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## Nether Kammer - Wunder mind

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# Nether Kammer – Wunder Mind

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Catherine Heard

In her introduction to *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Erika Suderburg outlines her hypothesis that the genre of Installation Art bears “more than a passing resemblance” to the Wunderkammern of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Suderburg is not alone in relating the Wunderkammer to late twentieth century installation practice, as significant exhibitions have been mounted linking the Wunderkammer to Installation Art, the most prominent of these being the Adalgisa Lugli’s curation of the “Wunderkammer” section of the “Arte e Scienza” exhibition of the forty-second Venice Biennale in 1986.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, prominent artists – including Mark Dion and Rosamund Purcell – have purposefully modeled installation works on the structure and theme of the Wunderkammer. At the turn of the twenty-first century, numerous museums, including the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.,<sup>3</sup> have recreated cabinets of curiosities for temporary display, bringing them into the public eye as an alternative model of learning that mingles science and art, and parallels the current vogue for interdisciplinarity.

In response to the recurring associations made between the Wunderkammer and Installation Art, I propose to examine Suderburg’s hypothesis using the final exhibition of the Toronto artists’ collective, Nether Mind, as the subject of my investigation. The reasons for selecting the final Nether Mind exhibition as the subject of inquiry are multi-fold. Firstly, it narrows discussion of a broad category to the manageable field of a single exhibition consisting of eleven artists’ site specific works. Secondly, the final

exhibition of the collective took place in 1995 – only a few years prior to the publication of Suderberg’s observations. Thirdly, I was struck by an immediate outward resemblance between the characteristics and themes of the Wunderkammer and those explored by the collective. Additionally, as a former member of the collective, I would like to take advantage of the insight this familiarity grants me to the works of the exhibition. I was privy to the artists’ works – not only during the course of the exhibition, which I spent several hours sitting as part of my responsibilities as a collective member, but also in the early stages of their inceptions, during the studio visits that were part of the collective’s preparations for the exhibition. Finally, I was also present during the phase of final resolutions for these works in the three weeks prior to the exhibition when members of the collective were engaged in the process of completing and installing their works on site.

Nether Mind’s catalogue for their final exhibition centered around Christopher Dewdney’s fictional essay, “The Votive Chamber of the Nether Mind.”<sup>14</sup> This tongue-in-cheek scientific paper analyzes the exhibition through the eyes of a fictitious archeologist who has stumbled upon the rare find of a cache of artifacts and human skeletal remains from the “Boskopian” civilisation several thousand years after their preservation by a volcanic eruption. Mistaking his discovery of Nether Mind’s exhibition for a votive chamber, and the artworks for expressions of “complex religious beliefs,” he attempts to interpret their meaning, debating whether they are of human or cyborg origin. The archeologist, director of the *Institute for Late Twentieth Century Culture*, is, despite his determined scientific manner, seemingly not immune to the emotion of wonder. Puzzled by the lack of “cyborg husks” and the “human names attached to cyborg artifacts,” he “postulates,” “speculates,” “puzzles” and “feels” in response to their mystery, eventually experiencing a “sense of expectation and eagerness” as he imagines the “Boskopians looking forward to their own destiny beyond the planetary cradle.”<sup>15</sup>

In interpreting Nether Mind’s exhibition as a votive chamber, Dewdney has, intentionally or not, shed light on one of the more subtle links between the divergent forms of the

Wunderkammer and Installation Art. In 1908 Julius von Schlosser published a study comparing the Wunderkammer to the chambers of Greek temples and Christian churches concealing sacred treasures perceived to have powerful spiritual, metaphysical, or thaumaturgical qualities.<sup>6</sup> Suderburg notes that personal altars and roadside memorials are private acts of collection and repositioning that are related both to the Wunderkammer and to Installation Art.<sup>7</sup> Standing before an altar, or entering into a sacred space, one is surrounded by an echoing stillness that alerts and heightens the senses.

Similarly, Installation Art often depends upon phenomenological devices to affect the viewer. Visitors to the Nether Mind exhibition, for example, were dwarfed within the cavernous main space (approximately 15,000 to 17,000 square feet), and by the twenty-five foot ceilings soaring above them. The abandoned warehouse was dusty and dimly lit, except where spotlights illuminated the artists’ works. Particular works, such as John Dickson’s *Vertigo* (figure 1), and my own work, *Confessional* (figures 2 and 3), were isolated from the main space in separate rooms where the viewer was enveloped by recorded sound, in addition to controlled light and visual effects. The atmosphere and structure of the space was, in retrospect, curiously analogous to that of a cathedral, where the visitor is initially awed by the grandeur of high ceilings, then drawn by banks of flickering candles to altars devoted to individual saints, and finally into the private chapels adjacent to the primary liturgical space.

In 1993, in her article “In Installation Art, a Bit of the Spoiled Brat,” Roberta Smith criticized the artists of the “Art at the Armory: Occupied Territory” exhibition in Chicago, for their exploitation of similar phenomenological effects. Smith denigrates these effects, generated by the manipulation of dilapidated architecture and found objects, as “The Shock of the Old.” She points out that, under these circumstances, “...everything is pregnant with ambiguous meaning, a sense of unspecified ritual and loss.” In Smith’s eyes, the sense of awe or wonder that can be produced by environmental effects degenerates to “a deadly funhouse atmosphere.”<sup>8</sup> Smith’s critical commentary of the “worn” conventions

of Installation Art, are reminiscent of the etiquette of connoisseurship that surrounded the Wunderkammer. Guides to European cabinets admonished the visitor, "not to admire things that are not particularly rare – you'll make yourself ridiculous."<sup>9</sup>

In *Cabinets of Curiosities*, Patrick Mauries identifies the importance of space as a vital element in contemporary Installation Art, describing it as, "the medium of contamination, the locus of chance encounters, the revealer of hidden meanings...the vital dimension, indeed the very principle underlying artistic meaning."<sup>10</sup> The dark, atmospheric space chosen by Nether Mind for their exhibition was subsumed by an aura that transcended that of the modernist gallery, which, in the words of Thomas McEvilley, is "a kind of non-space, ultraspace, or ideal space where the surrounding matrix of space time is symbolically annulled."<sup>11</sup> The Nether Mind space, in sharp contrast to the space O'Doherty describes, forced viewers to become aware of history and of the passage of time – if one were to believe Dewdney's archeologist, the passage of millennia. It was impossible for the viewer not to be physically aware of the space; far from a neutral ideal, the air was filled with dust motes, and the smell of mildew. On days when it rained, water dripped onto the floor, creating shallow puddles that reflected the dim light from the skylights high above. Raised areas on the floor traced the phantom architecture of rooms that had been constructed and then removed, while gauges and dials on the walls recalled the former presence of industrial machinery.

Inside the musty vault of his Votive Chamber, Dewdney's fictional archeologist seems not unlike the early collector assembling his Wunderkammer. With few proven facts and many misguided notions, he responds poetically to the task of classification and interpretation. He recognizes the complexity of the universe he has unearthed and seeks to classify and organize it into seemly order. Similar to the collectors of the Wunderkammer, Dewdney's archeologist is fascinated by objects that appear to transgress logical categories.<sup>12</sup> In the case of each 'artifact' he draws the reader's attention to the ambiguities it embodies and the various interpretations which might explain its existence. For example, he posits that the Miki McCarty 'icon' might be interpreted as "the

integration of machine and DNA...or the fusion of man and nature," or alternatively, as the expression of "the alienation felt by cyborgs upon achieving sentience." Dewdney's concern surrounding the breach of the categories of man and machine, of artificial and human intelligence, runs parallel to the long historical fascination with automata, complex mechanical versions of humans and animals that imitated life-like movement and sound. Popular in Wunderkammern, these devices aimed to mimic nature so perfectly as to deceive spectators, thus challenging the line dividing art from nature.<sup>13</sup>

While no true, mechanized automata inhabited the Nether Mind exhibition, Max Streicher's inflatable *Acrobats* were animated by fans so as to appear to breathe and exhale into each others' mouths, with one figure inflating as the other deflated. Similarly, his twenty foot-tall inflatable *Dragon* bowed and dipped its three heads, quivering in response to the varying air pressure vented inside it. Other works, such as Tom Dean's *Three Sheets to the Wind* – three white bed sheets pinned to a clothes line suspended at the height of the average viewer, positioned opposite three tall electric fans standing same height as the clothes line which formed a corridor of blowing air that the viewer walked through when entering the exhibition – played upon the anthropomorphism of common objects. This effect was heightened by fact that this corridor, the entrance to the exhibition, visually framed the cartoon silhouettes of Dean's *Three Ghosts*.

Holland Cotter identified one of the reasons for Installation Art's popularity as its "elastic nature and its capacity to bridge formal categories."<sup>14</sup> From its inception, it broke from the tradition of art movements being defined by their use of specific media,<sup>15</sup> their distinctive stylistic features and characteristic themes. Today it routinely juxtaposes diverse techniques and unexpected materials, often borrowing from other fields such as science, psychology and sociology.<sup>16</sup> Suderburg opines that the "lack of homogeneity" characteristic of the Wunderkammer makes it a fascinating precursor to Installation Art.<sup>17</sup> Representative of Installation Art's trend toward employing a diversity of unconventional materials, Nether Mind's final exhibition included works made from

thread, traffic cones filled with concrete, and fluorescent orange chalk dust (Lyla Rye, *Untitled* – figure 4); home-made plasticine, beeswax and honey bees (Mary Catherine Newcomb, *Untitled* – figure 5, and *Anonymous Delivery*); silver paper from the insides of cigarette packages and images appropriated from cigarette advertising (Tess Tzeckas, *The Players*); antique fabrics salvaged from a Victorian wedding dress and christening gown, human hair, and text modeled upon dream interpretation handbooks (Catherine Heard, *Confessional*); strings of Christmas lights, large sheets of glass and whirling vortices of water (John Dickson, *Vertigo*); electric fans, bed sheets and tar paper (Tom Dean, *Three Sheets to the Wind* and *Three Ghosts*); and glass thermometers as tall as the viewers (Reinhard Reitzenstein, *Wood Burns at 415° F*).

A significant difference between the materials contained within the Wunderkammer and those typically used in Installation Art are the forms' divergent approaches to value, rarity and ornament. Renaissance collectors prized objects made from rare and costly materials and they frequently increased the value and interest of relatively inexpensive yet exotic naturalia, such as ostrich eggs and polished coconut shells, by incorporating them into manufactured objects, such as sculptures, goblets or pitchers, which were then ornamented with more costly materials.<sup>18</sup> In sharp contrast, Installation Artists – influenced by the art form's roots in happenings, environment art, and minimalism<sup>19</sup> – generally use relatively inexpensive, commonly available materials, and found objects. Max Streicher, for example, sewed *Balancing Act with Dragon* (figure 6) from clear plastic sheeting, and Tyvek, a construction fabric normally used as a draft barrier inside the walls of houses. The oversize glass thermometers in Reitzenstein's work were found by the artists on site in a room cluttered with rubbish while they were cleaning the space prior to the installation.

The aesthetic of the found object provides another link across centuries connecting the Wunderkammer, via Dada and Surrealism, to Installation Art. In *Cabinets of Curiosities* Mauries identifies a "property of strangeness" as the fundamental attribute of both the objects chosen by the collector for the Wunderkammer,

and those selected by the Surrealists. The strangeness Mauries identifies appears to be the "uncanny," as identified by Freud, which depends upon the anxiety, "created when there is intellectual uncertainty whether an object is alive or not, and when an inanimate object becomes too much like a live one."<sup>20</sup> Uncanny objects were highly prized within the Wunderkammern. Collectors avidly sought works by artisans that were so lifelike as to deceive the viewer – trompe l'oeil images and plaster, ceramic and bronze casts from nature, in addition to automata, were popular items. Other favoured objects were those that appeared to contravene Nature's categorical laws. Coral, for example, seemed to reside simultaneously in the animal, plant and mineral categories,<sup>21</sup> and fossils were interpreted as stones mimicking animals and plants.<sup>22</sup> These examples resonate strongly with Freud's theory, as their categorization remained ambiguous in the era of the Wunderkammer. An additional layer of complexity occurred when an ambiguous material was animated in sculptural form – for example, the gold and coral goblet made in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century by Abraham Jamnitzer, which depicts Daphne transforming into a laurel tree.<sup>23</sup> This work is particularly resonant in its play between animate and inanimate – the selection of coral as an ambiguously situated material echoes the mythological narrative of transformation.

A similar thematic ambiguity is echoed in Miki McCarty's work *Mental Cabinet*, in which an anthropomorphic figure is created from the sculpted head of a hawk that has been enlarged to human proportions, a cast of a female torso adorned with feathered angel's wings, and plaster casts of human feet. Additionally, in Mary Catherine Newcomb's work *Anonymous Delivery*, a life-like self-portrait is executed in bees wax and adorned with spirals of honeybees. Both works play upon the mythical fantasy of man merging with animal and with illusion and mimesis, blending casts from life with real, natural materials, namely, feathers and dead honey bees.

Returning to Dewdney's fictional archeologist, we are reminded of the unsettling affects of the uncanny upon the viewer. The Director of the Institute for Late Twentieth Century Archeol-

ogy begins his account by describing his strong physical reaction to the sight he has seen: "...even now the hairs stand up on the back of my neck as I recall seeing the first artifacts looming up in the light from the xenon vapor lamps."<sup>24</sup>

Other writers have compared the experience of visiting Nether Mind exhibitions to experiencing, "Alice's Wonderland – a dimension beyond the illusory mirror,"<sup>25</sup> and to the ghost story game that,

Pubescent girls used to enact...at sleepovers, where one of their number was blindfolded and forced to touch all sorts of disgusting substances, described to them as eyeballs, bones, intestines, organs and suchlike, belonging to a corpse.<sup>26</sup>

The viewers' responses to the uncanny aspects of the collective's works were not unforeseen by the artists. In its mandate, Nether Mind's artists identified one of their objectives as exhibiting works in which the body is, "abstracted, distilled, or fragmented ... rather than (objectified) in its entirety."<sup>27</sup> Further, the mandate links the inanimate space where the exhibition is situated to the theme and function of the body, one in which:

The site itself becomes a physical entity...metaphorically the dark, labyrinthine spaces chosen for the exhibitions function as the bowels of the building and symbolically house the subconscious mind.<sup>28</sup>

In *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, Suderburg peers back through the veil of history to connect the Wunderkammer to both Surrealism and Installation Art, identifying their common relationship to the operations of chance and the uncontrollable,

The liberating arbitrariness of chance operations might be likened to the obliteration of scientific classification exercised in these personal cabinets. Wunderkammern evoke (in retrospect) some of the foundational impulses...for works of installation and site specific art.<sup>29</sup>

Among others, she cites the works of Yayoi Kusama, Mona Hatoum, and Anne Hamilton, along with David Wilson's *Museum of Jurassic Technology*, as examples of installation works that hinge on "...evocation, bewilderment, and enchantment," and operate, "...in disregard of the sanctioned systems of classification."<sup>30</sup> J. H. Martin describes a similar phenomenon in his writings about the Chateau D'Orion, a Renaissance house in central France that has been transformed by artists into a series of contemporary installations exploring the theme of the Wunderkammer:

...the territory of art has been hugely enlarged by the inquiring approach of artists, who have laid claim to great swathes of the human and physical sciences in order to transpose or appropriate them to their own poetic ends.<sup>31</sup>

Suderburg's and Martin's descriptions resonate strongly with the themes and intent of the Nether Mind artists. While many of the artists had a keen interest in the sciences, their fascination was expressed tangentially, through impressionistic interpretations. John Bentley Mays responds to John Dickson's *Vertigo* by stating:

The setup has been done in a nearly lightless room. As one's eyes adjust, the components gradually come into visibility: a pool of water swirling down into a central drain, the reflection on glass of a spiral galaxy executed with twinkling tiny bulbs, a motor, a dead pigeon. If pressed to say what this was "about," I'd immediately say "entropy," since everything about it is a reminder of the remorseless wind-down of closed systems. But when was Newtonian physics ever this interesting?<sup>32</sup>

The element of chance was a critical factor in the working method of the Nether Mind collective by virtue of the fact that the space was never acquired more than two or three months before the exhibition. Some artists, notably Lyla Rye and Reinhard Reitzenstein, waited until the space was acquired to plan their works, in order to respond directly to the site. Others began works in their studio, and adapted them to the site when it was acquired.

Thus, the final form of the works was shaped by fortuitous occurrences. For example, Reinhard Reitzenstein's discovery of boxes of giant glass thermometers stimulated his interest in the smoke damaged wall remaining from a fire decades earlier when the space had been a textile finishing factory. Other artists' works were enhanced by coincidental finds. John Dickson, for example, chose to leave a pigeon's desiccated body remaining as it was found on the floor of the room in which he was installing, subtly altering the reading of *Vertigo* with its presence. Max Streicher responded to the high ceilings of 376 Dufferin Street by sewing an additional element, the three-headed hydra that accompanied the acrobats in *Balancing Act with Dragon*. Often something which the collective initially thought might present a problem in the space became a significant feature of an artist's work – for example, one of the ten inch-deep, ten inch-wide trenches that traversed the floor of the main space was incorporated into Lyla Rye's *Untitled*. The Gothic arch, constructed from intricately woven thread, was located to span one of the trenches, which had been lined with fluorescent orange chalk, to create the illusion of a glowing chasm. In the interests of safety, the other trenches were covered with metal and plywood plates, inset flush with the cement floor.

An additional aspect of Nether Mind exhibitions governed by coincidence was the emergence of correspondences and contrasts between the artists' works. This is comparable to the eccentric arrangement of objects within the Wunderkammern, some of which were organized to emphasize the affinities between objects,<sup>33</sup> others to accentuate their heterogeneity.<sup>34</sup> The objects in the Wunderkammer could be categorized in any number of ways, according to the whim of the individual collector, just as the works within the exhibition could have been arrayed in an unlimited variety of conjunctions and juxtapositions. Frequently, we discovered upon installing a show, that parallels in imagery created unforeseen resonances between the works – for example, Mary Catherine Newcomb's *Untitled* tongue and Greg Hefford's *Untitled* comic book speech bubble, the repetition of spiral forms in John Dickson's *Vertigo* and Mary Catherine Newcomb's *Anonymous Delivery*, and the doubled bodies of Max Streicher's *Bal-*

*ancing Act with Dragon* and the conjoined twins in my work.

In *The Age of the Marvelous*, Joy Kenseth lists the predominant themes of the Wunderkammer as being,

...the supernatural...the natural...the artificial...novelty and rarity...the foreign or exotic, the strange and bizarre... variety...the unusually large and the unusually small...demonstrations of supreme technical skill or virtuosity; the triumph over difficult problems and the achievement of the seemingly impossible...vividness and verisimilitude...the transcendent and the sublime...(and) the surprising and the unexpected...<sup>35</sup>

Daston and Park, however, group them under the more restricted rubrics of, “opulence...rarity...strangeness...fine workmanship...medical or magical properties... ambiguity and metamorphosis,” and conclude their list with the criterion, “All [of these categories] converge in singling out the exceptional, the anomalous, and the bizarre.”<sup>36</sup> Suderburg emphasizes that the interdisciplinary hybridity of the Wunderkammer and its celebration of the “ornamental grotesque” – which was disparaged by its neoclassical critics as having, “...embodied everything that was excessive, contaminated and monstrous about the uncontrolled imagination...” – represents another essential parallel to Installation Art. She ties the Wunderkammer's celebration of the unrestrained imagination to the architectural folly, which, like the objects of the Wunderkammer and the form of Installation Art, has no “use value,” and represents a vernacular site, located outside of the distinctions between high and low art.<sup>37</sup>

The works of the Nether Mind collective embrace the notion of the grotesque both through literal depictions of monsters – as in the conjoined twins of *Confessional* – as well as, and perhaps more significantly, through an aesthetic of excess and impurity. Images of the body were fragmented, grotesquely magnified, fused with other forms, and imitated by anthropomorphic objects. The purity of the “white cube” was replaced by a space contaminated with detritus of history and invaded by suggestions of the outside world. The Nether Mind artists further polluted the

notion of high art by creating with common, ephemeral materials that are, like the space itself, infected by associations with popular culture, private histories, and the detritus of a consumer society.

Early installation works were considered immovable, invariably linked to their sites. In *One Place After Another* Miwon Kwon identifies the tension between the locational identity of site-specific art, and the tendency, from the 1980's onwards, for site-specific works to be transient in response to market forces. She notes that, "the efficacy of site specific work ... seems to weaken when it is re-presented".<sup>38</sup> Likewise, an object removed from the Wunderkammer is experienced in a significantly different manner than it would have been in its original context, crowded together with other objects in a chamber designed to overwhelm the viewer with the emotion of wonder.

Like the objects within the cabinet, Nether Mind works were embedded in their site – integrally linked to, and influenced by it and one another. The oily, red clay plasticine of Mary Catherine Newcomb's oversized tongue echoed the red clay bricks of the central chimney, and the scorched veil of smoke stains on the west wall faded downwards into the tableau of Reinhard Reitzenstein's evenly spaced, javelin-sized, thermometers. To remove either of these works from their original site would be to alter their fundamental identity. Nether Mind artists, however, did conform to Kwon's observations of the mid-1980s in that usually they designed works that could later be remounted in other venues. But, in order not to weaken the impact of the works, they have generally undergone significant changes to their component parts, scales and overall appearances when they have been remounted in other sites. Reinhard Reitzenstein reused the glass thermometers from *Wood Burns at 451° Fahrenheit* in a subsequent work, titled *Wilderness and the Scientific Method*, in which he set up a laboratory of oversized glass alchemical instruments, partially filling the enormous glass spheres and vials with essential oils from native plant species.<sup>39</sup> The acrobats from Max Streicher's work, *Balancing Act with Dragon*, for example, have been remounted in various versions in other Canadian and Euro-

pean galleries. In 1996, at the Synagoga na Palmovoca in Prague the acrobats were paired with *Sextet*; two years later, at Cambridge Galleries, they appeared as a single work in the gallery's atrium. In addition to recombining existing works with new elements, Streicher has also dealt with the problems presented in relocating site specific works by resewing his inflatables at different scales proportionate to their new locations.<sup>40</sup>

Certain works were destroyed when the exhibition was dismantled – Lyla Rye's soaring Gothic arch, for example, was cut down with household scissors, collapsing into an insignificant pile of orange thread. Later, in a personal response to the tension generated by the growing trend to create works that could be remounted, which conflicted with her own desire to respond directly to each new site, Rye entombed the thread from the Nether Mind exhibition – along with the small bundles of tangled thread from three other site specific exhibitions – in cast lucite cubes. These became anchors for the threads in the final work of the series, titled *Between Here and There*, which was exhibited at the Glendon Gallery in 1995.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the artists made significant changes to the works in order to re-exhibit them speaks to the vital importance of the site in determining the final form of each artist's work. Like the Wunderkammer, the site was a crucible, capable of shaping meaning by providing context for that which was contained within it.

An overarching theme unifying the contents of the Wunderkammer is the symbolic representation, in microcosm, of all that is wondrous in the world. Kenseth notes the importance of ethnographic objects in the Wunderkammer as the symbolic representatives of worlds separated by time or geographical distance. These exotic objects served in the collector's "quest to gain a complete view of the universe."<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Dewdney's archeologist imagines the artifacts he has discovered can facilitate his mastery of knowledge pertaining to all aspects of Boskopian culture, including their evolution from human to cyborg form, their philosophical outlook, their religion, and the key to their eventual exodus from the earth into interstellar space. Nether Mind's works seemingly provide Dewdney the potential microcosm of an imagi-

nary world, touching as they do upon wide-ranging themes and imagery – from architecture, in Lyla Rye's work, through to zoomorphism, in Miki McCarty's.

The microcosm of the world contained in the Wunderkammer was described in the sixteenth century by Samuel Quicheburg as a "universo teatro" and by Guilio Camillo as a "theatrum mundi."<sup>43</sup> While the Wunderkammer was clearly separate from the theatre as an art form, parallels existed between the two forms. The Wunderkammer was, on one hand, a private space of contemplation, but it also had a public aspect as a form of spectacle. Referring to published catalogues and treatises, available from the 1580's onwards, travelers sought out significant cabinets to add to their itineraries.<sup>44</sup> Just as the visitor to the theatre seeks to experience an emotional response to the action upon the stage, visitors to the cabinet made their pilgrimages to experience the emotion of wonder. The cabinet was, above all, structured to elicit awe,

The strategy of display piled one exception upon another... Distraction as well as disorientation amplified the onlooker's wonder... from every nook and cranny uncountable rarities clamored simultaneously for attention. The cabinets paid visual tribute to the variety and plentitude of nature... Stuffed with singularities, the astonished by copiousness as well as by oddity. Collectors did not savor paradoxes and surprises; they piled them high in overflowing cupboards and hung them from the walls and ceilings. The wonder they aimed at by the profusion of these heterogeneous particulars was neither contemplative nor inquiring, but rather dumbstruck.<sup>45</sup>

In *Art and Objecthood*, Michael Fried derides Installation Art's predecessor, minimalism, for its temporal nature, its dependence upon its particular situation or site, and its focus on the beholder.<sup>46</sup> All of these characteristics are at play in both the function of the Wunderkammer and in Installation Art. Fried describes the ideal of art as:

...[a] continuous and entire presentness...a kind of instantaneousness, as though if only one were infinitely more acute, a single infinitely brief instant would be long enough to see everything, to experience the work in all its depth and fullness, to be forever convinced by it.<sup>47</sup>

The Wunderkammer and Installation Art are both dependent upon the aesthetics of relationships and comparisons, and must be experienced temporally. As the viewer explores, the complex spaces of the cabinet and the installation continually unfold, revealing new aspects of themselves through the duration of the investigation. Neither seeks to "convince" the viewer, instead they envelop and bestow upon the viewer a visceral, emotional experience constructed through a broad sensorial experience. They belong to what Fried describes as "the history of sensibility."<sup>48</sup>

Despite its public aspects, the Wunderkammer was a private collection, into which visitors might be admitted only with the permission of the owner. Daston and Park remind us of "Michel de Montagne's disappointment...when he was turned away from the Ambras collection of Ferdinand II of Tyrol in 1580." The installations mounted by Nether Mind were intended for a broad public. In reality, however, the limited publicity possible from public grants assured that the audience were, for the most part, confined to an 'elite' of educated art viewers, who were, in the end, perhaps not much different from the connoisseurs who admired the objects the Wunderkammer – or, for that matter, from the fictional scientific team of Dewdney's catalogue essay.

In conclusion, Suderburg's hypothesis that the Wunderkammer is a viable historical metaphor for understanding Installation Art appears to be well founded when considered in relation to the works produced by the Nether Mind collective in 1995. Strong parallels exist in a number of areas, including: the heteroclitite nature of the materials and themes encompassed; the use of phenomenology to elicit emotional responses; the fusion of divergent categories; and the temporal, theatrical aspects of the two forms of display.

## Notes

- 1 Erika Suderburg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7.
- 2 Adalgisa Lugli, *Arte e Scienza: Wunderkammer* (Venezia: Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia, 1996).
- 3 Joseph. R. Goldyne, *Cabinets of Curiosities: Four Artists, Four Visions* (Madison: Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2000), 9.
- 4 Christopher Dewdney, *Nether Mind* (Toronto: Nether Mind Artists' Collective, 1995), 113–119.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 6 Patrick Mauries, *Cabinets of Curiosities* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 23.
- 7 Suderburg, (as in n. 1), 7.
- 8 Roberta Smith, "In Installation Art, a Bit of the Spoiled Brat," *New York Times* (January 3, 1993): section H, page 31.
- 9 Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 266.
- 10 Mauries, (as in n. 6), 236.
- 11 Thomas McEvilley, "Introduction," *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded Edition, author Brian O'Doherty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 8.
- 12 Daston, (as in n. 9), 260.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 281.
- 14 Julie H. Reiss, *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), 135.
- 15 Suderburg, (as in n. 1), 2.
- 16 Recent examples of artists borrowing from other fields include Wim Delvoyes' *Cloaca*; Peter Land's video, *Lie Detector*; and Eduardo Kac's installations of various live animals, including mice and rabbits that have been genetically modified with jellyfish genes which cause them to emit a green glow under ultraviolet light.

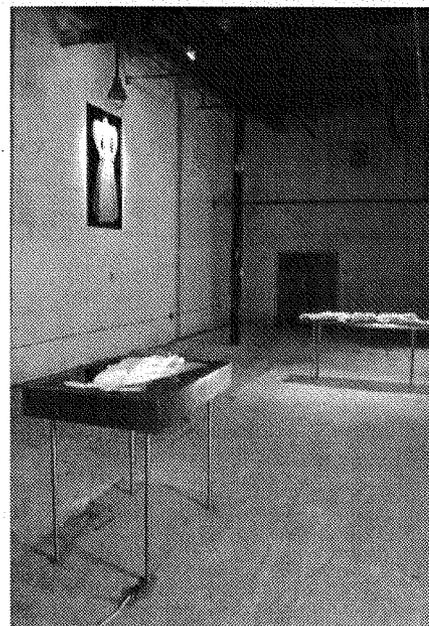
- 17 Suderburg, (as in n. 1), 7.
- 18 Daston, (as in n. 9), 281.
- 19 Reiss, (as in n. 14), x-xii.
- 20 Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVII, editor and translator James Strachey, (London: Hogarth, 1953), 219–252.
- 21 Mauries, (as in n. 6), 89.
- 22 Daston, (as in n. 9), 287.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 274.
- 24 Dewdney, (as in n. 4), 113.
- 25 Ihor Holibizky, *Nether Mind* (Toronto: Nether Mind, 1993).
- 26 Kate Taylor, "Sculptors at Play, with a Sense of Fun," *The Globe and Mail* (October 23, 1993).
- 27 Nether Mind Artists' Collective, *Mandate*, January 1, 1995.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 Suderburg, (as in n. 1), 8.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 Quoted by Mauries from Jean Hubert Martin, *Le Chateau d'Orion et son cabinet de curiosités* (Paris: Editions du Patrimoine, 2000), 64.
- 32 John Bentley Mays, "Two shows that show the unshowable," *The Globe and Mail* (September 9, 1995).
- 33 Mauries, (as in n. 6), 34.
- 34 Daston, (as in n. 9), 267.
- 35 Joy Kenseth, *The Age of the Marvellous* (Hanover: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1991), 31–52.
- 36 Daston, (as in n. 9), 273.
- 37 Suderburg, (as in n. 1), 8–9.
- 38 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 43.
- 39 Email correspondence with Reinhard Reitzenstein, June 11, 2004.
- 40 Gordon Hatt, *Max Streicher: Sleeping Giants* (Cambridge Galleries: Cambridge, Ontario, 1999), 20.
- 41 Shelley Hornstein, *Lyla Rye: Between Here and Then* (North York: Glendon Gallery, York University, 1995), preface.

## Catherine Heard

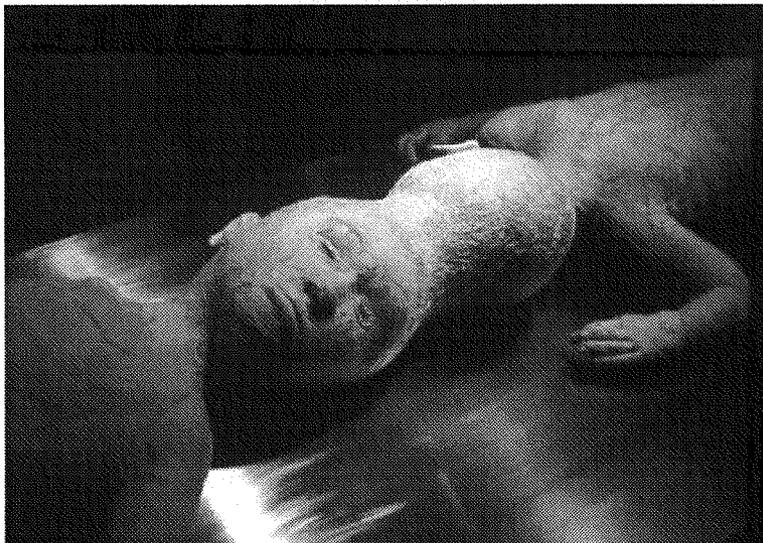
- 42 Kenseth, (as in n. 35), 90–91.  
 43 Ibid., 84.  
 44 Daston, (as in n. 9), 255 – 256.  
 45 Ibid., 273.  
 46 Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Reis, (as in n. 14), xiv.  
 47 Fried, (as in n. 46), 167.  
 48 Ibid., 148–149.



1 John Dickson, *Vertigo*, 1995, strings of Christmas lights, sheet glass, water installation, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)



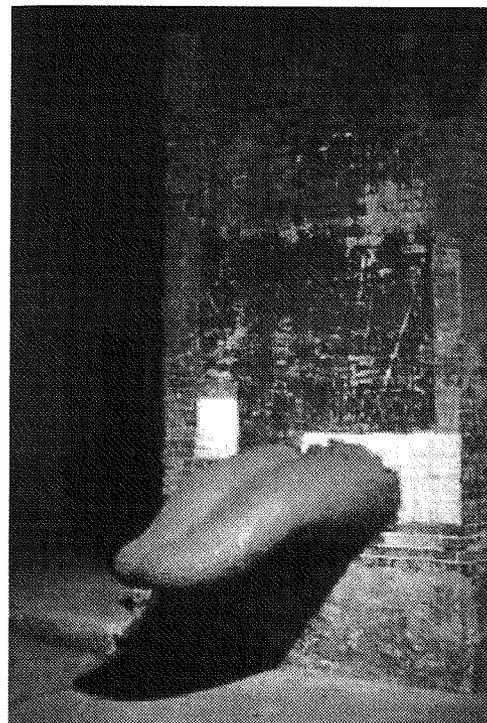
2 Catherine Heard, *Confessional*, 1995, antique fabric from Victorian wedding dress and christening gown, human hair, text modeled on dream interpretation handbooks, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)



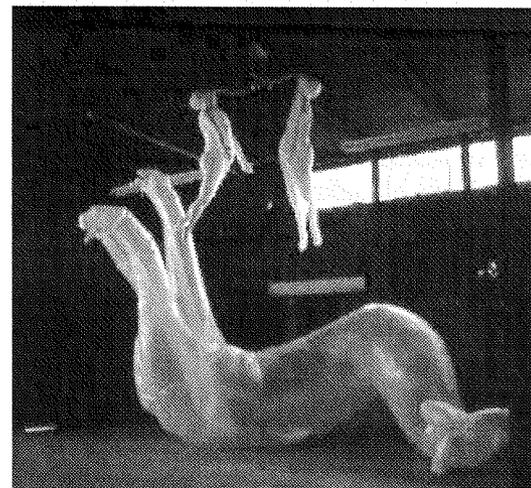
3 Catherine Heard, *Confessional* - detail, 1995, antique fabric from Victorian wedding dress and christening gown, human hair, text modeled on dream interpretation handbooks, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)



4 Lyla Rye, *Untitled*, 1995, thread, traffic cones, concrete, fluorescent orange chalk dust, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)



5 Mary Catherine Newcomb, *Untitled*, 1995, home-made plasticine, beeswax, honey bees, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)



6 Max Streicher, *Balancing Act with Dragons*, 1995, plastic sheeting, Tyvek, thread, electric fans, 1995 Nether Mind Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario (photo: author)