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THE PLOT AND THE ARCHIVE: CURATION, PROVISIONAL HISTORIES, AND NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

The Plot and the Archive applies museum studies and curatorial techniques to post-1960s novels dealing with history and outlines the importance of a figure called "the character-as-curator" within such spaces. This figure exemplifies different strategies employed to interrogate, analyze and reconcile what presents itself as a deeply problematic historical record. In so doing, this novelistic figure performs what postmodernity has tasked of scholarship as such, and *curation* signifies capaciously the critical techniques of identification, separation, re-arrangement and re-collection which enable the possibility of discovery and new understanding. It is no longer a worthwhile endeavor simply to characterize history as a falsehood, disregarding its offerings as corrupt, misleading, or potentially dangerous. Instead, this dissertation explores how characters create archives and curate artifacts as strategies for reconciling the past.

Each chapter in *The Plot and the Archive* deals with specific historical and archival challenges and uses museum studies as a lens to account for unempirical sources in historical records (e.g., memory and imagination). Chapter one situates readers in the historical and museological contexts this dissertation responds to and draws a relationship between novels and museum studies. Chapter two examines problems with relying on empirical modes for constructing histories in Don DeLillo's *Libra*. Chapter three moves away from overarching master narratives to examine memory and familial archives in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Chapter four focuses on Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* to explore how curation—coupled with imagination and memory—can provide authors and readers a language for locating women's excluded histories. By relying on literary and curatorial techniques (including *ekphrasis*, synecdoche, show-and-tell, and displayed archeology), this dissertation argues that characters-as-curators encourage readers to question known historical records, using

textually constructed exhibition spaces as sites for these reexaminations. *The Plot and the Archive* augments the character-as-curator's adaptability by extending museum studies to literary studies, arguing for their importance in reading literature.

DEDICATION

For Dad

Who wouldn’t have read a single word of this and who wouldn’t have had to. My only regret is that you weren’t here to see this project to its completion.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Who is the Character-as-Curator?

'I guess it makes sense when you think about it,' I said,
'although I didn't know about the mythological part.
It seems somehow that I remember hearing it meant the Glen
of Weeping.' 'That was Macauley,' she said, 'the historian. He just
made it up after the event…He was one of those people who went
through history picking and choosing and embellishing.'
She paused. 'Still, I guess when you look at it now,
one meaning can be true and the other can be accurate.'
– Alistair MacLeod, *No Great Mischief* 97

The study of the novel as a genre is distinguished by peculiar
difficulties. This is due to the unique nature of the object itself:
the novel is as yet uncompleted. The forces that define it as a
genre are at work before our very eyes: the birth and development
of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the
historical day. The generic skeleton of the novel is still far
from having hardened, and we cannot foresee all its plastic
possibilities.
– Mikhail Bakhtin, "Epic and Novel: Towards a Methodology for the Study of the Novel" 3

The earliest renderings in my mind of the character-as-curator began in 2011 when I attended the "Composing Ourselves" graduate student conference at the University of Cincinnati. The conference focused on how different kinds of texts cultivated writerly and readerly identities and subjectivities. In my presentation on *raconteurism* in Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*, I argued that MacLeod's central character, Alexander MacDonald, collects artifactual fragments in an effort to re-tell and re-historicize the legend of the Clan Calum Ruadh's irrecoverable past. Such artifacts include things like letters and maps; Gaelic ancestry and mythology; Cape Breton lore; actual historical text descriptions of The Glencoe Massacre, The Battle of the Plains of Abraham, and the Institution of Highland Regiments; references to numerous historical figures; and songs, such as "Macnap's Hornpipe" and the "Ballad of Glencoe." The challenges

Alexander faces in using these fragments to understand the Clan Calum Ruadh's history are due in part to the faultiness of memory (as it relates to his personal recollections, family stories, and the various historical renderings and artifacts he consulted). A theme I kept returning to was how characters can combine artifacts with memory and other kinds of historical fragments in novels to create a better understanding of present-day cultures and personal identities.

Fig. 1.1. "OBEY Stencil with Text" (Fairey "Engineering")

During that same conference weekend, I visited Cincinnati's Contemporary Arts Center, which featured an exhibit titled *Shepard Fairey: Supply and Demand*.[1] In a 2016 interview with Brandon Stosuy, Fairey notes that "OBEY Giant" (see Fig. 1.1.) "encourage[s] people to question" any and every trace of information "they [are] inundated with" (7). Using Andre the Giant to represent overarching master narratives, Fairey created a series of politically charged pieces that inspired his viewers "to think about . . . issue[s] in a way they [previously] may not have" (Fairey qtd. in Stosuy 1). As I walked through the Fairey exhibit, I began thinking about how the artifacts on display (e.g., canvas portraits, scraps of wood and metal, buttons, stickers, graffiti tags, collages, street paraphernalia, and skateboard decks) were preemptively and carefully presented to compose a narrative—or series of narratives—for

[1] Fairey's work emerged from the California skateboarding scene, and his first street graffiti project ("Andre the Giant Has a Posse") connected with my guilty pleasure of professional wrestling. Writing on the impact of the "OBEY Giant" campaign, Laurie Gries explains that "OBEY Giant" "started as an experiment in phenomenology intended to achieve three goals: trigger the viewer's curiosity; evoke questions about what this ambiguous sign means to and requests of the viewer; and challenge the viewer to confront their own obedience" (135). "OBEY Giant" persuades viewers to question the images they are routinely confronted with by appropriating older images that are familiar to them, with hopes that they question both the cultural significance of the older image, as well as the new visual design his artistry creates (Gries 137).

museumgoers. For example, the "OBEY Giant" collage appeared near the "Revolutionary Muslim Woman" portrait, which was curated side-by-side another image titled "Rise Above Cop." Themes of hope and change weaved through each section of the exhibit and I wondered how the curator's choices helped enhance that message. Like Alexander MacDonald in *No Great Mischief*, the Fairey exhibit's curator relied on a particular presentation and juxtaposition of artifacts and fragments to help viewers see something new in Fairey's work. In both MacLeod's novel and the Fairey exhibition, these meanings were not clearly prescribed to viewers. Instead, viewers had to piece together the artifacts in order to manifest and then come to understand the subtle arguments being made.

Fig. 1.2. "Arab Woman (Red)" (Fairey "Arab Woman")

One such portrait curated next to "OBEY Giant," titled "Arab Woman" (see Fig. 1.2.), reinforced the central purpose of the "OBEY Giant" campaign. While not immediately clear from a first glance at "Arab Woman," I understood that a kind of narratological questioning was taking place within this portrait (based on my previous understanding of Fairey's work). There is a cohesion across Fairey's repertoire with repetition of design choices like color, shading, negative space, and remixing older images to create art. The Arab woman, for instance, has Fairey's Andre the Giant reproduced in the center of her chest. The cohesive repertoire of Fairey's design choices enables many options for curatorial orchestration, such as, in the Cincinnati exhibit, the juxtaposition of "Arab Woman" with "OBEY Giant." As its own piece, "Arab Woman" functions to challenge narratives, specifically the post-9/11 rhetoric that registered Muslims as

"other," as a threat to American freedoms and liberties. "Arab Woman" furthermore touches on issues of patriarchy, sexism, and terrorism, and how the combination of these elements was institutionalized as a fear-mongering apparatus. By placing "Arab Woman" next to "OBEY Giant," the curator urges viewers to question these anti-Muslim narratives. Rather than simply accepting the institutionalized representations of the Muslim figure in mass media, the woman depicted within the portrait encourages viewers to look upon her as an agent of peace, unity, and reconciliation. That others could read different messages into the image points to curation's affordances as a vehicle to generate tensions of readability and possibility. Given its spatial proximity to the original "OBEY Giant," along with the meaning-making environment that the placement created for viewers within the Cincinnati exhibit, I argue that "Arab Woman" is exemplary of the crucial role that selection, arrangement, and display play in asking viewers to question what they see when they are in an exhibition.

As the weekend progressed, it became increasingly clear to me that a relationship existed between the kinds of historical subversions taking place in the Fairey exhibit and the re-historicizing happening in MacLeod's novel. Fairey's exhibit challenged master narratives linked to war and peace, culture, religion, and community. Similarly, in *No Great Mischief*, Alexander MacDonald, like the curator of Fairey's exhibit, collected various artifacts and displayed them to readers in an effort to reconsider the history of Scottish clans and the injustices they suffered. For me, the idea that there was a relationship that existed between how artifacts are displayed and the lost stories they tell in order to subvert particular narratives represented the earliest inklings of the character-as-curator. The relationship between characters in novels and curatorial practices does not exist solely in MacLeod's work. I began noticing other characters who used artifacts to examine history like Alexander MacDonald did, such as Aunt Emily in Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*;

the unnamed-narrator of Rudy Wiebe's "Where is the Voice Coming From?"; Anil Tissera in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*; and so on. Each of these characters displays artifacts in narrative and reconceptualizes history in ways that give voice to those outside hegemonic master narratives. In doing so, these characters use memories, imagination, fragments, and material objects to better understand the past.

Building on the connections I started making back in 2011, the goal of this dissertation is to establish a relationship between curation and novels, exploring how curatorial techniques enhance historical understanding. While it is my belief that curatorial techniques can apply to numerous novels dealing with history, the novels I analyze in this dissertation all illuminate different challenges that come with using artifacts (or a lack of artifacts) to understand the past. Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* each contain artifacts that are curated in narrative to reveal inconsistencies within the historical record. The act of curation in these texts augments the challenge of relying on memory, fiction, and artifactual fragments as a means of recovering the past. Beyond this, however, curation in these texts invites multiplicity and inclusion by providing spaces for the stories of forgotten individuals to take center-stage, many of whom have been excised from official historical narratives all together. Using these three novels to outline the application of curatorial techniques, each chapter focuses on the historical archives' inherent instability and curation as a tactic for recovering and re-seeing the past. While curation existed long before the advent of postmodern theory (Žerovc), I maintain that like postmodernism, contemporary curation recognizes the importance of open-endedness and fluidity. Contemporary curation also believes that the past is ultimately inaccessible, further connecting it with the postmodern aesthetic. As such, curatorial studies allows for both characters and readers to engage in different

experiences with history. The cause-and-effect sequence of events is one way of performing history. Curation, however, deals with space and time. There are multiple stories embedded within artifactual objects. The way curators spatially display these items augments the multiple stories-within-stories contained within such items, revealing how those narratives intermingle and relate to other objects (and stories) in an archive.

Curatorial studies also provide a unique vantage point for literary theorists wishing to understand the role of historical artifacts within contemporary texts. As Yin Xing notes in "The Novel as Museum," applying curatorial technique to novels featuring historical objects allows readers to "make different interpretations about the objects narrated in the novel . . . [thereby] bring[ing] back the past and endow[ing] it with memorable value" (201). The texts I explore all include characters wishing to learn something about the past that differs from accepted versions of history. These characters utilize a range of artifacts to recover lost voices and make these stories known. The reason I isolate these specific kinds of novels is that the artifacts within these texts make visible the faults of accepting singular versions of history; they furthermore represent spaces where these histories can be investigated and negotiated. By interacting with and manipulating objects, characters present and explore multiple versions of history.

Within my discussion of texts that combine fiction with artifacts and documents, I identify a central figure known as the character-as-curator: a detail-oriented individual who combs through the archives, selecting, analyzing, organizing, and displaying evidence for public consumption, in an effort to challenge accepted versions of history. In each chapter, I focus on a different role the character-as-curator plays in negotiating challenges with historical records. In Chapter two, Nicholas Branch (*Libra*) uses curation to remedy the overwhelming influx of artifactual data at his disposal. In Chapter three, Yunior de la Casas (*The Brief Wondrous Life of*

Oscar Wao) leans on curatorial techniques to fill in the purposeful gaps and silences in the Dominican Republic's violent history. In Chapter four, Annie Torrent (*Ana Historic*) uses curation to locate the unrecorded private histories of Vancouver's pioneer women. The character-as-curator is not necessarily the texts' protagonist but is instead the one who is charged with engaging with the given artifacts in some shape or form. These curators are never able to put together a definitive version of an historical account, because they know that a neutral account of what transpired is ultimately inaccessible. The novels I examine are always concerned with questions of identity and secure knowledge; the archive that the character-as-curator produces is always in the process of being *put together*.

The characters-as-curators in the novels I examine each deal in some capacity with issues of identity. Along with re-situating historical understanding, the archives the characters-as-curators create call into question their own and familial identities, as well as larger cultural narratives surrounding particular events. As a postmodern concern, identity construction also preoccupies contemporary museums (Lorente; Prus; Stanish; Steyn). In an interview with Nilay Özlü, Donald Preziosi discusses the impact postmodernity has on museums and identity construction:

> Well, you find yourself—you find your place—in the museum. You find your identity in the museum reflected in exhibitions or in aspects of exhibitions. [. . .] And so in the course of that dialogue you create a kind of relational identity; a relative identity in terms of what the museum presents. It's as if the museum gives you a vocabulary to think about yourself, and then you either adopt it, or don't adopt it, or adopt something else as a result of the engagement or interaction with it: you create a kind of third space. (62-63)

The application of postmodern concepts to curation results in an interpretive fluidity. In museum spaces, Preziosi argues that conclusions are not fixed and that there are multiple ways to read an artifact, artwork, or event.

The notion of opening up historical narrative goes beyond individuals' reading into exhibitions into broader histories and can be considered a postmodern phenomenon as it can uncover multiple truths, rather than the singular, overarching, view of history forwarded by empirical methodologies. As F. R. Ankersmit notes in *Historical Representation*, "[h]istorical insight is not a matter of a continuous 'narrowing down' of previous options, not of an approximation of the truth, but, on the contrary, is an 'explosion' of possible points of view" (16). Curation in the novels I have selected, to borrow Ankersmit's phrase, "[unmask] . . . previous illusions of determinacy and precision by the production of [multiple] new and alternative representations" (*Historical Representation* 16). Employing curatorial tools in *Libra*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* enables readers to recognize characters' choices in presenting alternative readings and representations of the past. Characters-as-curators within these novels arrange, display, and mediate artifacts spatially, thus opening up history to the kinds of readings Ankersmit refers to above. Curation is used in these novels to dismantle dominant historical archives, remain indeterminate, and postulate alternate and multiple readings of an historical event. In this sense, readers are forwarded "an 'explosion' of possible points of view."

Before further developing the character-as-curator and outlining the role of curatorial techniques in literary analysis, I will explore the evolution of modernist and postmodernist historical thinking, tracing how historical trends have evolved to better acknowledge the role of imagination and fiction in reconstituting the past. Additionally, I will highlight the main schools

of thought born out of these approaches (i.e., reconstructionist, constructionist, and deconstructionist) to explore differing approaches to historian subjectivity and how they handle artifacts. Each approach posits its own set of liberties and constraints in constructing history. Following this discussion, I will outline significant trends in museum scholarship that point towards the importance of curation as a bridge between multiple disciplines and the curator's influence in acting as intermediary of the past. The ultimate point of this discussion is to show how curation and the character-as-curator are not only situated within museological conversations but are also active participants in remedying the issues associated with these historical approaches. As a method for selecting and arranging objects for display, curation is an alternate practice that generates, revises, and shapes (as well as sometimes limits) historical understanding.

Histories, Historian Subjectivity, and How Historians Handle Artifacts

This dissertation aligns itself with Linda Hutcheon's view of history in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, arguing that we can no longer look upon history as "something to be escaped, avoided, or controlled . . . [a] 'nightmare'" (55). Rather, *The Plot and the Archive* positions curation—and, in particular, the character-as-curator—as a way to move beyond dismissive attitudes around history. Instead of viewing history as broken, untrustworthy, and potentially dangerous, this dissertation argues that there is merit to some reconstructionist and constructionist histories, particularly with the artifactual traces and evidence that comprise these accounts. In addition, this dissertation investigates the role narrative plays in history writing, arguing that fictions featuring the character-as-curator ask readers to question why certain historical accounts privilege specific groups of people over others. Like Fairey's "OBEY Giant"

campaign, these authors reuse artifactual fragments, presenting them to readers with hopes that they will question the historical narratives these artifacts previously represented. This dissertation shows how fictions featuring the character-as-curator can achieve a leveling of history; one that brings those individuals who are traditionally excised from these histories to the forefront.

While it is nearly "impossible to date," modernist theory is believed to have been "constituted out of a series of events around the time of the Enlightenment" (*Routledge*, 163), according to Alun Munslow. Modernist historical thinkers, such as Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Nietzsche ascribed to empirical[2] methodologies for producing history. According to their thinking (as developed in Ankersmit's *History and Tropology*; David Carrier's "Danto and His Critics: Art History, Historiography and After the End of Art"; and Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller*), when historians were closely attuned to the evidence at hand, they possessed the ability to create objective and authentic versions of the past. Ankersmit notes that empirical historians viewed the past as "a sea of historical phenomena" that needed to be interpreted; this "[sea] . . . of phenomena [was] lying before the historian, waiting to be described and explained" (*History* 98). Modernist historians believed they could explain an event as it initially transpired, or, at the very least, their methods assumed that they could achieve historical veracity. Such assumptions included a steadfast belief in empiricism's power to uncover the "truth," the idea that historians possessed the ability to deduce the authenticity of evidence through comparison, and a reliance on cause-and-effect relationships and inference to produce historical accounts. By subscribing to these beliefs, "[t]he

[2] By empiricism, I am referring to the historian's ability to definitively know what transpired in the past, based on an analysis of the evidence at hand. The empirical approach is a central tenet of modernist historical thinking and one that strongly influenced constructionist and reconstructionist historical thought.

historian [was] equipped . . . to faithfully recover that which [was] gone. The historian's cultural significance reside[d] in his/her ability to *know* the meaning of the past" (Munslow, *Routledge* 1, emphasis added). C. Behan McCullagh, writing in "Bias in Historical Description, Interpretation, and Explanation," examines the function of empirical methodologies, noting that modernist historians believed that they could "infer particular facts about the past from the evidence available to them [and that] they g[a]ve meaning to those facts by presenting relations between them" (39). Here, McCullagh hints at the cause-and-effect methodologies used by empiricists to uncover overarching "truths" of a particular historical event. These historians believed that by studying an artifact, the most likely *singular* account of a past event would reveal itself. A problem with this kind of empirical method, however, is that "presenting relations between [certain historical items] is [quite often] a function of [the historian's] creative imagination" (McCullagh 39); the historical accounts derived from such empirical methodologies "reflect [the historian's] personal interests and vision of past events" (39). While historians rely on artifacts to make sense of the past beyond the modernist period, what gets eluded from the modernist approach is how the historians' subjectivities, imaginations, and experiences are used in making sense of the past. The larger problem with modernist historical approaches is that by focusing on a singular reading of an event, that reading is institutionalized and becomes the dominant narrative of what transpired.

Both Munlow's and McCullagh's line of thinking regarding empirical methodologies[3] and how they are used to construct history are supported by Jerzy Topolski, who writes in "The Role of Logic and Aesthetics in Constructing Narrative Holes in Historiography" that empirical historical construction focuses on "dispersed pieces of basic information" (202). Within this

[3] i.e., that historians develop readings of historical events based on an analysis of the documents at hand, and that this form of cause-and-effect history does not account for historians' subjectivities.

process, empirical historians transformed "numerous single points" derived from an examination of the artifacts at hand and integrated them into "(coherent) narrative wholes" (Topolski 202). Just as Munslow writes that a study of documents will reveal to the empiricist historian a narrative of what most likely took place in the past, Topolski notes that "the fundamental factor" that contributes to creating such historical accounts is the belief that a study of documents will provide an "understanding of a given fragment of the past" (202). For modernist historians, each artifact represented an open window to the past; peering through this window revealed, according to the empiricist, what actually transpired.

Growing out of modernism in the nineteenth century, reconstructionist history[4] is centrally concerned with how historians treat evidence. From a methodological standpoint, this brand of constructing history believes that "the historian [can] . . . discover the most probably truthful . . . interpretation inherent in the document of the past" (Munslow, *Routledge* 195). Indeed, empirical historians "interpret documents . . . constructing the best available explanation . . . [from the] evidence about the events they study" (McCullagh 61). While using documents to study the past is still a contemporary practice, reconstructionist historians often assumed the past could speak for itself. As Jürgen Pieters writes in "New Historicism: Postmodern Historiography Between Narrativism and Heterology," "traditional" empirical historians "consider texts to be transparent in the sense that they offer a direct and unproblematical access to historical reality" (25). Reconstructionist historians relied on inference, objectivity, and common-sense in their handling of documents and artifacts, believing that these tendencies revealed "the true intentions and voices" of historical figures (Munslow, *Routledge* 195). As a handmaiden of empiricism,

[4] For further information on reconstructionist histories, see Richard Evans (*In Defence of History*); John Warren (*The Past and its Presenters: An Introduction to Issues in Historiography*) and Joan Scott ("After History").

reconstructionists' conviction that the past is accessible only through historians has led to present-day postmodernists outrightly challenging this stance. Still, endorsers of this method claim that it is possible for historical writing to achieve a semblance of truth and accuracy "because [the account] was built upon . . . primary sources" (Munslow, *Routledge* 195). Of course, this reliance on primary source material raises its own set of questions regarding the legitimacy of evidence (e.g., determining what constitutes primary evidence, where it comes from, and how it was selected). While these questions are significant—and form the basis of postmodernity's historical inquiry—reconstructionist historians maintain that their accounts are "built upon . . . primary sources" and, as a result, "are capable of writing truth-conditional descriptions" (Munslow, *Routledge* 195). This view is problematic because of the limitations of primary evidence. As will be discussed in Chapters three and four, oftentimes with historical writing, marginal views were forgotten or unrecorded and fell beyond the scope of histories worth referencing. Deeming the accounts found in dominant narratives to be more accurate or truthful is limiting, as other accounts that do not fit into this singular, historical representation are cast aside and forgotten.

Borrowing from modernist and reconstructionist schools of thought, constructionist history (e.g., R.G. Collingwood's *The Idea of History* and Dominick LaCapra's and Steven Kaplan's *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives*) emerged in the nineteenth century. Both reconstructionist and constructionist schools of historical thought concede that past understandings are derived from existing pieces of evidence. At its core, constructionist historians believe "that history results from a conceptual dialogue between the historian and the past" (Munslow, *Routledge* 53). Or, as Collingwood explains, when the historian ". . . thinks historically, he has before him certain documents or relics of the past. His

business is to discover what the past was which has left these relics" (283). Constructionist historians study the bits and pieces of evidence that remain to "think [the past] again for himself" (283).[5] Whether realist or skeptical, constructionist historians act as intermediaries between historical artifacts and the messages contained within, and use the evidence to conceptualize the histories that follow (e.g., in the case of empiricists, a single, authoritarian, overarching explanation of an historical event is actualized; meanwhile, post-empirical historians maintain that the past is unknowable and, as a result, many possible stories of what transpired can be derived from the evidence).

Constructionist historians maintain that historians can only come into contact with the past indirectly (due to the fragmented nature of the evidence they are dealing with). The reason why historians' experiences with the past are indirect is that quite often, historians are "limited by the amount of information that can be inferred from the remaining evidence" (McCullagh 47). While the constructionist historian's desire is to be surrounded by "a great amount and variety of evidence," more often than not, "the evidence is patchy, so that parts of the subject can be described but not all of it" (47). As such, historians deal only indirectly with the past and the historical narratives they construct is "partial, incomplete" (47). Constructionist historians maintain that imagination is key to filling in the gaps in knowledge that permeate any historical account. Acknowledging imagination, inference, and fiction is a sharp departure from the

[5] A more detailed example of the dialogue that takes place between constructionist historians and the documents they work with is found in Collingwood's *The Idea of History*. Here, Collingwood writes: "Suppose, for example, he is reading the Theodosian Code, and has before him a certain edict of an emperor. Merely reading the words and being able to translate them does not amount to knowing their historical significance. In order to do that he must *envisage* the situation which the emperor was trying to deal, and he envisage it as that emperor envisaged it. Then he must see for himself, just as if the emperor's situation were his own, how such a situation might be dealt with; he must see the possible alternatives, and the reasons for choosing one rather than another; and thus he must go through the process which the emperor went through in deciding on this particular course. Thus he is *re-enacting* in his own mind the experience of the emperor. . . ." (283).

empirical belief that historians can unquestionably contour a legitimate historical explanation; instead constructionist historians reveal history as little more than a fiction since "we access the past through concepts created in language" (Munslow, *Routledge* 54).

As theorists moved further away from modernist models of thinking, empirical methods for producing history were vigorously disputed by the emergence of postmodern thought in the 1960s and 1970s. The idea that historians could objectively understand the evidence and produce a complete and accurate account of what transpired was challenged by critics like Linda Hutcheon (*A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, and Fiction*), Keith Jenkins (*Why History: Reflections on the Possible End of History and Ethics under the Impact of Postmodernism*) and Jean-François Lyotard (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*), who disputed modernism's fundamental characteristics. As Lawrence Stone notes in "History and Postmodernism," "historical truth is unattainable . . . [A]ny conclusions are provisional and hypothetical, always liable to be overturned by new data or better theories. . . ." (255). Unlike the view that documents and artifacts could lead historians to true understandings of the past, postmodern thinkers saw how "documents . . . were written by fallible human beings who made mistakes, and had their own ideological agenda which guided their compilation. . . " (Stone 255). Many critics, such as Lyotard, Jacques Derrida (*Of Grammatology*), Frederic Jameson (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*), Roland Barthes (*Writing Degree Zero*), Michel Foucault (*The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*), and Hutcheon questioned modernist notions of objectivity, probability, and inference, and exposed empirical histories as inventions (i.e., fictions) of the past, rather than complete accounts of what occurred. Postmodern thinkers believed "that the frontiers of history [could] be expanded by moving beyond the empirical to fully explore the logic that it is the culturally situated historian

who, in his/her composition of the history text, is producing an invented narrative form of knowledge" (Munslow, *Routledge* x). Munslow, in pointing to the fictional constructedness of history and historiography, acknowledges the subjective liberties historians (knowingly or unknowingly) take when they handle objects and attempt to make sense of the past.

The role of fiction, and things like imagination and memory in historical construction, are underlying concerns of this dissertation and are important components of postmodern thinking. How postmodernist historians choose to handle different artifacts and the ways they acknowledge their subjective role in making meaning moves them away from objective, modernist ways of thinking. According to Munslow, "[i]t is usually claimed that evidence provides the bond between history and the past. Epistemologically the strength of that bond is to be found in the closest possible correspondence between events . . . and their description. . . . Without evidence, therefore, history would be just fiction. This is the issue. Can we write proper, or non-fictional history if we re-conceive the nature of this bond?" (*Routledge* 92). Postmodern historians would answer yes—that there is already a relationship between history and fiction, because both reside in the realm of language in which meaning is contingent upon discourse, which is itself already an organization of knowledge. As Hutcheon writes, "history and fiction are discourses . . . both constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past ('exertions of the shaping, ordering imagination'). In other words, the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in the systems which make those past 'events' into present historical 'facts'" (*Poetics* 89). The systems Hutcheon references are institutional and linguistic constructs that shape our experience of the world and guide us to represent experiences in particular ways. As Hutcheon writes, "[t]his is not a 'dishonest refuge from truth' but an acknowledgement of the meaning making function of human constructs" (89). Recognizing that people are always acting

within these systems, Hutcheon and other postmodern thinkers argue that language and action are influenced by larger discursive structures and that there is no such thing as an ability to objectively read the past.

As a way to account for historian subjectivity, McCullagh outlines several reasons why there are biases present in historical thinking. First, when interpreting an artifact, historians may rely on faulty judgement or be influenced by the ideological structures they are working within. As McCullagh explains, "historians sometimes misinterpret evidence, so that they are not justified in asserting that the inferences they draw about what happened in the past are true" (39). As historians act within the confines of the discursive structures in which they are situated, they may be unable to make representative conclusions about the past they examine. Additionally, historians may not recognize certain contextual factors that limit readers' understanding of the artifact or event under examination. Essentially, "when historians compile an account of a historical subject, be it a person, an institution, or an event, what they say about it might be justified and credible but the account might omit significant facts about the subject so that it is unbalanced" (McCullagh 40). Especially because there are instances where the forwarded histories are not representative of particular groups of people, the accounts may omit important information. Finally, historians could face a lack of information about an event and as such, rely on inference and imagination in their tailoring of a narrative. As McCullagh argues, historical accounts are "limited by the amount of information that can be inferred from remaining evidence" (47). As such, "[t]he resulting history is sometimes presented as a representation of the past, but really . . . it is merely a substitute for the past" (52).[6] It is my belief that using curatorial

[6] Or, according to Ankersmit, "historical writing gives us *representations* of the past" (*Historical Representation* 11). When it comes to historical representation, Ankersmit writes that "we may 're-present' something by presenting a substitute of this thing in its absence. The real thing is not, or is no longer available to us, and something else is given to us in order to replace it. In this sense it can be said that we have historical

studies as a lens can help readers make evident the limitations of historical understanding and acknowledge the subjective components that are involved in making sense of the past. In these instances, the curator is not purporting to know the 'truth' of an occurrence; instead, the curator's task is to enable varied interpretations of both artifacts and events. Of course, there is also a selectiveness involved with curatorial techniques. However, the novels under investigation in this dissertation show how curation can lead to an awareness of the difficulties of interpreting historical accounts, particularly when historical records contain too much or too little information.

Building on and growing out of modernism, postmodern thinkers did not wish simply to dismantle modernist history's empirical foundations; they understood that there was no specific method that could understand all of history and that relying on an omniscient explanation for an historical account itself was impossible as the past is ultimately unknowable and inaccessible. Postmodern thinkers believed that multiple interpretations of evidence and historical events existed and promoted studies of the past that were devoid of "the urge to write the indescribable or reconstruct the inaccessible" (Munslow, *Routledge* 190). However, as Geoffrey Squires writes, "modernism was not a single, unified phenomenon but rather a cluster of related movements" (41). Likewise, postmodernism contains multiple fractures and lenses that are taken collectively to define the shifts taking place across disciplines in history, literature, theatre, and art. As postmodern thinkers grappled with the unknown, further divisions of postmodern thought emerged. For postmodern thinkers, the past is inaccessible and it is impossible to uncover an all-encompassing understanding of the world as it may have existed. Knowledge of the past is

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writing in order to compensate for the absence of the past itself" (11). It is this substitute feature (e.g., re-presentation versus representation) that highlights the fictional constructedness of historical writing.

limited at best, since certain silences exist in the historical record that cannot be substantiated.[7] Terry Eagleton, writing in *Literary Theory*, equates fiction and history to news reports, where "neither [is] clearly factual nor clearly fictional" (2). Postmodern theorists thus apply a range of approaches to study history, where each approach yields a different historical explanation (e.g., Hayden White and his study of form and content; Foucault and his investigation of truth and power; and Derrida's desire to diminish hermeneutics in favor of deconstruction as a tool for envisioning historical and cultural realities, to name a few). Within postmodern perspectives, each approach offers a different relationship between language and reality. Language itself is not neutral: "[t]o use the language of feminism or class [will], therefore . . . constitute a preferred reality" (Munslow, *Routledge* 70). Each lens (like feminism or deconstructionism, for example) makes apparent certain realities while concealing others. These different lenses are agenda-based, at least to some degree, and provide theorists with different ways of interpreting the past, depending on the method selected and its relationship to language. Unlike reconstructionist historians, postmodernists do not wish to uncover a single, authoritarian, understanding of history, as they believe no such explanation exists. Rather, theorists prefer a more democratic model that relies on a range of approaches, where one method is not privileged over another, since each one offers alternate ways of understanding the past.

While there are certainly limitations to adopting any singular lens to understanding or uncovering history, what postmodern lenses provide theorists are multiple tools that can help make apparent vantage points previously excluded from historical understanding. For example,

[7] With history, we can have an understanding of a sequence of historical events without knowing the causality (or the fine-grained details) of why or how those events actually happened. As Louis O. Mink notes in *Historical Understanding*, "Caesar. . . did cross the Rubicon, and we know that he did, but there are many details about that action—how was he dressed? Was he shaved or unshaved? Did he hesitate and look around before the die was cast?—which we don't know" (93).

by focusing on the effect of psychic colonization (as a sort of "cultural bomb") in *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o emphasizes Kenyan peoples' experiences in order to legitimize and make apparent their cultural histories that at one time were wiped away or purposefully forgotten at the hands of British imperialism (4). Postmodern methods allow for certain historical viewpoints to be revealed, depending on the theoretical approach used.[8] In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ examines the relationship between language and cultural politics—a central characteristic of postmodern thinking[9]—in order to offer readers a kind of revisionist history. Throughout *The Plot and the Archive* and my development of the character-as-curator, I too consider the potential of adding museum and curatorial scholarship to the repertoire of postmodern theories concerned with challenging accepted historical narratives. One of the central issues with postmodern views of history is that while they carry the potential to include more voices, they are also limiting. To combat this position, *The Plot and the Archive* offers a language to record multiple voices in any historical account; it furthermore invites readings that privilege imagination as a tool for locating the disappeared.

Curators, Curation, and the History of Curatorial Studies

Curation is all around us. We live in a hyper-sensory world characterized by curation, whether these examples appear in the form of content-curated Pinterest boards, digitized jukeboxes, Twitter feeds, or expertly curated exhibitions featured at the MoMA. *The Plot and the*

[8] For more on this, consult: Derrida's *Of Grammatology*; Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"; Stephen Toulmin's *Cosmopolis*; Paul Cilliers's *Complexity and Postmodernity*; and Ihab Hassan's *From Postmodernism to Postmodernity: The Local/Global Context*.

[9] For more information on this, see Kathy Kessler's "Rewriting History in Fiction: Elements of Postmodernism in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Later Novels."

Archive operates on the premise that archives exist to preserve artifacts as well as make those historical items available to the public. Beyond this, however, the scope of items that can be archived is vast and deep, provided that the items carry historical significance for viewers (for example: The Instant Ramen Museum in Osaka, Japan; The American Sign Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio; and the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum in Wichita Falls, Texas). An excellent example of the cultural significance of artifacts and what they mean to their respective audiences can be seen in Zak Penn's 2014 documentary *Atari: Game Over*. This movie chronicled the filmmaker's search for the surviving video game cartridges of E.T., rumored to be located in a landfill in Alamogordo, New Mexico (*Atari*). The game, as an artifact, is believed to have triggered the North American Video Game Crash of 1983 (ultimately bankrupting the Atari video game company). As Penn's documentary highlights, quite often an artifact's value or worth is subjective; what was once literally trash becomes an important artifact in piecing together a forgotten or problematic history. These recovered cartridges were so significant in piecing together a history of the gaming industry's crash that they were added to the Smithsonian's exhibit on the development of video games in the United States. Whether discussing the cultural significance of Instant Ramen, professional wrestling, or lost Atari video games, at the center of each of these recovery projects is the figure of the curator; a detail-oriented sense-maker that selects, arranges, and presents artifactual materials to exhibition viewers.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines curator as "one who has the care or charge of a person or thing" ("Curator, n."). Kate Fowle, writing in "Who Cares? Understanding the Role of the Curator," extends this definition by explaining how curator initially meant "'guardian' or 'overseer.' From 1362 'curator' was used to signify people who cared for (or were in

superintendence of) minors or lunatics, and in 1661 it began to denote 'one in charge of a museum, library, zoo or other place of exhibit'" (10). While curators began overseeing museums and archives in the 17th century, the curator's role has greatly expanded in the last fifty years.

As the field of museology has grown as a discipline, it has been difficult for theorists to trace trends in museological thought. For example, in *Curationism: How Curating Took Over the Art World and Everything Else* (2014), David Balzer writes that it is extremely "difficult to propose a teleology of curating," although he defines the practice as "any arrangement or editing of things, usually cultural" (29). For Balzer, "[t]he curator is someone who insists on value, and who makes it, whether or not it actually exists" (33). This idea that curators can impose meaning on a given work points to the authority granted to someone in this role. As numerous art intellectuals communicated to Hans Ulrich Obrist in *A Brief History of Curating* (e.g., Walter Hopps; Lucy Lippard; Harald Szeemann), curators are currently conceived as indispensable trendsetters, "arbiter[s] of taste" (Balzer 120). This individual became a stylized innovator possessing the ability to create "'new truths' about art," presenting them through "universal narratives within an overarching curatorial frame" (O'Neill 5). Indeed, contemporary curators are intermediaries between objects on display, larger cultural aesthetics, and exhibition viewers. Through their choices in display and arrangement, curators guide museum visitors by demonstrating an object's worth and assisting them in making sense of the artifacts on display.

One of the curator's most central roles is to help museumgoers understand the past and guide their meaning-making. As someone charged with giving value to an object, curators do not tell viewers how to read or understand the past (as a historian might), but instead position artifacts so that viewers can produce meaning on their own. Curators thus function as intermediaries who connect the past with the public in the present, rather than act as the sole

vehicle to understanding the past. Building on curators' connective functions, in his *A Brief History of Curating*, Obrist interviews 20th and 21st century curators and art intellectuals, drawing out their ideas about curation and curators' roles. Throughout the interviews, the curator's role as intermediary between the art world and the public continuously emerges. For example, in her interview, Anne d'Harnoncourt explains that ". . . the curator is someone who makes connections between art and the public . . . curators [are] enablers . . . curators [open] people's eyes . . . to the subversiveness of art" (220-221). Curators, for d'Harnoncourt, guide viewers to see things in art or the past that they might not otherwise. Further characterizing the connective role that curators play, Obrist paraphrases Félix Fénéon, the art critic responsible for coining the term Neo-Impressionism, stating that "the curator should be a pedestrian bridge [une passerelle]" (220). As *une passerelle*, curators not only bridge artifacts and museumgoers, but they also connect with different schools of thought. When interviewing Jean Leering, former museum director of the Stedelijk Van Abbermuseum in Eindhoven, Obrist draws on Johannes Cladders who saw museums as spaces to "build bridges between various disciplines" (89-90). Echoing the museum's interdisciplinarity, Jean-Paul Martinon writes in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* that the curatorial is fluid, it "seeps and bleeds into many different fields and practices" and "is therefore this activity of always engaging disciplines and practices and of transcending them" (31). Rather than insisting that only one voice or approach is correct, the tendency towards multidisciplinarity acknowledges the value other fields and perspectives bring. Paul O'Neill affirms the idea of curator-as-mediator, writing in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* that "the figure of the curator has moved from being a caretaker of collections . . . to an independently motivated practitioner with a more centralized position within the contemporary art world and its parallel commentaries" (1-2). The idea that the curator

has moved beyond their initial role as caretaker to instead act as a bridge between artifacts and the public in various disciplines is important for how curation serves to enhance historical understandings. In *The Plot and the Archive*, both curation as a field of study, and the character-as-curator as a narratological figure, function as interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary tools. Both diminish the theoretical divide between novels and history, linking readers more forcefully to narratives of the past so that they may question the histories they encounter.

As a bridge between the past and present viewers, curators can position artifacts so that their meaning remains open and subject to interpretation. The reason that curation is an apt lens for reading novels dealing with history is that it allows for the multiplicity required to broaden our understanding of the past. In texts containing a character-as-curator, multiple viewpoints (and alternate stories) are forwarded. These viewpoints are often different from those forwarded by empirical master narratives and require different tools for historical understanding. For example, because there are fragmented artifacts available to Yunior in *Oscar Wao*, he employs show-and-tell as a device for isolating and drawing attention to those objects. The character-as-curator, through the process of selection, mediation, and display, opens up the possibility of multiple accounts of an event that move beyond a singular master narrative. The objects on display invite open-endedness. While I argue for the importance of forwarding multiple readings of the past, I recognize that curators too are limited by their cultural and ideological positioning. Curators are also limited by the materials available to them. As is the case with Yunior in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, his biases are limited since he only presents the tangible items he has managed to recover. There is very little selection and arrangement taking place that is motivated by a preferred history he wishes to uncover or forward. On another level, curation often moves beyond the biases connected with writing history since curation, as a discipline, is

itself an open-ended act. A central characteristic to any historical account is that it is finished and absolute. Historical narratives are themselves closed off from further meaning-making and are meant to offer a concrete resolution to the events they depict. Quite the opposite takes place in curated exhibits. As will be discussed further throughout *The Plot and the Archive*, museums rely on their viewership to investigate the narratives being presented. Viewers must meet the exhibit halfway so that the information offered by the exhibit is actualized (that is, it comes into existence).

There are a variety of ways curators' roles have been characterized (e.g., exhibition mediator, supervisor, museum guide, caretaker, custodian, overseer, manager, connoisseur, trendsetter, and cultural savant, to name a few) and all vary at least to some degree. This multitude of interpretations surrounding who the curator is and his or her role highlights a central challenge that has plagued curatorial studies for many years; that is, critics' inability to denote an all-encompassing, unifying definition of curators' duties and functions (Shott 262). While "artistic intermediary" emerges as the curator's dominant characteristic (Balzer), putting forth a fixed theory on curation and curatorial practice is still quite difficult. And there are a number of reasons why the curator's role is difficult to define. For example, O'Neill explains that the curator played an essentially invisible role in museums between the 1920s and the 1950s. Instead of having an individual at the center of the exhibition—one that presented objects and narratives to viewers in a manner that could be easily understood—it was believed that the relationship between the artifacts on display and the spaces in which they were housed defined meaning-making in museums (O'Neill 9). Curators held a practical focus; their function was downplayed in favor of stunning and remarkable exhibitions and, as a result, was relegated to the background of such spaces (9). Indeed, during the first half of the 20th century, the curator was out of the

public's sight and mind. Or, as O'Neill discusses, between the 1920s and 1950s, "the exhibition space came to function as the main contest of, and the primary medium for, the realization of the artwork" (13). The curator was largely unseen as the space and artifacts themselves took a central focus. Gradually, according to O'Neill, "a . . . change [in] the role of the [curator]" occurred, from "working with collections out of sight of the public, to a more central position on a much broader stage" (9). This dramatic shift in the curator's importance occurred at the beginning of the 1960s, when the public yearned for a figure who could demystify the power museums possessed over various exhibitions spaces, solve the ambiguity and mysteriousness linked to various artifacts on display, and act as a negotiator between the displayed work and viewers' meaning-making processes (O'Neill 14).

The term "curator" did not emerge in published scholarship until 1973, despite the work curators were already performing (Shott 259). However, the curator's role during the 1960s and 1970s became more publicly visible. With increasing public awareness of the curator's role in selecting, caring for, and displaying artwork, the art world began exhibiting "a growing understanding and acceptance of curators as having a more proactive, creative, and political part in the production, mediation, and dissemination of art itself" (O'Neill 9). The 1960s represented a moment when "the curator . . . emerge[d] with a twist of autonomy, through the vital concept of connoisseurship: a display of taste or expertise that lends stylized independence to the act of caring for and assembling [various exhibitions]" (Balzer 33). As acquirer and connoisseur of art, curators had the power to shape viewers' experiences, recognizing that exhibitions are active, not static, and result in particular constructions of meaning. In an effort to demystify the power of art institutions and the objects displayed within, the curator-as-mediator materialized as "a proactive agent in the communication chain (artist as sender, curator as mediator, viewer as receiver) . . .

[and was] primarily responsible for the production of . . . exhibition formats . . . through which forms of information (artworks, curatorial ideas) were mobilized" (O'Neill 25). As with the shifts in historical discourse brought on by postmodern thinkers, museology, too, experienced its own conceptual and theoretical shifts, from an unseen presence to that of visible voice, "advocating for new ideas (the conceptual era)" of studying and displaying artifacts (Balzer 61).

While this curatorial renaissance carried forward into the 1980s, a central issue, unbeknownst to critics and theorists alike, was developing – namely, how curators made visible the theories (i.e., conceptual frameworks, disciplinary influences, and creative techniques) informing curatorial practices. Prior to the 1990s, there are few published texts theorizing curatorial practices, and only a handful of graduate programs focusing exclusively on curation. The 1990s, however, represented a time when a "newfound focus on establishing a discourse specific to the curatorial field" surfaced, and "a history of curating [was] written in order to fill gaps in knowledge" (O'Neill 33). Degree programs focusing specifically on curation began emerging and a discourse around curatorial practices surfaced. While curators continued to fulfill their role as archivists, supervisors, creators, documenters, mediators, and, in some cases, museum directors, these individuals were in need of their own curator, a *caretaker* or *caregiver* who could document their strategies and tactics. As such, the 90s and beyond represented a time when an archiving imperative was levied upon the world of curation, where the work curators and their exhibitions, theories, and concepts were retroactively documented and recorded. The result was an explosion of texts that attempted to amend and reconcile the previous one hundred years of undocumented art history and curatorial thought.[10]

[10] Some of the most significant texts emerging at that time include: Bruce Altshuler's *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*; Gail Anderson's *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift*; Mieke Bal's *Double Exposure: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*; Tony Bennett's *The Birth of the Museum*; Pierre Bourdieu's and Hans Haacke's *Free Exchange*; A.A. Bronson's and Peggy Gale's

Prior to the growth of museology as a discipline, numerous curators such as Obrist, Lucy Lippard, Johannes Cladders, Margaret Mead, Frank O'Hara, Seth Siegelaub, Kasper König, Pontus Hultén, Franz Meyer, Harald Szeemann, and Walter Zanini (to name a few) utilized innovative and pioneering curatorial techniques in their respective exhibitions that had gone virtually unchronicled (i.e., once their respective exhibitions were completed they were taken down, stored away, and soon forgotten) (O'Neill 35). The 1990s were a time of increased importance for curation and conferences and symposia themed around curation were held and numerous academic programs of study (both graduate and post-graduate) in curation were instituted in various universities across the globe. This marked, for the very first time, "the consolation of [a] curator-centered discourse . . . when a history of curatorial practice began" (O'Neill 9).

Notably, museological theorizing propelled itself into the 2000s and still exists today. In 1998, Michael Brenson wrote in *Art Journal*, that "the era of the curator has begun" (16). Further solidifying this position almost fifteen years later, Balzer proclaims, we are living in the "curationist moment" where "the curatorial impulse [has] become [the] dominant way of thinking and being" (9). Curators are advocators for newness and, as such, are "a condition of the

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Museums by Artists; Steven Dubin's *Displays of Power—Art and Amnesia*; Paul Duro's *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays on the Boundaries of the Artwork*; Hugh Genoways's *Museum Philosophy for the Twenty-first Century*; Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne's *Thinking about Exhibitions*; Boris Groys et al's *The Discursive Museum;* Mika Hannula's *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*; Stephen Levine and Ivan Karp's *Exhibiting Cultures*; Didier Maleuvre's *Museum Memories: History, Technology, Art*; Suzana Milevska and Bilijana Tanurovska-Kjulavkovski's *Curatorial Translation*; Werner Muensterberg's *Collecting, An Unruly Passion*; Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube*; Steven Rand and Heather Kouris's *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating*; M.A. Staniszewski's *The Power of Display—A History of Exhibition Installations at The Museum of Modern Art*; Carolee Thea's *Foci: Interviews with 10 Curators*; Catherine Thomas's *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*; Gavin Wade's *Curating the 21st Century*; Scott Watson, Tom Hill, and Peter White's *Curatorial Strategies for the Future*; Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*.

contemporary" (Balzer 53). Contemporary curators play an important role in shaping public consciousness. As Brenson explains, curators must "think deeply about multiple audiences to allow individual curatorial perspectives to be invigorated by radically, even shockingly different experiences of space and time, memory, and history" (17). Throughout his report of the 1997 meeting of fifteen curators from across the world at the Rockefeller Foundation's Conference and Study Center in Italy, Brenson outlines challenges curators face in response to balancing multiple roles within museums. Among those challenges were curators' requirement to be "visible as mediators between art and its publics" (18).

What I find most beneficial about applying curatorial techniques in the analysis of novels is that curation allows one to account for multiple perspectives without alienating others. Certainly, a curator's selection and/or preference for certain documents can be exclusionary. Yet, curation through the presence of the character-as-curator gives readers agency to interpret the documents and artifacts on display in an effort to achieve alternate and more inclusive readings of the past. While I point out several limitations of historical thought, I recognize that there are necessarily limitations within any kind of interpretive act. I am not suggesting that curation as a practice and methodology for arranging objects for public display is inherently postmodern or that it inherently serves the recovery function that I am suggesting history requires. I also recognize that there is an empirical undertone present in any museum space, since the objects on display are selected based on certain acquisitions and on the curator's tastes and sensibilities. Curators' choices in selection are manipulative, as the choice to include one object over another is agenda-based, falling back on the curators' (or museums') preference.[11] The difference with

[11] For instance, Fowle describes the emergence of the Nazi party's 1937 exhibit, *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), "which was initiated as an official condemnation of modern art that promoted morals the public was not encouraged to embrace" (10).

the kind of curation promoted by the character-as-curator is that these individuals are using curation as a tool for dismantling the unconscious structure of master narratives. Some curatorial practices may create their own critical counter-narratives. Others, however, curate objects strategically to enable in viewers' minds experiences of how historical and other master narratives always deconstruct, reveal their ideological sutures, and open up the epistemological contests the narratives fantasize that they decide by their rhetorical and syntactical constructions. In the novels under study, the characters-as-curators perform awareness of the influential power of artifacts' selection and organization; however, the aim of this influence is to reveal possible readings of an historical event. In this sense, curation is a lens that gives readers choices. Readers are taken through the character-as-curator's process of constructing exhibition spaces (i.e., we, as readers, witness the choices these characters-as-curators make. We see how these alternate archives are being constructed). The alternate histories that result are placed at the readers' feet; it is up to readers to decide what to do with them.

In Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, the characters-as-curators featured in these texts maneuver through historical records in an effort to achieve alternate histories from those that have been accepted as conclusive and absolute. This mode of collecting, or of plotting the archive, redeploys the past in the present in an effort to unearth silent voices and, by extension, to foster what Michel Foucault would call "an insurrection of subjugated knowledge" (*Archaeology* 81). The character-as-curator's chief function in these texts is to organize, archive, and display, particularly in instances when history seems previously set. These characters work though the received records to uncover errors and omissions in accepted historical accounts, as well as highlight the multiple stories-within-stories contained within the archival traces on display. In

such narratives, “the significance of collecting objects lies not in the storing of the object itself but in the invisible value embodied in the object: the memory, the lived experiences, and stories dear to the heart of a person or nation at certain times” (Xing 198). How the character-as-curator interacts with and positions the artifacts can offer readers a broader understanding of the histories being recovered. The character-as-curator generates multiple meanings of an historical event, without imposing a single, overarching, explanation of the event in question. The challenges with understanding history laid out previously are ones that I wish to address by applying curatorial techniques to the analysis of the novels detailed above. Curation as a mechanism for investigating the past impacts how novels carry out these explorations.

Defining the Character-as-Curator within the Contemporary Novel

As I noted above, it was previously within the historian’s realm to construct a version of past events—through the evidence at hand—in an effort to foster historical understanding. The movement from modernist to postmodernist thought led to a skepticism or questioning of the historian’s ability to detail the particulars of an historical event accurately and without bias. Situated within these theoretical shifts, the post-1960s novel functioned to redress history’s grand narratives. For example, according to Teresa Gibert’s “‘Ghost Stories:’ Fictions of History and Myth,” the 1960s represented a cultural awakening in both Canada and the United States, where each country’s “collective memory was questioned, cultural icons were dismantled, and unified visions of history and their mythology were contested” (481). It was at this time that “writers began . . . view[ing] their country critically rather than nostalgically” (481). Just as some post-1960s curators more publicly use their work for subverting master narratives, creative writers at that time also problematized and critically revisited events and histories in their

writing.[12] I situate this dissertation within the realm of post-1960s novels that critically examine history's inconsistencies and falsehoods and position the character-as-curator within texts dealing with historical artifacts. I furthermore wish to explore how reading these texts through the lens of the character-as-curator and museum studies can provide theorists a different method for representing history in novels.

Museums and contemporary novels dealing with past events have a lot in common: they are similarly mediated spaces that enable audience engagement and participation. Through their interactive forms of meaning-making, both novels and museums shape, generate, or potentially limit an individual's understanding of forwarded messages. Vivian Nun Halloran, in *Exhibiting Slavery: The Caribbean Postmodern Novel as Museum,* explains that it is difficult to "demarcate the boundaries between the fields of literary, cultural, and museum studies. Within the overlaps between these disciplines, Halloran argues that in order "to meet their dual goals, postmodern novels and museums resort to interdisciplinary displays of historical facts and events" (13). According to Halloran, museum spaces and contemporary novels serve similar interdisciplinary and corrective functions because they reject all-encompassing grand narratives, leaving it up to readers to make sense of the ideas, stories, and histories put forth. For example, in constructing museum displays and offering ways to "read" exhibits, curators make careful selections with their interpretive frameworks, leaving much open to museumgoers. Museumgoers are thus granted a certain level of agency in how they make their way through exhibits and interpret artifacts. As such, Halloran sees museums—like contemporary postmodern novels—as spaces where audiences are encouraged to participate in meaning-making. Museums are "provocative

[12] For more on literary responses to postmodernism, see Hutcheon's *A Poetics of Postmodernism*; Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction*; Linda M. Shires's and Steven Cohan's *Telling Stories: A Theoretical Analysis of Narrative Fiction*; and Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*.

and suggestive" (Halloran 15), yet do not offer finality to the objects on display. The open-endedness of museums (and novels) echoes Janet Marstine's claim in *New Museum Theory* that the contemporary museum "is not . . . monolithic; it embraces many viewpoints" (5). Like Halloran's and Marstine's museum curators, I maintain that within postmodern and contemporary novels dealing with history, the character-as-curator is charged with a similar role: they collect, position, mediate, and display artifacts in narrative in order to undermine a single authoritative perspective.

The similarities Halloran views between postmodern novels and museums also extend to how writers position and explain artifacts for readers. In these texts, writers use museological and literary display techniques (such as e*kphrasis* and synecdoche) to mimic viewers' participatory experiences in museums. By utilizing literary devices to isolate objects and create exhibitions in novels, readers are left actively working to make sense of the past without passively accepting the artifacts or stories. As Halloran writes, "museums turn to curatorial explanations accompanying the objects on display, such as dioramas, works of visual art, [or] audio recordings . . . whereas novels showcase their chosen 'artifacts' within their plotlines and include in-text debates about an object's provenance, stylistic features, or aesthetic value" (5). Within both postmodern novels and museum displays, artifacts are given significance for readers who ultimately challenge and grant meaning to those objects. Like the museum curator, the character-as-curator is conscious of the artifacts at hand as well as the opportunities they offer for recasting silent and absent historical accounts. Instead of forwarding a singular account of an event that only the curator or writer can understand, artifacts are presented using different museological techniques and readers are involved in making sense of them.

The shifts in audience involvement and participation connect museums and novels. Active reader (and museumgoer) involvement is essential for making connections across texts. For example, Stephen E. Weil, investigating the influence of postmodern novels on museum theory and curatorial practices, explains:

> Also influencing how the museum and the public interact, or at least on how they may be perceived to interact, is an idea implicit in postmodernism. It is the proposition that no text is completed except through the act of "reading" it, and that every text, accordingly, has as many versions—all equally correct—as it has readers. Translated into museum terms, that would suggest that the objects displayed in the museum do not have any fixed or inherent meaning but that "meaning making," or the process by which those objects acquire meaning for individual members of the public, will in each case involve the specific memories, expertise, viewpoint, assumptions and connections that the particular individual brings. (44-45)

Depending on readers' or museumgoers' experiences, their engagement with and interpretation of objects or stories vary. Similar to novels, museums and curatorial displays feature a number of conflicting perspectives that do not come to a resolution, instead leaving the debate open to engage the audience in evaluating the presented arguments. In these instances, active participation is key in the meaning-making process. Within the novels I examine, characters investigate past events that have been stored and safeguarded within different archival spaces (such as a storage room, *Wunderkammer*, and *ana*) and are characterized by specific artifacts (such as texts, documents, maps, letters, archaeological remains, photographs, films, etc.). The archives in these novels are derived from an accumulation of conflicting and inconclusive artifactual fragments that require readers to acquire meaning.

While there are many postmodern and post-1960s novels that deal with historical revisions, not all post-1960s contemporary novels feature a character-as-curator. There are certain characteristics that novels featuring characters-as-curators possess. Novels featuring a character-as-curator all involve characters that work through ambiguous historical archives. Each archive contains artifacts that are put on display and these artifacts problematize the past, calling readers to question the inherent problems with history writing. How the character-as-curator displays items enables historical re-readings that challenge dominant historical accounts. Within these novels, the character-as-curator is conscious of the fact that he or she is performing a kind of future work for someone else; that is, the collection and display is meant to illuminate a history (familial, public, or private) and is not solely for the character-as-curator. By emphasizing open-endedness in their display and arrangement, the character-as-curator creates a separate, more comprehensible archive, from the voluminous and expansive historical record.

Ultimately, the character-as-curator functions to create an open-endedness or indeterminacy with the histories and artifacts they are presenting, asking readers to make connections themselves. Halloran outlines, these kinds of novels, like museum exhibitions, "do not provide historical or narrative closure" for readers; rather, they "encourage them to investigate the theme further on their own" (15). The character-as-curator becomes an intermediary between readers and the past without singling out an all-encompassing reading of the artifacts or history. The character-as-curator thus provides readers with an open-ended account of history, allowing for multiple voices that challenge grand narratives. What I will further address in *The Plot and the Archive*—and is implied by this Introduction's epigraph (quoted from MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*)—is that I am interested in how fiction can flesh out elements of empiricism within histories that a simple reading of the event does not reveal.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter Two: "I wanna die just like JFK / I wanna die in the USA:" Curating 'Official' Histories in Don DeLillo's Libra

Chapter two introduces the character-as-curator and problematizes representations of history in texts containing an overabundance of information. An excess of information is an issue when the manner in which the data collected is done with haste and without careful precision, resulting in a conflicting and inaccurate archive. To study how novels account for too much information, I draw on Don DeLillo's *Libra*, which is "a novel that refuses to see the historical record as a fixed or stable entity but instead as the product of interpretation" (G. Thomas 107). In *Libra*, Nicholas Branch, the text's character-as-curator, is unable to compose a conclusive account of John F. Kennedy's Assassination. The voluminous and expansive archive he is working through—stemming from the twenty-six volumes of testimony located in the *Warren Commission Report*—includes a bounty of information, significant or otherwise, linked to the assassination. In DeLillo's fictitious world, the CIA leans on Branch to harmonize the historical record. He does so by displaying and mediating items in his fictitious museum space (i.e., the book-filled, private study located off the side of his house), describing each one to readers with hopes of revealing the alternate stories-within-stories embedded within this collection of objects. Chapter two thus examines how Branch and other secondary curators make sense of the information at hand and utilize *ekphrasis* to create exhibition spaces within novels. Branch uses *ekphrasis* to describe each item, ultimately granting readers agency to examine the faultiness and insufficiency of the larger historical record. Just like within museum exhibits, readers are given a certain level of freedom to make their own decisions about the items on display, as well as the inadequacy of the record Branch is working through.

As a novel dealing with history, *Libra* attempts to challenge the ideology of empiricism by using empirical historical methods (e.g., reconstructionist and constructionist). The novel problematizes historians' reliance on empirical methodologies for constructing history when there is too much information. The issues that arise and prevent Branch from constructing his account are a result of the empirical data itself. There is simply too much information for Branch to work through (much of it irrelevant) and, as such, the fragmentary artifacts function only to hinder Branch as someone charged with re-constructing that history. However, as a character-as-curator, Branch is able to display the data for readers and ultimately highlight how the artifacts themselves require a mediator to make sense of them.

Chapter two provides an introduction to the character-as-curator within spaces of abundance. It is within *Libra* that Branch curates the items surrounding Kennedy's assassination into a separate archive, one that raises numerous questions about the constructedness of the original account (e.g., errors, omissions, etc.) forwarded to the public as *truth*. While DeLillo does not reproduce artifacts on *Libra*'s pages, Branch himself leans on a number of curatorial techniques to aid him in fulfilling his responsibility to the CIA. Branch relies on selection, arrangement, framing, and open-endedness. Through the use of *ekphrasis*, *Libra* becomes a participatory space that grants readers agency in making sense of the past. For example, readers can cross-reference their reading with the publicly available *Warren Commission Report* (Government). Branch, in this sense, acts as the traditional curator who becomes a bridge between the objects and the broader public reading the text. Chapter two introduces and illustrates how the character-as-curator's use of curatorial techniques offers readers a roadmap for understanding texts that contain multiple readings of an historical event.

Chapter Three: "Ways to blaze your brain and train ya:" Curating Memory, Loss, and Familial History in Junot Diaz's The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

Chapter three focuses on representations of history when the character-as-curator is limited by a fragmented historical record. In novels where the historical record is limited by omissions, future generations are challenged by how to best preserve and maintain familial pasts and memories. Because of Rafael Trujillo's totalitarian regime, few individual artifacts are present, and collective memories are sparse in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao*. In this context, the character-as-curator aims to dismantle and expose empirical (i.e., propagandist) models for creating history. Yunior, as the text's character-as-curator, is left with personal testimonies and various family mementos that he uses to construct a counter-history against that of the Trujillato. Using *Oscar Wao* as a focal point, Chapter three raises questions about how to use personal artifacts, family mementos, and memories to challenge the dominant (and totalitarian), official accounts of the past. To further explore the function of memory and situate how personal archives can be used to combat totalitarian histories, I extend Pierre Nora's use of *lieux de mémoire* to sites of memory created within novelistic spaces. These textual sites of memory are significant, since they offer places for characters—such as those found in Diaz's text—to begin reconciling their past when physical locations are unavailable.

Building on the character-as-curator's use of *ekphrasis* as a means of mediating archival fragments in Chapter two, Chapter three shows how the character-as-curator uses synecdoche and the pedagogical method of "show-and-tell" within a personal *Wunderkammer* to display significant artifacts and aid future generations tasked with maintaining family legacies. The displayed items in Yunior's *Wunderkammer* function synecdochically as a *lieu de mémoire* in narrative, where their parts-to-whole relationship enables the character-as-curator to work

retroactively, using the available archival fragments to piece together a history that aims to recover fractured and subjugated pasts. In doing so, Yunior isolates artifacts that were at one time suppressed or purposefully forgotten to performatively display a counter-history in narrative.

As a means of legitimizing personal history as evidence, Yunior employs show-and-tell, which operates on two levels in *Oscar Wao*. Within curatorial studies, "show and tell" is the colloquial name for the process by which a displayed artifact is equipped with visual accompaniments that explain its importance, be they in the form of signs, placards, audio/visual technology, or by a museum docent who guides visitors through the exhibition (Bennett; Martinon; Marstine). As character-as-curator, Yunior utilizes show-and-tell to disrupt the narrative frame and to draw readers' attention to errors and omissions within Trujillo's purported history. On a second level, show-and-tell in *Oscar Wao* aligns with the pedagogical act of display and description, providing readers with significant information regarding the objects displayed in Yunior's *Wunderkammer*. Yunior believes that the cure to what ails the de Leóns is embedded within Oscar's belongings (or, as the posthumous Oscar notes in a letter that his sister receives at the novel's end, it is *his* mementos that truly contains "[t]he [family's] Cosmo DNA" [Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 333]). Chapter three will thus extend the function and duty of the character-as-curator established in Chapter two, showing how texts like *Oscar Wao* use synecdoche and show-and-tell in building a textual *Wunderkammer* to combat dominant histories. Chapter three will show how Yunior collects and displays the de León's familial fragments in a personal archive to question, problematize, and understand the past.

Chapter Four: "History will have to find a different face:" Ana Historic and Curating Women's Histories in Early Vancouver

Chapter four focuses on how writers use imagination and their embodied experiences to write women's histories. Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* represents a text that attempts to make sense of a history when none is present. Whereas an overabundance of information confronts Nicholas Branch in *Libra* and a lesser amount of data meets Yunior in *Oscar Wao*, little to no evidence exists detailing Vancouver's early women's history in *Ana Historic*. The empirical accounts forwarded by individuals such as the city's first archivist, J. S. Matthews, exclude women's experiences apart from brief mentions. As such, Annie Torrent, *Ana Historic*'s character-as-curator, leans on curation to locate the disappeared by using artifactual fragments to imagine women's lacking histories.

In *Ana Historic*, fragmentary artifacts become even more significant for readers' meaning-making and are used as support for Annie's counter-archive. To give significance to the fragmentary artifacts, they are isolated and positioned on *Ana Historic*'s pages as a series of quotes. Annie's pastiche method of bringing these elements together (into an *ana*) relies on her affective experiences and embodied subjectivity. For Annie, affective history means having a material reaction to the references she locates within the historical archive; she connects with these feminine figures on an emotive level and imagines a history for them as a result. Whereas Branch is unable to achieve a grand historical account, Yunior and Annie use techniques such as show-and-tell and affective histories as they piece together fragmentary artifacts. Curation plays an even greater role in these texts because of how those artifacts are displayed or represented on the texts' pages. Marlatt's novel is thus significant to *The Plot and the Archive* because it begins

answering questions about how histories are represented for groups of individuals who were never accounted for in the historical record.

Within *Ana Historic*, Annie is confronted with the problem of creating an archive that more accurately represents women's role in Vancouver's history, when none exist. The challenges Annie faces are those that many curators, novelists, and historians alike encounter when history's subject is someone other than a white male. Indeed, *Ana Historic* chronicles "the absence of women in the records of the building of the city of Vancouver" (Vautier 19) through an examination of numerous source materials (including documents, artifacts, newspapers, and literature and historical texts). Although Annie has different source materials at her disposal, women's roles within those texts are minimal, and she is left coupling anecdotal information with her imagination to try and come to a greater understanding of what women's lives may have been like.

The technique that Annie uses to piece together her history is one I call "displayed archaeology," whereby the text's character-as-curator present facsimiles of archival materials on the written page. In *Ana Historic*, anecdotal sources originally appearing in Ralph Andrews's *Glory Days of Logging*, M. Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*, and Alan Morley's *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis* (among others) are represented on the page as they are reminiscent of an *ana*. These archival fragments are brought together and visually plotted within the narrative to create a form of literary display that shares the museum's preservation and recovery functions. Readers are required to engage the plotted source material actively to participate, co-create in the meaning-making process.

Through an analysis of *Ana Historic*, Chapter four explores the significance of women's self-representations, arguing for the importance of imagined and re-enacted historical

constructions for understanding their pasts. My theorization of displayed archaeology represents a progression of how documents and artifacts can be plotted on a text's pages. Whereas DeLillo's and Diaz's texts mediated their archival evidence to readers through *ekphrasis*, synecdoche, and show-and-tell, Marlatt's text visually recreates historical traces on the page, thereby transforming the novel into a literary museum exhibition. This form of displayed archaeology challenges readers' traditional, typically passive, manner of reading, forcing them to actively analyze the evidence on display. The end result of Annie's displayed archaeological style mobilizes women's anecdotal and fragmentary histories from the private or otherwise absent arena to the public. In doing so, Chapter four shows how *Ana Historic* plots *the plot and the archive* on the written page.

Chapter Five: Conclusion: ". . . curiosity killed the Kerouac cat / sometimes truth is stranger than fiction:" Implications of The Plot and the Archive

In addition to highlighting the importance of rescuing alternate histories from empirical readings, my conclusion extends the relevance and use of the character-as-curator to other kinds of texts, specifically graphic novels. For example, I investigate how curation and museum studies provide a lens for reading the past that welcomes open-endedness and indeterminacy, and gives space to subjective methods of history making (like memory and imagination). By inviting multiple kinds of readings, the character-as-curator provides a language for better representation of marginalized voices. By applying museological techniques to artifacts in novels, these characters-as-curators plot alternate archives in narrative. In the conclusion, I also revisit the ways this dissertation furnishes readers with tools to read novels featuring the character-as-curator with an aim toward redressing marginalized histories. These tools, which include

mediating, showing and telling, and displayed archaeology enable readers to consult and analyze fragmentary evidence in narrative. Because of how DeLillo's, Diaz's, and Marlatt's novels utilize museological techniques, readers come away with their own conclusions and revised understandings of history.

My conclusion also demonstrates how the character-as-curator functions in multimodal works dealing with history, such as graphic novels. I pinpoint this genre specifically since overlaps exist between curating artifacts in museums and plotting images, text, and historical artifacts in graphic novels. I believe graphic novels are suitable for curatorial readings because such texts, like museum spaces, represent hyper-visual and multi-sensory experiences for readers. In graphic texts, displayed archaeology is present and is a central component of their historical explorations (such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and *Maus II* and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*). Graphic novels represent a next step for applying curation and museum studies to texts dealing with history. Finally, while much has been said about the contemporary novel's relation to historical revisionism, historiographic metafiction, and postmodernity, little exists on the role of curation in contemporary graphic novels. This dissertation's conclusion analyze the character-as-curator's potential for re-visioning multimodal historical texts and outline future projects where this role can be explored on a much larger scale.

Taken together, *The Plot and the Archive* uses three novels as case studies for introducing the character-as-curator and for applying museological techniques to address different challenges with representing history in narrative. While this dissertation centers on these texts specifically, it is my hope that the character-as-curator can be applied to other post-1960s novels dealing with the past. Within the chosen texts, I highlight specific features of the character-as-curator and explore how theorists can use them to recover and further understand alternate historical

accounts. *Libra*, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* each treat the historical record differently; each novel performs varying and distinct types of curation that yield different historical results. Through my examination of these novels, I argue that the character-as-curator, and curatorial studies, can supplement postmodern theories used to recover past voices and challenge all-encompassing narratives.

CHAPTER TWO

"I wanna die just like JFK / I wanna die in the USA:" Curating 'Official' Histories in Don DeLillo's *Libra*[1]

This is a work of imagination. While drawing from the historical record, I've made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination. Any novel about a major unresolved event would aspire to fill some blank spaces in the known record. To do this, I've altered and embellished reality, extended real people into imagined space and time, invented incidents, dialogues, and characters.
–Don DeLillo, *Libra* 457

Chapter two develops the role of the character-as-curator in novels dealing with an overabundance of historical information. For example, in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Nicholas Branch attempts to manage a plethora of *official* and government sponsored documents to understand John F. Kennedy's assassination. Branch must work against the idea that the facts he handles, like those stemming from the *Warren Commission Report* (Government), are considered final and absolute. DeLillo subverts this kind of archival immunity by tackling state-sponsorship directly and problematizing the official data. Yet, *Libra* does not simply offer a single, alternative reading of the events leading up to the Kennedy Assassination. Instead, Branch presents conflicting data in an attempt to raise questions about its legitimacy and lead readers to their own conclusions. Against the sense of finality and closure of the truth as ascertained and verified, which was implied in the label "official" in an age when trust in the government went mostly unquestioned, DeLillo, therefore, offers not more closure, which an alternative would effect, but rather more structural openness – within the novel, certainly, but that openness extends from the text to readers, from fiction into reality.

Branch's use of curatorial techniques provides readers a model for understanding texts that feature multiple readings, while simultaneously granting authors language to complete their

[1] The Jesus and Mary Chain. "Reverence." *Honey's Dead*. Blanco y Negro, 1992.

tasks. I offer the curatorial and, by extension, the character-as-curator, as a lens to read texts like *Libra*. The curatorial tools Branch employs, including selection, arrangement, framing, mediation, and open-endedness, are conveyed through the literacy device of *ekphrasis*. By employing curatorial techniques, readers are invited to participate in the text's meaning-making process. Novels like *Libra* are participatory spaces that encourage readers to meet the character-as-curator halfway in their project. Chapter two thus features a text that augments curation's application to the novel form.

The central figure of DeLillo's *Libra* is Nicholas Branch, a retired CIA analyst struggling to write a *definitive* historical account of the Kennedy Assassination. Along with Branch, the novel features two additional narratives: one about Lee Harvey Oswald's life and the other about two disgruntled former CIA operatives, Win Everett and T.J. Mackey, who plan a staged assassination of Kennedy. In *Libra*, Branch spends the novel in "the book-filled room," the room of "documents . . . of theories and dreams" (DeLillo, *Libra* 14). He has been hired on contract by the CIA to write a history of the Kennedy Assassination, though he is not the first to try and fail at the task. There are too many fine-grained details, too many coincidences, and the "facts" drip with "endless suggestiveness" (57). Branch has seen "Schlesinger, Colby, Bush, Turner, Casey and Webster" each occupy the CIA's Director's chair since starting his project (60). "[S]ix point nine seconds of heat and lights" (15), the novel's enduring reference to the fatal bullet that took President Kennedy's life, are what occupy the majority of Branch's time. Branch is trapped in what Pierre Nora calls the acceleration of history, "an increasingly rapid slippage of the present into the historical past that is gone for good" (7). Branch and his book-filled room are "growing old" and he is horrified by the weight of the paper and artifacts surrounding him (DeLillo, *Libra* 16). He has committed his retired life to understanding that fateful day in Dallas. In fifteen years

of crafting his historical account, however, Branch "hasn't written all that much. He has extensive and overlapping notes—notes in three-foot drifts, all these years of notes. But of actual finished prose, there is precious little" (59). One of the reasons for Branch's inability to write is that the material he is dealing with is "marked by ambiguity and error, by political bias" (15). There are too many inconsistencies within the historical record for Branch to work through. Because Branch struggles in writing an all-encompassing account of Kennedy's assassination, he turns to curatorial techniques to make meaning of the disorderly archive's contents. I begin with *Libra* as my first case study of the character-as-curator because, given its plot and focus, it tacitly invites the application of curatorial techniques. The text engages curation as the problematization of historical records, while offering readers a number of resources and curatorial tools to apply to both *Libra* and other instances with abundant data.

In this chapter, I examine who the character-as-curator is and what curatorial practices can lend to novels featuring an excess of historical materials. Applying curatorial techniques while interpreting these texts can offer readers increased interpretive agency due to the novel's open-endedness. Within the art world, the curator's work involves presenting artifacts to viewers for their interpretations. Differing from this role, as Terry Smith explains in a panel discussion,

> [a]rt critics, theorists and historians have immediate responses to works of art—often to artworks they are seeing in exhibitions or museum installations, that is, in already curated situations. They consider their responses, then articulate them in language that is shared with their readers, the potential viewers of the artwork, those who might attend the exhibition. Meanwhile, the work of the curator has already been done: it is mostly manifest in the exhibition itself, supplemented by written words, in wall texts, catalog statements, and related discussions. But the core work that the curator does, based on the

> research and thinking that we just heard about, is to create an exhibit. (qtd. in Scalissi 147)

In novels dealing with history, curatorial figures are the ones who create exhibitions within the narrative that readers then experience in their completed form. For example, in *Libra*, Nicholas Branch adopts the role of the curator as he creates an exhibit within the narrative using archival materials. Instead of offering a definitive conclusion about the assassination, this exhibit is meant to problematize official, government sanctioned, versions of the event.

The biggest problem for curatorial figures in novels like *Libra* (or, in texts by Rudy Wiebe, Joy Kogawa, or Michael Ondaatje) is that the characters-as-curators who create the exhibits are left making sense of an overabundance of historical materials. For example, Wiebe's unnamed narrator investigates numerous so-called facts relating to the death of Almighty Voice, a Cree Indian shot down by the RCMP for his purported stealing of a stray cow in "Where is the Voice Coming From?;" Aunt Emily collects, orders, and challenges government *facts* concerning the internment of Japanese-Canadians post-World War II in Kogawa's *Obasan*; and Anil Tissera desires to solve the death of a skeleton (referred to only as Sailor in the novel) and its connection with the Sri Lankan government in Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*. While open-endedness and indeterminacy exist in countless postmodern novels (where the text relies on readers' interpretations beyond the narrative), the difference with the character-as-curator and the curatorial in texts such as *Libra*, is that readers are active in analyzing, investigating, and solving the archival enigma contained within texts (and dealing with historical occurrences and the artifacts that remain).

Where the curator's project differs from that of the historian is in the coherence of the account that is produced. As Alun Munslow writes in *A History of History*, the historian's

practice of constructing coherence involves an "attempt to retell the *most likely* narrative of the past" (1, emphasis added). According to Munslow, within this retelling, historians are often under the assumption "that (a) there is either 'the' or, at worse, 'a most likely' narrative in the past, and (b) it is capable of being told through its given history—in other words for what it was" (*A History* 1-2). The problem with favoring a "most likely" narrative is that it results in forwarding only certain accounts of the past. By avoiding a singular narrative, curation instead presents multiple readings of an event. Because novels like *Libra* resist singular readings, curatorial techniques can provide theorists a language to account for this indeterminacy and open-endedness.

Through my examination of *Libra*, Chapter two will accomplish three primary goals. First, to situate my reading of DeLillo's text, I discuss how the role of historical understanding is complicated by the abundant and conflicting types of data Branch encounters. In doing so, I explore how historiographic metafiction creates a space for these inconsistencies to be problematized and made apparent within literature. I utilize Branch's archive as an example of how historical understanding can be difficult to achieve when scientific and ancillary evidence form the basis of the historical record. Unlike absolute historical judgements, historiographic metafictions perform a self-reflexive putting together of the historical record. The exhibitions that characters-as-curators create in these novels reveal the inconsistencies of differing accounts and place onus on readers to come to their own understanding of historical events.

My second goal in this chapter is to outline the role of the character-as-curator and discuss the potential of curatorial figures in texts dealing with an abundance of historical materials. By overviewing the curatorial techniques that Branch and secondary curators (like Everett and Mackey) utilize in *Libra*, I argue that the character-as-curator can grant readers

agency in their understandings of the past. In *Libra*, the novel's character-as-curator, "does justice to historical likelihood" (DeCurtis 58). Branch curates all the historical evidence at hand and puts it on display in the "book-filled room." Numerous post-1960s novels feature characters-as-curators who aim to uncover alternate historical truths. The characters in these texts transform the world of the novel into exhibition spaces where items are collected, organized, investigated, and mediated to readers, resulting in their active engagement with the text. Such curatorial excursions produce texts characterized by metafictive stories-within-stories, radical narrative shifts in time and space, historical rewritings and recoveries, and dialogical impulses resulting from the curated artifacts and historical accounts. The histories portrayed in these texts do not agree, nor do they come to a resolution; rather, they invite multiple readings, leaving readers to evaluate the perspectives offered. In such texts, dominant worldviews are resisted in favor of provisional and relative histories.

The final goal for this chapter is to discuss how the museum space functions on the written page. Through *ekphrasis*, characters-as-curators provide readers with descriptions of certain documents, objects, artifacts, etc., on the pages of the text. It is these descriptions that form the basis of the exhibit within novels. These descriptions then "transform words into images" and cause the reader's "imagination [to become] fully employed. . . [and] the world of the novel [comes] into [. . .] complete existence" (Xing 199). By textually placing objects on display for readers, characters-as-curators leave it to readers to decide which views to adopt or accept. The museological qualities of the postmodern novels I examine thus provide characters-as-curators exhibition spaces to organize, display, and present historical artifacts to readers. Branch juxtaposes the artifacts in the book-filled room to reveal the complexities in creating a singular account from an overabundance of conflicting data. By displaying the contradictions

within the historical record, Branch curates a separate archive featuring alternate opportunities for understanding the events preceding Kennedy's assassination.

Because curation is open-ended, it can lead readers to reconsider their understanding of an historical event, thus expanding their potential for meaning-making. Within historical thinking, the historian utilizes "a perceptual (empirical), analytical (inferring [the] most probable meaning), and representationalist ([presented] [with]in a text) route" for uncovering pieces of the past (Munslow, *A History* 2). The historian's understanding stems from perceptual models they use to analyze the historical data at hand, yielding *objective* discoveries of what took place in the past. Munslow's empirical-analytical-representationalist model for constructing history positions history writing as "an emotional, moral, political, economic, [and] cultural" practice (2). Within this model, there are numerous socio-political factors that limit, constrain, and influence the historian's decision-making process. With regards to internal pressures, the historian's subjectivity can impact his/her reading of the artifactual evidence (McCullagh 39). As C. Behan McCullagh explains, "although historians can infer particular facts about the past from the evidence available to them, the way they give meaning to those facts by presenting relations between them is a function of their own creative imagination" (39).

Acknowledging the influence of internal and external factors towards meaning-making, I position curation as a model that allows for these influences while granting readers agency in their understanding of an event. The character-as-curator's method of presentation limits their tendency towards historicizing and supplies it instead to the readers, thereby granting the latter more agency in their efforts to contour an understanding of an historical event. While this presentation of artifacts can potentially limit meaning-making in certain ways (as readers are still relying on the character-as-curator's selection of specific documents), displaying the available

artifacts leads *Libra's* readers to the water but does not force them to drink. Using *Libra* as an example of curation in novels, I establish a definition of who and what the character-as-curator is and show how these tendencies are ultimately realized through the literary device of *ekphrasis*.

Historical Re-Writings and Historiographic Metafiction

In *Libra*, Branch handles artifacts and documents hoping that these items will reveal some greater truth about the Kennedy Assassination. This reconstructionist view of history is problematic because "the true intentions and voices" of the past are not revealed to the historian by simply conducting a study of primary sources (Munslow, *Routledge* 195). Within history writing, reconstructionist historians are firm in their stance that artifacts and documents contain inherent meanings that are exposed to the historian (195). Leopold von Ranke argues that this kind of history "wants only to show what actually happened (*Wie es eigentlich gewesen*)" (57). According to von Ranke, the facts can expose "the unity and progress of events," shaping how history is formed (56). Challenging this linear relationship between artifact and historical understanding is the overwhelming amount of data situated within Branch's historical record. The data Branch encounters moves beyond the textual as he is asked to bring scientific evidence as well as mundane personal artifacts and objects into his analysis. Because the past fails to reveal itself through the documents and artifacts alone, Branch becomes stuck sorting and categorizing a range of physical and scientific artifacts with the hopes that these will lead him to a deeper, more lucid understanding.

Where Branch finds himself the most challenged is in telling a story, or making a coherent narrative of the information from within the archive. In "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," Louis O. Mink discusses the function of narrativity and storytelling as

modes of understanding in philosophy and history. As Mink explains, "Memory, imagination, and conceptualization all serve this function, whatever else they do: they are ways of grasping together in a single mental act things which are not experienced together, or even capable of being so experienced, because they are separated by time, space, or logical kind. And the ability to do this is a necessary (although not a sufficient) condition of *understanding*" ("History" 547). For Branch, the mixture of textual, physical, and circumstantial data prevents him from forming a thorough understanding of the Kennedy Assassination as a whole. Because novels like *Libra* reject simplistic readings, theorists need methods to account for their complexity. As such, applying curatorial techniques can provide theorists a different language for how artifacts are described, presented, and displayed within literature.

For historians working through an abundance of historical data, the problems of selection are made apparent by the volume and complexity of the data at hand. The challenge is not just in choosing the necessary artifacts, but also of logically organizing, judging, and narrating their significance to readers. Or, as Mink argues in "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding:"

> . . . the historian has a peculiar problem of organizing (not merely 'selecting,' as is commonly said) what he has to tell, and not merely because he cannot reproduce exactly in the order of narrative the sequences and simultaneities of the events described. His problem becomes intelligible, however, if it is seen as an attempt to communicate his experience of seeing-things-together in the necessarily narrative style of one-thing-after-another. (44)

Because the historian's goal is to "'tell what he has learned,' not what he has demonstrated" (Mink, "Autonomy" 45), his or her task involves making meaning of isolated events into a comprehensible whole. As Branch's quest illustrates, having access to all the data does not make

the task of selecting and organizing that data into a "one-thing-after-another" narrative any easier. Even with the scientific evidence available to him, Branch is unable to recreate the sequence of events in Kennedy's assassination and finds it difficult to isolate the artifacts that will lead him to a greater understanding of it. Along with organizing this data into a narrative form, the historian is also tasked with making judgements about "complex events in terms of the interrelationship of their constituent events. . . . Even supposing that all of the facts of the case are established, there is still the problem of comprehending them in an act of judgment which manages to hold them together rather than reviewing them *seriatim*" (Mink, "Autonomy" 38). For Branch, the complexity and parts involved in understanding these other events impedes his ability to "hold them together."

Further complicating Branch's task is that he never stops receiving data—more and more conflicting artifactual items arrive throughout the text. Branch is thus unable to decipher the factual data from the fictitious. Because new data is brought into the record, as Leonard Wilcox writes, "[o]ne of the chief difficulties Branch faces is that his study of the evidence surrounding the assassination fails to converge on some transcendental signified or to provide some stable meaning to historical events" (340). While the event itself is complete, the evidence around the event continues to pour in. Branch is quick to lament that "the data keeps coming . . . new lives enter the record all the time. The past is changing as [I] write" (DeLillo, *Libra* 301). While Branch uses the *Warren Commission Report* as the basis of his analysis, the emergence of more information limits the authority that document holds. Although the "most definitive account of the [Kennedy] assassination is [the *Report*]," Branch still "finds it difficult to differentiate [it] from fiction" (Wilcox 341). Its layers of complexity and inconsistencies provoke Branch to refer to the report as the "megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City

and lived to be a hundred" (DeLillo, *Libra* 181). Branch must go beyond the Warren Commission's findings, "follow[ing] the bullet trajectories backwards to the lives that occupy the shadows" (15), to make sense of the multiple narratives surrounding the assassination.

The artifactual indeterminacy Branch encounters is a result of the Central Intelligence Agency's actual treatment of the Kennedy historical record which, as Shannon Herbert writes, "produced an archiving imperative that treat[ed] the collection of facts as a reflexive response to an event without establishing a proper method for processing [those] facts" ("Playing" 290). The CIA operates as an omniscient organization and, as a result, must gather *all* the available information relating to a specific event. Because everything is suspect, any minute trace of data—regardless of how miniscule or irrelevant it may seem—matters and must be added to the existing collection of evidence. As noted in *Libra*, the agency possesses "systems [that] collect and process . . . [a]ll the secret knowledge in the world" (DeLillo, *Libra* 77). The individuals responsible for originally piecing together the Kennedy archive carried this order out to its highest degree (i.e., each piece of evidence stumbled upon was collated, quantified, organized and inserted in the master index). The CIA and *Warren Commission Report* are at least partially responsible for the archival issues Branch encounters.

Beyond its limitations for Branch in *Libra*, The *Warren Commission Report* possesses several flaws and omissions, which affect its usefulness for someone like Branch. For example, Earl Warren withheld information from both the Commission and the public because he believed it to be too salacious; the FBI and CIA intentionally deceived the Commission by minimizing their previous knowledge of Lee Harvey Oswald; the report presented no conclusive explanation of Oswald's motive; and, finally, the public's faith in the report waned after these myriad issues

were brought to light.[2] In "Narrating from the Archive: Novels, Records, and Bureaucrats in the Modern Age," Marco Codebò explores the challenges the Commission faced in creating the archive, noting that the totalization of Kennedy's historical record is symptomatic of intel agencies' desire to master an event. As Codebò writes: "[t]he CIA [runs] a total archive that adheres to two principles: (1) it aims at creating records about any event that might fall under the agency's watch; (2) it considers that even the most trivial record deserves a place on its shelves" (147). Indeed, no formal methods existed for assessing the artifacts' meaning, or for properly organizing and storing them (as the agency's goal was to accumulate as many sources as possible in an effort to further their omniscience). Rather than attempting to make sense of these items, Branch lists *all* these historical materials, relying on readers to make *Libra* "experiential and participatory" (Martinon 2). In doing so, Branch creates an archival space where these sources can be gazed upon and studied; "a refuge for reader's left stranded by the postmodern archive's failures to provide its users with conclusive documentation about . . . [the] event" (Codebò 142).

Due to these initial problems with the *Report* and after the release of the Zapruder film, a second government investigation was launched. The United States House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), established in 1976, was the next government appointed committee to investigate JFK's assassination. The HSCA moved away from the testimonies and exhibits that formed the basis of the *Warren Commission Report* to instead privilege more sophisticated scientific and technological analyses. Such scientific analyses included things like "ballistic analysis" to help reveal the placement of the gunman ("Ballistic Evidence"); "autop[sies] . . . handwriting, fingerprint[s], [. . .] and acoustical analysis" to confirm the credibility of JFK's autopsy photos (Herbert, *Aesthetics* 56); as well as the creation

[2] See Bugliosi's and Posner's work for more information on the problems with the Warren Commission's findings and the myriad conspiracies that followed.

of a "Forensic Pathology Panel" consisting of nine doctors who analyzed and authenticated the *Warren Commission Report*'s medical results (National Archives). Along with highlighting the numerous oversights committed by the Warren Commission and relying on more scientific methods of analysis, the HSCA "did not preclude the possibility of two gunmen firing at the President," thus reaching a far different conclusion than that of the *Warren Commission Report* (National Archives). By the time DeLillo began writing *Libra*, ". . . three government commissions had continued the work of the Warren Commission with access to additional documentary material and novel forms of scientific and technological analysis. Each failed to produce a single, definitive explanation of the assassination" (Herbert, *Aesthetics* 41). The institution of other government commissions—and the whirlwind scientific experiments that followed—marked the precise moment that the archive expanded to its present-day incommensurable state (as depicted in *Libra*).

In the end, the HSCA relied on scientific and empirical methods they believed could uncover and explain the details leading up to Kennedy's assassination. The belief was that scientific experimentation could achieve a level of historical authenticity that the other government appointed commissions failed to produce. Yet, rather than determining the most likely narrative of what transpired based on the evidence at hand, these commissions created numerous oversights and errors that added to the pre-existing issues with the historical record. Herbert, writing in her dissertation, *The Aesthetics of Information*, elaborates on both the ascendency of and the reliance on these experts to make sense of the assassination. She argues that due to the constitution of the HSCA, the Kennedy Assassination became a "repeatable experiment" where the scientific information extracted from such experiments was deemed "the most reliable information available" (60). Within this context, new evidence was generated by

recreating and weighing the validity of various scenarios. All of this material further obscures the record and anyone's interpretation of it. Nicholas Branch becomes "anyone's" representative distilled in concentrated form.

Where the scientific project (of the HSCA, for example) differs from the historian's is in the aims of its conclusions, the goals of understanding, and the methods of selection and organization. According to Mink,

> . . . the proto-science view provides an admirably clear conceptual map, in which the concept of understanding is identified with the concept of explanation, and the concept of explanation is identified, so far as its formal properties are concerned, with the concept of prediction, through a logical model which specifies the relation of both to other concepts such as 'law,' 'deductibility,' etc. ("Autonomy" 38)

Whereas historians are concerned with re-experiencing particular events, scientists are instead focused on an event's generalizability and predictability within established laws. Branch is caught between the historian's methods of coming to a new understanding of the event and the scientific "assumption that to understand an event is equivalent to seeing it as an instance of a law" (Mink, "Autonomy" 37). Branch does not achieve the understanding he seeks through a scientific replication of the Kennedy Assassination. Branch is neither historian (by training) nor scientist. Instead, he is left to mediate the artifacts left behind by these groups.

Part of the problem with the Kennedy archive Branch is working through is that it is not possible to double check the evidence against the figures within it. Among the data is what Branch crassly refers to as a "roster of the dead:" all the individuals linked to the assassination plot that are "conveniently and suggestively dead" (DeLillo, *Libra* 16). While Branch is quick to point out that the HSCA concluded in 1979 that there was nothing abnormal about the many

deaths of those involved in the Kennedy case (he later accepts this decision as "actuarial fact" [57]), there is still "endless suggestiveness . . . [t]here is the language of the manner of death" present (57). Because of the strange circumstances surrounding their deaths, Branch calls into question the definitiveness of what transpired. When listed as a whole, the gruesome details of these deaths become even more suspect:

> . . . Shot in the back of the head. Died of cut throat. Shot in police station. Shot in motel. Shot by husband after one month marriage. Found hanging from toreador pants in jail cell. Killed by karate chop. . . . There is enough mystery in the facts as we know them, enough of conspiracy, coincidence, loose ends, dead ends, multiple interpretations. . . . Still, the cases do resonate, don't they? Mostly anonymous dead. Exotic dancers, taxi drivers, cigarette girls, lawyers of the shopworn sort with dandruff on their lapels. (Delillo, *Libra* 57)

Through Branch, DeLillo uses the curious deaths of individuals connected with the assassination to create an open-ended and indeterminate posture within the novel. The novel is open-ended because the *facts*—as superfluous and untrustworthy as they may be—are presented to readers, who are left to draw conclusions themselves. Using the scientific artifacts Branch displays, he problematizes their deaths by revealing the odd circumstances surrounding them.

Branch's difficulty drawing conclusions from the evidence he has suggests that texts such as *Libra* do not present "a transcending of history, but a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 117-118). For Hutcheon, the central character of historiographic metafiction is aware that s/he cannot know the past with any certainty. Patricia Waugh, writing in *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, defines historiographic metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its

status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (2). For Waugh, history, like fiction, is a human construct; she believes that an historical account is no less fictitious than a historiographic metafiction dealing with the same event. As such, the subject of history is treated as the subject *in* history as it is being made, where the characters in these texts interrogate and investigate the historical record in order to reveal the problems and inconsistencies of such archives. Thomas Carmichael furthermore notes in "Lee Harvey Oswald and the Postmodern Subject: History and Intertextuality in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, *The Names*, and *Mao*," that *Libra* "participates fully" in the installation, contestation, and subversion of institutionalized histories that Hutcheon's model promotes. The novel does so "by setting a destabilizing narrative of self-consciousness against a supposedly stable history that is presented . . . in the fictional text" (Carmichael 204).

Destabilized historical narratives are presented in historiographic metafictions where the past is problematized through the leftover documents and artifacts that commemorate an event. In A *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon argues that historiographic metafiction ". . . paradoxically lay[s] claim to historical events and personages" (5). The representative existence of historical figures within *Libra* points to the historiographically metafictive qualities. As Hutcheon explains, the term describes novels that possess "a theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs [that has] made the grounds for [a] rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (5). As a postmodern critic, Hutcheon ascribes to the ideology that history is only known through language. The documents and artifacts that exist—relating to any historical event—are presented to readers in narrative and referred to as an *historical account*. *Libra* can be considered this kind of text, as it intermingles fictional characters (such as Nicholas Branch) with actual historical persons (including Oswald, Kennedy,

Ferrie, among others) in an effort to highlight the historical inaccuracies of the Kennedy Assassination as an historical event. Historiographic metafictions, such as *Libra*, are also characterized by multiple plots that shift between the past and present. On one level, Branch is working through the Kennedy archive in the here-and-now. On another level, the Mackey/Everett/Oswald secondary plots are situated in a historical past. Historiographic metafiction is thus a genre whose action is set in the past, setting or plotline is drawn from history, and characters (be they central or ancillary) are based on actual historical figures. Such narratives re-write history—or, in *Libra*, curate alternate histories—through fiction, in order to challenge historical accounts that have been accepted and forwarded as *truth* in the historical arena.

Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction calls attention to the inherent instability of historical archives and their inability to reveal the power structures and ideologies inscribed within them. By "install[ing] and [subsequently] . . . blur[ring] the line between fiction and history" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 113), historiographic metafictions achieve a level of historical re-conceptualization that oppose traditional realist novels of the mid-twentieth century. In the case of *Libra*, DeLillo inserts numerous items from the actual Kennedy archive to subvert such empirical discourses by revealing their inaccuracies and inconsistencies. Because the remains of an event (e.g., the facts or evidence) are used to give the event meaning, historiographic metafictions, at least for Hutcheon, are revealed to be purely imaginary and their meanings are "derive[d] . . . [more] from verisimilitude than from any objective truth;" this kind of history is a "linguistic construct, [one that is] highly conventionalized in [its] narrative forms" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 105). Hutcheon argues that language plays a crucial role in the construction of history. As such, history is not a truthful representation of what transpired, but a desire to *understand*

what happened, leading to a narrative construct of what *may* have transpired. The desire to understand can motivate and provide direction to the historian, whether or not understanding is ever reached.

Within historical writing—and historiographic metafiction—there is a shift away from history as an all-encompassing account of an event to instead focus more closely on the language historians employ in their accounts of the past. F. R. Ankersmit, writing in *History and Tropology: The Rise and Fall of Metaphor*, explains that "the historian is no longer required to discover and to express (general) knowledge, but to organize it. The language used by the historian is no longer seen as a passive and immutable medium but as a Proteus adapting itself to the circumstances each time an individual historian depicts or pictures part of the past" (81). Since we only know the past through language, Ankersmit's views of history as a literary enterprise emphasize historians' subjective and interpretive roles in deciding which language to use to discuss history. Because of the historian's adaptability, the act of writing history raises several issues, including "the impositional role of the historian, the nature of the social construction of reality, the character of historical explanation, the art of interpretation and the constitution of the historical imagination, [and] the relationship of form and content" (Munslow, *Routledge* 133). In this sense, the historian's subject position, their relationship to the evidence at hand, and the syntactical arrangement of their account (e.g., the relationship between form and content), are all factors that contribute to the historical product's creation.

While I acknowledge their differences, there are similarities between fiction and history-writing. For example, Mink writes, "An historical narrative does not demonstrate the necessity of events but makes them intelligible by unfolding the story which connects their significance. History does not as such differ from fiction, therefore, insofar as it essentially depends on and

develops our skills and subtlety in following stories" ("History" 44). Both history and fiction rely on the historian's or narrator's storytelling abilities. However, "History does of course differ from fiction insofar as it is obligated to rest upon evidence of the occurrence in real space and time of what it describes and insofar as it must grow out of a critical assessment of the received materials of history, including the analyses and interpretations of other historians" ("History" 544). While historians have the interpretive obligations of casting acceptable judgements on the past, they share similar linguistic and narrative imperatives with fiction.

Libra augments the issues that arise for historians who attempt to represent a historical account in a narrative form. In *Libra*, Branch initially leans on language to create his overarching history, though this method fails him and prevents him from achieving any sense of historical veracity. As Hayden White outlines in his explication of the relation between history and fiction, "the very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity" ("Value" 10). The ability to tell stories and to narrate historical occurrences is a key function of history—one that is complicated by different experiences of the same event. For White, "Narrative becomes a problem only when we wish to give real events the form of [a] story. It is because real events do not offer themselves as stories that their narrativization is so difficult" ("Value" 8). Historiographic metafiction, as a postmodern phenomenon, differs from this kind of history-writing as it refuses to apply present beliefs to past events. Branch himself faces the difficulty of narrating the events of Kennedy's assassination. His inability to offer a final resolution of Kennedy's death aligns with Hutcheon's claim that historiographic metafictions "install totalizing order, only to contest it, by . . . radical provisionality, intertextuality, and, often,

fragmentation" (*Poetics* 116). The desire to locate a privileged historical center in historiographic metafictions is always on shifting ground; the characters of these texts are purposefully unable to locate or "know the past with any certainty" (*Poetics* 117). The aim of texts like *Libra* is to undermine the authority of empirical sources and their historical explanations.

Just as Hutcheon's methodology encourages the questioning of history, Branch challenges the reconstructionist historian's conventional approach to history-making. As Wilcox argues, Branch is unlike the "normal historian" (340), as he is "grappl[ing] with a . . . world characterized by a profusion of prior representations that circulate in the culture and constitute the historical subject" (344). For Branch, these "prior representations" are a result of the influx of historical data that were collected, measured, quantified, and added to an already existing archive by the Warren Commission and later the HSCA and Rockefeller Commission. Branch is unable to lean on empirical models for re-constructing history, since these models necessitate a clear relation between artifactual sources and historical events (as they initially transpired). Furthering the divide between Branch and reconstructionist historians is his inability to privilege one artifact over another, instead displaying all the artifacts at his disposal, putting the onus of interpretation on *Libra*'s readers. Rather than forcing an explication of Kennedy's assassination, Branch turns to curatorial techniques, which ultimately allow readers to make conclusions on their own. As character-as-curator within *Libra,* Branch makes apparent the faultiness of the historical record. Through Branch's curatorial work, *Libra* highlights the inconsistencies forwarded by certain government-appointed commissions responsible for producing the problematic archive.

Open-Ended Interpretations and Levels of Curation in *Libra*

Certain museological and curatorial techniques are contained in novels featuring characters-as-curators. Key to their projects are promoting open-endedness and multiple readings of an event, maintaining transparency in selection methodologies, and establishing connections between artifacts through their selection and arrangement. For curators, developing relationships between objects is necessary for establishing contextual significance within an exhibit. For example, in a panel discussion, Cynthia Morton explains how "figur[ing] out relationships" between objects historically and in their current context is key to her role as Associate Curator at the Carnegie Museum of Natural History (qtd. in Scalissi 146). These relationships are then communicated to a broader public who give them meaning in the present. To this conversation, Smith adds, "To exhibit something is to hold it out, as evidence, for inspection, instruction, education, or entertainment" (147). The tasks of exhibition, audience inspection, and instruction are present in novels like *Libra,* where curatorial figures in the text use their displays to problematize historical events.

As Branch attempts to make meaning of Kennedy's archive, he positions and displays the artifacts for *Libra*'s readers to consume. According to DeLillo, "the novel [is] a 'refuge' for the facts, a space where they can be collected and displayed but not interpreted" (qtd. in Herbert, "Playing" 291). As a space where the artifacts are "not interpreted," no forced singularity or forced ideological reading of the evidence takes place. From the readers' standpoint, an act of interpretation does take place, as one is charged with reading meaning into the items contained within the text. The novel, like the contemporary museum space is "performative, open-ended . . . [and] politically transformative" (Martinon 3). By bridging the temporal gap between past and

present, *Libra*, like the curatorial, "puts forward a constellation of meaning" that relies on the viewer or audience to make sense of the materials on display (Martinon 2).

While Branch "wants a thing to be what it is" (DeLillo, *Libra* 379), meaning that the artifacts will clearly speak for themselves, such convenient resolutions are simply unattainable. It is by curating the artifacts within *Libra* that Branch makes them visible and gives them meaning. Whereas Branch's historical project may be unsuccessful, his curation of artifacts within the archive leads readers to a greater understanding of the assassination, although it may not be *the* understanding Branch desires. According to Boris Groys, "[s]ince curatorial practice can never entirely conceal itself, the main objective of curating must be to visualize itself, by making its practice explicitly visible. The will to visualization is in fact what constitutes and drives art. Since it takes place within the context of art, curatorial practice cannot elude the logic of visibility" (45). Because of an exhibit's transparency, viewers can see the curator's selection process in creating their narratives. As such, it is through the larger narrative created within an exhibition space that the artifacts gather their meaning. The decontextualized sock or bullet fragment Branch has by itself lacks meaning. However, when placed in the context of the book-filled room, these independent objects suggest something completely different. As Groys explains, "the curating of an artwork signifies its return to history, the transformation of the autonomous artwork back into an illustration—an illustration whose value is not contained within itself but is extrinsic, attached to it by a historical narrative" (46).

Because Branch is unable to come to a complete understanding of Kennedy's assassination, he utilizes curatorial techniques, including organizing, creating relationships, and displaying artifacts within an exhibition space (in the book-filled room). According to Groys, "[t]he work of the curator consists of placing artworks [or, artifacts] in the exhibition space"

(43). The curator's positioning of the artifacts gives them meaning within a particular historical or contextual frame. Beyond placing the artwork within an exhibition space, "[t]he process of curating cures the image's powerlessness, its incapacity to present itself. The artwork needs external help, it needs an exhibition and curator to become visible" (Groys 45). In novels dealing with history, the character-as-curator is the one who makes the artifacts visible and, through curatorial techniques, gives them meaning. By displaying the artifacts and highlighting their inconsistencies, Branch transfers the interpretive framework to readers, who are then left to make sense of the artifacts for themselves. Instead of remaining an overwhelming collection of unmediated artifacts, Branch curates the data to problematize the Kennedy archive.

As the person creating the archive, Branch becomes the text's central curator. Because there is no definite conclusion offered in the novel, readers draw their interpretations from the objects Branch mediates. As Herbert explains, "DeLillo's novel does not seek the truth about who killed Kennedy or why, but rather performs the forensic evidence" ("Playing" 291). *Libra* is thus a "performative space" that respects "the innocence of facts and [attempts] to make them meaningful" ("Playing" 291). Relying on the curatorial practices of selection and display, Branch describes and arranges the artifacts to leave their meanings open for readers. As Susan Cairns explains, the relationship between objects within a collection are what "craft an understanding of the world, its past, and present" (108). Cairns writes, "Museum collections are composed of individual objects whose meaning is constructed, at least in part, because of their relationships to other collection items. The way these relationships are exhibited and described, then, is critical to the way that meaning is constructed in the museum context" (108). As the character-as-curator, Branch organizes and presents the archival materials to readers to paint a picture of the confusion and indeterminacy around the assassination.

One of the curator's responsibilities is to take distinct artifacts, provide context for them, and give them meaning within exhibition spaces. Describing the contemporary curator's function across different kinds of institutions, Erin Peters writes:

> In looking for commonalities across curators of contemporary art, science, digital data, and ancient material culture from the information here, perhaps it can be said a curator generally uses research, knowledge, and opinion to select and collect, and combine elements (objects and ideas) into a different thing than the thing was alone before being collected and combined (in a museum collection, an exhibition, a research publication). In this vein, and in simpler terms, a curator selects a thing as important through research and expertise, cares for and preserves it, and makes it available and viewable. (124)

Inherent in this definition is the idea of combining and presenting elements so they become a new whole. Novels that utilize curatorial techniques contain characters who employ selection and preservation practices. These characters expose the fallibility of history by granting readers interpretive agency. For example, the way Branch positions artifacts in the book-filled-room is meant to lead readers to a new understanding without prescribing what that understanding should be. The increased agency granted to readers is an important component of their meaning-making within contemporary museum scholarship (and novels containing characters-as-curators). As Peters argues, ". . . if we go beyond seeing audience participation in museums as solely something to seek, entice, and therefore control, and also take participation as a given through reception, more productive practices of curator-audience co-creation could be developed" (124). Recognizing and granting agency to museumgoers can lead to more productive relationships between museums and the larger public. This same kind of receptive/productive relation building

also takes place in novels like *Libra*, where readers are equally granted agency in their interpretation of materials on display.

Along with Branch, there are subsidiary curators present within the novel who contribute to problematizing Kennedy's assassination and the archive. Everett and Mackey are two such curators who collect, organize, and combine objects and data into their plotted assassination attempt. In *Libra*, it was Everett's dismissal from the CIA for his connection with the Bay of Pigs invasion that lead to his and Mackey's plot to assassinate Kennedy. Three levels of CIA specialists termed his dismissal "motivational exhaustion" and decided it would be best for Everett to semi-retire to a teaching post at Texas Woman's University, where his job involved recruiting "likely students as junior officer trainees" (DeLillo, *Libra* 18). Along with plotting the assassination attempt, Everett desires to expose the backroom workings of the CIA. He explains how the "major subtext and moral lesson" of his plan is to reveal to the general public the "successive layers" of the CIA's plans to assassinate Castro (53). As a ground level employee who feels wrongfully dismissed, Everett wishes to expose the inner workings of the CIA, to reveal "the secrets that quivered like reptile eggs" (21).

In the text, Everett and Mackey's desire to expose the CIA, along with their curation of the assassination, point to how a curator's subjectivity can impact a museum display. In Nicole Scalissi's panel discussion on visual practices in curation, Dan Byers, the Richard Armstrong Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Carnegie Museum of Art, discusses the role of the "living collection" within museums. He explains, ". . . we try to look at our permanent collection as a living collection, one that is contingent and subjective, and displayed in various ways, depending on either my subjective approach as the curator or from a revisionist approach to art history" (qtd. in Scalissi 146). The curator makes particular design choices based on their

interpretive framework. The way that Everett and Mackey collect and display artifacts to expose the CIA is different from the story Branch is trying to tell in his attempts to understand Kennedy's assassination. Because Everett and Mackey collect, organize, and display artifacts as they work to expose the CIA, both men take on curatorial roles in the narrative. Their plotting furthermore exposes how individuals working to understand the assassination (like Branch), cannot simply trust the available information. Everett and Mackey lead readers to inspect and question the inner-workings of the CIA. By explaining their plot, *Libra*'s narrator details how Everett and Mackey were "at work devising a general shape, a life" (DeLillo, *Libra* 50). They would "script a gunman out of ordinary dog-eared paper. . . . [A] name, a face, a bodily frame they might use to extend their fiction into the world" (50).

As part of their archive, Everett and Mackey combine forged document blanks, photographs, fingerprints, and handwriting samples. Their goal was to place these artifacts so that this "near anonymous" marksman "with little known history" would surface and disappear throughout the investigation until he was finally charged for shooting at JFK (DeLillo, *Libra* 50). As John Johnston explains in "Superlinear Fiction," Everett and Mackey do not "set up . . . a fall guy;" they carefully *put together* an individual, "someone with a fabricated trail leading back to the Cuban Intelligence Directorate" (326). Everett wants ultimately to "plan every step, design every incident leading up to the event" (DeLillo, *Libra* 27). Within *Libra*, Everett and Mackey's forgery is visible to readers. The transparency of their curatorial project makes visible both the process of selection that goes into creating a larger archive and the subjectivity of such selection. While the two are not attempting to mislead readers, their archival work does raise questions about authenticity in document selection and bias towards particular narratives. As secondary curators, Everett and Mackey's plan is a significant development within *Libra* because it

contrasts Branch's recovery project. Everett and Mackey's curatorial practices also point to the potential problems with curation as a methodology. While Branch uses curation to better understand the assassination, Everett and Mackey—knowingly or not—underscore the nefarious side of curation, where the practice can be used as a propagandist tool, or as a corrupt tool for persuasion.

Everett and Mackey's curatorial impulse leads them to Oswald, whom I consider a pseudo-curatorial figure within the text. In *Libra*, Everett is determined to find "a man with believable quirks" to be the central character of his plot (DeLillo, *Libra* 78). Enter Lee Harvey Oswald, whom Frank Lentricchia describes as "an undecidable intention waiting to be decided" (201). Oswald's identity is shaped by Everett's idea of who and what the assassin should be. Oswald conforms to Everett's plan because of his "dizzying history:" he is a communist sympathizer, Cuban supporter, lone shooter, and social outcast (DeLillo, *Libra* 303). Oswald "fits . . . aptly into the role Win Everett evolves in his basement" because "everything is 'linked in a vast rhythmic coincidence" (Radford). While Everett begins building "a skein of persuasion" through forgeries such as "address books . . . photographs expertly altered (or crudely altered) . . . letters, travel documents, [and] counterfeit signatures," his "massive decipherment" is already in the process of constructing itself (DeLillo, *Libra* 78).

Andrew Radford explains that throughout *Libra*, Oswald constructs "social masks for himself." Oswald wishes to "script himself an active role in history as a defiant communist sympathizer" (Radford) and, in doing so, subsequently curates various elements of his identity through these masks. Oswald leaves traces of himself to be found through his transparent alter identity, Hidell. There are "the homemade documents, the socialist literature, the weapons and false names" that Oswald is in the process of curating, as Everett and Mackey build their archive

(De Lillo, *Libra* 303). Oswald purposefully leads the authorities to the center of his own plot through these documents, as he "wanted his path to be tracked and his name to be known" (303). Oswald curates a particular version of his own history through the use of misleading and manipulated artifacts.

In *Libra*, Oswald content-curates the self (through legitimate and forged documents) to indulge his outsider impulses. Accordingly, Radford explains that Oswald should be viewed as a "ritual to be performed using carefully rehearsed artifice, adopting and then discarding a variety of social postures." Theo Finigan takes the idea of Oswald scripting himself into history even further, suggesting that Oswald is literally situated within the archive when he fires at the president; Oswald's sniper's perch at the Texas School Book Depository carries a "privileged, doubled position as both location of the historical event's occurrence and archival site" (188). The Texas School Book Depository has been a museum since 1989, though it once functioned as an archive in its initial incarnation as a warehouse that collected, filed, and distributed textbooks to the local public school board. As Finigan writes:

> Indeed, as the banality or functionality of its original name suggests, the Depository was already an archival space long before its musealization, housing a private company that 'stocked and distributed textbooks for public schools in north Texas and parts of Oklahoma.' Eerily anticipating its subsequent transformation into an exhibitionary space with a marked pedagogical focus . . . The Sixth Floor Museum . . . is not merely a historical archive . . . but, complexly, an archive of an archive. (188)

Like Finigan, I argue that *Libra* is a novel about archivization and features archival work that takes place on several different levels. In this sense, it is fair to question Oswald's historical makeup as an individual predestined to fill the role of marksman, since the fatal bullet that took

the president's life literally travels from one archive to another. Oswald's acute awareness of his role in history, the messy state of Branch's present archive, and even the various conspiracy theories surrounding the assassination, are all symptomatic of the archival layering depicted in the text. Bits and pieces of the depository are indexed in the *Warren Report*, which itself contributes to the creation of another archive, The Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza, "a museum devoted to the memorialization of that single event of contemporary American history" (Finigan 187).

As a writer, DeLillo is preoccupied with Oswald's composition and fabrication. For instance, DeLillo considered the idea of Oswald's historical composition in an essay he wrote for *Rolling Stone,* titled "American Blood:"

> Oswald often seems a secret design worked out by men who will never surface—a procedural diagram, a course in fabricated biography. Who put him together? He is not an actor so much as he is a character, a fictional character who first emerges as such in the year 1957. . . . [He] seemed scripted out of doctored photos, tourist cards, change-of-address cards, mail order forms, visa applications, altered signatures, pseudonyms. (24)

Oswald's historical fabrication presents an interesting dilemma for DeLillo the writer. Through the novel's two independent subplots, DeLillo goes to great lengths to show the problems of Oswald's historical composition. Given Oswald's nuance, contradictions, and intricacies, the question offered by DeLillo and *Libra* is how could anyone—Nicholas Branch or otherwise—be expected to write a definitive history of such a dizzying figure and event? Connecting Oswald's historical composition to the larger arguments of this chapter, Oswald's characterization shows how history writing is problematic, and how the expectation of understanding a figure such as this—through the glass of time—is an unreasonable science.

Beyond Oswald's curation through his own doing, as well as through Everett and Mackey's, Branch too attempts to understand Oswald's character and what his role in the larger Kennedy archive. One example of Branch's textual curation of Oswald comes near the end of the novel. Branch displays a number of Oswald's photographs (including newspaper clippings, magazine articles, and family Polaroids). In an effort to underline the instability and unreliability of the historical record, Branch notes of Oswald's facial features in several photos that he:

> even looks like different people from one photograph to the next. He is solid, frail, thin-lipped, broad-featured, extroverted, shy and bank-clerkish, all, with the columned neck of a fullback. He looks like everybody. In two photos taken in the military he is a firm killer and a baby-face hero. In another photo he sits in profile with a group of fellow Marines on a rattan mat under palm trees. Four or five men face the camera. They all look like Oswald. Branch thinks they look more like Oswald than the figure in profile, officially identified as him. (DeLillo, *Libra* 300)

Oswald's apparent transformation in these photos further Branch's inability to overcome the Kennedy archive. Even something as seemingly empirical as a documented photograph of Oswald does not elicit historical accuracy for Branch, nor does Branch feel that he can trust his empirical reading of these items. Here the fault is not *of* or *in* the documents themselves. The problem for Branch relates to mass; that is, the multitude of sources resist a singular reading and, as a result, lead to his inherent suspicion and paranoia.

Along with Oswald's implication in Branch's archive, there is one final curatorial figure in *Libra* who impacts Branch's historical record. The Curator figure is the gatekeeper to a plethora of secured data housed at the CIA headquarters and supplies Branch with information and artifacts he does not already possess. If Branch needs any of it, "he simply has to ask. The

Curator is quick to respond, firm in his insistence in forwarding precisely the right document" (DeLillo, *Libra* 15). The Curator's gatekeeping is significant for Branch's growing archive as he explains how he and the Curator "talk on the telephone, terse as snowbirds but unfailingly polite, *fellow bookmen after all*" (15, emphasis added). As a "fellow" bookman, Branch, growing increasingly more comfortable with the task at hand, aligns himself with the Curator he is in contact with. Like the curator of a museum space, Branch becomes the novel's controlling figure, "retrospectively choreographing the development both of Oswald's convoluted career, and of the Everett [and] Mackey plot to implicate Oswald in the assassination" (Boxall 137). Through Branch's function as the text's curator, he becomes the archive's gatekeeper. Further solidifying Branch's position as the central curatorial figure is his admission that he "is on his second Curator" (DeLillo, *Libra* 59). Although this second individual is titled "Curator," it is important to note that Branch has already outlasted the first Curator. The length of Branch's work will soon outlast the second, maybe third.

The longevity of Branch's project, and the alternate archive he has produced in his last fifteen years of labor, positions him as the unofficial Curator. Because he has worked so closely with the Kennedy archive, with a "magnifier" in hand (DeLillo, *Libra* 59), Branch has superseded all other archival gatekeepers, official titles aside. While the novel's second Curator can also be viewed as a totalizing force (as he forwards Branch certain items from the grand historical archive), his gatekeeping of the master archive does not represent an additional obstacle holding Branch back, as this Curator acquiesces to Branch's every request. Branch, in turn, presents the grand historical archive to *Libra*'s readers, revealing its discrepancies and the various areas where the historical evidence may be altered or embellished.

Libra's goal is not to forward a version of the *truth* concerning Kennedy's death, as the assassination is "a moment" in American history that "resists the cohesive power of narrative" (Boxall 133). DeLillo, supporting this idea, writes in his Author's Note that "any novel about a major unresolved event would aspire to fill some of the blank spaces in the known record," and that this can only be achieved by "alter[ing] and embellish[ing] reality, extend[ing] real people into imagined space and time, invent[ing] incidents, dialogues and characters" (DeLillo, *Libra* 458). The Mackey/Everett and Oswald subplots are some of the artistic liberties DeLillo takes in creating his text. These subplots, while fictions, grant DeLillo the ability to "[think] about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities, by the tide of speculation that widens with the years" (458). It is these artistic liberties that ensure that DeLillo's text will not degenerate into proving crackpot conspiracy theories.

For novels like *Libra*, the character-as-curator(s) allow readers to explore multiple readings of a historical event because of how artifacts surrounding that event are positioned and displayed. Open-endedness leading towards reader interpretation is one of the characteristics of novels containing characters-as-curators. DeLillo commented on this kind of open structure in his own novels, stating that "my work has always been informed by mystery; the final answer, if there is one at all, is outside the book. My books are open-ended" (qtd. in DeCurtis 63). Within DeLillo's narrative, there are multiple avenues for interpretation and meaning-making extending beyond the space of the text. Within a museum space, too, "Every exhibition tells a story, by directing the viewer through the exhibition in a particular order; the exhibition space is always a narrative space" (Groys 44). Like an exhibition, these narratives direct readers through the archive.

Ekphrasis and the Museological Qualities of DeLillo's *Libra*

Within an exhibition space, the sequencing of objects allows them to *speak* to one another. These exhibition spaces become sites that are visually appealing to viewers, positioning them to interpret the objects on display. It is through the collection and display of artifacts in Branch's archive that historical inconsistencies are brought to light and made apparent. In the book-filled room, each artifact is positioned in spatial relation to the other. The juxtaposition of artifacts emphasizes the curious connections that exist between them. As Smith explains, "An exhibition organizes a selection of artworks in a certain way . . . and constructs them in space, as points on a journey through a space or sequences of spaces" (qtd. in Scalissi 148). In the book-filled room, Branch takes readers on a journey surrounding Kennedy's assassination based on the artifacts he displays. As Branch explains, he "sees again how the assassination sheds a powerful and lasting light, exposing patterns and links, revealing this man to have known that one, this death to have occurred in curious juxtaposition to that" (DeLillo, *Libra* 58). Through curation, Branch places these items side-by-side, revealing their excess and, through this excess, shows how the event itself cannot be contained or made consistent.

The most significant space for Branch's collection is the book-filled room he curates throughout the novel. At *Libra*'s onset, the book-filled room is full of stacks of folders that reach up one wall. There are legal pads and cassette tapes that cover the floor and desktop. There are countless books that cover a table and much of the floor. There are also massive file cabinets crammed with documents (DeLillo, *Libra* 16). While no inherent system exists to help Branch track the data, the way he displays the documents and artifacts speak to the endless plots swirling around Kennedy's assassination and help illustrate the challenges that come with making sense of such an overwhelming number of artifacts. By the end of the novel, Branch begins to frame

the items within the book-filled room, creating connections between the objects and augmenting their significance to readers.

Within an exhibition, the artifacts' mediation grants them meaning. According to Smith:

> When the exhibition is installed, its meaning emerges within the network of interactions between the actual artworks. There's a constant production of new knowledge in that process, which, again, parallels the new knowledge that art historians discover during their research process. . . . They deal first and last with arrangements of specific artworks, the ones that they can assemble for the occasion. These particular artworks begin talking to each other, and may say unexpected things. (qtd. in Scalissi 148)

Like an exhibition's installation, the same operations are performed in novels where artifacts are mediated and described to readers. Artifacts are given new meaning through their interaction with each other. Moreover, like the museum curator who makes connections between artifacts in an exhibition space, Branch uses "hand and eye, color and shape and memory, the configuration of suggestive things that link an object to its contents" (DeLillo, *Libra* 14-15). This organizational methodology allows Branch to move through the materials located in this room.

As a means of understanding the artifacts within the book-filled room, characters like Branch employ a "framing" mechanism that is similar to the display technique derived from the field of museology. As she examines art historian Donald Preziosi's concept of framing, Janet Marstine explains that "framing is a metaphorical process that creates a vision of the past and future based on *contemporary needs*" (4, emphasis added). The curator must anticipate the viewer's experiences when displaying artifacts and situate the objects for them so that they bridge the artifact's past with their present moment. Framing includes all elements that surround the artifact and produce the viewing experience. An artifact that appears in any museum display

is framed by its spatial position its location (on a pedestal versus mounted onto the wall); its relation to other items on display; and its reliance on ancillary items (such as lighting or signage). Framing is an important museological technique because it creates an argument about an item's historical context and significance. Framing creates the viewing environment for the museum visitor and commences the process of meaning-making.

In novels, writers construct exhibition spaces textually where artifacts gather their meaning. For example, in *Libra*, the architecture of the book-filled room frames the assassination's archive. Within the book-filled room, the "epistemological problem posed by [its] unfiltered data is solved artifactually—through storage and display rather than interpretation" (Herbert, "Playing" 302). The architectural design of a museum space helps viewers navigate the exhibit and interpret the items on display. According to Michaela Giebelhausen, "the architecture *is* the museum: it is precisely the architectural configuration that gives the museum meaning" (42). Aesthetically speaking, everything within a museum display placates the viewer's senses and contributes to the viewer's meaning-making process. Meaning is not simply generated by the items on display; ancillary items, like signage, are critical as they can augment the artifact's significance. The space and configurations of the book-filled room—signposts connect ancillary items to accentuate their significance—determine "the viewing conditions both conceptually and physically" (Giebelhausen 42). The reader's "viewing" condition of the displayed items is dictated by these spatial coordinates and how the room unfolds in the narrative. Branch mediates the artifactual fragments to readers in the book-filled room. These narratological renderings are important as they exhibit Branch's curatorial mind at work. The spatial qualities, along with the decisions Branch makes regarding his project, create his exhibition space.

In any museum display, space is manipulated and used to augment viewers' experiences and an exhibition's organization often dictates how they encounter the items. Kali Tzortzi, writing in *Museum Space: Where Architecture Meets Museology*, explains how the architecture of the museum and the spatial relation of the objects on display are like a "script" that shapes a visitor's viewing experience (2). According to Tzortzi, the museum's layout is in itself a form of control where the viewing space is already determined for the viewer. Within novels, a similar kind of unfolding takes place through the narrative. In *Libra*, the book-filled room not only frames the archeological materials on display in spatial relation to one another, but it also shapes the reader's experience of the artifacts Branch displays. Within a typical museum, "the architecture of a museum . . . [unfolds] along a processional route . . . [and] provide[s] symbolic architectural decoration which help[s] to frame the elaborate classification of the collections" (Giebelhausen 51). This processional path can be considered as a map for meaning-making in a museum exhibition. To walk through a museum display involves barriers, walkways, and different forms of visual cues that point viewers toward the suggested path. In novels, the narrative provides the path for the readers. Branch mediates the exhibition's mapping as he brings readers through the novel.

While there is a difference in how objects are presented for visual consumption within a museum compared to how Branch curates and describes the objects on display in his book-filled room, it is through *ekphrasis* that a relationship between word and image exists. Branch's textual renderings allow readers to reconstruct these objects in his/her mind. To better understand how translating the visual into the verbal affects the recipient, consider people's individual experiences of listening to a radio broadcast of a baseball game. In this case, listeners cannot see the routine double-play unfold, though they can visualize this sequence of events in their mind's

eye with the aid of the announcer's in-depth description. Listeners expect and often desire the subjectivity and personality an announcer brings to their descriptions. Listeners receive descriptions of the events (the play-by-play), but the subjective characterization of the events (tone, word choice, the crescendo which creates the excitement and is central to the experience of immersive listening), is desired and needed as much for the events to be real(ized) as for the experience of them to be real(ized). The way the listeners visualize the game is similar to the experience of reading Branch's description of both the spatial qualities of, and the objects displayed within, the book-filled room. Like the radio announcer, Branch employs certain strategies to represent both static and shifting visuals textually (i.e., he establishes a connection between the items being described and how readers interpret them). Branch's descriptions conjure up certain mental images for readers, transporting them to the private exhibition space located within the world of the novel. In this sense, as if a radio announcer, Nicholas Branch and, to a greater extent, DeLillo engage with what I believe to be a form of *ekphrasis*, the Greek term for expressing an image in words.

Ekphrasis refers to the description of a visual work of art in literature. James A.W. Heffernan, the foremost literary critic on the term's origins and evolution, notes in his *Museum of Words* that "[t]he earliest known example of *ekphrasis* in western literature is the lengthy description of the shield that Hephaestus makes for Achilles in the eighteenth book of Homer's *Iliad*" (1). At its most basic, *ekphrasis* represents a vivid description of a work of art in prose or, in the case of Homer's *Iliad*, verse. Numerous examples of this literary technique have extended the term's application beyond its initial function as a literary ornament or rhetorical device "that engages [only] with the visual arts" (Heffernan, "Ekphrasis" 1). Such examples include: Giacomo's description of Innogen and her bed chamber in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*; the

descriptions of the various stages of decay that Dorian's portrait endures in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; the imagined interviews, hospital transcripts, and personal stories that comprise Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter*; and, finally, the various post-9/11 images of terrorist violence portrayed by the media in DeLillo's 2007 novel *Falling Man*, perhaps pointing to the idea that DeLillo himself is no stranger to utilizing this technique within his own work (his 1985 text *White Noise*, published three years prior to *Libra*, also comes to mind here). Although several of these examples are still rooted in the art world, at its foundation, *ekphrasis* offers a detailed description of inanimate objects.

Branch's use of *ekphrasis* thus extends Heffernan's definition to the description of artifactual items beyond the portraits, tapestries, and frescoes of the art world. Scholars of the term, such as Valentine Cunningham, Simon Goldhill, and Ruth Webb, respectively, have argued that *ekphrasis* can represent the reproduction of *any* artifactual fragment in writing, either real or imaginary, provided it adheres to William Mitchell's definition of the term outlined in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Mitchell defines *ekphrasis* as involving both "(1) the conversion of the visual representation into a verbal representation, either by description or ventriloquism; [and] (2) the reconversion of the verbal representation back into the visual object in the reception of the reader" (164). Because DeLillo is unable to render these objects physically before readers' eyes, Branch describes the displayed objects for readers to imagine. Certainly, readers must be willing to meet DeLillo halfway, as it takes a considerable leap of the imagination to recreate these images in our mind's eye. As Yin Xing observes in "The Novel as Museum," in such cases "[t]he visible or even touchable object in the museum can only become visible in the novel through our mind's eye. Only in the process of transforming words into images, with our imagination fully employed, can we bring the world of the novel into its

complete existence" (199). In *Libra*, readers visualize the objects—such as the bloodied shirt, the knotted string, or the x-rays—and mentally recreate them. Through the reader's visualization, they experience the text and give new meaning to the objects.

Cunningham, writing in "Why Ekphrasis?," examines the evolution of the term's meaning, noting that *ekphrasis* can also represent the textual description of archaeological items:

> The scope for ekphrastic focus is vast: shields, urns, cups, statues, frescoes, tapestries, cartoons, paintings, photographs, movies, bits of buildings, whole buildings, ruins of buildings. These may be real, actual frescoes, statues, paintings, ruins, *whatever*, or they may be fictional, made-up ones . . . whatever real, historical items, or invented ones, the imperative that literature seems to feel to picture such nonverbal items, to incorporate them into text, to have us picture them along with the writer, the poet, the novelist and their characters . . . appear[s] to be simply inescapable. (57)

Cunningham argues that *ekphrasis* has moved beyond simply reproducing artifactual fragments from the art world, further positing that this very act of reproduction, at least for writers, is inevitable. The central goal of this "inescapable" *ekphrastic* encounter is to flesh out a more lucid understanding of the described items. *Ekphrasis* seeks to get at an object's "*thisness*" and to "lay claim to the absolute *there-ness* of an aesthetic object" (Cunningham 61), with hopes of achieving a deeper understanding of that object's meaning. With each item that is examined, turned-over, organized, displayed, and eventually mediated to readers in the book-filled room, the "thisness" Cunningham describes is precisely what Branch is so desperately trying to achieve. Branch lays all the items on display before readers with hopes that they will join him in his process, to assist him in making sense of his "archival Midas" (Finigan 191).

Ekphrasis captures and recreates material objects (where the verbal is meant to represent the visual); this process of recreating "is never passive, never recuperative since its function is to produce a *new* text, not to re-capture" the original object "in another medium" (Davidson 77, emphasis added). Branch describes the artifacts in such a way that he leads readers to a new understanding of the objects' significance. How these objects are formed and move within the narrative accounts for the relationship between mediated object and viewer. As Diane Chaffee notes in "Visual Art in Literature: The Role of Time and Space in Ekphrastic Creation," "Literature, though it may imitate an arrangement of objects in space, is perceived as a series of referents in time. Its component elements are ordered in a sequence through which the reader must not only retain each word-induced image, but also superimpose each subsequent one" (314). The *ekphrastic* encounter is a two-way street. While it offers a description of the object to readers, it is incumbent on them to first take hold of the object, to recreate it visually, and to then analyze it in order to determine the new narrative/story being forwarded. In this sense, language enables the writers, like DeLillo, to produce vivid images of objects in narrative.

Through *ekphrasis* in *Libra*, the architectural coordinates of the book-filled room are determined and the exhibition space is thus developed. Branch envisions an ideal viewer to whom the book-filled room is tailored and who will investigate the artifacts themselves. This viewer "is one who would be ideologically and culturally at home" with the artifacts on display, or "politically comfortable with the information that is presented" (Lindauer 204). While other texts might not contain a book-filled room, *ekphrasis* is a way that characters-as-curators can bring museums to novels and create exhibition spaces within them.

Conclusion

In an interview with Anthony DeCurtis, titled "An Outsider in This Society," DeLillo discusses his novel's open-endedness and how this places onus on the reader to generate meaning. He states:

> Branch feels overwhelmed by the massive data he has to deal with. He feels the past is changing as he writes. He despairs of being able to complete a coherent account of this extraordinarily complex event. I think the fiction writer tries to redeem this despair. Stories can be a consolation—at least in theory. The novelist can try to leap across the barrier of fact, *and the reader is willing to take that leap with him as long as there's a kind of redemptive truth waiting on the other side*, a sense that we've arrived at a resolution.
>
> I think fiction rescues history from its confusions. It can do this in the somewhat superficial way of filling in blank spaces. But it also can operate in a deeper way: providing the balance and rhythm we don't experience in our daily lives, in our real lives. So the novel which is within history can also operate outside it—correcting, clearing up and, perhaps most important of all, finding rhythms and symmetries that we simply don't encounter elsewhere. (64, emphasis added)

In *Libra*, the *Warren Commission Report*'s various interpretations illuminate the absence of any one kind of authoritative historical account, thus demonstrating the provisionality of "truth." The marginal facts Branch relies on do not lead him to construct a conclusive history; rather, they offer different ways of thinking about the assassination that are free from "political bias" or "ambiguity" (DeLillo, *Libra* 15). By utilizing multiple-viewpoints that rely on artifacts, DeLillo attempts to raise questions about how various versions of the *truth* have been historically

misinterpreted. The artifacts that Branch displays and mediates in the book-filled room enable DeLillo to "restore coherent cause and effect" (Green 100).

DeLillo's preoccupation with Kennedy's death does not simply appear in *Libra*. For example, his inaugural novel, *Americana,* concludes with its central character journeying through the president's motorcade and ending at the hospital where Kennedy was eventually pronounced dead (Radford). Kennedy's assassination is a topic that has plagued much of DeLillo's writing. Peter Boxall notes that as DeLillo's career extended beyond *Americana*, an "homage to Kennedy [is] made again and again, in variously covert or cryptic ways" (132). Other examples beyond *Americana* and *Libra* include: *Players*, where "Lyle Wynanat finds himself mixed up with a potential terrorist who claims to have known Oswald" (Green 95); *Running Dog,* as "a senator's wife . . . is reading her way through the twenty-six volumes of testimony that accompanied the *Warren Commission Report*" (Green 95); and, in *Underworld*, "Klara Sax attends a party where the [Zapruder] film is playing in a continuous loop on a wall of television screens set up as both art installation and entertainment" (Herbert, "Playing" 305). In DeCurtis's interview with DeLillo, he asks whether the author could invent a novel such as *Libra* without the Kennedy Assassination happening. DeLillo's responds:

> Maybe it invented me. Certainly, when it happened, I was not a fully formed writer; I had only published some short stories in small quarterlies. As I was working on *Libra*, it occurred to me that a lot of tendencies in my first eight novels seems to be collecting around the dark center of the assassination. So it's possible I wouldn't have become the kind of writer I am if it weren't for the assassination. (56)

If the Kennedy Assassination invented DeLillo as a writer, then it also played a central role in the creation of another key design. Because of DeLillo's invention, *Libra* becomes a space where the

character-as-curator emerges and can be explored; a figure that is central to texts that weave history and fiction with curatorial technique and museum design. In subsequent chapters, I continue highlighting how the character-as-curator provides readers with different models for understanding alternate versions of history raised in these texts.

As a novel, *Libra's* goal is not to offer a conclusive account of what transpired in Dallas. As DeLillo explains in his Author's Note, "while drawing from the historical record, I've made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination" *(Libra* 457). Rather, *Libra* offers readers "a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities" (DeLillo, *Libra* 457). DeLillo acknowledges the complexity and indeterminism of the assassination and, as a result, "[creates] a space where the facts can be [collected and] preserved . . . as part of [a] shared cultural archive" (Herbert, "Aesthetics" 43). DeLillo's use of fiction and Branch's curatorial techniques allow him to explore the assassination in a way "that a strictly empirical account cannot" (Johnston 325). What Branch as character-as-curator encounters in the book-filled room is representative of other texts dealing with an abundance of state-sanctioned historical information. Using selection and display and *ekphrasis* for describing artifacts, characters-as-curators in novels can make meaning of historical events by creating exhibition spaces within narratives.

Within novels, exhibition spaces become sites where history, fiction, and meaning-making are questioned and explored. Rather than forwarding a singular narrative, the characters-as-curators position and display artifacts throughout exhibitions to invite multiple readings of an event. The curatorial model forwarded here augments the historian's work by drawing together artifacts into an exhibition space on the page through *ekphrasis*. Branch's curation of the Kennedy archive is evidence for how the character-as-curator navigates through insurmountable

data without drawing definitive conclusions. The displacement of artifacts "is like a kind of archival dust that [DeLillo] spreads all over *Libra* without privileging any particular section of the book" (Codebò 152). The book-filled room is the curatorial space Branch believes is full "of theories . . . [the] museum of contradictory facts" (DeLillo, *Libra* 299). Branch's central purpose—evidenced by his curatorial display—is to show that JFK's assassination archive is broken and riddled with inconsistencies.

The challenges that Branch encounters in dealing with too much history do not represent the full scope of instances the character-as-curator must work within. When histories are shrouded in silence, the character-as-curator is more limited with of how they display and represent archival fragments and histories on the page. In Chapter three, the overwhelming sense of choice is no longer present, and the character-as-curator must resort to different types of display techniques. Drawing on a legacy of personal and familial collections (i.e., a *Wunderkammer*), Chapter three's character-as-curator begins to make their presence in the archive more apparent. As the archive becomes sparser, the choices that go into representing individual, collective, and familial memories and histories are enhanced. Chapter three thus examines the techniques the character-as-curator employs as s/he move further away from official and state-sanctioned archives.

CHAPTER THREE

"Ways to blaze your brain and train ya:" Curating Memory, Loss, and Familial History in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*[1]

So, which is it? You ask. An accident, conspiracy or fukú? The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you'll have to decide for yourself. What's certain is that nothing is certain. We are trawling in silences here.
–Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao* 243

Chapter three explores how the character-as-curator functions in a text where histories are removed or forcibly forgotten. Whereas Chapter two examines the character-as-curator's use of *ekphrasis* for creating exhibitions within novels, this chapter will develop how the character-as-curator utilizes synecdoche and show-and-tell within personal *Wunderkammern* to help recover missing or forgotten histories in narrative. Especially within totalitarian and colonized regimes, individual counter-histories are often erased by destroying documents, silencing individuals, and forcefully displacing collective identities. In this process, individual memories and experiences are omitted from the larger historical record. As Pierre Nora explains, "The passage from memory to history has required every social group to redefine its identity through the revitalization of its own history. The task of remembering makes everyone his own historian. . . . Those who have long been marginalized in traditional history are not the only ones haunted by the need to recover their buried pasts" (15). As a way of redefining identity by recovering histories, this chapter examines the use of personal and familial histories to revitalize past erasures. In order to recover the past, the character-as-curator reclaims colonized spaces (such as *lieux de mémoire*, or *Wunderkammern*), and uses those spaces as sites of memory, ultimately challenging the narratives forwarded by totalitarian regimes.

[1] Public Enemy. "Welcome to the Terrordome." *Fear of a Black Planet*. Def Jam Records, 1990.

The novelistic space I consider in this chapter is Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Diaz's novel documents the life and times of Oscar de León: a youthful Dominican immigrant growing up in the United States during the 1980s. Not-quite-American, but not-quite-Dominican either,[2] Oscar must overcome the weight of his family's diasporic history as he attempts to fit into the American landscape. Beyond chronicling Oscar's life, *Oscar Wao* describes the de León's and Cabral's history in the Dominican Republic (including Oscar's great aunt, La Inca Cabral; his mother, Belicia Cabral; and his sister, Lola). The novel documents the family's forced migration to the United States, along with the challenges of assimilating culturally and linguistically once they arrive in New Jersey. Before coming to the United States, Oscar's family was directly impacted by the United States' occupation of the Dominican Republic, which led to Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship. Oscar's family comes to the United States in the 1960s and the story begins in Paterson, New Jersey. Yunior, Oscar's friend and *Oscar Wao*'s narrator and character-as-curator, charts Oscar's family history utilizing the fragmentary gaps left over from Trujillo's regime. Gathering the de León's objects and stories, Yunior curates a museum space in his basement, safeguarding all of Oscar's items in "four refrigerators" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 330), and preserving them for future generations of the de León's perusal. In *Oscar Wao*, Lola's daughter (and Oscar's niece), Isis, is the intended viewer for Yunior's museum space. As the one chosen to maintain the de León's past, "she is encouraged to look at the juxtaposition of objects," to uncover their "life histories," and to use wonder and curiosity "as a [means] of contemplating the unfamiliar" (Harris 112). To aid Isis in familiarizing herself with the unfamiliar family and cultural history, Yunior explains that,

[2] Yunior explains that Oscar "was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about—he wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly bachatero, not a playboy with a million hots on his jock" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 11).

> [he has] prepared it all. A light, a desk, a cot. . . . How many nights will she stay with us? As many as it takes. And maybe, just maybe, if she's smart and as brave as I'm expecting she'll be, she'll take all we've done and all we've learned and add her own insights and she'll put an end to it. This is what, on my best days, I hope. What I dream. (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 331)

While the novel ends prior to Isis's arrival, *Oscar Wao* concludes with the idea that she will one day arrive and engage with the artifacts contained in this space.

Even once the de Leóns arrive in the United States, family members continue to combat the past they left behind in the Dominican Republic. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is considered a fukú story because of Oscar's troubled family past. *Fukú americanus* refers to "a curse or doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 1). Oscar's family's diasporic experience of migrating from Santo Domingo to Paterson is the tragic fukú story that forms the basis for Diaz's novel. The fukú story is revealed early within the text, as Yunior explains that this fukú story is not ". . . the best of the lot—fukú number one . . . [it's not] the scariest, the clearest, the most painful, or the most beautiful. It just happens to be the one that's got its fingers around my throat" (*Oscar Wao* 6). Through the lens of a fukú tale, Diaz's novel interrogates the *official* Dominican history constituted under the Era of Trujillo, one that was highly controlled and possessed obvious omissions. For example, some of these omissions included censoring the education system and media; monitoring telephones, mail, and other means of correspondence; and murdering and torturing political opponents to deal with political unrest (Commire). As the character-as-curator, Yunior's task is to sort through the de León's fragmentary history and to self-consciously piece together a more complete account of their past. The problem for Yunior is that this history is always in the process of

construction: as he attempts to articulate the silences in both the de León's past (and the Dominican Republic's national history), Yunior is constantly faced with gaps in knowledge, with the "páginas en blanco" leftover by the Trujillato (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 119). Because of history's blank pages, Yunior is left piecing together only parts of the whole to try and understand the de León's fukú story, as well as problematize government-sponsored histories within the Dominican Republic that created the fractional archive he is now dealing with.

Because Oscar's story centers on this fragmentary data, Yunior, as character-as-curator, faces a different set of curatorial challenges compared to a character-as-curator like Nicholas Branch, who dealt with an overabundance of forensic, scientific, and official artifacts. Instead, Yunior's project is complicated by the silences and omissions cultivated by Trujillo's regime. While both characters-as-curators aim to make sense of the artifacts in their possession and enhance their understanding of the past, the tools at their disposal differ. With his overabundance of factual material, Branch must rely on organizing, displaying, and mediating what will only ever be portions of the artifacts to readers. Curation in this manner still understands itself as working *for* history; it does so by facilitating readers' task to engage the curated material critically, interpreting it as explanatory. Yunior's curatorial approach and function diverges from Branch's because the artifacts at his disposal are different. Trujillo's oppressive regime was committed to manufacturing misinformation of its own present. This is the history that Yunior must engage; however, the bulk of the archive is problematic, as it is illogical and disconnected in its initial production. Seemingly ironic at first glance is that in order to get at the real story within the manufactured history, Yunior must construct an alternate story, to narrate it in such a way that synecdoche and textual display through show-and-tell come together in the search of the family's past.

Chapter three has three primary goals. First, this chapter contextualizes the problems with memory and history through the lens of *lieux de mémoire*. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* signify "a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn. . . . There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" (7). For individuals like the de Leóns, physical state-sanctioned sites of memory fail to represent their experiences of the past. While these sites are typically dominant and public spaces like national museums or monuments, Yunior creates an alternate *lieu de mémoire* for Oscar (whose history is underrepresented in those larger public spaces) that challenges dominant and government-sponsored narratives. Within *Oscar Wao*, Yunior utilizes fragments from Oscar's past to create an alternative *lieu de mémoire* through his *Wunderkammer* that serves to recover Oscar's family's history. This *lieu* becomes a space where future family members can visit in order to be reacquainted with the past.

The second goal of this chapter is to explore how the character-as-curator can utilize the space of the novel to create *Wunderkammern* of fragmentary archival materials. While *Wunderkammern* were initially employed to display marvelous faraway objects in private collections, I argue that within novels, characters-as-curators can create *Wunderkammern* on the page to display and represent particular items taken from a lost past. Because the character-as-curator lacks the physical space typically associated with a *lieux de mémoire*, the objects in Yunior's *Wunderkammer* come to represent the de León's forgotten histories. As Nora writes, "Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects. . . ." (9). When there is no site, the individual objects are what's left to lead viewers to a greater understanding of the past being constructed. These items tend to function synecdochically in that they allow the character-as-curator to create a broader whole using fragmentary materials. Synecdoche within

these novels allows the character-as-curator to make meaning of incomplete fragmentary items. The objects curated in Yunior's *Wunderkammer* function in a parts-to-whole relation; they are curated and investigated so that readers might work backwards to the family's purposefully forgotten past.

Finally, this chapter explores how the character-as-curator can utilize show-and-tell to disrupt the narrative frame and lead readers to question official representations of the past. Going beyond its pedagogical function, the character-as-curator can interrupt readers' experiences by drawing their attention to (show) and explaining (tell) significant items or events outside the text. While Yunior describes objects and artifacts as they exist in his *Wunderkammer*, his use of footnotes provides a space to further problematize how readers understand, make sense of, and construct histories. To facilitate the visual distinction between the narrative and additional comments in *Oscar Wao*, footnotes augment readers' experience with the narrative by drawing attention to omissions and inconsistencies within the reported history. Like the early childhood education activity, the use of show-and-tell in *Oscar Wao shows* specific historical inaccuracies relating to the Trujillato and *tells* of alternate, minority histories that combat these oversights. Taken together, this chapter will discuss how a character-as-curator can combat a fragmentary, silent, and fabricated history. Using a combination of synecdoche and show-and-tell in building his *Wunderkammer*, I argue that Yunior collects and displays the de León's familial fragments in order to posit the use of personal archives as a way to question, problematize, and understand the past.

Curating Memory and Forgotten Histories Through *Lieux de Mémoire*

One of the biggest challenges the character-as-curator faces in texts with missing or fragmentary materials is that there is not enough available evidence to constitute a definitive or near-complete history, particularly of a group of people. In these instances, not only are individual histories erased, but collective histories and memories are also wrapped in silence. Instead of relying on existing archival materials or accounts of the past, characters within these texts are left utilizing memory—which is itself problematic and incomplete—as they try and piece together the past. Along with navigating documents and archives, the character-as-curator is concerned with how the past is memorialized and how individual and group memories are represented and recalled. As Alon Cofino explains in his outline of memory studies, the term memory

> has been used to denote very different things, which nonetheless share a topical common denominator: the ways in which people construct a sense of the past. It has been used to explore, first, the memory of people who actually experienced a given event. . . . In addition, it has come to denote the representation of the past and the making of it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in 'vehicles of memory' such as books, films, museums, commemorations, and others. (1386)

Especially in instances where individuals have forcefully forgotten the past, or there is a lack of information to explain or contextualize past events, finding ways to cultivate shared memories becomes increasingly important. Despite the desire for enhancing personal memories, one of Cofino's concerns is with the power structures that are established when defining collective memories. Cofino writes: "Memory is viewed here as a subjective experience of a social group that essentially sustains a relationship of power. Simply stated, it is who wants whom to

remember what, and why" (1392). When cultural narratives forward a particular vision of history, the collective memory maintains existing power structures. In these instances, memory comes to function both individually and collectively. For individuals who have been subjugated, the challenge becomes disrupting the dominant narratives forwarded by regimes of power.

Within novels like *Oscar Wao,* where individual voices are excluded from dominant cultural narratives, the character-as-curator uses curatorial techniques to combine individual memories to reconstruct different collective experiences. As Cofino further outlines, it is important to be mindful of "the danger of assuming that the representation of memory can speak for itself, without intermediaries" (1392). Memory thus requires an interpretive audience, and how memories are transmitted and received requires attention (especially when they represent particular social and political values). The character-as-curator can act as an intermediary to understand memory's function within literature. The memories challenged in texts, like *Oscar Wao,* cause readers to re-examine how individuals experience events in the past and question their experiences across "vehicles of memory" that transmit knowledge to future generations. The challenge that Yunior faces in *Oscar Wao* deals with representing individual and collective memories when there are none available.

For individuals aiming to challenge dominant cultural narratives by favoring memory, creating reflective spaces becomes necessary. As Kelli Lyon Johnson explains, the issue with collective memory "is space: the social, political, and personal space necessary for assertions of national and individual identity. Such postcolonial contests for space—geographical, political, linguistic, and cultural—define the recent history of Hispaniola as well." For Johnson, the in-between space needed to cultivate these memories is the novel, in part because of its ability to move "between history and memory, the vernacular and the official, fiction and fact." Because

there is a lack of space for individuals who have been marginalized to explore and cultivate a broader cultural voice, novels allow writers opportunities to negotiate varied positions and examine memory for those in which it is lacking. While Johnson explores novels by Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat, her theorizing applies to other diasporic texts, such as *Oscar Wao*. According to Johnson, "[t]hese novelists create and claim a new, literary space in which collective memory expresses a national identity that includes members of the memory community previously excluded from historical discourse because of racial, class, sexual, or national identity." In the case of *Oscar Wao*, Yunior attempts to understand Oscar's past and, because of the existing silences, uses the novel to negotiate Oscar's individual and collective Dominican identity within the United States.

In *Oscar Wao*, the novel grapples with the Dominican Republic's history and its effects on the characters' present-day realities. The cultural legacy of the de Leóns—one characterized by an uneven political system in the Dominican Republic and the family's subsequent migration to the United States—prohibits Oscar from escaping his family's fukú and this troubled historical past. According to Yunior, this familial curse begins in La Vega in 1944 when Oscar's grandfather, Abelard (a respected doctor), refuses the Dominican Republic's "dictator-for-life," Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina's advances on his daughter (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 2). Yunior notes throughout *Oscar Wao* that the fukú knows no boundaries: it represents the family's legacy of diaspora, one that transcends geographical space, generations of people, and is responsible, at least to some extent, for Oscar's present day "fucked-upness" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 15).

Throughout the novel, Yunior grapples with the idea that temporal progress cannot eradicate a history (be it familial or totalitarian) that has been suppressed, ignored, or purposefully forgotten. While it takes almost the entirety of the novel for Yunior to recognize

this idea, *Oscar Wao*'s emphasis on collection and remembering takes place throughout the text. Regardless of how far removed the family is from the fall of the House Cabral, their damaged and uneasy past is omnipresent and continues to haunt the family's living members. For example, Oscar attempts to amend his diasporic identity and fails (ultimately losing his life in the cane fields outside of Santo Domingo); Lola desires to flee Paterson and reconcile her strained relationship with her mother, which is undermined by numerous family tragedies (forcing her to go between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic); finally, the de León family is unable to achieve temporal progress, which is captured perfectly by Lola's daughter, Isis, who wears three *azabaches*[3] around her neck, in an effort to stave of the family's fukú (along with the tragic past that certain family members desperately wish to forget).

Oscar's family's silences are caused by Trujillo's dictatorial regime. Trujillo ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961, and "control[led] nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent . . . mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 2). During Trujillo's regime, the forwarded cultural narratives were the ones that supported his rule. Because of Trujillo's suppression of alternative perspectives, Yunior is left with a lack of information about both Oscar and his family, since much of this history "has been violently suppressed . . . [through a] purposeful lack of documentation" (Hanna 501).

Trujillo's version of history is constructed through erasure. Once Trujillo fraudulently stole the Dominican election from Horacio Vasquez in 1930 (Derby 20), he immediately established a police task force called the SIM. The SIM not only murdered at Trujillo's request,

[3] Like the use of a *cornetto* in Italian lore to stave off the *malocchio* in Latin American culture, the *azabache* is a bracelet or necklace that protects one from the *mal de ojo*, or evil eye.

but they also controlled all the messages that Dominican news agencies forwarded to the broader public. Much of the Dominican Republic's history during Trujillo's dictatorship is conflicted, due in part to the deliberate destruction of texts and source materials as well as the fact that most, if not all, of the history was rewritten to suit Trujillo's tyrannical interests. Mark Anderson, writing in *Disaster Writing: The Cultural Politics of Catastrophe in Latin America*, outlines how Trujillo's "political branding" was a way for the dictator to turn the Dominican Republic into his very own "private corporation" (30), one built on Trujillo's fondness for possession and patriarchy. As M. Anderson writes:

> A key move in Trujillo's rewriting of the Dominican Republic was to replace the existing *ciudad letrada*, which was composed primarily of members of the post-independence oligarchy, with a new group of intellectuals and bureaucrats who swore absolute loyalty to his regime. Indeed, Trujillo's strategy of rewriting history through transforming place was not an entirely novel idea: the old order had made use of place names and historical markers to maintain its social and political hegemony, tracing its legitimacy back to the colonial period and particularly to the Colón (Columbus) family [. . .] Th[is] tragic view of Dominican history reappears in works written by Trujillo supporters throughout the "Era of Trujillo," some of them even published under his name. The majority of these texts . . . aimed at offsetting criticisms of human rights abuses from abroad while trumpeting the regime's modernizing achievements. . . . (30-31, emphasis added)

Under Trujillo's dictatorship, approved history texts were those written in celebration of the regime and its tactics. Any counter-histories or alternative views were destroyed, and the authors of such works endured fatal consequences. Beyond disposing these counter-narratives, Trujillo also promoted himself as a supernatural and cosmic force to his people; he inscribed his name

and likeness on all Dominican public spaces and "used the police and the [SIM] as instruments for repression on the civilian population" (Galván 52). Accordingly, in *Oscar Wao*, Yunior remarks that Trujillo was famous "for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS in the Dominican Republic to honor himself (Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo, and Santo Domingo de Guzman, the first and oldest city in the New World, became Ciudad Trujillo)" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 2-3). Even government-run hospitals featured placards that read "Only Trujillo Cures Us" (Derby 5). This re-naming of public spaces and self-commemoration were ways that Trujillo claimed national identity and memory for himself (Johnson).

Along with regulating the Dominican Republic's broader cultural messages, Trujillo also controlled both personal artifacts and people's stories. According to Johnson, "Dominicans and Haitians under the dictatorships that characterized much of their history in the twentieth century have seen history books written that neglect their stories—as the poor, the disenfranchised, the silent, and the 'disappeared.'" These individuals are not represented in the broader history texts and because of Trujillo's regime, even smaller acts of remembering are erased. In *Oscar Wao*, after Abelard's arrest for speaking out against Trujillo, Yunior realizes that there are few traces of Oscar's grandfather that remain. With reference to a book Abelard was supposedly authoring on Trujillo, Yunior states:

> I wish I could have read that thing. . . . Alas, the grimoire in question (so the story goes) was conveniently destroyed after Abelard was arrested. No copies survive. . . . Also strange that none of Abelard's books, not the four he authored or the hundreds he owned, survive. Not in an archive, not in a private collection. Not a one. All of them either lost or destroyed. Every paper he had in his house was confiscated and reportedly burned. You want creepy? Not one single example of his handwriting remains. I mean, OK, Trujillo

> was thorough. But not one scrap of paper with his handwriting? That was more than thorough. (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 213)

Abelard's personal belongings, including handwritten notes or personal mementos are destroyed. Such destruction is exemplary of the kinds of historical erasures taking place in the Dominican Republic. While Trujillo's regime had access to public artifacts and could erect monuments and texts that forward his image, the destruction of his detractors' personal or familial texts highlights the range of his reach. Because of these erasures, future generations are at a loss when trying to understand their familial past.

Going beyond the disappearance of material artifacts, Oscar's family history, like many families living in Trujillo's Dominican Republic, is veiled in silence. For example, in his countless attempts to recover Oscar's familial stories, Yunior comments on the struggles he faces when trying to constitute a definitive account of their history, stating that ". . . due partially to Beli's *silence* on the matter and other folks' *lingering unease* when it comes to talking about the regime, info on the Gangster is fragmented; I'll give you what I've managed to unearth and the rest will have to wait for the day the páginas en blanco finally speak" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 119, emphasis added). Yunior's comment that there is reluctance to discuss family history or occurrences during Trujillo's time further complicates the history he attempts to write. The lack of family stories and unwillingness to discuss the past adds to the difficulty of Yunior's project, especially since personal narratives are silenced under Trujillo.

Reluctance to talk about Trujillo's oppressive regime goes beyond *Oscar Wao*'s pages, as Diaz discusses his own personal encounter with family silence and the Trujillato at a 2007 "Talks@Google" lecture. There he discusses how these chasms between known histories became the inspiration for writing *Oscar Wao*:

> . . . the gaps in stories . . . the places where there isn't a story. . . if someone misses a four or five month gap in someone's life, that's what really pulls me. If there's a period of history where there is no writing or no records about it, I'm absolutely fascinated . . . it's a bizarre thing because most writers want to write about things where there is at least some documentation. . . . I wanted to write . . . a book about this period in the . . . Dominican Republic where everybody talks about this dictatorship but nobody actually says anything. It was such a weird trauma . . . people will always say "oh in the time of Trujillo" but then they won't actually say anything. There's no details. And I was fascinated about how you can hide something in plain sight. The dictatorship is hidden in plain sight. Everybody mentions it but nobody there actually gives any details about it. (Talks@Google 3:23-4:31)

Like Yunior's attempts at piecing together Oscar's family history, Diaz was confronted with "páginas en blanco" when piecing together his family's past and grapples with the silences and his inability to give words to these experiences throughout *Oscar Wao*. Elsewhere in the novel, Oscar's sister, Lola, recalls a conversation she had with her great aunt, La Inca: "[She] was about to say something else and then she stopped. . . . My abuela was sitting there, forlorn, trying to cobble together the right words and I could not move or breathe. . . . She was about to say something and I was waiting for whatever she was going to tell me. I was waiting to begin" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 75). In both this example and in Diaz's Talks@Google comment, he hints at the material consequences of being unable to speak and the desire to hear what is going to be said. The regime managed to ensure a silence that extended into relationships with future generations.

For novels attempting to characterize these familial silences and erasures, the space of the page becomes a place where these forgotten histories can be negotiated and reclaimed. As Johnson explains, "the novel becomes a literary space in which [authors] remember the Trujillato by locating collective memory both within individuals and in a specific location—the novel itself. By locating the collective memory of the Trujillato in the novel, they reconceive collective memory as existing in a shared space (the narrative) and in the individual (the narrator[s])" (Johnson). The space of the page is a place where histories can be reimagined and the silences that Diaz alludes to can be negotiated and explored. As such, *Oscar Wao* represents a space for Diaz and for the characters within the text who are interested in alternate perspectives. Such space also allows for readers to examine how individuals on the periphery posit alternate viewpoints to recover both individual and collective memories. Especially when the effects of the dictatorship are silenced and hidden "in plain sight," *Oscar Wao* grapples with how to use available fragmentary materials to fill blank pages from the past.

In order to account for missing histories resulting from totalitarian regimes, individuals and broader societal collectives turn to other mechanisms of recalling the past. Especially when the language used to account for an historical event is no longer available, there are other items (both tangible and spatial) that achieve similar recall effects. Nora's *lieux de mémoire* offers a way for historical objects and spaces to be used when bringing together past histories and memories. According to Nora, "*lieux de mémoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such activities no longer occur naturally" (12). Memory is no longer spontaneous or embedded in cultural traditions. Memory alone cannot be counted on and there is a need for sites where memories can be invented and

maintained. The purposefulness of these sites comes from "the breach of the organic continuation of unbroken tradition and ancestral practices, a breach that was brought about by different facets of modernization: industrialization, urbanization, secularization, and the emergence of the nation-state—all of which destroyed the community of yore, along with its routine habits and ordinary, quotidian life" (Shauli 266). Because of modernization, there was a necessity for sites that retained the symbolic traditions and rituals of the past. In his explication of history and memory, Nora suggests that "[m]odern memory is, above all, archival. It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" (13). *Lieux de mémoire,* then, become the embodied sites where history and memory connect.

In his conceptualization of *lieux de mémoire,* Nora outlines three components that the *lieux* must all share: they must be material, symbolic, and functional. According to Nora,

> even an apparently purely material site, like an archive, becomes *lieux de mémoire* only if the imagination invests it with a symbolic aura. A purely functional site, like a classroom manual, a testament, or a veterans' reunion belongs to the category only inasmuch as it is also the object of a ritual. And the observance of a commemorative minute of silence, an extreme example of a strictly symbolic action, serves as a concentrated appeal to memory by literally breaking a temporal continuity." (18-9)

Given Nora's sentiments, *lieux de mémoire* are at one time material (they represent a tangible item, such as an object in an archive, that communicates information); they are symbolic in the sense that the material object demands a specific population of people to observe it; finally, *lieux de mémoire* are functional since they connect us to past realities/memories. Nora explains that these three elements can exist in any historical time and place. He writes that a historical

generation "is material by its demographic content and supposedly functional—since memories are crystalized and transmitted from one generation to the next—but it is also symbolic, since it characterizes, by referring to events or experiences shared by a small minority. . ." (19). Although the spaces Nora describes are physical locations, within the narrative, Yunior creates an alternate *lieu de mémoire* that he uses to problematize and carry memories of a group (specifically the de León's), that are passed on to successive generations. Yunior's *lieu de mémoire* also illuminates ruptures and discontinuities surrounding memory in the Dominican Republic. In this sense, the items Yunior collects and displays in his *Wunderkammer* embody the material, functional, and symbolic aspects that Nora refers to above; these objects forward the lived experiences of a minority peoples that will inform Isis de León.

Building on Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, others have used this concept to analyze historical sites within Eastern Europe (Sendyka), or literary representations of history in places like China (Shauli), and the Dominican Republic (Johnson). Looking at abandoned sites of violence in Eastern Europe, such as a Płaszów concentration camp and selections from Marci Shore's work in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Russia, Roma Sendyka describes how "the locations in question are interpreted as still potent agents in local process of working with a traumatic past" (687). The sites themselves live on for those who experience them and remain entangled with the meaning and explication of such spaces even when they lack official commemorative markers. In particular, Sendyka attempts to explain the affective dimensions of such sites, exploring how they trigger emotional reactions evoking "fear, disgust, and shame" (687). The importance of *lieux de mémoire* in such contexts shifts viewers back in time; the memories contained within serve as visceral reminders of the horrors tied to that specific historical time and space in locations devoid of past markers. Likewise, in her application of

lieux de mémoire to the Dominican Republic specifically, Johnson argues that *lieux de mémoire* are the sites Trujillo built. However, I argue that in order to forge an identity away from the dictatorial regime, new *lieux de mémoire* must take shape. Alternate sites like novels and museums (e.g., the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana [the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance]), are examples of attempts to forge a broader historical identity from sites outside of those that are state-sanctioned.

Santo Domingo's Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana (MMDR) commemorates the 50th anniversary of Trujillo's assassination. The resistance museum's mission is to memorialize the 70,000 Dominican and Haitian people who lost their lives during Trujillo's horrific thirty-year dictatorship. In the *New York Times*, Randal Archibold interviews the museum's director and chief curator, Luisa de Pena Diaz, who states that the museum's central goal is to rescue memory and to highlight an oppressive and turbulent history that is lost on much of the younger Dominican population (Archibold). The museum's exhibitions counter the "Myths of Trujillo," including any advancements and/or achievements the regime claims to have achieved during his dictatorship (e.g., economic stability and the modernization of the Dominican Republic through constructing infrastructures, building schools, and distributing electricity). In addition to honouring the memory of victims and resistance fighters, the museum hopes to remind "present and future generations" that "never again should anyone anywhere have to endure the brutalities suffered by the Dominican Republic" (Archibold).

The MMDR represents a *lieu de mémoire* where Dominican people continue to combat historical silences by openly acknowledging the atrocities of the Trujillo regime. Drawing on Nora's criteria, the MMDR is material (as a literal structure that houses a litany of historical artifacts and objects connected with the Trujillo regime); symbolic (since as a historical site, it is

invested in amending the collective memory of a specific group of people); and functional. It is a constantly evolving site that functions to correct oversights and omissions appearing in Trujillo's preferred histories. Its functionality can furthermore be seen in its ability to educate its viewers. The museum demands that viewers actively participate in the historical revisionist project by investigating the objects on display and engaging with the testimonial spaces where they can offer their own personal stories of family members affected by the regime. The MMDR's mission, to "rescue memory" (Archibold) echoes Nora's sentiments about "sites of memory." As a "site of memory," the MMDR is the work of "human will" and its reliance on memory challenges Trujillo's fabricated history. Not only does the MMDR represent "*a site* commemorating those fallen in the [country's] democratic struggles," but it also catalogues "*Sitios de Memoria* (Sites of Memory) throughout the Dominican Republic, where heroes . . . lived and died" (Gantz). Through its reliance on memory, the Museo Memorial undermines the history of the Trujillato.

Along with these physical sites, *lieux de mémoire* come through narrative spaces in the ways that characters interact and move in those sites on the page. In *Oscar Wao*, the *Wunderkammer* that Yunior constructs is itself an example of a *lieu de mémoire*. It is a material space that houses all the documents and artifacts pertaining to the de León family that Yunior has managed to collect. As a symbolic entity, Yunior's *Wunderkammer* carries cultural and historical significance as it relates to the de Leóns; it holds historical value for viewers and instantiates one's memory to *recall* the displayed object's historical significance. Its functionality exists on several levels. To begin, Yunior pieces this *Wunderkammer* together, not only to memorialize Oscar's life, but also to achieve a better understanding of his own past. On another level, the *Wunderkammer* exists to educate future generations of the de Leóns about their past, which

Oscar so desperately wanted to piece together prior to his death. Through narrative *lieux de mémoire,* characters within novels can begin combatting forgotten and missing histories.

Wunderkammern, Synecdoche, and Curating Forgotten Histories

Originally, *lieux de mémoire* were public-facing spaces that relied on cultural memory to generate their significance. In instances where individual histories and stories are not represented within these public-facing spaces, I argue that opportunities continue to exist for using *lieux de mémoire* to cultivate memories on a smaller scale. Thus, private, personal spaces and collections can serve similar functions of generating and recovering memories as the public *lieux de mémoire* described above. In novels like *Oscar Wao*, the character-as-curator does not always have access to the necessary materials to create an organized, purposeful exhibition space that adequately contextualizes the past. Instead, in instances when the past is unavailable or where there are minimal fragments used to represent the past, the character-as-curator can create alternative spaces to organize and display the materials on hand in an attempt to understand the past. When there are only fragmentary remains of the past, one way that personal histories can be represented is through the creation of a *Wunderkammer* within the narrative.

Historically, according to Steven Mullaney, a *Wunderkammer* is a "wonder-cabinet: a form of collection peculiar to the late Renaissance, characterized primarily by its encyclopedic appetite for the marvelous or the strange and by an exceptionally brief historical career" (40). These wonder cabinets (or rooms) were private exhibition spaces contained within homes where rare artifacts were collected, stored, and displayed. Prevalent during the sixteenth and seventeen centuries, it was from these personal collections that museums later developed:

> The museum as an institution rises from the ruins of such collections, like country houses built from the dismantled stonework of dissolved monasteries; it organizes the wonder-cabinet by breaking it down-that is to say, by analyzing it, regrouping the random and the strange into recognizable categories that are systematic, discrete, and exemplary. The museum represents an order and a categorical will to knowledge whose absence-or suspension-is precisely what is on display in a [*Wunderkammer*]. (Mullaney 41)

While the *Wunderkammer* may have contributed to the early museum's development, the audience and power structures surrounding the two are part of what keep them distinct. While both *Wunderkammern* and museums represent displays of imperial power to different degrees, the private nature of *Wunderkammern* ensures the audience and reception of artifacts are different from the institutionally supported meaning-making that comes from museums. Instead of the public exhibitions seen in museums, *Wunderkammern* contained collections of exotic and marvelous items from around the world that were put on display in private dwellings, often arranged by an individual collector for others to see (see Fig. 3.1. for an example of late sixteenth century *Wunderkammer*).

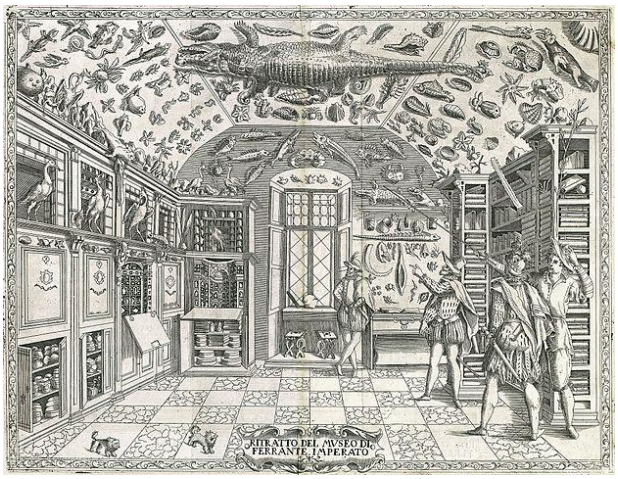

Fig. 3.1. *Wunderkammer*, appearing in *Dell'Historia Natvrale di Ferrante Imperato* (Imperato).

The *Wunderkammer*'s central function was to bring together a varied selection of unusual and extraordinary objects,[4] including diagrams, feral specimens, bizarre instruments for experimentation, and rare works of art. While the objects appearing in these *Wunderkammern* were out-of-place because they represented fragments of an elsewhere land, they functioned to represent a cultural totality of the worlds they depicted. Samuel van Quiccheberg, author of *Inscriptionnes*, a 1565 treatise on museums, noted that Ferrante Imperato's first rendering of a *Wunderkammer* (depicted in fig. 3.1.) represented "a theatre of the broadest scope, containing authentic materials and precise reproductions of the whole of the universe" (Quiccheberg qtd. in Mauriès, 23). These spaces, according to Quiccheberg, were *universal* exhibitions; objects from the world over were collected, arranged, and displayed, resulting in viewer curiosity and engagement.

Since the *Wunderkammer* as an exhibition space initially appeared within private collections and homes, the individual overseeing these *Wunderkammern* thus became amateur curators. As Adrian George explains in *The Curator's Handbook*, "The owner-collector would

[4] For more on the history of *Wunderkammern*, see Christina M. Anderson's *Early Modern Merchants as Collectors (Visual Culture in Early Modernity)*; and Tod Williams and Billie Tsien's *Wunderkammer*.

select what to acquire and produce a list of what was in the collection, or delegate these responsibilities to a member of the household staff" (2). The "keepers" of these collections were responsible for overseeing and caring for the artifacts in that space. As "Western precursors to museums, [a *Wunderkammer*'s] creator-custodians [became] precursors to contemporary curators" (Balzer 34). The role of the curator in these private collections differed quite drastically from those found within museums. In museum spaces, an object's plotting is more calculated and directed; a careful amount of consideration is invested in how objects are arranged and communicated to the public. The effect of the careful arrangement is to increase viewer engagement, thus augmenting the stories contained within such objects. In *Wunderkammern*, however, a wide variety of objects are displayed; the plotting is not as deliberate, relying instead on the positioning of different *kinds* of objects based on their thematic qualities (e.g., empirical knowledge and superstition, science and philosophy, etc.).

One of the defining features of the *Wunderkammer* is the random juxtaposition of artifacts in that space. Whereas a museum curator will purposefully order artifacts in an exhibition, items in a *Wunderkammer* often appear at random. Despite this randomness, it is in the objects' relation to each other that viewers begin to create meaning. Because of an object's rareness and exoticism, it can stand on its own and connect with the object alongside it. As Mullaney explains,

> These are things on holiday, randomly juxtaposed and displaced from any proper context; the room they inhabit acts as a liberty or sanctuary for ambiguous things, a kind of halfway-house for transitional objects, some new but not yet fully assimilated, others old and headed for cultural oblivion, but not yet forgotten or cast off. Taken together, they compose a heteroclite order without hierarchy or degree. (42)

Although the arrangement lacks systematic order, there is space for any variation of objects to appear any which way. Because "[n]o system determines the organization of the objects on display or separates one variety of the marvelous from another" (Mullaney 42), interesting combinations of artifacts can come together to create new meaning for viewers. Likewise, Jan Westerhoff maintains that the chaotic arrangement of displayed artifacts in *Wunderkammern* encourage such items to speak to one another, merging together the dissimilar perspectives contained within. This form of "deliberate disorder" allows for connection building across various objects and, as Westeroff writes, the creation of a *Wunderkammer* "provided an opportunity for experimentation in merging form and meaning. . . . The arrangement of the genera did not serve to separate all the various areas, instead, it built the visual bridges to emphasize the playfulness of nature through the associative powers of sight" (644).

More than acting as mere household collections, *Wunderkammern* signified the economic development of the modern nation state. The artifacts' collection, retrieval, and accessibility were linked to the advent and growth of global trade. As Jonathan Gil Harris explains in "The New New Historicism's *Wunderkammer* of Objects," early *Wunderkammern* represented a "cobbling together of the newly available artifacts" resulting from a surge in foreign and domestic commerce. Silke Dettmers similarly notes in "On the Necessity of Wonder" that the assembly of these items "show[ed] off the richness and diversity of the 'new' universe" (41). Beyond the development of trade markets and universal wealth, these *Wunderkammern* served as an extension of the imperial agenda, since objects were taken from colonized peoples and were used "to make distant territories tangible and present [them to] European audiences" (Arellano 373). As a tool of colonialism, the marvels contained within *Wunderkammern* "[were] samples of an 'absolute elsewhere' that [were] meant to be apprehended, conquered, and rendered

visible" (Arellano 372). Although these collections historically represented displays of wealth and colonialism, the amateurish and private nature of these collections situates them differently from museums and the larger, public-facing museum spaces described above. Despite their imperial origin, *Wunderkammern* can be used subversively as literary tools to make visible forgotten histories and allow spaces to represent voices that were otherwise silenced.

The ways that *Wunderkammern* function as recovery spaces within literature is discussed by Jerónimo Arellano in "From the Space of the *Wunderkammer* to Macondo's Wonder Rooms." In that article, Arellano explains that *Wunderkammern* have experienced "an afterlife in modern and contemporary culture . . . in order to critique hegemonic epistemological . . . structures" (377), particularly because of their move away from museums and "visual culture . . . into literary texts" (378). In such texts, as Arellano writes, *Wunderkammern* are used to plot the archive in a manner that transforms "literature . . . [into] a collection of fragments" (372), one that reverses the "center-periphery" model of the early *Wunderkammer* (376). Whereas "early modern collections of marvels . . . entail an effort to assimilate, regulate, and contain the radical alterity of the 'peripheries' of the world" (376), novels like *Oscar Wao*, through the presence of a *Wunderkammer*, display minority histories to critique and problematize hegemonic discourses.

In novels like *Oscar Wao*, the character-as-curator uses their *Wunderkammer* as a space to mediate artifactual fragments when there is not enough material available for full meaning-making. Like their early precursors, the objects in literary *Wunderkammern* can be used to represent the larger past the character-as-curator is trying to understand. As Bettina Messias Carbonell writes in her introduction to *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, "the rhetoric of museology relies on the . . . poetic 'master tropes'—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony," (8) in order for meaning to be made in exhibitions. Accordingly, Peter Mason, writing in

Infelicities: Representations of the Exotic, discusses the relationship *Wunderkammern* share with synecdoche as a literary device,[5] noting that "individual objects [in *Wunderkammern*] evoked more than what they were themselves, *conjuring up an elusive whole of which they were all parts* . . . [i]n this microcosmic form of representation, the collection . . . [represented] a scaled-down model of the world at large, and the mechanism of synecdoche . . . [constructed] that metaphor" (73). Within the space of the *Wunderkammer*, synecdoche and metonymy are relational figures that enable an abstraction (a "whole" or "totality" that has been fragmented over time) to come together, which can be understood through the remaining "parts." This parts-to-whole relationship allows *Wunderkammern* to achieve their central objective (in this case, to create a world in miniature of distant and faraway lands).

Further linking the *Wunderkammer* and synecdoche as a literary trope, Grant Parker writes that the *Wunderkammer*'s display of artifactual fragments to depict foreign lands is "itself a case of synecdoche combined with metonymy . . . the medium and the obvious referent of the presentation . . . enact the theme" of the remote lands these spaces represented (160). For example, in Imperato's *Wunderkammer* (fig. 3.1.), exotic animals, shells, and other artifacts are presented to a group of men who appear to be marveling at them. The artifacts within the room signify the places from which they came and are used as tools for identity construction. These early *Wunderkammern* represented scientific, philosophical, and individual self-discovery, and encouraged viewers to locate human existence within the broader context of the universe.

[5] Examining the value of synecdoche in literature, Kenneth Burke writes in *A Grammar of Motives* that synecdoche "stresses a relationship or connectedness between two sides of an equation, a connectedness that, like a road, extends in either direction," from part-to-whole or from whole-to-part (509). In both literature and in museums, the part (fragment) stands in place for the missing whole (skewed or purposefully forgotten history/origin). Carbonell further writes that for these reasons, "[w]e find these tropes . . . appearing frequently in the analysis of the museum" (9).

In literature, too, the limited fragments within a textual *Wunderkammer* synecdochically depict a more complete experience than the artifacts would on their own. These items function together to create a greater representation of a forgotten time or place. In each of the examples to follow, the synecdochical qualities of the textual *Wunderkammern* are used to either (a) develop the protagonist's understanding of the remote lands portrayed within that space; or (b) instantiate the protagonist's memory of a lost or misplaced past. In either instance, there is not enough available information in the text to fully represent the past and the characters must utilize the fragments to make broader connections to the events in question. For example, early modern utopias by J.V. Andreae (*Christianopolis,* 1619) and Sir Francis Bacon (*The New Atlantis,* 1627) both feature *Wunderkammer*-like structures that highlight the wonders of the world. At the heart of *Christianopolis* is a museum-like college where ". . . the *whole* of natural history is . . . depicted on [its] walls" (212, emphasis added). Similarly, Bacon's *The New Atlantis* features a structure devoted "to the study of the . . . true nature of all things." The "structure" at the heart of Bacon's text is Salomon's House, a *Wunderkammer*-like building featuring fantastic objects taken from the applied and pure sciences. Like Imperato's *Wunderkammer*, Salomon's House encourages human discovery for the betterment of one's self, as well as for all humankind. The college/museum space within Andreae's *Christianopolis*[6] similarly promotes identity-construction in curious juxtaposition to the various artifactual fragments displayed within. Onlookers view these artifacts, which fortify their understanding of mathematical and scientific principles of investigation. In both texts, the general characteristics of *Wunderkammern* as

[6] In Tessa Morrison's "The Architecture of Andreae's *Christianopolis* and Campanella's *City of the Sun*," she investigates the city coordinates (and boundaries) of both utopias. Her analysis of *Christianopolis* includes a diagrammatic breakdown of the city's layout, showing how its appearance of "a small fortified complex" (265) from a topographical view is itself spatially evocative of a *Wunderkammer*.

theatres of the world that endorse contemplation and intellectual self-discovery are highlighted and on full-display.

More recently, Philip K. Dick's short story, "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," features a *Wunderkammer* in miniature that triggers Douglas Quail's memories. In Dick's short story, government cover-up—along with the nefarious business dealings of Rekal Incorporated (a corporation specializing in implanting false memories into customers)—forces Quail to forget his past identity. As Artur Blaim and Ludmila Gruszewska-Blaim note in their introduction to *Mediated Utopias: From Literature to Cinema*, "Quail's [past] memories . . . are [only] confirmed by a little Wunderkammer-box of souvenirs he smuggled on his return. The Wunderkammer-box embodies . . . [a] desire for [self] knowledge, boosting awakened memory of a past identity that has been erased" (21). In "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," the items located within the *Wunderkammer* synecdochically make visible the fantastic qualities of faraway lands in order to trigger Quail's memories connected to those spaces. In this case, the fauna-filled box triggers Quail's memory of his trip to Mars and his forgotten identity as a secret agent and government assassin.

Finally, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Commander Fred Waterford's study represents a decontextualized (*Wunderkammer*-like) space featuring numerous items from a pre-totalitarian New England. As Offred remarks, the Commander's study represented an "oasis of the forbidden" and contained items that had been banned or destroyed in this new totalitarian world (147). The artifacts on display in Waterford's study (e.g., board games, books, women's magazines, plants, rugs, electronic devices, etc.) are evocative of an elsewhere time and, like Quail in "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale," trigger Offred's memories of this not-so-distant past. While playing Scrabble with the Commander, Offred notes that "[m]y tongue

felt thick with the effort of spelling. It was like using a language I'd once known but had nearly forgotten, a language having nothing to do with customs that had long passed out of the world" (164). The Scrabble pieces in this scene provide an example of how synecdoche functions for Offred in Atwood's textual *Wunderkammer*. The pieces spark Offred's memory and come to characterize the pre-totalitarian world where women still possessed their liberties and independence; a time when women were furthermore referred to by their birth name and not their handmaids' title (e.g., Offred is Captain Fred Waterford's handmaid, hence her re-naming "Of-Fred").[7]

Although these literary examples feature different kinds of spaces where synecdoche and *Wunderkammer* collections take shape, a defining characteristic across these examples is that each *Wunderkammer* contains rare items that trigger some sort of association with the past. Patrick Mauriès, discussing the rareness of objects in *Wunderkammern*, writes that "[i]n cabinet of curiosities as in any other collection, the presence of any particular object was justified, a priori, by its rarity. It was a rarity that might be purely contingent (when the item in question was one of the last surviving parts of a series, for instance); or *it might concern its origins, whether in time (as with relics) or in space (as with ethnographic objects)*" (73, emphasis added). In literary *Wunderkammern,* an item's rarity contributes to forming the synecdochical relationships

[7] Other texts featuring *Wunderkammern* include: Tomasso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*; Gabriel Garcia Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; Shelley Jackson's *My Body—a Wunderkammer*; Roger McGough's poems "The Sound Collector," and "The Kleptomaniac" in his collection *All the Best*; Lynn Fullington's *For a Poet's Wunderkammer*; and Cynthia Cruz's *Wunderkammer*, to name a few. Even Michel Foucault wrote on the importance of narrativized *Wunderkammern*. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault makes reference to Jorge Luis Borges's *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* (specifically the essay titled "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins"). Within this discussion, Foucault imagines a museum space (similar to the *Wunderkammern* discussed here) that features "fragments of a large number of possible orders [that] glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry from one another" (xix). In this particular space, "things are 'laid,' 'placed,' 'arranged' in sites so very different from one another" (Foucault xix).

between an object and the characters in these texts. In doing so, readers "work backwards to the event as a whole," to their historical cause or beginning, "to understand it or at least to know 'this happened'" (Bernard-Donals 420). Indeed, synecdoche in *Christianopolis*, *The New Atlantis*, "We Can Remember It For You Wholesale," and *A Handmaid's Tale* function in a manner similar to Michel de Certeau's investigation of the device in *The Practice of Everyday Life*; each text "replaces totalities" (e.g., human existence, one's past identity and occupation, or one's political independence) with "fragments" and, in doing so, magnifies the origins of the displayed "detail and miniaturizes the whole" (101). In various stages of each of these texts, the *Wunderkammern* represent (1) tools for self-discovery and identity construction; (2) an inversion of the imperial agenda that instead enables marginalized peoples on the periphery to inform the self through an investigation of the imperial center; and (3) further secures the relationship between text and museum, synecdoche and *Wunderkammer*.

In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior's textual *Wunderkammer* adopts each of these characteristics, thereby allowing future generations of the de Leóns to utilize Oscar's fragments in an effort to understand their family's past experiences. It is the place where rare and diverse objects meet: fukú and zafa, history and fiction, de León and Trujillo. By displaying the items he collects and recounting Oscar's family's history to readers, Yunior's cabinet of curiosity becomes a testimonial space that celebrates Oscar's life and emphasizes the violence committed by Trujillo's regime. Within this room, Yunior is not simply displaying documents and artifacts; rather, the light, desk, and cot he provides invite Isis (and by extension, readers) to inhabit and dwell within this space. Like those visiting a *Wunderkammer*, both Isis and readers are left exploring the many objects left there. As Mauriès argues in *Cabinets of Curiosities*, *Wunderkammern* featured "an accumulation of objects in such profusion that it was difficult to

find one's way around [them]; there was no beginning and no end . . . the visitor was . . . expected to open the cupboards and the drawers to examine each object in detail" (69). Readers in this context are asked to perform a similar function in their examination of Oscar's objects. By making the objects accessible to both Isis and readers, Yunior collapses the boundaries between public vs. private in home-based museums or familial archives.[8] Moreover, these curated mementos function synecdochically within the narrative; 'parts' of Oscar's life (e.g., "Oscar's voluminous writings, the oral testimonies of Oscar's female relatives, the de León family's photographs, Lola's letters" [Gantz], audio recordings, family mythologies, his comic book collection, Tolkien novels, and Sci-Fi movie collection, to name a few) represent the forgotten historical 'whole' that Isis, Yunior, and readers are attempting to recover. In this case, the *Wunderkammer*'s central feature as a space for self-discovery and remembering the past is augmented, since it is Yunior's belief that Isis's encounter with these items will "produce healing . . . allowing a better future to emerge for Oscar's family" (Gantz). Synecdoche in Yunior's textual *Wunderkammer* offers the characters within the world of the novel the opportunity to piece together the past, recover, correct, and sustain the de León's legacy, thereby enabling future generations to reconcile the family's fractured history. This reconciliation is made possible by the multiple stories-within-stories contained within the fragmented objects on display.

More precisely, the objects Yunior curates in his *Wunderkammer* carry a "cultural biography," or social history of the de León family embedded within them (Harris 121). The

[8] Examples of home-based museums or private archives include any structure that was once private but has now been curated for public consumption. For instance, the Taft Museum of Art in Cincinnati, Ohio, or the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam are public and accessible museum spaces (though their accessibility is controlled, at least to some extent, by price, membership, geography, and operating hours). However, these spaces were initially private residences, and their contents represented personal and familial histories and lives.

objects serve to "impart . . . [historical] significance . . . as a result of the paths they have traced through time and space" (Harris 118). While the objects are removed from the time and space of their initial acquisition, as they come together in the narrative, they synecdochically represent the spaces the de Leóns left behind. Just as objects in early modern *Wunderkammern* acquired historical significance based on their present-day viewing context, Harris argues that the objects maintain their significance independent of the context where they are later seen. He explains that each artifact in a *Wunderkammer* possesses a "life history" or "career" of meanings that are accrued through time, through "tournaments of value" (118). Within *Oscar Wao*, Oscar's most significant artifacts also carry life histories—or "tournaments of value"—that are significant beyond their contemporary viewing context. The meaning behind these artifacts is augmented when viewed alongside one another. Some of the histories contained within Yunior's *Wunderkamm*er include: a history of colonialism in South America (particularly with *fukú americanus* and Columbus's *discovery* of Hispaniola in 1492); a history of the U.S.-backed occupation of the Dominican Republic (and its connection with establishing and strengthening the Trujillo regime); alternate historical perspectives of subjugated families (such as the de Leóns) and the personal traumas these families endured; and, most especially, Oscar's historical legacy (as a writer, artist, theorist, son, brother, uncle, and friend). The histories contained in these objects, which travelled from Santo Domingo to Paterson, New Jersey, are "portals through which may be glimpsed the contours of [these] overarching [historical] structure[s] or system[s]" (Harris 114). Here, Harris forwards the idea that the artifact's meaning is incumbent on viewers to look upon the objects, and to trace out the overarching histories contained within. In *Oscar Wao*, Isis is left to engage with this "multisensorial [encounter] . . . [to] not only . . . wonder reflexively, but also to experience an affective wonderment" (Staunaes and Kofoed 1236), one

that not only pushes her towards new historical understandings, but also enables her to unlock the artifact's "life history" or "career" of meaning, to borrow Harris's phrase.

Through the creation of a textual *Wunderkammer*, Yunior reveals significant details of the de León's history. These historical nuances are important, not only because they function to undermine Trujillo's preferred history, but also because they illustrate how the de León's story can be any family's story; the objects represent the alternate stories that were at one time suppressed, forgotten, or buried within. When combined, the artifacts in Yunior's *Wunderkammer* become a *lieu de mémoire* for those viewing the objects. While Yunior's *Wunderkammer* contains moveable artifacts removed from a specific place and time, the affective quality of the objects working together creates a space for negotiating memory for those who would be excluded from the otherwise state-sanctioned *lieux de mémoire.* In talking about how abandoned sites of war function as *lieux de mémoire*, such as the "Warsaw neighborhood of Muranów" (688), Sendyka writes that "these abandoned, neglected locations, which nevertheless retain the right to commemoration, generate a particular kind of affective aura that eventually becomes their trademark" (688). While these locations remain physical sites (albeit stripped of commemorative markers traditionally associated with *lieux de mémoire*), Sendkya argues that "places that have been stripped of their 'placeness' . . . of their potential habitability—and of their memory" are still significant locales for meaning-making (688). While Yunior's *Wunderkammer* lacks the physical location of the war-based *lieux de mémoire*, the artifacts synecdochically create a connection between readers and the past, becoming "a 'place of memory'" for those viewing the objects (688). The ability to make meaning based on the objects on display—as well as the viewer's opportunity to 'inform the self' by way of a textual *Wunderkammer*—is made possible *only* by the artifacts' synecdochical qualities. Indeed, the comic books, photographs,

pieces of creative writing, RPGs, etc., create a synecdoche that stands in place of the de León's forgotten past. Through their display in a *Wunderkammer*, the objects serve as fragmentary signs for what took place, educating viewers (i.e., Isis) of this repressed history and its affiliation with the contemporary self. Like a *lieu de mémoire*, Isis is meant to come into contact with this past and be affected by her ancestors' artifacts. Through her, their memory will live on.

Curation Matters: Yunior's Reliability, Footnotes, and Show-and-Tell

A focus on the use of *Wunderkammern* in literary spaces begs the question of how the character-as-curator handles items contained within these cabinets of curiosity. The character-as-curator makes the artifacts visible by using show-and-tell. In narratives, show-and-tell functions as a corrective mechanism that addresses gaps and inaccuracies. In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior uses show-and-tell through footnotes on the page to visually disrupt the narrative (show) and call readers' attention away from the body of the text. These footnotes reveal salient insights about Yunior as a narrator and about his understanding of Dominican history and Oscar's family's role within it (tell). "Footnotes," as Anne H. Stevens and Jay Williams write in their overview of how footnotes are used in the journal *Critical Inquiry*, can "be a way for the author to reveal more of his or her personality, to step out of the bounds of the self created by formal academic discourse. . ." (211). For Yunior, footnotes create an alternative space for self-presentation (show) and historical negotiation (tell). On another level, show-and-tell augments the objects contained within his *Wunderkammer* as Yunior uses it to convey salient information about the objects displayed (e.g., describing Oscar's copy of *Watchmen* or various photographs he recovered).

Although show-and-tell is typically associated with the childhood activity of taking an object, displaying it before others, and explaining its significance, this activity remains an

important learning technique throughout adulthood. For example, in his introduction to the November 2004 issue of *Art Education*, editor B. Stephen Carpenter II, reflects how "[i]n show-and-tell situations of my childhood I learned the value of different perspectives and experiences. I learned how to listen and to find alternate ways of asking for and conveying information" (5). Here, Carpenter emphasizes the important qualities that characterize the social nature of show-and-tell (such as perspective taking, listening, and conveying new information). At its core, show-and-tell involves an audience willing to receive and interpret important information. Carpenter writes that as he grew older, "my friends and I changed where and how our show-and-tell interactions occurred" (5). The social and interpretative function of show-and-tell remains long after the classroom practice disappears. Furthermore, as a multidisciplinary explanation and display technique, show-and-tell has been used across disciplines, particularly in childhood education (Noonan et al.; Swords et al.), human resources hiring practices (Walesh), and in workplace-leadership scholarship (Dragoni et al.).

For show-and-tell to operate correctly, it requires cognitive and connective work from the audience. As a method of critical thinking, show-and-tell is institutionalized in early childhood development and sets the stage for lifelong learning. Indeed, it is through show-and-tell that children learn how to learn, and how to learn about ideas different from their own. Museums also utilize show-and-tell pedagogically in their displays. As Tony Bennett writes in *The Birth of the Museum,* an exhibition's central function "is to show and tell so that the people might look and learn" (98). Showing-and-telling in museums forges an emotional link between exhibitions and viewers (oftentimes evoking sensory experiences that relate to ways of seeing, hearing, believing, and knowing). Curators organize and display objects to distribute knowledge on a given subject, presenting information to museumgoers so that these individuals may look upon

the objects and understand the forwarded messages. The museum—especially Yunior's *Wunderkammer*—builds off these foundational cognitive processes. In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior adapts show-and-tell through his use of footnotes in order to counter Trujillo's totalitarian regime. The fragmentary nature of Yunior's archive necessitates this kind of curation to facilitate readers' knowledge production. The discrete artifacts in Yunior's *Wunderkammer* offer the opportunity for explication, which function synecdochically: each is a part in relation to a larger whole. Yunior adapts the basic structure of show-and-tell, calling on readers to become active in how they question the artifacts and totalitarian histories on display.

Show-and-tell also functions as a curatorial technique in museum spaces. For example, in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Jean Paul Martinon refers to the descriptive nature of any museum display in order to solidify the connection between object and viewer. In any exhibition, it is difficult for viewers to contextualize the objects they are viewing when they lack necessary background information. As Martinon notes, the museum is "essentially expository: *it both shows and explains*" (3, emphasis added); displayed artifacts are often accompanied by some sort of explanation (whether it be a sign, audio tour, or personal descriptions from a docent). Museum spaces do not simply "pitch an object (artwork) against a subject (viewer) . . . [these spaces are] viewer-centered: the crowd makes it *experiential and participatory*" based on the descriptive cues provided (Martinon 3). It is the combination of people within the space and the descriptive cues surrounding an exhibition that encourage a museumgoer's active participation and critical thinking. These visual and auditory cues are extremely important, as Janet Marstine explains in *New Museum Theory*, since "[m]useums are not neutral spaces that speak with one institutional, authoritative voice. Museums are about individuals making subjective choices [and meaning]" (2). Just as curators make choices in what they decide to

show-and-tell, museumgoers also have choices in whether or not they decide to read the materials, purchase the tour or audio accompaniment, or spend time in front of an artifact.

In *Oscar Wao*, show-and-tell is connected to Yunior's use of footnotes. As Shari Benstock writes in "At the Margins of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text," footnotes "serve, at their most elemental, as commentaries on, or references for, the parts of the text which they are keyed . . . their purpose being to elaborate on the text without engulfing it" (204). Footnotes in narrative possess an inherent show-and-tell quality to them; they are disruptive in part because they enable writers to break the fourth wall between author and reader. In doing so, footnotes interrupt readers' reading processes by calling attention to critical commentary "from a perspective that may be different from . . . that established in the text" (Benstock 204). Along with visually providing space for digressions from the text, footnotes persuade readers of an author's knowledge and authority on a subject (Grafton; Stevens and Williams).

Footnotes in narrative have a long history, especially given their ability to generate doubly-voiced discourses that perform both intratextually and paratextually. According to Michael Hemmingson, "in contemporary fiction, the footnote is a textual device that has moved from the mechanics of the beleaguered scholar to the artistic endeavors of the writer with Microsoft Word at one's disposal and metatextual aspirations at heart" (277). Footnotes are commonly used in literature to augment the narrative and serve various ends. For example, Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is a literary work flushed with footnote descriptions of both real and imagined "sources" that complement Sterne's central storyline. The footnotes help readers progress through the text by developing their understanding of both the outside allusions Sterne references (e.g., those contained in works by individuals like John Locke, Jonathan Swift, François Rabelais, Miguel de Cervantes, and Michel de Montaigne),

and the hidden meanings behind many of the jokes Tristram tells from within the narrative frame.

The form and shape of footnotes in poststructuralist and postmodern texts challenge citational authority. For instance, Jacques Derrida's *Glas*[9] is arranged into vertical columns that analyze works by G. W. F. Hegel and playwright Jean Genet. Derrida's commentary is interjected around and between the columns and is both demonstrative and descriptive in his critique of Hegel and Genet. Drawing on Derrida's form in *Glas* (Hemmingson), Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* is a novel whose footnotes contain footnotes, a number of which are written upside down or spread horizontally across the page. Danielewski's flurry of footnotes function paratextually and create three separate storylines within the novel. Beyond adding depth and dimension to the plot, the footnotes (in their sheer mass) are an overwhelming example of Danielewski's use of show-and-tell, particularly as the first letter of footnotes 27-42 spell his full name. Discussing Derrida's and Danielewski's bifurcated form in *Glas* and *House of Leaves*, Hemmingson writes that "[b]y appropriating this method of parallel and competing texts Danielewski [and Derrida create] a polyocality where the various voices and presentation of the words compete for a reader's attention" (275). In both cases, the footnotes "stand out visually and aesthetically from other volumes on the shelves; they create a wholly separate narrative. . ." (Hemmingson 278). The footnotes in these examples are significant additions for reading and understanding the text.

Even with young adult literature, footnotes can be used to provide readers additional insights into the narrator and plot. For example, in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, footnotes are used to trace the thoughts of the text's central character,

[9] See Marian; Spivak; and Todd for further readings of *Glas*' form and use of citation practices.

Christopher Boone, who has an auto-processing disorder. Upon discovering the dead body of his neighbor's dog, Boone assumes the role of junior sleuth in his attempts to solve the curious case. Similar to Benstock's explication of footnotes, those appearing in Haddon's text function traditionally as they trace the inner-workings of Boone's autistic mind, revealing how he uses logic, reason, and deduction to solve the text's mystery.[10]

In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior uses the practice of show-and-tell through the text's footnotes to signpost alternate histories that challenge Trujillo's dominant master narratives. Through the footnotes, Yunior contextualizes the *Wunderkammer*'s artifacts and highlights the role these items play in forwarding or dismantling Trujillo's preferred history. Such footnotes include background information on Oscar's comic books; the interviews Yunior conducts with members of the de León family; and the personal letters, manuscripts, and private writings he has obtained and read. Footnotes focusing on history provide counter-narratives, such as those featuring radical dissenters during Trujillo's regime. For example, in a footnote, Yunior explains the significance of Jesús de Galindez, "a Basque super nerd and a Columbia University grad student who had written a rather unsettling doctoral dissertation. The topic? Lamentably, unfortunately, sadly; the era of Rafael S. Leonidas Trujillo Molina" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 96). Other footnotes outline the stories of dissenting figures who are written out of Trujillo's history, provide background information about the Dominican freedom fighters, and expose the individuals responsible for the Dominican Republic's greatest cultural atrocities.[11] The advantage of these

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[10] Although this list is not exhaustive, other novels that exhibit show-and-tell through the use of footnotes include: James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*; Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire*; Nicholson Baker's *Mezzanine*; David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*; Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell: A Novel*; Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza: A Graphic Novel*; and George Saunders's *Lincoln in the Bardo: A Novel*.

[11] For example, the first member of Trujillo's fleet that Yunior contextualizes for readers is Porfirio Rubirosa. He notes in footnote four that: "Rubi. . . was the third-most famous Dominican in the world. . . . A tall, debonair pretty boy whose 'enormous phallus created havoc in Europe and North America,' Rubirosa was the

curated footnotes is that they allow readers to accelerate the process of discovering relevant content as it concerns the Dominican Republic's oppressive history.

In *The Footnote* A Curious History*, Anthony Grafton describes the history and variety of footnotes in historical, scientific, and theoretical writing. Grafton outlines how ". . . the footnote varies as widely in nature and content as any other complex scientific or technical practice" (11). Footnotes, according to Grafton, tell an important story within a text, establishing an author's legitimacy and pointing towards their school of thought or theoretical training. Along with proving an author's worth, Grafton argues that "[u]nlike other types of credentials, however, footnotes sometimes afford entertainment—normally in the form of daggers stuck in the backs of the author's colleagues" (8). In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior's use of footnotes allow him to speak back to readers and insert some of his personality into the narrative. In total, there are thirty-three footnotes scattered throughout *Oscar Wao*. The footnotes more broadly contextualize and explain points that cannot be included within the narrative; in doing so, the footnotes function to complement the story Yunior tells. Sean O'Brien, writing in "Some Assembly Required," remarks that Dominican history is the topic of at least "twenty-six footnotes," while "genre literature/pop culture and family history" round out the rest (78). These footnotes are informative, particularly to an audience who might not be aware of the Dominican Republic's past. For example, while providing a history of the Dominican Republic's democratic struggles, Yunior bluntly states in the novel's beginning pages, "Oh, you didn't know we were occupied twice in the twentieth century? Don't worry, when you have kids they won't know the U.S. occupied Iraq either" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 19). This interjection within the narrative frame brings

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quintessential jet-setting, car-racing, polo-obsessed playboy, the Trujillato's 'happy side' (for he was indeed one of Trujillo's best known minions)" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 12). There are numerous other figures that Yunior describes for readers in his footnotes.

attention to the U.S.'s refusal to acknowledge its long history of Imperial warfare while giving readers a glimpse into Yunior's personality. More importantly, however, it precipitates the novel's first footnote, one that draws attention to the Unites States' involvement in Trujillo's rise to power. The first footnote reads:

> For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: Trujillo . . . treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master. . . . Outstanding accomplishments include: the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community, *one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S.-backed dictators*. . . (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 3, emphasis added)

The novel's first footnote provides a historical and textual explanation while also revealing Yunior's sarcastic personality. Like display signage at a museum, the footnotes supplement and augment the text, asking readers to look more closely at the histories being described.

Footnotes in narrative grant readers a choice: they can consult the footnoted data provided or disregard this information and continue moving through the text. Footnotes are curated to appear at telling moments within the narrative. Or, as Brian McHale writes in *Postmodernist Fiction*, footnotes in novels place the reader in a peculiar situation since "we are forced to choose which to read first, main text or footnotes" (191-92). Like museumgoers, readers are also forced to devise a plan for how they might navigate between footnote and source text. As McHale explains, one can ". . . read forward through the main text to a certain point, then backtrack to read all the footnotes . . . Or the other way around, first all the footnotes to a certain point, then the main text . . ." (191-92). Because of the footnotes, readers are asked to disrupt their experience with the text and the character-as-curator provides them opportunities to

challenge their knowledge and historical understanding. Just like in museum spaces, readers are offered choices for how they wish to encounter, investigate, and comprehend the information provided.

Along with their supplemental role in the text, Yunior's footnotes also reveal his subjectivity as a curator and provide a space for him to interrogate the challenges of remembering and constructing someone else's history. Because of the dialogic nature of the footnotes, they allow Yunior a space to speak back to readers. Grafton articulates that "the use of footnotes enables historians to make their texts not monologues but conversations, in which modern scholars, their predecessors, and their subjects all take part" (234). *Oscar Wao*'s readers are thus invited to take part in engaging with Yunior, understanding his ways of thinking. The footnotes provide Yunior an opportunity to admit to his own fallibility and trouble making sense of the past. In places within the narrative, Yunior discloses that he does not have full access to the family's history. For instance, when recounting the memory of Abelard's fateful end, Yunior states that "if you're looking for a full story, I don't have it" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 243). In another instance, Yunior explains how Belicia's early life in the Dominican Republic "remains mysterious, either through denial, amnesia, or both" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 78). The de León's hesitation to talk about life during the Era of Trujillo, coupled with the untrustworthiness of the regime's documented history, prevents Yunior from constituting a definitive version of the past. Along with the lack of physical evidence or familial stories, Yunior "often expresses the most doubt about his narrative when the event he is describing originates in an [unidentifiable] source" (Miller 99). The lack of source materials causes Yunior to doubt himself and the story he is telling. In an attempt to be transparent about the history he is curating, Yunior uses footnotes to admit to his own shortcomings and present a more authentic representation of the past. Just as

footnotes function to "allow us a means of evaluating the scholarship of an essay" (Stevens and Williams 211), Yunior uses a space originally concerned with establishing authority to admit to his uncertainty and lack of knowledge. As a curatorial technique, using the footnotes for show-and-tell draws in readers and encourages them to question both the reliability of the broader history (especially in instances where histories are silenced and erased), and the reliability of the historian.

As character-as-curator, Yunior is constantly making choices in how much or how little he reveals to readers. Curators make similar choices when choosing accompanying materials to display. While such work is often hidden, the footnotes reveal the challenges of making these choices, especially when things like history and personal and familial memories are concerned. Much of the information Yunior is dealing with is mired in inconsistency and thus limits the choices he can make while constructing his historical project. T.S. Miller writes that while "[Yunior] attempts to lend his narrative a veneer of authenticity by pretending to base much or all of it in source material" (99), a number of footnotes featured in the text persuade readers to challenge Yunior's all-seeing and all-knowing style. For example, early in the text, Yunior admits in a footnote to possessing only partial knowledge of the geography of the Dominican Republic as he mixes up the location that Belicia and the Gangster run off to:

> In my first draft, Samaná was actually Jarabacoa, but then my girl Leonie, resident expert in all things Domo, pointed out that there are no beaches in Jarabacoa. Beautiful rivers but no beaches. Leonie was also the one who informed me that the perrito (see first paragraphs of chapter one, "GhettoNerd at the End of the World") wasn't popularized until the late eighties, early nineties, but that was one detail I couldn't change, just liked

> the image too much. *Forgive me, historians of popular dance, forgive me!* (*Oscar Wao* 132, emphasis added)

In this footnote, Yunior admits his fallibility as a historian and makes his omissions apparent to readers. The footnote not only makes visible Yunior's thought process (he consulted Leonie who corrected his assertions), but it also highlights where he decided to ignore what she said (with GhettoNerd in Chapter one). Yunior uses the footnote to reveal that his narrative contains both corrections and omissions. Rather than asking readers to accept what he says without question, Yunior utilizes the footnotes to draw their attention to his oversights, causing them to think more critically about how histories are constructed and about how history and memory are blurred without the evidence Yunior needs.

The choices a curator makes are often a concealed part of how viewers experience a museum. Other than when they are revealed by docents, or through signage or other accompaniments, the choices that go into a display are not always apparent to viewers walking through exhibitions. Daniel Sherman, writing in *Museum Culture*, describes the importance of the curator's influence when constructing a museum display:

> One important aspect of a curator's role is the potential it offers to focus on a *particular subject and bring it to the public's attention at a specific moment*. Through the selection of artists, through the juxtaposition and interpretation of their works of art, curators are able to generate dialogue (or more accurately a *trialogue*) between the audience, the artist and the institution. ("Introduction" x)

Sherman suggests that the act of curation, of putting together a museum display for the public's perusal, relies on the curator's ability to use kairos in their selection and display, knowing the opportune moment to present and display certain histories. The tripartite relationship between

audience, artist, and institution hinges on what the curator decides to incorporate into an exhibition. The use of show-and-tell through footnotes in *Oscar Wao* become a curatorial opportunity to create dialogue with readers. Through their content and appearance on the page, Yunior draws attention to specific insights and asks readers to slow down and pay attention.

Because the footnotes serve to challenge Trujillo's forwarded histories and augment the artifacts in Yunior's *wunderkammer,* they assist him in building a counter narrative that recovers the de León's past. The footnotes work alongside the objects, adding to the synecdochical qualities of the *Wunderkammer.* Since there are so few objects in the *Wunderkammer*, each is displayed and mediated without coming to a definitive conclusion and inviting readerly interpretation. The footnotes and objects in the *Wunderkammer* work together to lead readers toward a bigger conversation about the de Leóns, the Dominican Republic, and history.

Conclusion

By assembling fragments, and through the use of show-and-tell, the character-as-curator as discussed in this chapter constructs personal histories to help recover the past and create spaces (or *lieux*) for interrogating dominant narratives and for preserving familial memories. In *Oscar Wao*, the archival fragments are framed and isolated in the narrative to problematize historical understanding and vocalize the personal testimonies contained within. While they never render themselves finished and absolute, these experiences do open themselves up to readerly interpretation and reinterpretation. Curating fragments within spaces like *lieux de mémoire* or *Wunderkammern* can result in vital alternate archives that curate a history of the present for successive generations.

The idea that the archive is created to recover history and supplant collective memories for future generations is carried throughout *Oscar Wao*. In the time between when Yunior constructs his *Wunderkammer* and Isis' presumed arrival following the novel's conclusion, Yunior fulfills his duty as Oscar's keeper. While he waits for Isis to arrive, Yunior preserves Oscar's mementos, not only to ensure that they are safe, but also to use them as archival evidence of Oscar's family and their cultural history. In the novel's last chapter, when Yunior is feeling "downtrodden [and] morose" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 331), he draws attention to one of the most significant objects on display in his *Wunderkammer*: Oscar's dog-eared copy of *Watchmen*. In that moment, Yunior,

> flips through the book . . . to the last horrifying chapter: "A Stronger Loving World." To the only panel [Oscar] circled. Oscar—who never defaced a book in his life—circled one panel three times in the same emphatic pen he used to write his last letters home. The panel where Adrian Viedt and Dr. Manhattan are having their last convo [see Fig. 3.2.]. After the mutant brain has destroyed New York City; after Dr. Manhattan has murdered Rorschach; and Viedt's plan has succeeded in "saving the world." Viedt says: "I did the right thing, didn't I? It all worked out in the end." And Manhattan, before fading from our Universe, replies: "In the end? Nothing ends, Adrian. Nothing ever ends." (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 331)

Fig 3.2. Final panel in *Watchmen #12* (Moore, "A Stronger Loving World")

The emphasis on continuation and longevity, despite a nod towards struggle in the *Watchmen* panels, hints at the sustaining qualities of the de León family's legacy. Through Isis, the de León's history and story will never end. She is responsible for adding to the archive and carrying forward the family's legacy. Moreover, because Yunior assumes the role of character-as-curator (and, by extension, Oscar's guardian and keeper), the objects and mementos he collects, tends to, and puts on display, furnishes readers with a better understanding of Oscar's cultural and family legacy. *Oscar Wao*'s conclusion points to the prospect of transforming a destitute historical past into an optimistic future: "[t]his hope is transferred to future generations" with Yunior envisioning Isis as the recipient of the history he has pieced together (Hanna 516).

The enduring and life-affirming nature of the de Leóns is furthermore suggested by Isis' name. As Lauren Jean Gantz explains, "[i]n Egyptian mythology, Isis is wife to Osiris and mother of Horus. She resurrects Osiris after he is murdered by his brother, then is impregnated and gives birth to her son. She is thus linked to birth, death, and rebirth—the most basic cycle of human existence." While Manhattan's declaration that "Nothing ever ends" can possibly reference the enduring qualities of the family's fukú (Gantz), I alternatively posit that it is a

reference to the sustainability of the family's legacy through Isis. Yunior's *Wunderkammer*, coupled with Isis's presence, staves off the supernatural qualities of the fukú, thus allowing the de Leóns' memory to live on. What remains after family members, like Oscar, are gone, is the archive Yunior creates. Serving as a *lieu de mémoire*, the archive is meant to facilitate the transmission of familial and cultural memories to subsequent generations.

Yunior's *Wunderkammer*, his use of synecdoche and show-and-tell though footnotes, and the historical project he undertakes illustrate how *Oscar Wao* is itself a collection of fragments. Texts like *Oscar Wao* critique hegemonic historical models and the entrenched oppressive politics contained within. Because of footnotes' visual disruption and the use of show-and-tell in the narrative, the character-as-curator becomes the interpretive figure presiding over these types of literary/revisionist projects. The characters-as-curators keep these archives and, in the case of *Oscar Wao*, use show-and-tell in an attempt to dismantle totalitarian propaganda and champion personal stories and minority histories. Through Yunior's *Wunderkammer*, and his use of synecdoche, he curates a counter-archive that gives voice to experiences and stories that are silenced by those in power and lost in cultural migration. The issue of space and preservation is one that exists in a text like *Oscar Wao*, but not necessarily in one like *Libra*. Footnotes and *Wunderkammern* thus become tools to make marginal histories visible and disrupt the past. The character-as-curator's presence in *Oscar Wao* provides a model for creating contested spaces in literature, ones that combine disparate historical fragments/objects that would not otherwise be united.

Archives in narratives are places where dissimilar archeological sources can be analyzed, interpreted, dismantled, and reassembled. Or, as Arellano writes, this literature of fragments (or "archival fiction") is a place where disconnected shards "are contained and analyzed as in a kind

of active memory; it is a repository of narrative possibilities" (380). The author's ability to display and curate historical fragments in novels, and the recovery potential within those displays will be considered in greater depth in Chapter four. There are numerous examples of contemporary postmodern texts that are evocative of Arellano's "literature of fragments," each utilizing archival materials to serve specific ends.[12] The archival materials within these texts all function to dismantle overarching histories that have been unquestionably accepted. Like the use of archival materials in these texts, this chapter illustrated how *Oscar Wao* utilizes curatorial techniques to critique biased and seemingly impenetrable structures like Trujillo's regime of "truths." Or, to quote Oscar, Diaz's text shows how the "more speculative genres" can disassemble pragmatic systems of historical "faithfulness" (Diaz, *Oscar Wao* 43).

[12] See, for example Alistair MacLeod's *No Great Mischief*; Nino Ricci's *Lives of the Saints* and *The Origins of Species*; Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Englishman's Boy*; Michael Crummey's *River Thieves;* Thomas King's *One Good Story, That One*; Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and *Coming Through Slaughter*; and Modris Eksteins's *Walking Since Daybreak*.

CHAPTER FOUR

"History will have to find a different face:" *Ana Historic* and Curating Women's Histories in Early Vancouver[1]

> *history is built on a groundwork of fact, Richard states. Richard is a good historian, known for the diligent research behind his books. one missing piece can change the shape of the whole picture—you see how important your part in it is? but i'm no longer doing my part looking for missing pieces. . . . history married her [Mrs. Richards] to Bill Springer and wrote her off. . . . entered as Mrs., she enters his house as his wife. she has no first name, she has no place, no place on the street, not if she's a 'good woman.' her writing stops.*
>
> –Daphne Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 134

Chapter four involves a different kind of curatorial challenge and representation of artifacts than did Chapters two and three. Moving even farther away from the overabundance of knowledge that Chapter two's character-as-curator managed, Chapter four focuses on a text where few artifactual fragments are available. In Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic*, the character-as-curator must utilize alternative means to make sense of the minimal fragments concerning women's lives in early Vancouver. Adding to the character-as-curator's repertoire of display techniques, such as *ekphrasis* and synecdoche, in Chapter four, the character-as-curator represents artifacts on the text's pages. Because the artifacts themselves are represented on the page, the character-as-curator is less an intermediary for readerly interpretation and more a facilitator of knowledge production. By plotting artifacts on the page, the character-as-curator makes visible where gaps in the historical record exist and creates a space for interrogating those gaps and imagining alternative possibilities for filling them.

To a greater degree than Chapters two and three, Chapter four involves histories that existed yet were minimally referenced in official historical records. With Don DeLillo's *Libra* in

[1] Sleater-Kinney. "Male Model." *All Hands on the Bad One*. Kill Rock Stars, 2000.

Chapter two, the source materials Nicholas Branch works with exist in excess and are publicly sourced and widely available. In this case, historical understanding involves making choices that are complicated by the copious and contradictory data Branch receives. Because of the abundance of available data, Branch questions the legitimacy of archival items by offering alternate readings of the events through curation and *ekphrasis*. In doing so, Branch's readings invite multiplicity and place onus on readers to be active agents in analyzing, investigating, and problematizing the archival puzzle of Kennedy's death. With Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in Chapter three, artifactual materials were destroyed, forgotten, or exist in fewer quantity than those appearing in Chapter two. The items that do exist are conflicting because familial memories—themselves difficult to locate and retrieve—contrast with the state-sanctioned histories forwarded by Trujillo's regime. While Chapter two involved *ekphrasis* as a tool for interpreting an overabundant archive, Chapter three examined how synecdoche, show-and-tell, and footnotes are used to make meaning of conflicting histories in personal *Wunderkammern*. As with Chapter two, Chapter three's character-as-curator still had choices about which artifacts to display and highlight.

Because the archive in Chapter four has even less available data, this chapter is principally concerned with how to examine histories that were inferred from the data rather than explicitly stated. *Ana Historic* represents a sharp departure from *Libra* and *Oscar Wao*, because little to no public data exists on the lives of pioneer women that Annie Torrent, the text's character-as-curator, researches. Instead, Annie must locate the disappeared through imagination and through an analysis of the silences and gaps that exist between known historical sources of the time. In Annie's archive, women were mentioned in pieces, implicated in history, but their experiences were not worth recording. As a result, historians wishing to understand women's

histories must infer and fictionalize the past in different ways than are required when one has an overabundance or even conflicting historical data. The character-as-curator in this context reads between the lines to curate inferences brought on by a lack of reference to women's experiences.

In *Ana Historic*, Annie is employed by her historian husband as a research assistant. While gathering research for his projects, Annie discovers partial references to women's experiences in the city's historical register. She is particularly drawn to mentions of a schoolteacher named Mrs. Richards: "[i]n 1874 Mrs. Richards marries Ben Springer and the Pattersons move to Moodyville" (Marlatt, *Ana Historic* 48). Stuck on the reference, Annie realizes how women's stories in the Hasting's Sawmill record are only briefly mentioned. Comparatively, Annie notes the voluminous and expansive histories of Vancouver's father figures, and cannot help but ask "where are the city mothers?" (28). Annie observes:

> there are photographs of the buildings, of the docks, of the men. there are maps of the streets, the first few blocks of Granville or Gastown (Gassy Jack's town, the appropriative hidden in the abbreviation). there are histories of properties changing hands and names, of civic developments named for those who pushed them through. Amidst all this there are brief references to women: Mrs. John Peabody Patterson, practical nurse and wife of the loading supervisor at Hastings Sawmill, 'the sort of hardboiled angel of mercy Gastown needed,' Alan Morley sketches her. or Mrs. Richard Henry Alexander, wife of the assistant manager and 'social queen of the inlet' (Morley again), a Scots girl who came over on one of the brideships to marry a man and a station. (47, emphasis added)

Annie recognizes women's presence—they are in the record, yet their experiences are not given the time and space that men's experiences are. The few existing sketches of women (which

Marlatt pulls from Alan Morley's *Vancouver: From Milltown to Metropolis*) emphasize the nature of the patriarchal and proprietary society in the late 1800s. Women's identities and social stations in Hastings Sawmill are linked primarily to their husbands' accolades, achievements, and identities. Even the photographic evidence Annie discusses in the novel privileges the conquered lands and men's achievements over women's. For Mrs. Richards, the scant details of her life are as follows: "she was English, she was a widow, she was a school teacher, she married Ben Springer, she bought a piano" (Thompson 126). The relatively few details of Mrs. Richards's life further Annie's conviction that "history is the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world" (Marlatt, *Ana* 28). In this version of history, women's experiences are glossed over in favor of men's. As the text's character-as-curator, Annie turns to poetry, prose, literary theory, history texts, and newspapers, and uses those fragments to fill in what women's experiences were like. Despite the omissions in the historical record, Annie's emotional and embodied response to the little she does uncover propels her to imagine an alternative history that makes space for women's identities beyond the limited space they are initially given.

What distinguishes texts like *Ana Historic* from other novels dealing with history is how Marlatt represents source fragments on the written page, allowing the excerpts to function like artwork in a museum space. In examining the relationship between postmodern novels and museums, Vivian Nun Halloran argues that "the archive, and, by extension, the museum," function as these novels' "central motif[s]" (24). In *Exhibiting Slavery*, Halloran focuses on numerous texts that bring the novel and museum together, including: Maryse Condé's *Segu* and *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*; Reinaldo Arenas's *Graveyard of the Angels*; Caryl Phillip's *Cambridge*; Fred D'Aguiar's *The Longest Memory*; and David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress*,

to name a few. These texts feature multiple allusions to visual art, paintings, dioramas, and other artifactual source materials. Halloran's investigation of these texts reveals certain characteristics that classify them as museum novels (and that are site-specific to *Ana Historic*). Her first characteristic involves novels that "[dramatize] the process of constant discovery of new evidence of the past" (Halloran 24). In *Ana Historic*, Annie builds on the fragments she finds and recreates the past by making inferences about women's histories. Halloran's other characteristics include placing emphasis on the "constructed, fragmented, and necessarily imperfect nature of our knowledge of the past" (24). By questioning and working through the archive on the page, Annie problematizes the masculinist histories penned by the city fathers. Thirdly, Halloran names novels that highlight "their own status as [a] virtual archive or repository of (fictitious) historical documents" (24). There are countless instances in *Ana Historic* where Annie refers to the fictional status of her historical project. As such, Annie's project relies on a more subjective and imaginative reading of Canadian women's pasts, one that was never officially included in the historical record.

In order to examine how women's histories are represented in texts like *Ana Historic*, I begin by examining affective histories and the effects of historians' embodied responses to the materials they are working with. Affective history allows historians to make space for their subjectivity when dealing with the past. Similar to the embodied reactions viewers experience in *lieux de mémoire*, affective history recognizes how historians are corporeally and emotionally affected by the histories they encounter. Because she is making inferences from fragments, Annie's emotions towards her subject allow her to *feel* Mrs. Richards's history on a very personal level. Annie experiences an emotional and physical response to the archive she is dealing with, ultimately compelling her to reimagine and give life to women's lost voices.

Chapter four will initially demonstrate how Annie's use of affective history makes apparent the felt knowledge she experiences in directly handling the historical materials and urges her to imagine what pioneer women's experiences might be like.

The second goal of this chapter is to explore how the *ana* and commonplace books function as archival repositories in *Ana Historic*. In Marlatt's novel, *ana* is not simply referenced in the text's title; rather, the *ana* is the space where Annie curates women's place in the past. In relying on scant archival materials as a starting point, Annie locates the lives of Mrs. Richards, Alice Patterson, Birdie Stewart, and many others. When collecting these sources, Annie realizes that she requires a place to record and display these scattered and fragmentary experiences. The *ana* represents a place where Annie commits women's private and mundane stories (i.e., anecdotes) to writing. I believe that there is benefit to combining fragmentary materials with imagination in an archive like an *ana* when attempting to account for women's self-composed experiences. Yet, I also acknowledge that these spaces are limited by the creator's subjectivity (i.e., Annie's ideologies, gender, politics, and place in the world shape the histories she writes). However, as a space to juxtapose competing voices and make apparent where women's experiences are lacking, the *ana* becomes a useful vehicle for Annie to represent women in the novel.

The final goal of Chapter four is to make apparent a new mode of reading that can be applied to texts like *Ana Historic*, a technique I call displayed archaeology. In her *ana*, Annie displays different historical and literary references along with her own additions and imaginings. These items are pieced together in her *ana* and visually plotted to create a form of literary display that shares the contemporary museum's preservation and recovery functions. Display, as a curatorial technique for exhibiting archaeological fragments in exhibition spaces, is entrenched

in the field of museology. Displayed archaeology further augments the stylistic relationship between texts like Marlatt's and museum spaces that bombard viewers with a litany of sources, calling on viewers to question past narratives. Texts that feature displayed archaeology do not rely on traditionally linear-logical narrative forms. Rather, the multitude of seemingly disparate anecdotal sources featured within such narratives create a dialogic and polyphonic posture that privileges multiple voices over a singular, authoritative one (similar to the multiple voices and perspectives that are symptomatic of exhibitions that challenge dominant knowledge). The sources appearing in displayed-archaeological texts are often marked by specific stylistic agents, including: italics, quotation marks, broken down punctuation and syntax, marginalia, and spatial plotting.[2] Unlike footnotes, which are offset from the body of the text, texts featuring displayed archaeology include the distinct sources in the narrative itself.

Writing about the inherently polyphonic qualities of Marlatt's writing, Barbara Godard notes in "'Body I': Daphne Marlatt's Feminist Poetics" that "truth is not singular, logocentric, but multiple, polyphonic. There is no single speaking voice, but many voices, many languages at play in her work" (481). There exists a plurality of meaning in displayed-archaeological writing that does not merge into a singular perspective. Instead, the sources carry their own weight and validity within narratives and must be reviewed both in isolation and alongside one another. This multiplicity of voices (or source material) frustrates readers, since it is oftentimes difficult to infer who is speaking and when. This displayed-archaeological posture calls on readers to participate, co-create, and engage in the meaning-making process, rather than passively consume forwarded source material. Discussing Canadian documentary poetry and writing styles, Manina

[2] While these sources are rendered textually in *Ana Historic*, other displayed-archaeological texts, such as Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* and Frank Davey's *How We Think We Won the War in Iraq*, reproduce images of actual fragments on the text's pages.

Jones writes in *That Art of Difference: 'Documentary-Collage' and English-Canadian Writing* that *Ana Historic* "depends on a foregrounding of the reader's position as a sense-*maker* or interpreter of documentary evidence, implicating him or her in an active process of reading as rewriting" (17). The economy of sources featured in Marlatt's text (and that Jones refers to) demands that readers become active agents in uncovering their meaning.

Beyond mimicking the relationship between exhibition-display and audience-engagement, the interventionist qualities of texts like *Ana Historic* also align themselves with curatorial recovery work. As Katy Deepwell writes in "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices Since the 1970s," curation—and, specifically, feminist curation—is "position[ed] as a practice designed to intervene or to challenge existing bodies of knowledge" (66). Curators display multiple voices and viewpoints, creating a dialogue of perspectives that counter exclusionary hegemonic truths with hopes of undermining inherent biases contained within those worldviews. In *Ana Historic*, displayed archaeology achieves the kind of interventionist function that Deepwell claims is specific to certain curatorial projects. Deepwell's contested spaces, which can be observed in *Ana Historic*, "insert women . . . into the standard narrative of . . . history" thereby "correct[ing] the bias which had contributed to their neglect" [3] (69). Chapter four will thus show how *Ana Historic* as a displayed-archaeological text encourages discovery of women's experiences through its presentation of historical fragments within the narrative frame.

Using *Ana Historic* as an example, this chapter takes up the significance of women's self-representation and argues for the importance of imagined and re-enacted historical constructions

[3] Other exhibitions that feature women's experiences and challenge the exclusionary nature of histories, museums, and art include Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro's *Womanhouse,* now archived online (California Institute of Art Archives); Mierle Laderman Ukeles's use of "Maintenance Art" (Buckberrough and Miller-Keller); and Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document* and *Women and Work* (Kelly).

for understanding women's pasts. In particular, because women's historical writing must often rely in part on elements like imagination, memory, and the intangible, this chapter explores how these components can be used alongside fragmentary materials to make sense of the past. Ultimately, I maintain that not only does Annie function as the text's character-as-curator, but the text itself also comes to function as a museum space. The creation of a museum space on the page makes apparent the constructedness of Annie's historical archive and signals her own role within its construction. Instead of presenting data as empirical truth, displayed archaeology encourages readers to pay attention to the sources and where there are gaps and fragments. The use of displaying artifacts in *Ana Historic* legitimizes women's histories and places emphasis on their absences.

Women's Histories, Affective and Imaginative Re-covery Work

In their introduction to *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell write that ". . . it is imperative that historians not lose sight of the power relations that constitute, and are constituted by, gender" (11). Examining gendered structures in Canadian history can further contextualize historical occurrences in the past and help readers better understand current power structures. Complicating historical understanding is that women's histories remain fragmented and difficult to uncover because of their subordinate roles and exclusion from many historical accounts. Further arguing for the importance of understanding Canadian women's histories, Mona Gleason and Adele Perry write in their "Introduction" to *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* that ". . . women are a distinct group of people with a particular story to be told and analyzed. [Their collection] also rests on the more implicit belief that Canadian society has

valued and treated women differently, and usually more unequally, than men" (1). Historians thus need to learn about women's distinct histories and experiences within the particular contexts in which they lived.

In British colonies in the 1800s, women were largely prevented from publicly playing significant roles beyond the scope of what was deemed acceptable for their gender. In particular, historians "have shown how the assertion of British legal traditions served to disenfranchise female property holders and to limit women's chances of inheritance" in the 1800s (McPherson, Morgan, and Forestell 7). Some women worked or held high social status at the time; "[m]ost women, though, were defined by their dependent status, subordinate to the male head of the household, and this status was inscribed in advice literature and common law'" (9). In addition to the domestic role they played, women in the colonies were often used as tools for moral regulation; their utility was established through their ability to correct and shape white male behavior. Perry discusses pioneer women's corrective function in *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia 1849-1871*, writing that:

> . . . [first] white women . . . compel[led] white men to reject the rough homosocial culture of the backwoods in favor of normative standards of masculinity and respectability . . . second[ly] . . . white women [sent to the New World] would . . . address the local labor market and relieve overpopulation in Britain . . . [finally] white women would address the other central 'problem' of British Columbia's gender organization, namely the widespread practice of white-Aboriginal conjugal relationships. (140, 141, 144)

From Britain's perspective, women served a crucial role both within the Imperial center and abroad (e.g., to remedy the job market *here*, as well as maintain normative standards of white

male virility *there*). Despite serving important supportive, domestic, and social roles, women's mention in historical records was limited compared to men's recorded experiences.

Even when women were granted the opportunity to work outside of the home, these positions were not highly regarded. For example, Perry writes of an 1862 correspondence between Mary Norman and Bishop George Hills regarding Norman's opportunity to immigrate to British Columbia as an unwed woman: "'Is it true,' she wondered, 'that domestic servants even are making from twenty to thirty-five dollars a month, and some even more?" (170). Indeed, the possibility of achieving independence created much excitement among women in the Imperial center. Unfortunately, such promises proved too good to be true, since upon their arrival, these women adopted gender-specific roles of service or simply servitude. Perry writes that "[w]hite women's paid labor was largely confined to a handful of . . . female areas. Middle-class white women were employed as teachers in private 'dame schools,' the female departments of urban public schools, and one-room schoolhouses" (168). Not only were these women restricted to performing gendered labor, but these positions were also not highly regarded by their male counterparts. The inferior spaces women occupied are related to the limited mention of women's experiences in the historical sketches of the time. That is to say, because men did not view the position of school teacher with admiration, there was little need to commit the tasks or figures performing these menial positions to writing.

The consequence of excluding women's experiences beyond the occasional mention is that historians must infer what happened, using what little evidence is there. While all historians must make inferences at some point, their reliance on imagination and fiction is heightened in contexts where the data or artifacts are simply not there. As R.G. Collingwood explains, "[t]he historian's picture of his subject, whether that subject be a sequence of events or a past state of

things, thus appears as a web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points provided by the statements of his authorities" (242). For historians, imagination is a critical component of their process that allows them to connect various points to construct a particular history.

Yet, historians' obligation to fictionalize aspects of their historical accounts has been the subject of much debate. For example, in separate interviews on "The Discourse of History" and "The History of Sexuality," Michel Foucault elaborates on the intersections between history and fiction as they appear in his own work. When discussing how authors occupy space in their texts, Foucault states, "My book is a pure and simple 'fiction': it's a novel, but it's not I who invented it; it is the relationship between our period and its epistemological configuration and this mass of statements" ("The Discourse" 20). Foucault argues that authors navigate several roles (subjectively and in response to constructing histories) and implies that it is not possible for authors (or historians) to exist purely outside the texts they write. Foucault further considers the use of fiction in his writing in an interview with Lucette Finas on "The History of Sexuality:"

> I am well aware that I have never written anything but fictions. I do not mean to say, however, that the truth is therefore absent. It seems to me that the possibility exists for fiction to function in truth, for a fictional discourse to induce effects of truth, and for bringing it about that a true discourse engenders or 'manufactures' something that does not as yet exist, that is, 'fictions' it. One 'fictions' history on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, one 'fictions' a politics not yet in existence on the basis of a historical truth. ("The History" 193)

Foucault's claim that fiction can "function in truth" suggests that imaginative thinking can work alongside authenticity to achieve certain rhetorical ends. He discusses this line of thinking further

in *The Order of Things*, arguing that fiction reveals alternate ideas to readers through the imaginative worlds created within the text. Foucault does not imply that fiction is a superior method for understanding history; rather, he believes that both history and fiction rely on language and imagination to make meaning and that language is a truth unto itself (e.g., language exists, as it is, on the written page. Its truth-value is the meaning the words represent). While Foucault raises important questions about the role of authenticity within imagination, fiction, and history, relying on imagination and fiction can help explain the past when little information is present. In particular, I argue that imagination and fiction within historical thinking can serve as a space for re-covering re-covering marginalized voices.

Because of the lack of evidence, the necessity of fiction in history writing is especially prominent with women's histories. Since women are often missing from larger historical archives, historians must infer elements of the history based on the existing evidence and knowledge of the cultural and sociopolitical conditions at the time. The issue of writing women's histories is considered in *Ana Historic* when Annie contends that if women like Mrs. Richards were granted the opportunity to speak, their testimonies would be viewed as "'inauthentic', fictional possibly" (Marlatt, *Ana* 30). Women's experiences were not deemed important enough. Instead of seeing these omissions (and later imaginings) as a limitation, Marlene Goldman notes that "Annie's *fictional history-making*. . . enable[s] her to let loose (her)stories of women from three different generations, stories which will help Annie to envision a new future for herself" (113, emphasis added). By imagining a history for Mrs. Richards, Annie is able to revitalize her own identity. Like Foucault's views on postmodern history as a "fiction" that "functions in truth" ("The History"), Marlatt imagines—and creates within the text—Mrs. Richards's fictitious diary to grant her a voice that would have otherwise been excluded and forgotten. Marlatt furthermore

attends to historians' subjectivities and the role that they play in re-creating the archive in order to challenge fixed notions of female identity embedded within early Vancouver's historical narratives. Along with recognizing the validity of her embodied responses to the past, Annie's curating and combining various archival documents legitimizes and gives voice to the lives of women like Mrs. Richards. Or, as Annie states, "i wasn't dreaming of history, *the already made*, but making fresh tracks my own way" (98, emphasis added).

By using Mrs. Richards's journal as the grounding artifact to create her fictional histories in *Ana Historic*, Annie complicates the relationships and experiences Mrs. Richards had in her life. Annie characterizes Mrs. Richards as "a nineteenth-century [lady] attempting to escape Victorian ideologies of proper womanhood by travelling to the edges of the British Empire" (Warder 62). Rather than limiting Mrs. Richards to the status of someone's wife, Annie imagines her as an active agent and gives voice to a myriad of complex feelings she imagines her possessing:

> Mrs. Richards, who stood as straight as any tree (o that Victorian sensibility—backbone, Madam, backbone!) wasn't there for the taking. i imagine her standing slim in whalebone at the ship's rail as it turns with the wind, giving her first view of what would become home as she imagined it, imagining herself free of history. (black poplin. Useless baggage.) there is a story here. (Marlatt, *Ana* 14)

In framing Mrs. Richards's life, Annie recognizes that there was certainly more to her story than being married to Ben Springer. As she explains, Annie is "trying very hard to speak, to tell [them]" about the lives women, like Mrs. Richards, had (Marlatt, *Ana* 49). Annie desires to tell these women's stories because she believes that women's historical testimonies, "if they are considered at all by scholars of the past, are treated as 'documents' but not as 'history,' because

they are not 'factual'" (Vautier 25). Annie further challenges the 'factual' nature of history by giving voice to the affective, embodied, and *irrational* components of women's experiences—ones that are most certainly not accounted for within historical writing.

Along with acknowledging the importance of imagination in history writing, recognizing historians' embodied subjectivities is another way to make visible historical work as it is being done. Such acceptance of the historian's own subjectivity in recreating the past is part of the turn towards "effective" and "affective" histories that make visible the embodied historian at work. According to Sinéad Murphy, "one understands a historical time or event simply by placing oneself within it; one puts oneself in the 'shoes' of another tradition, so to speak, through a painstaking reconstruction of the details preserved in contemporary documents, in eyewitness accounts, in archaeological evidence, and so on" (7). Murphy criticizes this attempt to understand history, because it positions the historian as being objective and removed from their object of analysis. Being able to "put oneself in the 'shoes' of another tradition" does not happen just from following a line of thinking based on connected factual evidence. Accordingly, Murphy argues that "Romantic historicism remains historically naïve in its assumption that even historical investigation presupposes an ahistorical investigator, someone who stands over and above the object of her inquiry (a particular historical tradition, person, text, event) and brings nothing of herself to it" (7). It is impossible to approach even fact-based historical data without bringing one's subjectivity to the reading of that data. Within this mode, "one is always at a distance from the object of one's study, gazing at it 'objectively' and manipulating it at will" (Murphy 6); it ignores the manner in which historicizing is a "critical *process,* which is ongoing and unending because we, the critics performing our tasks, are always caught up in it" (5).

Effective history, then, makes visible the historian's own subjectivity and recognizes that history has ongoing *effects* that themselves are implicated in the ways that historians write.

While effective history might acknowledge the historian's subjectivity, affective history goes further to consider a historian's embodied response to archival materials. More than an intellectual endeavor, affective history deals with the emotions and felt knowledge that one experiences in directly handling materials or physically being present in the locations where past events took place. In "Touching the Void: Affective History and the Impossible," Emily Robinson explains that "[t]here is a deeply affective side to historical work which might not be readily admitted in print but which animates discussions among colleagues and sends historians dashing to archives, pencils sharpened, digital cameras charged, minds racing" (504). This affective side of historical work deals with the physical and psychological effects that historians experience when touching and physically handling objects from the past. Robinson draws on those embodied responses to bridge the past and present. As Robinson elaborates, "this is about more than the possibility of empathy, identification or comprehension; it is about the state of feeling oneself (on whatever basis) in communion with the past" (514). By physically being in locations where the past takes shape or by touching and feeling the objects, Robinson explores how historians come to know and understand the past on embodied and emotive levels. As Marlatt explains in an interview with Kevin McGuirk, when Annie "starts thinking about what a woman's life would be like in that period, … she starts thinking about her own life and her mother's life" (Marlatt qtd. in McGuirk). Annie's work allows her to "approach the unwritten or what has not been recorded. And of course it brings her to her own unacknowledged in herself" (Marlatt qtd. in McGuirk). Annie's historicizing is wrapped up not only in Mrs. Richards's life, but also in her own life, familial legacy, and experiences as a woman.

Along with calling attention to historians' embodied presence, affective histories move away from the collective to focus on individual pasts. In an attempt to focus on local (rather than universal) histories, Dipesh Chakrabarty in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, defines "affective histories" through his assessment of the theoretical divide between analytic and hermeneutic historical traditions. He writes that analytical (i.e., empirical) historians desired to achieve social order through the historical methods they employed; the analytical tradition "tend[ed] to evacuate the *local* by assimilating it to some abstract universal" (18, emphasis added). Conversely, he considers the hermeneutic tradition to be a detail-oriented historical approach. As Chakrabarty writes, the hermeneutic tradition "produce[d] a loving grasp of detail in search of an understanding of the diversity of human life-worlds" (18). "Evacuat[ing] the local" references certain histories of peoples, places, cultures, and traditions that were vacated from the historical record. Chakrabarty's appeal to "a loving grasp of detail" represents an incessant search for historical traces associated with these individuals and spaces that managed to leak into, and through, the historical archive. In *Ana Historic*, Annie takes on the role of an affective historian in her acknowledged emotive and corporeal responses to the historical record, as well as in her focus on local and individualized histories. The history Annie deals with is affective: it is a history that carries forward as certain meager details move in-and-out of the historical record. In Marlatt's novel, Annie uses these fragments as a starting place to imagine the life early Vancouver women once held. As such, Annie becomes an affective historian as she personally experiences the past and is keenly aware of history's function to both embody and displace.

Due to Annie's brief archival encounters with women in the historical record, she feels compelled to imagine a life for these women. Annie's historical work collapses past and present

and allows her to complicate women's lives in early Vancouver. Similar to Chakrabarty's appeal to affective history, Annie "finds thought intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life" (Chakrabarty 18); these "forms of life" in *Ana Historic* are closely linked to women's private stories that are, at present, frustratingly unreachable. Because of her unreachability in the known record, Mrs. Richards's identity is constructed from presumed presences behind numerous historical absences. As such, Annie must attempt to reconstruct Mrs. Richards despite the fact that the documentation at hand is written for and by men. In her explication of affective history, Robinson outlines the trouble researchers like Annie face: "The archive is the place where historians can literally touch the past, but in doing so are simultaneously made aware of its unreachability. In a maddening paradox, concrete presence conveys unfathomable absence. In the archive, researchers are both confronted with the absolute alterity of the past and tempted by the challenge of trying to overcome it" (503). Robinson's discussion of the affective historian's "maddening paradox" (503) of being physically near the past and its artifacts while recognizing its unreachability is similar to the situation in which Annie finds herself.

There are numerous instances throughout *Ana Historic* when Annie directly confronts the past. While she is entangled in the historical archive, she is also reminded of the unreachability of her goal. She states that the record she is working through is "not the facts but skeletal bones of a suppressed body the story is" (Marlatt, *Ana* 29). The remains of the story are there, but as ones she has to piece together. Later in the text, Annie previews the concrete information she has regarding Mrs. Richards's life, only to lament the information missing from the historical record: "like her first name, like her past that was dropped away. . ." (30). Annie's frustrations concerning Mrs. Richards's limited information highlights some of the problems historians face when encountering fragments of individuals whose lives were not appropriately chronicled: "No

one knows when she came or how long she had been there when she was appointed school teacher. Or even whose widow she was . . . . In actual fact, Ana Richards, precedes both and fades into the northern shoreline of Burrard Inlet as Mrs. Springer of Moodyville, of whom we hear nothing more" (Marlatt, *Ana* 39). Mrs. Richards's mere mention in the historical archive results in her being both within and beyond Annie's reach as a historian. As an affective historian, Annie's task is to use that fragmentary information to reenact and identify with Mrs. Richards as she imagines her to be.

Anecdotal Collections and Women's History Writing

Mentions of women's experiences appear in small pieces throughout *Ana Historic*, but oftentimes these accounts are written by someone else. To better understand women's histories, archives can be useful sites for compiling materials and locating women within particular places and times in order to propel future action. Jean Bessette, writing in *Retroactivism in The Lesbian Archives*, urges women to invent rhetorical strategies like constructing an archive that can be "wielded in the process of composing the past" (2). Archives, for lesbian women in particular, are themselves "*compositions* with implications for lesbian identity and sexual politics" (*Retroactivism* 2). Women's archives, constructed using a variety of mediums, including "print newsletters and books to material collections of artifacts . . . [in] film and digital video . . ." can assist "in the pursuit of shaping identity and challenging then-present social and political denigrations of same-sex desire and relations" (2). Archives are places where artifacts can more fully represent women's lives and their identities.

Like Marlatt, Bessette's study is primarily concerned with using archives to capture women's everyday experiences and stories. In her chapter, "The Daughters of Bilitis Archive:

Clearing Historical Space for Clustered Anecdotes," Bessette discusses how anecdotes—as they specifically function in Del Martin's and Phyllis Lyon's *Lesbian/Woman*—can challenge the limiting, problematic, and pathologizing representations of lesbian women. *Lesbian/Woman* features lesbian women's personal testimonies in late 1970s America to highlight how each woman "views herself as a person; how she deals with the problems she encounters in her various roles as woman, worker, friend, parent, child, citizen, wife, employer, welfare recipient, homeowner, and taxpayer; and how she views other people and the world around her" (Martin and Lyon 9). Sharing anecdotal personal experiences are not simply identity-affirming; rather, they produce a "form of 'archival consciousness-raising'" (Bessette, *Retroactivism* 3) that subverts grand narratives by offering "a homonormative history in [their] place" (53). The origins of this kind of "archival consciousness-raising" (Bessette, *Retroactivism* 3) are touched on by Sara Evans, who writes in *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* that " . . . [y]oung women's instinctive sharing of their personal experience . . . became a political instrument called 'consciousness-raising' [. . . whereby] women . . . junk all the old [historical] theories and start from scratch, *relying on their own experience*. . . . Consciousness-raising [thus] became a method for developing theory and strategy for building up the new [women's] movement" (214, emphasis added). Whereas the personal experiences women had in *Ana Historic* would have been excluded from the archive Annie explores, feminist historians today argue for the necessity of re-covering and recording women's experiences (both large and small). Evans argues in favor of an oral testimony or oral history project that inspires women (particularly lesbian women) to document their individual experiences and, in doing so, participate in building a more representative and diverse archive.

Archives can function as feminist spaces for consciousness-raising. With respect to lesbian women's archives, archivists are not simply bringing together diverse historical materials to combat historical inadequacies. Rather, it is significant that these women's lives and activities *are* documented at all. In such cases, Bessette argues that "[c]onsciousnesses are 'raised' . . . [because] the composition of a multiplicity of experiences transforms what was previously felt individually into a foundation for collective identification and action" ("An Archive" 30-31). Bringing together and archiving these histories is a form of archival consciousness-raising since it "create[s] awareness (through shared experience)" (Campbell 128), whether these experiences are representative of lesbian women, migrant workers, Francophone women in Canada, or Native American women in both Canada and the United States. In any of the cases listed, women's experiences are promoted and gaps in historical documentation are combatted.

Like the sources used in *Ana Historic*, Martin and Lyon's text brings together personal narratives, interviews, biographies, coming-out stories, and other archival materials to give lesbian women ways of voicing and legitimating their own experiences. Martin and Lyon's text features several hundred women's personal testimonies on topics ranging from "Self Image" and "Sexuality and Sex Roles" to "Lesbian Paranoia – Real and Imagined Fears," "Lesbian Liberation," and "Myths and Realities." The artifacts appearing in *Lesbian/Woman* are curated side-by-side on the text's pages, and the editors, like Marlatt, ". . . provide a minimum of intervention, a . . . choice to allow the immediate personal voices . . . to express their own lives and . . . shape . . . a growing and changing community" (Zimmerman 670). By not intervening within the textual frame, Martin and Lyon allow women's voices to speak for themselves, avoiding the stylistic or narrative interjections commonly associated with traditional historical writing.

By compiling and organizing anecdotes, Marlatt and Martin and Lyon are working within a tradition of commonplace books or *anas*. According to Victoria Burke, "The term 'commonplace book' typically refers to a collection of humanist-inspired extracts from classical writers arranged under topic headings, but it is also sometimes used to describe an unstructured compilation of verse and prose practices" (153). Individuals would record quotes, pieces of information, and anecdotes in notebooks. A commonplace book represented an individual's collection of materials they wanted to remember and provided insights into what they deemed worth recording. During the early modern and modern periods, commonplace books were used as "educational aids which were storehouses for information to be remembered and applied" (154). According to V. Burke, these books were developed eclectically and represented their written work.

For women, commonplace books were used to help them remember what they read and as tools for identity construction. Looking at Evelyn Wilson's *Note Books of a Woman Alone*, and discussing how women desired to self-represent and see themselves in their writing (especially when few accounts were being written for and about women), Ella Ophir writes, ". . . first-person accounts by [women] are scarce. The *Note Books* therefore appeals to what Hampsten calls the quest for presence, the desire to hear, in this case, the unmarried woman speaking for herself" (43-44). By compiling fragments, explanations, and quotes into one's own book, writers have the power to shape the reading they desire, thus presenting themselves in specific ways. Accordingly, Lucia Dacome notes that "[o]ne of the purposes of early modern commonplace books was in fact to offer reserves of arguments and topics to those who wanted to show inventive genius by elaborating upon them" (610). Commonplace books were kept by both

women and men,[4] though they gave women a private space to negotiate ideas related to what they read when more public forums may not have existed. In addition, commonplace books became spaces where writers could use anecdotes and other fragmentary materials to curate a personal history or significant record of their thinking on a subject.

Within historiography, anecdotes have long possessed the ability to undermine historical grand narratives. For instance, Lionel Grossman writes in "Anecdote and History" that historiography is "like an ideal human form . . . [once] inspected close through a microscope, the heroic and orderly public narrative . . . is undercut by a ragbag of anecdotes" (152). Grossman argues for the utility of anecdotes as freestanding accounts that challenge history's repressive and exclusive nature. Anecdotes, functioning in opposition to history, possess the ability to "undermine established views and stimulate new ones" (Grossman 143). Randolph Starn also considers the powerful function of anecdotes in "Historicizing: A Formal Exercise," explaining how the "jarring anecdote . . . [aggravates the] detached prose and forced coherence of history-as-usual" (140). While anecdotes are little more than terse expressions, when plotted in a text they function individually and autonomously. As Anne Stevens and Jay Williams argue, footnotes act as places where authors can augment (through citations) or speak back to a text (through conversation with other authors); anecdotes (through the quotations Marlatt employs), "signify in new ways and engender new contexts" (Milne).

In further assessing the differences between footnotes and anecdotes, it is prudent to note that footnotes are often explanatory (either detailing the origins of a quote or providing supplemental information about a topic referenced within the body of a text). Conversely,

[4] For example, Dacome's work chronicles John Locke's lineage and importance in the commonplace book tradition.

anecdotes[5] represent only parts of the whole to which they refer; they are fragmentary pieces of information that, when referenced within novels, often create an interpretive interplay between readers and texts (and this is precisely the kind of interpretive exchange that exists between readers and *Ana Historic*[6]). Heather Milne, writing in "The Elliptical Subject: Citation and Reciprocity in Critical Readings of *Ana Historic*," notes that this interpretive interplay is a "shared space" (86); the quotations (i.e., anecdotes) appearing in *Ana Historic* are not "closed, fixed and determinate but . . . [are] a polylogue that engenders multiple dialogic possibilities" (86). By not offering a full explanation of the history to which they refer, these anecdotes undermine "the primacy of authorial intent and . . . [locate] interpretive authority with the reader" (Milne 90). Bessette furthers this line of thinking by explaining how "anecdotes . . . validate readers' experiences and encourage them to contribute to the archive" ("An Archive" 24). With respect to *Ana Historic*, readers both engage with and contribute to an archive that unfolds on the text's pages. This archive challenges Vancouver's patriarchal history in favor of women's lost undocumented histories.

Anecdotes fulfill several important functions when used in archival spaces: first, they allow women to depict their experiences in thoughtful and knowledgeable ways by approximating, as closely as possible, their voices. Because women's self-reported experiences are typically lacking, anecdotes hold similar authority to fuller accounts in different contexts. Second, anecdotes are future-oriented because they can enact change for future generations.

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[5] Speaking on their utility in *Lesbian/Woman*, Bessette writes that ". . . the anecdote itself *shows*, rather than supporting a statement that *tells*, each anecdote exists for its own sake, next to others' anecdotes, rather than in service of an explicit claim" (*Retroactivism* 40, emphasis added).

[6] Beyond this, however, anecdotes often represent a form of historical evidence. As Bessette writes in "An Archive of Anecdotes," anecdotes "are experiences articulated second-hand and retold in absentia of the subject whose experience is divulged, with no material record to authenticate it" (29-30).

Bonnie Zimmerman writes in "The Politics of Transliteration: Lesbian Personal Narratives" that books that contain anecdotes are "free space[s]" that "develop notions of identity, culture, and community" (669). Like the numerous sources that Marlatt uses, anecdotes in historical recovery texts, such as *Lesbian/Woman*,[7] "exist as an *artifact*, as words on paper, and as oral culture, as a recounting of past experiences. . . . [Anecdotes] continue the process of . . . creating a continuum of wimmin's culture and community; connections are made among wimmin in the present, and a record of the past becomes available to the wimmin of the future" (Penelope and Wolfe xxi). In this sense, a compilation of anecdotes can project a particular history and motivate future generations towards accomplishing new goals.

While the anecdotes Bessette describes serve as a tool for recovering women's histories, historically anecdotes have been collected and used to help one's memory in the form of an *ana*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *ana* as "[c]lever sayings or anecdotes of any one; notes and scraps of information relating to a person or place" ("Ana"). While *anas* may have been used initially as a way to record and keep track of pieces of text, I argue that *ana*, as collections of anecdotes, can serve as repositories for lost voices. In *Ana Historic*, Annie's history is limited to the *ana* she pieces together. In texts like *Ana Historic*, an *ana* can be used as a tool to store and display primary sources together to give readers a better understanding of the past.

Anas originated as private repositories of collected source materials. As an example of such work, Isaac Disraeli's 1881 *Curiosities of Literature* defines the *ana* as:

[7] Around the time of *Ana Historic*'s writing, other texts that featured the strategically curated personal testimonies of women include: Evelyn Torton Beck's *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*; Julia Penelope and Susan J. Wolfe's *The Coming Out Stories*; Margaret Cruikshank's *The Lesbian Path*; and Ruth Baetz's *Lesbian Crossroads*.

> a body of literature not universally known. It may, therefore, be useful to inform the reader, that in the early part of the last century, it was prevailing custom to take down for publication the Conversations, or '*Table-Talk,*' as they have been sometimes called, of the most eminent Wits and Scholars . . . their respective Compilers . . . evinced great inattention, or little discernment; nothing was discriminated in the mass of their materials. . . . (vi-vii, viii)

Disraeli curates pieces of conversation, quotes from literary texts,[8] and anecdotes concerning a variety of subjects in his *ana*. In the preface to the third edition, Disraeli explains how the collection was developed over 50 years and the content reflected his thinking at different points in time. Disraeli compiled these historical fragments for "instruction in modern literature," as "our language afforded no collection of the *res litterariæ*" (*Curiosities* xli). Per Disraeli's preface to the 1881 edition, *Curiosities of Literature* became an instructional literary tool that ultimately helped educate others when no similar text existed (xliii). This assortment of presented materials was "culled from [Disraeli's various] readings" to become "an extended book of quotations" (Cooksey). On the one hand, Disraeli's *ana*, like Marlatt's educates readers on a range of literary subjects by curating representative pieces of various sources. On the other hand, an *ana* represents what the compiler would like to have included as part of their respective "Conversations, or '*Table-Talk*'" (Disraeli, *Curiosities* vi-vii).

For *Ana Historic*, the most immediate reference to the *ana* is in the text's title. Herb Wyile notes in *Speculative Fictions* that "the play on words in the book's title signals [the text's]

[8] For e.g., *Curiosities* references a range of materials, such as works by Milton, Johnson, Spenser, and Shakespeare; French thinkers such as Saint-Évremond, La Rochefoucauld, and Corneille; Italian writers like Ariosto, Dante, and Tasso; numerous philosophical and humanist thinkers including Aristotle, Cicero, Plato, Camden, and Bodley. Beyond these literary texts, *Curiosities* is also concerned with the structural components of books, like "Titles," "Prefaces," "Dedications," "Quotations," and "Indexes."

concerns: on the one hand, "an ahistoric" suggests something that has been left out of history . . . while "Ana Historic" reinscribes Ana's historicity and significance" (67). In addition, Wendy Plain writes that "[t]he full title, *Ana Historic: A Novel*, suggests a re-vision or even a renewal both of history and the presumed authenticity of its documentary facts, and the fictitious narratives of the novel" (2). The use of *ana* in the title itself is indicative of the fragmentary history contained within the text. Annie uses the *ana* to present historical persons, events, and unusual books. More precisely, the *ana*'s collection and display of anecdotes challenges the existing definition of who can and should be included in the historical record. Annie's curation of anecdotes is also a form of archival consciousness-raising—similar to Martin and Lyon's recovery project—since the novel is a space where early pioneer women's stories are preserved, further developed, and made accessible to contemporary readers. The novel itself broadens the scope of collecting, placing a spotlight on women who have been traditionally hidden from history.

Ana Historic utilizes the *ana* to combat Annie's subjective limitation as historian in the face of the artifacts she has at her disposal. Because an *ana* involves representative pieces of a larger work, the fragments can easily be decontextualized or misrepresented. As William Veazie writes in his 1860 review of an earlier edition of *Curiosities of Literature*, Disraeli's work included "mere records of facts, without any systemic attempt to show the relation of causes and effects" (53). In the 1881 edition of *Curiosities of Literature*, Disraeli acknowledges the limitations of his work, stating that "A voluminous miscellany, composed at various periods, cannot be exempt from slight inadvertencies. Such a circuit of multifarious knowledge could not be traced were we to measure and count each step by some critical pedometer; life would be too short to effect any reasonable progress" (xliii). With a volume that was compiled and re-released

over a 50-year period, *Curiosities of Literature* contained several inaccuracies, especially as Disraeli grew as a writer. Accordingly, as Thomas Cooksey writes, Disraeli "was sometimes cavalier with his facts," raising questions about whether the anecdotal materials recorded in his *ana* were reliable and accurate. Similarly, there are aspects of unreliability that permeate Annie's historical project. Annie's project is limited because she is already only left with the fragments she represents on the page. For example, regarding Mrs. Richards, Annie states, "no, we don't know how [Mrs. Richards] came. we know only that she was appointed teacher for the second term of the mill school's first year" (Marlatt, *Ana* 15). Unlike the full accounts of men at the time, the information Annie has regarding Mrs. Richards is limited to several lines. The gaps in the historical record are again noted when Annie, searching for "scraps of information" concerning Mrs. Richards's life ("Ana"), is discouraged by her inability to uncover something as rudimentary as her first name. She states: "what is her name? she must have one – so far she has only the name of a dead man, someone somewhere else" (Marlatt, *Ana* 37).

Both Disraeli and Annie make their unreliability and reliability visible to readers through their placement of sources. Annie utilizes the *ana* to respond to a tradition of historical work that has been hampered by expectations about which kinds of material are worthy of representation and reproduction. In doing so, she is granted great latitude in the way she pieces together her *ana*, in the sense that her use of imagination (which is itself a form of unreliability) is an acceptable enabler to bring together various sources. An example of how anecdotes are plotted in *Ana Historic* can be seen early on in the text:

> *'Douglas fir and red cedar are the principal trees. Of these, the former—named after David Douglas, a well-known botanist—is the staple timber of commerce. Average trees grow 150 feet high, clear of limbs, with a diameter of 5 to 6 feet. The wood has great*

strength and is largely used for shipbuilding, bridge work, fencing, railway ties, and furniture. As a pulp-making tree the fir is valuable. Its bark makes a good fuel.' (13-14)

—[...]—

'The red cedar, unequalled as a wood for shingles, comes next to the fir in importance. Because of its variety of shading, and the brilliant polish which it takes, it is prized for the interior finishing of houses. As the cedar lasts well underground it is used for telegraph poles and fence posts...Well can this wood be called the settler's friend, for from it he can with simple tools, such as axe and saw, build his house, fence his farm, and make his furniture.'

without history or use, sitting in the middle of the rain forest, an immigrant school teacher wrote: 'To touch the soft fingerlings of Fir, the scaly fronds of Cedar!—Underfoot, a veritable pelt of needle droppings. If Earth be sentient here, then Man with his machinery, his noisy saw, his clanking chain and bit, is after all dwarf in such green fur, mere Insect only.—It comforts me.' (19-20)

The aforementioned italicized anecdotes outline the resourcefulness of the Douglas fir and red cedar. Each anecdote represents Annie's thesis throughout *Ana Historic*: that is, that only men's discoveries and accomplishments are worthy of this early history (e.g., "*Douglas fir . . . named after David Douglas"*). These anecdotal renderings are furthermore significant since the value associated with either tree is determined almost entirely on the assistance they offer men in furthering their expansive colonial agenda. Each anecdote depicts the Douglas fir and red cedar as important commodities in both the business and building trades. Both are "*the settler's friend;*" they aid him with building his bridges, furniture, and homes; they are sturdy,

dependable, and paramount in building the city's infrastructure (e.g., telegraph poles). The anecdotes are followed by a brief authorial interjection that immediately segues to another anecdote, an entry from Mrs. Richards's imaginary journal. The entry depicts—and preserves—one of Mrs. Richards's everyday lived experiences. In detailing her encounter with the natural landscape, her anecdote effectively undercuts the italicized quotations that precede it. Mrs. Richards's challenges the service these resources provide men, arguing that all this inventiveness and ingenuity are little more than diminutive accomplishments in the presence of mother earth as a sentient being. Mrs. Richards, as the anecdote concludes, takes comfort in this leveling of history.

There are other parallels that exist between Disraeli's project and Annie's in how they use the *ana* as a curated space on the page. Both projects are curatorial in nature as they research, collect, document, and display. Disraeli remarks in *Curiosities* that his anecdotal project is defined by "original investigation" (xli) and "original composition" (xlii). His incessant pursuit of a clearer understanding of the past, like that of the curator, "moves inductively from a variety of particulars" (London 352), where parts of the whole are pieced together and examined. Similar to Annie's project, Disraeli "turn[s] away from the public 'archives of a nation' . . . toward something approximating 'domestic memoirs' . . . [to encourage] sympathetic engagement with the past on the part of both the historian and his readers" (London 361). Disraeli's examination of private writings/histories over known, publicly-archived ones (as evidenced in *Curiosities*, *Amenities of Literature*, and his writing on Charles the First) allow him to form a better understanding of the individual in the past, while "becoming [better] acquainted with the times in which [he or she] lived" (Disraeli, *Commentaries* iv-v). That is to say, focusing on individual stories, perspectives, and words within a broader history offers readers a more

nuanced perspective. Disraeli's preference to focus on the individual over the collective in his *ana* is significant since it allows him to relate his subject-in-question's experiences in their words. As such, readers are offered a more refined depiction of the historical figure. Both Disraeli's and Marlatt's projects are driven by the desire to achieve a better understanding of the past through assemblages of anecdotes, quotations, and excerpts. By using an *ana* to relate the person's quotations, it allows for greater authenticity than Disraeli representing their thoughts himself.

Displayed Archaeology and Representing the Museum on the Page

A significant question in narratives is how to best represent anecdotes, fragments, and imagined occurrences. For example, in their "(hi)story" of the correspondence between actress Annie Russel and writer Faith Baldwin, Joseph Bromfield and Jennifer Jones Cavenaugh discuss the role of imaginative thinking in historical theatre. As theatre historians, they write that "[a]lthough we regularly engage in speculation based upon our research, theatre historians have perceived imaginative intervention as a compensation for limited access to some complete and knowable past" (54). Bromfield and Jones Cavenaugh augment the role of imagination in filling in missing gaps in historical theatre. In situations where there is limited or missing historical data, Bromfield and Jones Cavenaugh weigh the theatre historian's three options:

> (1) make no speculation at all, (2) craft speculation that we defend as highly probable based upon available evidence, or (3) clearly mark the events that occur between the [events] as fiction. The first option reduces the function of historiography to data gathering. The second option operates on the pretense that speculation carries the same weight and serves the same function as 'evidence.' The third option (the one we are

> exploring here) acknowledges the ethical imperative of historians to make themselves visible in the narrative in order to counter the belief that they are writing what actually happened. (54)

Likewise, novels also hold the possibility of characters or writers making "themselves visible in the narrative" to bring together imagination and historical occurrences. In their inferred correspondence between Russel and Baldwin, Bromfield and Jones Cavenaugh use italics when separating source material from their imaginative additions. Their historiography of informed imagination relies on using primary sources, asking questions, identifying limitations, and visibly acknowledging where different ideas emerge (77). While the two are discussing the use of imagination in historical theatre, the ways they make histories visible is similar to my use of displayed archaeology.

Displayed archaeology is characterized by selecting and placing historical artifacts onto the novel's pages. If, as Marlatt suggests in "Of Mini-Ships and Archives," that the goal of any historical project is to "[put] together scattered fragments, [put] together what once occurred or was experienced as a gestalt, a whole, but is now available only in shards. . . ." (24), then it is through displayed archaeology that Annie accomplishes this end. With displayed archaeology, artifacts are treated like any other artifact in an exhibition where they are handled, examined, and displayed for viewers. Like a museum space, the sources are visually marked on the page (often appearing italicized or offset from the body of the narrative in some way). The physical layout of sources on the page is a distinct quality of displayed archaeology. Displayed archaeology differs from recreating objects in the reader's mind through *ekphrasis* (as evidenced in *Libra*), or through the use of synecdoche to describe objects in textual *Wunderkammern*, where only parts of the artifact stand in place for the whole (as depicted in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar*

Wao). Instead, displayed archaeology involves a visual inclusion of source materials. Whereas footnotes provide space for a writer or character to expand on the body of the text, displayed archaeology represents the sources themselves on the page and in an *ana*. In texts such as *Ana Historic*, displayed archaeology can make visible where there are limitations and gaps within the historical record, and like *anas* or commonplace books, serve to isolate and augment the sources themselves. Because of the display and arrangement choices the character-as-curator makes, displayed archaeology gives characters the potential to question and problematize accepted histories.

One of the ways that Marlatt utilizes displayed archaeology is by juxtaposing different sources on the page. This juxtaposition, like an *ana*, provides a space for the source texts to speak for themselves and back to one another. For example, Annie curates the sentiments of J.S. Matthews, H.S Rowlings, and other male figures present in the historical archive against those of Alice Patterson:

> *'A world event had happened in Vancouver … On the eve of the Queen's birthday, 1887, the Canadian Pacific Railway … closed the last gap in the All-Red Route," and raised the obscure settlement on the muddy shore of West Street, sobriquetly termed "Gastown," to the status of a world port.'* Major Matthews.
>
> all the figures, facts to testify their being present at it:
>
> *'I had 400 men working 140 in a tented camp one third mile west of the hotel. I build the two and one half miles of the CPR from Hastings*

to Hastings Sawmill …' John ('Chinese' McDougall).

'I hauled logs with oxen down Gord Avenue, also out of the Park at Brockton Point, had a logging camp at Greer's Beach (Kitsilano), and another on Granville Street at False Creek.' H.S. Rowlings.

I / my laying track with facts rescued against the obscurity
of bush, and the women moving about their rooms all day in the
rain, remembering:

'*The first piano on the south side of Burrard Inlet was one which was part of the cabin furniture of the barque "Whittier," Captain and Mrs. Schwappe. Mrs. Schwappe sold it to Mrs. Richards, school teacher, who lived in a little three-room cottage back of the Hastings Mill Schoolhouse …'* Alice Patterson.

what is a 'world event'? getting a piano was a world event in that
'obscure settlement' because years later somebody still
remembered it, even remembered where it came from and
who bought it. Mrs. Schwappe. Mrs. Richards. a ship's piano
suddenly landed in an out-of-the-way spot, this little three-
room cottage. these are not facts but skeletal bones of a
suppressed body the story is. there is a story here, Ina, i keep

trying to get to. it begins: (Marlatt, *Ana* 28-29)

In this example, Annie displays fragments of four different sources that address "world events" from various angles. This juxtaposition augments the disparity between events and facts that constitute history for men and women. Progress on the Canadian Pacific Railway (marking Vancouver's evolution from pioneer settlement to world port) represents a world event for men. Conversely, for Patterson, a substantial event consists of the purchase of the first piano in Burrard Inlet (which, as Annie notes, only becomes history because someone happened to record it). Women's experiences are represented by ordinary or trivial facts. While these women have stories that should be recorded in the annals of history, such stories are not worthy of inclusion. Conversely, men's histories and their ingenuity are recorded and preserved. By displaying the documented sources alongside Annie's commentary, Marlatt calls attention to specific aspects of the documents' histories in purposeful ways. Annie's display and arrangement of sources is similar to a curator's because the source texts appear in a specific sequence that instantiates certain reactions from readers. In this sense, readers become acquainted with the multiple stories-within-stories contained within each artifact. Annie's displayed-archaeological style combats "historiography's privileging of public accomplishment and documentation skew[ing] history in favour of men and banish[ing] women to the wings" (Wyile 67).

My concept of displayed archaeology draws on Foucault's archaeological method defined in *Archaeology of Knowledge*.[9] According to Foucault,

> [a]rchaeology tries to define not the thoughts, representation, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses

[9] These ideas were initially developed in *Madness and Civilization*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, and *The Order of Things*.

> themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules. . . . Archaeology does not seek to rediscover the continuous, insensible transition that relates discourses, on a gentle slope, to what precedes them, surrounds them, or follows them. (*Archaeolog*y 138-139)

For Foucault, the *truth* of a historical period (e.g., "what happened") will not reveal itself solely through an analysis of the historical documents at hand. Foucault recognizes that history's construction is governed by a set of rules that do not simply dictate the historian's approach; rather, these rules contribute to the historian's understanding and use of language. As such, Foucault believes the key to understanding history begins with an understanding of the historian's relation to the concepts and language s/he employs. In *Archaeology*, Foucault contends that the history of ideas, modes of knowledge, worldviews, and the historical statements (*énoncé*) contained within, break down when they are closely analyzed. As Foucault writes, "[a]s soon as one questions [history's] unity, it loses its self-evidence; it indicates itself, constructs itself, only on the basis of a complex field of discourse" (*Archaeology* 23). For Foucault, history should not be read as a narrative of progress but as a "phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity" (*Archaeology*, 4). As such, meaning in history—and forwarded by certain historical statements—is generated amid the fragments that exist between various ideas and worldviews; these items are defined as much by their breaks as by any common themes.

It is the fault-lines between historical statements where Foucault argues meaning emerges. In this sense, it is more so a matter of *how* statements are aligned (in relation to other statements coming both before and after) that produces meaning, and not their grammatical or syntactical arrangement. As Foucault explains, "[t]he statement is neither a syntagma, nor a rule of construction, nor a canonic form of succession and permutation; it is that which enables such

groups of signs to exist, and enables these rules or forms to become manifest" (*Archaeology* 99). If meaning in statements is derived from their structural placement then, according to Foucault, lesser nuanced groupings of letters—such as "GHJKL"—may become discursively meaningful based on their arrangement amongst various other statements. For Foucault, the placement and arrangement of words is important within very specific contexts. Context, here, should be taken as the reason for a history's construction. Relative to my concept of displayed archaeology, Annie's selection, arrangement, and placement of discordant statements is representative of Foucault's archaeological model. While these items might seem randomized, their very specific form and their spatial positioning in *Ana Historic* augment women's excluded voices, personal stories, and deep histories. Unlike footnotes, which typically appear offset from the page, displayed archaeology requires careful attention to how artifacts are arranged on the page. On another level, the counter-archive Annie creates is itself defined by "rupture" and "discontinuity" (in a manner similar to Foucault's divergent modes of historical thinkers Foucault discusses above).

Ana Historic's display of sources is reminiscent of museum visitors' call to engage with exhibition spaces. Halloran discusses the complementary function of novels and museums, writing that:

> [t]o meet their goals, postmodern novels and museums resort to interdisciplinary displays of historical facts and events [. . .] postmodern museums and novels eschew static, overdetermined grand narratives in favor of interactive exhibitions presenting a variety of viewpoints, thereby allowing individual readers/visitors to customize their consumption of information to suit their particular tastes. (13-14)

Annie's displayed archaeological style features multiple perspectives that do not agree, nor do they come to a resolution. The voices and fragments interact with one another. By not offering any clarification or conclusions to the sources on display, *Ana Historic*, like the museum space, encourages readers to participate in the meaning-making process; the novel "is not . . . monolithic; it embraces many viewpoints" (Marstine 5). Multiple viewpoints are the norm in *Ana Historic* as Annie collects and positions the artifacts to undermine history's singular and authoritative voice. Halloran writes that museum-texts "[f]unction like national history museums: they explicitly display and label their literary 'artifacts'" (27). The dialogical positioning of quotations from actual historical texts, melding of poetic and narrative sensibility, and inclusion of archaeological traces (both real and imagined), create a hyper-sensory and hyper-visual experience for readers that mimics the kind of embodied experiences they might encounter in a museum.

Because of her use of displayed archaeology, Annie, as character-as-curator, plots her alternate history through its unedited juxtaposition of source materials, resisting the overarching narrative of men's "dominance and mastery," to instead privilege the private histories of women that have gone unrecorded in historical archives (Helms 83). That is to say, Annie's arrangement of literary artifacts re-inscribes the historical record with stories of women that have been neglected within traditional literary and historical arenas. What distinguishes Annie's archaeological plotting from the historical novel or historiographic metafiction is that in certain sections of the text, the narrative is made up entirely of references to other historical sources and artifacts. By juxtaposing a series of textual artifacts written by men with imagined accounts of women's experiences,[10] Annie visually draws attention to the ways that these sources undermine

[10] Some of the literary artifacts Annie references include: Ralph Andrews's *Glory Days of Logging*; Martin Allerdale Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West*; J.S. Matthews's *Early Vancouver*; Alan Morley's *Vancouver:*

women's work. By displaying instances of the text on the page, Annie is able to speak back to this history, which creates her a space for imagining women's histories in return. For example, Annie curates women's place in history in order to combat commonplace historical representations (such as the mechanical proficiency of Carter and his men):

> kids, their men would finally come home. how peaceful i
> thought, how i longed for it. a woman's place. safe. suspended
> out of the swift race of the world.
>
> the monstrous lie of it: the lure of absence. self-effacing.
> *'Watch Carter when the "donk" (his donkey!) has got up steam – its*
> *first steam; and when the rigging men (his rigging men!) drag out the*
> *wire rope to make great circle through the woods. And when the*
> *circle is complete from one drum, round by where the cut logs are*
> *lying, back to the other drum; and when the active rigging slinger (his*
> *rigging slinger!) has hooked a log onto a point of the wire cable; and*
> *when the signaller (his signaller!) has pulled the wire telegraph and*
> *made the donkey toot … just think of Carter's feelings as the engineer*
> *jams over levers, opens up the throttle, sets the thudding, whirring*
> *donkey winding up the cable, and drags the first log into sight; out*
> *from the forest down to the beach; bump, bump! Think what this*
> *mastery over huge, heavy logs means to a man who has been used to*

From Milltown to Metropolis; A.M. Ross's "The Romance of Vancouver's First Schools;" James M. Sandison's *Schools of Old Vancouver;* and Maria Lawson, M. Watson and R.W. Young's *A History and Geography of British Columbia*

coax them to tiny movements by patience and a puny jack-screw …'

history the story, Carter's and all the others', of dominance.

mastery. the bold line of it. (Marlatt, *Ana Historic*, 24-25)

In this passage, Annie examines the level of detail granted to men's accomplishments outlined in Grainger's *Woodsmen of the West.* These lengthy descriptions of men working in equally menial and day-to-day ways are juxtaposed with the minimal references to women and the daily tasks they perform. Italicizing the font is a tactic Annie employs throughout *Ana Historic* to highlight the literary artifacts she references, thus recontextualizing them in a new space (Warder 99). In Grainger's excerpt, men's stories and their command of machinery are favored over women's stories during that time (Helms 82). Among these narratives, women's stories are inconsequential and unworthy of history's esteem. By offsetting men's accomplishments, Annie does not allow readers to get lost in the narrative of the story. The artifacts and sources stand out to readers and call them to isolate and question what they read.

As Annie arranges the sources together, her added commentary is minimal. As part of a masculinist history, women's stories, as Marlatt suggests, "ghost [their] way through the written records" ("Of Mini-Ships" 26). The inconsistent histories Annie navigates through are reminiscent of the discrepancies that exist within historical writing, where some voices are more prominently featured than others. In this case, women's voices appear as "ghosts" in official histories. Annie's displayed archaeology shines a light on the ghost-stories of early frontier women, re-inscribing their thoughts, memories, and voices back into the historical record. Or, as Warder explains: "[i]n an attempt to create a discursive space in which female readers can 'see through' the constructedness of patriarchal 'truths'. . . Marlatt turns to a model of visual art . . .

[her] departure from one-point perspective in her polyvocal text . . . ultimately effects a revisioning of the production of space and society in Canada" (61).

Warder's emphasis on *Ana Historic* as "visual art" illustrates the relationship between Marlatt's novel and the museum's display-function of the museum. Without performing the analytic work of creating an overarching meaning, "[t]he curator is a simple operator working behind the scenes" (Martinon 2). These museum exhibits are furthermore "viewer-centered: the crowd makes it experiential and participatory . . . it offers the audience a 'deal,' the opportunity to determine the event" (Martinon 2). The interplay of literary and historical sources, interspersed with Annie's commentary (without definite explanation) show how Annie, as character-as-curator, works "behind the scenes" of the text (Martinon 1). Annie charges readers with the task of uncovering the sources' meanings and piecing together the stories they tell. For example, *Ana Historic*'s readers are forced to achieve some semblance of "chronological coherence" (Halloran 16). To achieve this end, they may have to consult sources "outside of the text to fill in gaps in [his/her] historical knowledge" (16). By visually plotting the artifacts on the page, Annie creates an "experiential and participatory" setting in narrative (akin to that of a museum space) that forces readers to make meaning out of the displayed-archaeological sources. This form of archaeological plotting appears throughout *Ana Historic* and is not limited to a particular moment or scene.

Artifacts on display in a museum space contain multiple stories-within-stories. In *Ana Historic*, the objects Annie collects are also endowed with multiple perspectives. Likewise, Elaine Gurian in "What is the Object of this Exercise?" explores how although documents and artifacts are obviously important in museum exhibitions, "these alone are not sufficient" (165). "[L]ike props in a brilliant play" who rely on a theatrical producer (Gurian 165), objects in a

museum rely on curators to highlight their significance by promoting the multiple memories, stories, and voices contained within. In *Ana Historic*, Annie, as the text's character-as-curator, is the theatrical maestro to which Gurian refers; she selects, organizes, and presents historical items to readers. By augmenting the different stories embedded within these objects, Marlatt—through Annie—positions women's historical experiences as an alternative to the Vancouver City Archives.

Annie fulfills Gurian's role of a curator working behind-the-scenes through her use of selection and arrangement, thereby undermining Vancouver's patriarchal history. Throughout the novel, Annie looks to history to reconcile her fractured subjectivity. She explains that she "longed for it. a woman's place. safe. suspended. . . " (*Ana* 24). Yet, Annie's combing through the historical archive reveals only "hegemonic heterosexual and patriarchal narratives that present uncomplicated performances of national idealism" (Waese 114). Annie's selection and arrangement of Carter's archival accounts as a frontier entrepreneur, along with "all the others" present in Grainger's novel, highlight the "important events in the world" advanced by men (Marlatt, *Ana* 28). Men's histories within the text are challenged as being the ultimate authority on the past. Marlatt's use of Grainger and others, as Gabriele Helms remarks, ". . . powerfully asserts the presence of men in the world. Presence is defined in his novel by Carter's dominance and mastery over machines, nature, *and women (through their very absence from history)*" (82, emphasis added). Annie's displayed archaeology underscores Marlatt's claim that what constitutes 'a world event' for men is very different from what signifies a valuable historical occurrence for women (Helms 83). Yet, I argue that these disregarded histories show why private memories are consequential; they emphasize the constrictive and domesticated role that women were confined to in this tiny logging community. Annie furthermore values and makes meaning

from these experiences, bringing them together to produce a collective experience that is reminiscent of the kinds of archives Bessette referred to earlier. In "Of Mini-Ships and Archives," Marlatt writes that the memories of women, "often considered too personal to be of public value, when collected . . . deepen our understanding of the impact of past events" (24). By bringing to light women's hidden stories, Annie's literary plotting does not simply show how little substantive historical evidence of substance exists concerning women's roles in Hastings Sawmill; rather, it makes valuable women's domestic practices, giving historical life to women's experiences. Women's voices in *Ana Historic* gain prominence they otherwise would not in Vancouver's more patriarchal histories.

Conclusion

As a text that challenges the "phallocentric" (Lowry) qualities of traditional historical narratives, *Ana Historic* moves beyond the representative characteristics of these visual/written forms. Marlatt's text does so through the production of a visual and textual counter-history that underscores women's struggles against patriarchal structures. The pivotal role the character-as-curator plays in the creation of this alternate archive—one that "challenges and recreates histories 'anew'" (Dunlop 70)—cannot be overstated. Rather, the optimistic outlook for women's future roles that Marlatt's novel achieves, such as the "open[ing] up [of] new spaces for the embodiment and expression of women's experiences" (Dunlop 70-71), is accomplished through the presence of the character-as-curator and the museological qualities on the page. In *Ana Historic*, Annie collects, plots, displays, and curates a textual museum space that accounts for the voices of history's lost women (particularly the misplaced stories of Mrs. Richards, Ina,

and other real and imagined historical female personages). In doing so, Annie gestures to a more hopeful world-to-come for women in and beyond Vancouver.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that *Ana Historic*'s displayed archaeology mobilizes women's anecdotal and fragmentary histories/stories from the private arena to the public. Because historical writing has traditionally focused on white male achievements, such re-covery projects have potential use for other marginalized voices. The ability to blend fragmentary artifacts with imagined occurrences to make those re-imaginings visible breathes life into undocumented historical records. The need to re-cover women's lost histories privileges the role of memory in history writing and meaning-making. In a 2003 interview with Sue Kossew, Marlatt outlines her preoccupation with unreliable historical contributions like memory and fiction:

> Official history, written history, interests me because it passes itself off as objective, documentary, as "the facts," when it usually represents the view of an elite or of one privileged historian. . . . I'm always interested in what gets left out of any official history. . . . And then there's memory, which is famously unreliable because it tends to carry a fictional component. I like rubbing the edges of document and memory/fiction against one another. I like the friction that is produced between the stark reporting of document, the pseudo-factual language of journalism, and the more emotional, even poetic, language of memory. That's why I used such a hodgepodge of sources in *Ana Historic*, a little nineteenth-century and very local journalism that sounds like a gossip column, a 1906 school textbook, various historical accounts, some contemporary feminist theory and a school teacher's diary from 1873 that was completely fictitious. (55)

Memory and fiction are devices that can address, retrieve, and rework historical imbalances; they represent "stories of the past that haven't found official or institutional endorsement, but which may exist, nevertheless, in the minds or voices of those whom we don't always consult when we go about writing or studying history" (Tancock). Marlatt is aware of history's fictional constructedness; she proposes to Kossew that memory and fiction, both unreliable, possess the ability to uncover the truth.

Ana Historic's displayed-archaeological style brings together memory, history, and fiction to propel women's stories from private to public. Due to the use of displayed archaeology, *Ana Historic* fulfills the ontological-driven duty of a museum display. I believe that *Ana Historic* is the preeminent manifestation of the relationship between the novel form and curatorial thought. *Ana Historic*—with its blatant, over-the-top, disjunctive form—not only features a character-as-curator as its central protagonist, but it also uses an unconventional style to perform the visual practice of the museum space more overtly on its pages.

The power of displayed-archaeological texts is that they move the curator outside the museum into other artistic realms in purposeful and powerful ways. As David Balzer argues in *Curationism*, "[t]he curator is no longer just an art-world figure;" curating "as an expression of taste, sensibility, and connoisseurship" is everywhere (16). Curation (as an artistic practice) and the curator (as an overseer of the tangible assets that constitute this practice) are "visible in so many likely and unlikely ways" (16) that Balzer believes we must now account for "the increasing use of the noun curator and the verb to curate outside the art world, where playlists, outfits, even hors d'oeuvres are now curated" (7). Balzer's assertion that curation has extended beyond gallery spaces is especially apparent when several curatorial powerbrokers attempt to distance themselves from the "exhausted c-word" (Judah). Numerous contemporary curators

(e.g., Obrist, Szeeman, Kounellis, Maurer, and Gioni, to name a few) now refer to themselves as organizers, exhibition makers, drafters, and so on (Judah). Aligning more with the "exhausted" curators than Balzer, I do not think that there is value in curating any and everything. Instead, I posit that the language of curation is valuable in texts that incorporate artifacts when authors apply museum techniques to narratives. As has been considered throughout *The Plot and the Archive*, I maintain that the language of museums is of particular importance to novels since it provides a vocabulary for the archival work authors and characters-as-curators perform.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

". . . curiosity killed the Kerouac cat / sometimes truth is stranger than fiction:" Implications of *The Plot and the Archive*[1]

The Plot and the Archive highlights how curatorial techniques are used in novels to augment historical understanding and enhance representation and recovery. The use of curatorial techniques like arrangement and display in novels allow characters to navigate personal and communal archives and explore different ways of representing conflicting data, memory, and imagination in writing about historical events. The combination of museological and literary techniques like *ekphrasis*, synecdoche, and displayed archeology offer writers and readers an alternative method to account for abundant, forgotten, or excluded archival materials in novels. Central to this meaning-making relationship is the figure of the character-as-curator; someone who is openly concerned with investigating the past.

The character-as-curator shares several qualities across different historical archives in novels. First, the character-as-curator deals specifically with documents, artifacts, and historical data as part of a larger recovery project. These artifacts reveal historical inaccuracies and outline the challenges of historical work. Having a space for maintaining, organizing, and displaying these artifacts is integral for the recovery work the character-as-curator performs. While the use of such spaces differ, each character-as-curator displays archival materials for readers in an archive. The character-as-curator thus assembles, catalogues, manages, and mediates his or her archival collections for readers. Finally, by curating the documents and artifacts at hand, the

[1] Bad Religion. "Stranger Than Fiction." *Stranger Than Fiction*. Atlantic, 1994.

character-as-curator creates interpretive agency for readers, similar to the autonomy museumgoers might find in museums.

The characters-as-curators in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* and Daphne Marlatt's *Ana Historic* embody these aforementioned characteristics; beyond this, however, each character-as-curator also manages numerous challenges presented by the historical record in unique ways. For example, in *Libra*, Nicholas Branch is confronted by the challenge of maintaining authenticity when dealing with too much historical data. His inability to separate one artifact of greater or lesser importance from another prevents him from writing his definitive historical account. Conversely, in *Oscar Wao* and *Ana Historic*, the texts' characters-as-curators are presented with challenges of recovering memories and imagining histories that were not initially included in official histories. Yunior and Annie piece together what little evidence they manage to recover, regardless of such artifacts' personal, familial, or fragmentary qualities. The countermeasure to these particular challenges is for each character-as-curator to *plot* an alternate archive in narrative through the use of various literary, rhetorical, and curatorial devices (including: *ekphrasis*, show-and-tell, synecdoche, and displayed archaeology).

In Chapter two, Branch works through the inconsistencies of a problematic historical record as he attempts to write a definitive historical account of the Kennedy Assassination for the Central Intelligence Agency. The record Branch is analyzing, however, features multiple data sources that are oftentimes contradictory, fragmented, and that do not result in a single authoritative account regarding the events of November 22, 1963. As character-as-curator, Branch relies on curation to navigate an inordinate amount of historical data and provides commentary on the unreliability of empirical methods for constructing history. Branch does not simply display the artifacts he collects for readers. Rather, Branch describes each object in detail.

Through *ekphrasis*, Branch offers readers a comprehensive description of the objects and case evidence he handles in his book-filled room. Readers reconstruct the materials in their mind's eye and are invited to work alongside Branch, with hopes of better understanding the events leading up to Kennedy's assassination. Chapter two thus offers authors a model for how they might detail the complexities of a problematic historical record in narrative. In doing so, readers are invited to investigate such narratives with skepticism, focusing on the detail or minutia that constructed such accounts, rather than the overarching messages they forward as historical truth.

In Chapter three, Yunior curates familial and personal archives to recover and maintain Oscar's family's legacy and life in the Dominican Republic. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* builds off of Nicholas Branch's style of mediating case evidence through *ekphrasis* by using the curatorial and pedagogical practice of show-and-tell. Because he works to combat incomplete histories and forced erasures, Yunior plots numerous footnotes within the text to disrupt readers' experiences and serve a visual corrective function to Trujillo's empirical propaganda. On another level, Yunior uses show-and-tell throughout the novel to describe the objects he displays in his personal *Wunderkammer*. The items appearing in Yunior's wonder chamber function synecdochically, where each fragment's parts-to-whole relationship reveals certain histories that had been purposefully forgotten. By showing and telling, Yunior works retroactively to gather a fuller historical explanation of the silencing that occurred because of Trujillo's tyrannical regime.

Finally, Chapter four investigates a text that deals with imagination and inferences by mediating historical materials directly on the page. Through displayed archeology and the construction of an *ana*, Annie literally plots various sources and objects on the written page to make apparent the ways that women's voices and experiences were excluded from the historical

record. Their juxtaposition reveals the lack of documented women's experiences, which causes Annie to imagine women into that past. By leaving the anecdotes open to interpretation, Annie invites readers to participate in meaning-making. In doing so, *Ana Historic* produces an alternate historical archive that privileges the private stories of Vancouver's historical women over the institutionalized stories of men and their accomplishments. Beyond this, however, *Ana Historic* shows how we can use inferences can be used to make sense of absences in the known historical record, as Annie's displayed-archaeological renderings offers readers a model for how they might visualize those imaginings in narrative.

Taken together, applying curatorial techniques to the texts outlined in this dissertation highlights the relationships between fiction, language, history, and archival collections. Historically speaking, collectors are associated with historians and with museums. *The Plot and the Archive* raises the issue that collecting should also be associated with writers because fictional and non-fictional works featuring characters-as-curators are themselves collections of past archival materials. This dissertation emphasizes the idea that a fictional work can reveal a form of accuracy that history writing cannot (or, perhaps, that history writers is unable to represent due to inherent biases or problems with their methodologies). This statement does not neglect that fiction-writers, too, possess inherent biases in the novels they produce. Through the act of curation, however, *Libra*, *Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* highlight the potential of novels featuring curatorial techniques and what they can accomplish relative to what history does. The conceptual work performed in *The Plot and the Archiv*e emphasizes how recovering voices in historical texts is a multi-disciplinary project that includes contemporary literature(s), museology, curation, art history, rhetoric, archival studies, and historiography. This dissertation argues that these disciplines should not be viewed in isolation; rather, these disciplines borrow

from each other and they each offer different approaches that complement one another when investigating novels featuring the character-as-curator.

The use of museological techniques, particularly the integration of footnotes and displayed archeology, allow authors to represent inconsistencies visually and make the historical archive appear on the page. The interactive relationship that emerges from this kind of archival rendering offers readers an extraordinary amount of meaning-making agency; that is, readers are invited to examine, explore, and participate in making sense of texts' presented materials, and the various histories contained within. As a means of enhancing readers' agency, *The Plot and the Archive* demonstrates how novels featuring the character-as-curator use visual cues to enhance readers' experiences and augment the relationship with museumgoers and readers. Alternatively, museums collect and organize artifacts for publicity/performance/display; they exist to be viewed, analyzed, questioned, preserved, and pieced together.

Within the novels I examine, readerly autonomy exists as readers develop their own interpretations of the content provided. While viewer autonomy also exists in museum displays, knowledge is limited by a gallery's spatial qualities and the number of artifacts on display. Similarly, meaning-making in novels is already predetermined. While the novels I examine in this dissertation encourage readers to draw their own conclusions from textual archives, the collections on display exist in a limited structural space. For instance, there are only so many words, sentences, paragraphs, pages, and chapters that exist within these artistic forms. The author-as-curator understands where certain pieces of the archive will *go* in the collection and already *knows* what these collections will *say*. There is only so much meaning readers can garner, since this information has already been fantasized into the project.

With both museums and novels, the spatial limits of galleries are determined by the perimeter and surface area of the building (or text) in which they appear. In novels, space is restricted by publishing requirements, page limits, use of images, and word counts. However, museum spaces, while confined to a specific surface area, possess the ability to be reshaped and reorganized. The curator can reconstitute or reshuffle the artifacts on display in order to garner new meanings. Ancillary items or props (e.g., signs, placards, symbols, risers, lighting, video installations, audio devices, etc.) can also help stress an artifact's significance. Curators rely on props to further viewers' meaning-making and shape their experiences. Alternatively, once novels featuring the character-as-curator are set, printed, bound, and exit the publishing house, they arrive presumably in a fixed and static state. It is thus incumbent on the author to plant cues throughout the text that guide readers' meaning-making processes. Techniques like *ekphrasis*, synecdoche, show-and-tell, and displayed archaeology challenge the fixedness of complete novels, offering readers the agency they need to question the artifacts they encounter. In doing so, novels align themselves with museums, in that they become moveable and unfixed (similar to how museum displays can change despite their stationary and immovable structures).

Authors who are concerned with representation and recovery thus have an increased responsibility to equip readers with the tools they will need to best uncover the past. For instance, Nobel Prize winner Orham Pamuk argued in a 2009 Norton Lecture at Harvard University that authors can furnish readers with more information than accompanying materials in an exhibit can (130). As Pamuk writes, "[w]hen we stand before an object or a painting in a museum, we can only guess with the help of the catalogue, how the piece fitted into people's lives, stories, and worldviews—while in a novel, the images, objects, conversations, smells, stories, beliefs, and sensations *are described and preserved* as an integral part of the daily life of

the period" (130, emphasis added). Even though artifacts in novels become preserved at a novel's completion, authors are able to go beyond the artifactual limitations in ways that curators are unable to. As *The Plot and the Archive* demonstrates, authors have many ways they can make histories apparent when those histories are not otherwise present.

As my examination of *Libra*, *Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* shows, meaning still abounds in texts featuring the character-as-curator, even though the texts' design is finished and absolute. If nothing else, the spatial differences between novels and museums further unite their central functions, along with the similarities that they share. For example, objects featured in both novels and museums represent very specific histories; the displayed artifacts circulate their histories and make them relevant in the here-and-now; and, finally, both novels and museums rely on the interpretive relationship between objects and viewers to actualize the displayed object's meaning. Or, as Yin Xing highlights in "The Novel as Museum:"

> The readers of [museum novels] rely on their own understandings, memories, and imaginations to fully access the objects in the novel, and *the objects in the novel perform a series of functions like the objects in the museum*. First, through the displayed or described objects, we can observe the social reality closely related to them; second, readers of the novel resemble visitors to the museum, in that they all make different interpretations about the objects narrated in the novel and displayed in the museum; third, as long as the objects are envisioned within a narrative context, they can perform the function of souvenirs to bring back the past and endow it with memorable value. (201, emphasis added)

Just as curators collect and display archaeological source material, novels such as *Libra*, *Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* show how writing, too, is a form of archival creation. Novels and

museums each feature tangible items that produce alternate archives to negotiate pain and loss; each function as sites of remembrance that memorialize a lost or forgotten past; each call on readers to challenge accepted historical interpretations of the past and create histories anew; and, most importantly, each possess archaeological, documentary, and aesthetic value. Both Xing and Pamuk illustrate how novels and museums perform similar functions despite the spatial differences I outline above. Interestingly, as Xing writes, objects in narrative are akin to "souvenirs to bring back the past". Readers can easily return to novels time and again whereas the museum exhibits are fleeting and they must return to the space to fully recreate the experience.

Building on the work that began in *The Plot and the Archive*, a potential future project might examine curation at an even finer level. While I explored artifacts, fragments, and anecdotes throughout the chapters, future projects might examine *poetics*, or how words are curated on the page. For instance, given *Ana Historic*'s composition as an anti-novel—one that refuses to adhere to proper punctuation and syntax by combining various poetic and prose techniques—Marlatt curates her text through a syntactical and semantical[2] arrangement of letters and words. A future research project investigating the semantics of curation would examine how the individual letter, word, sentence, paragraph, and so on, are carefully curated to produce meaning on the page. Rather than simply looking at how the character-as-curator organizes and displays historical artifacts more broadly speaking, it may be prudent to look at how the author-as-curator curates language in texts that resist genre identification such as *Ana Historic* or

[2] By semantics, I am referring to meaning between connotation and signifiers.

George Elliott Clarke's *Execution Poems: The Black Acadian Tragedy of George and Rue*.[3] In a conscious effort to highlight the larger implications of this dissertation, as well as outline the type of future-work that might develop from this research, I believe that investigating the relationship between curation and linguistics (e.g., syntax, phonetics, dialectics, and semantics) would provide a rich area of study. Closely examining how language is curated is particularly important given the recent interest in the spread of misinformation and news media in the United States. Analyzing the rhetorical impact of language and words is a serious endeavor, one that has important potential for future historians concerned with characterizing the present moment and countering a proliferation of disinformation.

Another project that I believe merits further investigation—one that certainly grows out of *The Plot and the Archive*'s findings—investigates the presence of the character-as-curator in graphic novels dealing with history. There are a number of parallels between curating artifacts in museum displays and plotting images, text, and historical artifacts in graphic novels. Graphic novels offer authors even more affordances by combining artifacts with text providing characters-as-curators additional opportunities to employ displayed archeology. As Scott McCloud notes in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*, "words and images [are combined in graphic novels] to transmit a . . . series of ideas" (152). Just as meaning-making in museum spaces is seemingly limitless, "[t]he different ways in which words and pictures can combine [to produce meaning] in comics is virtually unlimited" (McCloud 152). In certain graphic novels, documents and artifacts are visually curated on the page in a show-and-tell fashion. Speech

[3] Specific poems to investigate within Clarke's collection might include: "THE CASKET, FREDERICTON, N. B., July 27, 1949;" "TO VISCOUNT ALEXANDER OF TUNIS, GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF CANADA;" and "DUET".

balloons, text boxes, captions, and thought bubbles accompany artifactual facsimiles to highlight their significance and meaning.

The narratives and/or stories surrounding the artifacts on display in museum spaces unfold linear-logically, like a comic strip. Yet it is through the help of certain meaning-making agents (e.g., visual cues, exhibit graphics, signage, labels, and audio/visual technologies) that stories unfold for museum visitors. These aids serve a number of functions for artifacts on display: they communicate truncated versions of history highlight significant dates and origins pertaining to and augment the embedded stories-within-stories. The curatorial practice of show-and-tell is accentuated by these aids, transforming "static galleries of canvas and artifact" (Cannell) into extrasensory experiences that enhance viewers' meaning-making processes. Just as textual accompaniments are invaluable to enhancing meaning in graphic novels, visual aids and signage, are imperative to artifactual storytelling in museum exhibits. As McCloud notes, "[i]n comics at its best, words and pictures are like partners in a dance and each one takes turns leading . . . when these partners each know their roles—and support each other's strengths—comics can match ANY of the art forms it draws so much of its strength from" (156). Like the signs and placards used to emphasize meaning of specific artifacts on display in a museum, "words [in graphic novels] elaborate [meaning] on an image [and] vice versa" (154).

On another level, the connection between museums and graphic novels can be seen in how readers infer meaning from each's displayed archaeology. Graphic novels, like museum spaces, are hyper-visual and hyper-sensory experiences for readers. As Dale Jacobs notes in *Graphic Encounters*:

> . . . comics provide a complex environment for the negotiation of meaning, beginning with the layout of the page itself. The comics page is separated into multiple panels,

> divided from each other by gutters, physical or conceptual spaces through which connections are made and meanings are negotiated; readers must fill in the blanks within these gutters and make connections between panels. *Images of people, objects, animals, and settings, word balloons, lettering, sound effects, and gutters all come together to form page layouts that work to create meaning in distinctive ways and in multiple realms of meaning making.* (5, emphasis added)

Jacobs highlights the complexities of meaning-making in the comic and graphic novel form, lending support to my argument that graphic novels, as a result of their intricate structural composition, inundate readerships with an abundance of information. Moreover, comics, like museums, are multimodal experiences that require more than vision to interpret what viewers are seeing. In museums, viewers are spatially aware of what is happening, are equipped with audio accompaniments, and are kinesthetically moving within those spaces. Graphic novels replicate some of these experiences through readers' engagement with panels and information appearing on the page. The complex interplay between pictures, narrative, form, and structure (i.e., frames, panels, gutters, etc.) requires readers to call on multiple modalities to engage with the text. Furthering comics' storytelling potential, McCloud writes that "words and pictures [in comics] have great powers to tell stories when creators fully exploit them both" (152), since "[a] huge range of human experiences can be portrayed in comics through . . . words or pictures" (152). Both Jacobs and McCloud emphasize the constant negotiation readers perform in making sense of a comic. It is the interplay of pictorial, narratological, and structural components of comics that force readers to be active participants in meaning-making. The textual, visual, audio, and spatial qualities of graphic novels are interrelated; they combine to produce clarity and coherence and rely on readers to make sense of the information they put forth. In this sense, the experience

of reading a comic is only fully actualized once the readers attend to all these items at once. Similar to a museum, viewers can look at the pictures featured in comic panels, but when they ignore the words that accompany the panel, they lose out on the full experience.

As has been noted throughout *The Plot and the Archive*, an elaborate interpretive interplay exists between the museums, artifacts on display, and museum visitors. Like graphic novels, the spatial layout and design of museum exhibitions affect how meaning is produced by museum goers. Moreover, the sheer visibility and volume of artifacts on display in both museums and graphic novels can cause embodied and emotive responses. Finally, lighting and color also influence one's experience of an exhibition, as these aids single out and draw attention to specific artifacts on display. There is a similar structural relationship that exists between graphic novels and museum displays, as both stimulate their respective audiences to play a pivotal and active role in meaning making.

A project that examines the apparent relationship between museum spaces and graphic novels materializes through the curator's presence (either as a manager or overseer of an exhibit, or as the central character of a historically revisionist graphic text). A number of graphic novels exist that feature characters-as-curators who are openly concerned with making sense of the past (be it historical, familial, or cultural). Some examples of these graphic novels include: Art Spiegelman's *MAUS: A Survivor's Tale* and *MAUS II: And Here My Troubles Began*; Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* and *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*; and Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. The characters-as-curators featured in these graphic novels fulfill the stylistic tendencies of the characters-as-curators found in museum texts.

One significant difference exists between the characters-as-curators examined in *The Plot and the Archive* and those appearing in graphic novels. Where artifacts were described to readers

in *Libra* and plotted on the page in *Oscar Wao* and *Ana Historic*, in the aforementioned graphic texts, the characters-as-curators *visually* represent or reproduce and recreate documents and artifacts on the artistic page (see Fig. 5.1). These pictorial renderings go a step further than the citation practices featured in *Oscar Wao* and *Ana Historic*. In graphic novels—such as Bechdel's *Fun Home* and Spiegelman's *MAUS* and *MAUS II*—historical disruptions take place, though these disruptions are depicted differently through the use of visuals.

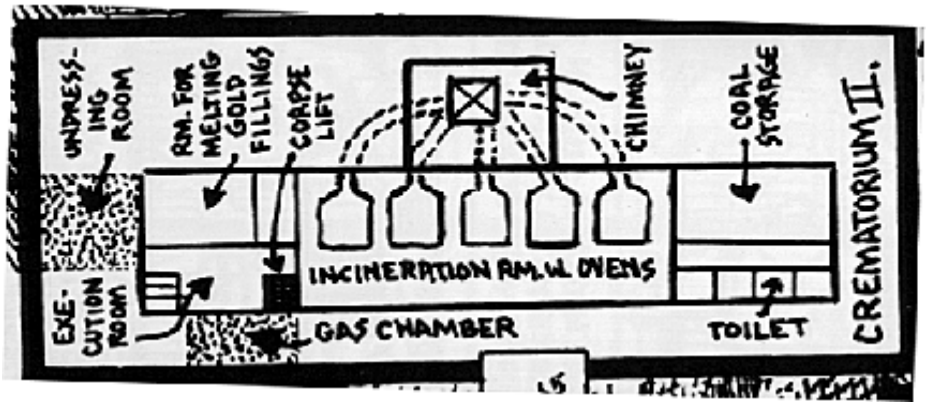

Fig. 5.1. Reproduction of a crematorium in *Maus II* (Spiegelman 70).

Along with architectural representations, like the crematorium, *MAUS* and *MAUS II* feature "images, dialogue boxes, commentary . . . maps of Poland and the Camps, diagrams of hideouts, real photographs from the family archive . . . an exchange table for goods in Auschwitz, and a manual for shoe-repair" (Leventhal). In *MAUS* and *MAUS II*, the texts' character-as-curator (Artie Spiegelman) is not only concerned with putting together an alternate history from those that have been accepted empirically, but he is also focused on visually reproducing certain documents and artifacts on the artistic page to achieve these ends. In *MAUS*, Artie documents his father Vladek's experiences as a Holocaust survivor. The text's illustrations, coupled with narration and dialogue, move beyond textual descriptions, using *ekphrasis* (as exemplified in DeLillo's *Libra*). While aspects of show-and-tell also exist in *MAUS* and *MAUS II*, the interplay of text, word, image, and space moves beyond these textual renderings,

extending my concept of displayed archaeology further. In graphic novels such these, readers are offered sensory experiences through the reproduction of historical sources.

Spiegelman's adept combination of image and text forwards Jacobs' assertion that comics "work to create meaning in distinctive ways" (5). In multimodal texts—such as comic strips, comic books, and graphic novels—"meaning is created through words, visuals, and the combination of the two in order to achieve effects and meanings *that would not be possible in either a strictly alphabetic or strictly visual text*" (Jacobs 5, emphasis added). In the case of *MAUS* and *MAUS II*, the texts' character-as-curator visually reproduces animated artifacts from the family's historical record. Readers must analyze and interrogate the reconstituted artifacts by measuring them against the accompanying text boxes and word balloons. Through this combination of image and text, readers are called to question their understanding of the past based on Spiegelman's reproduced artifacts forwarded by Spiegelman. *MAUS* and *MAUS II* are only a few examples of graphic novels future studies might investigate.

A future project investigating the character-as-curator in graphic novels truly shows how much this project has evolved. From an initial idea I conceived while completing my Master's Degree at the University of Windsor in 2009; to researching how central characters in revisionist texts reconstruct existing archives to produce alternate histories; to investigating how these characters subsume the role of museum curator, where the space of the novel functions as a museum exhibition; to finally exploring how the character-as-curator meticulously combs through the historical record in order to challenge accepted versions of truth. The concept of the character-as-curator has come a long way. When incorporated into novels dealing with history, the character-as-curator and museum techniques allow readers to reconceptualize and reimagine the histories they encounter. This revision is incumbent on readers' active meaning-making.

Libra, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *Ana Historic* each demonstrate how curatorial techniques and displayed archaeology challenge readers' traditional manner of thinking, forcing them to analyze the artifactual evidence on display to decide which historical views to accept. Given *The Plot and the Archive*'s findings, I am excited for what the future might hold for the character-as-curator, the kinds of texts s/he appears in, and the relationships such texts share with the museums. *The Plot and the Archive* demonstrates how the character-as-curator is an enabler of thought for past events. It furthermore shows how such examinations of the past can lay the groundwork for alternate, more hopeful, futures.

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