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**The Purloined Travelogue of William Bartram:
Mark Dion's Reinterpretation of History, Genre, and the Collection**

A Thesis Presented

by

Amanda Jayne Donnan

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Abstract of the Thesis

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Concentrating on installation artist Mark Dion's project *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (2007–2009) and utilizing the theories of Michel Foucault, this thesis considers the problematics of enacting institutional critique within and against the grain of non-art discursive regimes. In relation to *Travels*, this involves looking at how the artist adopts and manipulates the procedures and rhetorical structures of literary genre, historiography, and display culture, in order to trouble their regular functionality as vehicles for ideology, while also carving out a degree of personal agency. The thesis centers on Dion's deployment of devices such as parody and anachronism, which both, paradoxically, recapitulate discursive strategies and (can) disrupt them. The discussion of parody corresponds to the process facet of the *Travels* project— a series of road trips the artist undertook across the American South to loosely “retrace” eighteenth-century naturalist William Bartram's exploratory journey of 1774–77. Here it is argued that by his establishment of Bartram's journey as a historical analog or counterpoint for his reinterpretation, Dion's travels may be seen to highlight the way contemporary tourism— and the concomitant depoliticized and “innocent” touristic subject/consumer— as well as “the great American road-trip” as a genre, are bound up with the romanticized exploratory journeys of Manifest Destiny and the “anti-conquest” narratives of Enlightenment-era expansionism. Anachronism is discussed in relation to the display aspect of *Travels*, which was staged at Bartram's Garden, William's conserved homestead in Philadelphia, and involved the exhibition of items collected during Dion's journey in custom-made cabinets modeled on Renaissance era prototypes. In this section it is argued that the artist exhumes the Wunderkammer from the history of natural history in order to disrupt the seamless, distantiated historical panorama presented by heritage sites and other exhibitionary institutions. Paradoxically mining the archives of “official” discourse in order to interject his own alternative, Dion simultaneously gestures to the constructed and self-effacing nature of hegemonic representations of history and institutes a personal, practicable approach to the past.

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Introduction The Making of a Magnet

As I see it, artists doing institutional critiques of museums tend to fall into two different camps. There are those who see the museum as an irredeemable reservoir of class ideology– the very notion of the museum is corrupt to them. Then there are those who are critical of the museum not because they want to blow it up but because they want to make it a more interesting and effective cultural institution.

– Mark Dion¹

Distanced critique is a useful but boring tool. I like the idea of throwing myself into the fray...to become a magnet for critical questioning.

– Mark Dion²

Institutional Critique may seem like the ultimate endgame in contemporary art. Succinctly defined (confined?) by Johannes Meinhardt in the Dumont *Dictionary of the Terms of Contemporary Art* (2002) as an attitude articulated through “artworks and aesthetic procedures that analytically investigate social and institutional framing conditions,” the modality is fraught with contradictions that often trouble or negate its potential for critical efficacy.³ Even the term itself– frequently abbreviated as “IC” within the discourse that has increasingly (and paradoxically) canonized artist-proponents of Institutional Critique– belies an a priori reliance on “the institution” as a condition of the

¹ In conversation with Miwon Kwon, “Interview,” *Mark Dion* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 17.

² *Ibid.*, 20.

³ Isabelle Graw, “Beyond Institutional Critique,” in *Institutional Critique and After*, edited by John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier Verlag, 2006), 139.

concept's possibility. Indeed, since the first "bombs" were hurled from the oppositional bases of Dada, the museum— that wily socio-cultural arbiter and artistic tastemaker— has managed to absorb all admonishment, transforming assailants into accomplices and incorporating divergence into its institutional purview. Duchamp's "readymades," for instance, such as *Fountain* (1917) and *Bottle Rack* (1914), though intended as "negation[s] of artistic competence," were long ago transfigured into touchstones of modern art's innovating spirit. This maneuver stands, in Andrea Fraser's view, as the "supreme affirmation of the omnipotence of the artistic gaze and its limitless incorporative power," an instance that "opened the way for the artistic conceptualization— and commodification— of *everything*."⁴

During the 1960s, the object of Institutional Critique expanded from "specific places, organizations, and individuals to a conception of it as a social field" or structured set of social relations, and thus, the "question of what is inside and what is outside [became] much more complex."⁵ In this context, artists such as Michael Asher, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Marcel Broodthaers, and Hans Haacke, shifted focus from the earlier avant-garde's mode of sabotage to an analytical "strategy of 'critical engagement/disengagement,'" but their (sanctioned) actions, too, have been seemingly neutralized in the "archive of historical information."⁶ Striving to expose the socio-

⁴ Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, 131.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁶ Joshua Decker, "De-coding the Museum," *Flash Art* no. 155 (November/December 1990): 141. Decker follows Jürgen Habermas' critique of Dada and Surrealist "negativistic" modes, which he asserts had "little more effect than unsettling the contents

economic circuits operating behind the walls of exhibitionary institutions, these artists worked within the gallery to highlight the supposedly “timeless” and “neutral” apparatus as a self-effacing exclusionary construct, tied up with market interests and buttressed by exploitative business practices. Works of this kind were, however, usually approved of and paid for by the very institutions they supposedly undermined.⁷ Alternately, pieces like Bochner’s *Measurement Room* (1967) may be seen, not only as an “examination of the ‘material fact of the gallery walls as framing device’...but also as a literal intensification of its parameters, as a kind of ‘homage to the material conditions and proportions of the gallery space.’”⁸

of the autonomous cultural sphere.” As opposed to these early “anarchistic gestures” against the “normative values of the high culture system,” the institutional critique of the 60s and 70s analyzed the “institutional infrastructure of this system [...] on ideological, social economic and political terms.” Nonetheless, Decter writes, institutional critique has become a “convention among other artistic conventions” (141). Indeed, artists like Daniel Buren, who was censored by the Guggenheim in 1971 and then, ironically, given a retrospective there in 2005, are now thoroughly embedded in the traditional chronology of twentieth-century art.

⁷ See Brian O’Doherty’s discussion of Han Haacke’s *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings: A Real Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* and Christo’s 1968 wrapping of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), Chapters III and IV.

⁸ Graw, 140. This is not to suggest that the paradoxical nature of their practices was lost on the artists involved in Institutional Critique. Rather, as Fraser notes, “The idea that institutional critique opposes art to institution, or supposes that radical artistic practices can or ever did exist outside of the institution of art before being “institutionalized” by museums, is contradicted at every turn by the writings and work of Asher, Broodthaers, Buren, and Haacke...[their] critique of the apparatus that distributes, presents, and collects art has been inseparable from a critique of artistic practice itself (127). Fraser later asserts that “the insistence of Institutional Critique on the inescapability of institutional determination may, in fact, be what distinguishes it most precisely from other legacies of the historical avant-garde” (131). A case in point, Haacke wrote in 1974, that “‘Artists,’ as much as their supporters and their enemies, no matter what

Focusing on the work of installation artist Mark Dion, this thesis will explore how a paradoxical oscillation between critique and complicity, subversion and recuperation, agency and inefficacy, continues to manifest in contemporary institutional critique despite its annexation of “targets” beyond the walls of the White Cube, in traditionally extra-art discursive formations.⁹ Since the late 1980s, Dion’s practice has focused primarily on cultural representations of nature, on the ways in which environmental politics have grown out of the historio-cultural construction of “the natural.” This has often entailed his performing the roles of field naturalist and laboratory scientist, gathering organic specimens in alternately “exotic” and decidedly mundane locales, and appearing in the gallery to work on them until tasks like preservation and classification

ideological coloration, are unwitting partners... They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set the frame and are being framed.” See “All the Art That’s Fit to Show,” in *Institutional Critique and After*, 55.

⁹ Miwon Kwon, following James Meyer’s notions of “expanded institutional critique” and the “functional” site, has traced the development of site-specificity and institutional critique from the 1960s to the present through stages (all of which have overlapped and continue to exist simultaneously) of concern with the phenomenological site, to intervention in the social, institutional, or ideological site, to working in the “discursive vector, the ”ungrounded, fluid, virtual” site. The distinguishing characteristic of Mark Dion’s work, among other contemporary site-oriented artists, is thus in this formulation, the way in which “the actuality of a location (site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange or cultural debate.” See Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), Chapters 1 and 2. Robert Smithson is an early presage to artists like Dion’s engagement of non-art discourses like natural history and museology (see “What is a Museum?” and “Some Void Thoughts on Museums,” among many diverse writings in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

are complete (fig. 1).¹⁰ Dion has also done several collaborative “arrangement” projects with institutions such as the Wexner Museum of Art, which have involved his excavating collection storerooms to create unconventional and suggestive cabinet displays (fig. 2), and is well known for installations that, rife with visual allusions, imagine the desk or workspace of historic naturalists such as Alfred Russel Wallace and Alexander Wilson (fig. 3).¹¹

Seeking to escape his being “pigeonholed as the artist who works on themes of zoology,” Dion began in the mid-90s to foray into other scientific fields, most notably archaeology.¹² His “dig” projects— such as *Tate Thames Dig* (figs. 4, 5, and 6) and *Raiding Neptune’s Vault* (figs. 7, 8, and 9)— begin outside of the museum where he and, in some cases, a team of assistants perform the roles of research “specialists,” superficially borrowing scientific methods of collecting. After cleaning (conserving),

¹⁰ As Amy Pederson notes, performativity, as well as interactivity, “lie at the center of 1980s and 1990s reformulation of Institutional Critique” (see “Relational Aesthetics and Institutional Critique” in *Institutional Critique and After*, 269). Other artists working in a performative mode similar to Dion’s include Andrea Fraser, whose piece *Museum Highlights* (1989) involved the artist posing as a tour guide named Jane Castleton and giving a grandiloquent tour of Philadelphia Museum of Art’s water fountains, restroom signs, and cafeteria to a bewildered audience. Fred Wilson has similarly, if in a less dramatic sense, performed the role of curator in a series of museum residency projects. These works, of which *Mining the Museum* (1992-3) at the Maryland Historical Society has been the most widely discussed, involved his “mining” collection store rooms and rearranging displays to highlight the ways minority histories are elided or misrepresented.

¹¹ A few of Dion’s performative pieces will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, but for more on his “Great Naturalists” series, arrangement pieces, and other “zoological” projects, see Irene Hoffman, ed., *Weird Science: A Conflation of Art and Science* (Bloomfield Hills, MI: Cranbrook Art Museum, 1999), Dieter Buchhart and Verena Gamper, eds., *Mark Dion: Concerning Hunting* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), and Barbara Pollack, “Animal House,” *ArtNews* 102, no. 1 (January 2003): 108-11.

¹² In conversation with Miwon Kwon, *Mark Dion*, 29.

sorting (classifying), and, if necessary, shipping his finds to the collaborating art institution, Dion arranges them in cabinets according to atypical classificatory categories like “bones” or “long metal objects” predicated upon subjectively determined formal similarities. These “cabinets of curiosity,” often modeled on sixteenth century Wunderkammern,¹³ are frequently shown with hand-drawn concept trees (which provocatively suggest direct relationships between, for example, “the history of the biological sciences” and “anthropomorphism and folk classification”) in addition to photographs taken during the first two phases, maps, and other “official” documents.¹⁴

Like other contemporary artists that engage extra-art world discourses such as science, museology, and history— a few notable exceptions such as works by Fred Wilson and Andrea Fraser notwithstanding— Dion’s critical interventions have usually taken place outside of scientific or historical institutions, in an “art context.” The art gallery walls (or by extension, of the publicity surrounding art-based initiatives elsewhere) ostensibly create a bracketing effect which signals his use of ironic double-voicing to viewers who might elsewhere fail to recognize the scientific objects, processes, and display techniques he utilizes as appropriated. The presentation frame of the natural history museum is designed to remain invisible as a meaning-making construction: opening onto arrangements of natural objects and found artifacts, it purports to simply re-

¹³ The Wunderkammer will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 3.

¹⁴ For more detailed information about Dion’s archaeological projects, see Alex Coles and Mark Dion, eds., *Mark Dion: Archaeology* (London: Black Dog, 1999), Mark Dion, “Mark Dion Talks About Rescue Archaeology,” *Artforum International* 43, no. 3 (November 2004): 180-81, and Andrew Cross, “Stream of Conscience,” *Artforum International* 38, no. 3 (November 1999): 117-21.

present the world as it really is, to be a mirror of nature.¹⁵ As trans-contextual grafts that subsume discourses of science and history under the banner of art, Dion's pieces become recognizable as interruptive gestures that mar this seamless surface and trouble the "objective" sciences' rhetoric of transparency by transposing a double that is somehow amiss. His work serves to denaturalize prevailing systems of "world order," expressed via taxonomic categories, chronologies, and hierarchies, and reveal them to be contingent human inventions—fictions from which an authorial "voice" only seems absent.¹⁶

This sustained imbrication in the art world, even as artists like Dion have become itinerant service providers (offering "subversion for hire" according to Miwon Kwon) is, however, not the locus of the paradox I am suggesting here.¹⁷ Rather, concentrating on

¹⁵ The realist aesthetic of this presentation frame is concentrated most potently, as Donna Haraway notes, in the form of the diorama perfected by taxidermist Carl Akeley for the American Museum of Natural History's Africa Hall. See Haraway, "Teddy-Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936" in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 237-291.

¹⁶ Marcel Broodthaers' mock museum *Musée d'art moderne, Département des Aigles* (1968) is an important precedent here. Initially installed in the artist's Brussels studio (with later permutations at *documenta V* (1972) and in various museological settings), the "museum" was composed of empty packing crates, postcards, placards, and later, various objects representing eagles borrowed from institutional sources. As Joshua Decker notes, the installation was "produced to examine the traditional museum institution's role in organizing a "picture" or representation of cultural matrix within a given social frame [...] The eagle...remained a constant icon, somewhat corollary to the way in which Buren utilized the high modernist stipe to produce an ironic device for staging a counter "administrative sameness" (140). Broodthaer's eventual sale of the museum completed his extended gesture of sarcastic, self-conscious complicity with the art museum/market system.

¹⁷ See Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 47–50. In an earlier work ("Unnatural Tendencies: Scientific Guises Mark Dion," *Forum International*, May–August 1993) Kwon points out another contradiction in Dion's work that is also distinct from the one I am suggesting here. She was concerned then with his tendency to expose both the

Dion's recent project entitled *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* and utilizing the theories of Michel Foucault, I shall be concerned with the problematics of operating within and against discourse, in the ways that Dion uses the technologies of his co-opted discursive regimes against themselves. In relation to *Travels*, this will involve looking at how he adopts and manipulates the procedures and rhetorical structures of literary genre, historiography, and display culture, in order to problematize their regular functionality as vehicles for ideology *and* to carve out a degree of personal agency. My investigation centers on Dion's deployment of devices such as parody and anachronism, which both, paradoxically, recapitulate discursive strategies and (can) disrupt them.¹⁸ As the artist's quotes with which I began intimate, Dion's work suggests that ambiguity of position in relation to discursive formations— simultaneously enacting and questioning their operations, as one must in Foucault's formulation— itself functions as a valuable strategy for engendering critical thought. Furthermore, Dion's is a self-reflexive practice that, as will be demonstrated, refers to its own modes of operation in order to implicate the role

negative consequences (such as extinction) *and* the ameliorative effects (such as the discovery of unknown species) of scientific practices. James Meyer noted this problem posited by Kwon in his article, "The Macabre Museum" (*Frieze* no. 32 (January–February 1997): http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/the_macabre_museum) and used it to conclude that Dion's interventions have "multiple and contradictory effects. If Dion's work has one lesson it is this we make nature for ourselves; let us take account of our making...it is only through such a reckoning that responsible and effective ecology become possible."

¹⁸ Andrea Fraser suggests a similar conundrum when she says, "If you want to change something, a relation, particularly a relation of power, the best, if not only way to accomplish such change is by intervening in the enactment of that relation... And this is what makes institutional critique...so profoundly difficult, because to intervene in relations in their enactment also always means you yourself participate in their enactment, however self-consciously." See "What is Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique and After*, 307.

of the artist in the economy of mediation common to museums, theme parks, and heritage sites.

*

Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered, conceived of by independent curator Julie Courtney and accomplished by Dion in collaboration with the staff at Bartram’s Garden,¹⁹ began in its performative aspect more than a year ago (in November 2007). As of my writing, the project is ongoing in its display component within the historic Bartram house (fig. 10). During the months between November 2007 and May 2008, Dion made several trips to the American South to loosely “retrace” eighteenth-century naturalist William Bartram’s exploratory journey of 1774–77, using his journal entries, drawings, and maps– most of which were collectively published under the title *Travels...*²⁰ in 1791, fourteen years after Bartram returned to Philadelphia– as a guide. Along the way, Dion (accompanied by his wife, Dana, as well as various other pro tem “team members”) collected natural specimens, soil and water samples, and man-made artifacts both sought out and happened upon amidst the much-altered landscape of regions like South Carolina

¹⁹ The historic home, commercial nursery, and botanic garden of eighteenth century naturalists John and William Bartram, Bartram’s Garden is situated (incongruously) about three miles from center-city Philadelphia in a now neglected industrial district on the Schuylkill river. Widely considered the first botanic garden in North America, the Garden was saved from demolition in 1850 by railroad industrialist Andrew Eastwick and is today maintained by the John Bartram Association in cooperation with the city’s Fairmount Park Commission.

²⁰ The full title is *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida, the Cherokee Country, the Extensive Territories of the Muscogulges, Or Creek Confederacy, and the Country of the Chactaws: Containing an Account of the Soil and Natural Productions of Those Regions, Together With Observations on the Manners of the Indians. Embellished With Copper-Plates.*

and Florida. Periodically, Dion would pack his souvenirs and specimens into boxes and ship them back to the Garden, where most of the boxes were opened and the contents spread out on tables to await the artist's return. Several of the boxes arrived with alternate instructions: their brown paper wrapping stamped with "Hate Archive: Do Not Open," these boxes were set aside and will remain sealed in perpetuity.

Once his travels were over, Dion carefully sorted his finds, placing some of his pressed botanical samples into an open shelving system—modeled after units designed by master taxonomist Carl Linnaeus in the eighteenth century—in the conservatory on the first floor of the Bartram house. The majority of the objects were placed in the partitioned drawers of a made-to-order wooden cabinet modeled after a Renaissance-era Wunderkammer (see fig. 11 and 12) to be displayed in an upstairs room, alongside several smaller specimen cases, preservation jars, and a three-leaf print cabinet which held the hand-painted postcards Dion had sent to museum staff while on the road (fig. 14). Water sample bottles and their mailer tubes were neatly arranged in a glass-panel cupboard in John Bartram's study downstairs, and the "Hate Archive" boxes were packed into a cabinet (fig. 13) opposite the Linnaeus unit in the conservatory. A built-in set of shelves in this latter room also showcased an impressive sub-collection of alligator kitsch (fig. 15), apparently gathered in lieu of live representatives.²¹ Since the objects exhibited in the house are the physical "documents" of an ephemeral *process*—a series of road trips, canoe and horseback excursions, "wilderness" hikes, tuber digs, beach combings, museum visits, even pit-stops at greasy-spoon diners and flea markets, a day at

²¹ Dion said as much in a brief video segment posted online which documents some of the installation process: <http://www.markdionsbartramstravels.com/post22.php>.

Disneyworld, and another at a Florida retirement community– which Dion considers an inextricable facet of the piece, a “parallel” online project was initiated by Bartram’s Garden to showcase his journal entries and photographs from the road, as well as video segments about the installation process.

Dion’s *Travels* is clearly a very intricate piece, the historical precedent for which will, among other things, be discussed in more detail in the pages that follow. At the outset, however, I would like to suggest that the project be thought of as a *spatialized* genealogy in the Foucauldian sense: elaborating Tony Bennett’s incorporation of cultural institutions– specifically the “exhibitionary complex” comprised of museums, amusement parks, fairs, etc.²²– into the power/knowledge constellation outlined in Foucault’s genealogy, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), Dion traverses a pathway which links nodes of contemporary display culture (tourist and heritage sites, theme parks, museums) and gestures to their development out of problematic tendencies. Taking up William Bartram’s “mask” as a historical counterpoint (via reinterpreting the naturalist’s travelogue), Dion’s *Travels* highlights the way contemporary tourism– and the concomitant depoliticized and “innocent” touristic subject/consumer²³– as well as “the great American road-trip” as a genre, are bound up with the romanticized exploratory journeys of Manifest Destiny and Enlightenment-era expansionism.

²²Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 59-88.

²³ See Maurita Sturken’s discussion of the “touristic subject” in *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 9–18.

Between Bartram— who set out into the forests and everglades of the lower Colonies and returned to the capital of the newborn United States— and Dion, there is 230 years of land development, industrialization, pollution, *difference*. Judging by Dion’s vitae, this environmental facet would seem to be one of the artist’s primary concerns. While I will concentrate primarily on tourism and travelogues, collecting and display, and visual strategies of disrupting the veiled technologies of power working through these practices, the issue of environmental politics lingers between the lines. These cultural modalities— forming a web of interrelated discursive crosshairs within which Dion’s *Travels* is situated— govern and are governed by attitudes towards the natural world, and as Foucault would say, “structure the possible field of actions” in and upon the environment. Each offers up nature and history as consumable views or attractions— as a world that spreads outward from the subject.

Thus, in Chapter 2 I shall focus on the process facet of Dion’s project, unpacking Bartram’s trip and Dion’s re-performance in terms of tourism and the travelogue genre, and looking at how parody functions as a disruptive, relational (cooperative meaning-making) device. Chapter 3 will concentrate on the object or “document” portion of the project, centering on Dion’s use of anachronistic and interactive display techniques, and thinking in terms of privatizing the past/personalizing the public as ways of seizing (small) agency. The various extra-Foucauldian perspectives enlisted in the course of these two chapters will reveal a tension in Dion’s work between critique and complicity, subversion and conservative recuperation, apart from the potentially problematic institutional affiliations advanced by Kwon, among others. First, however, an

introduction to Foucault's project will be presented in Chapter 1 to preface concepts that will carry over to Dion's installation work.



Fig 1. Mark Dion, *The Great Munich Bug Hunt* (in process), 1993. Tree, collecting cabinet, specimens, lab equipment. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig 2. Mark Dion, *Curiosity Cabinet for the Wexner Center for the Arts*, 1996. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 3. Mark Dion, *Alexander Wilson – Studio*, 1999. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig 4: Mark Dion, *Tate Thames Dig* (in process, dig team on the shore of the Thames River, London), 1999. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig 5: Mark Dion, *Tate Thames Dig* (in process, view of Dion sorting objects with assistants), 1999. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig 6: Mark Dion, *Tate Thames Dig* (installation view), 1999. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 7: Mark Dion, *Raiding Neptune's Vault: A Voyage to the Bottom of the Canals and Lagoon of Venice* (in process, "Dredging Canal Rio della Sensa"), 1997/8. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 9: Mark Dion, *Raiding Neptune's Vault: A Voyage to the Bottom of the Canals and Lagoon of Venice* (installation view, "Cabinet B"), 1997/8. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 8: Mark Dion, *Raiding Neptune's Vault: A Voyage to the Bottom of the Canals and Lagoon of Venice* (installation view, "Lboratory/Collection"), 1997/8. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 10: View of the Bartram house (originally completed 1731, expanded between 1740–70), Bartram's Garden, Philadelphia, PA.



Fig. 11: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of the cabinet referred to as “the Wunderkammer” in this thesis), 2007–09. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 12: Views into four (of twenty-four total) drawers of Dion's Wunderkammer.

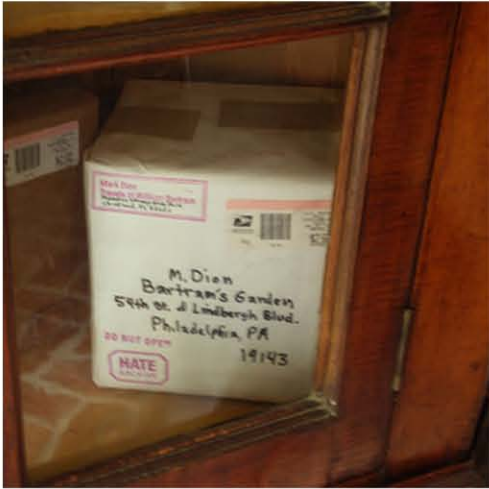


Fig. 13: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of the “Hate Archive”), 2007–09. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 14: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of the artist’s postcards sent from various locations in the Southern states), 2007–09. Mixed media. Di-



Fig. 15: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of alligator kitsch found and purchased during the artist’s journeys), 2007–09. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

Chapter One “Ever the Foucauldian”

Drawing an initial connection between Dion’s work and Foucauldian theory does not require an incredible stretch of the imagination, especially since the artist has himself acknowledged the philosopher-historian’s influence on his thinking. He responded as follows to an interview question about how the institutional critique projects of his early career, which explored political agencies and issues such as FEMA and foreign policy, led to his ongoing interest in cultural representations of nature:

It wasn’t until I began reading a lot of nature writing and scientific journalism that I stumbled into Stephen Jay Gould, who opened up a huge window for me. Here was someone applying the same critical criterion implicit in the art I aspired to make– which can be loosely described as Foucaultian (*sic*)– to problems in the reception of evolutionary biology.²⁴

Authors writing on Dion’s work have similarly mentioned the connection in passing, dropping jam-packed snippets like “ever the Foucauldian...” into reviews without ever detailing *how* Foucauldian methodology– or Foucault’s “critical criterion” as Dion puts it– translates into the visual field.²⁵ It is my aim in this chapter to remedy this situation

²⁴ In conversation with Miwon Kwon, *Mark Dion*, 9.

²⁵ Here I refer to Suzanne Hudson’s review of Dion’s 2005 installation, *The Curiosity Shop* (*Artforum* 44, no. 6 (February 2006), 209–210) in which she says that the work’s “ordering functions differently from that of past projects in that Dion, ever the Foucauldian, here turns his gaze on his own work.” While self-reflexivity may be an important facet of Foucauldian theory and method, this strikes me as a very presumptive

by unpacking these overly condensed and generalized phrases, by looking closely at what it means to describe Dion's concerns as "Foucauldian." This will primarily involve describing Foucault's project as it evolved over several decades. Of course, entire rows of library stacks are given over to interpretations of Foucault's oeuvre, which is to say that I cannot possibly do justice to the finer points of his work here. What follows is rather a necessarily cursory overview aimed at establishing, in relatively broad strokes, what may be said to be the Foucauldian approach to history and the human sciences. The glut of scrutiny over the past forty years attests to the difficulty of pinning this down in any resolute way, and perhaps settling the inconsistencies and contradictions that occur across the course of Foucault's many essays, lectures, and books is, finally, an impossible task. "Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to stay the same"²⁶ he wrote, signaling that this is what he intended— to evade classification (and reduction to one-line invocations), to remain divided against himself, provocative and unresolvable.

The most obstinate impediment for many analyses has been Foucault's notion of the self: the subject emerges over the course of his writings as constituted through and by historically contingent discourses and the operations of various disciplinary mechanisms acting on the body, on the one hand, and the willful agent of resistance ("self-stylization") on the other.²⁷ His ambivalence on this point, if it can be called that, likely grew out of his being "intellectually weaned" in post-World War II Europe, the academic

and reductive statement (granted, she had two pages). See also Andrew Cross, "Stream of Conscience," 118.

²⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. Rupert Swyer (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 17.

²⁷ Daniel T. O'Hara, "Why Foucault No Longer Matters," in *Reconstructing Foucault: Essays in the Wake of the 80s*. Ed. Ricardo Miguel-Alfonso, and Silvia Caporale-Bizzini (Amsterdam: Rodopi Press, 1994), 139–141.

climate of which was strongly polemicized between existential phenomenology and Marxism.²⁸ Foucault sought to move beyond these poles of post-humanist theory— substituting a relational network for the unidirectional Marxian model of power and eschewing the transcendental, meaning-giving subject of phenomenology— and aimed to avoid strictly structuralist and hermeneutic modes of analysis as well.²⁹ Although he resisted being lumped in with the Structuralists, however, like those thinkers that did (temporarily) accept that appellation, he too rejected the notion of a unified, Cartesian subject (the cogito) and looked instead to the functioning of underlying systems. But Foucault’s “archaeological” method, characteristic of *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963) and *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), among other early works, focuses on *historically situated* institutional systems— on actual statements (énoncé) and “discursive formations” rather than on possible permutations between chosen terms.

Bracketing off context (attending to genuine, “expert” statements only) and content (disregarding questions of truth and validity), Foucault the archaeologist sought to make the history of the human sciences comprehensible in terms of rules or principles, which, “unknown to the actors involved, regulated all their serious speech acts” and defined what could count as “an identical meaningful statement.” Non-discursive

²⁸ Lisa Downing, *The Cambridge Introduction to Michel Foucault* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 3.

²⁹ Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow succinctly describe the structuralist program as one which aims to “eliminate notions of meaning altogether and substitute a formal model of human behavior as rule-governed transformations of meaningless elements,” while hermeneutics seeks to unearth “a different and deeper meaning of which social actors are only dimly aware.” *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xxiv.

circumstances and practices such as apprenticeship, which surely also transmit skills and preconceptions, are here ignored; rather the archaeologist's question is narrowed to "who can be taken seriously? or, who has the right to speak with the presumption that what he/she says is true?"³⁰ Placing discursive practices in relation to others across the disciplines of a given epoch— all of which ostensibly share the "accepted concepts, legitimized subjects, taken-for-granted objects, and preferred strategies that yield justified truth claims"³¹— the archaeologist aims at uncovering the "conditions of possibility for knowledge" which collectively form a synchronic constellation Foucault called the *episteme*. Though these conditions or rules have never been formulated because they are "anterior to words, perceptions, and gestures," they are what "make manifest the modes of being of order" across all fields of knowledge during a given time period and give rise to "discursive regularities" which are perceptible to the archaeologist's impartial eye.³²

Seen from this perspective, history is a succession of distinct spaces of knowledge crossed by (relatively) abrupt transformative ruptures; it is discontinuous, a segmented chain rather than a steady flow of undifferentiated change or development. Thus, in *The Order of Things*, which examines the discourses of natural history, language (grammar), and economics (exchange) since the Renaissance, Foucault posits "two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture," the first occurring around 1650, inaugurating the Classical age, and the other straddling the transition into the nineteenth

³⁰ Dreyfus and Rabinow, 55-68.

³¹ *Ibid.*, xxiv.

³² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Random House, 1970), xxi.

century, initiating the Modern age. The totality of these schisms is such that the natural history of the Classical period, for instance, “if it can be related to anything,” is better compared to the general grammar and analysis of wealth of its own period than to the natural history of the nineteenth-century.³³ Since it pertains to natural history specifically and will therefore provide a useful backdrop for my analysis of Dion’s *Travels* in subsequent chapters, and because it elucidates the archaeological perspective in general, I would like to briefly elaborate on *The Order of Things* and the discursive formations partitioned by these seismic shifts.

Prior to the Classical period, the “fundamental category of knowledge” had been what Foucault calls Resemblance. This way of knowing was characterized by a superimposition of hermeneutics and semiology, in which to find meaning in something was to discover its similitude to other things, to “bring to light a resemblance” in terms of analogy, adjacency, or sympathy (which “creates communication between our bodies and the heavens, and transmits the movement of the planets to the affairs of men”).³⁴ Since nature was teeming with signs and resemblances— the infinite hidden analogies prepared in advance by God— there had to be visible marks or “signatures” that would make humans aware of the connections between things. Thus, “in order that we might know that aconite will cure our eye disease,” the seeds must be “tiny dark globes set in white skinlike coverings whose appearance is much like that of eyelids covering an eye.”³⁵

³³ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxii-xxiii.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

Seeking to describe a law governing signs was thus an infinite task of discovering “the things that are alike,” because things *as signs* speak a language of resemblance that tells us “quite simply what the syntax is that binds them together.”³⁶ For Renaissance-era naturalists, ‘knowing’ about an animal, a serpent for example, involved much more than description of its anatomy, habitat, food sources and so on: an encyclopedia entry also included the serpent’s appearance in quotations, fables, mythology, hieroglyphics, dreams, and as portents of disaster or of miracles.³⁷

The magical thinking of the pre-Classical period, which permitted the decipherment or interpretation of the world by “revealing the secret resemblances beneath its signs” gave way in the mid-seventeenth century to a system that dissociated the form and content of what we know. Comparison became a function of analysis and categorical arrangement: rather than drawing things together, the activity of the mind consisted of *discriminating* to establish certain identities, and the whole of the existent world— no longer infinite— was thought of in terms of a great static table.³⁸ In this shift,

³⁶ Ibid., 29.

³⁷ In the Renaissance, natural history was a humanist pursuit based on *reading* about nature— compiling and commenting on what other scholars, especially the ancients, had written about the natural world over the centuries. Natural historians of this time did not feel it was wrong or contradictory to include both fact and fiction in their scholarly works, and perhaps did not even discriminate between the two in the same way we do today. The “discipline” then seems to have been dedicated to recording the place of plants and animals in human culture, to helping the reader understand the web of relationships that connect humans and other beings. William Ashworth suggests that expounding on the richness and complexity of this web was itself the goal of pre-classical natural history. See William B. Ashworth, Jr., “Emblematic Natural History of the Renaissance” in *Cultures of Natural History*, edited by N. Jardine et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 54.

the written word (i.e. the authority of the ancients) lost its status as a transparent form of knowledge, and history and science became detached from one another. History was now limited to the “perusal of written works, the interplay of their authors’ opinions” and science confined to that which may be judged “by means of intuition and their serial connection.”³⁹ Within this space of knowledge, the fundamental category of which Foucault terms Representation, the sign can no longer be a mute “form of the world,” because in the Classical age it is constituted by knowledge, by relations between our perceptive impressions: “there can be no sign until there exists a *known* possibility of substitution between two *known* elements.”⁴⁰ The ability to perceive and think was still a gift from God, but man had not yet become the creator of signification he would become in the Modern age: Classical man was the locus of clarification who, using his God-given but necessarily arbitrary system of signs, was meant to represent and order the world, to discern the great chain of being that God had so masterfully laid before him. Thus, the comparison of simple structures (the pistils and stamen of Linnaeus’s sexual classificatory system for example⁴¹) allowed man to construct a table based on series

³⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁴⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 59.

⁴¹ Carl Linnaeus, a provincial Swedish naturalist who achieved international recognition with the publication of his *Systema naturae* in 1735, created a global classificatory tree encompassing all life on earth and conceived the binomial nomenclature denoting genus and species still used by natural scientists today. His was a five-level system that categorized plants and animals according to class, order, genus, species, and variety; plant genera were sub-divided according to the number, size, placement and shape of pistils and stamen— arbitrarily chosen simple structures as were the petals, leaves, etc. of other systems— but animals were grouped by broad and variable characteristics such as teeth, locomotion, and habitual home. See Lisbet Koerner, “Carl Linnaeus In His Time and Place,” in *Cultures of Natural History*.

arranged from simple to the most complex. Now underpinning all Classical knowledge “in its most general form” was the *possibility* of total enumeration and universal characterization in a general taxonomy— a non-measurable *mathesis* “understood as a universal science of measurement and order.”⁴² Since it was “taken for granted that language by its very nature made possible successful representation,” however, “the role of human beings in relating representations and things [the act of constructing the table] could not itself be problematized.” In other words, man as the special being who “gets the whole picture as well as gets into the picture” is unthinkable in the Classical episteme.⁴³

The classical discursive formation gave way over a span of about fifty years (1775–1825). Representation as the foundation for all possible orders was eclipsed and, replacing the static table of identities and differences, a “profound historicity” imposed on things the forms of order “implied by the continuity of time.”⁴⁴ The Modern space of knowledge is one made up of “organic structures, that is, of internal relations between elements whose totality performs a function. These organic structures are discontinuous [...] So that we see emerging, as the organizing principles of this space of empiricities, *Analogy* and *Succession*.”⁴⁵ Rather than implying proximity in the permanent space of representation, a “high density of analogies” in adjacent organic structures now signals that they were formed around the same time in a temporal progression. Moreover, since

⁴² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 56.

⁴³ Dreyfus and Rabinow, 20-27.

⁴⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiii.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 218.

this historicity permeates all fields of knowledge, there is a shift in focus from the Classical “exchange of wealth” to “analysis of production,” and from Classical “discourse” to “analysis of languages” in terms of evolution. In other words, as things “become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principles of their intelligibility only in their own development,” the general taxonomic table, discourse, and exchange of Classical thinking are replaced by modern fields of evolutionary biology, philology, and economics.⁴⁶

Concurrent with this increasing reflexivity, ‘man’ was constituted as the subject *and* object of knowledge and was thus “born” as a concept just over two hundred years ago, “a new wrinkle in our knowledge (that will) disappear again as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form.”⁴⁷ Modern man is born from the recognition of Classical discourse as opaque: only when language “no longer appears as a perfectible medium whose natural elements represent the natural elements in the world” does representing itself become a problem. The knower, now recognized as being enmeshed in language, which has an uncertain history in its own right, can no longer be merely a spectator: he is totally entangled with, and his understanding veiled by, the very objects he would seek to know. An “analytic of finitude,” as opposed to the analysis of the Classical age, emerges to “show on what grounds representation and analysis of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 219–21. For more on development of the field of natural history from the Classical period and into the Modern, see Peter Dear, *The Intelligibility of Nature: How Science Makes Sense of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Carla Yanni’s *Nature’s Museums: Victorian Science and the Architecture of Display* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) discusses the translation of these ideas into the modern museum space.

⁴⁷ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiii.

representations are possible and to what extent they are legitimate.” Paradoxically, the analytic posits the limits of knowledge as a positive foundation for the possibility of knowing.⁴⁸ Hence Kant was able to define man as the unique creature that “is totally involved in nature (his body), society (historical, economic, and political relations), language (his mother tongue), and who at the same time finds a firm foundation for all of these involvements in his meaning-giving, organizing activity.”⁴⁹ Thus, rather than simply describing the world, or serving as an objective reflection of the way things truly are, discourse actually produces and internally legitimates its own “truth.”

The “fundamental event” that *caused* the rupture with the Classical discursive formation is still principally beyond our comprehension: we are (or were as of Foucault’s writing) caught in the resulting modern episteme, effectively imprisoned within the codes of our culture that govern our language and schemas of perception. One of the aims of the archaeological method is to highlight the situation of the present via an exploration of the past, to show how the conditions of possibility at the foundation of the Comte de Buffon’s brand of knowledge, for example, may still operate today and limit our ability to think in certain ways (Foucault’s ostensibly autonomous position in this respect is one of the problems of archaeology). Discovering what exactly initiated our epoch is, however, of secondary importance for Foucault: “In attempting to uncover the deepest strata of Western culture, I am restoring to our silent and apparently immobile soil its rifts, its instability, its flaws; and it is the same ground that is once more stirring under our feet.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Dreyfus and Rabinow, 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, xix.

⁵⁰ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xxiv.

Fragmenting history and highlighting the structures that shape the experience of any age is thus a project aimed at evoking the opportunities for change, at hastening a contemporary shift by which thought may no longer be so narrowly “anthropologized.” It is an “an enterprise that wishes, in return, to reveal how these [anthropological] constraints could come about.”⁵¹

Dion, like Foucault, has often been concerned to trouble the anthropocentric approach to nature prevalent since the Classical period, and to encourage a contemporary shift, presumably toward a more holistic, ecological worldview. Projects like *The Great Chain of Being* (1999) (fig. 16) and *Scala Natura* (1994) (fig. 17), for instance, represent what Dion calls one of the most “persistent and pernicious” historical cosmologies: the notion, received from Aristotle and prevalent during the Classical period, of natural history as a “one-dimensional progression from the simplest of forms... to the most complex, almost always to humans, who construct the hierarchy.” This notion, “which remained until the middle of [the twentieth century] the dominant principle of arrangement for most natural history museums... firmly seats humankind on the throne of the animal kingdom,” thus legitimating an exploitative relationship to “lower” life forms.⁵² Though Dion’s *The Great Chain of Being* and *Scala Natura* utilize different representational formats— a cabinet with twelve open compartments and a stepped plinth, respectively— both employ taxidermic animals, specimens, and various allegorical antique

⁵¹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 15.

⁵² Mark Dion, *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999), 98.

objects to convey a hierarchical progression culminating in the uniquely sentient human being, symbolized by a white portrait bust—presumably of a philosopher. The ridiculous specificity of some of the objects that are made to stand in for whole classes of life—such as the stuffed cat and duck on the second step down of *Scala Natura*—disturbs the alleged comprehensiveness of the system and draws the viewer’s attention to what is not included, to what might trouble the tidy boundaries of the “rational” categories made actual in Dion’s work. Furthermore, the undeniable physicality of the objects presented in his structures “contrasts sharply,” Lisa Graziose Corrin suggests, “with the metaphysical realm of ideas implied” by the space above and beyond the philosopher’s head.⁵³

Thus, more so than his so-called “archaeological digs,” which Dion says are about “refram[ing] the fascination that many Americans have with the simultaneity of history one encounters in older European cities,”⁵⁴ it is Dion’s natural history projects such as *The Great Chain of Being* and *Scala Natura* that I would say best reflect Foucault’s early archaeological concerns.⁵⁵ Re-presenting ways of knowing from

⁵³ Lisa Graziose Corrin, “Survey,” in *Mark Dion* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 74.

⁵⁴ Mark Dion, in conversation with Miwon Kwon, *Mark Dion*, 29 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ I would argue that Dion’s archaeological works, such as the afore-mentioned *Tate Thames Dig*, are actually more genealogical in strictly Foucauldian terms, since they are interested in privileging histories other than those of “serious” discourse. In a sense the “dig” projects do ask “who can be taken seriously?” because they show us what has *not* traditionally received the museum’s legitimizing stamp of approval. However, the display portions of his “dig” projects— as Dion suggests when he speaks of temporal simultaneity— break with teleological notions of progress by presenting objects according to a formal or associational classification systems, which means they do not make visible the ruptures between the present episteme and those of the past. Especially because his objects are not obtained by stratigraphic methods, which in “real” archaeology allow researchers to connect objects from various places (and discursive realms) to others of

epistemes past effects disjunction and highlights historical discontinuity by illustrating the difference between our space of knowledge and “theirs.” Foucault similarly underscored our limited ability to think outside of our own discursive structures when he famously took as an example of an “impossible” alternative taxonomy Jorge Luis Borges’ fictional Chinese encyclopedia, *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. Upon reflection, the seeming absurdity of this classification system— including categories of animals like “belonging to the emperor,” “frenzied,” “drawn with a camel hair brush,” “et cetera,” and “included in the present classification”— troubles the stability of our “real” and “correct” systems of representing relationships in nature. How can one know that our view is not equally as distorted? His juxtaposition of an alternative to our current mode of knowing, like those enacted by Dion, reminds us that the systems in place are *accepted* (but ultimately arbitrary) *representations* which became so by the exclusion and marginalization of other ways of thinking. The hope is, presumably, that destabilizing the authority of science and the “pernicious” attitudes it has often sanctioned will clear the way for a new, less destructive way of viewing and living in the world.

However, since in Foucault’s estimation we cannot describe the episteme that might result from such a contemporary shift— because, ostensibly, we cannot really even describe our own— and because the schisms that have occurred were apparently not caused by conscious efforts of individuals, we are left with little to *do*: constructive change is something we can apparently never intend. Lisa Downing has suggested that the “political sterility” of the archaeological method is the primary reason Foucault

their same time period, Dion’s “archaeological” projects can be seen as actually quite distinct from Foucault’s. More will be said about the genealogical method below.

“abandoned” it in the years following the May 1968 revolts: “the mere identification of signs and their functions within systems may have begun to seem redundant or sterile” as “the everyday [as described by Lefebvre] became the sphere in which the political was most at stake.”⁵⁶ Foucault subsequently became more personally involved in grassroots political actions and, after a hiatus (from book-length projects at least) of about five years following *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), charted a new methodological course for his written work as well. Dion’s work has also evolved considerably over the course of his career and has, I would argue, increasingly engaged the philosopher-historian’s ideas and methods in a more complex, nuanced manner than can be expressed by simply labeling him “Foucauldian” and leaving it at that.

Foucault’s later “genealogical” approach retains archaeology’s interest in analyzing and denaturalizing serious discourse, but pays attention also to structured and structuring social practices, to “that which conditions, limits, and institutionalizes discursive formations” at given moments in time.⁵⁷ Archaeological questions— such as who can be taken seriously?— become visible as questions of access. His notion of self-legitimizing “discursive regimes” of truth now comes to the fore: “We should admit... that power produces knowledge...that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.”⁵⁸ The power constituted by knowledge at a

⁵⁶ Downing, 11.

⁵⁷ Dreyfus and Rabinow, 104.

⁵⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1977), 27.

given historical moment is pervasive and operates at the level of the individual body. Thus discourses such as psychiatry, in as much as they articulate categories like “deviance” versus “normality,” produce the means of subjectifying people— they *create* the deviant body. Natural history, in interrelation with other discourses, similarly produced inferior races and lesser life forms, as intimated above in relation to Dion’s *Scala Natura*.

These power relationships are, however, strategies without strategists. They are not so easily discerned as in Marx’s binary class model, but are “fixed, throughout history, in rituals, in meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations.”⁵⁹ Sites or institutions where these rituals or “technologies of the body” transpire most acutely— such as the scaffold or Bentham’s Panopticon— are important as handles in Foucault’s genealogical work, but are not his true subject; it is rather the more pervasive rituals these institutions embody, which produce man as object and subject of power/knowledge.⁶⁰ In his late (and incomplete) multi-volume work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explains that power is not “a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of

⁵⁹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D. F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 150. Dreyfus and Rabinow summarize Foucault’s concept of bio-power, or the pervasive, self-regulating organization of our society, as “the increasing ordering in all realms under the guise of improving the welfare of the individual and the population. To the genealogist this order reveals itself to be a strategy, with no one directing it and everyone increasingly enmeshed in it, whose only end is the increase in power and order itself” (xxvi).

⁶⁰ *Discipline and Punish* thus explores the power/knowledge constellation that makes systematic normalization possible; the prison, hospital, school, etc. are only local apparatuses of a more general mechanism.

the citizens of a given state,” but the “multiplicity of force relations,” the operations of which are “always local and unstable.” Power, which is “exercised from innumerable points in the interplay of non-egalitarian and mobile relations,” thus cannot be wholly seized, but remains in constant flux, pulled in different directions in a ceaseless process of minute confrontations and reversals.⁶¹ Within this sphere of power relations, critique is a “mode of ethical self-questioning...which opposes itself to the established order by interrogating the terms by which subjects are constituted.” This questioning necessarily takes place within “existing discursive structures, so that rather than a refusal of morality, virtue is a ‘specific stylization of morality,’ where ‘stylization’ is opposed to codification and ‘fixture.’” It is through this process of “self-stylization” that the limits of power/knowledge are laid bare, and perhaps, destabilized.⁶²

Foucault adapted his genealogical method from that of Nietzsche, a debt he acknowledged at length in an essay titled “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” which he published in 1971 as he was actively rethinking his objectives. The essay is an exegesis of Nietzsche’s genealogical project— which generally aimed at destabilizing the Enlightenment discourse of progress and improvement so prevalent in the nineteenth-century— and is therefore not exactly a Foucauldian methods statement, but it does nonetheless provide valuable insight into his, and Dion’s, approach to history. Against the grain of traditional history, which is here understood as a teleological projection into

⁶¹ Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 92–94.

⁶² Sarah Salih, Introduction to Judith Butler’s “What is critique? An Essay on Foucault’s Virtue,” in *The Judith Butler Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 302.

the past that seeks continuity and legitimation in terms of present forms and practices,⁶³ genealogy opposes the search for origins and metaphysical essences. Rather, it records “the singularity of events outside any monotonous finality” and historicizes that which is felt to be “without history.” Here “false universals”—seemingly neutral concepts such as ‘truth’ or the idea that liberty is fundamental to man’s nature, for example—are exposed as ideology constructed in a “piecemeal fashion” by interested parties and “hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history.”⁶⁴ Dion’s “Great Naturalists” series, like *Alexander Wilson—Studio* (1999) to which I referred in the Introduction, pursue this Foucauldian line of questioning by gesturing to the contingencies and idiosyncratic proclivities—the subjective and coincidental character of research and practice—behind supposedly “objective” science.

While traditional history dissolves “the singular event into an ideal continuity,” genealogy “deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations” and affirms “knowledge as perspective,” rather than erasing evidence of its writer’s “grounding in a particular time and place.”⁶⁵ In other words, if the historian effaces his or her individuality in service of alleged “objectivity, the accuracy of facts, and the permanence of the past,” which results in a “concerted

⁶³ In other words, Foucault’s is not an attempt to capture the “whole picture” of a past age or distill its essential significance; Foucault avoids tendencies toward presentism (which takes a concept from present and tries to find that it had a parallel meaning in the past) and finalism (finds the kernel of the present at some distant point and then shows the necessary development from that point to the present). Dreyfus and Rabinow, 119.

⁶⁴ Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, 143–44.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 154–8.

avoidance of the exceptional and (the) reduction of all things to the lowest common denominator,” the genealogist focuses on “the accidents, the minute deviations [...] the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist for us.”⁶⁶ More so than the archaeological method, genealogy fragments history and shows it to be far more heterogeneous than typical accounts allow: Nietzsche called it “effective history” or “counter-memory” that dissipates stable identities and denaturalizes that which is consolingly familiar, which grounds people and breeds complacency. More specifically, because genealogy is a reflexive practice that acknowledges itself as interpretation or perspective, it is a truer form of “historical sense” which gives rise to three uses opposed to the “Platonic modalities of history”: 1) the parodic, “directed against reality,” and opposed to the “theme of history as reminiscence or recognition,” 2) the dissociative, “directed against identity,” and opposed to “history given as continuity or representative of a tradition,” and 3) the sacrificial, “directed against truth,” and opposed to “history as knowledge.”⁶⁷ Foucault elaborates on the idea of parody in terms of a “concerted carnival” in which the “alternate identities” offered by the historian (such as Roman prototypes for the French Revolution) are recognized by the genealogist as nothing more than a disguise, but are taken up with a knowing wink. “The genealogist will push this masquerade to its limit and prepare the great carnival of time

⁶⁶ Ibid., 139–147.

⁶⁷ Foucault, *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History*, 160.

where masks are constantly reappearing, [...] our “unrealization” through the excessive choice of identities.”⁶⁸

Hence, Foucauldian genealogy seeks to undermine the discourse of “monumental history” by dispersing it, troubling its reductive, idealistic narrative by exposing details and interconnections that have been repressed in the interest of creating a cohesive (substantiating) story. Some have argued that genealogical analysis generates pessimism at the expense of criticality, contending that its agenda of fragmentation and delegitimation undermines the possibility of making history meaningful— not only for powerful institutions, but also for those that would oppose them.⁶⁹ But the method has been successfully adapted by many critical historians including Tony Bennett, who in *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995), adopts Foucault’s genealogical approach in order to trace the development of the modern museum’s “political rationality” through “apparently alien and disconnected” correlations in the world exhibition, traveling fair, amusement park, and heritage site as these forms emerged in the nineteenth century.

Beyond drawing connections between these cultural institutions, however, Bennett is concerned also (through a large part of his book at least) with inserting them, the so-called “exhibitionary complex,” into the “governmental” cluster of normalizing

⁶⁸ Ibid., 161. Foucault also often employed parody citationally to critique the discursive conventions of the institutions he historicized, but he also used it in order to pay tribute to Nietzsche, echoing for example one of the philosopher’s most notorious claims (“God is dead”) when he posited the aforementioned death of “man.” See Downing, 13.

⁶⁹ Michael S. Roth, *The Ironist’s Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 71.

apparatuses— including the prison, asylum, hospital, and school— outlined by Foucault. Following Foucault’s notion of liberal government— which describes a modern type of “panoptic” power relation that, pervading society to the level of the individual body, produces a docile, self-regulatory citizen and thereby reduces the need for overt coercion— Bennett looks to the modern museum as an exemplar of “the development of a new ‘governmental’ relation to culture in which works of high culture were treated as instruments of [...] social management.”⁷⁰ As punishment (i.e. the spectacle of the scaffold) is withdrawn from the public gaze, surveillance permeates society and is internalized, but, Bennett postulates, this is not a unidirectional transmission: the exhibitionary complex orders people, but in allowing them to see themselves as both the object of knowledge (via natural history displays, for instance) and the subject (via vantage points over the crowd, flattering displays of national industry, ethnographic exhibitions of the “other,” and so on), it also inculcates *identification* with power and the orderly imperative. The “eye of power” is here distributed and possessed by everyone— the crowd becomes visible to itself as the ultimate spectacle and the working class is morally “improved” by exposure to and identification with the upper classes.

Manifestations of the exhibitionary complex share several important characteristics that contribute to their operation as technologies of power. Firstly, they generally assume a didactic or “rational and improving orientation” and are largely based on the practice of “showing and telling” (exhibiting objects and/or people in a “manner calculated to communicate specific cultural meanings and values”). Secondly, they are all, as opposed to the private collections of the Renaissance, essentially public or open to

⁷⁰ Bennett, 7.

everyone, which occasions their concern to devise ways of regulating the behavior of their visitors and, ideally, to “do this in ways that are unobtrusive and self-perpetuating.” Finally, they are all concerned in one way or another to manage the performative aspect of visitors’ conduct (i.e. to direct physical movement through space and thereby construct a certain type of experience and maintain order).⁷¹ I would add that tourism, the institution of travel and sightseeing that connects the various nodes of culture described by Bennett to a range of others, is itself both a structured and coercive “system of aesthetic surfaces”⁷² with an improving, exhibitionary orientation. Like the orchestrated procession through the exposition or museum, the regional tour or road trip is also a social ritual, a “ceremonial agenda involving [...] obligatory rites,”⁷³ that promises a transcendent or total view— a way of incorporating disparate episodes into a unified and *authentic* experience of otherness (both geographically and historically speaking). Like the museum, it relies on a realist aesthetic, an uninterrupted surface that will not belie its constructed, mediating nature.

While more will be said about tourism in Chapter 2, I introduce it now in order to place the road trip or exploratory journey as a point among others— the heritage site, the museum, the amusement park— in the genealogical constellation traced over the course of Dion’s project, *Travels of William Bartram— Reconsidered*. These contemporary technologies of power/knowledge, which reproduce dominant understandings of and

⁷¹ Bennett, 6.

⁷² Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976, new introduction by the author from which this quote was taken, 1989), x.

⁷³ Erving Goffman quoted by MacCannell, 43.

attitudes toward nature and history, are connected through the actions of the artist and given a temporal or diachronic dimension by his establishing Bartram as a historical counterpoint. Acting as both the author-display maker *and* a reader-spectator who allows himself to be positioned by the exhibitionary/touristic complex and its rhetorical structures, traditions, and tropes, while also gesturing back to the root of these modalities, Dion spatially sketches connections between “apparently alien” yet interrelated roles and spaces, past and present. These spaces share, in addition to didactic (enculturating) and ordering (normalizing) functions, the realist aesthetic of “objectivity” or “authenticity” and its attendant panoramic subject— a subject who identifies and is complicit with power, with the desire to know and possess. Drawing these sites together for analysis – in a manner which announces itself as interpretation (as art) no less– is itself a Foucauldian move, but, as will be shown in the following chapter, Dion’s parodic adoption of Bartram’s “mask” is also a genealogical maneuver aimed at subverting science’s claim to objectivity, as well as interrogating dominant historical narratives at the foundation of American identity.



Fig. 16: Mark Dion, *The Great Chain of Being*, 1999. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 17: Mark Dion, *Scala Natura*, 1994. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

Chapter Two Reinterpreting History: Parody and Process

In keeping with the genealogical task of spotlighting seemingly ancillary historical figures—slightly “odd birds” whose work or beliefs do not fit neatly in monumental history’s progressive trajectory—Mark Dion has chosen in William Bartram an often overlooked and complex character with apparently contradictory proclivities.⁷⁴ William (1739–1823) was the fifth of seven children of John Bartram (1699–1777), a Quaker-cum-Deist farmer and naturalist who went on, despite his lack of formal education, to be appointed the King’s botanist by George III and to found the American Philosophical Society with Benjamin Franklin. John corresponded with several prominent scientific figures in Europe, including Carl Linnaeus, who called him the “greatest natural botanist in the world.”⁷⁵ Growing up on the family farm, botanical garden, and commercial seed nursery on the banks of the Schuylkill River in Kingessing

⁷⁴ “Overlooked” is a relative term: there have been several books and essays devoted to the life and work of William Bartram, some of which explicitly announce the author’s intention of correcting a tendency to neglect the younger Bartram’s significance (see for example Bruce Silver, “William Bartram’s and Other Eighteenth-Century Accounts of Nature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 39, no.4 (Oct.–Dec., 1978): 597–614) and others of which (such as Thomas P. Slaughter’s *The Natures of John and William Bartram*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) assert that William’s contribution to horticulture was of equal or greater importance to those of his father, as if to suggest that no such tendency exists. Most histories of natural history focus on Europe, in any case, and therein William Bartram is indeed rarely if ever mentioned.

⁷⁵ John D. Cox, *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), 42.

(now within Philadelphia city limits), William is said to have been a quiet and sensitive child who displayed a great talent for drawing flora and fauna from a very young age. As such, he was invited to accompany his father on several botanizing and collecting trips throughout the Northern and Southern colonies, and thereby continued to refine the illustrating skills (figs. 18 and 19) that would one day garner comparison to John James Audubon, among other celebrated artists. Father and son together are credited with “introducing into cultivation” more than 200 native species of plants collected during their trips spanning the length of Eastern North America, and William is additionally recognized for his identification of 215 species of birds.⁷⁶

The Bartrams had a somewhat tempestuous relationship as William grew into adulthood, stemming primarily from the younger’s inability to settle into a career after studying history, languages, and the classics at Philadelphia Academy (now University of Pennsylvania). In 1761 he left a business apprenticeship in Philadelphia to try his hand as a merchant on Cape Fear River in North Carolina, and after failing at that, managed a rice and indigo plantation in Florida, lasting there for less than one year.⁷⁷ After returning to Pennsylvania in 1767 and being unsuccessful or unhappy in other business pursuits, William secured the patronage of an English medical doctor in 1773 to undertake his own collecting journey to virtually unexplored (by white settlers at least) regions of the Southern colonies. Beyond vicariously satisfying his amateur interest in botany and European curiosity about the fabled American wilderness, it is unclear exactly

⁷⁶ From the brochure available at Bartram’s Garden visitor center.

⁷⁷ Judith Magee, *The Art and Science of William Bartram* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), Chapters 1–3.

what this patron, Dr. Fothergill, hoped would be gained from the trip; William was asked, anyway, to collect plants and seeds as well as keep a journal. The expedition lasted for over four years and eventually produced Bartram's *Travels*, but William also sent a separate report to Dr. Fothergill, the tone and content of which suggest he was surveying the region's natural resources and native peoples in terms of future settlement and agricultural development.⁷⁸

While the private report is thus a relatively straightforward reflection of the “Enlightenment project of attempting to map, know, and dominate,” William's strikingly Romantic public account of fifteen years later suggests a more complicated relationship to nature.⁷⁹ The narrator of *Travels* describes in minute detail, classifies according to both the systems of local native communities and the Linnaean taxonomy, and hypothesizes causes for observed animal behavior, but also waxes poetic in the face of God's great abundance and anthropomorphizes much of what he sees. Counter to the “proto–evolutionary” theories of Hume for example, which were being widely discussed in Europe around the time Bartram returned to Philadelphia,⁸⁰ *Travels* describes nature as a product of God's planning:

⁷⁸ Cox, 43.

⁷⁹ Quoted text is from Cox, 43. Bartram's relationship with the Native Americans of the South, including a community of Seminole (a faction of the Creek Nation) he camped and traveled with on several occasions, generally seems to have been amicable on a personal level, if finally deeply problematic in terms of the displacement and land development he helped make possible. An in-depth analysis of his interactions with the Creek and Cherokee is, however, beyond the scope of this project— hence my intentional focus here on his relationship to nature.

⁸⁰ Silver, 600.

We admire the mechanism of a watch, and the fabric of a piece of brocade, as being the production of art; these merit our admiration, and must excite our esteem for the ingenious artist or modifier, but nature is the work of God omnipotent. . . . If then the visible, the mechanical part of the animal creation, the mere material part is so admirably beautiful, harmonious and incomprehensible, what must be the intellectual system?⁸¹

Even when Bartram cannot enthuse over a living thing's aesthetic beauty, as he is inspired to do by the "pompous Palms of Florida" and the "umbrageous Live Oak," he rests assured that it possesses other valuable qualities that likewise attest to the Creator's great craftsmanship and good will toward Man:

Though none of these most useful tribes [here he is speaking of various medicinal plants] are conspicuous for stateliness, figure or splendor, yet their valuable qualities and virtues, excite love, gratitude and adoration to the great Creator, who was such to endow them with such eminent qualities, and reveal them to us for our sustenance, amusement and delight.⁸²

The last lines of this passage echo pre-classical treatises on signatures and as such suggest that Bartram was perhaps a truly anomalous late Classical figure in whom many strands of thought coexisted. Bartram's expressive prose style also reveals an artistic sensibility, a subjective viewpoint that sees in terms of association and metaphor rather than through a mechanical lens of objective perception. Readers find themselves far beyond the ostensibly transparent "plain style" language dictated by the scientific societies of Europe,⁸³ for example, when Bartram describes being engulfed by a hurricane:

⁸¹ William Bartram, *Travels and Other Writings* (United States: The Library of America, 1996), xxiv.

⁸² Bartram xvii, quoted by Silver, 601.

⁸³ In *Voyage Into Substance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984), Barbara Maria Stafford describes how, in the 17th century, Descartes, Bacon, Locke and others challenged the

Being heretofore so closely invested, by high forests and deep swamps of the great river, I was prevented from fleeing the progress and increase of the approaching tempest, the terrific appearance of which now at once confounded me; how purple and fiery appeared the tumultuous clouds! Swiftly ascending or darting from the horizon upwards; they seemed to oppose and dash against each other, the skies appeared streaked with blood or purple flame overhead, the flaming lightning streaming and darting about in every direction around, seems to

tradition of rationalist thought descending from Plato and Aristotle, discarding the notion of nature as a “permanent and abiding” entity. Principles previously thought to have been atemporal (“lodged in nature”) were thereafter seen as being engendered by the mind and senses; nature became the mutable object of ongoing empirical research and amendment (i.e. progress) interested in establishing unchanging rules applicable to these contingencies. The conundrum posed by the notion of knowledge as limited to *ideas* about reality, in combination with this imperative to “certain truth based on the ideal of unanimous consent” (science) beyond the vagaries of personal vision (art), gave rise to what Stafford calls the “scientific gaze.” This is defined as “a tireless and unrelenting visual exploration which was determined to register and “prove” the existence of the external”; in this mode of conscious perception, “the beholder wills to refrain from intervening and controls the associating powers of the mind.” Concurrent with this development, Stafford posits the establishment of a “utilitarian prose style” and reformation of the scientific academies in which metaphor, figurative language, “obscurity and mystification”—any hint of finesse that might draw attention to the author’s personality—was banned as illusionistic and deceitful. The explorer was thus armed with an insistent (and mythic) empirical method of perception and newly “lucid idiom” against the bewildering chaos of nature; he aimed at perfect mimesis in his descriptions and, because he could ostensibly see *more*, recognized the need for greater systematization. Combined with the celebration of the explorer-scientist’s “lively curiosity,” this desire to see and know grew in the 18th century into an ideal of “passionate intelligence” marked by “openness to everything, intellectual boldness,” and the keen perception and vivid description of the “concrete particular.” This was opposed to the non-scientific 18th century travel account’s bias toward the Picturesque, in which the particular functions as “stimulus for mental wanderings” directed at ultimately transcending singular forms, such as was urged by Sir Joshua Reynolds. (pp. 31-47) Regardless of official disciplinary constraint on grandiloquent language, however, into the nineteenth century the voyaging field naturalist was increasingly publicized and collectively imagined as a heroic figure, thought of as struggling over remote and dangerous terrain in pursuit of strange new plants and animals for the glory of the national museum. Dorinda Outram postulates that figures such as Alexander von Humboldt, of the generation following Bartram, “came closer than any other men of science to emulating the heroic men of action central to 19th century imperialist mythology.” See “New Spaces in Natural History,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, 259.

fill the world with fire; whilst the heavy thunder keeps the earth in a constant tremor.⁸⁴

Certainly Bartram's stirring recourse to blood and fire would be disparaged by most of the scientific community, and it is unlikely that this description, or others like it, were recorded immediately as empirical observations. Bartram's narrative continues following the above passage, for instance, with his crossing a lake between the woods from whence he came and a plantation visible on the other side. The appearance of the sky that day, as well as many other sights Bartram documented, surely further percolated through intervening memory and the conventions of the travelogue genre as the author reworked the text over a fifteen-year period. Indeed his text conforms to many tropes of the travel narrative tradition against which the academy was trying to establish an empirical plain style. These narratives always involve an element of overcoming hardship, because the account must be perceived as a *record* of survival so it can pique interest and achieve an effect of veracity. Gillian Beer describes this effect as the product of a "double motion created by telling the tale in retrospect to a reader who is setting out on the journey." In other words, the publication of the account affirms the traveler's re-entry into "normal" (shared) society and thus offers the reader reassurance, at the same time as it proffers possession of the exotic knowledge gained by the explorer.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Bartram, 141.

⁸⁵ Gillian Beer, "Traveling the Other Way," in *Cultures of Natural History*, 322–23. Beer underscores the difficulty field naturalists and explorers encountered in describing their experiences in a compelling but objective tone, especially after several travel narratives long believed to be true documents of journeys undertaken, such as Defoe's and Captain Singleton's, were proven fictitious. Since the tradition of writing about voyages is ancient, "natural historians on their travels found themselves writing within rhetorical

Bartram's own rhetorical embellishment of his struggle in the wilderness (or perhaps the distorting quality of his subjective lens, which is here likely glazed with fear), is perhaps nowhere more in evidence in *Travels* than in drawings (fig. 20 and 21) Bartram made of "the subtle, greedy alligator." One of the images, in which the alligator appears more as a fairytale dragon than an empirically observed animal, depicts a mammoth reptile rearing up from its watery lair, a menacing billow of steam exuding from its oversized head. The other shows the beast presiding over an ominous sinkhole, which, as a de-contextualized alcove in an abstracted field of sketchy lines, could be happened upon anywhere in the exotic unknown of the Everglades. The accompanying description heightens the drama and sense of danger:

Behold him rushing forth from the flags and reeds. His enormous body swells. His plaited tail brandished high, floats upon the lake. The waters like a cataract descend from his opening jaws. Clouds of smoke issue from his dilated nostrils. The earth trembles with his thunder. When immediately from the opposite coast of the lagoon, emerges from the deep his rival champion. They suddenly dart upon each other. The boiling surface of the lake marks their rapid course, and a terrific conflict commences. They now sink to the bottom folded together in horrid wreaths. The water becomes thick and discoloured. [...] The proud victor exulting returns to the place of action. The shores and forests resound his dreadful roar, together with the triumphing shouts of the plaited tribes around, witnesses of the horrid combat.⁸⁶

modes that were both enabling and dangerous to their project: enabling because detailed sensory description was valued in the genre, dangerous because such description was easily melded into fantasy and received as playful exaggeration rather than controlled observation" (323). Diaries, field notes, samples and specimens thus became important for vouching for the objectivity of a given record, but at the same time, the personal record of what was smelt, touched, etc. provided convincing written evidence of actual experience and thus, authority on the subject described.

⁸⁶ Bartram, 118.

Judging by passages such as these, it is perhaps easy to imagine why, though the book did not do quite as well in the newly independent United States, it excited scores of “armchair travelers” and even garnered acclaim from a few noteworthy poets— including Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Chateaubriand— across the Atlantic.⁸⁷ Beyond the aesthetic quality of his prose, one of the likely reasons Bartram’s text was found so enthralling was because it achieved a sense of veracity despite its capricious forays into pure lyricism. Thrilling tales of adventure and rhapsodic asides before the sublime exist side by side with passages written from the perspective of a strict pragmatist with an eye to order and sheer resource potential. Bartram is thus in many ways an idiosyncratic figure in the discourse of natural history: he was a poet-artist *and* scientist in the age of Enlightenment, a time when these roles were believed largely inimical to each other. He was also a restive, religious man with an introverted— even frail and fearful—disposition who became an unlikely explorer and self-aggrandizing author, and a traveler mapping territory— bringing “remote” areas and cultures into the fold of a burgeoning national identity— at the very moment of that nation’s inception. One of a dying breed of “gentleman” scholars whose career straddled Foucault’s postulated break between the Classical period and the Modern, Bartram is a figure who cannot be neatly slotted into the secularizing progress of history defined by “great controversies that are said to have

⁸⁷ Albert E. Cowdrey, *This Land, This South: An Environmental History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 63. *Travels* went through nine editions within a decade in Europe, and, Cowdrey suggests, the Southern forests described therein subsequently passed into European literature. Coleridge, for example, apparently transformed Floridian springs described by Bartram into the fountains of Xanadu in *Kubla Khan*. Underscoring the book’s oddity in terms of *scientific* or ostensibly objective travelogues, in 1804 Coleridge wrote this on the flyleaf of his copy: “This is not a book of Travels, properly speaking; but a series of poems, chiefly descriptive, and occasioned by the Objects, which the Traveller observed.”

divided men's opinions and passions, as well as their reasoning."⁸⁸ He has likely been left out of many history books because he is not representative of either side of any great controversy— he is not emblematic of anything other than ambivalence and subjective complexity— and because his unscientific scientific account problematizes all supposedly empirical narratives' claim to objectivity. Dion's contemporary reinterpretation of Bartram's journey can thus be seen, on one level, as a performative genealogical endeavor that disperses the neat linear trajectory of history by giving prominence to a marginal and multivalent character.

Dion's presence necessarily looms large in his rendition of *Travels* because, enacting the role of genealogist, he cannot efface his position in the present, but must illustrate historiography as interpretation. His re-performance, as opposed to "faithful" historical reenactments, calls attention to itself as a distorted mirror image of the past, a representation that could never be accurately mimetic. Though Dion's personal identity is never dissipated in this particular masquerade, his taking up of Bartram's "mask" serves to undermine historical continuity and agitate national identity, in so far as this is tied up with collective imagination of the iconic American landscape and notions of the pioneers' heroic conquest of the wilderness. I will revisit this issue, but suffice it to say here that his re-performance highlights how much the landscape has in fact changed over the course of our nation's relatively brief lifetime. What Bartram and Dion saw and had occasion to collect in the same geographical locations, separated by 230 years, are of course much different things. This begs the question as to whether a geographical location truly remains the same place, and a constant foundation for identity, when so

⁸⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 126.

much has been completely altered.⁸⁹ In the same stroke, this gesture also underscores the accidental or arbitrary nature of science by demonstrating that what a traveler comes to collect, see, and “know” about a region is determined in large part by subjective choices (where to visit), personal or historically dependent proclivities (beliefs, interests, memories, etc. which direct attention to certain objects over others), and coincidental experiences (who one happens to meet, what modes of transport are available, and so on). Foucault’s notion of contingency, and of the limiting structures underpinning the possibility of “thinking *that*” at any given moment, echo through each of these deciding factors highlighted by Dion’s journey.

It is not just the fact of difference that exists *between* Bartram and Dion, as two endpoints on a chronological continuum spanning from natural idyll to post-industrial degradation that is emphasized by Dion’s repetition, however. When Dion says in an online video-conference that he sees Bartram as initiating a tradition that continues through “Lewis and Clark, Kerouac, Pee Wee’s *Big Adventure*, and Borat,” he playfully subverts Bartram’s import and levels the differences between high (scholarly, scientific, “factual”) and low (entertaining, pop culture, fictitious) travel genres, while also implying that these are related modes of viewing the world.⁹⁰ Bartram’s scientific journey and the

⁸⁹ This of course leads into infinite regress toward the conclusion that no two perceptions of a place may be the same, whether between two different people at the same time or even one person at different times.

⁹⁰ This type of irreverent blending of fact and fiction, high and low is a recurring theme in Dion’s work. *Extinction, Dinosaurs and Disney: The Desks of Mickey Cuvier* (1990), for example, featured stuffed Mickey Mouse dolls in the place of Baron Georges Cuvier (another “mixed” figure in the history of natural history whose notion of geological time contributed to theories of evolution, but whose Christian faith ironically led him to attack Lemarck and other proponents of natural selection) at desks allegorically representative

grand narrative of Manifest Destiny embodied by Lewis and Clark are thus placed on par with a Beatnik's partly factual, partly fictional quest for authenticity in the elsewhere of America, a man-child's ridiculous cross-country adventure in search of stolen bicycle, and a "mockumentary" which takes as its premise a Kazakh journalist's quirky (and critical) odyssey from New York to Los Angeles in hopes of marrying Pamela Anderson. Like Sasha Baron Cohen, the British comedian who plays the "journalist" Borat, Dion takes up a premise or guise with ironic intentions—Bartram affords him an entry point to the "field naturalist" or "Enlightenment explorer" trope and its implications, which can be juxtaposed to that of the contemporary, touristic road tripper and exploited for critical effect. This critique, which is parodic in structure, cuts several ways at once, exposing the rhetoric of history and science as such, implicating the "original text" (Bartram and explorers like him) in a problematic lineage of "unwitting" expansion and domination, and gesturing to the cultural institutions which have inherited and promulgated those tendencies by rendering history and nature as consumable attractions.⁹¹

of his various achievements. The tableaux became animated when the viewer stepped on a button, prompting a recorded lesson from Mickey and thus imitating the dioramas of Disneyworld that convey the 'official' (i.e. hegemonic, selective, conciliatory) version of history.

⁹¹ Here I follow Linda Hutcheon in assuming that parody can still function as a politically potent tool for critique. Hutcheon's position on parody, first elaborated in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1989), counters detractors such as Frederic Jameson, who view it as having been transformed in the postmodern age into the "value-free, decorative, de-historicized quotation of past forms" (*Politics*, 94). For Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), parody has been replaced by pastiche: "Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (17). This "blank parody" is, in Jameson's estimation, an expression of both our political impotency

The Bartram project represents a more subtle and complex use of parody as a tool for criticality than many of Dion's past projects. He has frequently relied more directly on visual signifiers, as in adopting and displaying the conventional costume, tools, and mannerisms of field or laboratory scientists. For his project *On Tropical Nature* (1991), for instance, the artist donned the khaki and olive drab fatigues of naturalists like William Beebe (see figs. 22 and 23) and camped alone for three weeks in a relatively remote area of the Venezuelan rainforest, with only occasional visits from a photographer and boatman sent to pick up his latest findings. Using all the typical tools of the trade, such as killing jars, insect mounting pins, a plant press, 'field glasses,' and so on, and living the machismo lifestyle of a solitary explorer in an exotic locale, Dion simultaneously went through the motions of a 'real' botanist or entomologist and acted out the mythologized explorer 'type.' His findings, however, ended up at the Sala Mendoza in Caracas, rather than in a display case or storage room at a natural history museum (fig. 24). Similarly, in 1992, Dion appeared in a white lab coat, with latex gloves, tweezers, preservation jars, infra-red lamps, labels, etc. in the American Fine Arts, Co. gallery during business hours to work on 'specimens' gathered for *The Upper West Side Plant Project* and *The Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of New York (Chinatown Division)* (fig. 25). The former of these so-called "bureaucracies" studied "fruits, vegetables, and plants purchased at markets on Broadway between 110th and 111th

and loss of genuine connection to the past. Hutcheon contends, on the other hand, that "through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (*Politics*, 93). In her view, parody upsets accepted belief systems and disrupts prevailing "doxa," politicizing representation and demonstrating the ways in which interpretation is essentially ideological. For her, it is a valuable mode of self-contradiction and "self-undermining" (*Politics*, 1).

Streets,” classifying, preserving, and labeling a representative sample of the botanical life available within these constrained parameters.⁹² The latter studied and displayed the “marine life” (i.e. seafood) of a similarly controlled section of Chinatown.

Jonathan Culler’s discussion of “meaning and iterability” in relation to J.L. Austin’s speech act theory serves as a useful way to begin thinking about how these pieces function critically, mocking ‘real’ scientific methods and highlighting the arbitrary inclinations and culturally coded quality of science.⁹³ Austin sought to explain ‘illocutionary force,’ noting that while linguistic relations in a sequence (langue) may tell us much about meaning, they cannot account for how this meaning can be changed in context—how a sentence may perform a promise in one situation, but not succeed in promising in another, for example. Traditionally, performatives, which accomplish an act such as promising, had been seen as supplementary to constatives (statements which describe), but Austin deconstructed this relationship, showing that constatives can be

⁹² Lisa Graziose Corrin, “Survey,” in *Mark Dion* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 65.

⁹³ Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism After Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 110–134. Nicolas Bourriaud includes Dion in his discussion of performative, interactive and collaborative art practices of the 1990s that he says create “social interstice” (*Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods, Dijon, France: Les presses du réel, 2002). In Bourriaud’s view, works like Dion’s “Bureaucracies,” which involve an element of role-playing, generate ideational spaces at a remove from the social, economic and political systems of the “outside” world. Dion’s appropriation of discursive and professional protocol, aimed at “recreating the socio-professional” and “relational” world of scientific disciplines within the gallery space, activates slippage between the aesthetic and utilitarian functions of the objects he utilizes. Bourriaud dubs this type of practice “operative realism,” a tendency he sees as encouraging oscillation between “contemplation and use” (35). While these are valuable observations, I would like to extend his passing mention of these as parodic practices, and look at how activating such as slippage might function to critique the appropriated socio-professional realm (discourse).

seen to perform the act of affirming. Thus constantives are actually special cases of performatives, and the former hierarchy becomes meaningless.

In trying to systematically describe what makes signifying events (parole) possible, Austin concluded that it is not the speaker's intention, but the conventional rules of particular contexts that make a statement a command or a promise. Illocutionary force, in Austin's formulation, does not follow from grammatical structure, but depends on other factors "going off right"—a conventional procedure like a wedding must, for example, be performed by a person appropriate to the circumstances, i.e. someone invested with power from the state, or the marriage is not valid. In this light, the processes, tools, and guises of science can be seen as signifying sequences or codes which rely on convention to gain meaning (validity): they must be used by someone with an 'appropriate' level of knowledge or 'expertise,' and be situated in a serious, scientific context as opposed to an amateur, artistic, or role-playing one. This engages Jacques Derrida's notion of "supplementarity"—the unauthorized, unserious or pretended usage of language is something extra, added to ordinary language and wholly dependent on it— but, as Culler notes, "for me to be able to make a promise in real life, there must be iterable procedures or formulas, such as are used on stage... 'serious' behavior is a special case of role playing."⁹⁴ For features of a 'real' meaning-making event to be identifiable, one must be able to isolate them as elements that could be repeated, and thus "the iterability manifested in the inauthentic, the derivative, the imitative, the parodic, is what makes

⁹⁴ Culler, 119.

possible the original and the authentic.”⁹⁵ Seen from this perspective, Dion’s ‘unserious’ appropriation of scientific guises (fig. 26) and procedures reveals them as signifying sequences, denaturalizing their everyday appearance and making them available to critique. If, as Umberto Eco has said, “a sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else... if it cannot be used to lie, it cannot be used to tell the truth,”⁹⁶ than these codes for ‘expertise’ can be made to lie, and the expert, as well as the facts he or she produces, should not be trusted as unquestionably right or ‘true.’

Dion’s work thus reminds us that the scientist or naturalist operates in/with and (re)produces a historically and culturally constructed system that, like language, mediates and determines what can be “known.” Derrida, so often interested in highlighting logical collapse in theories by exposing their reliance on the notion of presence, in his essay “Signature, Event, Context” (1971) showed Austin’s exclusion of the unserious to have been necessary if he were to avoid falling back on intentionality. Similarly, the expert’s exclusion of the amateur is a strategic way of imposing limits on context, putting a frame around it to control who’s opinion can become fact, or who’s fiction may be accepted as history. As Culler notes, however, “when anyone proposes an example of a meaningless sentence, listeners can usually imagine a context in which it would in fact have meaning; by placing a frame around it, they can make it signify. This (is an) aspect of the functioning of language, the possibility of grafting a sequence onto a context that alters

⁹⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁶ Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (1976), quoted by Culler, 114.

its functioning.”⁹⁷ Thus, because a further frame can always be placed around the circumstances at hand, context is boundless. Meaning in language is, as Austin postulated, context-bound, but context is interminable, and is thus not a solid base upon which to judge legitimacy or authority. If attempts to describe limits always make possible the displacement of those limits, then Dion’s appropriation of the language of science can be seen to displace the limits of expertise in order to undermine the exclusionary matrix that legitimates its authority.

Dion’s parodic doubling can thus be seen to open up possibilities for interpretation, showing that context is what makes opinion into fact and subjective observation into objective information, but that context is an unstable ground. The critical effect of projects like Dion’s “bureaucracies” does, however, depend on a working notion of bounded context— the viewer’s sense of location within a physical and/or ideological “art” space as distinguished from the everyday world— and on meaning being at least partially *directed*, using the “double-voicing” of irony, rather than being left open to free play. The trans-contextualization of science into art or art onto science is a sort of synchronic graft through which Dion’s performance of “naturalist-explorer in the wild” or “expert in the lab” can be read as a repetition of a generalized “original.” This repetition is, however, characterized by ironic inversion which signals critical distance and highlights difference instead of similarity between the two “texts” (parody).⁹⁸ The possibility of such a reading relies on shared aesthetic or formal conventions— such as the

⁹⁷ Culler, 122.

⁹⁸ This is the basic definition of parody provided by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

uniforms and equipment associated with the scientific field— that can be “superimposed onto seemingly very different conventions” or expectations.⁹⁹ The “success” of parody in highlighting contrast or opposition thus relies on the sophistication of the viewer or reader, since he or she must be able to perceive the aesthetic and ideological overlay that is occurring. This assumes a certain common cultural background, and in more complex cases such as Dion’s project *Travels of William Bartram— Reconsidered*, specific knowledge of the text and tradition being referenced will deepen the viewer’s recognition of references. Allusions to incidences described in *Travels* are found throughout Dion’s cabinets, such as a large crow in a preserving jar that likely refers to Tom Crow, a pet of Bartram’s that he raised from a hatchling, and a jar of conte, a Seminole foodstuff made from Smilax tubers that Bartram enjoyed.¹⁰⁰

On a more general level, however, Dion’s trip is a version of the emulative collecting journeys of the Renaissance, in which naturalists, who described themselves as

⁹⁹ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 9.

¹⁰⁰ “We were graciously received, and treated with the utmost civility and hospitality; there was a noble entertainment and repast provided against our arrival, consisting of bears ribs, venison, varieties of fish, roasted turkies (which they call the white man's dish) hot corn cakes, and a very agreeable, cooling sort of jelly, which they call conte; this is prepared from the root of the China brier (*Smilax pseudo China*; *Smilax aspera*, fructu nigro, radice nodosa, magna, laevi, farinacea. Sloan, tom I. p. 31. t. 143. f. I. habit. Jamaica, Virginia, Carolina and Florida;) they chop the roots in pieces, which are afterwards well pounded in a wooden mortar, then being mixed with clean water, in a tray or trough, they strain it through baskets, the sediment, which settles to the bottom of the second vessel, is afterwards dried in the open air, and is then a very fine, reddish flour or meal; a small quantity of this mixed with warm water and sweetened with honey, when cool, becomes a beautiful, delicious jelly, very nourishing and wholesome; they also mix it with fine Corn flour, which being fried in fresh bear's oil makes very good hot cakes or fritters.” Bartram, 241. Dion dug for catbriar tubers with a horticulturist and a few collaborators, and included an anthropomorphic tuber in the cabinet along with the jelly the team made after the dig. (<http://www.markdionsbartramstravels.com/post16.php>)

“pilgrims” in the religious sense, were compelled to visit sites described by their scientific forebears or places reminiscent of those described in classical literature. The Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher was, for instance, inspired to visit Mount Vesuvius because of the legendary status it had achieved as a parallel to “Vulcan’s furnace” in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and scores of other naturalists made herborizing trips to Italy, and Monte Baldo in particular, so that they might “see first-hand the plants that Pliny had known.”¹⁰¹ The fact that Dion is unable to turn up some of the plants that Bartram had known, such as the now-extinct (in the wild at least) flowering *Franklinia* that the Bartrams actually “discovered,” is one part of the difference highlighted by his ironic emulation.

In Dion’s parodic “pilgrimage,” travelogue tropes made manifest in Bartram’s narrative, such as “the hero overcoming danger in exotic lands,” are ironized by virtue of their relative banality. At one point in the artist’s trip, Dion and his companions became lost while paddling along Alabama’s Bartram Canoe Trail, despite their having a “glossy brochure” and “prominent yellow signs” to follow.¹⁰² Finding parts of the Tensaw waterway obstructed by debris from recent hurricanes, the team was forced to wade and portage their canoe several times, and ended up completely disoriented, somehow having made their way onto the Alabama River. Here they received a tow from some bemused fishermen. Finding they had forgotten to pack the tent (but had remembered the single malt scotch), the team camped under the stars in a littered

¹⁰¹ Fifteenth-century humanist Rudolf Agricola, quoted by Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 180.

¹⁰² See Dion’s journal entry about this incident at <http://www.markdionsbartramstravels.com/post10.php>

campsite on shore, only to become lost again the next day, and so on, until they were finally towed back to their cars by some “hard-drinking” sportsmen on day three. Dion’s description of these trials in his journal lapses into terms oddly reminiscent of the film *The Blair Witch Project* (1999): “Then something went wrong...Four times we passed by [the] ancient hollow cypress, but could not find a passage through this creek.”

Another “encounter” with the “natives” is described in the artist’s journal using an overtly parodic tone. Dion’s description of his visit to a Floridian retirement community, called Sun City, clearly takes up the conventional “field notes” rhetoric of disciplines like anthropology and zoology, which has become familiar to contemporary Americans via the likes of *National Geographic* and a range of more ridiculous television shows like *The Crocodile Hunter*, but which extends out of a long tradition of patronizing, “observing X in its natural habitat” type writing. The account describes the retirees as a “tribe of people who live in a manner utterly foreign to us,” a migrating “monoculture” from the North who have settled in a village comprised of identical dwellings, the manicured lawns of which are maintained by a group of “ethnically distinct” laborers.¹⁰³ The games of golf and tennis, which “have been elevated to the status of religion,” are the rituals that, along with swimming and the “social consumption of alcohol,” bind the community together. Here parody mocks all such retirement communities, a commonplace of American culture, making them seem strange and absurd, while also deprecating the author’s position. Other journal entries document the artist’s experience of places like Disneyworld, where it was “hard to tell what was real and what was

¹⁰³ See the Sun City journal entry at <http://www.markdionsbartramstravels.com/post6.php>

artificial,” and St. Augustine, Florida, which Dion (condescendingly) calls a “city of hyper-tourism...crammed with hordes of over-weight, t-shirt wearing tourists.”¹⁰⁴

Hence, while a repetition of Bartram’s seemingly innocent collecting journey is perhaps the surface idea or message, the double voice of irony here implies a subtext that also implicates Bartram in a problematic modality: one that gave rise to things that “continue to exist for us” in the form of the ruined American landscape and its artificial refurbishment with Disneyworld, tourist districts, and homogenous subdivisions of spacious single-family homes. In some ways he would seem an improbable fit for the role of gallant explorer-colonialist, but Bartram’s may be seen as a version of the “anti-conquest” narrative in which “the naturalist naturalizes the bourgeois European’s [or American’s] global presence and authority.”¹⁰⁵ Traveling under the pretense of harmless data-collection, naturalists often constituted the advance guard of the larger Enlightenment project, the goals of which correlate to those of “an ever-expanding European (and later American) capitalism” and which required systematic accounting of natural areas in order that they could be efficiently exploited.¹⁰⁶ John D. Cox, describing Bartram’s implication in the “anti-conquest” of the American landscape, notes the ironic symbolism of the following passage from *Travels*, in which the author downplays his role in leading a surveying party to large tracts of land just obtained from the natives: “I chose to keep a small distance ahead of the Main body; by which I avoided the heat and dust

¹⁰⁴ See journal entry posts 19 and 27 respectively.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, quoted by Cox, 46.

¹⁰⁶ Cox, 45-6.

rais'd by such a Number of People; & at the same time had leisure & oppertunaty to pick up any curiosities within view.”¹⁰⁷ Bartram thus unassumingly paints a near perfect picture of himself as an inadvertent(?) trailblazer for the imperialistic Enlightenment project.

Alternately, Bartram’s enhanced accounts of dangerous encounters (with animals as well as “Indians”) in the untamed wilderness heroicize their narrator and, Cox argues, are symptomatic of his *fashioning* himself as an ideal American individual.¹⁰⁸ Entering the wilderness has long been symbolic of the stripping away of social conventions and sanctions, and in American culture, became dually bound up with notions of personal freedom and the necessity of mastery. A century after *Travels* was published, ‘biographer’ of the American frontier Frederick Jackson Turner would even suggest that “the taming of the wilderness was *the* significant fact of the American identity.” For Turner, westward progress symbolized movement away from effete Europe and acted as

¹⁰⁷ Bartram 440, quoted by Cox, 46.

¹⁰⁸ John Rennie Short outlines the trajectory of the “myth of the wilderness” in his *Imagined Country: Society, Culture, and Environment* (London: Routledge, 1991). He suggests that the wilderness as a place to be feared had a long lifespan in the European imagination— from the evil spirits of Beowulf through Little Red Riding Hood— and that stories of this type often reflect fear of those marginalized people who live in the wilderness and are not part of the “formal social order.” This attitude, he says, persisted in colonial America and engendered the notion of wilderness as a place to be tamed and transformed into civilization. This image was shaped by Christian rhetoric of the garden: “the garden became the image of human achievement and ethical endeavor; subduing the wilderness contained the possibility of moral redemption.” This according to the author follows from the biblical account of Adam and Eve who, cast out of Eden, “were thereafter made to till the ground” (12-13). Cultivating the garden, or the image of “the family farm,” hence condenses in American ideology notions of togetherness and cooperation, closeness to the earth and thus high morality, as well as free enterprise and just rewards for hard work (103).

a kind of “safety valve,” as each frontier “did furnish a new field of opportunity, a gate of escape,” and promoted democracy and self-reliance by engendering traits of “rugged individualism.” John Rennie Short suggests that once internal frontiers had been exhausted, this expansionist ideology was expressed through the creation of new frontiers abroad (in Vietnam, for example) and beyond (the Space Race).¹⁰⁹

However, domestic frontiers do remain on a personal, if not national, level. Susan Stewart suggests that traveling, by virtue of taking the tourist to markedly *other* places, promises “authentic” experience that cannot be had in the everyday familiarity of home. Authenticity, she writes, has become “both elusive and allusive as it [has been] placed beyond the horizon of lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated.” In Stewart’s estimation, this results from “the development of culture under an exchange economy” in which “experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world...replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence.”¹¹⁰ Thus, travel and the road trip, as depicted in countless novels, films, and television shows like *On the Road*, *Easy Rider*, and *Route 66* since World War II, have become synonymous in contemporary American culture with freedom, rebellion, and direct, authentic experience. Paradoxically, this association arises from and feeds the accumulation of these representations which, as did the travelogue genre in Bartram’s time, constrain and direct our experience of the “open road” and contribute to the

¹⁰⁹ Short, 92–94.

¹¹⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 133.

“sacralization” of sights and sites as shared cultural icons. Dean MacCannell suggests that the attraction thus acquires its aura of authenticity, not by virtue of being the original, but through and by the process of reproduction: it is the re-presentations in narrative and image that, by their detached and simulacral nature, create the original’s originality by contrast.¹¹¹

However, the connection between travel, freedom, and American identity can be traced back in a concrete kind of way to Bartram’s time, when it was written into the Articles of the Confederation as the very first standard of individual rights: “[...] entitled to all the privileges and immunities of free citizens in the several States, the people of each State shall have free ingress and regress to and from any other State, and shall enjoy therein all the privileges of trade and commerce.”¹¹² Bartram, who proudly reached the Mississippi River during his travels, then a Western extreme that his father had also dreamed of attaining, may thus be seen, as Dion suggests, as one of the progenitors of this now classic American ritual— one of the first (domestic) American tourists. Guy Debord described contemporary tourism as “human circulation packaged for consumption, a by-product of the circulation of commodities [and thus of the homogenizing power of capitalism to unify and abstract space] (and) the opportunity to go and see what has been banalized.”¹¹³ Tourism today is more than a by-product, however— it is a powerful engine in its own right that actively transforms history and

¹¹¹ MacCannell, 158–59.

¹¹² Article 4 of the *Articles of the Confederation*, quoted by Cox, 2.

¹¹³ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), 94.

nature into an attraction to be gazed upon, an agent of the *differentiation* that is necessary for capitalism's perpetual expansion.¹¹⁴ Dion's "double-voiced" performance, by including, for instance, a visit to Disney's Animal Kingdom® Park within the parameters of its Bartramian agenda, links the "anti-conquest" narrative of Enlightenment expansionism to this contemporary touristic modality of power.

If the critical subtext is not recognized, however, or perhaps even regardless, Dion's *Travels* may, on the other hand, be seen as simply *partaking* in this capitalist commodification of place and the sacralization of cultural sites. It comes dangerously close to being just another nostalgic road trip in the American tradition— with the added mystique of the Artist (recently reborn according to Kwon's formulation of the "itinerant artist" as the unique "progenitor of meaning") in the position of protagonist— which expresses longing for a lost, "real" nature in the face of postmodern simulacra.¹¹⁵ I would argue, however, that Dion's trip may be seen on another level as a self-reflexive parody that actually takes the notion of the itinerant artist (especially since Dion features prominently in Kwon's *One Place After Another*) to a condensed and absurd kind of endpoint. The itinerary is made part and parcel of the art product, rather than a side effect of contemporary site-specific practice, in which "the artist has come to

¹¹⁴ Miwon Kwon, in her essay "The Wrong Place," *Art Journal*, Vol. 59, no. 1 (Spring, 2000) points to Lefebvre's insights on the "dialectical rather than oppositional relationship between the processes of expanding abstraction of space and the production of particularities of place, local specificity, and authenticity of cultures." She goes on to suggest that "one might go so far as to say that this desire for difference, authenticity, and our willingness to pay high prices for it (literally), only highlights the degree to which they are already lost to us, thus the power they have over us" (35).

¹¹⁵ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, Chapter 2.

approximate the “work” (and) it is the performative aspect of the artist’s characteristic mode of operation that is repeated and circulated [among institutions] as a new commodity.”¹¹⁶ Even so, the trip still accomplishes the very thing it mocks.

Parody as a form inherently walks a fine line between criticality and conservatism, as it necessarily positions the producer as a kind of controlling agent who inscribes evidence in the work to be found— the act of parodic communication cannot be considered complete unless this encoding intention is realized. This circuit of “co-creation” involves the receiver in a “participatory hermeneutic activity,” at the same moment that the ironic rhetoric distances him or her critically from the “target” text.¹¹⁷ Linda Hutcheon suggests that the completion of the circuit gives the receiver “pleasure in recognition and delight in critical difference” and that for the artist, parody may be a therapeutic kind of gambling on the reader’s “getting it.”¹¹⁸ Thus, the device may be seen as a way for the encoder or producer to exercise agency, as the appropriation of institutionalized structure is in effect the (momentary) seizing of control from the authority of history and discourse.

While parody may in this light, as Hutcheon suggests, open up a “workable and effective stance toward the past in its paradoxical strategy of repetition as a source of freedom,” it still relies on a (variable) degree of cohesion and uniformity in its audience: the paradox of parody is, in other words, that its transgression is always already

¹¹⁶ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 47.

¹¹⁷ Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 94.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

authorized, that it becomes, in Foucauldian terms, “the affirmation of limited being.”¹¹⁹ This begs the question as to whether Dion’s work effectively critiques or, conversely, reinforces existing cultural codes, modes, and tropes. Parody, especially of the “reverential variety,”¹²⁰ can be a conservative form that *preserves* or resuscitates continuity over time rather than disrupting it. The opposite, “revolutionary” brand of the form aims at and ostensibly produces renewal, or the creation of new, distorted form through “parodic incorporation and synthesis.”¹²¹ Whether Dion’s *Travels* is, finally, reverential or revolutionary—whether he is critical of or complicit with the dominant modes he engages in—one can never conclusively ascertain. The point is, rather, the creation of a complex web of discursive connections, of various possible readings, that keeps the audience wondering. Dion thus becomes a “magnet for criticism” not by didactically confronting his audience, but by coaxing them into a mutable constellation of interpretation and reversal, seeming at one moment to highlight and question discursive regimes of power, and the next to be part of the “problem.”

¹¹⁹ Foucault, quoted by Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody*, 26.

¹²⁰ Hutcheon’s take on parody is different from several other authors’ on the same subject, notably Margaret Rose’s, in that she does not exclude non-comedic or non-mocking manifestations in her definition of the form.

¹²¹ Hutcheon, 97.



Fig. 18. William Bartram,
Franklinia alatamaha, 1788.

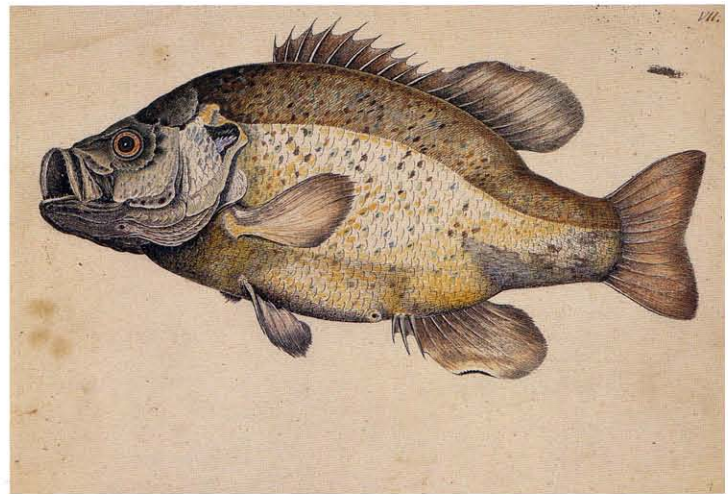


Fig. 19. William Bartram, *Lepomis gulosus* (Warmouth),
1770s



Fig. 20 William Bartram, *The alligator hole in E. Florida*, 1774



Fig. 21. William Bartram, *Alligator mississippiensis*, 1770s



Fig. 22. Mark Dion, *On Tropical Nature* (in process in Venezuela), 1991. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 23. William Beebe, 1917



Fig. 24. Collection (installed by museum staff) from *On Tropical Nature*, 1991. © Mark Dion.



Fig. 25. Mark Dion, *The Department of Marine Animal Identification of the City of New York (Chinatown Division)*, 1992. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 26. Mark Dion, *Costume Bureau*, 2006. Mixed media. Dimensions variable. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.

Chapter Three Indeterminate Transference: the Dialectics of Display

A motley collection of items gathered during Dion's travels through the southern states— from tourist kitsch and everyday items such as thimbles, golf tees, and cocktail umbrellas, as well as antique trinkets, gadgets, and toys, to pickled and taxidermic birds, serpents, and eggs, bones large and small, driftwood, shells, and pressed plant life of all sorts— was shipped back parcel by parcel to Bartram's Garden where it was displayed in the landmark residence for several months. Dion's idiosyncratic assemblages of objects inside the dimly lit stone house, enclosed in wooden cabinets and out of the way crannies, quietly clashed with the spartan eighteenth-century décor and stood in contrast to the Bartrams' living "collection" (as augmented and reproduced by modern caretakers) outside. There, the upper gardens of herbs and flowers, planted in an informal manner near the kitchen entrance to the house, open onto a lower plot of larger trees and shrubs. The assortment of species featured in these gardens, the brochure tells us, faithfully reflects the Bartrams' typical inventory, and specifically mirrors their 1783 nursery catalogue. Beyond the tended tracts, a fifteen-acre meadow, encircled with rustic split rail fencing, and a shaded wetland area slope down to the banks of the Schuylkill. Pathways provide access to what remains of John Bartram's cider press— a circular furrow carved in the bedrock near the riverbank— and to grassy riverside knolls from

which one might take in the idyllic view of oil refineries and smokestacks across the water.

Aside from this glaring (and ironic) inconsistency, and perhaps the additional hiccup experienced on entry to the Garden's gravel drive— which meanders through a locally infamous housing project called “Bartram's Village”— the 45-acre site is a virtually seamless oasis of American heritage. While falling shy of proffering the total immersion experience of reenactment sites like Colonial Williamsburg (though the gift shop is camouflaged within the carriage house, there is no one in period costume sitting around churning butter), the Garden, like most heritage sites, shares the realist aesthetic of the natural history museum. As in the museum, and even more so, objects here are believed to “speak for themselves,” to be straightforward *presentations* as opposed to representations. Situated within this context, Dion's performative interpretation of history, translated into a collection of souvenirs that have been arranged according to personal predilections and offered for visitors' discovery and further construal, serves as a critical counterpoint to the rhetoric of unmediated actuality. This chapter will introduce several ways of thinking about how this is, or might be, accomplished.

My reticence here, and the reason I say “might be,” stems from my knowing that not everyone who visited the house during the *Travels* exhibition was allowed the same degree of freedom to walk through the house alone as I was granted. Most visitors were accompanied by a tour guide, who discussed the historical function of each room and offered a brief overview of the performative aspect of Dion's *Travels* piece, as well as a summary of the artist's past work and concerns. Visitors could direct their guide, should they want to revisit a room or linger somewhere longer, and were permitted to circulate

through each room and to pull out the drawers of Dion's cabinets as they pleased following the guide's introduction. I do not believe the guided aspect wholly negates the critical functioning of the artwork. It may even heighten one's awareness of the thoroughly managed and mediated nature of experiencing such sites, especially in incongruous juxtaposition to what was for many, an unexpected encounter with contemporary artwork. The supervised and (partially) directed nature of engagement should, however, be noted as a potential locus of tension between its critique of and complicity with the disciplining nature of exhibitionary institutions.¹²²

This push and pull, between creating personal agency and being hopelessly directed by discursive regimes and managed by technologies of power, is of course the hallmark conundrum of Foucauldian theory with which I began Chapter 1. In Chapter 2, I suggested that parody functions in a similarly paradoxical way, as a kind of cognitive relational device that involves expropriating and bending tradition (discourse) to one's own purpose, but which necessarily also entails acknowledging and acting within the constraints of those conventions. In this chapter, Dion as genealogist is seen to exhume a cast off approach to display, which was popular in the Renaissance but long afterward disparaged as a muddled and irrational hodgepodge that failed to accurately represent the world order. The formerly aristocratic Wunderkammer, or "cabinet of curiosities," as a throwback to the episteme undergirded by Resemblance, an anachronistic blemish on the

¹²² I am aware of the dangers attendant to assuming a stable, ideal viewer or abstract phenomenological subject of experience, and so proceed with caution in the pages that follow. It is my aim to give the reader a sense of the space, the order in which I imagine most visitors likely encountered Dion's objects, and to describe what interacting with each of the pieces that I have singled out for discussion might be like. I have tried, in sum, to discuss what is essentially my experience of the piece in more general terms, though I acknowledge my perspective as such and assume that other interpretations exist.

surface of the carefully conserved eighteenth century Bartram home, like parodic re-performance holds out the possibility of critical agency even as it affirms our limited ability to think beyond what is or came before.

Most visitors to the Bartram house during the *Travels* exhibition probably first came across the collections of objects situated in various out of the way places on the ground level before encountering the cabinets upstairs. This is an important preparatory step that, to my mind, initiates a mode of seeing and thinking that should be carried over to interaction with the Wunderkammer. Entering through the front door into a modest common room with a low wooden ceiling, the viewer is likely drawn (or led) to the right, past the open (but roped off) door of the study into a very spare and sunny conservatory. Here, one begins to realize that something is slightly amiss. Looking left, the viewer notices a collection of alligator kitsch— ashtrays, decorative figurines, the base of a boot brush. Odd indeed, but there is something more alluring across the room: noticing that the tall, built-in glass-panel cabinet which spans the far right corner is packed full of something, the viewer is inclined to get up close in order to peer in on the contents.

Upon finding the shelves are stacked with brown paper-wrapped packages, which have been stamped, addressed, and processed by the post office, the viewer strains to read the text through the glass (fig. 27). After realizing the boxes were sent from various locations in the southern states to Bartram's Garden staff, the viewer may notice that all the boxes are stamped in red ink: "HATE ARCHIVE: Do not open." Whether or not the tour guide is asked to explain the presence of these seemingly misplaced objects (the tour guides did not suggest how the viewer should interpret the boxes, but described whom the sender was, what the overall project entailed, and that the contents of these boxes are

racist memorabilia discovered during Dion's travels), the viewer familiar with American history can begin to piece together clues. The boxes are displayed, but their hateful contents concealed: one cannot help but wonder why the artist would do such a thing. Is he trying to spare the viewer? Is he symbolically blotting out the United State's racist past as a wishful, healing gesture? Is he performing, in order to expose, the selective, mollifying versions of history recounted at Disneyworld and other aestheticized heritage sites such as Bartram's Garden? Obviously, I would argue that this last interpretation is the best one, but "the Hate Archive" aspect of *Travels*, as an inaccessible collection preceded by signals that conjure shared cultural associations as well as personal memories, is also interesting as a galvanizing technique.

Like shadows or silhouettes, the unopened boxes engage the aesthetic principle of *non finito*, which tells us that the human mind responds strongly to the unfinished thing. Silhouettes, for instance, activate the mind of the beholder, in as much as he or she must supply the contour with features from memory. In the nineteenth century, John Ruskin emphasized the "potent psychological effect of silhouettes, of memory and imagination working in synthesis," and argued for the importance of exercising this human faculty he called "Second Sight."¹²³ Describing the metaphoric quality of the drawer, chest, and wardrobe in terms of memory and imagination in *Poetics of Space* (1957), Gaston Bachelard similarly deduced that "there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box. To verify images kills them, and it is always more enriching to *imagine* than

¹²³ Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 160.

to *experience*.”¹²⁴ Rather than trivializing America’s troubling racist legacy by containing it (figuratively speaking) in an easily digestible narrative, Dion challenges viewers to fill in the ellipses themselves, to actively engage their own memories and associations, at the same time as his blatant effacement gestures to the subjective choices that shape all displays. His “Hate” objects, hidden in plain sight, provoke critical awareness of the ways in which museums and heritage sites often work to the opposite effect, “killing” images for wholesale consumption by wrapping them in (biased) didactic information and positioning visitors as passive learners. He thus demonstrates Walter Benjamin’s proposition that not only is there “no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” but that “the manner in which [the document is or was] transmitted” is also “tainted” with brutality.¹²⁵ Selective representation of history, in other words, promulgates the atrocity, commits the same oppression, as those unseemly events that it elides.

Walking back through the common room toward the stairs, the viewer would likely next pause at the roped-off door of the study. Looking right, he or she would see a desk— with paper and quill poised as if someone has just decamped mid-sentence— and to the left, a wide glass-panel cabinet beside a window. This one, too, is filled with objects, but cannot be accessed for a closer look; one may, however, be able to make out the shapes of plastic bottles (filled with water samples, the guide might say) and their brown mailer tubes beside. Again one is left to wonder why they should be displayed and yet

¹²⁴ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 88.

¹²⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 256. Dion also apparently likes to quote this passage— see Cross, 118.

inscrutable, and thus the curiosity and consciousness awakened in the conservatory is sustained as the viewer takes to the steep staircase. Veering left when the steps split off in two directions at their apex, one enters what was once probably a bedroom. Now almost devoid of eighteenth century trappings (for the run of the exhibition at least), several pieces of Dion's custom-made furniture— including a large chest of drawers, shallow horizontal display case, and small, triptych-like cupboard— were here given pride of place.

The latter cabinet— the first visible on entry to the room— held about thirty postcards (fig. 28), which were pressed between panes of glass in hinged, wood framed leaves that folded out from a central panel. Each card bore a simple hand-painted “portrait” of an object on the front and a hand-written inscription on the back. Some cards were inscribed solely with caption information, reporting where, when, and how the pictured “Inky cap mushroom” or “Small rubber Mickey Mouse” was found and collected, while others also recounted a related snippet of historical information about William Bartram's travels. A card picturing the “Ring-billed gull, seen on the Lake Pontchartrain causeway by Mark Dion. Louisiana Nov 25 2007,” for instance, also straightforwardly informs the addressee, Stephanie Phillips— and, by extension, the viewer— that “William Bartram sailed along the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain in mid-October 1775.”

Like the unopened boxes of “the Hate Archive,” the postcards contribute to an atmosphere of indeterminate transference that is counter to the seemingly straightforward pedagogic messages that they, and the exhibitionary complex, convey. The postcard partakes in a paradoxical economy of the gift, in which “the acts of giving and receiving

are complicated by the uncertainty of their destinations or sources, and the resulting difficulty in assigning responsibility for the exchange.”¹²⁶ The sender, surrendering his personal message (which is ostensibly addressed to one person but which is in fact available to anyone) to chance and the “aporias of the postal relay,”¹²⁷ undermines the possibility of absolute or infallible address. The transmission from sender to receiver can always go astray, and “must, in fact, since any going at all, with no unique destination, must be in some sense astray—‘a letter can always— and therefore must— never arrive at its destination.’”¹²⁸ Dion’s addition of historical information to several of his postcards further exacerbates this uncertain state of affairs, for it places Bartram’s historical record— the source of the recounted information— at another remove from the addressee. Here the artist gestures to the potential for loss in translation inherent to the transmission of historical knowledge: he relates the “facts,” but acknowledges his status as an individual (subjective) and distant (indeterminate) sender, who is liable to have misinterpreted the original text or re-recorded the information erroneously. Perhaps even Bartram himself— whose Lake Pontchartrain is further abstracted, made less a real and experienceable site by Dion’s gesture— recorded or remembered the wrong information. Thus, Dion points up the potentially distorted and unstable nature of received historical “truths,” which are, following Foucault, relative and based solely in the vagaries of motivated interpretations.

¹²⁶ William N. West, “Nothing as Given: The Economies of the Gift in Derrida and Shakespeare,” *Comparative Literature* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 4.

¹²⁷ John Phillips, “Reading the Postcard: On ‘Envois,’” an expanded version of a paper Phillips delivered at a conference also entitled “Reading the Postcard,” n.d., Oxford University: <http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/elljwp/readingthepostcard.htm>.

¹²⁸ Derrida, *The Postcard*, quoted by West, 11.

Part of the paradox of the postcard is that, while its absolute communication to the intended recipient— or anyone at all for that matter— is never assured, the other’s reception of the postcard is, at the same time, “the receipt, the ticket stub, that validates the experience of the site, which we can now name as the site of the subject [sender] himself or herself.”¹²⁹ The postcard, strongly associated with leisure travel and the tour, once purchased (or in this case, produced) at the “authentic” site (perceived as *more* authentic than home by virtue of its otherness) and made “official” by the postmaster’s stamp, cements the reality of the subject’s experience via his giving it to an other.¹³⁰ This is the gesture which Susan Stewart suggests “recapitulates the social’s articulation of the self— that is, the gesture of the gift by which the subject is positioned as the place of production and reception of obligation.”¹³¹ But whose experience is validated here? Whose self is

¹²⁹ Stewart, 138.

¹³⁰ Akbar Abbas, in his discussion of the figure of the collector, echoes Stewart’s discussion of elusive authentic experience, but gives it a historical dimension. He writes that modern writers such as Flaubert, Nietzsche, and Conrad underscored “an intense longing for experience [that] goes together with an even more intense suspicion that authentic experience under modern conditions is somehow not available.” The figure of the collector, whose “dangerous though domesticated passions” were articulated differently by each of these writers, “focuses and exacerbates these tensions in modernism.” More will be said about the collector below. See Abbas, “Walter Benjamin’s Collector: The Fate of Modern Experience,” *New Literary History* 20 (Autumn 1988), 225.

¹³¹ Stewart 138. Other authors, including William West (quoted above), have written about the economy of the postcard as inherently erotic and destabilizing. Georges Bataille, subsuming postcards and forms such as folklore under the heading of “acts with erotic value,” associated this economy with “the heterogeneous,” which threatens homogenous exchange society. “Locating the foundation of homogeneity in money, Bataille insisted that social cohesion was constantly threatened by the heterogeneous, or ‘unproductive expenditure.’ The unconscious, dreams, excrement, violence, excess, delirium, and persons, words, acts with erotic value (i.e. folklore and postcards) all fell within the category of the heterogeneous.” See Donald LaCoss and Raymond Spiteri, *Surrealism, Politics, and Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 176.

articulated? Dion's? Bartram's? Identity, experience, historical trajectory— all become splintered and convoluted. The allusion to this economy of indeterminate address and (complicated) self-reflexive affirmation, and to contemporary tourism in general, establishes an important frame of reference to carry over to the Wunderkammer across the room.

Turning to face this much larger cabinet, its divided stack of drawers elevated on tall legs to an accessible level, one's eye was immediately captivated by the glinting specimen jars covering its uppermost surface. The appealing, warm glow of sunlight refracting through the amber-colored preservation fluids quickly took on a more macabre cast, however, as one's gaze fell upon the blank, open eyes of dead reptiles, birds, and fish. Approaching the cabinet and cautiously taking hold of one of the gold knobs, the viewer gambled (likely with a subtle thrill of perverse curiosity) on what they might find inside the heavy wooden chest. The drawers slid open with ease— this was clearly a newly built piece of furniture, but one modeled on an old and unusual design.

Like a “Choose Your Own Adventure” story, the twenty-four different drawers provided for many possible experiences of the piece, depending on which drawers the viewer selected to open and in which order (fig. 29). The left column of drawers held *Artificialia*— mostly mass-produced items— and the right column, *Naturalia*. Larger natural objects like manatee rib bones, shelf fungi, and an anthropomorphic smilax or “catbriar” tuber occupied a deeper bottom drawer, which was matched on the left by another containing things such as rusty railroad spikes, ice cream scoops, and old-fashioned metal toys. Shallower drawers were subdivided according to evident typologies like “wine corks,” “door knockers,” “hotel soaps,” “animal figurines,” “seed

cones,” “corked vials of insects,” “seaweeds,” “miscellaneous spherical pods,” and so on. Alternately, some compartments held only one or two unique objects such as (what appeared to be) a mummified baby vulture, a brightly colored bird, and a bat with a broken wing.

The kind of physical engagement encouraged by Dion’s Wunderkammer is clearly not of the same order as the interactive buttons, bells, and whistles commonly found in contemporary science centers and history museums. There is no pre-determined lesson to be learned here, but rather an open-ended process of discovery, association, and allusion. It is immediately apparent that the arrangement of objects reflects not the modern “scientific” or evolutionary (causal) taxonomy, but an order based on formal and functional similarities (correspondences), as well as concern for aesthetic cadence and provocative juxtaposition. What the overall arrangement *means*, or if it indeed represents a significant system or “world order,” remains a mystery: discernment, beyond recognition of scattered visual references to Bartram’s book and to Dion’s travelogue and postcards, is beside the point. Rather, it is the gesture to an alternate way of knowing—the essentially flexible, active, and relative one expressed in the Renaissance-era Wunderkammer—and to the inducement to wonder and interpret that is key.¹³²

Other artists currently working in a manner similarly based on collecting,

¹³² Perhaps not surprisingly, many authors writing on Dion’s work have noted or elaborated on the historical connection to the “cabinet of curiosities,” and in fact this model of display has even become a popular paradigm for collection remix types of exhibitions such as MoMA’s “Wunderkammer” (2008). I believe that by taking up a particular strand of Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s thinking—who it should be noted also assumes a Foucauldian perspective in her book *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992)—in the pages that follow, I am bringing something of a new angle to this aspect of the discourse on Dion’s work.

classification, and display— such as Karston Bott and Portia Munson, among others— often forgo presentation architecture or furniture all together, opting instead to break with established systems by non-hierarchically spreading objects across the floor. Clearly in comparison, Dion’s (repeated) adoption of historical fittings is important to the interpretation of his work, and is, I would argue, directed at effecting disjunction by confronting the viewer with an “enigmatic object seemingly unhinged in time.”¹³³ Before discussing how the appropriated Wunderkammer form functioned in its own time, I would like to briefly elaborate the effect of its reincarnation, as a sixteenth-century technology in an eighteenth-century house, within a twenty-first century city, and so on: in short, as an anachronism. In disrupting a realist aesthetic by subtly manipulating its terms, it perhaps comes as no surprise that Dion here draws on a technique exploited effectively by the Surrealists in the years following the First World War.¹³⁴

In his 1929 essay “Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” Walter Benjamin outlined the ways in which the “revolutionary energies that appear in

¹³³ Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 22.

¹³⁴ Dion has in the past made explicit reference to the Surrealism in his work, as in his 2005-08 piece at the Manchester Museum in England, entitled *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy*. Dion created the installation— a locked room, the contents of which were visible through glass windows in the front wall— during a period when the museum was undergoing major renovations, and salvaged many pieces of outdated furniture and equipment in order to create a tableau evocative of an eccentric research office. Open drawers and shelves— inaccessible and intriguing like the boxes and samples in *Travels*— displayed anomalous and symbolic objects including a platypus, a mandrake root, and a six-legged guinea pig. See David Lomas, “Mark Dion’s Surrealist Legacy,” *Bureau of the Centre for the Study for Surrealism and its Legacy* (Manchester: Book Works and The AHRB Research Centre for the Studies of Surrealism and its Legacies, 2005) and Endt, “Beyond Institutional Critique: Mark Dion’s Surrealist Wunderkammer at the Manchester Museum,” *Museum and Society* 5, no. 1 (March 2007).

the ‘outmoded’” could be used to undermine the industrialist rhetoric of modernization and advancement.¹³⁵ For Benjamin, the Surrealists in particular had succeeded in transforming the culturally cast-off into the politically significant by confronting bourgeois culture with its own relinquished dreams, “testing it against its own compromised values of political emancipation, technological progress, cultural access, and the like.”¹³⁶ The act of forcing the obsolete back onto consciousness, in other words, disrupts capitalist culture’s “mythic assumptions of a rationalized, evolving history (and modernity) by provoking the interpenetration of past and present.”¹³⁷ Activating varieties of the outmoded such as “the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photos...grand pianos, the dresses of five years ago, [and] fashionable restaurants when the vogue has begun to ebb from them,” Breton and the Surrealists thus mastered the “world of things” by substituting a political view of the past for a narrowly historicist one.¹³⁸ Dalí wrote of his own deployment of the anachronistic as an unsettling, invasive technique in more evocative terms:

¹³⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Surrealism: the Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 177–92. David Lomas suggests that the views expressed in Benjamin’s Surrealism essay “are anticipated in an earlier passage from “One-Way Street” where [Benjamin] talks about the magnetic attraction that detritus has for children and of their capacity to fabricate alternative, more intuitive worlds from the leftovers of the adult one. ‘In using these things,’ Benjamin writes, ‘they do not so much imitate the works of adults as bring together, in the artefact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one.’ See Lomas, 2.

¹³⁶ Lowenstein, 22.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁸ Benjamin, *Surrealism*, 182.

Anachronism is the single ‘imaginative constant’ capable of perpetual ‘traumatic renewal,’ thanks to which it becomes possible to snatch raw and living lumps from that hard and extremely thick thing which is the sentimental fog from which are formed the very checks of memory... Far from being the unusable, so-called ‘stuffed thing,’ considered inoffensive by the intellectual pseudo-experience which ironically disposes of it in the ‘storehouse of junk of the ages,’ ‘anachronism’ is, on the contrary, a real and living thing, a thing having flesh and bones.¹³⁹

While I seriously doubt that Dion’s use of obsolete display technologies truly shocks anyone, or induces “traumatic renewal” as the Surrealists’ aimed to do,¹⁴⁰ it does disrupt viewers’ expectations by enabling the interpenetration of disparate chronological moments. Beyond presenting an affront to capitalist modes—since in Benjamin’s view, the collector strips objects of their commodity character by conferring a “fancier’s value” on them, in place of exchange or use value¹⁴¹—Dion’s Wunderkammer challenges the “objective” and “rational” scientific way of knowing that undergirds the myth of progress so indelibly entrenched at the foundation of capitalist ideology. Rather than effecting “spontaneity and liberation through the irrational” as the Surrealists supposed they

¹³⁹ Salvador Dalí, from *The Collected Writings of Salvador Dalí*, 253, quoted by LaCoss and Spiteri, 176.

¹⁴⁰ As Lowenstein points out, Benjamin implies that the interpenetration of past and present “depends on the catalyzing force of horror (Surrealism at its most profane), and on shocking recognition of history’s horrors within the fabric of the everyday” (22).

¹⁴¹ Akbar Abbas notes that Benjamin described the collector as a figure engaged in a struggle against universal commodification, whose possession of objects seemingly negates their commodity status. “But, Benjamin immediately adds, it is a ‘task of Sisyphus.’ The collector confers on objects ‘only a fancier’s value, rather than use-value’ (*Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 168). In other words, the collector saves objects only by turning them into Art. In the process, however, art turns into mere objects of contemplation; hence the uneasy relation between art and commodity fetishism” (220).

could,¹⁴² however, Dion *orders* his collection, but does so according to an alternative, esoteric logic based on a model from the archive of natural history.

Widely considered the precursor to museums as they developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries— though the differences between the two forms are more abundant than similarities— the Renaissance Wunderkammer showcased the private collection of an aristocrat or scholar. The cabinet manifested in a variety of forms over the course of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, from sizable rooms filled from floor to ceiling with objects to freestanding, and often opulently ornate, little wooden cupboards (figs. 30, 31, and 32).¹⁴³ Collectibles similarly ranged in size and type according to the individual’s tastes, purpose, and means. “Exotic” geological specimens, shells and Narwhal tusks (thought to be unicorn horns), rare and “monstrous” animals, ancient Roman coins, Egyptian statuary and mummies, miniscule carvings on cherrystones, weapons from the recently “opened” New World— all found their way into European cabinets via crisscrossing networks of travelers, scholars, dealers, and everyday merchants.¹⁴⁴ Examination of the material remains of antiquity complemented the

¹⁴² Bourriaud, 12.

¹⁴³ It is not within the scope of this chapter to distinguish between the studiolo, the Schatzkammer, the Kunstschränk, and various other types of curiosity cabinets, but I do want to discuss the form in general terms and cannot do justice here to what is obviously a diverse and historically specific phenomenon. See Hooper-Greenhill; Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor, *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) for more detailed accounts.

¹⁴⁴ Findlen 174–79. Findlen discusses the ways in which the scholarly collector’s entry into the marketplace— to purchase unusual specimens hauled in by local fishermen, for example— “forged a new relationship between knowledge and experience” (174). Thus,

“revival of literary classical studies which lay at the root of Renaissance learning,” and in combination with efforts to map and collate objects from the “fringes” of the world, was directed at establishing “the position of mankind in the grand scheme of things.”¹⁴⁵ The character of this grand scheme, and the process by which one situated oneself in relation to it is, however, largely unthinkable from our present orientation.

As opposed to the modern museum, the cabinet was a microcosmic reflection of the world as macrocosm, a non-linear and associational model of “universal nature made private.”¹⁴⁶ Expressive of the interrelationships between God and man, and arranged by the collector in such a way as to “represent or recall either an entire or a partial world

she asserts, the seeds of the empirical sciences and a broadening definition of natural philosophy were sewn during the Renaissance, even as knowledge was still based largely in the perusal of ancient texts.

¹⁴⁵ Impey and MacGregor, 2.

¹⁴⁶ Hooper-Greenhill, 78. Lisa Gaziose Corrin (“Survey,” *Mark Dion*) suggests that contents were typically discussed according to four main categories: 1) *Naturalia*, or specimens created by God, such as animals, plants, and minerals (with special emphasis accorded to oddities and deformities), 2) *Artificialia*, or paintings, sculpture, inventions, and assemblages of natural items ‘perfected’ by man, 3) *Antiquitates*, or objects of historical significance such as medals of rulers or architectural fragments, and 4) *Ethnographica*, or ‘exotica’ garnered from Native peoples of the “New World.” More fundamentally, according to Mark Meadow and E. Bruce Robertson, the distinction between *Artificialia* and *Naturalia* “emphasized the special status of human consciousness and its products within the cosmic order, and was linked to a new view of human purpose in the world; no longer a mere spectator attempting to read the text of God’s creation, the individual was now seen as an active participant granted the divine gift of creativity, able to draw power from and to reproduce the natural world. [...] The relationship between *Naturalia* and *Artificialia* reflected that of the macrocosm and microcosm: nature was recapitulated in human artifacts; the order of the cosmos was reiterated in that of the human body. The truth of this relationship was revealed in those things which blurred the distinction between art and nature: shells which demonstrated architectural principles, crystals which formed perfect geometrical solids, natural patterns which rivaled the creation of painters, and human crafts which mimicked nature.” See UCSB-sponsored site authored by Meadow and Robertson, “Microcosms: Objects of Knowledge,” <http://microcosms.ihc.ucsb.edu/essays/004.html>

picture,” placement of objects within the cabinet was fluid and directed at creating knowledge by comparison.¹⁴⁷ “The fact that the world was interpreted in terms of allegory and symbol and that this could be endlessly reinterpreted through reversibility and shifts in emphasis...meant that each thing could be ordered and reordered as different classifications...or plays of sympathies were employed.”¹⁴⁸ Without regard for “natural” relationships based on geographical origin or historical continuity, juxtapositions instead might suggest metaphorical relationships or surprising correlations between distant locations or peoples. The overall collection— never felt to be complete or completable— was thus a testament to God’s infinite wisdom and bounty.

Aristocratic collectors like Piero de Medici gathered together precious objects and presented them in their cabinets as “a unified totality,” which was relational and relative to the collecting subject’s judgment and understanding.¹⁴⁹ Juxtapositions of material objects, based on an elaborate system of correspondences or similitudes, were regarded as aids to active contemplation, but the intended connections between them were not necessarily apparent to everyone equally. An individual collector’s system of arrangement, directed toward the occult objective of “penetrat[ing] beyond the world of appearances,” was “frequently deliberately obscure, often to protect ‘secret’ knowledge

¹⁴⁷ Quote is from Hooper-Greenhill, 78; E. Bruce Robertson, “Curiosity Cabinets, Museums, and Universities,” *Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation*, Colleen J. Sheehy, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 49.

¹⁴⁸ Hooper-Greenhill, 67.

¹⁴⁹ The fact that Dion’s collection is composed of relatively “worthless” items (as opposed to Piero’s gems and other rare and costly objects) seems to work in opposition to the process of subjectification detailed by Hooper-Greenhill, by which the aristocratic cabinet-owner established his superior standing via the display of wealth and status. See Hooper-Greenhill, Chapters 2 and 3.

from profane eyes.”¹⁵⁰ Eilean Hooper–Greenhill suggests, furthermore, that within the Renaissance episteme, the cabinet of curiosities articulated order and truth in a manner similar to, or dependent upon, a contemporary and highly individualized mnemonic method called “the art of memory.”¹⁵¹

The art of memory was an old technique even by Renaissance standards, having been developed during ancient times. It was adapted during the Renaissance, however, to suit the hermetic inclinations of Neoplatonism. Many of the references contained in memory images and expressed through juxtaposition within the cabinet have been lost—thus enabling most histories to speak of these forms as “irrational” or “confused”—but it is the structural or functional similarity that is important here. Essentially, the idea was to memorize a complex theory, speech, or text by imagining (or physically representing) a series of easily graspable *loci*—usually architectural structures such as rooms in a house, but also sometimes segments of a garden or phases of a journey (fig. 33). Within each of these *loci*, a strategic distribution of allegorical images— a sword above the fireplace, a basket of apples on the table— would jog one’s memory when the imaginary spaces were “revisited” in turn. The wise subject, Hooper-Greenhill notes, chose “striking or unusual, beautiful or hideous, comic or obscene” images that would stick out in his memory, as opposed to “petty” or “banal” ones.¹⁵² It is this emphasis on the rare and unusual, arranged according to individually derived systems of similitude within a (visualized) space, which bears striking resemblance to the Wunderkammer form. By featuring banal

¹⁵⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, 90.

¹⁵¹ See Hooper-Greenhill, Chapter 4.

¹⁵² Hooper-Greenhill, 92.

items in his cabinet of curiosities, Dion reawakens viewers to the strange and marvelous in natural and everyday objects, while also, more disturbingly, evoking an anthropological exhibit of artifacts left over from some (our) lost civilization. This revelation brings to mind Walter Benjamin's notion of obsolete commodities as "fossils," which Susan Buck-Morss has extended, saying:

As traces of prior life, [commodity remains] are historical clues, with an objective meaning... Benjamin perceived historical nature as an expression of truth's essential transitoriness in its contradictory extremes— as extinction and death on the one hand, and as creative potential and the possibility for change on the other.¹⁵³

Not only the container— the anachronistic cabinet— but also the contents may thus be seen to expose the dialectical truth of modern reality. Cast-off products like those in Dion's cabinet, as yesterday's novelties-cum-historical relics, reveal this truth by underscoring the decay and ephemerality attendant with the celebrated achievements of industrial progress. Benjamin's approach to the construction of the *Passagen-Werk* was to sustain and *make visible* this dialectic by joining "archaic" fragments (quotes and illustrations pertaining to 19th century Paris, including notes on the arcades, catacombs, iron construction, advertising, the collector, etc.) together through montage. Montage was, in his formulation, a disjunctive form that by acknowledging its own piecemeal constructedness, opposed illusionistic, "harmonizing" fabrications like the panorama, the falsified photographic document, and, most importantly, the teleological or evolutionary model of history. The resulting ideational collages of "politically charged monads," which Benjamin called "dialectical images," thus presented a nonlinear logic in structure

¹⁵³ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 66.

and set up a constellation of 19th century forms in dialogue with the (Benjamin's) present.¹⁵⁴

In this light, Dion's Wunderkammer may be seen as a sort of dialectical image made actual— the juxtaposition of mass-produced “junk” and commonplace natural items across the two columns of drawers suggest that perhaps the processes of decay, fossilization, and extinction are common to both of these “natures.” And like the dialectical image and the Renaissance memory picture, Dion's cabinet gives structure, but not fixed position or final coherence, to a collection of meaningful forms. Like Benjamin's fragments, which Buck-Morss asserts were never “lodged in a rigid narrational or discursive structure [but were] easily moved about in changing arrangements and trial combinations, in response to the altered demands of the changing 'present,'" the placement of objects or categories within Dion's cabinet remains mutable.¹⁵⁵ His objects are *connected to* narrative— the story, or should I say, stories, of his travels through the South, as well as Bartram's — but the overall *arrangement* does not necessarily reflect a sequential, narrational structure.

The meaningful yet fluid resonances between object and place suggested by the art of memory, as well as the correlation of “the journey” or movement through space to the processes of recollection and (personal) knowledge-construction, provides a rich background against which to understand how Dion's work functions non-sequentially and narratively at the same time. With the allusion to popular tourism provided by the artist's postcards and alligator kitsch, the objects in the Wunderkammer cabinet take on the mien

¹⁵⁴ Buck-Morss, 221.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 336.

of idiosyncratically meaningful souvenirs. Like the postcard, the souvenir object substantiates the experience of the authentic site for the traveler— whose everyday experience is felt to be so mediated as to be rendered false— and allows for the external to be domesticated and internalized. According to Susan Stewart, the souvenir “marks the transference of origin to trace, moving from event to memory and desire.”¹⁵⁶ She continues:

We do not need or desire souvenirs of events that are repeatable. Rather we need and desire souvenirs of events that are reportable, events whose materiality has escaped us, events that thereby exist only through the invention of narrative.... Like the collection, [the souvenir] always displays the romance of contraband, for its scandal is its removal from its natural location.¹⁵⁷

As a metonymic object that can only refer to, but never recoup, a “lost” referent, the souvenir is always necessarily “impoverished.” Paradoxically, it is just this partiality that gives the souvenir its power, which is to articulate desire and authenticity through the narrative that must accompany it, must “speak” for the mute object.¹⁵⁸ This is a narrative of the public and monumental made private and real, the story (of variable length and detail from one telling to the next) of the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the

¹⁵⁶ Stewart, 134.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 135.

¹⁵⁸ The attraction, Dean MacCannell contends, must remain superior to the souvenir, which is necessarily presented as a “fallen object, as no substitute for the thing itself,” in order that society may remain superior to the individual. “But the souvenir, because it is more immediate and intimate, constantly threatens the ascendancy of the attraction,” and thus, personal memory may be seen to threaten the social construction of place, at least for the individual who possesses it (158-9). Benjamin similarly asserted in “Unpacking My Library” that “for a collector ...ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects” (67). It thus seems that for Benjamin, “under certain conditions, the experience of possession could be transformed into the possession of experience” (Abbas, 230).

specific item in question. A collection of souvenirs does not, therefore, amount to an exhaustive linear narrative, but represents a fragmented or episodic assemblage of memories— a nebulous formation with the potential for infinite variance. Thus, though Dion’s entire travel narrative is not immediately accessible to the visitor while at Bartram’s Garden— and need not be— a strong sense of his personality, of his stories being that which connects the dots between objects, is pervasive. While this does not preclude the viewer’s forming of his or her own interpretation, or freely associating based on his or her own memories, it does, importantly, disrupt the cohesiveness of William Bartram’s narrative, the purloined travelogue as it were.

In this way, Dion carves out a degree of agency, working critically within and against discourse (history) in order to undermine its power. The objects in Dion’s collection, connected to the artist and to each other by a curious internal logic, and to Bartram’s narrative by symbolic citation, form a constellation that ramifies beyond reductive, linear continuum of history concomitant with the ideology of the heritage site, eternally frozen in time. His collections, as new, informal “archives” of the American South, “underscore the nature of all archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private.”¹⁵⁹ They represent a personal narrative— one self-reflexively shaped by discursive regimes— as told through objects, each of which also has a history and meaning beyond that which Dion bestows. In Benjamin’s view, objects acquire a history that can be read by the “true collector,” “a whole background... [that] adds up to a magic encyclopedia,” and become the material means, the *loci* of experience,

¹⁵⁹ Hal Foster, “The Archival Impulse,” *October* no. 110 (Fall 2004), 5.

by which history is passed on.¹⁶⁰ Attending to the individuality of these simple things as souvenirs rather than classifiable types, and interpreting their “fate” through a double lens, Dion effects a telescoping of discrete historical periods, aligning his project with the renewable, responsible process of storytelling rather than the mode of information.

*

Hence, Dion’s work suggests that the past is not a static and inviolable bygone thing, a series of epic events unfurling unto our doorstep, but is, through the self-conscious re-performance of history and the personal collection, reactivated and recast in the present. As Benjamin said, “Some pass things down to posterity, by making them untouchable and thus conserving them, others pass on situations, by making them practicable and thus liquidating them.”¹⁶¹ This latter, “destructive” approach to history, as actuated in Dion’s *Travels*, is, however, not merely negative. As Akbar Abbas has suggested, it is also “a form of prophesy; a way of taking hold of the future.”

Just as the past, because it can be rewritten, does not lie safely in the past, so too the future, the not-yet-written, does not lie safely in the future. As [Benjamin] puts it, “even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins” (“Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 257). If this is indeed the case, then language, memory, and experience, these constituent elements of our modernity, are the genuine sites of a cultural politics: both a politics of resistance to the potential erosion of language, memory, and experience in modernity; and a politics of anticipation alert to emancipatory strategies.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Book Collecting,” *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 60. The object’s history is, for Benjamin, composed of the historical conditions of its production and reception (Abbas, 231-2).

¹⁶¹ Benjamin, “The Destructive Character,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 302.

¹⁶² Abbas, 236.

Thus the modes drawn together via Dion's journey— the heritage site and cultures of display, the museum and practices of collecting, the travel genre and its tropes, the road trip and tourism, the discourses of science and historiography— as technologies which structure “language, memory, and experience,” are made visible as interrelated sites of political intercession. Rather than “blow up” these institutions, however, Dion demonstrates that we must necessarily work within and against their constraints, that critical awareness and manipulation of the terms by which they order our thought and manage our movement can allow one a certain degree of latitude. Though Foucault's notion of “self-stylization” has usually been applied, by Judith Butler and others, to questions of sexual “deviance” and gender normativity, Dion's actions within and against different, but not entirely unrelated, cultural constraints may be seen as a kind of stylization as well. Rather than a refusal of science and history, his artistic practice opposes itself to the codification and fixture of science and history, paradoxically adopting their rhetoric and archival forms in order to interrogate and destabilize the power/knowledge constituting and constituted by these discourses. Power, as Foucault professed, cannot be wholly seized, but then neither is it wholly unavailable to us: if it operates at the level of the individual, then it can be reversed there as well, even if only fleetingly.



Fig. 27: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of the “Hate Archive”), 2007–09. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 28: Mark Dion, *Travels of William Bartram – Reconsidered* (installation view of the artist's postcards), 2007–09. © Mark Dion. Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery.



Fig. 29: Views of preserving jars atop and three open drawers of Dion's Wunderkammer.



Fig. 30. One of two cabinets housing the smaller rarities in the Bargrave collection at Canterbury, thought to date from the 1660s.

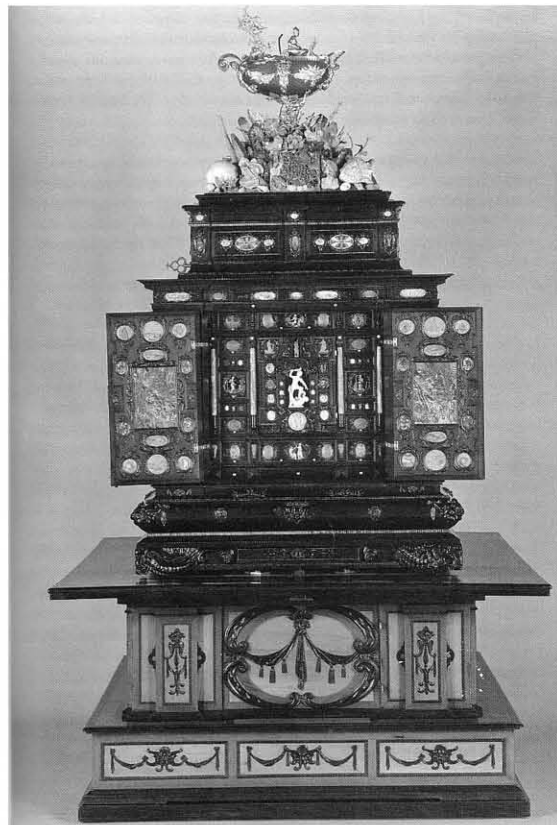


Fig. 31. The Kunstschränk of Gustavus Adolphus, ca. 1630.



Fig. 32. Engraving depicting Ferrante Imperato's "museum," 1599.

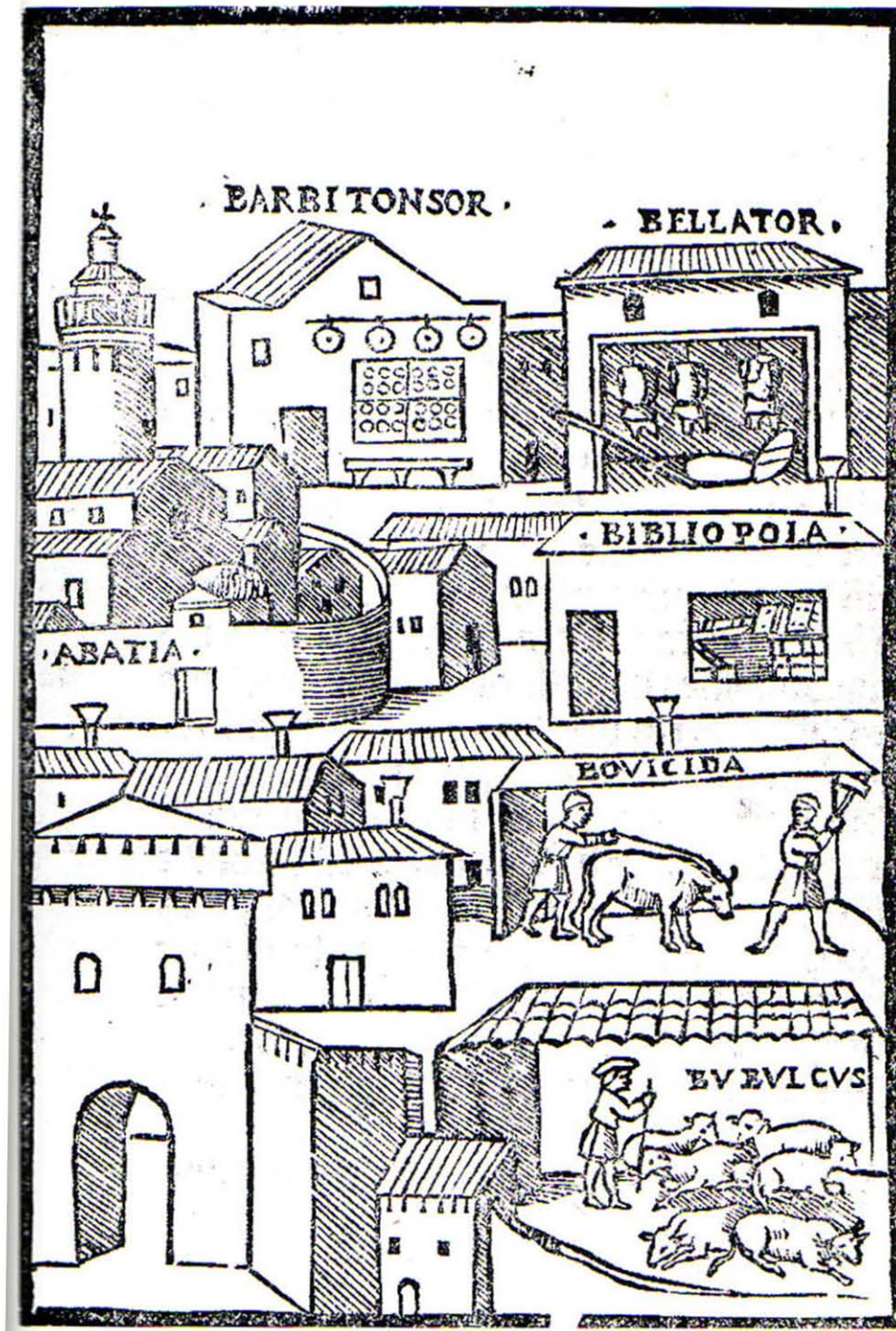


Fig. 33. Memory image depicting the 'Abbey memory system' of Johannes Romberch, 1533

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