University of Alberta

Beyond the Museum as Muse: collecting, classifying, and displaying objects in contemporary artistic practice

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
History of Art, Design and Visual Culture

Department of Art and Design

Fall 2011
Edmonton, Alberta

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Abstract

Working within the framework of the museum rather than attempting to resist it, Karsten Bott, Portia Munson, Kelly Mark and Jac Leirner exemplify the current generation of artists who are critically engaged with the museum. In this thesis I will make the case that by using their own collections, rather than existing ones as previous generations of artists had done, these artists actively enact the traditional museological practices of collecting, classifying, and displaying objects as well as the related archival functions of storage and preservation. The work of these artists is reliant upon the museum as a site and draws attention to the institution's capacity to legitimize art. The result is a diverse set of works that raise questions about what kind of objects, people and experiences are recognized by the museum.

Acknowledgements

My utmost gratitude goes to my supervisor, Dr. Anne Whitelaw. Throughout the past three years, her dedication has provided me with the valuable advice, candor and insight that I needed, as well as rounds of edits that have transformed me into a much stronger writer. She has been amazing and has been instrumental to my success.

I am grateful to Lianne McTavish and Michael O'Driscoll for taking time out of their busy schedules to be committee members and for their feedback on my research.

I would also like to acknowledge the faculty and staff from the Department of Art and Design. In particular, Amanda Boetzkes and Melinda Pinfold for their suggested readings on phenomenology; and Blair Brennan for always having an open door and the candid conversations about art.

To my colleagues and friends, thank you for the wonderful thesis related discussions and the much needed times away from writing: to Kim for the hours spent over cappuccinos; to Sara and Anne for the edits; to Ruth for being so accommodating; to Kathy for the long runs; to the Mafia for the hijinx; to Laura Jean for the story-telling; and to Allison for the adventures.

A special thanks to my entire family for the encouragement they have shown me, especially to my mother Joanne Bergos and my father Joe Bertagnolli. Their curiosity and questions about my research has been incredibly heartening.

Finally, I wish to express my thanks and love to my husband, Dave. His unwavering ability to listen, even at 6 am, enabled me to work through my ideas. I am indebted to the sacrifices he made to help me achieve my goals and I could not have done it without his constant support.

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In 1999, Kynaston McShine curated *The Museum as Muse: artists reflect* for the Museum of Modern Art and wrote the exhibition catalogue of the same name. According to McShine, the purpose of his endeavour was to illustrate "the use of the museum as a subject for art [which] has accelerated during the twentieth century in response to both developments within art and the altered social role of the museum" (1999, 11). International in scope and focusing on the last fifty years, the exhibition featured fifty-nine artists whose work explores historical and contemporary aspects of institutional practices. Artists selected included such seminal figures as Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers, Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Christian Boltanski, Andrea Fraser, Louise Lawler, Fred Wilson, and Mark Dion, each of whom explores diverging museological workings such as collecting and archiving; policies, funding and sponsorship; museum pedagogy; as well as display and exhibition strategies. The exhibition and catalogue read as a shopping list of the essential artists whose works take the museum as subject to expose and question the established authority of the museum, which makes it useful as an introductory reader, yet it does not address the way in which *The Museum as Muse* itself serves to reinforce the established authority of the museum and institutionalizes the very works that were once critical of that authority.

The Museum as Muse was quickly followed by James Putnam's survey *Art and Artifact: the museum as medium* in 2000. This later work built upon the same core group of artists as McShine's exhibition but with an expanded scope

that includes artists whose projects were not widely known or had never before been published (Putnam 2000, 7). The resulting publication is a survey in which Putnam loosely categorizes artist projects into seven broad chapters: the museum effect; art of artifact; public inquiry; framing the frame; curator/creator; on the inside; and without walls – divisions which "ironically allude to the museum's own need for ordering systems" (7). I highlight these two publications because they emerge at a time when the first group of artists who began a sustained and concerted investigation of the museum as subject had been fully absorbed into the institutions they critiqued, through retrospectives, invitational projects, and inclusion in museum publications. These books also foreground the work of my thesis which considers the projects of artists more recently engaged with the subject of the museum. Building upon the precedents outlined by McShine and Putnam, Karsten Bott, Portia Munson, Kelly Mark and Jac Leirner represent younger artists who enact traditional museological functions earlier artists critiqued via their own habits of collecting, classifying, archiving and displaying collections. Working within the very framework of the museum, rather than resisting it, these artists continue to challenge entrenched institutional practices.

In 1970, artist Daniel Buren described the museum as serving a tripartite role: that of framing a work, giving economic value to what it exhibits, and of elevating what it exhibits to the status of being 'art' (1983, 57). As he further states, preservation is an important function of the museum since it

"perpetuates the idealistic nature of all art since it claims that art is (could be) eternal" by protecting it from the effects of time, which romanticizes a linear construction of history whereby the object becomes a souvenir of the museum (58). Buren's statement underpins the sentiment of many artists of his time and suggests the historicizing effects of the museum. As art historians Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach have argued, this linear and historical strategy was implicit with the formation of the public art museum. As royal and private collections were being dispersed in the late eighteenth century by the growing social and political power of the bourgeoisie into public spaces that belonged to the nation's people, so too did the arrangement of works change. The former "iconographic programs that glorified the ruler" were reconfigured to fit into rational Enlightenment ideals where paintings, now divided into schools and movements, gave visitors "an organized walk through the history of art" (Duncan and Wallach 1980, 455). Displaced from their original contexts, Duncan and Wallach maintain that artworks could be put to new ideological uses (456). This observation has been picked up by contemporary scholars who consider the museum as a site where meaning is constructed and disseminated, rather than existing as a supposedly neutral space.

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Professor Emeritus of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, has written extensively on museum education and learning, and how these are both informed by and contribute to individual world views. In her book *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000) she

details how individual objects have an ambiguous relationship to meaning, "being mute themselves, they are open to interpretation" and may be viewed from a diverse set of perspectives which are contingent upon different cultures and histories (2000, 3). As such, the way a particular object is framed, and the meaning that is attributed to it, depends entirely upon who is doing the framing. This recognition leads to questions about what has been deemed worthy of collecting, what has been left out, and why. During the nineteenth century museums were seen as educational institutions with a social and moral responsibility to educate the public. Hooper-Greenhill argues that this attitude was based "on the conviction that placing objects on view was sufficient to ensure learning" since it was believed that displays could "transmit the universal laws of object based disciplines... [when] presented in formal and authoritative ways" (2). As such, object rich displays were used to communicate knowledge to visitors. These displays privileged vision as a way of receiving that knowledge, with the objects placed on display so as to reinforce divisions among the disciplines and the objects of their study.

The primacy of vision in museums is something cultural theorist Tony Bennett has argued in *The Birth of the Museum*. The newly emergent classifications required that collections be displayed in a manner that supposedly made them intelligible to all visitors so that as they moved through the museum, modern man would be firmly positioned at the centre. As such, everyone who

entered the space of the museum would be made aware of the 'natural' order of things and people. As Bennett elucidates:

> The birth of the museum is coincident with, and supplied a primary institutional condition for, the emergence of a new set of knowledges – geology, biology, archaeology, anthropology, history and art history – each of which, in its museological deployment, arranged objects as part of evolutionary sequences (the history of the earth, of life, of man, and of civilization) which, in their interrelations, formed a totalizing order of things and peoples that was historicized through and through. (Bennett 1995, 96)

In this assertion, Bennett draws upon Foucault's theories of visibility in the way that the display of objects simultaneously privileges and affirms the authority of a particular construction of knowledge. The arrangement of objects in the museum makes visible their organization within the different sets of knowledges Bennett outlines. The particular way objects are divided depend on what Foucault calls epistemes (Renaissance, classical and modern), since each shift in episteme brings with it new ways of conceptualizing the world and the things within it. While the museum emerges as a product of the Enlightenment, the most significant of Foucault's epistemic shifts that gives rise to the modern museum occurs in the nineteenth century between the classical episteme and the modern episteme. For Bennett, this is because of how objects and people changed from being strictly gridded to being positioned within an evolutionary series which served to reinforce hierarchies between categories (96). Through its modes of display, the museum makes visible not only the items designed to speak to the relationship between man and knowledge through the use of displays, but the very way knowledge is constituted and organized for viewers.

Drawing a specific connection to the art museum, art historian Douglas Crimp outlines in his introduction to *On the Museum's Ruins* that "the modern epistemology of art is a function of art's seclusion in museums, where art was made to appear autonomous, alienated, something apart, referring only to its own internal history and dynamics" (1993, 13). Like Duncan and Wallach before him, Crimp's position is that the museum created the discipline of art history and reified the works it housed, elevating what it framed to the status of art object. Similarly, art historian Donald Preziosi has stated that museological practices such as art history and connoisseurship have "played a fundamental role in fabricating, maintaining, and disseminating many of the essentialist and historicist fictions that make up the social realities of this world" (2003, 407). While Preziosi is more searing in his analysis of the crucial role the museum has played in the shaping of knowledge, his assertion relates back to both Hooper-Greenhill and Bennett, and gestures to the work of artist Marcel Broodthaers.

In 1972, Broodthaers opened his *Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles, Section des Figures*. This "museum" contained over three hundred objects, largely borrowed from public institutions and private collectors, each bearing an image of an eagle. The items contained in the *Section des Figures* included such varied items a suit of armour, textiles, stamps, cigar bands, statues, photographs, and empty beverage bottles. Furthermore, each object had a label that read "this is not a work of art," a reference to Rene Magritte's *La trahison des images* in which a painting of a pipe is subtitled with the phrase

"ceci n'est pas une pipe" (this is not a pipe). Broodthaers recognized that the museum frames and declares objects as art objects. The items displayed within his museum are not art objects, in part because the objects he displays have been removed from the museum and displaced from their own array of contexts. Broodthaers has also declared his museum as a fictional construction, with neither its own collection nor permanent location. The work's unfamiliar juxtaposition of objects calls attention to the institutional division of objects according to established disciplines and the oddness of the museum's own systems of classification (Crimp 1993, 87). As Broodthaers himself wrote: "to talk about this museum, my museum, means to talk about how to analyze the deception. The ordinary museum and its exponents merely represent a form of the truth. To talk about this museum means to discuss the conditions of truth" (2009, 138).

While Broodthaers *Musée d'Art Moderne* is emblematic of the kinds of endeavors being executed by artists working in the late nineteen sixties who took the museum as the subject of their work to question the assumed neutrality of the museum, it also recalls an earlier subversion of traditional taxonomy: "The Analytic Language of John Wilkins" published in 1942 by writer Jorge Luis Borges. Borges' short story describes a fictional Chinese encyclopaedia, the *Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge*, in which Borges re-envisions traditional classifications of animals. His fourteen categories include the following taxonomies: "(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling

pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies" (1968, 103). Borges' short story is often cited, perhaps most famously in Foucault's *The Order of Things*, in which Foucault describes a feeling of uneasiness after reading Borges' story because of how it blatantly challenges the familiar classification of animals. In re-envisioning these classifications, Borges invites questions about the nature of taxonomy, calling attention to, as Foucault does in turn, widely accepted and therefore seemingly natural ways of classifying things. It is quite possible that in this *Celestial Empire of Benevolent Knowledge* animals can be included in several taxonomic groups at once by perhaps simultaneously belonging to the Emperor, being drawn with a very fine camel hair brush and having just broken the water pitcher. In fact, the category entitled "those included in the present classification," represents a paradox as it encompasses each of the other thirteen categories. Borges' categories themselves seem absurd, in part because they challenge fundamental assumptions and ideas about systems of categorization.

More recently, the use of collections can be located in the projects of Fred Wilson and Mark Dion. Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1993), staged at the Maryland Historical Society, was the product of a residency he completed at the Historical Society after receiving an invitation to collaborate with a museum in Baltimore as part of their museum without walls project. Wilson spent his year

there getting to know collection of the museum, as well as its staff and structure. What resulted was a series of eight connected rooms that juxtaposed objects the museum conventionally displayed with others that were rarely shown. For example, in a case labeled "Metalwork, 1723-1880," Wilson displayed slave shackles next to a silver tea service, while another room featured Victorian style furniture and a wooden pillory. The effect was jarring in that it raised questions about the disjuncture between what is contained in the museum's collection versus what it chooses to display. Significantly, Wilson used only minimal labelling in *Mining the Museum*. Display cases or exhibition spaces were named, but individual objects were not, as a way to encourage viewers to come to their own conclusions about the relationships between objects.

Where Wilson uses existing collections to bring attention to the museum's history, Mark Dion uses his own. Dion appropriates modes of collection and classification that are meant to evoke practices found in the sciences, like archeology, then displays his objects in wooden display cases with glass doors in such a way that they visually reference sixteenth and seventeenth century cabinets of curiosity. In doing so, he establishes his own hierarchies and relationships among objects. Notable among Dion's body of work was his 1999 *Thames Dig*. For this project, Dion and a team of volunteers combed the shores of the Thames river in London in front of the Tate Modern. Items found included: glass, teeth, shells, toys and shoes. Each was cleaned and catalogued. Dion and his team consulted with experts about the proper way to conduct an

archeological dig and received permission from the port authority to execute the dig. The accumulated objects were then carefully arranged and displayed in a double-sided case, roughly organized by type. This project recalls Broodthaer's reframing of objects, aimed to subverting hierarchical distinctions between objects.

While artists continually challenge and question the history of institutional practices of collecting, classifying and object display, it is impossible to escape the institution of art. As artist and writer Andrea Fraser contends, a critique of the institution "could only have emerged [from] *within* and… can only function *within* the institution" (2006, 131). Any attempt to redefine or reintegrate art with everyday life has the effect of expanding the frame itself (131). Aware of how the critical works of artists like Broodthaers have now been absorbed and institutionalized by the very institutions they were so critical of, many artists working since the nineteen-eighties do not pretend that creating a critical distance from the museum is possible. Rather, they recognize that this distance is always compromised, as institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art now openly welcome and encourage work that takes the museum as its subject by hosting exhibitions and inviting artists to participate. Although younger artists like Bott, Munson, Mark and Leirner are not as radical as their precursors, in their questioning of dominant museum practices of collecting, classification and display, they take up Isabelle Graw's assertion that "art can be critical in the sense that it raises objections or poses problems" (2006, 148).

In this thesis, I will explore how contemporary artists have undertaken questions of classification, preservation and display more recently through a sustained examination of the work of Karsten Bott, Portia Munson, Jac Leirner and Kelly Mark. Bott was born in Germany in 1961, and studied fine art at the *Städelschule* Frankfurt from 1986 to 1991. It was during this time that he began collecting items for his *Archive of Contemporary History*. This overarching project emanates from questions about the kinds of objects museums collect and how these objects, along with their taxonomic categories, discount the lives of ordinary people. Bott's work has been shown internationally including exhibitions at the Rose Art Museum, New England, USA (2004), the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery, UK (2007), and the Kunsthalle Mainz, Germany (2011). American artist Portia Munson was born in 1961 and completed her Masters in Fine Arts from Rutgers University in 1990. Like Bott, Munson's collections of commonplace objects fill her displays, but her choice to collect by colour makes her system of categorization immediately apparent and calls attention to how different colours, like pink for girls and green for the environment, have been mobilized as targeted marketing strategies. She has exhibited extensively including shows at the Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki (1996), at the Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College (2005) and the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (2010).

Rather than the mass accumulations of Bott and Munson, Kelly Mark and Jac Leirner are more specific in choosing objects for their collections, since the

things they accumulate make salient their own lived experiences. Jac Leirner, born in 1961 in Brazil, studied art at the College of Fine Arts, Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, São Paulo, between 1979 and 1984, and at the Licenciatura in 1984. Leirner's work has been internationally acclaimed, and she has had solo exhibitions at the Galeria Presença, Lisbon (2007), the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (2001, 1998), and the Centre d'Art Contemporain, Geneva (1993). Leirner's work has also been included in the Venice Biennale (1997, 1990), and at Documenta IX in Kassel, Germany (1992).In addition, she has been an artist in residence at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, and at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. The final artist whose work I will be exploring is Canadian Kelly Mark. Born in Ontario in 1967, Mark graduated from the fine arts program at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in 1994. She has shown internationally including exhibitions at the National Gallery of Canada (2008), the Netwerk Centre for Contemporary Art, Belgium (2009), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (scheduled for May 2012), and has represented Canada at the Sydney Biennale (1998) and the Liverpool Biennale (2006).

In the first chapter, Collecting and Classifying: resisting the museum model, I argue that these artists establish their own collecting and classifying strategies rather than subscribing to established institutional conventions, which are functionally more rigid in their classifications as to reinforce divisions between categories and academic disciplines. The kinds of objects being collected by these artists are also important, since they do not fit into the

standard repertoire of museum objects. Rather than collecting exemplary items with perceived historic or cultural significance, the things acquired by Bott, Munson, Mark and Leirner are chosen for their ordinary nature, which draws attention to the objects typically excluded from museological collections. All four artists' projects will be outlined here. In chapter two, Archiving the Self, I contend that the individual projects of Mark and Leirner construct personal archives, which reveals something about each artist - not unlike how princely collections or large donations from private collectors, which museum collections are built upon, speak to the particular lives and interests of individual collectors. The two central projects I consider are Mark's collection of punched time cards which form *In & Out* and Leirner's *Lung*, a careful recording of her smoking habit and its by-products. In the final chapter, Making Sense of Collections on Display, I argue that the display of a collection, whether that of an artist or an institution, is the primary way viewers are able to engage with the objects it contains. Bott's *Archive of Contemporary History* and Munson's *Green Piece* call attention to the display strategies used by museums, which are designed to isolate and identify individual objects, by literally crowding their displays with an overwhelming number of things and providing only limited didactic information.

Each artist in my thesis has formed their own collections, rather than using a museological one that exists already. In doing so, they engage with the collecting, classifying, and display habits of museums as well as the related archival functions of storage and preservation as a way to question what kind of

objects, people and experiences are recognized by the museum. Like earlier artists who critically investigated the museum, the work of Bott, Munson, Mark and Leirner is reliant upon the museum as a site; on its capacity to legitimize art.

Since 1988, German artist Karsten Bott has been collecting all manner of discarded objects for his *Archive of Contemporary History*. Each item in Bott's continually growing collection of more than 500,000 different objects is carefully documented and categorized. As an artist whose practice involves collecting and exhibiting objects that are not rare or categorically exemplary, but are common and show signs of use, Bott is interested in exploring ideas of collecting, classification, and consumption and their relationship to institutional practices. Bott's decision to collect common objects and then to categorize these into familiar rather than scientific categories deliberately encourages potentially new or different kinds of associations between objects. While Bott questions entrenched forms of museum taxonomy, he is not the first to mobilize variant strategies of collecting and classifying. Joseph Cornell's "museums," created in the early part of the twentieth century, offer an illustrative precursor and will foreground the subsequent use of collections by contemporary artists. In particular, this chapter will focus on how Karsten Bott and artists such as Portia Munson, Jac Leirner and Kelly Mark are commenting on conventional collecting, classifying and display strategies found in museums.

Before discussing some of the strategies used by Cornell, the historical antecedents of the cabinet of curiosity and subsequent shift to the public museum need to be addressed. In their introduction to *The Origins of Museums: the cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe*, Impey and MacGregor describe how the cabinet of curiosity or *Wunderkammer* reflects

the Renaissance preoccupation with learning and an interest in the natural world. As they demonstrate, the cabinet of curiosity had been a fashionable way for collectors to display and emphasize the wonder of objects in an age of discovery, both from the natural and the man-made world (1985, 1-3). Citing Krzysztof Pomian, Cultural Studies theorist Tony Bennett explains how, in the cabinet of curiosity, stress was "placed on the singular, the unique and the exceptional....the singular and the exceptional objects assembled in the cabinet are valued because they stand in a special relationship to the totality" (1995, 40-41). While exemplary objects were the most desirable, the aim of these collectors, like that of the public museum which would follow in the eighteenth century, was universality.

A cabinet of curiosity could be many things to different collectors, depending on their station and individual interests. Although some collections were literally stored in cabinets, this title is somewhat of a misnomer since larger collections could occupy one or more rooms, especially those collections whose contents included very large items. Every kind of imaginable item was collected. Artefacts from antiquity, such as Roman coins and sculptures or Egyptian mummies and figurines were particularly desirable, as were strange animals from the New World, Africa and the Far East including "polar bears, cassowaries, [and] dodos" (Impey and MacGregor 1985, 2). As interest in exotic lands grew, some collectors turned their attention to their own societies, collecting obsolete tools, clothing, produce, local flora and insects. Items "displaying feats of

technical virtuosity" came to be made as the result of technical advances in milling and lens making "with no practical purpose... produced specifically for the cabinet" (2).

In conjunction with the cabinet of curiosity, taxonomies were being developed and cross referenced among collectors as a way of creating authority around these systems of labeling and classification. Objects in these displays were often arranged in a way that would heighten this sense of discovery by highlighting the contrasts between them; very small things like the egg of a humming bird might be juxtaposed against very large things like the egg of an ostrich. Though collectors made use of categorization, categories were often idiosyncratic. Items in these cabinets could be subject to position changes within the greater constellations of objects they contained as new discoveries were made and added, enabling new relationships between the objects to emerge.

In the eighteenth century, a shift away from the cabinet of curiosity occurred as private collections were "recruited for a civilizing task," that of public education (Bennett 1995, 33). In addition, this shift was marked by a new scientific rationality that would lead to the demise of the cabinet of curiosity as a way of encountering the world via the relationships among the wondrous things it contained. In the public museum, objects gained an increased instructive function where the classification and display of objects was seen as a tool to enlighten the people "rather than merely evoking wonder and surprise for the idly curious" (24). Instead of juxtaposing the unexpected or forming groupings

derived from a particular collector's knowledge base, the increasingly stricter categorical constructions of the Enlightenment aimed to prevent cross contamination between different academic disciplines and reinforced hierarchical distinctions between groups. Things could be identified or named by a general taxonomy before being sorted into an even more discrete sub category. This structuring of knowledge rests upon assumptions so fundamental that they appear invisible. As Foucault argues throughout *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, it is not so much the categorization that is problematic, but the unquestioned assumptions inherent in the structures that govern the production of knowledge in a particular culture.

While precedents can be formally traced to the cabinet of curiosity, collecting and classifying objects is an active strategy used in contemporary artistic practices where the categorization of objects is often malleable. The work of artists like Cornell, Bott, Munson, Mark and Leirner subverts the idea of a historical a priori that foregrounds how knowledge has traditionally been structured. Evoking Foucault, Susan Stewart states that "the older form of knowledge does not disappear. Rather, in juxtaposition to new devices of thought, it acquires a transformed meaning" (1993, 293). American artist Joseph Cornell (1903-1972), provides a prototypic example of an artist who collected and classified all manner of objects and ephemera according to his own system of classification, transforming each item and establishing new sets of meanings.

Cornell collected and categorized a wide variety of items including: all sizes and types of balls, corks, bird's nests, bits of shell, aperitif glasses, pipes, sheet music, images of ballet dancers and starlets, newspaper clippings about celebrities, references to the Medici family, and the scraps of paper swept up from his studio floor after a particular project was complete. These items were then re-combined in such a way that they were given new meaning and significance: a small cut out promotional image of a ballerina's head and some sand could be combined in a vial and made to conjure the mysterious and stoic nature of the Sphinx. Others, containing bits of text and tiny pieces of semi-precious stones, or being filled with gold dust, recall the ancient practice of alchemy. In producing a new relationship between these objects taken out of their original context, Cornell creates modern versions of the cabinet of curiosity, albeit on a smaller and more intimate scale than those of the seventeenth century. For the most part, Cornell's cabinets are no larger than 16 x 13 x 4 inches, whereas the seventeenth century cabinets often filled entire rooms. Much of what is now known about Cornell comes from his dossiers and boxes of collected materials, from the photographs taken inside his studio where those dossiers and boxes were meticulously organized and visible upon shelves, and from the diaries and correspondence that he kept. This documentation reveals the time Cornell devoted to rummaging through second hand shops and the five-and-dimes near his home looking for interesting papers and objects that could later be used in his works.

Cornell painstakingly sorted and classified his collection. For example, “balls” was not a sufficient category for him; rather they would be parceled out into categories like “Balls/Cork” or “Wooden Balls Only” (Hartigan, 2003b, 17). He sorted images in much the same way, giving each folder a straightforward title descriptive of the contents, like “castles” or “windows,” or even the name of an individual or family, like “Medici.” These collections were never displayed as they appeared since Cornell was not interested in displaying or exposing his entire collection of “Wooden Balls” in the way some artists would later do; rather, he used these rich collections as materials for his collages. The difference between Cornell and collectors from the seventeenth century is that Cornell collected items that were not typically singular, but relatively common and without much monetary or symbolic value on their own. Cornell’s use of objects from everyday life foreshadows how the contemporary artists of this thesis will breathe new found significance into the commonplace objects they use thereby rendering the commonplace exceptional.

From the nineteen thirties to the nineteen fifties Cornell produced a series of works he described as “museums.” As the foundation of these projects he used old wooden boxes and cabinets with glass doors that had previously been used to carry and store such items as writing supplies, medicine or toiletries. He would collage two- and three- dimensional items into these boxes, often incorporating images of actresses, the ballet, or French poetry. The use of the box alone is particularly interesting since, as Lynda Roscoe Hartigan states,

"the box is one of man's oldest means of sorting, carrying and presenting things, no matter how trivial or precious" (2003a, 84). Using a box as a means of displaying one's collection is a strategy to which artists continually return. Cornell's boxes also visually reference their large scale predecessors: cabinets of curiosity, museum vitrines and department store display cases. This connection is seen both in terms of the materials of their construction and in the way objects are assembled and displayed together. Given the emergence of public museums in the late eighteenth century at the same moment as department stores, there is a strong visual and functional similarity between the two. Cornell is aware of these cabinets and the museums that succeeded them, as he deliberately references them in a title like *Museum* (c.1940-1950). However, while Cornell makes use of the word museum as a way to conjure associations between these institutions and his work, it is what happens within the context of his boxes that sets his aims apart from the museum.

Museum consists of a wooden box that measures 2 5/8 x 10 7/8 x 6 1/8 inches and opens to reveal a series of twenty-eight glass vials with cork stoppers sealed shut with red wax. These vials can be taken out of their individual spaces and handled for closer inspection, then arranged into any order the viewer wishes. None of the vials have a prescriptive place in the box, nor are they labeled. Each contains something different: small watch parts, a spiral seashell resting inside some pink sand, a small feather and tiny ball, a piece of paper with an illustration of a constellation or a fragmented bit of text. Together these

contents evoke the marvelous nature of the cabinet of curiosity in the juxtaposition of the objects contained within each glass jar as well as in their placement in Cornell's *Museum* as a whole. While the contents of the vials appear visually like specimens, the vials' lack of individual labels deliberately recalls the cabinet of curiosity, purposefully inviting speculation and wonder. Given the kinds of items from the natural world included in each glass vial, this work has been described as a miniature natural history museum by Robert Lehrman, a private collector of Cornell's work (2003, 194). With a lack of labels or any other didactic information identifying each vial and its contents, Cornell's museums are intentionally ambiguous and open to interpretation, his idiosyncratic system of classification obscured from the viewer. Cornell's decision to frame the space of the box as a museum plays with the systems of organization and protocols of the public museum. There is no hierarchy that elevates the contents of one vial above another; the ordering of the vials depends on the viewer's interaction with the work and the relationships they create between each of the twenty eight containers. The combination of Cornell's deliberate lack of labeling and curious contents of his museums returns the viewer to the conditions of the cabinet of curiosity.

The active participation that characterizes Cornell's museums is meant to involve multiple senses, rather than giving preference to vision as the primary source of knowledge. The glass vials and their contents, fragile like the contents of the seventeenth century cabinets of curiosity, are meant to be removed from

their cabinets and turned over, the weight of them felt in the hand, and then shook so the bits inside move around to reveal the sometimes hidden contents, with many also producing sounds. Above all, not only are the contents meant to be taken off shelves or out of pre-cut slots, but drawers are meant to be opened and lids are meant to be lifted; the texture of each element is as varied as the contents inside. This decision to encourage engagement with the other senses marks a significant shift in the way viewers are invited to experience artworks and foreshadows the work of future artists who are also interested in exploring the materiality of the object. The tactile elements of Cornell's museums, coupled with his pedestrian acquisition strategy and idiosyncratic categories of classification, set his practice apart from the conventional museum or natural history collections that his work evokes.

The strategies used by Cornell have been influential on contemporary visual artists, especially his use and assembly of commonplace objects into unexpected combinations as to accord them new significance. Cornell's implementation of his own system for classifying his acquisitions is especially relevant when considering the recent works of Karsten Bott, Portia Munson, Jac Leirner and Kelly Mark. Bott takes an encyclopaedic approach to collecting in his attempt to obtain one representative item of every different kind of mass produced object ever created, each newly acquired item contributing to his *Archive of Contemporary History*, while Munson uses a different approach and collects objects according to their colour. Leirner and Mark focus their collecting

habits on the acquisition of multiples, seeking depth rather than breadth to their individual collections. Although each of these artists differ in the kinds of questions they are asking about collecting and use different forms of idiosyncratic classification, their practices are similar in that they disregard traditional hierarchies and examine different ways of seeing banal, everyday objects.

Bott's *Archive of Contemporary History* was conceived, in part, as a response to what he felt was an underrepresentation of the lives of ordinary people in museums (Thornton 2007, np). To remedy this, Bott collects ordinary, everyday objects. As of 2010, he had amassed some 500,000 objects which are part of Bott's "attempt to collect one representative of every object of everyday life" (Winzen 1998, 25). These are then divided into categories like toys or kitchen, which correspond to their function or place in daily life in an approach that upsets conventional hierarchical classification systems. The objects in Bott's massive and expanding collection are not new and are often acquired from yard sales or other people's trash. Bott is interested in these kinds of objects because they speak to the disposable nature of contemporary life, where things are constantly being thrown away once they have outlived their desired purpose. These objects are not special or unique as items in private or institutional collections typically are, instead these items exemplify the commonplace. Among the items Bott has collected are a hula hoop, magazines, all kinds of toys, office supplies, kitchen gadgets, tub stoppers, gaskets, toggles, cassette tapes, table-

top hair dryers, taxidermied animals, images of celebrities, road signs and even a teal bathroom sink. Once a new object is acquired it is meticulously sorted according to how Bott conceptualizes it in relationship to the constellation of other items already in his collection. The objects are subsequently entered into a computer database where Bott organizes his collection into such diverse and distinct lexical categories as: occupations, death, festival/customs, film, kitchen, and household pets. The division of objects into Bott's categories evoke a Borgesian sensibility because no one object is limited to a single classification and may simultaneously belong to many different categories at once.

In the database, objects are cross-referenced with other entries with which Bott feels an object shares similar features. For example, a knife might be found under the headings of kitchen, occupations, and death; a passport photo under the headings of certificates, travel, and youth (if it is a child's passport photo). In addition, each item in the database of Bott's vast *Archive* contains a brief description of the object to indicate its function, contributing an understanding of how objects might relate to another. While the objects are entered into his database with a name, dimensions and a category, when he exhibits the objects in a museum or gallery, it is without *any* reference to this ordering. Bott deliberately chooses not to label, tag or identify what the objects are because he wants to leave the collecting strategy open to interpretation. I will discuss the display of Bott's *Archive of Contemporary* at greater length in

Chapter 3. Where Bott reveals his system of collecting and classifying in a more overt way is in his book *One of Each.*

Bott clearly invests a great deal of time and care in describing objects, making connections, and forming links between the objects in his categories. As Bott says of his process, "I put a structure on the collection of my archive that defines things other than alphabetically.... I am humanizing these things. It's like a giant polka" (2007, np). By describing his classification process as humanizing its contents, Bott connects the objects to how ordinary people use and categorize objects and allows for movement between categories. Like the objects they contain, Bott's categories are based on grouping objects in ways that are routine and familiar to everyday life as to evoke the kinds of daily interactions that occur with individual objects. Moreover, the process of recovering and salvaging discarded objects removes them from those familiar contexts in which they often go unnoticed and invites the viewer to reconsider their relationship to the objects Bott presents. Many artists who collect are interested in exploring the tension between the commonplace and the unique. In the catalogue for *Deep Storage*, an exhibition that explored the work of artist collectors, curator Matthias Winzen speculates on a paradox that he calls the trivial/exceptional. He asserts that when an artist collects and displays trivial things "the worthless, unnoticed, anything-but-rare piece is rendered exceptional" (1998, 28). Winzen is suggesting that this is the reversal of conventional acquisition strategies where collectors (private and institutional

alike) are primarily interested in rare or genuine objects. Winzen goes on to state that for artists who collect "worthless" objects, "the treacherousness of the object, the unavoidable trivialization of the exceptional object as a result of being collected, is not fought against, but is instead agreed with" (28). The ennobling of the trivial object comes as a result of its relationship to other objects; it is rendered exceptional because of its place in a particular collection.

The 2007 publication, *One of Each*, contains photographs of 2,000 objects selected from Bott's collection, organized according to Bott's own categories. Every page begins with a categorical heading and contains two columns of four photographic images, resulting in a double spread of sixteen images in a four by four grid. Just as in his database, Bott gives each image a title, identifying the object, and providing its dimensions. Still, Bott's book defies the recognizable systems of organization typically found in encyclopaedic books. The categories in *One of Each* are not listed alphabetically nor are the objects within his categories, and there is no index to help readers navigate their way. Despite its departure from traditional categories and the unfamiliar organizational structure, Bott's book echoes Diderot's *Encyclopédie.* The 27 volumes of Diderot's work, published between 1751 and 1772 with its 75,000 entries (2,500 of which are illustrated), is considered an important work that reflects the ideals of the Enlightenment. As with the public museum, one of the Diderot's goals was to provide a systematic and rational ordering of human knowledge, replete with hierarchical system fashioned around man to reinforce his position at the centre

of the great chain of being. It contains three broad categories: memory, reason, and imagination (which are known in the present day as history, philosophy, and poetry). The contents of these general categories are then further divided into increasingly discrete sub-categories in an attempt to present a structured understanding of the world. Each of the entries includes lengthy descriptions of tools and machines, manufacturing processes, philosophical and political concepts, as well as sections on chemistry and the biological sciences.

Aside from attempting to represent a "complete" or inclusive catalogue, both texts by Bott and Diderot seek to elevate the status of the commonplace. In Diderot this can be read in the way all manner of manual labour or tasks are given the same attention as the work of intellectuals and clerics; in Bott, it is the photographic documentation, names and dimensions of ordinary objects as though they were collectible treasures. However, Bott's lack of description for his entries makes his catalogue less instructive and more idiosyncratic than Diderot's. Furthermore, although Bott names his categories, these divisions are fluid, because objects can be located in a number of categories, leaving them open to interpretation and active questioning.

Bott's use of photography in *One of Each* is perhaps more significant than the encyclopaedic nature of the book. The photographs themselves conjure the photo documentary tradition of artists like Bernd and Hilla Becher with their images of water towers and grain elevators, or Ed Ruscha's books such as *Twenty Six Gasoline Stations* (1963) all of which employ a straightforward, serial, and

formally "objective" approach to photography. Each item in *One of Each* is photographed in colour, frontally, against a stark grey background and is accompanied by a caption with the name and dimensions of the object. The serial banality of these images and captions are what contribute to the so-called objective quality of the overall book. Furthermore, Bott's choice of the book format for presenting these images, rather than displaying them as large scale photographs, is significant. The medium of the book necessitates a particular kind of interaction, altering the viewer's experience of the work from an open and collective encounter with the images to an intimate and private engagement. Readers are able to devote as much time as they choose looking at particular images, flipping back and forth between the pages and making connections between the objects presented within the pages of the book without restriction.

Yet each photographed item has the appearance of being somehow special or unique. As curator and art historian Okwui Enwezor posits: "from its inception, the photographic record has manifested 'the appearance of a statement as a unique event.' Every photographic image has been endowed with this principle of uniqueness" (2008, 12). It is not that the subject of the photograph *is* unique, but that it *becomes* unique because it has been selected for inclusion. Similar to taking a photograph, the act of choosing one object from many endows that particular object with the quality of being representative of an entire class or series of objects, as seen in the public museum. However, while

the objects selected for photographing may appear to be unique given Bott's undisclosed process of selection, he is purposely selecting ordinary objects in an attempt to make visible the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The work of Portia Munson also involves the acquisition and classification of ordinary objects which have outlived their use value. In a related longitudinal practice to Bott, Munson has been acquiring objects for over thirty years. While both artists might be seeking discarded and found objects for their respected collections, their motivations and strategies diverge. Munson's categories appear straightforward in their simplicity. She classifies by colour: pink, green, and blue. Her interest lies in part in the assumptions and stereotypes associated with colour which are conveyed in so many mass produced and disposable items. Though exact numbers are not known, each colour-coded collection contains hundreds of different items. When exhibited, objects are displayed either as heaps with a clearly defined border or in glass vitirines so that her installations draw visceral attention to "manufactured perceptions of nature" (Munson 2010, np) via the mass produced objects that reinforce them. Like Bott, Munson employs objects that have outlived their original function and have been designated as trash to delineate clear connections between consumption and the construction of identity, reflecting viewers' own consumption habits and constructed identities back upon themselves.

Munson's choice of colour to categorize objects eschews normative classification. Her objects are not named as they are in Bott's book, or

meticulously sorted by type and size as with Cornell's cornucopia of source materials. By using colour as a strategy for grouping items, regardless of what they may be or purpose they may have served, Munson's objects are often placed up against something that may otherwise appear completely unrelated. There is no hierarchy in Munson's system, all objects are equal. Although the groupings of objects may appear random, there are similarities other than colour, and the more- time one spends with a particular installation, the more visible the latent, interrelated similarities between objects become. This kind of collecting recalls Marcel Broodthaer's *Musée d'Art Moderne: Département d'Aigles: Section des Figures* (1968), in which Broodthaers collected over 300 objects and images each bearing a representation of an eagle from a host of both public and private sources. While some of these items had previously been accepted as art objects, others included such everyday items as comic strips, typewriters and product logos (Crimp 1993, 86). In de-contextualizing the contents of his museum from their original sources, Broodthaer's heterotopia of eagles are drained of their symbolic value and appear absurd given how these items are typically classified. As Broodthaers himself wrote "a comb, a traditional painting, a sewing machine, an umbrella, a table may find a place in the museum in different sections, depending on their classification" (quoted in Crimp, 87). For Crimp, Broodthaers isolation of the eagle as its own category "demonstrates the oddness of the museum's order of knowledge" (87).

The diverse collection of items in Munson's *Pink Project* (1994 - present) raise similar questions about the way objects are collected and categorized. While the isolation and repetition of the eagle contribute to an awareness of the proliferation of that symbol, so too does the plethora of pink things make salient the excess to which certain objects have been specifically marketed towards women. From the day they are born, baby girls in western cultures are outfitted in pink hats and booties, while boys are dressed in blue. One of her newer collections, *Blue Project* (2010 – present), acts as a counter point to *Pink Project* and consists completely of various blue items. These two collections include toys, religious icons, household products, and personal care items such as toothbrushes and combs. One of her most recent works is *Green Piece* (2000-present). This collection consists entirely of green objects. Green has become emblematic of the outdoors, the environment and so called "green" movements. Like her pink and blue projects, this collection also interrogates how colour is strategically mobilized in the manufacturing and representation of consumer goods and services. It is this final category of "green" things that I will be discussing in this chapter.

Green Piece is particularity interesting not only because this work has not been discussed as extensively as *Pink Project*, but because of the proliferation of "green" products over the past twenty years. The colour green emerged as an ecological symbol in the early nineteen seventies after a group of environmentalists known as Greenpeace incorporated the word into their name

to associate it with nature. The clever play on words and the connection (or perhaps rather the disconnection) between Munson's collection of green-coloured objects and Greenpeace the organization is clearly deliberate. *Green Piece* is an amalgamation of pieces of green plastic that form a larger piece of work. Once disposed of, these cheaply produced objects cause harm to the environment while their colour is used widely in marketing to foster favourable public opinion about companies and their products, whether that perception is accurate or not. Plastics are certainly not produced in an environmentally friendly manner, especially if one takes into account the means of extraction of fossil fuels, the processing of these into useable polymers, and the subsequent manufacturing of these into consumer goods. Then, once these goods have outlived their use, they are usually thrown out where they break down very slowly due to the molecular bonds designed to make plastics and synthetic fibers degrade slowly. Should these products end up being recycled, the process to convert them back into usable polymers once more is highly toxic in its own right (Rawsthorn 2010, np).

As chemist and co-author of *Cradle to Cradle* Michael Braungart argues, perhaps the most ironic part of using green as a colour to represent the green movement is that "green can never be green, because of the way it's made. It's impossible to dye plastic green or to print green ink on paper without contaminating them" (Braungart, quoted in Rawsthorn 2010, np). Green coloured plastic and paper cannot even be recycled or composted safely because

it would contaminate the other plastics. The most common shades of green produced commercially, greens 7, 36 and 50, contain hazardous levels of chlorine, bromide, cobalt, nickel and zinc oxide, chemicals that are inorganic and have been linked to cancer and birth defects (Rawsthorn 2010, np).

How do these factors relate to Munson's *Green Piece*? Green is more than just a colour: it is a political movement, it is a marketing strategy (also linked with "eco," "sustainable," and "the outdoors"), and it is even a pejorative expression ("greenwashing"). Munson is aware of all these layers of meaning that have been graphed onto both green the colour and, by extension, green objects. She chooses items that have been disposed of and categorically labeled trash to call explicit attention to consumption. Like Bott, Munson's collections are formed by everyday objects that have lost their original value, having likely been replaced by something new. Regarding the use of objects abandoned as waste, Julian Stallabrass comments that there is a simultaneous gain and loss: "what they lose is related to their presentation by advertizing [sic] as desirable commodities: newness, utility, wholeness, a distinction from other objects.... In becoming rubbish the object, stripped of this mystification, gains a doleful truthfulness, as though confessing: it becomes a reminder that commodities, despite all their tricks, are just stuff... behind the veneer imposed by a manufactured desire" (2009, 416). With objects chaotically piled one on top of the other, Munson's various installations of *Green Piece* display the dejected remains of manufacturing and obsolescence.

Munson's *Green Piece* currently has two predominant arrangements. The longest running of these is labeled *Lawn*, which has been exhibited since 2000, while *Sarcophagus* began being shown in 2007. *Lawn* is typically displayed as a large, rectilinear shaped installation meant literally to replicate a lawn within the space of the gallery. Unlike other artists who have used living grass with which to create lawns in galleries, Munson's lawn consists of "anything you can imagine that has a relationship to nature, good or bad" (Munson 2010, np): chairs, fertilizer containers, fly swatters, plant pots, camping supplies, toys, and wading pools to name a few. The variety of these objects is akin to the variety in Bott's own collection. Sometimes the objects in *Lawn* are arranged from the lightest to the darkest shade of green, showing a gradation in colour, other times they are not sorted at all but are heaped unceremoniously. Central to the naming of this particular arrangement of objects is the question of whether any lawn is natural, since the beloved green patch of grass ubiquitous in North America is also an artificial construct in and of itself. In *Sarcophagus,* the objects identified in *Lawn* are crammed into a horizontal display case made of wooden joists and glass panes. The title deftly alludes to the tombs of the dead in Ancient Egypt that contain the embalmed remains of nobility. However, given the contents of this sarcophagus, a more apt connection might be the idea of a memorial dedicated to the passing of the objects it contains and to the environment from which the colour draws associations.

For Bott and Munson, the practice of collecting is based on acquiring a diverse array of objects; Bott aims to collect the widest variety of objects and Munson's collection illustrates the range of things made in a particular colour. In contrast, the individual practices of Jac Leirner and Kelly Mark who also focus on everyday life, collect multiples. The objects in their collections are not as broad ranging but illustrate the variety that exists within single categories. Items in Leirner's collections include such ephemera as mail, bank notes, business cards, air sickness bags, ashtrays, plastic cutlery and cigarette packaging, while Mark collects knives, her signature (as written by others), and objects like time cards and metal bars, which are marked with her rituals and the passage of time. While the details of Mark's collection will be discussed in Chapter 2, Leirner's practice is particularly salient here because of the way it echoes the way museums collect.

At the core, both Leirner and public museums collect numerous objects or specimens that belong to the same taxonomic category. For museums the strategy of collecting multiple items offers the possibility of acquiring something that *best* represents a particular taxonomy or category. As new acquisitions are made the preexisting object may still be of research value and as such not necessarily replaced in the institution's larger collection. The newer object serves to replace the less perfect or damaged precursors in displays, thereby removing the older from view. This is where Leirner differs from the museum. Her practice of collecting multiples is not about acquiring or displaying the best of something

as she is not seeking the most representative example of a business card, piece of mail or air sickness bag. Rather than coming from an external source, such as another collector, the objects Leirner collects are things from her own life – the business cards are of the people she's met, the mail is mail that she received while working or residing in a particular place, the air sickness bags are from flights she's been on. The provenance or quality of objects is not of concern for Leirner as it is for the museum because they are things she has deemed worthy of gathering from the world around her. Additionally, while the public museum in interested in displaying an exemplary singular or limited sequence of things from a particular category as a way of enabling a broader range of objects to be exhibited, Leirner displays the entire set of objects within a classification and gives each item the possibility of varied readings.

Classification informs how the world is encountered and structured. The artists in this chapter are not suggesting that classification ought not to be used - their choice of objects, their systems of categorization, and their methods of display both question and transform prior forms of knowledge. By creating idiosyncratic systems which fulfill particular needs, Bott, Munson, Leirner and Mark subvert the established organization of objects in public museums as a strategy to disrupt conventionally accepted taxonomies. The collections of these artists contain ordinary rather than exemplary objects which have typically been designated as trash, not valuable artifacts. What is interesting about classification and taxonomy as related to the idea of artists as collector is how

the new arrangements strive to engage museum visitors with the sense of wonder found in the early cabinets of curiosity. Chapter three will consider how viewers negotiate meaning when they encounter the installations of Bott and Munson, paying attention to the individual display strategies these artists mobilize. The following chapter is devoted to the practices of Mark and Leirner where I will examine how their collections archive and manifest their own lived experiences.

The preoccupation with everyday objects, as discussed in relation to notions of collecting and classifying in the previous chapter, can also be conceptualized as the creation of a personal archive, as manifested in the works of Kelly Mark and Jac Leirner. Both Mark and Leirner collect the traces of their habits, which in turn become the subject matter of their works. Neither is engaged in collecting or archiving extraordinary objects or events from their lives; rather, the commonplace and the ordinary are the very stuff of their archives. Their interest lies in daily existence. For example, Mark conceptualizes her work as an artist like any other job. Since 1997 she has been hard at work on *In & Out*. Fundamentally, the project consists of punch cards as the tangible documentation of the hours Mark has spent working in her studio. When displayed, the cards are placed in wall-mounted metal racks, a reference to the common time punching set-up found in blue collar jobs. For this ongoing project, Mark clocks in and out of her studio every time she decides to make art. It is significant that her studio and her home share the same physical space; the time cards demarcate the fine line between the two. When Mark punches in, her job is that of an artist and she does her job of making art; once she has punched out, her studio work ceases and she is "free" to do what she likes. The evidence of each day's work is printed on the manila cards, providing a documentation of the hours spent working as an artist. Taken together, the longitudinal task of punching and collecting cards act as an archive of the particular ways Mark

divides her time. This activity based project will not be completed until Mark reaches the retirement age of 65 or dies, whichever comes first.

This merger of art and everyday life manifested in her archiving of daily rituals is common to Mark's practice and, in the words of Ingrid Jenkner, "belongs to the conceptual art tradition of nudging artistic production closer to the subject matter, [and]... daily existence" (2005, 5). Brazilian artist Jac Leirner also engages in the practice of archiving and it will be argued that in doing so she, like Mark, reveals her lived experiences via objects that testify to events from her own life. Leirner's collected objects include gift shop bags collected from the museums she's visited and every component from every pack of cigarettes smoked over three years. This chapter will elucidate how the collection of objects related to the personal and professional lives of Mark and Leirner enacts the will to archive, asserts a distinct agency and expresses subjectivity via the practices of acquisition, conservation and display of the traces of their lived experiences.

In the 2009 Broadus Lectures at the University of Alberta, archive theorist Michael J. O'Driscoll spoke of an archive of aspiration where he defined aspiration as the "wilful projection of self or community out of longing or ambition into and towards the future" (2009). In this light, the archive is purposefully oriented as active and forward moving. In his formulation, the archive itself can aspire: "to suggest that an archive aspires, or is an index of aspiration, or that aspiration can be archived, is to locate the archival functions

of gathering, consignation and preservation as moments of distinct agency" (O'Driscoll 2009). This agency can be connected to Jenkner's description of conceptual art as artistic production connected to daily existence. Artists assert their agency over their lived experiences by way of the archival functions of selection, maintaining, and storing objects in their collections. Okwui Enwezor has argued that, "the standard view of the archive often evokes a dim, musty place full of drawers, filing cabinets and shelves laden with old documents, an inert repository of historical artefacts, against the archive as an active, regulatory discursive system" (2008, 3); but this antiquated view is being challenged by artists like Mark and Leirner.

In "Archiving 'archiving'," O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop conceptualize archiving "as a historical, material and ideological set of practices" (3). Archiving is historical, in that the contents of an archive have been accumulated longitudinally over time; material, in the sense that it is composed of objects, documents or other trace ephemera; and ideological in that it is a cultural endeavour shaped by the values of the society that created and cares for it. Rather than limit the archive to a dusty repository of the past, O'Driscoll and Bishop call attention to the verb archiving over the noun archive. In doing so they highlight the situated nature of the material trace within the archive and pay attention to the spatial and temporal processes that are designated in archival practices including acts of accumulation, research, and discourse. This

conceptualization evolves out of Jacques Derrida's archive theories, stretching the boundaries of what an archive has the capacity to be.

Derrida opens *Archive Fever* by returning to the origins of the word archive and describing the archive as a place of authority; the site and symbol of power (1996, 2). It is from archives that histories are constructed and what is *written out* of the archive, both in the sense of the documents that are written based on archival research and what is excluded from archives, is a direct reflection of the power archives wield. Archiving and collecting are intrinsically linked, and the distinction often lies in valences. Historically speaking, as Derrida describes, archives are formed through the collection and accumulation of documents and objects. As such, all archives necessarily contain collections of one form or another, yet they are more significant than merely a collection of items amassed together. When considering the multitude of functions that archives fulfill, there is a sense that the contents of an archive, at their origin, were brought together with intentionality and for posterity. The contents were at some point carefully selected at the exclusion of others, regardless of whether the initial motivation behind the formation has now receded from view or been lost. Additionally, O'Driscoll describes the "technologies of textual management" of the material archive as marking the archive as a process via such strategies as document retrieval through codification of cataloguing systems; institutional structures like the professionalization of librarianship; architectural movements such as the adoption of reading rooms linked to

libraries and archival collections; and discursive representations in pedagogical programs (2002, 291). These qualities give archives an attribute of endurance, akin to a legacy, which is felt to be larger than the individual or institutional collector.

Increasingly, the historical authority and power of the archive is being challenged by individuals seeking to assert themselves and create their own archives, writing and documenting their own lives. As cultural theorist Mike Featherstone states, "the will to archive is a powerful impulse in contemporary culture" (2006, 594). This "will to archive" places a greater degree of authority with the individual to voice and record what they find significant. What is interesting about the contemporary will to archive is that what is being gathered are the kinds of things that have been deemed insignificant by cultural institutions: punched time cards, used shopping bags, and empty cigarette packages. Mike Featherstone observes that in contemporary culture, acts of archiving have been opened up as an "activity of individuals in everyday life who seek to preserve documents, photographs, diaries and recordings to develop *their own* archives" (my emphasis, 594). This gives individuals the opportunity to represent their own lives. If archives are compiled and maintained by those with power as Derrida writes, then the "will to archive," described by Featherstone, comes as a logical impulse. By collecting and documenting their own lives artists like Mark and Leirner reclaim power and authority, thereby explicitly constructing their own subjectivity. Subjectivity in this thesis refers to how the

self is lived and negotiated through individualized experience, mediated interaction with the world and other bodies, and expressed via acts of archiving one's own life. For artists like Mark and Leirner, these acts underpin much of their practice. The recording and documentation takes place across a multiplicity of formats, intervening in those technologies of textual management outlined by O'Driscoll; first by the individual artists and then reinforced by institutional structures such as galleries that exhibit and support the practices.

For Featherstone, the will to archive casts archived materials as "prosthetic memory devices for the re-construction of identity" (594-5). Events no longer need to be actively remembered because archived materials can be so easily accessed and memories can be re-constructed from these fragments. Additionally, repetitive acts, like Mark's daily practice of stamping timecards, become habitual and act as their own kind of memory device. The time cards bear witness to the way she divides her time, either working in her studio or not, documenting if she's "on the clock" or not. While the cards themselves are the material documents collected, the act of stamping and the subsequent record of the time spent in the studio is what is archived. The cards offer little truly useful information, but the result is an accumulated set of documents that can be referenced at almost any time, like a memory aid for the role Mark was enacting on a particular day at a particular time.

Derrida and Foucault both caution that there is "an incompleteness of the archive" (Derrida 1996, 52) since "the archive cannot be described in its totality"

(Foucault 1972, 130); as a result, no archive, or act of archiving, can be wholly known. That does not mean that an image of something or someone cannot be constructed from the fragments that do exist. The incompleteness they describe exists, in part, because the entire drive for an archive's inception can never be fully known, and in part because archives are active works in progress where "new archives can still be discovered, come out of secrecy or the private sphere, so as to undergo new interpretations" (Derrida 1996, 52). Any construction of identity is necessarily incomplete and mandates flexibility. While it is possible to find out whether Kelly Mark was working as an artist in her studio or not, the time cards do not really reveal much about how specifically she was spending her time between punching in and out. Instead, the cards describe a fragment of Mark's day to day experience and interrogate how a job is often equated with an identity. Individual collections are the outward manifestation of these fragments of identity and objects are the visible representation of the self. This is especially true for artists like Mark who are engaged in the practice of accumulating objects which bear witness to their own lives. Fundamentally, the will to archive is the intentional act of recording one's life and activities. This connects directly to O'Driscoll's proposition that an archive can aspire precisely because those intentional acts of self-recording reveal moments of distinct agency .

In her examination of the archive, historian Carolyn Steedman contrasts Foucault's view of the archive with that put forward by Derrida. According to Steedman, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Foucault argues that "the archive

does not so much stand in for the idea of what can be said, but rather *is* 'the system that establishes statements as events and things;'", whereas in *Archive Fever* Derrida provides a compelling "theoretical perspective on the institution of archives, the practices of reading and writing attendant on them, and [their] systems of regulation." (2002, 2). Foucault's contention that the archive establishes statements as events informs O'Driscoll and Bishop's assertion that an archive is not restricted to site alone; rather, "archiving" is "neither noun nor verb, but rather both at once" and, as they conceive it, "can only ever be an event" (2004, 3). Conceptualized as an event, archiving is an active moment that affirms subjectivity as a result of individualized interaction with the archive. While on its own an event is "singular, [and] non-repeatable," (3) the repeated engagement with the archive is what reinforces subjectivity. Whether this engagement is with one's own archive, or an intervention into an outside archive, both the archive and those who intervene are affected. The archive as an event signals that precise moment of archival intervention.

The active collecting and documenting traces of her own life are central to the artistic production of Kelly Mark, and as such are connected to the notion of archival intervention. The majority of Mark's works are created either as multiples or as ongoing projects with open editions. These open editions include such projects as "drawings," which include *Drawing of a Drawing*, *Drawing of a Diptych* (begun in 2002) where she uses an 8B pencil to completely cover an existing drawing and its frame with dark graphite lines until the original image is

completely obscured; *Signature Stamps* (2007) which reproduce her signature as signed by other people into stamps; and *The Canada Council Greatfully Acknowledges the Support of Canadian Artists* (2007) buttons. As she stated in an artist's talk in Edmonton in the fall of 2009, the open editions allow her to recreate works that sell well any time she needs to generate revenue. This unabashed statement frames the art object, whether it is a drawing, a button, or stamped time cards, as a commodity that she can sell to support herself. Furthermore, the cards that comprise *In & Out* deliberately serve to document Mark's labour, revealing that art is a product of that labour. The fact that she uses open editions as a way to make money reinforces her assertion that being an artist is a job like any other, in that like everyone else she must work for her income. But the work of an artist is not a job like any other. Rather, the task of clocking in and out which she has given herself for *In & Out* references blue collar jobs that manage physical human labour, where workers work in factories or in the trades.

The managing of human labour is documented in many blue collar jobs by the use of time clocks. In these instances, employers require that employees record their arrival and departure by punching a clock, where the time in between these literally belongs to the employer. In thinking about this kind of system and Mark's conceptualization of making art as a job like any other, it comes as no surprise that *In & Out* is already owned by a private collector. By purchasing the work and agreeing to pay Mark an annual fee for her continued

work on this project, the collector owns Mark's time: past, present and for the next twenty-five years until she "retires." This contract is between artist and collector, employee and employer. Moreover, though the idea of setting about to work and finishing every day at a specific time initially appears straightforward, her projects often spill out beyond the time stamped on a card. There is an inherent absurdity to the idea that she is somehow transformed by clocking in or out, as though at one moment she is an artist, at another she is not. Of course this is not true. Many of Mark's projects continue long after she has clocked out for the day. *Object Carried for One Year* is an example of one such project. This work, begun in 2002 and to be completed in 2012, requires that a metal bar be carried around in the back pocket of her pants, every day, for one year, then stamped with the date it ceased to be carried. Ten are to be completed in all, each destined to be placed in its own blue velvet lined box. Although Mark's project has yet to be completed, like *In and Out*, every bar has already been purchased by a collector.

Mark's *In & Out* has precedents in the work of artists On Kawara and Annette Messager. On Kawara has several ongoing projects in which he "collects" himself through daily rituals and encounters. One of these projects is his *Today* series; paintings in which the date, in simple white Gill Sans or Futura font, is painted against a monochrome background. Each painting is to be completed on the day on which it was started, using the language and calendrical conventions of the country in which it was begun, otherwise the work

is to be destroyed at midnight. Every day Kawara rises to start another painting. Each painting is stored in a handmade cardboard box with a newspaper clipping from the same day and city in which the painting was begun. Some days he produces more than one painting, but more often than not, he produces none at all. Similar to Mark's *In and Out,* scheduled for completion either with retirement or death, Kawara project will only be complete at the time of his death.

In the 1970s, Messager compartmentalized the different aspects of her life and artistic practice. In her bedroom she was "Annette Messager: Collector," whereas in her living room she was "Annette Messager: Artist." The space of the bedroom was where she stored and sorted her collections, 56 in total, including: *Les tortures volontaires* (1972), a series of images of women undergoing a variety of modifications in an attempt to attain, maintain, and regain a preconceived notion of beauty; *Enfants aux yeux rayés* (1971-1972), a collection of photographs of babies and children whose eyes she scratched out with black markers; and *Comment mes amis feraient mon portrait* (1972) containing portraits of Messager as drawn by others. The majority of these collections ended up in albums, a prototypical archival space for recording memories or documents. In the space of the living room Messager engaged in the practice of making art, which, in the 1970's when the albums were being made, included knitting little outfits for the dead birds she had found in the streets of Paris. When Messager crossed the threshold from the bedroom to the living room, it was as though she underwent a transformation. While not physically changed,

each room defined Messager differently and had an effect on her process of identification, either framing herself as a collector or as an artist. This process is similar to Mark's practice where she also identifies herself differently, depending on whether she's punched in or not. The significance of this process of identification is especially important for Mark and Messager since their home and studio are the same; yet it is a designated space, either that of the time signature or the space of the bedroom, that makes the distinction. These divisions relate back to the roles Mark and Messager take on, particularly with the idea of work. In both cases, the task of making art is framed as their occupation, the thing they are paid to do, while their habits of collecting are framed as the thing they do when they're not working. Their attempts at compartmentalization can be viewed as playing with notions of how identity can be constructed or deconstructed, highlighting the very process of identification and the tenuous nature of defining identity in any absolute way.

Both Mark's *In & Out* and Messager's albums are concrete examples of works that connote events, as benign as those events may seem to the outside observer. Taking up O'Driscoll and Bishop's conception of the "event of the archive," it can be argued that Marks's punched cards literally symbolise the act of archiving her time, while just like photographs in albums serve as archival records for things that have happened, the contents of Messager's albums archive the things she commits to memory. The idea that an archive is eventual suggests a looking or moving forwards towards an unspecified time in the future,

further supporting O'Driscoll's suggestion that archives can aspire. In this formulation, aspiration, which itself is not a tangible thing, also suggests that an archive need not be concrete or literal, but rather can encompass the theoretical. Time cards, marked with specific dates and logged hours, more literally act as an archive than the knives that Mark collects, which are like present day artefacts with their surfaces marked by evidential traces of usage, but that do not provide concrete information to reference when or where they are from. Yet, the knives also signify events or occurrences in Mark's life and reflect moments of distinct agency in the archival functions of collection, protection and storage.

Mark's knife collection began in 1995, around the time she was at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. While waiting tables in restaurants she started collecting, or rather stealing, knives: the knives from restaurants, from friends, from airplanes. The slender shape of a knife makes it easier to slip into a pocket or bag than a salt shaker or a coffee cup might be. Regardless of where they were taken from, her only requirements were that they had to be table knives, and each had to be unique. As a result of Mark's acquisition strategy, none of the knives in her collection are pristine. Their surfaces are scratched and not shiny as they once were, the serrated edges dulled. These traces speak to their usage at countless meals, by countless strangers. For the past fifteen years Mark has been collecting these knives, and every few years the way she chooses to display them changes, thereby altering her relationship, as well as the

viewer's, to the collection. For example, the arrangement known as *Knife Collection: Bout Time* (2002) displays 250 individual knives hanging on magnetic strips that have been mounted directly onto the gallery wall. This particular installation measures five feet by nine feet in the form of a 5 strip by 5 strip grid where each strip holds ten evenly spaced knives. Though she uses ordinary dinner knives, the effect is that of an oversized souvenir spoon collection. The collectible spoon collection typically holds unused miniature spoons collected from places the collector has visited or that mark commemorative occasions. Like these decorative spoons, Mark's knives are silent witnesses to the places she has been, but instead of being engraved with the names of places or events, the knives in her collection are marked in a manner that is not as forthcoming about where they have been.

Though titled *Knife Collection* because it is literally a collection of knives, there is a sense that together they can be framed as an untypical archive of the odd jobs Mark has held and the meals she's eaten. Essentially the knives act as the documents or traces of those events, though they lack the inscription of date, time or place common to the musty archive described by Enwezor at the opening of this chapter. Rather, Mark's knives move towards Enwezor's description of the "archive as an active, regulatory discursive system" (2008, 3) in that they reflect an ongoing dialogue between Mark and her experiential place within the world. The earlier displays held fewer knives, and were largely acquired from waitressing jobs. However, as the years progressed and her

collection grew, it began to hold an increasing number of knives taken from other sources such as friends. The knives from the nascence of the project are displayed alongside those gathered later on. Regardless of the source, once acquired, all knives were subject to ordering and arrangement, as manifested in her display. As highlighted, Mark's choice to modify the way she displays the knives affects the way the archive is understood. As with a traditional paper archive, when new documents are added to the collection, the existing records are transformed because the archive itself is no longer the same. Just as the original motivation for why a document has been included in an archive recedes from view, it does not really matter if Mark remembers where each individual knife came from, or that each knife *actually* be different from all the others. What is more important is that at some point in the past they marked an event and that each knife is part of the embodied processes of collecting, possessing, and ordering.

Possessions are understood to be an extension of the self, either figuratively as with objects that stand in symbolically for something else, or literally as in the case of a tool. As Russell Belk contends, "our self-definition is often highly dependent upon our possessions" (1995, 321). As the foundational element in forming an archive, acts of collecting and preservation require a sustained investment of time and energy. Self-definition is revealed by the collection where the repetitive act of collecting affirms the collectors' subjectivity. Accordingly, the collection becomes the embodied representation

of the time and energy devoted by the collector to its formation. As Amelia Jones points out, individual artworks, which in the case of Mark are often entire collections, need to be read "as enactments of subjects (bodies/selves) whose meanings are contingent upon the *process* of enactment rather than attributing motive to the authors as individuals or origins of consciousness and intentionality" (1998, 10). Again, process is emphasized because what initially precipitated or motivated the artwork is less significant in terms of how the self creates meaning than is the active nature of process. A collection enacts the subject via the process of formation precisely because the individual subject is engaged in the creation of the archive. This process of formation points to the performative dimension of archiving. In archiving, subjectivity is enacted or performed through the process of acquisition and the subsequent care, maintenance, storage and display of those acquisitions becomes a visible manifestation of that subjectivity. With *In & Out* Mark punches the time cards that signal her arrival or departure from studio-based work. Then, gathering the cards together, she stores them until they are exhibited in commercial metal racks where they hang in the space of the gallery or in the home of the collector.

The same holds true of *Knife Collection*. While Mark's process of acquisition via theft is important, what is more significant in terms of an expression of her subjectivity is the manner in which she varies the display of this collection. The fact that she changes the arrangement every couple of years suggests that Mark is engaged in the ongoing process of enacting and

negotiating her subjectivity. First the knives revealed her work as a waitress and student in need of readily accessible materials with which to make art. Then, as a thief and compulsively dedicated collector, when Mark ceased being a waitress and took up working as an artist full time she continued to steal knives from the homes of friends or the restaurants she visited, the source material for the ongoing project already established. Following Belk's assertion that the devoted development of a collection is the ultimate in self-definition, Mark's repetitive acts of collecting indicate an extended and sustained engagement with notions of identity, an ever capricious and pluralistic construct. Mark is collecting and performing herself as an artist and collector though benign tasks that are repeated daily, in the movements through her home, the studio, and the city. Because for Mark, everyday life and the practice of being an artist are synonymous, those small, everyday gestures recorded and transcribed on items like time cards are her source material and offer up glimpses of her daily rituals.

Mark's method of transcribing and archiving her daily rituals is a way of collecting them together as evidence of her life and habits. Similarly, Jac Leirner created an archive of her smoking habit for her work *Lung* (1987) in which she ritually collected and preserved the 1,200 Marlboro cigarette packs she had smoked over three years. All parts were kept: the price stickers, the metallic strips to open them, the sleeves of cellophane, the squares of foil designed to keep the cigarettes fresh, and the boxes. Only the cigarettes themselves are absent. Once Leirner had amassed all of these components, she arranged them

into different groupings. The Price stickers are combined to form a grid arranged in ascending order of cost, the metallic strips are joined end to end, and the foil squares and cellophane sleeves are stacked on top of each other. The boxes themselves, once divested of all other components, are punched with two holes and threaded together so that they can be hung. In addition to these elements, two chest x-rays were taken. One of these was taken before she undertook the task of collecting the Marlboro packs, one at the project's completion. Taken together, *Lung* stands as documentation for Leirner's smoking habit, manifested through the packaging and bracketed by x-rays. It has been stated that Leirner's "appropriation of the object frequently possesses an autobiographical dimension" (Jiménez 2002, 185). The small gesture of smoking becomes monumental when collected, categorized and displayed.

The most overt autobiographical dimensions come first through the title, *Lung*, followed by the visual of the chest x-rays that illustrate a darkening of her lungs, a physiological change written directly into her body. The accumulation of the 1,200 cigarette packages over three years indicates that, by choice, Leirner smokes approximately a pack of cigarettes per day. There is also the fact that instead of establishing a habit, like Mark did when she began punching time cards, smoking was already part of Leirner's daily life when she decided to start collecting, storing and caring for the by-product of her addiction. Closely wedded to *Lung* is the idea of life as process: there is the very process or act of smoking, replete with its own set of rituals and semi-automatic gestures; the process of

methodically keeping all the different parts that constitute a cigarette package; the process of ordering these parts; and of converting them into the base materials of *Lung,* which itself consists of various components. Leirner stands at the centre of these processes which permeate her life. While the side-effects of her habit are put on display, this work does not suggest an attempt to quit smoking or reduce the amount that she smokes, rather when all the elements she has collected are taken as a whole, the work operates as an autobiographical archive of her habit. Just as the gestures involved in smoking are so semi-automatic and habitual that they become predictable: flipping up the top, sliding the cigarette out of the package and placing it between the lips, protecting the flame, drawing in the smoke, etc; so too does the serial repetition of the way *Lung* is presented become banal and seemingly innocuous.

In addition to cigarette packages, the archive of Leirner's habits includes: business cards, Brazilian bank notes, brochures, envelopes, airline tickets, ashtrays, cutlery, and plastic bags from museum gift shops. The business cards name the people she has met, the envelopes collected are evidence of every piece of mail that came in during her residency at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis in 1991, and the museum gift shop bags acquired from museums and galleries she has visited act as signposts of her international travel. Leirner's collection of bags is one of her most widely circulated projects, where groupings of bags are arranged to form individual works like *Names (Museums)* (1989-92) and *144 Museum Bags* (2006). While the specific arrangement of the bags

depends upon the exhibition, they are almost always hung in a rectilinear and grid-like pattern on the wall of a gallery. In one incarnation they are loosely organized according to the color spectrum, changing as they progress across the wall. In another, the bags are hung in a seemingly random pattern that has the effect of looking at a painting by Mondrian. The dimensions of the installations are also variable. Sometimes they may occupy a single wall in a gallery or be immersive installations as the bags cover multiple walls and the floor. Leirner states that a museum gift shop bag "before being a bag, is a material with specific colours and measurements" (Leirner, quoted in Jiménez 2002, 185). Despite these formal qualities, they are still recognizable as bags from well known and identifiable gift shops, and imply a narrative typically eschewed in modern art's use of the grid. Rosalind Krauss explains how the function of the grid "announces, among other things, modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse" (Krauss 1979, 50). While Leirner acknowledges this dialogue with art history, she simultaneously subverts it by using objects that possess literal references to the world, to commodity culture, and to biographical aspects of her life. In doing so, minimalism is reframed.

The museum bag projects reveal that Leirner is not only obsessive (carefully collecting, ordering and preserving the bags, then filling them with a thin layer of polyfil and stitching them together), but someone who has travelled extensively. The bags are not crisp and new, but slightly worn, having been used to carry gift shop items from locations across America and parts of Europe. The

museum bags speak to the circulation of goods; once the purchase is brought home, the bag is meant for disposal. *Names*, like all of her museum bag pieces, draws the bags out from their "natural routing and circulation" (Leirner, quoted in Jiménez 2002, 186) and reinserts them back into the structure of the museum, sometimes being exhibited in the very places where the bags originated. This reinsertion has a transformative effect on their intended circulation as bags. As art historian Ariel Jiménez observes, the bags work "no more as a publicizing object, but as an artwork and, therefore, as part of this ensemble that the museum intends to display for public knowledge. A second circuit is thus established, which is no less than a parody of the first" (186). This strategy is reminiscent of the work of Mark, Bott and Munson, who are all engaged with bringing items not typically considered art objects into the gallery and framing them as worthy of viewing.

Like Mark, Leirner's choice of objects is highly determined by her experiences and highlights her appreciation of the commonplace. Together *Names (Museums)* (1989-92) and *144 Museum Bags* (2006) span seventeen years of collecting. Central to this work is the return to life as process. If the will to archive exists as the power and authority to document one's experiences, then the collected museum bags and cigarette packages act as documents and repositories, testifying to the artist's lived experiences. Although Leirner's bags are more forthcoming about where they are from, given the name or logo of the museum emblazoned across them, they are not unlike the knives in Mark's *Knife*

Collection. Both sets of objects are mundane, and yet both sets act as a kind of record or document of an event. Like the knives, the bags are particular to Leirner's own travels. Hanging the bags on the wall of a gallery makes this privileged experience public and helps anecdotally define an aspect of Leirner's identity through the display of her possessions, as disposable or ephemeral as they are. Leirner shows viewers that she is a world traveller for whom visiting the cultural institutions of different countries is important. It is an aspect of herself that she is choosing to make visible.

The works of Mark and Leirner begin in the practice and habit of collecting and ordering the everyday objects and events from their own lives, then preserving them as a way of locating archival agency. This agency, in tandem with the will to archive, challenges the antiquated view of traditional archives as restricted to places and sites full of dust and historical documents and moves forward, taking up the challenge of thinking about how archives have and can be reconceptualised. Increasingly, the archive is being posited as having both literal and figurative potentials, which give the archive the capacity to be more than just a place, but also an active process and an event. This stretching of the definition of archive, while no means decisive in application, is present in the works described in this chapter by Mark and Leirner. Archiving the events of their lives allows Mark and Leirner to assert their subjective experiences and intervene in the archival processes of documentation, accumulation, storage and display.

To physically experience Karsten Bott's *Archive of Contemporary History* is to experience excess. When Bott presents objects from his vast collection as a gallery installation, the viewer is confronted with literally thousands upon thousands of objects typically displayed directly on the floor or on low risers in such a way that the floor is *completely* obscured, save for the walkway which leads the viewer through the exhibition space. Larger and taller items are positioned towards the back of the room and closer to the walls, while smaller things are arranged in front so they can be better seen. In the exhibition at the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery in 2007, this kind of arrangement was followed by an adjoined gallery lined with cubby holes full of objects arranged in a similar style, with the bigger things towards the back and littler ones towards the front, and rows of display cases in the centre with the most minute of items. Every imaginable object rises up to confront the viewer from all sides: magazines, hair dryers, bicycles, action figures and bobble-heads, canned food, gaskets, buttons, safety pins, bottle caps, sports equipment, store signage, car parts, tools, etc. The result is a visually overwhelming compilation of objects gathered from everyday life. Bott began collecting items for his now massive *Archive of Contemporary History "*because he felt that museums failed to represent the lives of ordinary people, that they gave undue priority to the rare, beautiful or historically important" (Thornton 2007, np). This belief is what inspired Bott to collect and display everyday items.

In *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture*, cultural theorist Eilean Hooper-Greenhill focuses on the role of the institution in fashioning meaning from the objects in their collections. As she states: "museum pedagogy is structured first through the narratives constructed by museum displays and secondly through the methods used to construct these narratives" (3). Two conclusions can thus be drawn about the work of the museum: 1) all displays produce a narrative (or a story), underlining the importance of taking exhibitions themselves into account, rather than just isolating the objects on display as purveyors of meaning; and 2) through exhibitions, the museum frames the works it displays as exemplary and designates these objects as culturally or aesthetically significant precisely because of their placement within the walls of the institution. The use of exemplary objects in museums is significant. The modern museum emerged out of nineteenth-century learning theories that "positioned the visitor/learner as passive, understood knowledge to be objective and information based, and saw authoritative linear communication as one of the main purposes of museums" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, xi). This approach to learning was based on an object-centered approach where singular, exemplary objects were displayed as representative of whole category of similar objects. The exemplar was chosen because it possessed the greatest number of categorically defining features and could be mobilized to communicate information about all others related to it. The subsequent rise of explanatory information in the form of carefully written extended labels or didactic panels

became a way to give viewers insight into understanding a particular object on display. The drawback of the object-centered approach was that some viewers come to only passively view the object in terms of the over-simplified and distilled explanation given on the panel. With this view of the importance of exhibitions in mind, this final chapter examines how Karsten Bott and Portia Munson play with different kinds of display and didactic strategies as a way to call attention not only to the kinds of objects displayed by museums, but also to question how objects are displayed. I will argue that Bott's and Munson's manipulation of exhibitionary frameworks function as a critique of established museuological modes of displays. Previous discussion of Bott's and Munson's collections considered them in relation to taxonomy and consumption. Here, my focus will be on how artists who exhibit their collections often make use of different display strategies to convey meaning about commonplace objects, collections of objects that Bott and Munson have chosen to frame as art. I will also consider how these displays are generally designed to operate on viewers and how viewers then create meaningful experiences through individual engagement. These two artists are particularly interesting because of how they themselves respond to conventional museum displays by subverting traditional strategies and because the objects they choose to display are unconventional in museums. As will be explored further, Bott's and Munson's overcrowded displays of everyday objects are a critique of public institutions like museums and galleries.

Both artists and museums construct their displays in such a way as to foster or guide particular interpretations. Choices that go into presenting objects include such elements as title (or lack thereof), manner of display (wall mounted, plinth, display case, etc.), physical arrangement and juxtaposition of objects, and the scale of the work or quantity of objects being displayed. Changes in any one of these components elicit a different response for the viewer. One principle distinction between Bott's installations and museums displays is that Bott displays vast amounts of his collection in single displays so that there is virtually no space left between objects, while museums display exemplary objects from their collections and give each item in a display space to breathe. As an artist Bott in particular is involved with the arrangement and installation of his collection in the galleries where it is exhibited and exercises great control over how viewers will physically come into contact with the objects from his collection. He intentionally leaves out the typical didactic information found in museums to put viewers in a position where they have no choice but to create meaning on their own, meaning which comes as a result of their embodied movement among his crammed displays. Hooper-Greenhill states that "bodies adopt a performative relationship to objects, they enact the construction of meaning which is at once dramatic and contingent" (113). The path Bott creates for viewers dictates their movement through his installations and emphasizes the physical experience of engaging with the work.

Phenomenology provides some insight into how meaning is negotiated between the subject and the object, and how subjects perceive a particular work of art given their own embodied relationship to the larger world. For theorists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, consciousness, the body, and the world are fundamentally intertwined and the self does not just exist in the present but is caught up in the past and the future as well. Furthermore, objects are understood in relationship to their environment and in their relationship with other objects. Consequently, the perception of an object is never just of that one object, indeed perception can never be just of a singular object, but is contingent upon all the elements of the environment. The perspective of any viewer is constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated due to the provisional relationship between the subject and the object. In Merleau-Ponty's view "the thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never actually be in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence" (1989, 320). Peter Schwenger clarifies this in his book *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* where he argues that although it seems natural to think that an object can be understood in an objective manner, for Merleau-Ponty this would assume that the object exists as pure consciousness, rather than existing as it does in the lived world, both in an environment and among other objects (Schwenger 2006, 2-3). The existence of objects in the lived world makes it impossible for them to be apprehended by any objective measure. To take an example seemingly more simple than a three dimensional object, it is impossible to know if two people

perceive a particular colour in exactly the same way. The juxtaposition of two or more colours side by side tremendously affects the way that each is perceived. Beyond the basic perception of hue, there are also the associations or meanings attributed to colour, which exist in their own culturally specific contexts.

Schwenger also points out that embodiment occurs as part of perception, and connects the embodied perception of objects back to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty stating that "not only does our existence articulate that of an object through the language of our perceptions, the object calls out that language from us, and with it our own sense of embodied experience" (3). Language in Schwenger's description is not restricted to verbal or written language, but speaks broadly to the "language" or experience of the senses. Just as the viewer perceives an object, the object mediates the way the viewer will respond. Hooper-Greenhill also examines the way perception mediates the experience of objects more directly by using scale as a concrete example:

> Embodied responses are influenced by the scale of things. Cognitive and emotional responses to objects are affected in subtle ways by their size in relation to our own body size. Levels of emotional comfort may relate to the relationship of the human body in the environment. Physiological and psychological comfort is promoted when the senses are kept at an optimal level of arousal...too great an arousal is disturbing. (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 113)

Further arguing that embodiment is key to perception, art historian Amanda Boetzkes writes, "perception is not achieved by senses that passively await stimulation from the external world, but rather is delivered through movements, gestures and expressions of the body"(2009, 692). As such, the act of perceiving

is an ongoing process that changes as the body interacts with the world. Before a viewer even enters the space of a gallery he or she has already begun the process of negotiating meanings around the works on display. Boetzkes goes on to point out that Merleau-Ponty has steered questions of the body towards consideration of "how the body functions as a locus of transaction... [and how] the relation between artwork, spectator, and the visible world constitutes the trajectory of an artwork's meaning" (694). While the object viewer relationship is complex and multi-layered on its own, the role of vision adds another element to the negotiation of meaning. The experience of viewing is predicated on the space and framework of the museum because it is a space which is loaded with its own set of ideologies. The richness of Bott's work comes from the way it responds to the history of museums in general and to the specific museum in which the work is displayed. Bott is aware that his works are being viewed through the lens of the institution such that his installations actively respond to their place in that framework.

Containing over 500,000 objects, Bott's *Archive of Contemporary History* is difficult to imagine conceptually. What does that quantity of objects look like when laid out together? In 2007 Bott was invited to exhibit part of his collection at the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery as part of its visual arts festival. The result was a site specific work entitled *Museum of Life*. The Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery also collects a diverse array of objects, boasting the world's largest collection of teapots alongside its fine art, anthropological and

historical collections. Bott selected thousands of objects from his *Archive of Contemporary History* to form the installation, which was shown concurrently with other collections displayed in Norwich Castle. While Bott meticulously arranges the objects so that each is potentially visible to viewers, the sheer quantity of objects typically covering the entire floor surface of an exhibition space often requires that a pedway be constructed over top of the installed objects to allow viewers the possibility of moving through the space. For *Museum of Life*, larger and mid-sized objects were arranged so that a walking path clear of objects was incorporated into the layout of the objects. Furthermore, the objects were placed on raised two-tiered structures. This allowed visitors to easily navigate the space and encounter the objects up close in a way not possible from a raised pedway. This first room gave way to an interconnected gallery lined with shelving units, in which smaller objects from Bott's archive were displayed in cubbyholes. Nicholas Thornton of the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery describes the effect as "an overwhelming expanse of objects that encompasses the viewer's field of vision" (2007, np).

As though to offset this effect, Bott provides thematic arrangement or groupings for the objects in the installation, just as he did in his book *One of Each*. Thornton observes that these themes may relate to a particular space, like the kitchen; or to object type, like toys; or to a broader subject like family or science (np). Unlike the book, which uses headings at the top of each page to distinguish between categories, the groups of objects in one of Bott's

installations are unidentified and require viewers to decipher the themes on their own. Untitled as Bott's groups are, it is as though these groupings serve to help orient the visitor, just as the organization of objects does in a typical museum or gallery. Bott uses the display strategy of organizing objects into categories much in the way museums do, illustrating each grouping with a profuse set of examples. But as Thornton points out, while "museum professionals often aspire to 'object rich' displays from their collections [the] *Museum of Life* delivers this to an excessive degree. ...The sheer number of objects and the density of their presentation mean that they are difficult to isolate, to appreciate on their own terms. They interact and compete to capture our attention" (np). While the object rich displays in museums that Thornton refers to highlight the character and quality of each object, Bott's installations take the number of objects in a display to such an extreme that individual objects disappear in the profusion. The excessive number of items displayed both horizontally and vertically in the *Museum of Life* overwhelms viewers as the objects seem to encroach upon the visitor's personal space.

It is not the scale of the individual objects in Bott's *Museum of Life* that elicits strong cognitive or emotional responses, but the overwhelming scale of the installation when all the objects are massed together. Writing from an art historical perspective, Claire Bishop, author of *Installation Art: A Critical History*, suggests that the immersive quality of installation art reflects the artist's "desire to heighten the viewer's awareness of how objects are positioned in a space, and

our bodily response to this" (2005, 6). Central to Bott's work is the experience of viewing and the associations that arise from actively engaging with the work. Installations presuppose an embodied viewer, and position the viewer as integral to the work. To experience a work like *Museum of Life*, viewers must walk around and among the objects rising up from either side of the pathway, sometimes straining to move in closer to see things better. With objects encompassing the total space of two galleries that lead from one into the next and with no chance for reprieve between the two, this experience can be overwhelming to visitors. As a result, Bott subverts the particular immersive space of object rich displays traditional of museums. His form of installation art reacts against typical art gallery installations as well as the standard conventions and guidelines used for hanging and displaying well spaced objects in museums, by physically engaging viewers and bombarding their sensory fields.

Compounding the viewer's overwhelmed response to Bott's installation is the nature of the objects on display. These comprise common objects like toothbrushes, lighters, nail files, mannequins, tools, and toys, most of which are conspicuously absent from museum collections not only because of their everyday character, but because they are used. Indeed, as discussed in chapter one, Bott amasses objects that are not new, but rather have been taken from other people's lives. This "used" character is important: because it is impossible to apprehend all the objects on display either simultaneously or individually, objects that are familiar and visually more arresting will rise above the

cacophony. For some people, Bott's *Museum of* Life is a veritable "I Spy" game, where hunting for memorable objects is conflated with free association between others as the task of making sense of the installation is undertaken. The resulting experience of these objects is potentially layered with feelings ranging from nostalgia from the sight of familiar or forgotten objects, to disgust at the excess produced by the disposable commodities of consumer culture. Both of these reactions are brought about, in part, by Bott's lack of labeling or naming of the particular objects or groupings on display. This is in contrast to the organization of his electronic database the *Archive of Contemporary History* and his book *One of Each*, which not only names each object but also provides the object's dimensions and a category. Bott intentionally chooses not to use labels in *Museum of Life* so that visitors can engage with the objects and their display in a non-textually mediated manner, encouraging and frustrating people to fashion their own connections and relationships with and between the objects. Bott guides the formation of these relationships in three significant ways: by grouping the objects categorically (even though the categories may not be overtly apparent or legible), by laying out objects so that they are all potentially visible, and by selecting objects that possess a relationship to other displays in the institutions where his collection is be installed.

The deliberate effort to ensure the visibility of the objects on display makes it possible for all objects to participate in the process of meaning making. If Bott's displays contained objects that were partially obscured from view or

haphazardly heaped in a pile, as will be discussed in the work of Munson, they would be read differently. This is because objects sustain different meanings to viewers both on their own and in proximity to other objects. Schwenger asserts that objects placed together suggest a story or narrative, even if these "characteristics of narrative are at best merely implied in its conventional use....[they] are always there" (2006, 144). In the construction of meaning, objects act as reference points for viewers and "associations evoked during that attempt often dart into personal memory and beyond into the unconscious" (144). Each viewer, with his or her own set of reference points and memories, inevitably creates a different story from the same set of objects.

The particular gallery or museum where the objects will be on display also affects which objects Bott selects from his massive archive; this is because his installation invariably enters into dialogue with concurrent displays. For example, Bott's inclusion of teapots In *Museum of Life* references the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery's own Twining Teapot gallery, while the clothes, shoes, tableware and kitsch items he displays call attention to its Decorative Arts gallery. In this way, Bott raises broader questions about the types of collections formed by museums and galleries and the kinds of objects that merit preservation as records of a particular culture. The objects neatly laid out from Bott's archive resemble archaeological evidence and act as a testament to the consumption of mass produced goods. Since both Bott and the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery actively collect and catalogue items for their permanent

collections, Bott's archive creates an intriguing counterpoint to that of the institution. In Thornton's view, Bott's ever expanding archive underlines "the importance and value of conserving the material culture of our past and present" (2007, np). Undoubtedly, Bott's archive places value on contemporary objects, and yet the material culture Bott collects is that which has been conspicuously absent from most museums. Bott draws attention to this when he calls his installation at the Norwich Castle Museum & Art Gallery the *Museum of Life.*

The objects and display strategies Portia Munson uses are remarkably similar to Bott's. Though Munson uses colour as the foundation of her collecting, both artists make installations by placing objects directly on the floor or using display cases, some of which allow objects to be seen at eye level. The viewer needs only to look at the display straight on or lean over the case to get a better look at its contents, rather than the more obscured view offered when the objects are arranged on the ground and smaller objects are easily lost from view. Just as the objects on the floor require that the viewer walk either along a designated pathway in the *Museum of Life* or around the piled objects of Munson's installation of green objects for *Lawn*, so too do display cases require the viewer to move around them so that different items are offered up for view. Several transformations occur when objects are placed in a display case or in a cubbyhole. Instead of an overwhelming mass of objects presented in an arrangement radically larger than the human body, the items on view become scaled back and manageable. The potential for individual items to be seen

increases and objects become singular, special. The case designates them as worthy of inspection, which encourages viewers to move in close and peer inside. Visitors to exhibitions with display cases will often touch or tap on the glass of the cases, pointing out the objects inside as they engage with the contents in heightened proximity.

In 1995, the year that followed *Pink Project: Table* which displayed Munson's collection of pink objects laid out on a large table, Munson chose to install her collection of pink objects in two cabinets made of glass and wood. Together they are entitled *Pink Project: Vitrines*. With the reference to vitrines in the title, Munson guides the viewer to recall other uses of this form of display, both historical and contemporary. Inside one of the display cases are eleven glass shelves upon which different objects have been carefully laid out in a style that references the displays of the cabinet of curiosity, the museum and the department store, where each object is clearly visible. The manner in which the contents of a cabinet of curiosity were organised reflected the individual collector's particular interests, whereas the public museum strove for a prescriptive form of education based on established academic disciplines, though each allowed the necessary space around the objects so that they could be seen for comparison. Munson's use of the vitrine also recalls how objects are displayed in department store cases, especially since the shelves in her cases contain bright pink consumer goods and not fossils or artefacts. Already

consumed and disposed of, the placement and arrangement of these objects in the display case signals a return to their original site of consumption.

In contrast, the second vitrine in Munson's pairing is so haphazardly packed with pink objects that it is completely full, leaving no room for more stuff, eschewing the sense of harmony and ordering the first possesses. While the first appears to present some form of internal logic and order, the second one suggests chaos. The chaotic nature of the second vitrine offers an atypical way of displaying things, especially in relation to the usual practice of museums and department stores, because in this case only the objects against the glass can be seen. Pointing to an ever expanding plethora of goods manufactured in pink plastic, the contents of the crowded case have reached such a critical mass that they can no longer be neatly organized; yet, they are contained. They do not spill across the floor or crowd into the viewer's personal space. Despite the profusion of objects pressed against the glass of the case, each competing for the viewer's attention, it is precisely their placement within the confines of the vitrine that allows viewers to approach them closely while retaining a measure of distance.

Hooper-Greenhill points out that historically "the experience of a visitor to the collection was that of a quantified observation of a rationalized, visual order....in museums, the glass case performed the function of defining appropriate viewing conditions and distance" (2000, 129). Munson's two cases disrupt this paradigm. While the meticulous nature of the first makes direct

reference to the tradition of rational viewing, the second obliterates this possibility, presenting its contents in a wholly inappropriate manner. Munson's collection takes the prototypical viewing conditions and makes the individual observation of objects impossible. Not only are the objects presented in a disordered manner, those at the centre cannot even be seen. The glass of the case acts as a physical barrier between the viewer and the objects themselves so that they can never be touched or smelt, as they might when laid out for *Pink Project: Table*. The distancing that happens as a result of the glass is different from the distancing that occurs when objects occupy the entire space of a gallery. The display case represents the authority of the institution and the distance it creates is that between expert and amateur, teacher and student. In contrast, the distance created by Bott's *Museum of Life* or Munson's *Lawn* is produced, in part, by the size of the work. Compared with these two projects, each of the *Vitrines*, though filled with many pink things, act as single objects because the display case itself can be taken in at one glance. When viewers enter the space where the vitrines are on display, they encounter two free-standing cases, positioned away from the walls, so viewers are able to move back and forth between them, as well as fully around them.

While the bulk of my discussion thus far has focused on displays of objects and how these operate on viewers, before I conclude, I want to highlight the role of titles, which direct the viewer and have only briefly been addressed. Whether for an individual object or an entire installation, naming is an important

didactic element in an exhibition. Unlike Bott, who chooses to only title whole installations so as to encourage free association between different objects, Munson names each individual arrangement of objects. The titles given by Munson to her installations have a direct impact on how viewers negotiate their understanding of each work. Acutely aware that this negotiation takes place via naming, Munson chooses evocative titles like *Sarcophagus* or *Lawn* for her collection of green objects, or intentionally draws upon historical and museological precedents with *Vitrines.* Although thoroughly discussed in chapter one, *Sarcophagus* merits briefly revisiting here. Lying horizontally, rather than positioned vertically like *Vitrines*, it is densely packed with objects. However, the objects this case contains are green. As with the pink vitrines, the glass sides allow the objects to be seen while containing them, which is different from Munson's other installations of green plastic objects known as *Lawn* that spread across the gallery floor like overgrown Astroturf. The word "sarcophagus" is commonly associated with the funerary rites of ancient Egypt. Through the association of the word and green objects typically connected to nature and the outdoors, like fly swatters, wading pools, water guns, watering cans, hoses, plant pots, etc., Munson skillfully engages her audience in a game of associations that includes ideas about the death of nature, the manufacturing of nature, capitalization on green or eco movements, and even calling for moratoriums on the excessive nature of cheap, disposable, and mass produced goods. The visceral experience of *Sarcophagus* is different from the overwhelming

experience of Bott's installations. A work like *Museum of Life* is unsettling due to the sheer number of objects both in his collection and on display, whereas the success of Munson's pieces comes from the combination of her choice of colour, her use of titles and her arrangement of objects. While Bott encourages free association with the objects he displays, Munson guides the viewer in the construction of meaning through the central role played by her choice of titles.

As Boetzkes judiciously asserts, "the viewer's task is not to ascertain the artwork's objective meaning, but rather to respond to the artwork with the question, 'how does this artwork mean to me?'" (2009, 690). By 'how does this art work mean,' she clarifies that it is "the way in which [the artwork] expresses, communicates or presents itself to the viewer" (710). Indeed, no objective meaning can exist. Meaning exists as a result of complex intersections between the object, the way it is framed (both in terms of the place where it is seen and the way it is displayed), and the viewer. Artists like Bott and Munson take their collections of everyday objects and alter the way they are perceived first by choosing to display them in ways that are so excessive they challenge traditional display methodologies, and second by framing them within the context of institutions that have normally excluded these kinds of objects from their own collections. In effect, viewers are asked to reconsider their own relationship to familiar objects and to think critically about both the choice of objects and how displays are constructed in galleries or museums. Throughout all of this negotiation, the physical object remains unchanged. Objects themselves are

silent and are indifferent to viewers; as Schwenger rightly states, “things do not reveal themselves, only our investments in them” (2003, 3).

As Donald Preziosi has argued, “museological practices have played a fundamental role in fabricating, maintaining and disseminating many of the essentialist and historicist fictions which make up the social realities of the modern world” (2003, 407-8). In this thesis, I have argued that artists whose own practices critically engage with traditional museological approaches to collecting, classifying, and display, as well as the related archival function of preserving objects, question what kind of objects, people and experiences are recognized by the museum. In doing so, they upset the fictions identified by Preziosi and confront viewers’ expectations about museum practices.

In particular, the first chapter, “Collecting and Classifying: resisting the museum as model,” focused on the activities of collecting and classifying as essential to the structuring of knowledge and I argued that these are central strategies used by the artists of my thesis to disrupt conventional museological practices. The historical precedents of Joseph Cornell and Marcel Broodthaers illustrate that this general approach is not new. What distinguishes the works of Karsten Bott, Portia Munson, Kelly Mark and Jac Leirner is that they amass and form their own collections, which are presented as the completed work, rather than using items from these collections as source material for other projects. Furthermore, these artists create their own classification systems, designed to reflect individual and sometimes idiosyncratic needs, and make use of everyday objects as the foundation of their collections rather than objects that are categorically exemplary. This latter dimension is particularly overt in Bott’s

Archive of Contemporary History. In conceptualizing categories that differ from rigid, historically rooted classifications, each artist transforms the way objects can be understood in relationship to the whole collection.

In the second chapter, I paid particular attention to how the development of a personal archive asserts agency and expresses the subjectivity of the collector to argue that by enacting the archival functions of gathering, ordering, and storing objects, the highly individual items collected by Mark and Leirner bear witness to their lived experiences. This chapter, "Archiving the Self," evolved out of Michael O'Driscoll and Edward Bishop's position that archiving is an active process, an event. *In & Out* is emblematic of more than fourteen years of Mark's practice as an artist, while Leirner's *Lung* testifies to her smoking habit and simultaneously points to its visible and invisible impact. These personal archives can only ever offer glimpses of their collectors, yet they reference each artist's embodied engagement with process and ritual. Starting from the view that an archive is a site of engagement, I argue that these works challenge the traditional, static view of the archive as solely a repository, and wilfully animate it.

The final Chapter, "Making sense of Collections on Display," brings the viewer into the discussion by considering the role that different display elements have on how meaning is negotiated. In this section I argued that the combination of everyday objects placed within the space of the museum and the

manipulation of traditional display strategies, such as the use of cases, plinths and labels, facilitates the way different works are experienced. Rather than existing as works on walls, object rich displays such as Munson's *Green Piece* or Bott's *Museum of Life* present an overwhelming excess of things and are organized in such a way that they demand active and embodied movement around and through the work. The presentation of objects in these displays is designed to invite questions that consider our relationship as viewers to the particular objects on display, their relative juxtaposition with other objects, and their relationship to the collection or display as a whole.

Every artist in my thesis understands that their work exists within the frame of the institution in which it is shown, and that it is also the institution that lends legitimacy to their practice. The critical distance from the institution sought by earlier generations of artists who examined the practices and politics of the museum has been lost. Their practices have become absorbed into the very institutions they problematized through retrospectives, invitations to work with museum collections, and canonization in art historical discourse and texts. Bott, Munson, Mark and Leirner know that critical distance no longer exists, yet they continue to explore the museum as a site of investigation because the questions about how museums order and present information and the role they play in their communities remain relevant. By continuing to consider the museum as the site for both the production and reception of knowledge, artists will keep expanding and stretching the frame of the museum.

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