







VOL 17 NO 1 A collection of articles, reviews and opinion pieces that discuss and analyze the complexity of mixing things together as a process that is not necessarily undertaken in an orderly and organized manner. Wide open opportunity to discuss issues in interdisciplinary education; art, science and technology interactions; personal artistic practices; history of re-combinatory practices; hybridizations between old and new media; cultural creolization; curatorial studies and more.

Contributions from

Frieder Nake, Stelarc, Paul Catanese

and other important cultural operators.



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The Ammonite Order, Or, Objectiles For An (Un) Natural History



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ABSTRACT

The demonstration exhibition, The Ammonite Order, Or, Objectiles for an (Un) Natural History (2008–09) explores a non-deterministic relation between digital mediation and spatial practice that supplants the primacy of real objects present in gallery space. The outcome of a research residency in London, the theme for this work evolved out of imaginatively projecting a fictive 'correspondence' between two local personages: the architect George Dance (the Younger) and naturalist Charles Darwin. Drawing implicitly upon a creative curatorial impulse in order to pursue this narrative fabula, the exhibition space unfolds as a multidimensional installation that combines physical elements with an accompanying set of media content. The exhibition promotes a model for a different type of aesthetic experience through defamiliarising how the art object is modulated at the intersection of the exhibition.

Figure 1 The Ammonite Order (The Darwin Room), 2008, Vince Dziekan.

Revolving upon notions of coincidence and synchronicity, the work reevaluates the status of objects in the exhibition's evanescent realm. Enamored with the idea of the museum as a 'haunt of the muses', the exhibit employs the formal languages of ordering and display as means for making the sources of inspiration intelligible. 1

The creative work entails an open conceptual play drawing upon a variety of elements – categorised as discrete collections of installation 'props' and media 'samples' - that comprise the exhibition's inventory. These forms gain added force through their recycling and recombination. Collectively, these motifs establish an iconography that operates across the exhibition's interconnected, narrative structure.

The exhibit sends out contradictory signals: the appearance of order and proportion associated with its measured use of architectural space is confounded by the disorientation of its intertextual narrative. ² Basing its 'exhibitology' on a non-deterministic relation between digital content and spatial practice, the conventional expectation placed upon digital mediation

- in which the interpretive role of the gallery guide is called upon to supplement the primacy of 'real' objects present in gallery space – is inverted. The more 'freeform' approach adopted in this case contrasts with prevailing museological attitudes and the ideal of reinforcing a coordinated sense of narrative space. Through creating an unpredictable and open-ended aesthetic experience, the viewer is invited to actively participate in meaning making by intuiting possible associations between the constituent parts of the exhibition left at their disposal.

The exhibition was the direct product of a research residency, hosted by the Slade School of Fine Art, London in early 2008. During this time I was provided with a studio at their research centre, based at Woburn Square in the middle of the grounds of the University College London. The university played an important part in establishing Bloomsbury's reputation as the intellectual centre of London during the nineteenth century. Along with the British Museum - which was founded in 1753 to house the collection of Sir Hans Sloane - the area become notable for its numerous literary and artistic associations; the legacy of whose contributions are marked today by plaques that adorn the facades of many of the Georgian brick terraces that front onto the gardens and squares in the area.

The genesis of creative ideas for the resulting work was inspired by numerous experiences during this formative period. Most directly, the concept was set in motion by my passing observation of a particular pair of such markers, which I would pass on my regular route to the studio each day. There along Gower Street (the primary thoroughfare connecting the British Museum to the south with the collection of university colleges) I encountered two plaques diametrically facing each other: on the west side, a plaque marking the residence of George Dance (The



The exhibit sends out contradictory signals: the appearance of order and proportion associated with its measured use of architectural space is confounded by the disorientation of its intertextual narrative.

Younger), and on the east-side one commemorating Charles Darwin. 3 Their proximity compelled me to investigate what other associations might arise from this coincidental relationship. Subsequent investigation led me to imagine the possibility for a fictive 'correspondence' between these two figures and how that might express something of the spirit of intellectual curiosity and challenge that characterised the age (In Dance's case this was expressed in architectural form, whereas for Darwin this would draw upon techniques gleaned from his earlier studies in geology, stratigraphy 4 and classification leading up to the revolutionary formulation of his theory of evolution).

The museum itself is an expression of this attitude and the Enlightenment's prevailing quest to make sense and order of the world through expository techniques that classify, order and arrange. Therefore, my discovery that the site marking where Darwin had lived when he moved to London now housed the university's Grant Museum of Zoology carried with it added resonance. The basis of the collection dates back its establishment in 1827 by Robert Edmond Grant, whose controversial investigations into the 'unity of

plan' of animals exerted an important influence on Darwin's still formative evolutionary views during the latter's studies under him at Edinburgh University. 6 From my subsequent ruminations amongst the collection, my imaginative projection of the possible asynchronous relationship between the naturalist and the architect Dance found emblematic expression in the form of ammonite fossils. 7 Dance was credited with inventing the architectural style known as the 'ammonite order', so described because of its fitting of volutes shaped to resemble fossil ammonites atop fluted columns and capitals. 8

While not operating properly as a curated exhibition - in the conventional sense of an exhibition involving a selection of works by different artists collected together under an editorial theme or guiding principle - the exhibition nonetheless draws implicitly on the curatorial impulse in order to creatively pursue this narrative fabula and how it would unfold in exhibition space. During my residency, a number of exhibitions taking place in London proved informative and inspirational on a variety of levels. 10 Of these, the Sir John Soane Museum in London offers a particularly



Figure 3 The Ammonite Order, Carte-de-visite (The Darwin Room), 2008, Vince Dziekan.

idiosyncratic example of the synergies that can exist between architectural and curatorial aspirations. Following in the wake of the establishment of the British Museum, Soane – who was an understudy of Dance before becoming a Neoclassical architect of some repute in his own right and Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy – transformed his private residence on the fringe of Bloomsbury to accommodate his obsessive collection of objects, works of art, models and assorted curios. These suites provide the stage for "Soane's all-pervading desire to establish a Pantheon of architectural inspiration." 11 Conceived to inspire and promote the union of painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry, Soane's described his encyclopedic private collection as "studies for my own mind and being intended similarly to benefit the artist of future generations." 12 Through erecting this labyrinthine monument, Soane's personal quest acts as a museological expression of the spirit of the age. 13

In one sense, my project develops as something of an anamorphic version of Soane's museological expression; as if it were 'formed again' through a distorting mirror. 14 This motivation is reflected in the exhibition's thematic exploration of its own 'medial' nature - its 'inward facing' attitude that playfully explores the manifestation of concepts in material and virtual form – and self-reflexive tendency to its coordination in exhibition form, which might properly be described as 'mannerist.' 15 In so doing, the 'exhibition' has been approached as the primary medium through which the artwork assumes shape and form (this inverted relationship to the items displayed in the gallery is betrayed by referring to these components as 'props' and 'samples').

The resulting exhibition concept operates as a multidimensional, polyphonous installation that combines elements of physical installation with an accompanying set of media content. The fabula unfolds as a product



of this mixed discourse between objects and media created by their overlapping as part of the distinctive exhibition experience. The prevailing sense involves the viewer actively in forming interpretive meaning from co-incident encounters within the exhibition space with these fragments: between the syncronisation of two events, or two objects made to coexist in the same location. 16

Structurally the exhibition's scenographic design proceeds from a series of parallelisms. Twin gallery spaces are set up, formally organised in an identical fashion. Upon entrance into either gallery, the viewer is faced with a small square framed panel presenting the detail of an architectural façade [Figure 2]. A black or white circle masks the centre of each image. Continuing past this screen, the viewer enters the main body of the gallery. A set of discrete elements

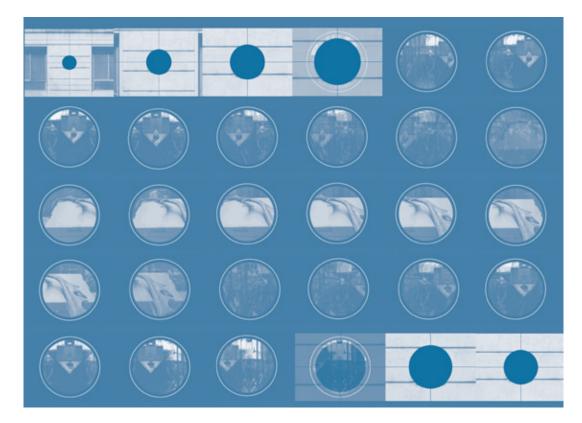


Figure 4 The Ammonite Cycle 6, 2008, Vince Dziekan, (storyboard visualization of portable media content: motion graphic, 320×240p, 60secs; designed for delivery via iPod).

are organised in the space. A square framed unit is hung on a side wall perpendicular to a similar unit presented upward facing on a low plinth. Each of these frames contains a roundel: the wall units presenting an emblematic image of skull and antlers, whereas the sculptural frame presents a disc-shaped print resembling a plaque [Figure 3]. This sculptural unit is aligned along the central axis of the gallery with a long table occupying the far end of the space. On its surface a series of panels resembling chessboards are arranged. A narrow opening in the connecting wall between the two galleries is situated directly opposite the framed prints; their line of vision bisects the space laterally.

The formality of the display exudes an overwhelming impression of proportionality. The quality of this spatial practice - its highly schematic arrangement alluding to a Neoclassical sense of rationality and geometric simplicity - is confounded by the exhibition's associated digital mediation. It has become a commonplace in conventional museological practice that physical elements presented in display are often

supplemented by the application of portable media to provide written, audio or multimedia (audio/video) commentary designed to add to the viewer's appreciation and understanding. This approach is indicated with the introductory images first encountered upon entrance to the galleries. Their accompanying wall labels direct the viewer to supplementary information provided on the accompanying iPod media player prepared specifically for the exhibition. But while in this first instance access to this collection of media is predetermined (the media content supplementing the viewer's engagement with the apparent artwork), the relationship of the remaining content is not prescribed. Throughout the rest of the exhibition there are no overt signs announcing the direct correspondence between any given item from the physical inventory with the remaining array of media content - a series of motion graphic pieces creating composite arrangements by superimposing a selection of specimens from the Grant Museum's natural history collection [Figure 4]. As a result, the viewer is left with total freedom to access this content how and as they see fit (the

responsibility for making meaningful connections is handed over to the viewer). As a result, the status of objects is undermined and their role as objectiles assumes ascendance. 17

This reconceptualisation of the objectile is derived from architect/philosopher Bernard Cache's critical response to the influence of digital technologies on methods of production and representation, proposing a shift from the understanding of the architectural image derived from the pictorial arts to a problematic of dynamics and variability. 18 Cache determines that "Objects, which are those solid parts of our actions, are but a moment of densification in the folds of our behaviour that is itself fluctuating." 19 According to Boyman 20, Cache envisages: 'a universe where objects are not stable but may undergo variations, giving rise to new possibilities of seeing'. Accordingly, images 'are connected through a logic where the whole is not given but always open to variation, as new things are added or new relations made, creating new continuities out of such intervals or disparities'.

My subsequent application of this concept in curatorial design emphasises how the art object is modulated at the intersection of the exhibition. The exhibition acts as the surface or plane of coincidence that governs the parameters for the viewer's interaction and subsequent interpretation with the objectile as a non-standardised object (precipitating a new kind of objectivity from the interrelation of the virtual artwork with the subjectivities, intuition and imagination of its viewer).

Serving to open up further interpretative license by inducing the viewer's active involvement in meaning making, the exhibition's construction places added emphasis upon how syntax and discourse occurs across its physical and virtual dimensions. 21 The exhibitology demonstrated by this exhibition could

best be described as polyphonous. In terms of its scenography, the exhibition design is characterised by the presentation of discrete elements existing on physical and virtual dimensions simultaneously. Exposition develops through the coordination of space and time. The installation strategy is intent upon creating formal and thematic 'mirrorings' that provide bridges between the works collected within each self-contained gallery, or by extension across the identically set out rooms. Further, the viewer's decision-making is involved in creating composite arrangements, as their synchronous viewing of any of the given 'props' present in the gallery space is overlayed by media content being viewed on the hand-held device. This juxtapositonal form of 'split-screen' viewing has a disorientating effect where whatever degree of undivided concentration that is lost is compensated by imaginative projection.

Increasingly sophisticated strategies around presentation have undoubtedly transformed the contemporary museum. Changes to techniques of exhibition practice impact on the character of aesthetic experience. The exhibition provides the arena for this dynamic to be explored. In closing, this exhibition has been approached as a model that promotes a different type of aesthetic experience through defamiliarising the relationship that presently exists – for the most part - between spatial practice and digital mediation. Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky introduced his essay 'Art as Technique', (writing in 1916) by asserting that as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic. He goes on to champion the rejection of traditional culture and how artistic forms associated with those conditions turn seeing and thinking into conventional exercises:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects

'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.

By exercising the liberty afforded its conceptualisation as an 'artwork' that blurs the distinction between fact and fiction, this creative work aims to raise the proposition that the integration of real and virtual through the art of exhibition offers a demonstration of how the nature of aesthetic experience associated with the multimedial museum might take shape.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The use of the term museum (derived from the Greek *Mouseion* – as shrine, seat or haunt of the muses) to refer to a place designed for the public display of knowledge is closely associated with the Enlightenment movement and came to prominence in the 18th century. The Age of Enlightenment is characterized by intellectual and philosophical developments based on the belief in the power of human reason. The Enlightenment acts as a central model for many movements that emerged in the modern period (i.e. the founding of the discipline of art-history by Johann Joachim Winckelmann). Reductionism and rationality are recognized as distinctive modes of Enlightenment thinking that stand in stark contrast to attitudes espousing irrationality and emotionalism. Represented in design terms, geometric order, proportionality and restraint are seen as expressions of Enlightenment virtues.

- 2. While narrative describes the part of a literary work that is concerned with telling the story through the account of a sequence of events in the order which they happened, narratology focuses critical attention to the art or process of telling a story or giving an account of something. For the purpose of this article, the qualification between narrative and narratology underpins their translation and resulting distinction between exhibition and what might be construed as "exhibitology" in order to centre on the "installation as a medium for narrative expression: combining objects in a specific way to make a "story' out of loose 'words'"" (Bal 2001, 162). Bal acknowledges the powerful tradition of the narrative mode in "museal discourse" and how this aspect "allows for extending from the specific, literalised sense of the role of the museum to a broader partly metaphorical sense, in which the museum postures or exposes" (Bal 2001, 164). See: Mieke Bal, Looking in: the art of viewing (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2001).
- 3. The architect George Dance (1741–1825) lived at 91 Gower Street, while Charles Darwin (1809–1882) lived at 12 Upper Gower Street, now the site of the Darwin Building, which houses ucu's Department of Genetics, Environment and Evolution and the Grant Museum of Zoology. Somewhat fortuitously, the realization of this work anticipated bicentenary celebrations marking the birth of Charles Darwin in 2009.
- 4. The term stratigraphy refers to the processes by which sedimentary deposits form and how those deposits change through time and space on the Earth's surface. This particular field of geological study was pioneered by the Dane Nicholas Steno in the seventeenth century. Steno's 'Law of Superimposition' provides a theoretical basis for this field by describing how sedimentary layers are deposited as a time sequence by observing two principles: Original Horizontality (which describes the way in which layers of sediment are initially deposited) and Lateral Continuity (which recognizes that sedimentary deposits initially extend laterally in all directions). Reference to Steno's Law adds an intertextual dimension in the resulting exhibition.

- 5. In her overview of shifting cultural attitudes to collecting and exhibiting during the nineteenth century, Celeste Ola-Iquiaga posits that: "The nineteenth century's reification ing point [...] of a cultural process that had started more ing artificialization), this gradual severance established the beginning of the modern era in the broadest sense, distinguishing it from both the classical and the 'dark' ages, where nature and culture were inextricably bound. In most astonishing production, the Renaissance 'wonder chambers' where massive compilations of natural specimens and artificial objects were mixed without care, offered a visual staging of natural history next to which nineteenthcentury dioramas pale. Immersed in a perspective of the world that saw in both organic and human creations the physical manifestation of a mysterious cosmic force, the 'age of wonder' anchored all transcendental implications to their earthly correspondents in such a way that, for almost three hundred years, things enjoyed an unprecedented autonomy as purveyors of the enigmas of the universe." Celeste Olalquiaga, The Artificial Kingdom (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 210-11.
- 6. Robert Edmond Grant (1793–1874) was the first professor of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy in England. Upon taking up the chair at the University of London in 1827 began to amass skeletons, mounted animals and specimens preserved in fluid as a teaching collection. Including many extinct species (including the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine, the quagga, and the dodo), Grant's original specimens as well as those of the comparative anatomist Thomas Henry Huxley (who became an energetic advocate of Darwinian evolution) form the basis of The Grant Museum of Zoology and Comparative Anatomy's collection today. Through his work on marine invertebrates, including sea sponges and mollusks, Grant established homology between these simple creatures and mammals, controversially suggesting that all life shared a "unity of plan" (as espoused by radical ideas by his French contemporaries, the zoologists Jean-

- Baptiste Lamarck and the Etienne Saint-Hilaire).
- 7. Ammonites are an extinct group of marine animals of the subclass *Ammonoidea* in the class *Cephalopoda*, phylum *Mollusca*. While outwardly resembling the *Nautilus*, ammonites are more closely related to the subclass *Coleoidea* that includes octopus and squid. The ammonite's distinctive spiral, coiled shape has lead to their mythological and symbolic interpretation.
- 8. In the Classical architectural tradition, orders establish a visual language or lexicon likened to the grammar or rhetoric of literary or musical compositions. Influencing other Neoclassical architects in England, including most notably John Nash, Dance applied the "ammonite order" to his celebrated design for the London's Shakespeare Gallery in 1789.
- 9. According to Umberto Eco, fabula are "narrative isotopies" (Eco 1979, 28) or manifestations of the discursive structure of a text. Derived from textual analyses of Russian Formalist literary critics (including Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson), fabula relates to the elements that make up a story such as the "logic of actions or the syntax of characters, the time-honoured course of events. It need not necessarily be a sequence of human actions (physical or not), but can also concern a temporal transformation of ideas or a series of events concerning inanimate objects" (Eco 1979, 27). See: Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1979).
- 10. Collectively, these instances mark out the conceptual and formal extremes of museological practice, ranging from the "period" displays found in the British Museum's Enlightenment Galleries and the Soane Museum to the latest temporary, site-specific transformation of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall by Doris Salcedo. In terms of spatial practice, inspiration was derived from formal principles applied to the design of the exhibition, *The Return of the Gods:*Neoclassical Sculpture in Britain in the Duveen Galleries of Tate Britain. Also of interest was the integral role that digital mediation played in sustaining the curatorial fiction of The Martian Museum of Terrestrial Art, which transformed

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the galleries of the Barbican Centre into an imaginary museum conceived by and designed for extraterrestrials. As illustrations of objects in their imagined context and an audio guide serve to further explicate the Martians' beliefs about the role and purpose of contemporary art, they also of the objects on view." Francesco Manacorda and Lydia (London: Barbican Art Gallery, 2008), 10.

- Ernst Wasmuth Verlag, 1994), 8.
- 13. In early 2001, contemporary architect Daniel Libeskind from this idiosyncratic exemplar. Evoking something of the same spirit that compelled Soane earlier, Libeskind is quoted as stating: "I believe that the connection between materials in space, between tradition and the future, is the core of the practice of architecture." (Online: http://www. soane.org/archive.html#g2). Libeskind used the exhibition, titled Drawing a New Architecture, as an opportunity to inarranged in response to Soane's own collection, scattering them throughout like the architectural fragments found of how display and exhibition space is mediated through
- 14. Anamorphosis relates to distortions that require the viewer to use special devices or occupy a specific vantage of anamorphosis: perspectival or oblique examples date anamorphoses are more commonly associated with the Baroque period. Etymologically, 'Ana – morphosis' comes

- from the Greek words meaning 'formed again.' 15. Mannerism describes a period of European painting,
- sculpture, architecture and decorative arts encompassing the harmonious ideals associated with the naturalism of Italian High Renaissance. In contrast, the early Mannerists – exemplified by Parmigianino's Self-portrait in a Convex Mirror of 1524 – employed exaggerated forms, manipulated irrational space and unnatural lighting to heighten the artificiality of their representations. In reference to this 'mannerist' tendency of the exhibition, I am relating an equivalent kind of 'knowing' distortion display. The most influential proponent of the exhibition as art form was the Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers. Employing the eagle as the symbol of his fictional Musee d'Art Moderne, Broodthaers writes: "There is a mirror decorated with an eagle – a late eighteenth-century antique – that belongs to a museum association in Ghent. An official mirror, if that's the phrase, which reflects the virtual image of those eagles whose multiple heads recount the history of arms as an aspect of art. This is a mirror of misunderstanding. Even though Jupiter's messenger perches on top, it's a trick mirror." Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs graphs, ed. Benjamin H.D. Buchloh (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1988), 47.
- events or circumstances without obvious causal connection. The word is derived from the Latin co- ('in', 'with', claims of psychic phenomena, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung ing for the existence of coincidences and other supposedly anomalous phenomena. The idea of synchronicity – which Jung also described as "acausal parallelism" – is that there exists an underlying relationship to synchronous events is an effect.

- Intriguingly, Jung resorts to an analogy of the Wunderkammern to underscore the only relative validity of causality and the bias promoted by a scientific world view when considering the acausal connection between events: "[...] to grasp these unique or rare events at all, we seem to be dependent on equally 'unique' and individual descriptions. This would result in a chaotic collection of curiosities, rather like those old natural history cabinets where one finds, cheek by jowl with fossils and anatomical monsters in bottles, the horn of a unicorn, a mandragora manikin, and a dried mermaid." Carl G. Jung, Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle, translated by R.F.C
- 17. Architect/philosopher Bernard Cache (1995) theorises the idea of a technologically integrated, quasi-object open to the possibility of unpredictable variation from drawing upon the possibilities offered by parametric modelling for nonstandard production of forms through computeraided design. Cache recognizes how these systems enable unique objects to be fabricated by modifying the parameters of their calculation. With the advent of digital technologies, "from the mould we move towards modulabetween objects created from varying the coordinates of their surface ('subjectiles') or volume ('objectiles'). Bernard Anne Boyman, ed. Michael Speaks (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 96.
- visual document. He states that: "In the elaboration of an architectural project, the image is the series of documents that starts with the location plan, leads to sketches, and ends up with the building plans." The formal elements of inflection, vector and frame enable the idea of image to be expanded: "they are no longer only documents but are any visible object, and in particular those objects that are that the image is granted wider meaning: 'designating

- thereby anything that presents itself to the mind, "whether
- transl. Anne Boyman, ed. Michael Speaks (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 2-3.
- 19. Ibid., 96.
- 20. Ibid., ix.
- 21. Mieke Bal articulates museal discourse as "set of semiotic and epistemological habits that enables and prescribes ways of communicating and thinking that may be of use to others participating in the discourse," while syntax the subject to connect the presence of the object to the past of its making, functioning and meaning." Mieke Bal, Looking in: The Art of Viewing (Amsterdam: G+B Arts
- 22. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in Literary Theory: An Anthology, ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, Second Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 16.

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