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Relating the Story of Things

Patricia Allmer

Abstract: The act and practise of relating is a key element in developing narratives. This essay will explore the interplay and connections between relating and narrating, and the possibilities of producing alternative narratives, independent from hierarchical structures located in linearity, causality and genealogy, by exploring what Gilles Deleuze termed 'involution,' as an alternative device of relating. This essay will explore and exemplify this, by focusing on artistic and curatorial strategies of the artist/curators Carson & Miller in the exhibition *The Story of Things*. This exhibition's re-organisation of anthropological and ethnographic objects challenges the conventional and traditional representation of such objects in linear and genealogical ways. Curatorial and artistic strategies of display, such as unconventional juxtapositions, slight shifts of the constituent parts of objects, and incongruous combinations of them will be examined. The essay will argue that such strategies are effective in establishing new modes of narrative organisation and new products of combination and juxtaposition.

Résumé: L'art et la pratique de lier sont des données capitales dans le développement de n'importe quel récit. Dans cette étude, on voudrait examiner les rapports et le dialogue entre ces deux aspects (récit et mise en relation), puis s'interroger sur les manières possibles de produire des formes de récit non classiques, indépendantes des structures hiérarchiques fixées par les notions de linéarité, causalité et généalogie mais informées par la notion deleuzienne d'*involution* comme technique non canonique de mise en rapport. La présente étude compte explorer et exemplifier cette approche en s'appuyant sur les stratégies artistiques et les choix d'exhibition des Carson & Miller dans l'exposition *The Story of Things*. La manière dont cette exposition réorganise les objets anthropologiques et ethnographiques est un défi aux techniques conventionnelles et traditionnelles de représentation linéaire et généalogique de ce genre d'objets. Les choix artistiques et organisationnels qui ont été faits pour exposer les objets, comme par exemple les juxtapositions non stéréotypées, l'accentuation de certaines parties de l'objet plutôt que d'autres et les combinaisons apparemment incongrues, seront au cœur de l'analyse. L'article se propose de démontrer que ces stratégies peuvent contribuer efficacement à la création de nouvelles formes d'organisation narrative et de nouveaux modes de combinaison et de juxtaposition d'objets.

Key words: Anthropology, Deleuze, exhibition, involution, narrative, object, representation

The rabbit-hole went straight on like a tunnel for some way, and then dipped suddenly down, so suddenly that Alice had not a moment to think about stopping herself before she found herself falling down what seemed to be a very deep well. (Carroll 2)

In 2009 Manchester-based collaborative artists Carson & Miller were invited by Manchester Metropolitan University Special Collections (MMU Special Collections) and the North West Film Archive (UK) to curate an exhibition exploring the museum and archive's varied collections, ranging from pots, toys and Victorian ephemera to scrapbooks and albums. The exhibition was called *The Story of Things*. Perhaps this exploration of the exhibition should start at its beginning. Entering *The Story of Things* was like entering a different world, a story, perhaps, although a story of a very strange nature. Arriving in the dimly lit environment and approaching the different glass cabinets the visitor discovered a world of the curious and marvellous, drawn together from the different artefacts of the two collections (see fig. 1). As Carson & Miller state in their introduction to the exhibition, the curatorial process was built on roaming through the archives and selecting objects in “a deliberately random and undisciplined journey”, cross-referencing the collections,



Fig. 1: Installation views of *The Story of Things* (2009). Photography by Tony Richards.

sometimes, as they explain, “relating things by type, sometimes throwing the unlikely together, sometimes remembering something they already knew, sometimes uncovering things unknown to them.”

According to Carson & Miller their curatorship turned away from the “academic study of objects” and “failed the history of art and design tradition” (“in Conversation with”). Here selection and arrangements (or rather dis-arrangements) were based on contingency – a word which designates ‘chance’, ‘accident’, ‘a fortuitous happening’, but which also stems from the Latin word *tangere*, ‘to touch’, implying ‘con-tact’, connection, affinity. Their playful approach, and play is a significant part in all their artistic projects, is there to explore existential questions as well as conventional ideological positions anchored in academic and curatorial practices.

The title, *The Story of Things*, mapped out the content of MMU Special Collections consisting of, on the one hand, significant collections of stories including children’s literature and artist books, and of ‘things’; a magnificent, weirdly beautiful collection of ephemera, objects, and, most significantly for Carson & Miller’s project, scrapbooks – books assembled out of fragments, out of scraps (in the double sense of the word, signifying fragment as well as something we regard as value-less). Carson & Miller also produced a scrapbook which had the same title as the exhibition and on which, in the manner of the Moebius strip, the exhibition was based, just as the scrapbook was itself based on the exhibition. This scrapbook, the content of which reflects some but not all the contents from the exhibition, was placed in the exhibition environment – it was part of the exhibition as an exhibit, as well as separate from it.

The history of the scrapbook can be traced back to Latin society, where students were instructed in Quintillian’s *Instituto Oratorio* to record in order to preserve memory on a tablet known as an *album*, deriving from the Latin for ‘white’. The recording of private thought for the purpose of learning developed in the thirteenth century with the introduction of paper. This early method of preserving knowledge was particularly prominent within the field of art, evident in Giorgio Vasari’s promotion of the preservation of works of art in albums, a method which was influential on proto-museums and collections. Later, collectors started to compile albums of ephemera which often consisted, like James Granger’s 1775 biographical history of England, of blank pages on which the owner could attach prints – a ‘Grangerised’ book designated a book which consisted of autographs, letters and other printed material compiled by the owner. The arrival of colour printing and new printing technologies in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries opened the scrapbook up to the general public, who began to be able to afford cheap and colourful images. Throwaway printed paper artefacts and ephemera such as tube tickets, advertising cards, visiting cards, postcards and sweet wrappers came into circulation. Through this, the scrapbook became an inexpensive, and

therefore widespread, way of collecting, an essential symbol of a particular configuration of modernity – of the democratising effects of mechanical reproduction and industrialisation.

The scrapbook is also a celebration of the proliferation of printed matter, typography, images and their significance in everyday life in modernity, evoking Eugène Atget's photographs of Parisian streets plastered with adverts and advertising, as well as André Breton's rummaging through the Parisian flea-markets, to find the *objet trouvé*, the marvellous encounter between two objects discarded from the circulation of commodities – the flea-market is full of scraps. The scrapbook also evokes Walter Benjamin's explorations of the nineteenth century, which according to him could only be read in its fragments, its ruins and refuse. The scrap of the scrapbook, like objects at a flea-market, always already entails in its fixedness the process of becoming 'memory', its ruinous state, its pastness, its exclusion from the mobile circulation of commodities. The scrapbook also draws together the mass-produced and the singular. It is, as Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker and Patricia P. Buckler elaborate, a mass-cultural form, but individually each is "unique, authentic, and not easily reproducible" (12), a mass-cultural product which paradoxically contains the aura of authenticity.

How we read and work through a scrapbook differs from the way we read printed books. Linearity threads through the conventional printed book, from cover to cover, from the beginning of the narrative to its end. Lines and linearity are staple concepts in narrative, in sequentially numbered pages, the reading mode from left-to-right, from top-to-bottom, the linearity of the sentences printed, the threading of letter to letter to produce a linear word. The word *text* itself comes from Latin *texere* meaning 'to weave', the stringing together of threads to produce texture. According to J. Hillis Miller, "the linearity of the written or printed book is a puissant supporter of logocentrism. The writer [. . .] sits at a desk and spins out on the page a long thread of filament of ink. Word follows word from the beginning to the end. The manuscript is set for printing in the same way, whether letter by letter, by linotype, or from tape by computer. The reader follows, or is supposed to follow, the text in the same way, reading word by word and line by line from the beginning to the end" (5). Indeed, the Greek myth of Ariadne is based literally on a thread – in Greek, the clue – which allows Theseus to find the way out of the labyrinth, a thread that unravels and drives the story.

The focus of conventional narratives, novels and stories, woven out of these lines, is on linearity. Line images suggest or symbolise interpersonal links: filiation, affiliation, family lines, plots, clues, liaisons, genetic and ancestral lines, passages, loose threads, missing links,

copulation, marriage ties, the end of the line. And, of course, genealogy and dominant Western conceptions of ontology and epistemology are based on linearity, tracing genealogies and traditions, chronological sequences of before and after, preceding and succeeding. This was represented in Carson & Miller's exhibition by a Tree of Life (see fig. 2), consisting of prayers and moral codes: the tree is here a symbol of all these lines and affiliations, growing from bottom to top in a linear manner.



Fig. 2: *The Tree of Life* illustrated sheet hymn, woodblock print in 4 colours. Printed and published by James Catnach, London (1830-1839). Photography by Tony Richards.

The scrapbook transgresses this linearity. The scrapbook is not read in the Western linear, orderly manner. No longer is the reading direction from left to right, from top to bottom. The book here becomes an exploratory space in which one can leaf back and forth (and some scrapbooks are not even bound) – according to Tucker, Ott and Buckler, in form

“many scrapbooks more closely resemble the junk drawer found in kitchens and desks” (12). Connections are no longer necessarily logical, or chronological, but follow double mental ordering principles, those of the compiler and the reader. As Tucker, Ott and Buckler suggest: “scrapbooks are eccentric and idiosyncratic, making them impossible to pick up and read as one would a published book. The meaning found in any particular scrap depends on the nimble skills of the reader” (12).

Scrapbooks are sensual, haptic objects. They shift the focus of the conventionally printed book from text to its textures, cultivating a multi-sensory experience emerging from the unevenness of the pages, the feel of different materials from different periods, and the noises and movements these different materials make when a page is turned. Here a haptical rather than an optical vision is invited. According to Laura U. Marks, one of the main differences between haptic and optic visuality is that the haptic image “forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative” (163). Haptic vision does not move in only one direction, but is exploratory, is all-over-the-place, focusing on the material details rather than the narrative line. These features were also traceable in Carson & Miller’s exhibition. The sense-making invited here shifted from the conventional exhibition environment which focuses on genealogical, chronological, biographical or thematically-organised material, to a different structure of making-sense, to an exploration which left linear narratives behind, an exploration which became sensory.

The missing of a ‘grand narrative’ in *The Story of Things* linking all these objects together allowed the viewer to start relating objects to each other in different ways and to start relating different stories of these objects. The display evoked and tied into the tradition of the Wunderkammer (literally translated as ‘chamber of marvels’ and more familiar under the name ‘cabinet of curiosities’) – a tradition also appropriated by the surrealists. The last and most famous remnant of the surrealist appropriation of this tradition was André Breton’s wall display from his office in the Rue Fontaine which consisted of a range of collected, marvellous, rare and mystical objects brought together with artworks he owned. This wall has been reassembled and is on permanent display at the Pompidou Centre in Paris.

The first cabinets of curiosities were early modern collections in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, assembled by kings, scholars, medics, merchants and apothecaries. These early cabinets, according to Jan C. Westerhoff, were spaces of “indiscriminate accumulation of curiosities, rarities, and marvels” (643), where works of art find a place next to precious stones, (so-called) unicorn horns, clocks and automata, antique statues next to renaissance medals, stuffed crocodiles, Egyptian mummies, optical devices, crystals and

much more. Most importantly in relation to the Story of Things exhibition, albums, the forerunners of scrapbooks, were part of, and would have been kept in, cabinets of curiosities – echoed by Carson & Miller’s inclusion of their own and other scrapbooks in the exhibition. Indeed, the scrapbook is, according to Tucker, Ott and Buckler, “the equivalent of a poor family’s cabinet of curiosities” (6). These cabinets contained collections which were not generically specialised, but organised by the pursuit of polyhistorical knowledge articulating a desire to include every discipline, ranging from art to science. This desire emerged out of the belief that everything was interconnected, that natural phenomena did not occur in isolation and could not be understood as isolated phenomena, but were part of a more universal process where, to grasp a phenomenon fully, the investigator had to analyse it from a multiplicity of perspectives. As William Ashworth suggested:

To know the peacock . . . , one must know not only what the peacock looks like, but what its name means, in every language; what kind of proverbial associations it has; what it symbolises to both pagans and Christians; what other animals it has sympathies or affinities with; and any other possible connection it might have with stars, plants, minerals, numbers, coins or whatever. (306)

Different disciplines, science and mysticism were not treated as separate. Art and natural sciences were not seen as separate. Similarly, in *The Story of Things*, art, science, mysticism were no longer separate – medical books shared their space with film clips of religious rituals, sporting events, Valentine cards and many other fragments of history. The identities of things loosened here and the value system was similar to the one Malebranche assigned to cabinets of curiosities, where “nothing has any real worth and where the price depends solely on imagination, on passion and on chance” (qtd. in Westerhoff 643).

Imagination, passion and chance are the guiding principles of the Wunderkammer. They were also the guiding and selecting principles of *The Story of Things*, where curatorial decisions were based on sensual impulses, as Carson & Miller described the selection and arrangement decisions, which were based on “being drawn” to objects and to their constellations with other objects, and on finding the moment in which the objects were, as Carson & Miller state, “very satisfying in their position” (“in Conversation with”). This approach was also anchored in the surrealist selection of the *objet trouvé* and evokes Walter Benjamin’s exploration of children at play: “[children] bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely different kinds in a new, intuitive relationship” (“A Glimpse Into the World of Children’s Books” 441). This method of assemblage can be characterised, using Max Ernst’s comment on surrealist methods of disrupting conventions of representation and *Image & Narrative*, Vol 12, No 3 (2011)

of display, as “systematic bewilderment” (16) – indeed the exhibition demonstrated that certain surrealist practices still offer potent ways of challenging grand narratives and conventions, and offer also fruitful methods to explore objects in a new light.

The exhibition played on the viewer’s expectations of the auratic qualities of objects and artworks, by utilising the principle of the scrapbook. As is well known, Benjamin described the aura of artworks, or more broadly speaking of objects in exhibition environments, as “the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be” (“The Work of Art” 23), the creation of a figurative distance from the beholder. On one level the aura was evoked by the exhibition environment in *The Story of Things*: the glistening glow of the spotlights, the glass cabinets, and other features of an exhibition environment are there to highlight and to emphasise the objects, and to foster the auratic distance Benjamin noted.



Fig. 3: Detail of an exhibition cabinet in *The Story of Things* (2009).
Photography by Tony Richards.

The objects themselves exhibited auratic qualities. They were often, to contemporary eyes, strange curios, drawn from the past – for example a penny lick, a notorious 19th century glass cup on which ice-cream was served and which was a major source of spreading diseases, as, after licking off the ice-cream, it was returned to the seller who simply reused it, without washing, for the next customer. Even more contemporary objects were drawn into this auratic exhibition environment. For example a brooch in the form of lips from the 1980s¹ echoes John Joseph McCole’s description of surrealist objets trouvés as artefacts “deposited

¹ Plastic ‘Lips’ brooch and/or ear clip (by Herman Hermsen, 1982)
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by the recent past yet already so obsolete that they seemed like relics from an extinct, prehistoric age” (207). Whilst the auratic qualities of the objects were established in these different ways, their consumption was disrupted, short-circuited, stirred and ruptured in a variety of ways (not least by collapsing literal distance between objects).

Like Tucker, Ott and Buckler’s description of the scrapbook as resembling a filled kitchen drawer, “filling space up” (in *Conversation with*) was also a repeated method of Carson & Miller, evoking arrangements which surround us in our everyday life and environment, creating immediacy rather than distance. Carefully and meticulously, things, often unrelated in conventional curatorial terms, were piled up on each other, were placed on each other – a ping-pong ball rested on the penny lick (see fig. 3), a tea cup and saucers were placed on a Ghanaian stool. Things constantly touched and overlapped each other, or used each other as rests and supports. These methods seemed to disturb the auratic qualities expected of objects in exhibitions by meddling with their exhibition-value, their self-contained discreteness, through returning the almost forgotten practical use-value of the things in two ways: things in the exhibition were no longer detached – they were returned into a context where they could fit, again, in our everyday household environment, and they were made use of, rather than purely exhibited: even if the penny lick was no longer used as an ice-cream holder, its use as a holder was re-introduced by placing a ping-pong ball on it.

Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the viewer of the exhibition was encountering what Bill Brown termed the object’s “misuse value”, leading him or her back to a primordial state of exploring and seeing the world: “One must imagine that within the child’s ‘tactile tryst’ the substantiality of things emerges for the first time, and that this is the condition for reshaping the material world we inhabit. One must imagine that this experience in the everyday foretells a different human existence. If the use-value of an object amounts to its preconceived utility, then its misuse value should be understood as the unforeseeable potential within the object, part of an uncompleted dream” (Brown 643). *The Story of Things* allowed the viewer to explore this unforeseeable potential of objects.

A wealth of these strategies of bewilderment unfolded in the exhibition, involving placing and misplacing, joining and disjoining, relating objects with and separating them from each other. For example, a copy of a fifteenth-century putto from 1898² was positioned facing a strange hybridic being. Unrelated objects were brought into strange conjunctions

² Copy of a fifteenth century putto by the Della Robbia family. By Figli di Guiseppe Cantagalli, enamelled earthenware (1898).

here, not only by turning the putto and the hybridic figure towards each other, but also in the composition of the hybrid's body. This being was composed out of a 1920s head (which originally either served as a doll's head or a lamp fitting) and a body that was assembled by Carson & Miller out of a Japanese vase stand, which in turn was placed on a pile of anatomical and medical books (see fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Installation view of *The Story of Things* (2009). Photography by Tony Richards.

Another display was brimming full with different containers. The containers were arranged next to each other in an almost regimental manner evoking the line-up of toy soldiers. Here a replica of a 16th century Italian majolica jar was settled comfortably next to a Philippine basketry wallet; a powder box from 1894 faced a coffee jar from the 1960s; an Egyptian vessel encountered a Japanese miniature teapot and lid. Neither chronology nor origin was the guiding principle here. The only shared quality seemed to be that these were containers with lids (or rather with lids removed) evoking a scrapbook's contents which, as Tucker, Ott and Buckler suggest, "fracture chronology; events that occurred weeks or
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decades apart seem, when placed side by side on a page, to happen simultaneously or in reverse order” (16). The lids of these objects were removed and lined up separately in the same regimental manner, constructing the objects as incomplete. Whilst conventionally a lid without its pot (but also a pot without its lid) is seen as scrap, in the exhibition, for once, the lids themselves became objects in their own right, playing with the viewer’s notion of completeness and incompleteness – here something fragmented was represented as complete, whilst something complete was fragmented, again challenging objects’ auratic qualities.

The vessel, in all sorts of shapes and forms, was a recurrent object in the exhibition. Its most exuberant display was in a cabinet in which a variety of large vessels were brought together – ranging from nineteenth century vessels from Nigeria to bowls and vessels by contemporary Western artists. Whilst the display on first impression evoked showcases of archaeological findings in museums, a closer look revealed smaller vessels placed within larger ones, transforming the auratic qualities associated with being an exhibit, making these objects become once again containers, whilst the vessels in the vessels became signifiers of their own containing potential.

Joining things that don’t originally belong together, separating those which conventionally are regarded as belonging to each other: these strategies created poetic rhythms and tensions and unfolded new, unexpected encounters. The things in *The Story of Things* transformed into objects of surrealist delight, as Breton described the moment of an everyday item, a thing, turning into a surrealist object: “A ready-made reality, whose naive purpose seems to have been fixed once and for all (an umbrella), finding itself suddenly in the presence of another very distant and no less absurd reality (a sewing machine), in a place where both must feel out of their element (on an operating table), will, by this very fact, escape its naive purpose and lose its identity; because of the detour through what is relative, it will pass from absolute falseness to a new absolute that is true and poetic” (275). The juxtapositions in the exhibition revealed new links and relations between the objects that shared and competed for space, fusing with each other, sometimes violently, sometimes readily, to form new poetic constellations. The ‘things’ in the exhibition became ‘communicating vessels’, mediating and fluctuating between interior vision and exterior fact, between imagination and the real.

The exhibition also revealed the volatility of meaning assigned to ‘things’. Calling the exhibition ‘The Story of Things’ emphasises this volatility of meaning. The term ‘thing’ is at once both entirely unspecific and yet totally specific. As Bill Brown explains, the word ‘things’ holds within it an “audacious ambiguity [. . .] it denotes a massive generality as well

as particularities” (4). Brown gives an example from Henry James’ *The Spoils of Poynton*: “Things were of course the sum of the world; only, for Mrs. Gereth, the sum of the world was rare French furniture and oriental china” (49). Another good example of the ambiguity of the word ‘thing’ is located in a conversation in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* where a mouse does not want to specify what the Archbishop found:

“Found what?” said the Duck.

“Found it,” the Mouse replied rather crossly: “of course you know what ‘it’ means.”

“I know what ‘it’ means well enough when I find a thing”, said the Duck: “it’s generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?”
(Carroll 10)

Carson & Miller noted that in *The Story of Things*, things were “misused for play” (“in Conversation with”). Play marked the exhibition on a number of levels, not least in Carson & Miller’s play with curatorial conventions and with the viewer’s expectations. Play was present in the range of toys and games on display, from teddies to puzzles, riddles and rebuses; from skittles to table tennis sets, from gambling to games of love. People were shown during play – a clip of a home-made film showed a man losing his artificial moustache during play-acting, marking the moment where play slips back into reality³; another clip showed a humorous reversal of roles in which firemen become involved in a water fight with each other whilst an appalled child looks on⁴. Playing also marked Carson & Miller’s ways of investigating and arranging the objects, evoking childhood memories of building and constructing things. Perhaps what we witnessed in this exhibition was the outcome of two people playing games with things and playing games with each other. Here display transformed into play.

Rules and instructions were recurring motifs in this playful environment. An artist’s book entitled *Rule Book*⁵ was positioned at the centre of the display of lid-less containers, as if to warn of the transgressive nature of the curators’ play; a table-tennis rule book was tucked into a corner of another display cabinet; there were instructions for how to use love

³ From [Norma’s Birthday Party and Family Get-together], produced by Ernest W Hart (1940-42).

⁴ From *Holiday Snapshots Part 1*, produced by Mr Smith (1934-44).

⁵ *Rule Book* by Angela Bulloch, with design by Florian Pumhösl. Commissioned by Stefan Kalmár as part of Book Works Projects/Open House 1998-2001. Published by Book Works, London (2000).

tokens, and woodblock prints detailed ‘female etiquette of making tea’; in another case Daedalus’s instructions to Icarus – not to fly too close to the sun or too close to the water – were counterpointed with an image of Peter Pan, who rejected rules and regulations, flying away with Wendy. Carson & Miller’s scrapbook alluded to other rules and instructions: there were instructions on ‘how to use a scrap-book’ folded into the pages, whilst we were reminded through the reproduction of a set of story-telling cards, showing the story of Red Riding Hood (see fig. 5), of what happens if we ‘run off the path’. And of course, rules and instructions are key aspects of the organisation of an archive, or a collection.



Fig. 5: Page from *Scrapbook (the story of things)* (2009)

These citations of rules and regulations counter-pointed Carson & Miller’s curatorial game, which could be characterised as what Gilles Deleuze referred to as an ‘ideal game’. Deleuze exemplifies this ‘ideal game’ by Lewis Carroll’s caucus race in Alice’s Adventures Image & Narrative, Vol 12, No 3 (2011)

in Wonderland, where one begins when one wishes and stops at will; and with the croquet match, where the mallets are flamingoes and the balls are hedgehogs which sometimes simply walk off in the middle of the game – games with no apparent rules, with no winners or losers; games which no longer correspond to our expectations of games, as Deleuze notes: “we are not acquainted with games which contradict themselves” (69). If the tree of life, as well as the rule books, represented the linear, arboreal fixity and rootedness of religion and symbolise a wider Western ideology of fixity, of seeking genealogy and origination, the play within the exhibition counteracted this by unfolding the meaning of the object and its relations as unfixed, rhizomic, shifting, spreading, wandering. Here ‘things’ and their meanings slipped.

As in other projects by Carson & Miller, such as *The Exquisite Fold* (2007) a question and answer game where there is no right or wrong, no winner or loser, in the exhibition the viewer was transported into a state where order did not matter any longer, where causality was no longer fixed, where one sometimes easily blurred into or even became the other, evoking another scene from Alice’s *Adventures in Wonderland*: “And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to herself, in a dreamy sort of way: ‘Do cats eat bats?’ ‘Do cats eat bats?’ and sometimes ‘Do bats eat cats?’ for you see, as she couldn’t answer either question, it didn’t much matter which way she put it” (Carroll 3).

The scrapbook as guiding principle of *The Story of Things* seemed to form what J. Hillis Miller calls “true disturbances of the [narrative] line that make it curve back on itself, recross itself, tie itself in knots” (6). Rather than producing an overarching narrative, the exhibition consisted of a gathering of unfixed stop-starts, of narrative threads laid for the viewer that they could pick up, play with, carry on or leave behind. *The Story of Things* was knotted and doubled in some places, broken and phantasmal in others, seemed sometimes to bob along a common thread, and, at others, suddenly to bifurcate. *The Story of Things* then, may have been of there being no single story.

Scrapbook (The Story of Things) included a reproduction of a puzzle taken from a scrapbook of games and puzzles, which was also an exhibit in the exhibition. This hand-made puzzle showed a maze, and was entitled *Hunting Ground find the Way from A to B*, demonstrating that the maker of the puzzle had taken great care to draw an intricate, elaborate network of labyrinthine lines, a Borgesian garden of forking paths, which seemed to tangle into each other, form and transform into dead ends, knots and wrong turns, turn back on themselves, or even lead back to the beginning (see fig. 6). Perhaps *The Story of Things* was a labyrinth (not necessarily with a way out, though) in which endless stories can be spun, *Image & Narrative*, Vol 12, No 3 (2011)

inviting the viewer, following the original meanings of the word ‘maze’, ‘to get lost in our own thoughts’ and ‘to dream’, to amaze.



Fig. 6: Pages from a notebook of riddles, puzzles and games (date unknown).
Photography by Tony Richards.

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