-lingual tracks, baskets we've got – that actually in terms of how the brain, how the mind, how the cognitive system is working, they don't seem to represent anything very well.

A problem of all words, no? It's a problem of language; we're stuck with them, and their baggage.

But at least when we're talking about a hammer: it has a handle and a head, we look at those and they're named after things that we can touch and see. Whereas with the brain we haven't had that access before, so we don't tend to talk about it in terms of tangible units.

I wanted to ask: I'm very focused on this one particular area of fictive art, which shades into institutional critique, about the museum. I wonder if you're looking at any of those as a case study?

I'm looking at a lot of case studies, maybe sixty, but I've collected them in different groups of practice. I know that Peter Hill and also Carrie Lambert-Beatty talk about institutional critique. I'm writing something closer to a general interest survey, or an introduction to a subject. But yes, since I have a fictive museum of my own, it's of great interest to me. I'm rolling most of that under a general idea of 'Institutional Facades,' because I'm particularly interested in two things. First, the facade aspect of these pop-up institutions, and second the facade as a way for individuals to assume authority. I like the institutional critique aspect of some of the projects I'm looking at. I think that assuming authority is obviously a very practical way to produce critique as satire.

For me, it's not a word that I have been using, but it makes very good sense to me. I'm quite interested in the idea of the mask, the institutional mask, and I think that facade captures that even better, because it's less bodily, less personal, and more architectural.

One of the reasons I moved in that direction is that it seems to me one of the things Internet did was produce a very large number of institutional facades in a very short amount of time. There are so many of these online, and there are certain affordances you gain from that. It seemed to me that it made fictive art not just easier to produce, but easier to achieve the reality effects. There's a series of constraints that operate in physical space; you have to work in a very different manner to produce the reality effect and the authority effect.

Something that isn't discussed in the art world as much as it perhaps should be is budget. We like to pretend that these things just appear or everyone gets the funding they need. Material investment is an enormous part of it. The thing about mail art, which is one of the places it started – or as we might call it over here 'post art' – is that it's similar; on the internet you can spoof sites, and just as with postal fraud, people do for nefarious purposes. The difference between a hoax and the real thing on the internet is maybe only in the domain name, or maybe it's in the amount of typos, or something. But that material investment that you would need to spoof a place in real life is very different.

I'm extremely aware of the economic realities of the art world for many different reasons, in terms of my own history, the kind of the work I've been doing, and some of the ways I think about our culture. I think it's actually incredibly true that the economics of art are under-discussed. Particularly in our current *1% take all* art world.

And if the economics are discussed, they're discussed in a kind of pseudo-critique of the million-pound scale, they're not really discussed in terms of casting in bronze and casting in another material because it's several thousand pounds, which is a huge amount to most people, but in terms of the art world that's seen as a relatively insignificant sum, as ridiculous as that is. I don't know if you've heard about Damien Hirst's current installation at Venice? But he has made an installation called The Wreck of the Unbelievable, *which is a kind of fictive museum, or at least a fictive art project. He claimed to have lifted up a bunch of artefacts from a wrecked ex-slave's ship, to have brought up these incredible sculptures from the bottom of the ocean. So, there's videos of divers down there, finding these sculptures covered in coral. And it is on a scale where lavish doesn't even cover it; the multi-million-dollar level. You really know that fictive art's hit the mainstream when it's worth a hundred million, right?*

He's such a great thief of ideas, I guess it was inevitable he would eventually steal this one! I don't know if I've ever seen an original idea come out of him, you can easily figure out what he's stealing. But the question of the hoax is a very interesting one. A lot of the terms that are used around fictive art are

intended to dismiss it, and create a way to make it ethically unsustainable, or morally beyond the pale. And I find that very interesting. I don't think that all fictive artists are trying to be transgressive. A lot of them don't act or speak the way radically transgressive artists do, but their work ends up being among the most transgressive out there. I feel that that's shown not by what's said about it, but the way people react to it; an almost universal reaction is to push it away.

Or to align it with culturally demeaned areas: that it's childish, or that it is intentionally misleading, with a kind of malign purpose, or that it's not serious…

…it's not serious, or that it's crossing the kind of boundaries that are now very much contested: people taking on identities of others they have no right to, and of course the issue of forgery and impersonation.

And I think that comes down to one of the things that Lambert-Beatty discusses in her parafictions piece of a few years ago. She's talking about Michael Blum's A Tribute to Safiye Behar (2005) in Istanbul. Actually, a lot of roads lead to Istanbul in this kind of work, somehow. I guess maybe because it's that East-West borderline place, I dunno, it's a personal theory… But the thing about Blum's piece is that it was critiqued both for being unrealistic, and – by another group of critics – as boring because they don't understand it's a fiction. So, they think it's pedestrian, whereas the other group who realise – or who have been told – think that it's unconvincing: you can't have it both ways, I don't think.

No, and that brings up another question that has been of great interest to me; the question of the degree to which fictive art is self-outing, which is something that Iser talks about also, that the fictive is always to some degree self-revelatory. Threading the needle of outing the self without outing the self is an incredibly operational aspect of fictive art.

The thing that I'm interested in about it is the implicit. The fact that you can say something to the careful reader that you're not saying explicitly to the casual reader. That it fractures the audience; you can't pretend that there's one audience, that everybody thinks the same.

It's an inferential art form rather than a denotative art form, so that inferential gap: you don't know how big it's ever going to be.

And in a way that seems to be one of the crucial operative concerns of it, that the inferential gap is in a way one of the things that's being investigated.

So, my turn for a question. I've read a good deal in previous years about impersonation in various forms. Avatars and impersonation are a very strong

interest for me, I have an article on impersonation as a form of improvisation that came out a couple of years ago. But since you're actually living some of the cultural madness around who you get to present as, under what circumstances in your culture, I'm wondering if you have a particular thoughts about how impersonation operates within many of these fictive art projects, especially the ones where people play roles in their own works.

I would say that impersonation does come up, but impersonation kind of gives the impression that there is another real form that you are impersonating. And I think for me, a lot of the fictive stuff that I'm interested in, particularly stuff that has a kind of 'passionate irony' – I keep re-reading the way that Donna Haraway discusses irony at the beginning of her 'Cyborg Manifesto' as a kind of heresy. That you actually have to care about something you're being heretical about, it's not just pastiche. I think there's a relationship with drag and there's a relationship with trans there for sure; a kind of I need to pretend to be something else to be myself or to express something. There's this weird thing about drag; I think it's Butler writing about drag as a kind of doubled form, because by putting on a different appearance, you see something about me that you can't see from what you consider to be my natural appearance. So, there's this kind of flipping that goes on with drag. I think there's a relationship with queering the institution in that sense, that it is unsettling and it does mess with people's reality boundaries. And the kind of dismissive responses that you were talking about, are about it being kind of superficial, or untrustworthy, and these are the kind of cultural responses to queer and trans identities more generally. A friend of mine who's a kind of mentor, a sort of academic fairy godmother, put the question to me after I'd come out very delicately: Do you think that this has anything to do with your interest in that field? And the more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that it does. Not in a kind of derivative way, but I think there is a genuine link. What it really pushes against is binaries and dualism. When you're talking about taking fictive away from a dualistic relationship with fact, and putting it in another space, where it's actually discussing the ways that performance and belief systems and material contingency and all of this kind of thing combine, I think that that's really relevant for trans identities. And this idea about co-opting the institution, the institutions of normality or authority, I think are also extremely valuable for feminist concerns, for queer concerns, for decolonial concerns, particularly.

This links back to what you were saying earlier about masks; masks are of equal interest to me, particularly because of traditions in the *commedia* that the mask is a revelatory device rather than a concealing device. This is not how most people understand it, but it's absolutely critical if you're going to talk about masks in a meaningful way. This is what I've discovered through avatarism; my avatarism in the '90s was the revelatory experience.

Building on that, what comes to my mind is the way that Julia Kristeva is discussing the intertext, and her interest in Bakhtin's term carnivalism, this idea of turning things on their heads, and the mask being something that actually reveals what's happening beneath the surface rather than obscuring it. And again, these ideas we're talking about were obvious to ancient thinkers, these are by no means new theoretical concerns, again, though they might be little known. Anyone who thinks that a mask is covering up, rather than revealing something, has never worn a mask.

Or never worn the right mask. It's often a matter of the right mask, if you want to create that psychic explosion.

And I think this is one of the reasons fictive art is simultaneously vulnerable to being disrespected, but also so powerful with audiences, though often not with art world audiences – with professional audiences, who feel very uncomfortable about it because they can't laugh with the jokes, or because they don't know how seriously to take it – but with more general audiences of people who might come in off the street. I think it is a powerful way of approaching things.

I think it's at the centre of fictive art, concealing and revealing always as a double move. An intentional double move that the audience can't avoid; there's a pretence of authenticity which is a performance of authenticity, but which is more explicit than the performance of authenticity we ask of artists. The performance of authenticity is part of the unspoken artistic *milieu* for the last century, since we started to have cyclical avant-gardes. Especially since art got connected to the idea of the pseudo-event and the stunt; the things you do to generate the publicity that generates the career.

And also the idea of the pose, and the signature. The problem is these things are so fraught with economics and politics. This relates to one problem I have with institutional critique, that it tends to be a critique of the art world. There's a sort of tail-chasing ouroboros recursiveness with this; what they're critiquing is the art museum, and then it's in an art museum. It just goes round and round, whereas I think that fictive art is, like Lambert-Beatty's talking about, a parafiction, in the sense that it's out in the world, it's not in the quarantine, it's not in the clinic, it's not behind closed doors, it is out in the mess of reality.

It hasn't been separated into the sacred space. That's a very important point. My interest in institutional critique dropped off very quickly when I realised that I didn't know of a single institutional critique artist who wasn't trying to get into the museums through the back door. I'm very antithetical to that, my whole ethos, my practice, my social views are all completely antithetical to the current system. I happen to be inside as a teacher, as a way of making a living, but I am

more than a little conflicted about the idea that I am producing artists, most of whom want to go into the gallery patronage system.

And if that works, and they do that, there are much worse systems. But I agree with you. I'm also by vocation an educator, in that I absolutely love running workshops and I love talking to people. I've recently been running workshops on trans theory and the question of dualism, and it's so so interesting running workshops for students – and these are postgraduate students – because you can introduce things in a very accessible way, using trans as an example of where the cracks in reality are. And as soon as you get near them, things start getting weird. Public discourse gets uncomfortable and aggressive and hypersexualised and institutionally repressive and people start saying the maddest, maddest things, ostensibly sensible commentators start putting together completely insane sentences. And it's because reality flickers there.

But speaking about being an educator, I was recently reading Peter Hill talking about The Glass Bead Game *by Herman Hesse, have you read that? I think a lot of those concerns about what it is to be institutionalised, and what your position is as a teacher, and so on, really resonate with a lot of people from that book. Written in the '30s, popular in the '60s in translations, maybe time for it to come back again. Peter Hill of course did the PhD by practice in Australia in 2000 on what he called superfictions, and produced a website as part of that. I think it's important to recognise his pin in the map there.*

He was ahead of the curve on this, in terms of defining the field that we're both interested in, but situates it closer to a whole set of practices like Fluxus and Situationism, which are discussed a lot but I'm not so interested in.

And of course, what we talk about when we talk about Fluxus and Situationism, in the same way as when we talk about Dada, what we're talking about now is an institutional canonised category, which has nothing to do with what people were actually doing. The way that people write about that kind of thing, and the way that it's been co-opted by the institution, is radically against what they were trying to do, and ignores the characters of the people involved, who were often very socially different, who absolutely hated the gallery system, and died young, and perhaps wouldn't like their work in a glass box.

And it's not an incidental aspect of fictive art that so much of it is essentially uncollectable. Relics can be collected and treated as relics, but essentially what you're left with is documentation. Is it a time-based medium? I actually don't think it fits into any of the easy categories that we have, it's a trans-genre practice.

I think that it's very much like conceptual art could have been, or was at one point, in terms of documentation and a kind of anti-institutional aesthetic. A lot of the early conceptual art stuff was very very ironic, and people tend to re-present it as though it's this kind of po-faced pseudo-philosophical concern, and a lot of it's not like that. If you really look at it fresh, a lot of it is a big fuck you, as well as being a serious investigation.

You're into this term passionate irony, which I think is great, and I think it's important the point Haraway makes because it helps position the cheaper forms of irony that dominate the art world. But I would also make an argument for passionate pastiche, rather than saying something is 'just pastiche.' There are different aspects of pastiche that are honoured in fictive art.

For me, I tend to think of that as drag. But again, pastiche is one of those things that because we're so obsessed with novelty, the cult of the original, the cult of the signature, pastiche is not something that we can handle very easily at the moment. You know, Tristram Shandy *is pastiche…*

Don't you love that book. One of the first books I fell in love with, long ago.

And there's a big link materially between Tristram Shandy *and Orhan Pamuk's* Museum of Innocence, *have you been?*

No, I haven't been there, I've only read about it.

Well, if you go, call me and I'll meet you in Istanbul. But there's a black page in Tristram Shandy…

The famous black page.

And we're talking… this is the earliest novel on record, this isn't 1980. So, there's a black page in Tristram Shandy, *and there's a ticket in Orhan Pamuk's* Museum of Innocence, *which in 2008 when it came out, looked like a* Tristram Shandy *gesture… but you can get it stamped and go into the museum now. I don't know if you've read the book? It's, it's horrifying. And I haven't read any critiques about it that really read it; it's Pamuk's* Lolita. *If you're in the mood for a very self-aware, and very destabilising investigation of misogyny from the inside, and how that relates to culture, that's what it's doing.*

I will say that I'm a contrarian at heart, I've noticed this since I was very little. When I hear things, dogmas, I tend to go to the opposite pole. One of the first things I was interested in was forgery for that reason, the last taboo. And so, I'm

very interested in the many ways in which fictive art serves a contrarian impulse within the art world. It's not just one thing; it's so many ways.

I'm also very interested in reading the writing and thinking of the Sufi thinkers, and that idea of contrarianism has a lot to do with particular mystical techniques for the Sufis, or rather practical – mystical is the wrong word – practical, social techniques of literally doing the opposite of what you are supposed to do. But performing such a perfect opposite position, that it reveals the ridiculousness of the opposition.

I know the tradition you're talking about. I'm very attracted to that. The Sufi parables particularly.

Yes, the Nasruddin stories. And I wonder if that contrarianism is also about a kind of practical critique, a praxis of anti-dualism.

Yes, because it isn't just about doing the opposite, but asserting the opposite in a way that makes clear the enormous excluded middle.

Asserting such a precise opposite that it reveals the extreme… it's very difficult to describe other than diagrammatically. For some reason that's making me come back to the thing that I'm really trying to write about and propose in my research, which is about space. About cognitive space, by which I'm not meaning mental space or imaginary space, but a kind of dimensional space which is really created between, or created among things, but requires the mind, requires the embodied mind to work. And the diagrammatic I think, when we're talking about modularity, and things operating together to produce something else, and it requiring different sorts of audiences as a plurality, and all this kind of thing. Somehow, I'm trying to formulate, in terms of a theoretical contribution, I'm trying to discuss things in those kinds of terms. And I wondered if you'd been drawn to the idea of making space, at all? Or to the diagrammatic?

I was going to ask about what the central thesis of your approach was, and so it sounds like we finally hit that. You're interested in fictive art as stemming from and producing particular cognitive spaces? And why is the diagrammatic so important to this? That's the part I want you to elaborate on.

OK, there's a wonderful image that C. S. Peirce talks about in 'Signs and their Objects', which I learned about through a wonderful new media artist and theorist called Anna Munster, who has a book out with MIT, which is called An Aesthesia of Networks. *Peirce's image is of a map of an island, on that island. And once you've put the map on the island – maybe it's been blown there by the wind – there's a point of correspondence somewhere on that map which links the map to exactly where it is on the island, you can put a pin through the map at that point to touch*

the same spot on the island. So they produce a kind of diagram together, but not an abstract diagram. There's something material going on there, it requires physical space and time to do its diagramming, it's not in an abstract space. It's more I can't think of a better word than diagrammatic to describe a cognitive, sculptural interaction between elements, between place and things, which for me in my work – at least in my experience of it – make a kind of tangibly spatial relation between things. I think these are things which are easier to diagram than they are to say. Which is one of the reasons I love conceptual art; that you can show something by doing it, in a way that it's very difficult to describe without falling into the problems of language. So that's why I'm interested in the diagrammatic, and also why I'm interested in montage. Not montage in terms of the History of Art, but the still radical thing of putting one thing next to another and it changing them.

The gaps, yes. I haven't thought about it from this angle at all. It sounds like it might be loosely related to the question of the degree to which a fictive art project is essentially a system, or a machine for generating certain kinds of products.

I would also say for generating knowledge and thought.

Before it's anything else, it's a system, and therefore it's diagrammable. And some of them, the things that produce taxonomies, are the project that make it most explicit; some of the speculative science projects are very overtly concerned with taxonomies. But diagrammatic is not a word that had really crossed my threshold.

I'm interested in modelling, but model has such an overblown, overdetermined sense in terms of sculpture, it's a very very heavy word.

I've thought of similar terms like prototype as well, but it's never a prototype *for* anything.

The thing about modelling for me, is that if you use it in a mathematical way – and I love mathematics from a distance, I know nothing about it really, I'm a kind of literal amateur, in the sense that I really feel passionately about how great it is, but not from anywhere near it – but modelling in that sense is something that you use to help you think about another system. You're not pretending that the model is the thing, but there are particular relationships within the model, that 'model' relationships of the thing that you're thinking about. But because the word model is so overdetermined in a sculptural context, that's one of the reasons I like diagrammatic more. But model is better in the sense that a model is generative, in the sense that a diagram is not usually considered generative.

And I may even have used the word model somewhere because it ties back to this idea of worldmaking. That all the worlds are temporary, fugitive, possible, equally actual worlds, so that each time you construct a world it's a model for all the others that don't exist or that you haven't thought of yet. With each thing, particularly with fictive art projects, is this very interesting question of them being open ended; they could always be scaled up. The only other place you really see that in art is with something that is specifically self-announcing as a series, like Monet's Haystacks, or Cathedrals, clearly there could have been infinitely more cathedrals. But it's really not common; art is very much about closing things off, finishing them, declaring them done and perfecting them.

Well, it's about framing. And I think what we're told about, again, the way things are presented by the institution to us, aestheticizes and quarantines and frames them. So, a lot of performance art, a lot of body art, and again a lot of material related to Fluxus, Situationism, and many other things including Surrealism, were very very open-ended, but the way that we consider them isn't.

We institutionalise them to be fixed. That has not been the dominant discourse, so even though they're all doing that, my students still come in thinking you're supposed to finish an artwork and make it right.

And I guess that's why the blog and now Twitter is such a perfect medium for me, as I can put something on there and it doesn't have those kind of concrete boots, you're not expected to chain it up and drop it in the sea, it's still sort of live.

This is one reason that I like the web also, but I've been on it long enough that I'm now somewhat burdened by the fact that websites are never finished, they're only abandoned.

Absolutely right.

There can be a psychic unease to that as well.

And also this radical contingency of the web which is that you just don't know when it's all going to disappear, right? You know, there's every chance that 20,000 years from now, this conversation might be listenable, and then there's every chance that 20 minutes from now, it might all be lost forever. It's very much live in that sense too, I think, the Internet. Or rather, it brings to the fore the reality of archiving.

And that brings us back to the fact that a lot of fictive art projects end up being engines for producing documentation. Often when they're even shown in museum type spaces, what you're looking at is documentation of something that happened outside the view of the viewer, who is not privy to the real and the

actual. This whole idea of the fake is doubled, because you're withholding from them the heart of the fictive art project. And I think that viewers sense this, that's part of the resistance; *I'm not getting the full experience.*

The qualification that I'd want to add for that, is that there is no heart of it. I'm… obsessed is not too strong a word, with donut shapes, donut shaped things, and the heart of the project is a centre of gravity, you know, it is an imaginary point about which things turn, it is not a point that's ever occupied.

Correct.

And so, I think that that's also something that fictive art projects confront the viewer with, and say – implicitly perhaps – that you too can inhabit this position, but only if you do the cognitive work to build it.

I try not to use this word, but I probably have to come to terms with it; the word that I'm trying to avoid is rhizomatic because of the way it builds out. Often people think with the rhizomatic that there was a centre of production from which everything moved out. But this point at which you say everything revolves; it's almost as though that point changes every time the piece expands. The centre moves with the piece. The piece itself constantly transforms as it produces itself.

I completely agree with you, and that's one of the reasons I like 'centre of gravity,' because once you've bolted something onto the side, the centre of gravity moves. If you're spinning something around and you glom other stuff to it, it spins in a different way.

A similar term that has crossed my mind although I'm not actually using it in this draft is 'strange attractor'.

So, in terms of rhizomes, you mentioned the centre, the seed, which is of course absolutely un-rhizomatic. The whole idea being multiply-seeded or spored systems. But people do love to get the wrong idea of them, even people who write about them.

Rhizomatic: yes, technically, of course. I was thinking about how my students use the word; there is often an implication in their minds of a centre from which the rhizome spreads outward. This misunderstanding so common that I believe it is inflecting the definition, against itself.

Exactly, the revenge of the arboreal.

Nice. The trees are coming for us.

Very much like literal meaning figurative.

Yes, I am an inclusionist grammarian but the literal/figurative thing still gets my goat.

The only way I can handle that is by disbelieving in any distinction between literal and figurative at all, á la George Lakoff.

Yes. Like David Wilson's strategy for the Museum of Jurassic Technology. I wanted to ask you about Vaihinger. Have only glanced in passing for my book. Recommendation?

Vaihinger, an anecdote: So, a couple of years ago I went to LA, to see the Museum of Jurassic Technology. And Mr Wilson was very nice to me, and drove me somewhere in his car, and I asked about Vaihinger's 'as-if'.

He is a lovely man indeed.

And he said: Yes, I've got a copy of Vaihinger's Philosophy of As-If *on my nightstand, but I must admit I haven't made much progress with it, have you? And I said: No, me neither. And that's the extent of my knowledge on the subject.*

Hmm… well that makes three of us.

But thanks Vaihinger: as-if is a useful term to appropriate. Or, as we say in the fictive museum business, 'accession.'

Appendix D: Craig Sherwood Interview

Mystery Boxes and Interstitial Objects:
Curator Craig Sherwood in Conversation with Clair Le Couteur
(edited from audio recording, Warrington Museum, 14 September 2016)

Craig Sherwood: I'll have to apologise for my ramblings in advance.

Clair Le Couteur: No, ramblings are good… So, I wanted to ask you a couple of slightly weird technical things about de-accessioning and destroying objects, about how often you need to do that and how difficult it is. So, for example, I came across – in one of the accessions books – a note about some birds being destroyed. Presumably…

Is that in 1963?

It was in the 1960s, yes.

Quite a few were.

And was that because they were just old and tatty? Or was there another reason for that?

I can't speak for it directly, because it was ten years before I was born. And a long time before I moved here! But reading through the records it seems to be that there was a *major* review of the taxidermy collection at that point. And those specimens which were disposed of from 1960 to '63 largely were ones that were in poor condition, deteriorating. I don't have any more details than that unfortunately.

You had a whole Bird Room, that was changed into the Cabinet of Curiosities, which seems to be going really well.

Yes, it was birds and insects.

And so presumably a number of those birds are in storage now?

Yes, certainly a lot of the smaller passerine birds – the smaller perching birds – are in storage now, yes.

Do you anticipate that they just live, if you like, in the store? Indefinitely?

Anticipate, no; I'd like them to be used in some way. I think we will have to take another look at the bird specimens, because some of them are in a condition now where they are past the point where we could actually repair them.

And it's very expensive.

Indeed. Yes, it's expensive but also it involves very specialist taxidermy conservators. So, it may well be that we will find another use for them, maybe as display settings. We recently had an artist from Priestley College who reinterpreted one of our magpies by dressing it as Robin Hood. [3:00] The idea of magpie being a thief and Robin Hood robbing from the rich and giving to the poor… And so that's another possibility.

And where's that now?

Well, the artist has taken back the little hat and quiver and so forth that she made…

It's not living with the magpie?

No, oh no. We might approach her at some later date and see if we can get that back.

Well, what's she going to do with it otherwise?

…anyway.

And where's the magpie now?

The magpie has returned to its fellow birds in storage.

One of the things that I am interested in doing as part of the project… this being a completely – how to put it – jumpy, patchy survey of everything, from plug sockets to light-fittings and everything in between, almost at random really, just whatever turns up. And I'm really interested in including other artworks inside that, if you see what I mean. There are some other interesting things: your Canned Tuna is particularly…

Oh, it's one of my favourites. It's great to watch visitors walk past that and then stop, and then back up and take another look at it: 'there something… different about that one.'

'That one doesn't look like the others…' But of course, a lot of the other ones are models as well. I love it in many, many ways, because it begins to make the whole museum craft a bit more self-conscious.

Oh yes.

It adds another layer, instead of that kind of po-faced, 'No, this is all absolutely true, there's no illusion going on here,' kind of attitude. Which you do find in some museums, that kind of straight-faced thing, which I find a bit odd… Is it possible sometime in the next couple of weeks to visit the birds in the store, to see where they live?

Yes, no problem.

That would be really great, because it's one of the things that I'm missing, a picture of inside the off-site stores. I've looked in the Painting Store, in the…

The birds are actually stored on-site still.

Where?

The birds are in what used to be our Spirit Store, and that's a small antechamber which is off our social history Time Tunnel gallery. I don't know if you've had a look at that, the one with the fifties kitchen? They're just off that.

That's not one I've seen. [6:00] And that used to have all of the specimens in formaldehyde and stuff in it?

Not formaldehyde, formaldehyde is relatively…

…unpleasant…

…recent in terms of preservative material.

In alcohol.

Yes, industrial alcohol.

And do you still have those? But they're stored off-site?

We still have those; they're also stored on-site, but in a small building.

A highly flammable small building. Yes.

It's entirely safe.

I hope so. Can I see that too?

Yes.

I'd love to see that. Um, actually these little annexes… The wonderful thing about a building like this, that's been here for so long and evolved organically – as you say about the collection, sort of haphazardly and organically – is that it has these little strange…

…nooks and crannies…

…multi-functional nooks and crannies. The other thing that I wanted to ask you: I was looking through some of the museum committee reports, some of the earliest ones, which are very interesting. There's a gap, actually, of a few years which is a shame. They might just have been in another box. But I was looking through them, and they were talking – and this is, oh, about 1900 – about having some 45,000 specimens. Some sort of astonishing number of things. Presumably they're counting every single butterfly in that list.

Mmhmn.

But I wondered if you had an estimate about how many things you think the museum has?

Uhm, the best estimate…

I mean, it's a ridiculous question in a way.

I know, and it's actually a question we get asked a lot. And it's always one that's very difficult to answer because, as you say, what do you define as an object? If you have a cabinet containing, I don't know, five thousand butterflies – is that one object? Or is that five thousand and one objects: five thousand butterflies, and the cabinet itself?

Exactly, not to mention the handles and the labels and the pins.

Well, yes. You can get down to that level if you like, yes indeed. So, the best estimate that we have was carried out in 1998 as part of a project called The Collected Collections, which looks at museums across the North West. It examined what holdings they had in which areas; so, archaeology, Egyptology, yada yada… And at that point, the best guide that we had was the card index. I believe it was calculated from the card index of the time, and I think the total came to about 170,000. [9:00] Obviously a lot of time has passed since then, and we have re-estimated it at probably around about 200,000 now. And that's the figure that we cite. But as you have so rightly said, it is a ridiculous question; it's not one we can give a hundred percent accurate answer to.

In a way, it's not really asking how many things you've got, it's asking in a sense how many things you've accessioned; how many things are in the catalogue, rather than how many objects are in the museum. And even the things in the catalogue are sometimes like, you know, four plates.

In terms of the actual catalogue, we have around fifty thousand entries, but as you say some of those contain, say, ten thousand insects.

So, the catalogue: I heard that there was a bit of a kind of blackspot, institutionally, in terms of keeping records and cataloguing?

A specific blackspot?

Yes, some sort of lost years in the latter half of the Twentieth Century…

The 1950s. The documentation went a little bit South, I think it's probably fair to say, yes.

So, this is a post-war kind of situation.

I think so. I mean, I would probably extend that into the end of World War II, into the early '50s. And I think the curators really got a handle back on it in the 1960s. But yes, if anyone does enquire about anything that came in in the 1950s, we always have a little bit of a groan because that's the…

…that's the Dark Ages in terms of what you've got.

Yeah.

And it was interesting looking in the Accessions Safe, where all the accessions books are kept, because there are distinct – if you like – institutional epochs, in terms of the binding and the quality of the accessions books. Some of them being very beautifully printed and bound, in a set…

…others less so.

…others less so, yeah. Others more the Red & Black book from Smiths, written in biro. Presumably now, everything gets entered in Modes…. do you keep paper copies of that?

Well, as an accredited museum, we do follow the accreditation procedure as laid down by Collections Trust. And we do have an Accession Register, which has all the information in a similar way that it was recorded historically. I'd like to think a lot better than… certainly more than the 1950s. [12:00] And there'll also be the catalogue records. The Accession Register and the catalogue are distinct, so one doesn't supplant the other; they work in tandem.

So it's entered in ink?

Yes, in the register that will be entered in archival quality ink, and the registers are supplied by the Collections Trust…

…a standardised museum register…

…yes, who are the body that oversee the documentation for museums in the UK.

So, the thing I really wanted to talk about, getting a bit more abstract; you obviously come into this sort of job inheriting a certain arrangement of stuff.

Yes.

There is a kind of status quo.

Oh yes.

In terms of what goes in what box, what we display, why we display them, how we display them. And I wondered if you would talk a bit about how, during your time, that's shifted. How you found it when you came in, and which direction you've attempted to steer it. I mean it takes a long time to steer a big ship, right?

Just like turning a tanker. Well, certainly when I came here there was a big problem with the documentation backlog, specifically location control. The museum relocated its stores in the 1990s and – due to circumstances which I won't go into – it had to be done rather hurriedly. So there was a difficult actually locating things, which is fairly fundamental for a museum.

It's pretty important, yes.

So, a lot of my time, and latterly Hannah the collection assistant's time, have been spent trying to…

…trying to find things…

…trying to find things, trying to catalogue things, trying to improve the level of information that we have about things. And very often – we can work on cataloguing things to a higher quality, finding out more information – but very often there will be information that comes to us from a random direction. Members of the public will come in, [15:00] or – like yourself – you sent that information about that Aleutian seal gut hat. We didn't know that there was one in the British Museum, we didn't know that the BM had the parka. We didn't know that the BM had conserved the parka, and we're looking at our parka now and looking at the pictures of the BM's crumpled parka that they had in the stores, and saying, oh, that's an uncomfortable parallel, but we know it can be done.

It can be done, and we know that they have done it, and might know how. And might be able to help, also.

Absolutely, so that's great. So, as well as us as curators, working to look into the collections to improve our knowledge about it, we also have people very kindly giving information that we are collecting in, and we are adding to our records. And that can happen quite randomly and organically in itself.

To me, talking to different people with different collections, it does seem in a way that some of the most valuable information comes in the least systematic way. That actually you can spend a month looking at all the reference books, trying to find what something is, but actually how you usually find out is that it seems to happen as if by magic.

Yes, a very good example of that is the Peruvian collection. We had a phone call out of the blue from a production company who are working on a programme. It was called *CSI Mummies* at the time, I think they've toned down the title a little bit. And they were looking at a Peruvian mummy in the collection of the Bolton Museum, but they had found out the same donor had given some collections to Warrington. And we are, sort of: did he!? And we looked in the register, and we looked at the names, and it was all correct, and the timing was correct. And obviously we were able to facilitate a visit by the production crew. But we then looked into this donor ourselves, and found out he actually lived next door to the museum at one point, and that – we can make the supposition – is presumably why he donated all this Peruvian material when he moved to Peru. We found out he was the manager of a local textile mill, which is interesting because a lot of the Peruvian collection focuses on textiles…

…and of course they have incredible textiles there…

…indeed, so can reasonably suppose that that's why his interest was in that area.

Incredible. What's the name of this collector?

This is a Mr. Smithies.

Smithies – and there is something in the Ethnology Gallery which says 'maybe found by Smithies' I think. Is it a skull? A very strange wrapped skull. [18:00]

There's the skull, and there's – and I'm going to pronounce this completely incorrectly, I do apologise – *falsas cabezas*, which are the false heads that sit on the mummy packs. They're both from the Smithies collection. Unfortunately, because he was not an archaeologist – and we're talking about a period where archaeology was actually still being firmed up…

…well, it was pretty cowboy at that time.

His information as to where he found these artefacts unfortunately hasn't survived, which archeologically speaking is a little bit of a head-scratcher. But it's quite interesting that these artefacts have made their way to us, a relatively small museum in the North West. But again, up until we had that phone call from the production company who happened to speak to Bolton, he was just a name in a register. We'd had no details about him.

Just a sort of blank name, in a way. Just Mr. Smith, in a way.

Mr. Smithies, yes. And as a result of that, we were able to turn the information that we'd got… we got in touch with his descendants, his grandsons… We made a little exhibition. Our exhibition went on to win a national award, which was fantastic.

That is fantastic.

It's all just coming from one single phone call.

One of the things that I'm fascinated by about museum craft is how you have all of this data, *but you need to turn it into information, in some way. You need to turn it into a coherence, some sort of narrative.*

A story.

A story. And perhaps a story in the broadest sense. Maybe a kind of story that no-one's told before, that you can't tell in a different way. Like, what do teacups look like from different countries? That's not a normal story that you have in a book, often. There's that sense that you have a mine of raw material, this huge collection. Some of it from the nineteenth century, which means some of the most bizarre and unlikely priceless things. From this period of Victorian imperialism, basically, where we as a nation went all over the world and pinched or bought anything that we could find, and brought it all back to a small building in the north of England. Thousands of miles away from where it came from. And that's the interesting thing: even if you do know where somebody picked something up, that doesn't necessarily tell you where it came from, because there was an enormous trade in curios, all over the world.

Absolutely.

And where they were told that it came from may not… In the Feejee Mermaid case, for example, it's not from Fiji. Certainly not a mermaid. [21;00]

No.

So, I was wondering about that more free-wheeling, going into the stores and sort of wandering about… Do you have a programme? Do you do it by room and location, where this month we're attempting to find out what's on this shelf? Do you have the time for that?

Well, less time than we did, I'll be honest. Certainly, in terms of 'tackling the backlog' – which sounds a very prosaic thing – it's a case of opening up the boxes, seeing what's there, making sure you know the history and the story behind it, and trying to put it into some kind of context.

And then trying to enter that data into some kind of table. You can say, well, how do you work out what year this came from? We kind of know when we got it, most of the time. It might have a note about when the person picked it up. We think it looks a bit like this. At what point do you…? I've noticed something about your labelling, which is rare in other museums, and I really like, which is a kind of transparency about 'this is our best guess,' rather than, 'this is what it is, we've stamped it with this date.'

Well, I think that springs from the fact that we are, historically at least, a small municipal museum, rather than a museum that's attached to a university. Manchester Museum is attached to Manchester, the Ashmolean is… Even though we've got this very diverse collection, we don't have specialist curators of Egyptology or something. It's always a laugh to me when we have letters, often from abroad, who don't know how small we are, saying 'To the Curator of Egyptology'.

Yes…er, I suppose that's me!

It's a Wednesday, so… So, it would be difficult for us to speak with authority. And actually, maybe it's not always helpful for museums to speak with authority. I mean, historically, museums always did.

Well that was the point, in some sense; it was a kind of authoritarian project. We organise and catalogue The World. We know better about your culture than you do, kind of attitude. Which does persist. [24:00]

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. But because we're not in a position to do that, we don't really do that in our interpretations. At the moment, we've got the display by the young women of Warrington Youth Club.

That just opened, didn't it?

That just opened at the weekend. And they've taken objects from displays, but they've recorded their own responses to them, which very rarely has anything to do with the historical context of the object.

Right. Why would it?

But to my mind it is just as valid an interpretation as anything we can write about the history of the object. So, I think we like to try and play a little bit with interpretation. Not too much, but if we can find a different way of looking at things – or even admit we don't know and maybe ask some questions – then we can come back with some interesting responses.

It's in a sense about subjectivity. Not that every story is equally true or worthwhile, not relativity, but subjectivity in the sense where you say: we're not just 'the museum's voice', we're people who work here, and we think this, and we'd like to know what you think. And that has the possibility… You know, a lot of the revolution in the '90s about public engagement, and asking questions on labels, asking people what they think, is often done in a very patronising way. A tone I find in many larger museums, where they say 'What do you think?' meaning 'We don't care what you think.' But you actually genuinely do care, because you have to care what people think; visitors can give you information that you're missing. Rather than the approach of a major institution, which might be that visitors aren't going to possibly give us anything that we don't know already.

Well, an interesting case was: we had a marching banner for the Primrose League, and we loaned it to the People's History Museum for election year. The People's History Museum – being the People's History Museum – didn't have any Tory banners in their collection, as you can imagine! They knew that we had this one, but they asked for some more information about it. And, embarrassingly, it turns out we have *no* information about it. So, we put an advert out in the local paper, saying we've got this in our collection, *does anyone know anything about it*? [27:00] Can anyone help us with this? We got a little bit back, we have to hold our hands up and say we didn't have a lot, but I like to think that's a nice example of a little bit of museum engagement.

In a way, there's all of this engagement for engagement's sake: it's on the list, so we have to do 'engagement', how do we do engagement? And then there's what to my mind seems genuine engagement, where you say 'We really want to know about this thing and we're asking people; we put an advert in the paper because we need to know.' Not like, we're trying to draw people into the museum, let's make up a reason. There's a kind of genuine-ness about it, about that kind of engagement.

Yes, I like to think so.

That's very nice. I wondered also… Obviously, there's a whole complicated history about the separation of archives and library and museum, which were all at one-point kind of a family unit in one building.

If you look at the earliest donor books which, for the latter half of the 19th Century, were the accession registers, if you like, it'll have 'A Roman Coin Found at Stockton Heath' and then the next entry will be…

…fifteen volumes of Lord Lytton, or something…

…yeah, exactly. Or 'A Report on Cholera in England' or something like that. And these two things will be mixed; it only really separated in the 1870s, I think, off the top of my head. That's a guess. So historically, it was all one thing.

Books were objects amongst other objects, although there was a separation between museum and library. There was a library room, and there was a museum room.

In terms of physical space, yes, but conceptually not so much.

And then – I may be getting the administrative history completely wrong – the South Kensington museums, which had a huge collection of books, got separated into the British Library and the British Museum. And that started a big administrative fissure, which carried on through a succession – this is, again, off the top of my head, an oral history, if you like, of museums – then in the '60s and then again in the '90s, about what constitutes a museum and what constitutes a library. There's a kind of administrative crack, which continues to widen. And I wondered: the archives seem to sit between the library and the museum, in a way? Are they part of your collection? You presumably have some manuscripts in your collection? [30:00]

Yes, I mean it's even more confusing than that, in a sense, because the donor book – which is the museum's earliest accession register, if you like – is actually part of the archive collection! So historically, we'd actually have to go to the archive to see our earliest records. When we were two separate bodies, which was the most bizarre thing I've ever encountered.

And run by two separate councils, did I get that right?

At one point. I mean, obviously Warrington's been a unitary authority since the '90s, I'm afraid I don't know when, but yes, prior to that there was a division between Warrington and Cheshire, different floors of the same building. It's something that we're actually going full circle with now, with the Archives and Local Studies collection having come over from Livewire, who manage the libraries, to Culture Warrington. We're now back in the same organisation, and we are hoping to knock down some of the museum / archive barriers, in a way. In terms of researching the history of Warrington.

It does seem to make a lot of sense, doesn't it?

Indeed. The fact that you've got to go to one floor with one database to find one area, and then go out downstairs to another database to look at another; that beggars belief, in a sense. It's difficult, in terms of pulling those spaghetti strands apart, and then recombining them, in a way.

It is a small museum, in a sense. But it's small on the scale of museums, which is vast in terms of the amount of data and information and objects, the length of time, and the kind of administrative history. You know, no museum – or really very few museums – start with a blank slate. You inherit this enormous labyrinth of different systems, and eras of stuff. You've got different registers, and different cataloguing; you've got the broadsides, which Philip was telling me about, which are relatively unusual, and really lovely to handle. And then you've got the card index, still.

[33:00] *Is that archive or museum, who owns that? I guess you've got more than one card index.*

There's a card index for the museum collection; there's a card index for the archive and local studies collection, yes.

The other interesting thing for me is about backlog, accessions, and then these kind of 'shadow' objects, like interstitial things that just end up in the stores, lying about, and aren't necessarily… No one knows… Particularly, I guess, donations?

Well, no, I mean, donations… If something is definitively a donation it has entered the process, if you like. If something is a donation it's an offer, it's officially part of that…

…it's officially been accepted as a donation…

…not necessarily! One would like to think it has, if it's been lying around in the store for quite some time. Occasionally, there will be material that people just leave on the doorstep and run away.

Foundlings.

Yes! About once every couple of years, someone will do that with a collection of birds' eggs. Because obviously the law shifted; people are finding collections of birds' eggs…

…in attics…

…in attics, often when parents die, or they move, or whatever. And they don't know what to do with them, they're worried if they take them to the police they'll get arrested. So, the common thing is to just to leave them on a museum doorstep and run away. It's the museum's problem then! And of course, we don't collect birds' eggs; we have to get in touch with the police, and go through a whole procedure then about whether they are retained for educational purposes, or destroyed, or…

Because, I mean, they last very well; they're good specimens, and they are fascinating, beautiful, beautiful things. I guess it's just a question of how much space you've got and what you want to display.

Indeed, I mean space is always the thing. [36:00] I sound like Doctor Who here, but space and time are the two biggest factors in museums.

Space, time, and I guess resources, although putting up a display if you've got the cabinets is – as you say – about how much time you've got, and the space. But I came across a couple in the store. The on-site store, let alone the off-site store, which must be just full of… How many mystery boxes do you think that there are?   A lot fewer than there were! There are still a number of mystery boxes on the ground floor, but we are now moving more into an era of mystery drawers of geology, which are a little bit beyond our ken.

Right, I mean if you know, you know, and if you don't… it takes years of study to work out what rock is what.

Yes, thankfully most specimens look like they were reasonably well-labelled. In terms of needing to be able to go to a specific drawer to find a specific specimen, they're there, but… we don't really have a way into them, if you like. But yes, the off-site stores. You do get these… interstitial is probably a very good word for this kind of material. It's a situation I've encountered here that I've not encountered in other museums, that you do have a lot of material that has been kept perhaps to use as display material, some secondary material etc., that was never intended to be part of the permanent collection. Never intended to be accessioned, it's intended to be retained and used for a display. A good example is our '50s kitchen; the majority of stuff in there is interstitial material, it's been retained with the plan of sometime in the future doing a 1950s kitchen. But when you come into the collection, that material was never intended to be part of the collection.

It's not accessioned, and it's not going to be…

…but unless it's marked as such, when you're coming to the collection cataloguing…

…how do you know?

…and you end up often having to treat it as accessioned material. [39:00]

Well, if in doubt…

Yes, you need some way of tracking, to know what you've got. So then, this interstitial material, unless it's actually identified very explicitly as such, becomes part of the backlog problem.

Sort of accidentally accessioned. When something's accessioned, it's given a number, and it's given an entry into all of the relevant databases. This kind of secondary collection, or interstitial objects; do you have a system for identifying them which is not the formal accessioning system? Or just in the back of the mind?

No. At the moment, what we are… The trouble with coming up with a system for identifying and logging, tracking interstitial material, is if you go to all the effort of having – I don't know – an interstitial register, and an interstitial database, you might as well accession it anyway. So, at the moment, the approach is to make sure that that is labelled explicitly as secondary material, or display material, yada. So there is no confusion; it wandering into this grey area where we're not sure whether it's part of the permanent collection or not.

…it kind of sneaking into the collection…

…because that has happened in the past, and that is a tear-your-hair-out moment from the point of view of someone who works with cataloguing, interpretation, etc.

I haven't looked into the codes and stuff because I'm not trained, but I am aware that there are certain kinds of legal obligations with regard to conserving and protecting accessioned material, and that de-accessioning things isn't so easy.

No.

And there's a national framework for that, or is that up to you?

Yes. Well, there is a disposals toolkit produced by the Museums Association, which is the go-to flowchart for how things should be de-accessioned and disposed of. That's too detailed to go into here, but broadly speaking when we talk about 'de-accessioning and disposal', they're very emotive words. I mean, disposal would also include for instance transferring something to another museum. For instance, we recently – a few years ago, now – acquired a heater made by a Warrington company that Leeds 'disposed of' and offered it to us. [42:00] It being more appropriate in our collection than theirs; I think they'd just collected it as an example of a heater from a particular period. We didn't have any examples of this particular manufacturer in our collection, so that works like that. And I think no-one would have a problem with that, because it's still in the public sphere, and it's gone somewhere that's more appropriate due to its provenance. But you know that's still a disposal: a disposal by transfer. The phrase 'disposal' can often be quite emotive, but it can be a good thing, and a practical – and a pragmatic – thing.

In terms of the emotion: obviously these things are in the public trust. But also, we as a culture – maybe a species, I don't know, but certainly as a culture – love to hang on to things. Everything's a memento if it's been around long enough. The disposal of things from an attic, which you're never going to use, they've just been stored, maybe they belonged to someone else; it's incredibly fraught, emotionally, as a process. So, I wondered if what tends to happen to this interstitial material if it sneaks its way in to the accession register – and it's complex to go through de-accession and disposal – that the tendency is then to just sort of keep it.

Yes. Yes, and that is a big problem. Where I'll sort of modify what you said slightly: the interstitial material shouldn't go into the accession register, because if it goes into the accession register there should be some sort of clear intention that the museum wanted or intended to acquire it.

…it should be justifiable…

…it should be justifiable. Because when something goes into the permanent collection – it's called the permanent collection for a reason – the idea is that material will be preserved as long as possible…

…in perpetuity…

…we say in perpetuity; some items will eventually…

…like the birds, sort of expire…

…they will eventually, well, they've already expired…

…expire again…

…yeah. There's also what you call the education collection, which is also I suppose part of the interstitial material, if you like, but the distinction there is that anything that goes into the education collection, there is a possibility that it will be 'used to destruction'.

Like, the handling collection? [45:00]

Yes, handing is another term for it: education / handling. So, you get this sort of weird categorisation. And nowadays, when we take an object in, we clarify with the donor whether they would be happy if something does *not* go into the permanent collection, for example, whether they are happy for it to go into the education collection, with the possibility that it may be used to destruction. The vast majority of people are actually fine with that; they're just happy it's being used, it's finding a purpose. Occasionally some people feel that, no they want…

…it's precious. I'd rather it be in a box… forever… than in the hands of children.

Well! I'll put my curatorial hat on here, Clair, and say that we *don't* like things that are in a box forever. We try not to have anything in a box forever; we do try to get things used as much as possible. 'Mobilising collections' is something that museums talk about a lot of the time, so things *aren't* in boxes forever. Even if we digitise them: we're able to put them online. Access and use is increased by that method. But yes, occasionally people do not like the idea of that, so in those cases we say, well… Have Hannah or Michelle gone through the acquisition procedure with you?

Nope. [Part 2]

Well, as quickly as I can: essentially, if someone brings something in, we will capture as much information as we can on point of entry. Because, very often, you go back to someone at a later date, and they've moved…

…you can't remember…

…you can't remember. So, the impetus is to capture as much information as we can when we have the person there, and even if for some reason someone can't stay, we capture their contact details, and get some information when they're available. And that goes back to what I've already talked about, about narratives. The objects themselves, without the information – contextual provenance, story, narrative – that lessens them as exhibits.

It's a kind of value, isn't it?

Yes. It's a horrible old cliché, but every object tells a story; if the object and story get separated, both the story and the object lose out, because you've not got the materiality, you've not got the narrative. So, someone will come in, and we'll take that, we'll take the information and we will meet – myself and my colleagues who work with the collections – will meet on a quarterly basis, or sometimes a bit more regularly if there's a particular issue, and we'll discuss

what's been offered to us, and assess it against our criteria. These used to be known as 'collecting policies', now they're known as 'collections development policies', and that outlines broadly what we do and do not collect. In Warrington now, broadly speaking, our collections development policy is that we collect anything linked with the town. With the secondary policy that we would collect things that are representative of life in the town at a particular period, where that particular specimen doesn't necessarily have to have a demonstrable link with the town…

…or maybe not only *the town…*

…exactly. The example I always give is a Rubik's Cube. If we were looking to do an exhibition on the 1980s, if someone brought in a Rubik's Cube, it wouldn't matter that that particular Rubik's Cube hadn't been used in Warrington, because Rubik's Cubes identical to it would have been. Obviously, if we could get a Rubik's Cube that has a story linked to Warrington, that's the *crème de la crème*. But we won't shoot ourselves in the foot and not take something that represents the particular era, the particular life, [3:00] the particular period that people would have experienced in Warrington, when it doesn't have any demonstrable link with the town.

That it can be, if you like, a specimen not a relic.

Indeed. That's a very good way… I'll remember that, thanks Clair. We'll gather as much information as we can from the person depositing the artefact, so that if we decided not to take it into the permanent collection, would they be happy with it going into the handling / education collection…

…or just being used in a display…

…being used in a display, or if we cannot find a home for it anywhere within the museum's remit, what would they like us to do with it then? And sometimes people would like us to dispose of it on their behalf, sometimes people would like us to return it to them, sometimes people would like it to go to a local charity shop, to generate money for a particular charity. So that's broadly how it works; we'll get together and we'll assess the objects against these criteria that we have, and see whether we can find a place for it in our own collection. Or sometimes we will – with the donor's permission – offer it to another museum where it's more appropriately placed.

So, I'd also like to know about – and it's also a big question – about the place of photography, because sometimes photography falls between the chairs of archive and museum. That archives don't really keep systematic registers of photography or slides, particularly glass lantern slides that everybody has. I don't know if you do, but many institutions have cases and cases of glass lantern slides that they don't know what to do with. And so, I wanted to know what your experiences have been, because also the question connected to that is photographs of objects. Digitising, as you were saying, which is a super important task right now. A wonderful thing, that we as the public can look at things from the comfortable surroundings of our own kitchens. We can find out a lot of things about, I don't know, Sumerian pottery, if we

wanted to. So, I wanted to know your experiences about the place of photography, or the places *of photography in your collections?*

Actually, photography occupies a similar space to the wider permanent collection, [6:00] in that we will have a certain number of photographs which are accessioned into our collections. And the digitisation process is very useful for those, because obviously that provides a surrogate. The digital scan is a surrogate, and photographs being fragile as they are, it removes a lot of the need for that item to be handled, which would put it at a greater risk. So that's the photographs in the permanent collection, but you do – as you so rightly say – have a large amount of secondary material. Material that people bring in to museums for you to scan, and then they take the photograph away. And museums are now moving towards accessioning those scans as objects in their own right…

…those digital files…

…yes! Yes, 'digital-born' I think they call it. And this is something that, probably in a lot of other frames of work, other workplaces are a lot more advanced in terms of digital assets, and museums are only just starting to get a handle on this sort of area. Museums are moving to a stage where digital-born content is as important as the actual physical objects, because very often the original is not available.

Quite. And actually, with some very old photography, the things that you can do when you digitise it can make it much more visible. Can actually bring out a lot of information in the faded or over-exposed photographs that you can see in the digital image, which you can't see in the original.

But you do have a certain amount of people questioning: is that authentic then? Because the way that an image degrades, or fades and so forth, is part of its…

…its aura…

…nature as an item of material culture. So, there's a lot of debate around that…

…and of course, what you want is both…

…and it would certainly fill your phone if we went into that whole area! Yeah, what you want is both. And as well as the items that you have in the permanent collection, you have a certain amount of secondary… What's the word? I've forgotten the word that you came up with, the grey area.

You were talking about interstitial things…

Interstitial, that was it. There's a certain amount of interstitial photography, as you described; photographs of objects in the collection…

…or photographs of displays… [9:00]

…photographs of displays, that were very often taken as an *aide-memoire* for a curator of the time, but then become a historical record in terms of looking at a how a museum has developed. Lots of the material I sent you, photographic records of the displays from 1920s-30s…

…precisely, which at the time seemed just incidental, but now are vital for museum history and museum studies. Those are sort of priceless artefacts.

Indeed, it gets to the stage where you have more enquiries about those than you do actually about the objects themselves! Certainly, from museum studies students. We used to have quite an interesting relationship with the Manchester course…

…as a living specimen…

…they would come and be very disapproving about our historic displays: 'It's appalling how they've not changed anything since the 1930s!' Well, what can we do? 'Oh, you can't change it!' It was a really weird relationship. Unfortunately, one of the drawbacks of having redisplayed some of our historic galleries in 2010, the number of visits from Manchester museums has lessened off, because there's not the opportunity to come and be appalled.

There's an enormous, an incredible irony with the fact that was the Ethnology display. Which is something I'm fascinated by, ethnology as a field, because in a way what you've got is an identical situation to a post-colonial situation about 'primitive culture'.

Yes.

Where we, the advanced nation – ha ha – visit people who live in the forest, and say, 'Oh, isn't it appalling how you're living 2000 years in the past. But you can't change. We don't want you to change, don't change anything! We're not going to sell you anything or give you any equipment; we're very hesitant about making any changes, because it's part of our culture to come over and stare at you.' Then you have that attitude fossilised in the Ethnology gallery, and you have people from upstairs, the fancy museum studies people, saying, 'We want to come over and look at you being stuck in the past, you're not allowed to change.' An astonishing layering of the same structure, in a way.

Yes.

But you've got some of that material still, in storage? In your secondary collection? You have labelling and things?

We've retained a lot of the historic labels because they are interesting artefacts in their own right…

…fascinating, yes… [12:00]

…I mean some things are… Like so many other workplaces, there's a lot of things we'll get around to, but I think there's a very good case – and this is the

ultimate 'museum eating itself' – for actually entering these into the collection as artefacts.

Well, certainly that's my feeling; these are actually priceless artefacts about the history of twentieth-century culture, and academic culture. Studying the way that we study things, which does sound a bit – as you say – tail-chasing and recursive but is actually really important. Thinking about how we think, for example, is very important. So, would I be able to see some of those physical things?

I mean, I can certainly send you transcriptions.

Because for me, partly because I'm from a design background, I'm really interested in the type, the card stock, the layout; the aesthetics, if you like, as much as the content. But again, it's a question of taking up time. But if you wanted an excuse to go and look at them, and accession them, we can do that, if you like.

Certainly, we'd be able to pick some up…

…but it needn't be exhaustive. Just whatever's handy.

Unfortunately, one that I don't know where it's gone right now…

…speaking of location…

…yes, which is why we need to maybe accession them so we've got that covered. But the one that accompanied the Chinese collection would make you wince. We've certainly got a transcription of that. But yes, we certainly still have a number. I mean, that one was thankfully removed in the 1980s, but some of the others stayed on…

…right up until the '90s…

…right up until in fact the 2000s. But the worst ones, thankfully, were removed quite a while ago.

It's funny though isn't it, because you've got the worst ones, which are the easiest to identify, but then the subtlety just increases. You get this sliding scale, where you can definitely go: oh, we look twenty years back, that's racism. Draw a circle round it. But it's everywhere all the time, it's the way that culture operates, this kind of othering; not being nice about people on the other side of the world as a way of dealing with your own unconscious problems.

Has anyone talked to you about the evolutionary paradigm of the gallery?

I have heard a little bit about it, but not enough! I'd certainly like to hear more.

I don't know how true it is, but a lot of speculation on how the gallery was laid out comes from the fact that, historically, it was put together in the 1920s, 1930s…

…eugenics peak…

…yes, exactly. A lot of unpleasant ideas going around. And this may explain why there are a number of casts and busts and so forth of Cro-Magnon man…

…physiognomy, the study of facial shapes.

A lot of those ideas going around. And as far as we can ascertain, the way that it was originally laid out, with basically Western civilisation from Stone Age up to Iron Age / Bronze Age and so forth, and then it would go into Ancient Egypt, and all the other cultures of the world. Interestingly, Ancient Egypt separated out from Africa, historically.

The imaginary white Africans.

And so that would be the first gallery, and then you'd go on into the second gallery, where you'd have Romans. Obviously, the next development of 'Western Civilisation'. And then you'd move on to the large art gallery, which would be Western Art, the flowering of…

…the flowering of the Renaissance?

Well, fewer Renaissance; we don't really have any Renaissance material, but certainly Victorian Western and Continental works. So, whether it was intentional or subconscious at the time, you can see what was going on there.

There's no hard line, and I think we still – you look at school books from the '80s when I grew up

– that kind of linear evolutionary paradigm is totally in control still, I think.

Yes. we've tried to shatter that a little bit, and when we reorganised it, we put Egypt back with Africa, for example. We took out the Stone Age, Iron Age, Bronze Age from that gallery, because that was making uncomfortable parallels. And I think probably sending out messages that we didn't want to send. [18:00] So hopefully we've then mitigated against that somewhat, but because here we walk a little bit of a tightrope… Back to Manchester saying 'Oh, this is all outdated, but you can't change it.' We're aware that that sort of Victorian municipal museum feeling – the museum-of-museums thing – is our unique selling point, if you like. So, we don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We want to preserve an element of that, because in so many other places it's been completely gutted, and replaced with stripped-pine IKEA type displays…

…well, the fake art gallery look. Something I'm interested in: the way that I work, the way I'm drawn to put things together is a kind of typology, which was very big in the 1800s. And I think, in a way, died with eugenics, because what tended to happen is – if you put things which look visually similar together in that same way that you were talking about – you can paint an incredibly ugly but very convincing picture about 'development' of different people, and value of different people. If people are still making things out of flint, and we're not making things out of flint anymore – even though things made out of flint work really well, it's very sustainable, very sharp, easy to fix, free, you don't need to pump loads of coal up a chimney to

make them – then we still see that as primitive, and 'primitive' as a bad thing. So, I wondered, what would you think about the possibility; what happens if we put all the shoes together? Rather than saying, 'Here are our Chinese things,' and 'Here are our North African things.' What happens? How do you feel about that, that kind of Pitt-Rivers approach?

Well, the minute you mention the P-word… I love the Pitt-Rivers, just because I grew up in Oxford, so I'm very familiar with it. And one of the attractions, coming here for my interview, was I recognised a certain amount of commonality between the two places. Certainly not something I expected to find when I walked in. I think it might be an interesting way to approach it, having moved away from that typology, historically, to actually try something [21:00] – maybe on a small scale initially – along those lines and see what the reaction is. When we were looking at redisplaying the World Stories, the Ethnology gallery, one of the options that we considered was basically a typological approach. And, for instance, a lot of the South African material is made from bound wire. And obviously Warrington is famous for wire drawing, so we can make some parallels there and have bound wire objects next to one-another from completely different cultures. I think, in the end, in terms of our remit, and I think probably curriculum-based as well, the approach we went for was the right one. But I'm still kind of intrigued as to what we would have come up with…

…how might it have looked, this other possible World Stories gallery. Because, in a way, is it then a design museum? If you display all of the wire-produced stuff together, and you start talking about different sorts of wire-producing techniques and different means of making things with wire, that different people have come up with around the world, and the similarities… That's ethnology, in a way.

Yes, absolutely.

That's the study of different cultures together; it's also design history and material culture history. What would you need, to be allowed – in terms of remit – to do that?

Remit's probably the wrong word. I don't know if it may have been as easy to use as the gallery that we have. In the end, the reason why we didn't go for that approach is as much due to pragmatic issues as notional, or ideological approaches. I'm not sure, but I think in the end… [24:00] It's very difficult to talk about, to even remember; it's a few years ago now, passed a lot of water. The exact details escape me, but… I think remit's probably the wrong word. I think it's… We felt that that was too much of a break with our 'Victorian municipal museum' unique selling point, museum-of-museums feel. So, I think it's something we'd like to do on a smaller scale, but maybe not in terms of completely redisplaying, a permanent redisplay. Something we could try out in the honorary curators' display at some point.

And particularly in terms of wire, and locality in Warrington, the history of wire: there's a lot. I found some wonderful stuff in the archives. 'Live Wire' magazine, the magazine of the Rylands Brothers company, has some great things about the history

of wire making. So: a Victorian history of pre-historic wire making... The other thing about how Ethnology, or the World Stories gallery, is laid out now, is that you can use it for many different education things. You can still go, 'Look for all the fish hooks, there's fish hooks from many places.' You can still use it for that kind of story, whereas the thing about typologically arranging things is that it is didactic, in a quite limited way, or can be. That what we're looking at here; we're not looking at different cultures and time periods, we're just looking at shoes. It's just, it's so rare to see that kind of arrangement now, although it was so popular in the very earliest museums.

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. There's an element of that in the botany gallery. There are some ethnological items mixed in there, where they have taken the route that the material, the process and the plant as the central things, rather than necessarily what culture produced it. And that's another very interesting and rare approach; our botany gallery is still an industrial botany gallery, showing the *uses* of plants. [27:00]

Well, quite. That's one of the things I loved about it, this 'The Plant as Beverage' thing. That it's not about botany for its' own sake, it's about a kind of functionalist botany; how do we use these woods, what are they for? Which is a kind of design question, as much as anything else.

But there is also a botanical approach. Right up in the corner, there's a sample of 'mummy wheat'; wheat from an Egyptian tomb, I can't remember which one, sorry. Thousands and thousands of years old. And it's in the section on wheat; people don't notice it or have their attention drawn to it, because it's part of a display on that particular family of plants. Which I always feel is really, really odd, because, coming from another point of view, that's really fascinating. The fact that it's a kind of wheat is – arguably, and I'm not a botanist – one of the less interesting parts about it. But in the end, curation is all about how you put things together, as much as it's about cataloguing.

Arrangement, constellation. But when you do have – as you would say in computer game language – 'Easter eggs', when you do have hidden gems like that in what seems to be one display, but actually you can read it in another way, that does give a museum depth and longevity.

And I'm going to go contrary to what I've just said, though, because I completely love that that piece of mummy wheat is there. Because whenever I take anyone into that gallery, I can point it out and say, 'You might not have noticed this, but...' And it's interesting because of the context it's in, which is important as it's totally out of context there, or arguably so.

I mean, context is a very complicated subject, isn't it?

It really is.

It's about framing, as much as anything else... So, the only other thing was, in terms of material, whether you have *a slide collection? 35mm, or glass lantern slides, or both?*

Both.

And where are they kept?

The more modern slides are kept largely in the Print Room, which is on-site. Glass slides are largely kept in drawers in the Library Top Store, though I think there are some in the Print Room.

So they're on-site? [30:00] *And relatively easy to see, to visit?*

Although I have to admit, the glass slide collection is another area where there's been very little cataloguing done up to now. So that's another area I need to pay more attention to.

But actually, this is not unique to Warrington. So, there's a huge project – I don't know if you know about it – in Oxford at the moment about glass lantern slides… [The HEIR Project.]

Will you send me some information?

I will. They're digitising them. They got a good amount of, I think, Lottery money [this is not the case], because they found out they had – in the colleges and in the museums in Oxford – just boxes… even after boxes of them had been skipped over the last thirty, forty years. Because people thought that they were useless, you know, people thought that because they weren't accessioned, because they were interstitial… But now are precious, absolutely precious objects. Slides which before were considered completely meaningless – because they were just street scenes, who cares – are now vital information about fashion, about architecture, displays, about a limitless amount of historical information… So, they've got lots of money to digitise them, and to preserve them and clean them up. The great thing about glass lantern slides is, as long as you keep them in a box, relatively normal temperature, they last for ages. They're excellent archival material. I'll send you the information about it.

I would love to hear about that.

They've got a huge project, and they're really friendly too. I saw somebody [Dr Sally Crawford] give a talk from them. They're very excited about their project… But yes, I'd love to visit the birds, particularly the magpie – Robin Hood Magpie – and I would very much like also to visit the slides, and also the physical, historical display materials, I would also like to see. And if you fancied formally accessioning one while I was there, I could take a photograph of it. That would make me very happy.

Appendix E: A Proposal for Decolonising the Label

Decolonising the Label
Clair Le Couteur

A version of this proposal was given at the 2017 SOAS Conference 'Decolonising the Cultural Institution.' Following that event, I was asked to present at 'Museums Showoff, Season 6, No. 1, 19 September 2017,' and to write up the presentation as an article for publication in Shades of Noir: Terms of Reference (forthcoming). This is the Shades of Noir text.

I'm currently finishing a PhD-by-practice on what I call fictive museums. These are elaborate artworks – like the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Los Angeles, or the Museum of Innocence in Istanbul – which not only weave together facts and fictions, but claim to actually be museums. My subject area is a cross between literature, installation and conceptual art, but my research has led me to question the workings of institutional power. I started asking myself what really distinguishes fictive museums from museum labelling in general. I'm going to describe some conclusions I've come to, touching on a residency I was involved with at Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, in a town between Liverpool and Manchester.

Roots Between the Tides (2016) is an installation of 188 photographs, taken in Warrington's displays, museum stores, and local archives, forming a kind of diagram or portrait of the museum. The images are connected together with giant elastic treasury tags into an associative assemblage, hanging in a mezzanine space. Above is the Fish Gallery, and below – with the lights off – is what's now called the World Stories Gallery, though it still has the original sign 'Ethnology' above the door. Before getting into detail, I just want to state here that I'm a huge fan of Warrington. It's no exaggeration to say I fell deeply in love with the

town, its beautiful museum, and its kind, hardworking staff. It's an under-recognised, under-funded national treasure.

Founded in the 1840s, Warrington was probably the first municipal museum in the UK. It was created by wealthy local industrialists for the education and civilisation of their workers, many of whom lived in conditions of extreme deprivation. During the twentieth century, the profits, the ownership, and eventually Warrington's industries themselves were removed from the local area. Today, many households in central Warrington – and the wider North West region – continue to live in conditions of endemic, long-term poverty. The residents of these areas are predominantly white. Right up until the early 2000s when it was completely refurbished, Warrington Museum's 1936 Ethnology hall

Slide X29.1: Roots Between the Tides *(2016–ongoing)*
Installation view, Warrington Museum and Art Gallery

featured labels of the most eye-wateringly racist type. The displays had remained in their original condition, organised on the principles of scientific racism and progress mythology. The race, technology and culture of the white English were depicted as the most evolved, advanced, and morally superior in the world; 'lesser races' were systematically dehumanised.

When the gallery was re-hung, the curators included an interesting little panel, featuring an image of one of the previous labels. Like almost all 'real' museum labelling I've seen, this double label has four features I'd like to point out. Firstly, it's very brief, about fifty words. This is the current best practice for museum labels. As the Victoria & Albert Museum's style guide states, 'visitors have come to look at objects, not to read books on the wall.' Secondly, the text means far

Slide 309.1: Slides JAM.RBTT.0X0;0 and 772;0
Labelling and Signage at the Entrance of the World Stories Gallery, WMAG

more than it says. There is a lot of thought, debate, and tension behind labels like this. What appears to be simple, literal, direct language is in fact highly euphemistic. The historic label shown is not itself explicitly racist, at least, not in comparison to some that were replaced. The new label is about racism, but racism is not mentioned, only alluded to by the mere presence of the word 'Race' in the image. The panel implies something like this: *Local visitors may ask, perhaps even angrily, why we changed the gallery. We removed the labels, eventually, because they were offensively, embarrassingly, obviously racist, but we won't state that directly. Nor will we state that the information on the labels was factually incorrect. Replacing the labels is evidence of our progress; we'll settle with 'out-dated' in order to avoid a public discussion. A potentially heated discussion, in which it might emerge that 'people's view of the world' may not be so very different after all – especially those generations living in Warrington who grew up learning about the world primarily by visiting this very museum.*

Before the re-hang, Warrington Museum was itself used as a specimen, a field trip location for nearby museum studies courses, who were both appalled by it, and insisted that it didn't change. An interesting symmetry, ethnology acting on its own past. A past *and present* that this double label implies, hints at, but does not engage directly. We jump directly from the 1920s to 'the 21st century world,' a different world, supposedly, with different conditions signalled by the word 'diverse,' which is used as a kind of code. But what this code means is not specified, open to interpretation. For many of the UK's more extreme right-wing nationalists, the word 'diversity' is indeed seen as a code: A Globalist code word for '#WhiteGenocide,' in which all racial diversity and anti-racist sentiment

is depicted as a programme of genocide-by-stealth against white Europeans. In not addressing race directly, this label takes responsibility for neither the museum's past nor for the present conditions of reception. The message of the previous labels is not discussed, nor contradicted in any way. Instead, the new message is simply: *times have changed, and it is no longer appropriate to speak about race at all.*

So first, the label is really short; there is no room for discussion. Second, it is euphemistic, meaning far more than it says explicitly. Precisely what it means is unclear, and it does not mean the same thing to all audiences. Thirdly, the label is unsigned, undated. The words 'different than' hint that the curator who wrote this wasn't British. He was Canadian, in fact, but the only way to find that out is by contacting current museum staff. Overworked, underpaid staff – continually subjected to 'restructuring' over the last ten years – who themselves may or may not know. Many museum labels, perhaps the vast majority in existence, are not only unsigned and undated, but do not have paper trails. We don't know who exactly wrote them, when, or under what conditions. The label doesn't tell us when the gallery was re-hung, or by whom. And, crucially, it's not a question we're really meant to ask. The museum's voice is institutional, timeless authority. Unless a famous guest curator is involved, museum labels are meant to be anonymous.

The authorship of anonymous labels – and I want to stress this point – is *fictive*. The label is written as-if by the museum itself; as timeless, anonymous and neutral as a street sign. As Elaine Heumann-Gurian pointed out in 1991,

although we may be reluctant to admit it, museum exhibitions are more like

theatre than anything else; they involve sets, props, and performances. In the

past, when museum curators were on site, and the attendants were active

guides and teachers – rather than passive security staff sitting alone on chairs –

the role of performance and authorship was more evident. More evident, more

oral, more discursive, and, of course, far more exclusive. But if you are writing a

label with no date, and no signature, you are also engaged in a performance.

Museums are buildings with things in, they do not write their own labels. You

are writing from the character of your museum, and no matter how seemingly

simple or factual your statements, the devices of fiction – allusion, metaphor,

implication, elision – inevitably come into play.

Let me give a contemporary example. We're in the 1990s section of the Making

the Modern World exhibit at the Science Museum, September 2017. A panel on

the wall nearby tells us: 'These displays are intended to paint the broadest

picture of technology in each period… Not only have people in different

periods owned and used different things, but they have understood them

differently. To convey this… we have laid out the objects according to a

classification that was devised at the time.' Apparently, looking at the display

according to the wall text, visitors are meant to conclude that during the 1990s,

some kind of classification was devised that linked: speed cameras; wheel clamps;

a test sample of a motorway; and… dowsing rods. There are two wooden sticks

on the left that are not dowsing rods, though they are a roughly similar shape.

Beside them, below the speed camera, however, are four right angles of metal.

These are commercially produced dowsing rods.

The label nearby says only: 'Dowsing rods, 1994. To search for hidden substances.' Why are they here? Are they considered road-building technology? Is this a curatorial in-joke? Behind their inclusion, and the brief, allusive wall text, is clearly some kind of attempt to convey very complex information about technology and belief systems. But this information is not conveyed. What results instead is an inadvertent seal of approval from the Science Museum for the dowsing rod industry. Dowsing, unfortunately, is more than just harmless New Age fun with the ideomotor effect. Throughout the early 2000s, a British company was selling what amounted to extremely expensive dowsing rods at military fairs as a way of detecting controlled substances, including explosives. They are still in use by some security services around the world, another legacy

Slide 31E.2: Wishbone-shaped sticks and commercially produced dowsing rods
'Making the Modern World' exhibit, Science Museum, 2017

of colonialism. People have died as a result, and in 2013, some of the ringleaders were sent to prison.

Another, very different example. An ancient clay cylinder, part of the British Museum's vast collection, number 1927,1003.9. It came to the museum from Sir Leonard Woolley's dig at the Babylonian city of Ur in 1927, and he claimed it as the first known museum label – the Ur-label, perhaps. It was made as part of another collection nearly three thousand years ago, kept in the palace. It was a label, translating an even more ancient clay tablet, which the Babylonians had found when digging their foundations. Labels are objects themselves and can tell us a lot about what information technologies were being used at the time; this clay cylinder does in fact name who wrote it, when, and why. Today, some of this is hinted at in highly condensed form by the museum labels around it; the information is there, encoded, but almost impossible to work out unless you already know the story. The cylinder is one of the very few items from the British Museum's estimated three million artefacts that is actually on display. Perhaps being possibly the oldest museum label in existence had something to do with its selection, but unless the British Museum tells us that by email, we'll never know. What Woolley thought it represented – the oldest known museum label – is not mentioned anywhere by the British Museum: neither in the labels around it, nor in the online catalogue entry.

So, on to my fourth point: unlike the clay cylinder, most labels are not considered part of the museum's collection. Cardboard labels are ephemeral, treated as-if they were not really objects at all. If old labels happen to be kept in the documentation file for an artefact, this is generally done on an *ad hoc* basis, not part of the museum's formal operating system. Labels are not routinely archived or conserved for future generations. Keeping records of historic labelling, adding them to catalogues, and making them publicly available for research, are not recommendations of the UK Museums Association. When the *Daily Mail* is caught publishing falsehoods, it must then print a retraction, however small, and this becomes a matter of public record. Museums are an important part of the way we learn about the world. Though labels have a hugely powerful impact on how the public understand what a museum

Slide 327.1: Woolley's Museum Label
'Digging Up the Past' exhibit, British Museum, 2017

collection means, when they are replaced, labels often simply disappear without a trace.

In 2007, a landmark exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum – 'Uncomfortable Truths: The Shadow of Slave Trading on Contemporary Art and Design' – made visible the presence of colonial slavery in the permanent collection with interventions from eleven international artists. Today, no physical traces of these interventions remain in the galleries, and the accompanying book is out of print. Temporary exhibits, usually involving artists, are given the task of 'celebrating diversity' and 'coming to terms with history'; these are festivals, special occasions outside of the day-to-day life of the museum. No matter the visibility or the budget for temporary exhibits, unless the permanent collection changes its labelling and display, nothing really changes.

In my research, I think a lot about the fact that we are labelling things with other things. I started investigating the slightly absurd idea of what might happen if we really took this to heart, removing any category distinction between an object and its label. In fact, removing category distinctions entirely, and just connecting things together in extended kinship networks of association. But that's not what I'm recommending today, as a queer, non-binary artist researcher, an amateur, with no formal museum training or experience. I'm recommending first, let's accept that labels are part of the collection. In 1894, the Smithsonian Museum curator George Brown Goode wrote: 'An efficient educational museum may be described as a collection of instructive labels, each illustrated by a well selected specimen'. He was right; to a great extent, the labels *are* the collection,

especially in the permanent displays. They tell us what things are, and what they mean.

The failure to formally accession past and present museum labels, to accept them as part of a museum's collection, amounts to the destruction by neglect of archival material. Vital material not only for the discipline of museum studies, but also for an understanding of cultural history, the material production of cultural reality, particularly those aspects of reality that our colonial, kyriarchal British culture would rather deny, ignore, downplay, or forget. This issue of *Terms of Reference* is themed around the ethics of voices vulnerable to erasure. Historic labels are unique artefacts of public heritage held in the public trust, for which museums must bear a duty of care. Unless we insist on this, the voices of the museum's own material past and present, particularly those colonial voices for which Britain most needs to take responsibility, will continue to be erased.

This is not to say that British archiving is itself a transparent process. Only within the last ten years – as a result of the Mau Mau trial currently taking place – has it come to light that the British Empire had a named policy for archival conspiracy on a vast scale. Operation Legacy was the semi-official name for the systematic destruction of hundreds of thousands of files, and the sequestering of others as 'migrated archives' outside the regular classification system, carried out by hundreds of governmental officers around the world over a period of decades. Evidence continues to build that huge numbers of files are still being held in breach of the Public Records Act, many at Hanslope Park. In 2015, for example, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) notified government

that it had 'found' 170,000 files overdue for release. Records of the Kenyan war crimes, and files demonstrating the destruction of other incriminating documents, were discovered largely thanks to the tireless efforts of the legal team at Leigh Day, and Edward Inglett, FCO desk officer for Kenya. Inglett was repeatedly told by Hanslope Park they had no such records, but evidence was presented to him by David Anderson that thousands of files had been 'retrieved' prior to the handover to Kenya's first independent government in 1963. Only after Inglett threatened to visit Hanslope Park in person did they release documents relating to the Mau Mau case, over 1,500 files. The 2011 Cary Report concluded, predictably, that no intentional wrongdoing had taken place. It did however include this telling observation: 'how well FCO paper files in the last century "told a story", and how much more difficult it seems to be these days to piece together a coherent reconstruction of recent events.' (p.19) The electronic records of contemporary decision-making processes are even more vulnerable to erasure, often through a failure to be archived in the first place.

The ongoing Operation Legacy scandal may seem to have little to do with museum labels; I include this information here for three reasons. It demonstrates that the voices of archival material are both vulnerable to erasure, and remain culturally and legally powerful decades later. It also demonstrates that colonialism was never a matter of top-down hierarchy, but a hugely distributed decision-making system of shared responsibility between multiple institutions and the individuals within them, which continues to this day. Lastly, it demonstrates that the British Empire was *within living memory* a colonial power that committed atrocities similar to those of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany,

and that there are powerful cultural forces at work which do not want this information to become public knowledge. Evidence of the true nature of Great Britain is even now being effaced. This includes not only missing official files on detention camps, and ongoing governmental obstruction of justice. It also includes the quiet tidying away – perhaps with the best of intentions – of the ubiquitous white supremacist propaganda which filled Britain's knowledge-producing institutions throughout the twentieth century.

We must insist that new labels are signed and dated; if we wish institutions to become transparent, then authorship must be transparent. There is no escaping the fictive condition of our cultural work. Facts can mislead even more effectively than fictions. 'The museum' has never written anything; people write things, and other people edit them. For so long, in performing factuality, museums have been indulging in unselfconscious fictive strategies. Not only does this obscure the real workings of the museum, but it adds to a lack of public accountability. The kind of lack of accountability that, for example, pays lip service to its past acts, wipes away decades of racist ideological programming with a wave of the hand, and takes no responsibility either for present conditions or for preserving the voices of its own past. Let's make the actual material conditions of co-authorship transparent to the public. Let's make sure everyone involved in the creation of public culture is publicly credited. And, while we're at it, why not also make public *precisely* how much each person is being paid for their time?

I recently presented these ideas before a group of museum professionals, and one young woman – who operates the Twitter account of a major London institution – explained that labelling transparency would work not only to make institutions more transparent and accountable, but to humanise the heritage professions. Perhaps, she said, if the public knew the person who was sitting behind the screen – rather than imagining they were fighting the faceless institution – she would need to deal with less daily online abuse. Museum professionals study extensively, work hard, and care deeply about what they do. Many people work in museums for very little pay, on uncertain contracts, and under increasingly difficult conditions. They often feel under attack not only from their management structures, but from the incompatible demands of different public groups, who take out their various frustrations with the institution – and even with history and culture as a whole – on the staff. Museum staff are people who care passionately about conserving, commemorating, and communicating our shared history. Signing and dating labels humanises the institution, and more humane institutions not only function better, but are more humane environments in which to work.

Colonialism is dehumanising; large numbers of individually minor acts combine into an abusive system. Institutional mechanisms not only work against the victims of the system's abuses, but equally work to diffuse the responsibility of its perpetrators among its perpetuators, who may themselves suffer institutional abuse. It is simply not enough to chase details, insist on corrections, argue every point, uncover the facts, though these are things we must continue to do. We also need to change the way institutions operate at the systemic level. We need

to make sure every text, every document, every label bears the traces of its

human authorship. And we need to recognise that every text which continues

to obscure those traces behind an institutional mask is a work of colonial fiction.

Appendix F: A Note On Our Typeface

This project is set in Gill Sans Light, based on a typeface designed by Eric Gill in 1926 and released by Monotype in 1928. Inspired by Edward Johnston's font for the London Underground produced a decade earlier, Gill Sans has been reissued repeatedly, the most recent being the release of the born-digital Gill Sans Nova in 2015. Gill Sans was one of the first fonts to be digitised, included with both Mac OS and Microsoft Windows. The typeface, known as 'the English Helvetica', has become iconic for the twentieth-century British 'humanist' establishment, employed by both British Rail and Penguin Books. Gill Sans is also often used in popular and commercial replicas of the *KEEP CALM AND [enter text]* meme, based on a1939 British wartime poster that was never actually issued, rediscovered in 2000. The original was typeset in Caslon Egyptian (1816).[483] For most of the twentieth century, Gill Sans was 'ubiquitous in England'.[484]

Eric Gill (1882-1940) was named Royal Designer for Industry by the Royal Society of Arts, and was a founding member of the Faculty of Royal Designers for Industry. Since the publication of Fiona MacCarthy's 'morally blank' *Eric Gill: A Lover's Quest for Art and God* (1989) – and arguably far earlier, given Graham Greene's review of his letters – it has been public knowledge that Gill was a serial abuser.[485] Gill ran a pseudo-religious patriarchal commune where, seemingly with the consent of his wife, he continued a lifelong incestuous relationship with his sister, he sexually abused his daughters and even attempted sexual intercourse with his dogs. Artworks depicting his daughters nude are on show in the Ditchling Museum of Art and Craft's current retrospective, the first

to include the question of Gill's 'biography' in a show of his work.[486][487] In

publication after publication, Gill's work continues to charm cultural

commentators; child abuse is downplayed, excused, sidelined – his daughter

Petra led 'a productive and happy life' – and his work described in glowing

terms.[488] Given the multiple ongoing enquiries into British establishment

collusion in widespread child sexual abuse, and countless other despicable acts

besides, whilst maintaining a façade of rational, institutional propriety, Gill Sans

thus seems the perfect emblematic typeface for our project: a fictive museum

concerning ethnology, cultural heritage, and colonial British modernity at the

dawn of the digital age.

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[483] 'Stop Keeping Calm and Carrying On', *Type Writing* (13 February 2013), <https://typewritingblog.wordpress.com/tag/keep-calm-and-carry-on/> [accessed 9 March 2018].

[484] Steven Heller, 'Gill Sans, One of the Most Popular Typefaces Ever, is Reborn for the Digital Age', *Wired* (11 October 2015), < https://www.wired.com/2015/11/gill-sans-one-of-the-most-popular-typefaces-ever-is-reborn-for-the-digital-age/> [accessed 9 March 2018].

[485] Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, 'Perversity Raised to a Principle', *New York Times* (7 May 1989),
 <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/05/07/books/perversity-raised-to-a-principle.html> [accessed 4 July 2017].

[486] Rachel Cooke, 'Eric Gill: Can We Separate the Artist from the Abuser?' *Observer* (9 April 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/apr/09/eric-gill-the-body-ditchling-exhibition-rachel-cooke> [accessed 4 July 2017].

[487] Ditchling Museum, 'Eric Gill: The Body', [exhibition] (29 April – 3 September 2017).

[488] Cooke, 'Eric Gill'.