

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN ART AND VISUAL STUDIES



WONDER

IN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTIC PRACTICE

EDITED BY
CHRISTIAN MIEVES AND IRENE BROWN



Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice

“Brown and Mieves bring a much neglected attention to the topic of wonder and the visual arts in this edited collection of reflections drawn from a diverse range of distinguished scholars and practitioners. The emphasis on practice is to be welcomed. It goes beyond theory into the studio and the role wonder has in the production and reception of visual arts. This stimulating volume is a must read for academics and practitioners in the visual arts.”

—*Christopher Smith, University of the Arts London,
UK and Editor, Journal of Visual Art Practice*

Wonder has an established link to the history and philosophy of science; however, there is little acknowledgement of the relationship between the visual arts and wonder. This book presents a new perspective on this overlooked connection, allowing a unique insight into the role of wonder in contemporary visual practice. Artists, curators and art theorists give accounts of their approach to wonder through the use of materials, objects and ways of exhibiting. These accounts not only raise issues of a particular relevance to the way in which we encounter our reality today, but also ask to what extent artists utilize the function of wonder purposely in their work.

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To Cozimo and Ralf

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Introduction

Christian Mieves and Irene Brown

Wonder has an established link to the history and philosophy of science. However, there is little acknowledgement of the relationship between visual artistic practice and wonder. This book presents a new perspective on this overlooked connection, allowing a unique insight into the role of wonder in contemporary visual practice. Artists, curators and art theorists give accounts of their approach to wonder through the use of materials, objects and ways of exhibiting. These accounts not only raise issues of a particular relevance to the way in which we encounter our reality today, but also the book asks to what extent artists utilize the 'function' of wonder purposely in their work.

One of the key aspects of the book is to question to what extent wonder, as a strategy for breaching the dichotomy between science and art, as well as having the potential to question preconceived notions of representation and visibility, is an essential component in contemporary artistic practice. The book has its base in the exhibition project *the Gallery of Wonder* (2010–14, curated by Irene Brown) and the conference 'Working Wonder, Wonder in Contemporary Art' (Newcastle University, UK, 2013).

In the last two decades, the history of science has taken a 'material turn' bringing attention to objects and their materiality as part of the 'knowledge-making-practice.'¹ Wonder and cabinets of curiosity within artistic practices have attracted increased attention, as reflected in recent exhibitions.² Understood as a place outside of the familiar cultural framework, wonder has frequently been linked to the fascination for change and the coincidence of oppositions, seemingly an unlikely place to interrogate the relationship between the artist and the tools and the materials of production in contemporary artistic practice. Art theoretical approaches still hold on to an 'instrumentalist understanding' of tools and materials and the role of technique, as well as the traditional role of the artist,³ and wondrous objects destabilize this particular order. Wondrous objects not only 'mark the outermost limits of the natural world' but also merge existing categories of natural vs. man-made.⁴ As Daston and Park have argued, curiosity cabinets deflate the preconceived

binary opposition and distinction between art and nature allowing for more permutations:

We will argue for a link between the art-nature crosses of the *Wunderkammern* and the collapse of the art-nature opposition in the study of nature. *Wunderkammern* [...] exploited the old opposition between art and nature to gain pleasant paradoxes and also hazarded new combinations of the two that subverted the distinctions altogether. It was in such collections of rarities and marvels that art and nature first mingled and ultimately merged.⁵

The subversions of natural/man-made features hint not only at a questioning of fine art practice and its relationship to wonder and artistic agency, but also our understanding of the relationship between art and nature and the limits of visibility altogether. An emphasis on the process involved in the making, and the link to contemporary practice-led research, is therefore not unexpected.

We want to ask to what extent forms specific to art and nature, as observed in the seventeenth century, have changed and whether the hybrid formation still describes a crucial function in the discussion of art and wonder today? Wonder is here understood, from a speculative perspective, as being ‘surprised and to entertain questions’,⁶ where the combination of the manufactured on the one hand and the unfamiliar and inexplicable on the other, appears merged, but incongruent. However, this heterogeneous pairing seems well suited for the trope of wonder where the overlap of man-made and nature epitomizes the idea of the wonder cabinet, what Stafford and Terpak describe as a ‘force-filled microcosm’. Stafford and Terpak have argued that, ‘[T]he bristling curiosity cabinet is the spectacular embodiment of the ancient, force-filled microcosm and the modern, “chaotic” cosmos. *Devices of Wonder* emulates the curiosity cabinet’s epistemic organization by juxtaposition and superimposition of heterogeneous elements’.⁷

Such subversions and overlaps require a more holistic understanding of visibility; ‘a manner of visibility’ characterized as ‘science’ or ‘art’ rather than established disciplines.⁸ The fact that wonder cabinets ‘accommodated divergent readings’ made them crucial for the history of early modern sciences.⁹ The heterogeneous aspect of wonder relates further to an active process, an ongoing negotiation. The *work of art* as opposed to the *artwork* interrogates our view on our understanding of tools and material in artistic practice, bestowing a broader sense of agency in the material or object itself. Similarly, wonder is here not understood as a static or accomplished fact. Contemporary approaches to wonder likewise underline the ‘return to ambiguity’ that offers the potential of ‘slipperiness, achieved through a delicate choreography of

physical and conceptual space ... merging earnestness with irony, certainty with self-doubt.¹⁰

The return to those ambiguities queries not only our modes of visibility, but also asks for a profound revision of the role of the Cartesian observer, usually positioned on the outside. The wondrous object and the curiosity cabinet become therefore not only the carrier of the inexplicable, but moreover expose our relationship to the alien, enigmatic and perplexing. The transfixion of the viewer in sight of the wondrous event seems not only to refigure the relationship between viewer and the mysterious object, but it also further allows a 'construction of personal order through withdrawal into the sensory pleasure of handling'.¹¹ Wonder cabinets firmly establish the position of the subject reaffirming the relationship between the object and the viewer:

The 'cabinet of the world' presented physical things whose identities, links and connections would be articulated and interpreted according to their visible surface signatures ... and which in their totality would represent a world view, a cosmological explanation, which included within it the position of the subject for whom the view was constituted.¹²

Wonder chambers may therefore be seen as a 'restoration of the viewing experience', and this book sets out to explore the re-establishment of this experience, the urge for wonder in the twenty-first century. Wonder is here understood as a particular level of attention, fixation, and absorption. Looking at the etymological meaning of attention, Cray expands:

The roots of the word attention in fact resonate with a sense of 'tension', of being stretched, and also of waiting. It applies the possibility of a fixation, of beholding something in wonder or contemplation, in which the attentive subject is both immobile and ungrounded.¹³

Despite the heterogeneous nature of the cabinets, the deflation of categories and questioning of modes of visibility, curiosity cabinets, perhaps paradoxically, offer a clear and safe framework to encounter the unknown. By providing a stable frameset, those collections 'gave users double freedom of manoeuvring and experimenting through the distributions of mutable contents'.¹⁴

In this book, we wish to examine if this 'freedom of manoeuvring' still has a place in artistic practice. What role do 'heterogeneous pairings' and 'hazarded new combinations' play? How do artistic practitioners respond to functions of wonder in artistic practice? *Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice* is structured in three thematic groups, each focusing on different facets of wonder but also adopting three different perspectives

on the trope of wonder in contemporary art, following the viewer's, curator's and artistic practitioner's standpoint.

Contributors' Sections

Readers of this book may be surprised by the rapid changes of register, within and between contributions, by the hybridity of tone and style and the mixing of methodologies and approaches evident throughout. This has been precisely our intention, to test the extent to which artistic practice can open up theoretical concerns and, conversely, scholarly convention can enter into the mindset of the creative practitioner. The tensions between these two seem highly appropriate in the discussion of wonder and the curiosity cabinet, a debate that has been described as a heterogeneous and contested field. It is exactly these figures of tension, between the familiar and the unfamiliar, that the contributors of this book encounter in either their practice as artists or in their reflections on creation as writers and thinkers.

Throughout the three sections of the book, we have identified key concepts and approaches to wonder which are shared amongst the practitioners, curators and writers.

The shift of the role of the artist is particularly relevant in the discussion of wonder where the artist becomes maker, collector or curator at the same time. So, too, is the shift of the role of the curator, into 'curator-as-narrator' or 'co-producer of knowledge', as Robinson in the chapter 'Spectral Exhibitions: *The Wonders of the Invisible World*' has pointed out. The notion of wonder allows artists not only to see the object from the 'outside', in an unfamiliar, non-art specific framework, but it also confirms a new artistic skill set. This is significant in relation to the so-called 'liberated object' based on a surrealist concept of curiosity, where the object is transformed through displacement.¹⁵ This form of 'illusionism' disentangles the object from its 'original' framework and allows the artist to become maker and onlooker at the same time.

The concept of collections and archives becomes one of the shared concerns in the discussions on wonder. 'Archive fever', described as a concern to locate or 'possess that moment of origin, as the beginnings of things'¹⁶ is reflected in a wide range of approaches in various contributions: Jane Wildgoose in her work raises awareness of the systematic nature of the collecting of human remains and its legacy in museums' collections; Laura Kuch in her approach to *Wunderkammer* and Tiffany Shafran in 'Archives of Wonder: Collecting the Liminal in Contemporary Art' allow an insight into collections/archives as artistic means in the twenty-first century. Shirley Chubb takes public photographic archives as a catalyst for a different way of focusing on micro-histories. In all of these approaches, the focus on collections, montages of images or installation of objects raises questions of continuity and linearity of

time. As Didi Huberman has argued, with reference to the Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* and its non-linearity and fragmented worldview: 'the accumulation of images radically challenges any taxonomy, classification or abstraction of the collection'.¹⁷ This notion of incompleteness and the deviation from clear taxonomies allow a particular insight into issues of time in relation to wonder. This is reflected in the discussion on the snow globe and the reference to snow as ceasing time (Hilker Sack); a photographic collection and the sensation of fleeting and fragmented 'slices' of time (Chubb) and the disruption of linear time (Shaffan). The archive here becomes a construct that allows the dismantling of the linearity of time providing alternative histories. As Baudrillard argues in his analysis of the archive, the collection of objects becomes a particular space outside certain linearity: '[B]y establishing a fixed repertory of temporal references that can be replayed at will, in reverse order if need be, collecting represents the perpetual fresh beginning of a controlled cycle, thanks to which [...] man can indulge in the great game of birth and death.'¹⁸

The variety of conceptual frameworks gathered in this book allows an understanding of these processes of taking objects out of the normative, restricted value systems. Objects converted into tokens and souvenirs, such as the snow globe or a brooch, exemplify in particular the paradoxical relationship between closeness/distance and, according to Stewart, 'contract[s] the world in order to expand the personal'.¹⁹ The souvenir stands here for general collections of items, where our perception of time and space is dramatically altered.

This is also true of the miniature as another manifestation of wonder deployed in artistic practices, where the transformative capacity of the lens to diminish becomes 'a sphere of careful attention' (Shafran). The miniaturization of objects has the potential to convert the ordinary into the marvellous by revealing wonders hidden within seemingly insignificant aspects of the world around us. Yet, while miniaturization alters our perceptions, absorbs our attention and reconfigures our relation to the object, the attraction of the miniature goes beyond this appeal. The miniature moreover 'presents a diminutive and thereby manipulatable version of experience, a version which is domesticated and protected from contamination'.²⁰ What is inaccessible, because of scale or the geographical location, is therefore somewhat protected and out of reach, physically and metaphorically. Shafran describes a carved cherrystone depicting hosts of angels; a seemingly inhuman ability becomes a magical, impossible feat. Dettmers and Sanderson discuss the scale of wonder and 'small worlds' that 'involve a kind of transformation in the viewing of them'. This visual absorption is also evident in viewing the snow globe, a tiny, domed glass vitrine encompassing an entire world where scale belies the power of the image. Kruger discusses how even a small, decorative brooch can become a subversive act and a powerful tool for

political change, in spite or because of the miniature scale. Dalwood references in her practice-led research the possibility of experiencing wonder through the poetic transformation conjured by the reflective quality of the Claude glass. Capturing a landscape in the hand-held picture surface of the dark lens transforms the world from one state to another, distilling, exaggerating or editing the experience.

Beyond the exploration of the repercussions of miniature, several contributors explore in their approaches the veracity of often overlooked and abandoned objects. The everyday objects in terms of Kuch's practice, the marginalized urban peripheries in Losq's large-scale drawings or Endt-Jones's discussion of Dion's 'back room' of the museum draw attention to the non-categorizable potential of objects. The potential to deviate from the established canon becomes a key theme in the exploration of wonder, not only in the making itself, but its understanding, as Mark Dion emphasises: 'Similarly, making art is no longer confined to the institutional spaces that we have created for such activity. It is more in the "field" now. The focus is on relations and processes – an ecology of art if you will – and not solely on decontextualized objects that are like natural specimens.'²¹

And indeed, the way wonder transgresses institutional categorizations has been traced throughout the texts. It is this ability of the unexpected, wondrous object that triggers the 'anti-classificatory impulse of the *Wunderkammer*,' (Endt-Jones), the need for creating heterogeneous networks between art, cultural constructions (Jeffery) or the way wonder distances and allows us to become temporarily estranged from the social and ideological formation (Robinson). This potential of conceptual 'slipperiness' in relation to wonder, as has been argued, has been 'achieved through a delicate choreography of physical and conceptual space' as a key aspect in contemporary practice.²²

In a world where everything is known, the unknown and exotic become increasingly ruled out, and the quest to locate the sense of wonder becomes more challenging. Kuch places the unexpected in the everyday object; however, Dettmers and Sanderson signal the endangered 'out-posts' of wonder, attributing a specific function and the artist studio as an 'ante-chamber' to the curiosity cabinet. Further, the validity of wonder is questioned as Buckingham sets out an alternative approach to wonder and the wondrous, emphasizing the mutually productive relationship between not-knowing and knowing, an endorsement of which is echoed by several other contributors (Robinson, Dettmers and Sanderson, Kuch, Kruger, and Wildgoose). Dettmers and Sanderson ask 'What happens if we have no wonder?' Their fear of a 'post-wondrous world' as being 'a flat world' contrasts against Buckingham's endorsement of a 'flat ontology'.

However, what many theories of globalization have drawn attention to is what might be termed the disappearance of the other, exotic or wondrous. This loss of the frontier, of border zones, leaves us casting

about for DIY exotics, home-grown others and internal elsewhere, leaving us with what Augé calls the ‘clamour of particularism’.²³ As Clifford has shown:

The ‘exotic’ is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the presence of ‘modern’ products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighbourhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth.²⁴

And the unknown is exactly here in the immediate environment where Kuch locates the very peculiar, unexpected encounter; where the mirrored surface of the Claude glass distils and transforms the landscape (Dalwood); in liminal areas of the city and along disused railway lines or derelict canals (Losq) that provide us with the hidden.

And while we have mentioned earlier the disruption of the linearity of time with reference to collections and archives, the notions of nature/man-made objects become equally challenged. Artists including Mark Dion have dealt in their work with a sense of ‘instrumentalizing’ nature and the exploration of nature as ‘taxonomies and systems of power’.²⁵ Dion’s work on natural history museum collections not only questions power systems, but it also challenges our notion of nature/man-made in various of his installations where nature is mediated and reveals institutional barriers.

The mediation of nature problematizes a clear-cut classification of nature/culture, and the opposition of urban space and natural spectacle for instance, as discussed by Endt-Jones, Mieves, and Jeffery in this collection, has changed radically over the last centuries. And as mentioned above, the overlap of natural specimen and cultural object is closely linked to the idea of wonder, and the confusion of not being able to designate clearly is one of the key aspects of wonder where the transmutations, and metamorphosis as mentioned previously, create the sense of disbelief.²⁶

In Jeffery’s curatorial project, *Preternatural* the sublime territories are endangered environments and shifting geographies; melting ice-caps, rising oceans, disintegrating edges between land and sea. In this ‘periphery or border of perpetual disturbance,’ we see nature’s magnificence dramatically inverted, in wonder, horror, anxiety and amazement. Jeffery also describes how the work exhibited for *Preternatural* occupied a particular kind of psychogeography with work from international artists situated in unconventional institutions and the exhibition unfolding over the course of a few months. Brown rejects the use of urban environments as well as conventional venues as the best context in which to discover wonder.

This finally raises the question of whether there is a need for wonder, as a form of social responsibility. Dillon in his recent 'Essays at Curiosity, or Eight Ways of Looking' highlights the aspect of curiosity as 'care and attention' by referencing Foucault, who underlines the different connotation to curiosity:

To me it suggests something altogether different: it evokes 'concern'; it evokes the care one takes for what exists and could exist; a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds us; a certain relentlessness to break up our familiarities and to regard otherwise the same things [...].²⁷

Contributions to this book have revealed deviations from the familiar and concerns about the marginal, the overlooked. Beside this, the book questions the ethical validity of wonder, for instance in the search for the subversive potential of wonder as productive strategy for political change (Kruger). Endt-Jones discusses the use of wonder to provoke an ethical sensibility and compassion linked to ecology and conservation, echoing Jeffery's question of whether the dynamic of wonderment can give rise to greater social responsibility and environmental change. Wonder here assumes actual power beyond prescribed conceptual connotations and art and has a particular function to change people's minds and provoke action. Robinson speaks of the power of wonder to dispose us towards political change, stating that 'wonder can and should equally well act as a force eliciting *antipathy* as much as *empathy*'.

Wonder in Contemporary Artistic Practice organizes these multifaceted, interwoven concepts and approaches to wonder into three thematic sections, following the viewer's, curator's and artistic practitioner's perspective.

PART I: Taxonomy, Structures and Identities

The first section focuses on taxonomy, structures and identities and the attempt to come to terms with the inexplicable. Despite the fact that cabinets of curiosity demonstrate a vested interest in the taxonomy and classification of objects, they also foster subversive strategies and dismantle existing frameworks. By envisaging radical new frameworks incorporating questions of morality, newness and subversion, wonder challenges our sense of reality and categories such as man-made/nature, as explored by Mieves or Buckingham.

Wonder is scrutinized here not only as an indicator of difference, openness and alternative social structures (Kruger), but also as an opportunity to explore key characteristics of collections and archives (Chubb) and to challenge the relationship between viewer and object, as examined by Hilker Sack in the case study of the snow globe.

Beginning with an analysis of collections in contemporary art, which focuses on one of the key strands of the book, Shafran takes the concept

of the collection and archive, with reference to the work of contemporary artists Tyran Simon, Tacita Dean and Susan Hiller as a point of departure in order to explore the discursive and complex relationships between ideas, images and objects. The focus on material that sits outside the traditional canon, Shafran argues, reflects the extent to which social and cultural traditions are mediated in contemporary art. The concept of the curiosity cabinet serves as a template for the unexpected and overseen, as a '[M]icrocosm or Compendium of rare and strange things'. Not only does it elucidate our relationship to objects but it also allows us to turn our view on 'singularities', both natural (*naturalia*) and man-made (*artificialia*) as characteristic for the cabinet.

The artist's response to a photographic collection and the role of the archive as visual expression of time and the engagement with liminal spaces become the focal point of Shirley Chubb's chapter *One Hour: Visual Practice Exploring a Collective History*. In the discussion of her artistic practice, she explores mid-nineteenth and twentieth centuries local photographic archives, and identifies on the one hand a sense of 'subjectification', and on the other the incommensurable amalgamation of individual single events. The work, as a reflection on the material culture in museums, finally amounts to the question of the veracity of photography as a documentary device. The 'actuality' of the photographs is here intersected by the 'virtual' image that shows a different set of 'materiality and a reality'.

Wonder, generally seen as the birth of new possibilities for thought and expression, is commonly understood in the West as a deviation from the norm. Buckingham juxtaposes Western and non-Western perspectives and introduces the idea of a 'flat ontology'. With reference to a fourth-century Chinese story, Buckingham asks to what extent the rare and strange is unavoidably linked to 'puzzlement or logical perplexity', in other words, wonder. Can we imagine, Buckingham argues, a place of wonder if there is no separate plane of the rare and wondrous?

The next chapter chooses a conceptually opposed position to the 'flat ontology', underlining the essential function of wonder as a means of subversion and newness. Runette Kruger sees the extraordinary as 'indispensable for the reconceptualization of existing human relations and social institutions.' The capacity to positively assess and respect that which is different is discussed in relation to two street art collectives and a designer. The role of wonder manifested in creative practices is here particularly relevant as it underlines our relationship to the perception of the extra-ordinary as defined as that which has not yet become concretely real.

While in the previous two chapters Buckingham and Kruger deal with the idea of taxonomies and to what extent the notion of difference and wonder, as renewal, have a particular function in our society, the following two chapters cast a closer look at specific object relations. Exploring wonder through the prism of the snow globe, Anne Hilker Sack discusses the snow globe as an example where polarities of motion

and stasis, solid and liquid, inside and outside are breached. Reflecting the radical amalgamation of categories, the snow globe exemplifies the idea of wonder as engagement with an external stimulus not without challenging our notions of reality. In her analysis, the paradoxical notions of the snow globe, for instance the glass and its translucency and containment, invisible yet entrapping, exemplify how the snow globe is purposefully placed outside of the familiar cultural framework, by instigating the fascination for change, the coincidence of oppositions.

The first section closes with another case study on our relationship to objects. As a point of departure, clouds offer a peculiar constellation as 'non-object', where the 'visible meets the invisible, the representable meets the unrepresentable'. In his chapter, Mieves explores in what way man-made clouds contest assumptions of nature/manufacture, and the genuine/synthetic, by exploring the fleeting character of clouds. The chapter not only investigates how artists purposefully utilize the image of clouds, but moreover, to what extent the inability to see clearly challenges our understanding of objects and evokes the sense of wonder.

PART II: Contemporary Curatorial Practices

In more radical terms, curiosity cabinets can be characterized, as has been shown previously, as contested heterogeneous fields. Contributions in this section focus on the aspect and function of 'curating wonder' and explore modes of curatorial practices in which cabinets of wonder can be understood today as a mediation of contradictory or unequal meanings. The focus on curatorial projects offers four different curatorial approaches, beginning with the need for the viewer to 'reactivate' historical understandings of the idea of wonder and a '*dis-identification*' with the status quo (Robinson) and the prerequisite for alternative locations and different audience demographics (Brown). The following two chapters (Endt-Jones and Jeffery) both focus on object categories and disciplinary boundaries, creating heterogeneous networks between art and cultural constructions of nature and empiricism.

Robinson sees a renewed critical relevance of wonder in contemporary art since the new millennium, arguing 'wonder' to be the 'only appropriate response to the iniquities and irrationalities that characterize contemporary social relations.' However, he argues that historical understandings of the idea of wonder have to be 'reactivated' by the viewer. The critical potential of wonder is here understood as the '*dis-identification*' with the status quo where wonder shows the possibility of distancing us and allows us to become temporarily estranged from the social and ideological formation. Robinson, in the analysis of his curatorial concept, the exhibition *Invisible Wonder* at Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art (NGCA) in 2011 asks to what extent does the potential of distancing and an artistic 're-encoding' of wonder allow a political critique?

The *Gallery of Wonder on Tour* re-examines in practical terms the potential of the fairground sideshow as the locus for wonder. Based on a long-term exhibition project in close conjunction with a natural history museum, Brown reconsiders established relationships between the *wunderkammer* and the ‘modern’ museum. By reassessing traditional cultural values allocated to the museum and sideshow, both depositories of disbanded *wunderkammers*, Brown examines the significance of context, site and audience in relation to the evocation of wonder.

Deviating from established artistic conventions by travelling to rural Northumbrian and Cumbrian country fairs, the project explores new frameworks within which to encounter the unknown, enigmatic, perplexing and mysterious, transfixing the viewer and reconfiguring the relationship between viewer and art gallery. The unconventional locations and different demographics of the audiences also raise questions about the level of enchantment and illusion, essential to the experience of wonder and often seen as opposed to the tendencies in an established contemporary art context.

A similar breach of categories and disciplinary boundaries becomes the focus in Marion Endt-Jones’s analysis of her curated exhibition at Manchester Museum (2013–14). The sea-coral epitomises here the amalgamation and cross-disciplinary approach into anomalies, fragments and forgeries within in the museum’s setting. References to the contribution by Mark Dion and his *Bureau of the Centre for the Study of Surrealism and its Legacy* elucidate further the ‘anti-classificatory’ potential of the *Wunderkammer*.

Continuing the focus on the aesthetic relations between nature, wonder and the extraordinary, Celina Jeffery looks at her curated international exhibition *Preternatural* (2011–12) to explore instances that exceed the boundaries between art and science. This chapter focuses on preternatural elements within art and to what extent artists in their work show a specific focus on the heterogeneous character of nature. In line with the previous chapter, Jeffery identifies the paradox of traditional classification and the need for heterogeneous networks between art and cultural constructions of nature.

PART III: Contemporary Artistic Practice and the Function of Wonder

The last section, *Contemporary Artistic Practice and the Function of Wonder*, engages directly, from a practitioner’s perspective, with tools and materials and in what ways those destabilize our common perception of reality. Wonder as a work principle is here linked with a wide range of media including drawing, video, photography, sculpture and installation. The artists explore functions of wonder as working principles of visual art. Wildgoose, for instance, queries installations and cabinets of curiosities

in relation to human remains and artefacts. Contextualizing her artistic practice within the modern Wunderkammer, Kuch's internationally exhibited installations explore aspects of enchantment, materiality and the mysterious quality of the ordinary object. Other artists examine in their practice aspects of the urban periphery as a Gothic enchanted realm (Losq) or family archives (Ownby), the mutability of objects and the disruption of known meaning (Dettmers) or the disorienting, distorted landscapes created through the application of a Claude glass (Dalwood).

Practitioner and artist researcher Jane Wildgoose explores in her work the potential of human remains as facilitators of personal memory. As keeper of The Wildgoose Memorial Library (WML), her work deals in particular with the repercussions of collecting, affect and wonder in relation to human remains. In her discussion of her own collection or the public museum collection, Wildgoose's practice explores specifically ways in which the public engages with the systematic collection of human remains.

The everyday and ordinary become the key issue in Laura Kuch's examination of the extent to which contemporary artists will go to find wonder today in the everyday. Going beyond the traditional notions of wonder, Kuch uses the Wunderkammer as a contemporary framing device for her work. References to German Romanticism, in favour of the poetic potential of the ordinary, trigger the question of 'not-knowing' or what Kuch calls 'realm of the ever unknown'. Her work offers a 'snapshot of this internal *Wunderkammer*', which manifests and materializes itself in the outer world, in an actual space, through the artworks.

The shift in the role of the artists as curator, collector, and creator, linked to the idea of collection and wonder, offers a starting point in the conversation between artist-researchers Silke Dettmers and Mark Sanderson. The two artists revisit what they call the 'outposts' of wonder in an 'Age of Whatever', where everything seems to be always already expected. Dettmers and Sanderson analyse the difference between creating and perceiving wonder and how this longing for the new experience can be facilitated. Wonder within artistic practices can be described as co-dependent on familiarity and repetition – knowing and not knowing. To what extent then does wonder emulate the creative working process and the unknowable and inexplicable? Dettmers and Sanderson see the artist's studio as a kind of 'antechamber to Wonder', as a place of artistic practice as a form of curiosity '*about something yet to be named or seen*'.

Problematizing the moment of seeing and 'attentive viewing' in her practice, Dalwood discusses in her practice the use of a highly reflective Claude glass. The use of the traditional device and its reflective picture planes convert the image into a site of tension between liminal and illusionistic space. How does one locate the viewer actively and 'within the picture's performative zone'? Dalwood deploys depictions of places,

often museum buildings, in the work. The overlap of location and the mirrored spaces as 'dialectic' of site, mirror and viewer in search of the picturesque, makes specific references to the inception of the Claude glass and its association with the experiences of wonder.

Photographer Terry Ownby contextualizes his own practice as visual ethnographer and photographer dealing in his work with the collection in forms of personal and family archives. His practice explores powerfully the collection of artefacts: personal or family memorabilia, documents and snapshots, while at the same time drawing references to Czech photographic artist Jelena Blagović and her engagement in her work with her family archive.

Juliette Losq in the chapter 'Gothic Wonder in the Contemporary Landscape' investigates the geographic periphery and neglected urban post-industrial areas. Exploring the materializations of the Gothic genre in abandoned areas in line with a Gothic fascination with the disused and uncontrolled, her works evoke mystery, bewilderment, threat and wonder. In her drawings and installations, the idea of hidden corners or liminal areas of the city as prominent features in Losq's work allow a discussion of the quality of the aberrant 'wild spaces' as 'sites of aversion' and wonder.

Notes

- 1 Maria Zytaruk, 'Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge', *University of Toronto Quarterly* 80.1 (2011): 1–23.
- 2 Recent exhibitions exploring aspects of wonder include *Wonder*, Smithsonian American Art Museum, November 2015 – July 2016, *Treasures in MK*, Milton Keynes Gallery, 24 January – 30 March 2014; *Exploring Awe and Wonder*: Interdisciplinary Conference: Florida, United States, 2013; *Curiosity: Art and The Pleasures of Knowing*, Hayward Touring, 2013; *Wonder: Art and Science on the Brain*, Barbican, London, 2013; *Wonders of the Visible World*, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, 2012; *The Wonders of the Invisible World*, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art, 2011; *Wunderkammer*, Raum Für Aktuelle Kunst, Berlin, 2011; *Wunderkammer*, MOMA 2008; *The Wunderkammer Olbricht*, Permanent Collection, ME Collectors Room Berlin / Olbricht Foundation, Berlin, ongoing; *Devices of Wonder*, Getty Institute, 2002.
- 3 E. Barrett and B. Bolt, *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
- 4 Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York: MIT Press, 1998), 13.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 260.
- 6 'It means both to be surprised and to entertain questions. It thus may refer to the double operation [...] to accept being affected, troubled, surprised, but also being forced to think and question his own knowledge, not in terms of its sad limitations, but in terms of the restricted set of practical situations in which it is positively relevant.' Isabelle Stengers, 'Wondering about Materialism', in Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), 374.

- 7 Barbara Maria Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), 2.
- 8 Caroline A. Jine and Peter Galison, eds., *Picturing Science Producing Art* (New York, London: Routledge, 1998), 1.
- 9 Zytaruk, 1–23, 3.
- 10 Pablo Helguera, 'Polyvalent Spaces: The Postmodern Wunderkammer and the Return of Ambiguity', in Louis Weinthal, ed., *Toward a New Interior: Anthology of Interior Design Theory* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 519–626.
- 11 Stafford and Terpak, 9.
- 12 Eileen Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 102.
- 13 Jonathan Crary, *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge Massachusetts, London, England: MIT Press, 2000), 10.
- 14 Stafford and Terpak, 7.
- 15 Stephen Bann, *Ways Around Modernism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2007), 106.
- 16 Carolyn Stedman, *Dust* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 3.
- 17 Pedro de Llano, 'Atlas: How to Carry the World on One's Back?' *Afterall Online*, 2011, <<http://www.afterall.org/online/atlas-how-to-carry-the-world-on-one-s-back#.VuK7lcfYkqi>> (accessed March 2016).
- 18 John Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, eds., *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 16.
- 19 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.
- 20 Stewart, 69.
- 21 Miwon Kwon, 'Miwon Kwon in conversation with Mark Dion', in Mark Dion, Lisa G. Corrin, Miwon Kwon, and Norman Bryson, *Mark Dion. Contemporary Artists* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 22.
- 22 Helguera, 519–626.
- 23 Marc Augé, *Non-Places Introduction to an Anthropology of Super Modernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1995), 34.
- 24 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 14.
- 25 Norman Bryson, 'Mark Dion and the Birds of Antwerp', in Mark Dion, Lisa G. Corrin, Miwon Kwon, and Norman Bryson, eds., *Mark Dion. Contemporary Artists* (London: Phaidon Press, 1997), 97.
- 26 Daston and Park, 237.
- 27 Michel Foucault, 'The Masked Philosopher', (1996) quoted in Brian Dillon, *Curiosity: Art and the Pleasures of Knowing* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), 22.

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