Anti-museums and Collecting as a Subjective Act

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Introduction :

Had you been a bourgeois of some sort, sometime back in the Renaissance, you might have had the exciting opportunity of penetrating the marvellous realm of a curiosity cabinet. Your breathing would have stilled as you found yourself surrounded with eerie beasts, engravings of foreign lands, and natural wonders beyond the imaginable. Perhaps would you have caught a glimpse of a collection of rocks in the form of shells. The owner, aware of your astonishment, would have taken the care of counting you their story, explaining that such pieces were creations of God himself and were left atop mountains after the Great Flood. And you would have stood there in pure awe, as this potent proof of the Divine's existence subjugated you to the bone. But maybe would you have been more than a simple curious man of high status seeking the thrill of sating your appetite for wonder. If the like of the noble collector who had granted you access to his *museae* and yourself a naturalist, this encounter would have represented a perfect opportunity for knowledge exchange, debating such grand questions as if whether or not frogs generated spontaneously from dust, or the formation of some precious stone within the bodies of animals. Now, do not get me wrong. The Renaissance period was not one purely consisting in theories that can only appear as ludicrous to our 21st century perception. This was the era of the Copernican revolution, of the commencement of scientific practice, one that saw the rise of encyclopaedic projects of an unprecedented scale. In response to the discovery of the New World, Sixteenth and Seventeenth century naturalists and humanists actively sought to surpass Antic references in the amassing of knowledge, as the collecting of nature and the wonder invariably attached to this activity constituted a stepping stone for this grand endeavour. In the face of overwhelming novelty, those early savants were concerned less with unquestionable truth than with what *could be* plausible. In that sense, theories of self-generating animals and Galileo's law of inertia could be taken just as seriously as one another. The curiosity cabinet – which could be declined as *Studio*, *Museae,* or *Galeria* – ancestor to our modern days museums, constituted the physical repositories of knowledge in which the world was to be studied and attempted to be made sense of. From these microcosms designed to embody the whole of the natural world – human productions included – modern museums were eventually born. In the 18th century, political revolutions and religious reformation prompted the apparition of new ways of thinking. The overwhelming aspect of New World novelty had faded, and it was now time for hard sciences and systematic classification to make their apparition. The separation of

disciplines occurred as a logical consequence, while the Enlightenment ideal of knowledge encouraged the opening of public museums dedicated to various topics, theoretically accessible to anyone desirous of educating themselves. As Bruno Latour has argued, the methodical separation of nature and culture as well as the perception of nature as a passive object which can be actively manipulated by humans are largely recognised as the starting point of the modern era. This radical change in interpretation of the world caused a radical break in time in the 18th century, one that gave birth to the illusion the modern human, resolutely turned towards progress and reason, was a better man than its ancestors. However, in his essay *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour disputes the reality of modernity. According to him, humanity has never been modern for we have never managed to apply modern values in their entirety. By fabricating such binary oppositions as nature/culture and rejecting tradition in aid of progress, the modern agenda has failed to recognise the complexity of the relationship humanity entertains with nature as well as the subtlety of human experience. By shaping sciences as a universal and objective truth, modernism has relegated other types of beliefs as inferior and subjective. Rationality came to been seen as superior to the feelings inevitably attached to human experience while blatantly ignoring that no human enterprise can ever be objective.[1] By borrowing from pre-modern institutions and revealing the flaws of modern museums, anti-museums reject modernity and remind us of the fantastic scope of human experience.

It is with the aim of both tackling the authoritarian nature of modern institutions and of reinvigorating wonder that anti-museums eventually appeared in the 20th century. But what are anti-museums, how do they oppose traditional ones? What role does the act of collecting play in their construction? How do anti-museums impact their audience? By raising these interrogations, I hope to demonstrate that anti-museums effectively confute the sustained myth that modern museums breed objectivity, and that, by borrowing from pre-modern tradition, these allow for a much needed return to wonder.

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will rely on three case studies: the Collection de l'Art Brut (Lausanne, Switzerland), the Museum of Jurassic Technology (Los Angeles), and the Viktor Wynd Museum (London). I have willingly chosen to focus on anti-museums as varied as possible, whether in their content, founder's profile, or geographic location, in order to better exemplify the uniqueness inherent to this type of institutions.

The Collection de l'Art Brut (CAB) is an anti-museum presenting a wide array of artworks exclusively produced by self-taught creators living on the margins of society, mostly as a

[1] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), https://www.perlego.com/fr/book/1148621/we-have-never-been-modern.

consequence of having spent years isolated in mental asylums or behind bars. The term Art Brut – "Raw Art" – was first coined by French painter Jean Dubuffet. The artworks it encompasses, which he perceived as radically "anti-cultural" by nature, stood for him as supreme expressions of creativity and the proof that all human beings bear within themselves the potential to be an artist. It is in 1945 that Dubuffet first started gathering this collection. After 30 years of clandestine exhibitions in Parisian basements, it finally found an official home in Lausanne in 1976 at Dubuffet's request, under the supervision of curator and Art Brut specialist Michel Thévoz.

Nested behind a storefront in Culver City, Los Angeles, the Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) has many more mysteries to offer than its name. At first glance, all the elements are there to elicit the modern museum. Entering through the gift shop, visitors then find themselves roaming dimly lit galleries, glancing at carefully elaborated dioramas, and reading endless scientific explanations and academic references supporting the authenticity of the displays. Yet, this familiar, almost comforting setting, serves to conceal an adroitly elaborated trick blurring the limits between facts and fiction. Many of the facts exhibited in this museum were indeed born from Wilson's imagination, but his skillful association of widely known facts and obscure, made up fables is enough to convince most viewers of the legitimacy of the exhibitions.

Finally, the Viktor Wynd Museum (VWM) is a small museum located in the Hackney borough in London. The term curiosity cabinet would perhaps stand as a more suitable definition of the VWM for it bears copious similitudes with these, as we shall later discuss. The items themselves, for the most part fantastic, squalid, or even frankly abhorrent in some cases, are reminiscent of a freak show's sinister sensationalism. A particularly compelling aspect of this museum is that it bases a great deal of its marketing strategy on proclaiming itself as an anti-museum, with a strong emphasis on its disruptive function.

Basing its arguments on these three case studies, this thesis will therefore seek to identify the differences between modern museums and anti-museums, their points of convergence, common features, and the potential impacts they might each have on their public and, more widely, society. While there exists an endless variety of museums, public or private, treating of topics as varied as art, ethnology, naval history, death, gas, magic, or even commercial failure, it would be impossible to establish an exhaustive account of their respective peculiarities. For the sake of clarity, I shall thus name museums fitting our modern definition of these institutions *modern museums,* in order to better distinguish them from anti-museums.

The first chapter will therefore start by analyzing the characteristics and interests of the anti-museum, using a comprehensive history and analysis of the modern museum in order to better

understand how anti-museums differentiate themselves from these well-established institutions. Over a second chapter, I will move on to exploring the importance and meaning of collecting, its role in the making of modern museums and anti-museums alike, its inevitable subjectivity, and the influence it might exert on both viewers and the collectors themselves. Lastly, the third chapter will focus on public reception, delving into viewers expectations et behaviours in museums as well as to what extent might anti-museums might constitute a deceiving or rejoicing experience for their spectators.

Chapter 1: Making the Anti-Museum

Walking in Hackney on a sunny January afternoon, there is a soft beer smell filling the air. The area has recently gentrified and craft beer bars and breweries have sprung all around. I get a wriggle on, my ticket was booked for three o'clock and I am already running late. I am about to push the front door when I see it. Right above the letterbox, a sign warns "THIS IS NOT A BROTHEL THERE ARE NO PROSTITUTES AT THIS ADDRESS." Add this to fact entrance to the VWM is made through a bar, The Last Tuesday Society, and the tone of the Viktor Wynd Museum is set before one even gets to enter its premises. "Would you like a drink?", asks the staff member as he checks my ticket. I recruited an old friend to accompany me on this first visit, for I admit having been slightly anxious of exploring the VWM on my own. The employee flies around behind the bar and hands us a can of pale ale. Now is the time for my friend to descend the narrow staircase located on the right hand side of the bar room, followed by the empty gazes of a plethora of animal trophies, and to discover Wynd's bizarre world. Our apprehensions as justified as soon as we emerge in the gloomy, cramped space, as we came face to face with a large display case filled with memorabilia of modern days dandy Sebastian Horsley, accompanied by a horrifyingly crude pornographic image that I shall not describe here. We chuckle nervously, a reaction that was to follow us throughout our entire visit as we alternated between stupefaction, horror and guilty laughter. This is an anti-museum. But do not take this as a textbook example of what an anti-museum should be. Like each and every one of them, it is unique. In order to establish a comprehensive overview of the anti-museum, we must first describe the rivals these seek to oppose: the modern museum. This chapter will thus examine the origins and principles of modern museums, before moving on to the concept of the anti-museum and its implications.

A short history of Modern museums

Originally signifying "Temple of the Muses," the origin of the museum as we know it today might be traced back to Antiquity. There is indeed a significative similarity to be found between Greek antique temples and our modern museums for, in addition to serving as places of worship, these also performed as repositories to the faithful's offerings. Once placed in these temples they now adorned, objects were stripped from their former utilitarian role and confined to this of being admired by visiting pilgrims. From that point onward, these objects were to remain

forever in the temples they had been deposited in, kept under the cautious gaze of an individual specially appointed to inventory and care for them.[2] Temples of the Muses per se eventually disappeared but, for the centuries that followed, art remained consigned to the religious realm. In the West, churches became the place for the common folks' appreciation of art. The aim was obviously not to satisfy their aesthetic contentment but rather the demonstration of God's all powerful nature, as artistic imagery constituted the only means for the Church to educate the illiterate to the Divine's will. It is only in the Renaissance, with the discovery of the "New World," that the tide changed. Christopher Columbus's 1492 voyage was the first of a long list that prompted a shift in the Western comprehension of the world. Flooded with an uninterrupted stream of previously unseen and unheard of wonders, Europe experienced, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, "something like the 'startle reflex' one can observe in infants: eyes widened, arms outstretched, breathing stilled, the whole body momentarily convulsed."[3] Naturalists and other bourgeois collectors started gathering collections and, through these attempts at encapsulating universal nature, curiosity cabinets were born. A means of comprehending this New World, these embodied "the plenitude of the world represented in the microcosm of a single room or space," as Susan Crane argued.[4] In an era where nature's extent seemed boundless yet possible to contain, some of these collectors were contemplating the grand project of gathering one of each of the things that existed. While curiosity and wonder constituted a philosophical lens through which to understand the world, it also was a "specific social attribute that only naturalists who belonged to and associated with the patriciate could hope to attain."[5] As such, collections of nature were reserved to men of high status, and, the more curiosity they demonstrated, the more their collections could prompt their social elevation. Naturalists furthermore based their collections and understanding of nature on the Antique writings of figures such as Aristotle and Pliny the Elder, simultaneously attempting to imitate and surpass them. The sacred aspect lingered for, whether natural or man-made, these were the marvels of God. A single man enterprise in the 16th century, the humanist attempt at creating an exhaustive description of nature took on a more collective aspect at the hands of 17th century Baroque naturalists. While individual collections remained the stepping stone for this operation,

[2] Krzysztof Pomian, "The collection: between the visible and the invisible," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 164-5.
[3] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 14.
[4] Susan Crane, "Curious Cabinets and Imaginary Museums," in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
[5] Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), 100.

naturalists and other savants now gathered their knowledge, as in the Accademia dei Lincei in the early 17th century. United around the common aim of producing an encyclopedia of nature that would be as exhaustive as possible, they collected books, manuscripts, and specimens, and could even count on Galileo's new inventions, the telescope and microscope, to observe the world as no one ever had before them. Renaissance and Baroque museums eventually fell into obsolescence as scientific technologies continued to progress, rendering their collections useless and outdated. These were eventually scattered, lost or destroyed, and rare are the artefacts that survived to our days. In the 18th century, Enlightenment scientists sought to create a radical break with the past. Naturalists such as Linnaeus and Buffon regarded the Renaissance savants that had preceded them as of little interest, deeming these gentlemen as having "embodied the excess and ignorance of a culture paralyzed by its reverence for the past." They perceived curiosity cabinets as sites of divertissement wonder, far removed from the crucial scientific progress they were aiming to achieve. In this degree, the new generation considered they were finally taking over a work that had remained stagnant for 2,000 years. These savants deemed the science of natural history a purely 18th century invention, concomitant with the replacement of curiosity cabinets with public museums of natural history "whose purpose was highly Baconian and whose organization attended to the debates about classification and taxonomy."[6] Curiosity "was no longer a valued premise for intellectual inquiry but rather the mark of an 'amateur'." As such, practitioners distinguished the cabinet of curiosity from the newly established cabinets of natural history to "underscore their diverse purposes; the former was for amusement and the latter for the progress of the sciences."[7] However, the main element that differentiated Enlightenment savants from their predecessors was the search for a methodical ordering of the natural world which would at once shed nature from the "chimerical interpretations and relations" of Renaissance naturalists and offer a universal, more sensical comprehension of it.[8] Methods of classifying nature thus became predominant over its possession. One could argue that, mankind having realised that absolute physical possession of nature was impossible, they retorted to systematic ordering as a mean of controlling it. Natural specimens, now divided in a wide variety of categories, were no longer to be displayed alongside artworks or man-made artefacts of the past, for these did not belong to the natural taxonomies that were being implemented. The revolutionary climate and religious reformation of 18th century Europe created the ideal context for the apparition of modern museums.

[6] Findlen, *Possessing Nature, 393*-4.
[7] Findlen, *Possessing Nature,* 398.
[8] Findlen, *Possessing Nature,* 401.

Collections were no private, belonging to a single proprietor, monarch, or the Church. Instead, they became properties of disembodied states which "placed the museum alongside other institutions of culture that it regulated, maintained, and reshaped to fit its new image."[9] Having now adopted the form of the modern museum, collections became of public utility. From the British Museum in London to the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence, modern museums opened their doors to the public throughout Europe. Opened to all classes of population, these aimed not only to educate and elevate visitors, but to effectively communicate their new national narratives and the ideas linked to them. The physical and ideological separation imposed onto artefacts and the multiplication of scientific disciplines eventually prompted the apparition of museums dedicated to particular interests, to such an extent that there nowadays exist institutions specializing in virtually every imaginable topic.

However, as Paula Findlen observes, while modern museums became state-sponsored from the eighteenth century onward, collecting "always has the potential to be a highly personal affair."[10] While private collectors continued to play an essential role in the eighteenth century and beyond, they were no longer central to the coming together of the learned world, as this function was being increasingly embraced by institutions rather than individuals.[11] They nonetheless continue to exist to this day, still exercising their personal taste to shape the world in their own manner, and it is thanks to some of them that anti-museums have come into existence.

Anti-museums, and why they exist:

Anti-museums are somewhat as difficult to define as modern museums. A concise way of characterizing them would be as institutions that have willingly opposed and reversed the founding principles of the modern museum.[12] They reject the "nature" chosen by a society in order to create their own narrative. By doing so, they offer a return to something that is closer to cabinets of wonder, often privileging the stimulation of viewers' imagination and feelings over education. The author Adrian Franklin, in his recent book *Anti-Museum* – one of the rare pieces of literature dedicated to this topic – establishes the origin of the anti-museum as early

[9] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 395-6.
[10] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 396.
[11] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 398.
[12] Adrian Franklin, *Anti-Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 1.

as the 18th century, thus concomitant with the apparition of the modern museum itself. According to him, critical views of the museum first stemmed from French critic Quatremère de Quincy's will to free objects and artworks from the museum-as-mausoleum model. Like other precursors at the time, he condemned the way in which modern museums disconnected objects "from their origins, contexts and their social life beyond the museum walls."[13] This skepticism towards the museum model was not unique to Quatremère de Quincy, but rather shared amongst intellectuals of the era. Goethe himself was, like mostly all of their early visitors, transcended by his first encounter with newly instituted museums. Upon discovering the Dresden Gallery, the writer described the experience as being "akin to the emotion experienced upon entering a House of God."[14] Despite this initial brush with the sublime, Goethe was however quick to take a critical stance, conscious of the fact the gathering of these marvels in a single space came at the cost of the destruction of something else. Indeed, he understood that the "very capacity of the museum to frame objects as art and claim them for a new kind of ritual attention could entail the negation or obscuring of older meanings," thus forcibly altering the circumstances under which art was to be made and comprehended.[15] Indeed, in spite having potentially served a clear purpose in their previous life, material pieces are stripped out of their usefulness once confined to the aseptic space of the museum. Just as in Greek temples, they are relegated to the status of aesthetic objects, as if originally produced without any utilitarian quality, thus shedding their original value. However, neither of them offering any alternative to the modern museum, the expression of their discontent appears not so much as a will to revolutionize the modern museum's operating than as a wish for museums to simply cease to exist altogether. As time went by, critics aspired to free viewers subjected to the modern museum's authority and agency, to undermine these institutions' power to frame collective memory, direct and govern, to "educate us in their beliefs," as Wynd phrased it.[16]

The criticism inflicted upon modern museums centered alternatively on these institutions as embodying "a source of redemptive memory and refuge that stunted progress" or as sites of "authoritative retrieval for the modern West's mythic/egoistic sense of its origins and superiority" forming a privileged medium for reflection on the human condition.[17] In this way, the concept of the anti-museum was intended as a more libertarian alternative to the modern

[13] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 6.
[14] Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside the Public Art Museum* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1995), 14-5.
[15] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 16.
[16] Viktor Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum* (London: Prestel, 2020), 11.
[17] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 6.

museum. One of the most recurring critiques was and, to a certain degree, continues to be, that most modern museums collect almost exclusively things of the past and generally struggle to integrate modern and contemporary elements into their existing practices. This observation is particularly relevant in regard to art museums.

The incapacity for the conceptualization of the present in favour of the past stands as one of the central arguments for the advent of anti-museums. Contemporary artists, Franklin notes, came to feel a lack of place and belonging in those institutions that glorified the works of past geniuses and generally refused to open their doors to new generations of artists. The anti-museum phenomenon steadily grew after the Second World War, and the development of this disruptive desire impacted the realm of art museums more than any other type of institution. This phenomenon might be explained through a variety of factors, in addition to the already aforementioned ones. In fact, the rejection of modern museums conventions and the desire for a renewal of these in the second half of the twentieth century were widely encouraged by the socio-political context of the era. The alternative society and civil rights movements as well as liberation politics called for art and heritage museums to become increasingly future-facing and diverse.[18] Likewise, the trauma provoked by WW2 and the various conflicts that followed pushed many towards a reconsideration of Western societal and cultural values.

At this point, it seems important to evoke another of the modern museum's major aspects: their relationship to memory. Modern museums may indeed serve as a society's repository of memory, or, more broadly, as safeguards of humanity's progress, these roles varying ever so slightly depending on which topic and discipline a particular museum focuses on. Despite the abstraction of its concept, memory may adopt a plethora of forms. It figures in museums in forms of representations that seek to provide a static form of memory, which is notably created through an emotional and active state that only becomes tangible through a process of imaginative recollection. It is mortal by nature, for it is related to the brain and the body that bears it. While the physicality of their collections constituted a means to immortality for Renaissance and Baroque collectors, the apparition of modern museums that defined a nation's identity made it "possible to imagine memory as a more institutionalized concept, the collective representation of a nation rather than the portrait of an individual."[19]Anti-museums have, as we shall see, largely borrowed from pre-modern museums.

[18] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 2.
[19] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 395.

Methods of display:

The organisation of modern museums is, as we have seen this far, centered around the idea of rationality. It is not solely about the objects themselves, but rather about the relationships these entertain with one another and with the wider context they belong to. The choice of display methods and positioning of objects in modern museums are determined by a variety of factors such pre-established institutional divisions existing objects, the physical condition of the artefact, as well as the curatorial practices of the given institution. Divisions are generally further established on the basis of subjective categorization comprising media, chronology, the geographic area the object has originated from, or the artistic movement a given artwork belongs to, for instance. The subjectivity of this enterprise is further amplified by the expertise and interests of the curators in charge of conceiving the displays.[20] While there is nothing inherently wrong with subjectivity, for it is purely inevitable, the issue lies in the perpetually reasserted myth that museums breed objective narratives. Just as with sciences, the post Enlightenment period witnessed the rise of historicism, the theory according to which current societies and culture may solely but understood through the prism of objective history. With the desire to represent historicised societies emerged the utopian ideal of display without an author, a form of order imbued with the so-called objectivity of History itself. An utopia that is flawed from the get-go, considering that History itself is fabricated. It is thus from historicism and the Enlightenment ideal of objective classification that sprung the negation of subjectivity of the museum enterprise. Despite a retrieval from the the microcosm ideal en vogue in the Renaissance, the set of museum objects continues subjected to a fictitious, fantasized objective order. Indeed, just as in 16th and 17th century curiosity cabinets, the so-called coherency formed by modern museums collections is solely bolstered by the wishful illusion that they form a meaningful whole. The sustained fiction is this that a metonymic displacement of bits and pieces of the world effectively stand for totality, a belief that results from the uncriticised notion that juxtaposition of artefacts through ordering and classifying produces a "representational understanding of the world."[21] The author Susan Pearce signals historicism as participating in the determination of a society's individual nature, as "each society 'chooses' from the large (but not infinite) range of possibilities what its individual nature is going to be." This choice is only temporary and may evolve through time, in accordance with changing circumstances. This

[20] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1992), 6.
[21] Susan Stewart, "Objects of Desire," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 257.

range of meanings ought to be ordered according to "socially understood rules which command a sufficiently broadly based range of social support," a support that shapes part of a society's ideology by submitting to a system of domination and conformity.[22] Inclusion of objects in any modern museum display is thus governed by cultural rules of rationality, taxonomy, and aesthetics. By comparison, the curiosity that served as the main criteria according to which collections were gathered in the Renaissance inevitably infers an authored display standing as a "subjective act of enunciation."[23] While such critiques were widespread in the Enlightenment period, and continue to be up to these days, the modern ordering of museums remains just as subjective, whichever the domain they focus on. In art museums, for instance, the extensive way of displaying has long been to simply "enshrine the pantheon of great modern artists and their works in due, historical succession." Anti-museums attempt to escape from this idea of coherent representation of a metonymic collection that substitutes for universal representation simply by revealing the subjectivity of their enterprise. In both the MJT and the VWM, for instance, the concept of coherency is willingly disturbed.

Let us thus focus on the Museum of Jurassic Technology for a moment. Upon entering its premises, visitors are greeted by an introductory slideshow presenting the MJT as an "educational institution dedicated to the advancement of knowledge and the public appreciation of the Lower Jurassic." While any viewer would establish an immediate connection between the word "Jurassic" and dinosaurs, the voice further informs us that the Lower Jurassic here designates the ancient name of a geographic area situated near modern days Egypt. It surely may sound odd, but isn't one of the points of museums to allow their audience to learn about new topics? As the visitor makes their way through the museum's galleries, they come across such exhibits as a softly swaying model of Noah's Ark, a specimen of an ant brainwashed by a parasite, a horn that has allegedly grown from the head of a certain Mary Davis of Saughall back in the 17th century, or even a display dedicated to the near encounter of amnesiac opera singer Madalena Delani and memory expert Geoffrey Sonnabend, a neurophysicist and author of the seminal volume *Obliscence, Theories of Forgetting and the Problem of Matter* – both of them long forgotten, ironically enough. There is obviously not a dinosaur in sight. What is more surprising, however, is that the museum does not seem to display any artefact relating to the Lower Jurassic area either. The various exhibits are presented through a series of remarkably

[22] Susan M. Pearce, "Objects as meaning; or narrating the past," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994,) 21.

[23] Stephen Bann, "The return to Curiosity: Shifting Paradigms in Contemporary Museum Display," in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 123.

intricate dioramas, meticulously lit display cases filled with artefacts and illustrations, all of these carefully described throughout the paragraphs of lengthy explanatory labels. Some exhibits even include listening devices through which a pedantic voice – the same as in the introductory slideshow – recounts the story of the artefacts displayed before the viewer's eyes. It is notably the case of the *Deprong Mori* display, which counts amongst the most intriguing ones in the MJT. Upon sticking the listening device to their ear, the visitor is introduced to the unlikely story of a small bat species native to the Tripiscum Plateau of the Circum-Caribbean region in "Northern South America." The story of this curious mammal begins in 1872, back when it was first documented by anthropologist Bernard Maston, then on a fieldtrip amongst the Dozo people. Described as a "small demon," this *Piercing Devil* – as it is nicknamed – was believed by the local tribe to possess the faculty of penetrating solid objects. While Maston's fieldnotes relate many occurrences of a *Deprong Mori* flying through Dozo dwellings, the most striking account undoubtedly is this of a bat flying through the arm of a five year old child. The infant surprisingly suffered no lesion whatsoever, although his left arm was left was left numb and immobile for three days. Subsequently to this episode, the child's hand was granted the miraculous "ability to heal warts, blood blisters and other superficial skin disorders."[24] Maston eventually fell into oblivion after his death, and with him the *Deprong Mori*. Interest for this exceptional specimen however resurfaced in the 1950s, when acclaimed chiropterologist Donald R. Griffith, author of *Listening in the Dark: Echolocation in Bats and Men* and the first scientist to suggest that bats found their bearings through echolocation, fortunately stumbled upon Maston's reports. His curiosity piqued, Griffith hastened to travel to the Tripiscum Plateau, only to discover that the *Deprong Mori* had in fact previously been studied and classified under the name *Myotis Lucifugus*. As a consequence of its great rarity, however, little was known about this species. During eight months, Griffith multiplied the attempts at capturing a specimen, in vain, as bats would invariably fly straight through his nets. But that did not suffice for Griffith to lose heart. Instead, the scientist mounted a second expedition, this time elaborating an intricate device the *Mori* would stand no chance against. Consisting in a pentagonal structure made of five 8 inches thick lead walls covering a grand total of fourty thousand square foot, the trap was installed in the heart of the rainforest. All shocks impacted onto the structure were monitored by a seismograph, which Griffith and his team spent two months carefully scrutinising the results. The scientists were close to losing hope when a miracle finally occurred at 4:13 A.M on an August day. The seismograph recorded a heavy

[24] *The Museum of Jurassic Technology : Primi Decem Anni Jubilee Catalogue* (Los Angeles: Society for the Diffusion of Useful Information Press, 2002), 50.

shock as a *Piercing Devil* had hit the number-three wall, twelve feet above the forest floor. The specimen was now trapped in the lead wall, where it was to remain forever frozen in mid-flight. The truth about this exhibit is revealed by Lawrence Weschler in his book *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder*. While working at the UCLA library shortly after his first visit to the Museum of Jurassic Technology, Weschler could not help but verify the sources cited in the *Deprong Mori* display. The library's computerized database showed no record of Bernard Maston nor Donald R. Griffith. The title *Listening in the Dark* – stripped from its subtitle – led him to discover the works and existence of a certain Donald R. Griffin. Not Griffi*th*. Confused, Weschler eventually reached out to that Donald R. Griffin, only to discover the chiropterologist had never heard of the *Deprong Mori*, nor of the Museum of Jurassic Technology, for that matter. According to him, the *Myotis Lucifugus* is in fact none other than the most commonly found bat species in Northern America. Needless to say, it does not bear the ability of flying through solid objects. While he apparently had a good laugh upon hearing the story presented in the MJT, Griffin's conclusion to the conversation is a compelling one: "Still, you know, it's funny. Fifty years ago, when we were first proposing the existence of something like sonars in bats, most people thought that idea no less preposterous."[25] This comment confirms that the critical perspective of the MJT on the assertive veracity usually associated with scientific facts holds ground, since the fantasies exhibited in this museum's narratives could turn out to be just as authentic of the ones presented in modern museums. Beyond that, it is reminiscent of the fact sciences are not fixated, but a continually advancing discipline, that what seemed ludicrous yesterday might be proven exact in the future. In a way, Griffin's conclusion is a reminder that curiosity and wondering beyond what seems possible still constitutes a founding feature of scientific progress. Bernard Maston was forgotten for the good reason that he was never real, but what could be more believable than the tale of an obscure 19th century anthropologist relegated into oblivion? The Dozo do exist, but are in truth a brotherhood of traditional hunters originating from Côte d'Ivoire.[26] As for the geographic location, the Tripiscum Plateau is another invention. The list of made up elements could go on but, in truth, none of this matter. What truly matters is that, had you found yourself contemplating the *Deprong Mori* display and discovering its story line after line, you would have most likely believed it. And you would have been enchanted. Indeed, the exhibit has been cleverly thought through to provide viewers

[25] Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast, and other Marvels of Jurassic Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 37-8.
[26] Joseph Hellweg, "Hunters, Ritual and Freedom: Dozo sacrifice as a Technology of the Self in the Benkadi Movement of Côte d'Ivoire," *The journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15, no. 1 (March 2009), 37.

with all the elements they might expect from a museum display, all the supporting evidences required to accompany such an astonishing story. This exhibit consists in an imposing display case, with bench facing its way. Comfortably sat, the viewer can let themselves be guided by the voice addressing them through the phone receiver. On the left-hand side, a photographic portrait of Bernard Maston establishes a semblance of familiarity, for the viewer is now able to put a face on that up to then foreign figure. A worn diary, opened to a random page covered in Matson's handwriting, reveals an excerpt of the fieldnotes the scientist consigned during his stay with the Dozo. Below the portrait, a reconstitution of the anthropologist's desk is covered in some of his personal belongings and scientific apparatus. A small-scale model of a Dozo hut completes this side of the display, providing the viewer with fertile grounds to imagine the scenes related in the exhibit. On the right-hand side, Donald R. Griffith's research are illustrated with scientific drawings depicting bats and the process of echolocation. Again, a portrait of Griffith and a series of photographs of the rainforest of the Tripiscum Plateau are there to achieve to convince us. Underneath these, a model of the pentagonal trap sits on a small table, as an echo to Maston's desk. A large black and white photograph of the *Deprong Mori* and the imposing block of lead allegedly containing the specimen captured by Griffith and his team take the centre stage. This is all wonderfully effective. The evidence provided in the exhibit appear authentic, and the large majority of visitors would not be familiar enough with the topic to question them. By using precise dates, locations, and latin names, by grounding made up elements in a ingenuine – or genuine sounding – historical and scientific basis, Wilson creates fertile grounds for the illusion to grow. As Marica Tucker expressed, in the MJT "everything initially seems self-evidently what is. There's this fine line, though, between knowing you're experiencing something and sensing that something is wrong. There's this slight slippage, which is the very essence of the place."[27]

[27] Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonders,* 39.

Fig. 1 : David Wilson, Bernard Maston, Donald R. Griffith, and the Deprong Mori of the Tripiscum Plateau, 1992, Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles (Bernard Maston, Donald R. Griffith, and the Deprong Mori of the Tripiscum Plateau exhibit at the Museum of Jurassic Technology – Credit MJT).

The Collection de l'Art Brut constitutes a remarkable example of these shifts in cultural and social perception. Like Renaissance curiosity cabinets, the CAB was originally only accessible to a "small group of cognoscenti."[28] While traditional art museums could only consider Art Brut as illegitimate a the time Dubuffet first started gathering his collection, the painter nonetheless entertained the conviction that these artworks had to be shown. Art Brut, he believed, possessed the power of shifting the way society and individuals thought about art. In the case of the CAB, it is not so much the display methods but the very items shown that make it an anti-museum. Modern museums and the art world of the era could only reject Art Brut, for it is anti-cultural by definition. At the occasion of the first showings of his collection, Dubuffet refused to identify the authors – as he insisted on naming them in order to differentiate them from mainstream "artists" – of the artworks on display by name, for he believed their expressivity to be self-sufficient. Conscious of the tension that existed between presenting these works he deemed as "true art" to the public all the while maintaining them outside of the mainstream art circuit, Dubuffet considered the creation of a permanent exhibition space dedicated to Art Brut as the sole viable option. This initiative was to be accompanied with an active research for "new works from different circumstances and places," as well as the development of an "alternative research narrative."[29] These new methods were to substitute these employed by modern museums, thus detaching Art Brut not only from mainstream art, but from the very functioning of modern artistic institutions. Despite these efforts to separate itself from modern museums, some flaws remain. Just as in modern museums, the artworks exhibited in the CAB entertained a function in their former existence. Indeed, these were transformative tools and the ultimate expression of an élan de vie for their authors, a way of survival detached from the dramatic sufferings of their everyday lives. One can only wonder how viewers, unconcerned by the circumstances that prompted the production of such works might substantially relate to these. For Adrian Franklin, the answer resides in the display methods employed by the CAB, in the "shadows and twilight of a darkened gallery."[30] With its black painted walls and carefully curated lighting, entering the Collection de l'Art Brut might recall the feeling of penetrating an ethnology museum. The naïve style of most exhibited works and the eclecticism of the materials – often organic ones- only add up this impression. Viewers successively come across the colourful, almost psychedelic crayon drawn figures of Aloïse

[28] David Maclagan, *Oustider Art : From the Margins to the Marketplace* (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 65.
[29] Franklin, *Anti-museum*, 22-23.
[30] Franklin, *Anti-museum*, 23.

Corbaz, the chimeric wooden sculptures of Auguste Forestier, or the monumental, mosaic like paintings of Augustin Lesage, amongst many others. The anthropological aspect of the Collection is especially compelling as it coincides, by a shuffle of chance, with Dubuffet's quest for exoticism, as related in his seminal essay "In Honour of Savage Values." This search led the painter on several stays with the nomads of the Algerian desert, until he came to the conclusion that the "Other," the "Savage" that had been fantasized by the West for centuries was not to be found on the edges of the world but within our deepest selves. As such, Dubuffet considered that this "savage" aspect, while present in every human being, could be best expressed by individuals living on the margins of society. Being ostracized from society in fact enabled them not to be subjected to the cultural norms and references that generally impact all of us. According to Michel Thévoz, the CAB has been fiercely criticized for its looks, its black walls deemed too theatrical. We might for instance cite the art critic Preszow, who deemed that "their style of scenography was deployed to *dramatize*."[31] But Franklin theorises the opposite, suggesting that a darkened environment hints a dark subject matter and is thus perfectly suitable to Art Brut. Sarah Lombardi, the current director of the CAB, concurs with this statement. In her opinion, the obscurity of the Collection's galleries participates to mark its difference from other art museums, enabling visitors to immediately feel that "they're in a very special place which is not an everyday museum, not a fine art museum…".[32] This distinctiveness is thus prone to making us look at these artworks with a different gaze, a more intimate one. It creates an atmosphere quiet and solitude similar to the conditions Dubuffet considered a requirement for the creation of true art. Originally, there was however nothing aesthetic in this choice of colour. Michel Thévoz was simply keen on doing his job properly. As an experienced curator, it was crucial for him to create the ideal environment for Art Brut pieces to be exhibited and conserved in. Often created using whatever material the authors could lay their hands onto, these tend to be dramatically frailer and more sensitive to light than artworks created using more traditional techniques. As counterintuitive as it may sound, a black room requires less light, thus allowing a better conservation of the artworks.[33] This peaceful and penetrating environment is indeed very much needed for one to be able to fully take in the tragic life stories of the displayed authors. An especially poignant case is this of author Clément Fraisse. Born and raised on a farm with his 13 siblings in a small village of Lozère, France, he worked on the family exploitation from a young age, before becoming a shepherd. At the age of 24, Fraisse

[31] Franklin, *Anti-museum*, 23.
[32] Franklin, *Anti-museum*, 24.
[33] Michel Thévoz, interviewed by Marie Sophie Danckaert, November 25, 2022.

attempted to burn down the family farm using a bundle of bank notes which constituted the entire extent of their economies. Following this incident, the young man was sectioned to a mental institution in the South of France, where his violent behaviour and multiple escape attempts caused him to be isolated in a confined cell. Over the two years he spent there, Fraisse meticulously carved the wood paneled walls of his cell (fig. 2), recreating a sort of imaginary landscape populated by schematic characters and Alpine flowers he had encountered during his days as shepherd, when he could roam the mountains freely. This clear yet desperate attempt to survive isolation by escaping into a world of his own, inspired by the great spaces he had evolved until then, is brutally revelatory of the suffering caused by his detention. Even more poignant is the fact he used whatever tools he could find to pursue his carvings. Having initially used a broken spoon handle which ended up being confiscated from him, Fraisse replaced it with the handle of his chamber pot, which he would sharpen on a stone. The brutality of having his ole mean of expression taken away from him is revolting, and, as viewers, we can only sympathise with Fraisse's condition. Such stories are at once revelatory of our fragility and helplessness as human beings and of the barbaric treatments patients were, and sometimes sadly continue to be, victims of. Despite their original attempts to prevent Fraisse's artistic production, the wood panels were preserved by two of the doctors who had treated him. It was eventually handed down to Jean Dubuffet in 1963.

Fig. 2: The Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland.

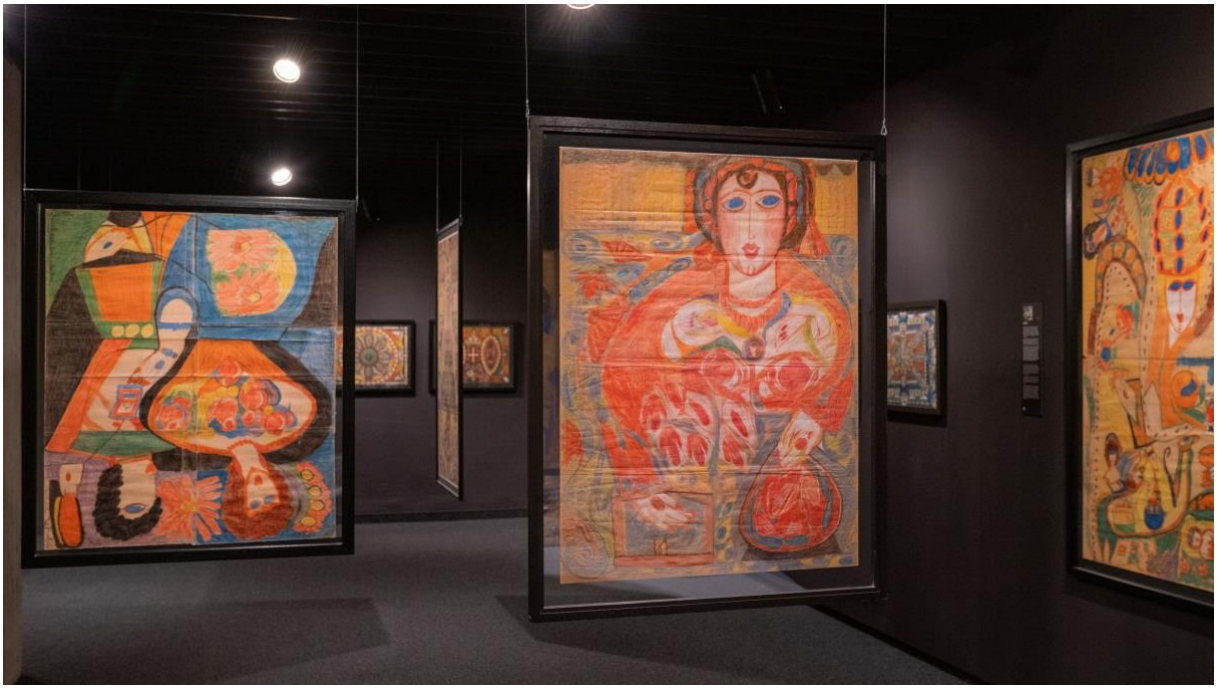

Fig. 3: The Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne, Switzerland.

Other than its walls, the Collection de l'Art Brut bears rather standard museum looks, to the point that learning about Dubuffet's loathing of the traditional exhibition space might come as a surprise. Hosted in an aisle of the rather grandiose 18th century Chateau de Beaulieu, the building to a certain extent incarnates the temple-like aesthetic en vogue in early modern museums architecture. Unlike these, however, visitors' entry is not made through a grand threshold preceded by an imposing flight of stairs, but through a narrow glass entryway added up to the façade of the building.

In the Viktor Wynd Museum, the overall display is reminiscent of some representations of cabinets of wonder that have survived to this day. Amongst the most famous of these figures an engraving of Ferrante Imperato's museum in Naples (fig. 4). Originating from the volume *Dell'Historia Naturale di Ferrante Imperato Napolitano*, the image has quite obviously served as an inspiration for Wynd. It depicts the collector guiding visitors through the discovery of his marvels, providing them with explanations as one visitor raises his hat and cane to the ceiling and gestures towards one of the numerous specimens displayed, his face frozen in an expression of astonishment. Just as in Imperato's cabinet, not a centimeter of the VWM's cramped space is wasted. The ceilings are covered in specimens and artefacts, a method of display which was common in the Renaissance and Baroque eras. Looking up, visitors to the VWM discover such oddities as taxidermized blowfish, various skeletons, and an extensive series of ostrich eggs cut

in halves and adorned with rubber nipples, which Wynd has worryingly named *Strange Dreams of my Mother* (fig. 7).

Fig. 4: Artist unknown, Ferrante Imperato's museum in Naples, from Imperato's Dell'Historia Naturale di Ferrante Imperato Napolitano, 1599, engraving, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Fig. 5: The Viktor Wynd Museum, London, England.

Fig. 6 : The Last Tuesday Society, Viktor Wynd Museum, London, England.

Fig. 7 : Viktor Wynd, Strange Dreams of my Mother, 2022, ostrich eggs and rubber, Viktor Wynd Museum, London.

Labels:

Most visitors assume that all museum collections are genuine, and that every information provided about them is veracious. And in all truthfulness, why should they not believe it? This is the very image modern museums seek to reflect, the aim they have been created to embody Yet, as Julian Spalding – a former curator – points out, few are the artefacts and museum objects that are correctly labelled.[34] Labelling constitutes an integral part of the museum experience, as viewers rely on them to guide them throughout their visit and provide them with fundamental information about what it is they are looking at. The question of labelling thus requires careful consideration. The centrality of labelling truly emerged in the Enlightenment period as, in yet another attempt to distinguish themselves from their Renaissance predecessors and avoid "emblematic portrayal of objects," collectors showed a new attention to these written

[34] Julian Spalding, *The Poetic Museum: Reviving Historic Collections* (London: Prestel, 2002), 25.

descriptions.[35] Since then, many are the museums that have successfully experimented with a wide range of possibilities, from colour to size, by way of the nature of the information expressed. Such experimentations aims to facilitate the absorption of the information while maintaining the label's purpose as a stimulus to looking at objects.[36] Labels are thus fabulous tools to play with, and a common feature to be found between the MJT, the CAB, and the VWM is an unconventional use of these. In the case of the Museum of Jurassic Technology, it is from labels that its strange exhibits draw an illusion of authenticity. While we have already witnessed this with the *Deprong Mori* display, another of the MJT's displays is worth looking at in relation to labels. Approaching a small, meticulously lit display case, viewers get a glimpse of a tiny object designated as a "Fruit-stone carving." (Fig. 8) Delicately fixed onto a metal shaft, its back is made visible thanks to an even tinier mirror attached to the wall behind it. The label reads:

> "Almond stone (?); the front is carved with a Flemish landscape in which is seated a bearded man wearing a biretta, a long tunic of classical character, and thick-soled shoes; he is seated with a viol held between his knees while he tunes one of the strings. In the distance are representations of animals, including a lion, a bear, an elephant ridden by a monkey, a boar, a dog, a donkey, a stag, a camel, a horse, a bull, a bird, a goat a lynx, and a group of rabbits: the latter under a branch on which sit an owl, another bird and a squirrel.
>
> On the back is shown an unusually grim Crucifixion, with a soldier on horseback, Longinus piercing Christ's side with a lance, the cross is surmounted by a titulus inscribed INRI. Imbricated ground.
>
> Dimensions: Length 13 mm Width 11 mm."[37]

The exhibit gets increasingly ludicrous as the enumeration goes on. The artefact seems a bit too spherical for an almond stone, but the question mark included at the beginning of the label does not allow this observation to be sufficient to rule out the authenticity of the artefact. It does

[35] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 399.
[36] Philip Wright, "The Quality of Visitors' Experiences in Art Museums," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 139.
[37] "Fruit-Stone Carving," The Museum of Jurassic Technology, accessed January 16, 2022, https://mjt.org/exhibits/foundation_collections/fruit_stone/fruitstn.html.

seem to have been somewhat gauged and is visibly hollow. Almond stones are never entirely smooth anyway, but since no magnifying glass has been installed to provide a closer look at the artefact – which is surprising, in a museum filled with viewing devices – viewers have no other choice than to rely on the label and believe it to be genuine. While this may come as a surprise, it is indeed authentic. The text is, at least, and may even be found in the book *Tradescant's Rarities.* Published in 1983, five years prior to the MJT's opening, this volume is dedicated to the Tradescant family and the collections they bequested to Elias Ashmole, which served as the foundation to the Ashmolean Museum. Amongst the many curiosities inventoried in the book figures a series of two fruit-stone carvings, each about 10mm larger than the one presented in the MJT.[38] While the description is in all point similar to this presented in the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the carvings pictured on the illustrating plate are positively different (fig. 9). The musician with his viol and the plethora of animals are easily discernable. But if these are stored in the Ashmolean Museum, then what is this thing visitors of the MJT have been squinting at for years? While it is most likely nothing more than a regular fruit-stone, it is somewhat rejoicing to think many viewers might have been keen enough to actually see the musician and his accompanying bestiary.[39] As Downing has argued, "by creating plausibly lackluster histories for improbable – even impossible – facts, the museums trades on the visitor's rarely-examined notion that history breeds legitimacy."[40] Through this efficient *détournement,* Wilson both demonstrates the influence labels exert on viewers' interpretations of an artefact and the fact that wrongly labelled museum objects can be difficult to discern – quite literally, in this case.

[38] Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder,* 97.
[39] Hirshorn, "Lecture: David Wilson on the Museum as Art," published November 4, 2008 https://hirshhorn.si.edu/explore/lecture-david-wilson-on-the-museum-as-art/.
[40] Spencer Downing, "So Boring It Must Be True: Faux History and the Generation of Wonder at the Museum of Jurassic Technology," *SPECS Journal of Art and Culture* 2 (2009), 50.

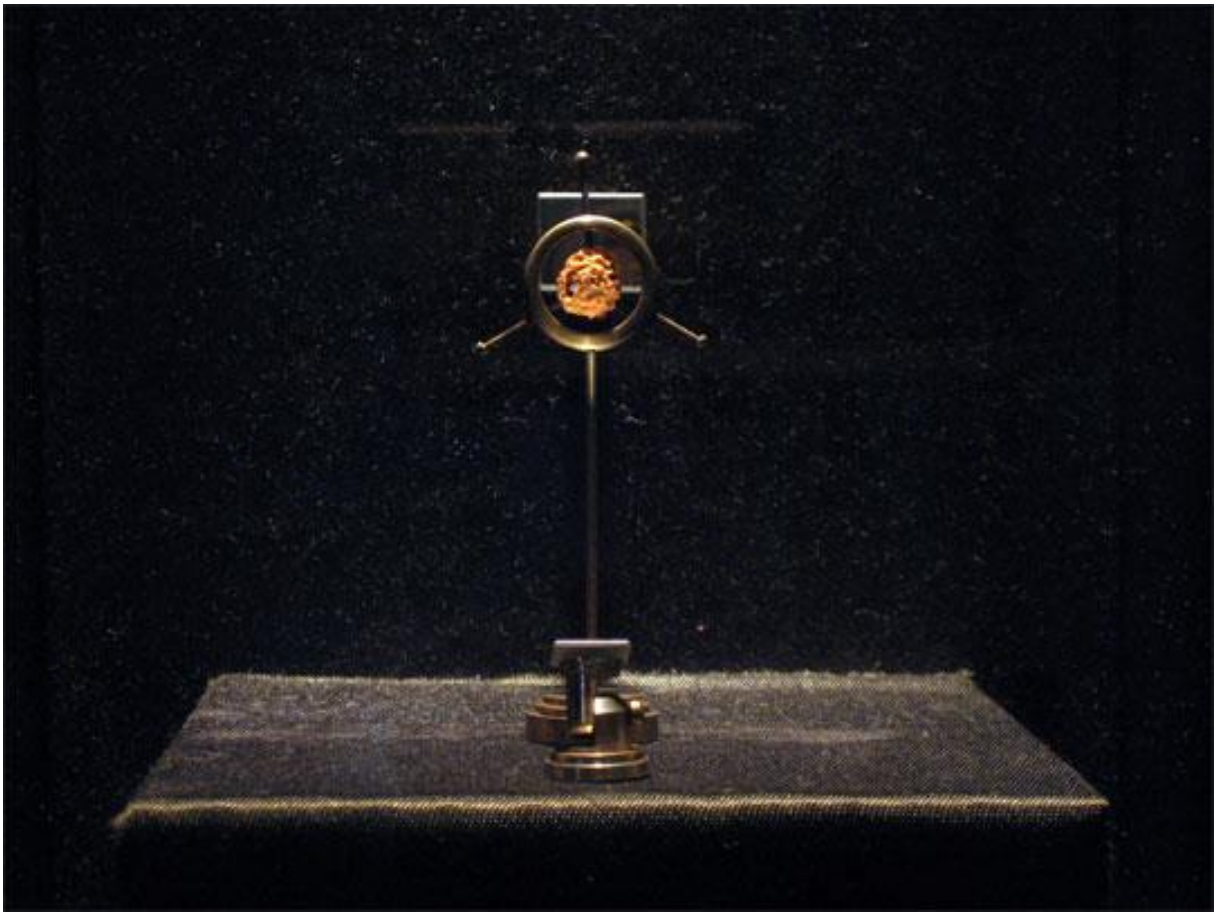

Fig. 8: Artist unknown, Fruit-stone carving, date unknown, Museum of Jurassic Technology, Los Angeles (Fruit-stone Carving at the Museum of Jurassic Technology – Credit MJT).

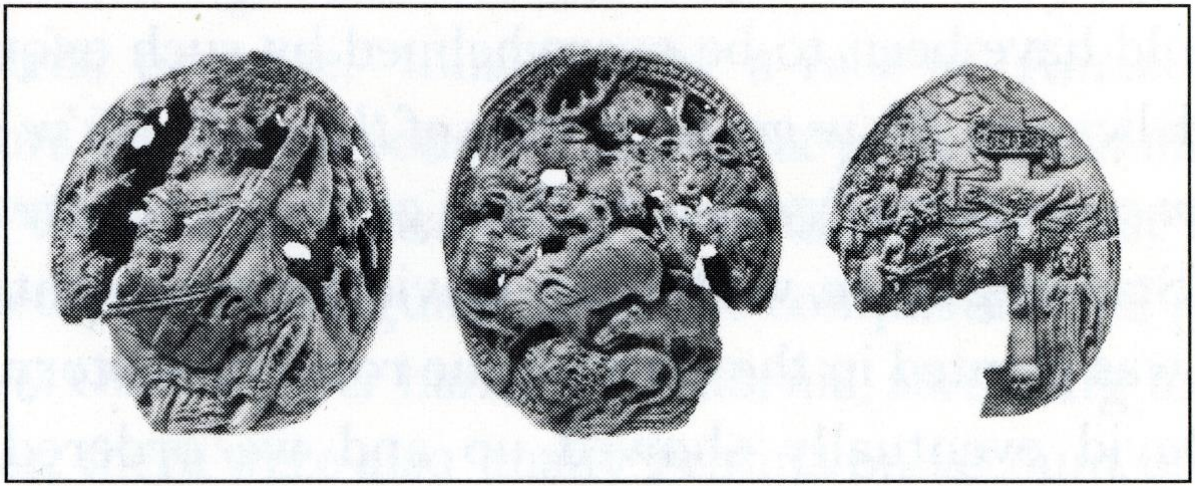

Fig. 9: Artist unknown, *Fruit-stone carving,* 17th century, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

As such, the art critic Maria Porges declared "Wilson satirizes perfectly the tiresome, pedantic qualities of 'authenticating' scholarship. The copious footnotes and references and didactic

panels are certainly fictitious, something I've long suspected of the citations in academic journals anyway."[41] The highly disturbing aspect of the *Deprong Mori* and Fruit-stone carving exhibits is that, while the facts they relate are fictitious, the exhibits are very much real. As Spencer Downing justly states, their "presentation renders the language convincing beyond its content."[42] This comment is somewhat reminiscent of French semiologist Roland Barthes's "Reality Effect." This effect consists in the addition to a narrative of details that do not enrich its structure, but instead constitute sort of a "narrative luxury, lavish to the point of offering many 'futile' details and thereby increasing the cost of narrative information." These additions tend to be neither incongruous nor significant, thus not constituting anything notable. While it would be tempting to consider them as simply irrelevant or superfluous, these serve to assert the credibility of a story. The functionality of these, Barthes notes, becomes particularly evident when applied to History. Once used to designate "what took place" in a so-called concrete reality, these details acquire a more legitimate status. History, as Barthes explains, constitutes the fundamental model of "those narratives which consent to fill in the interstices of their functions by structurally superfluous notations."[43] In essence, the more detailed the story, the more convincing it becomes. If Barthes's theory might be applied to the Museum of Jurassic Technology, it may also be considered in relation to both anti-museums and modern museums. In the case of the Collection de l'Art Brut, the tragic details related through the authors' biographies certainly add to the credulity of their works. Indeed, while they do include information on the medium used by authors, labels in the CAB are limited to detailed accounts of the authors' life, generally specifying the timeframe during which they were committed to asylums or locked up in prison cells, the location, and the mental illness they were eventually suffering from. By doing so, these labels justify of a new or different type of aesthetic the majority of viewers would not be familiar with. In addition, they offer open-ended cues for spectators to interpret the works as, in Art Brut probably more than in any other form of art, analysis can never be close enough to what the artist deeply sought to express. Instead of confining visitors to a pre-established "expert" reading of the works that would influence their viewing and experience of these, the CAB found a way of provoking the spectators' feelings, leaving way for them to create their own personal interpretation on the basis of a few biographical information. In the Viktor Wynd Museum, confused visitors may attempt to find

[41] Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder,* 39.
[42] Downing, "So Boring it Must be True," 47.
[43] Roland Barthes, "The Reality Effect," trans. Richard Howard in *The Rustle of Language*, ed. François Whal (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141.

comfort in the rational explanations the labels should offer. Looking around, they finally find one that reads: "Please Do Not Give Money To The Invisible Man Behind You He Does Not Work For The Museum." Creations of Wynd himself, labels such as this one are to be found all around the museum. Engraved onto gold plates, they adopt the aesthetic of early modern museums all the while further confusing the viewers. While visiting the museum, viewers come across such artefacts as a framed mummified finger which the label identifies as "Pancho Villa's Trigger Finger," the carefully conserved braid of Iris Godwin who "survived the Titanic but died of the Spanish influenza," and a miniature casket allegedly containing "some of the original darkness that Moses called down upon Earth." Wynd's descriptions are so far-fetched that they might allow viewers to realise the absurdity of most modern museum labels. As Danielle Rice has put it, "in their relentless pursuit of audiences, museums have found that telling a good story helps."[44] As we have seen this far, the examined anti-museums do tell a good story.

As for modern museums, Barthes's theory still holds true. The addition of details provide credibility to what supposedly "took place." They are a mean of conveying history, of justifying the present by painting a convincing picture of the past. When visiting a museum, most visitors ignore why they are shown a particular sequence of artworks, pictures or artefacts, and the accompanying labels rarely serve as effective cues.

Alternative Taxonomies:

Modern museums often encourage visitors to follow a certain direction throughout their visit in order to guarantee a "sensical" experience within the museum. The role of modern museums in building collections and conserving them within an intellectualized environment underlines their status of repositories of knowledge, thus implying that their "whole exercise is liable to be futile unless the accumulation of objects is strictly rational."[45] The existing ways in which collections are organized, the taxonomies employed, are in no way natural nor rational, but in fact socially constructed. Michel Foucault rejected the existence of an absolute rationality, instead suggesting its rooting in historical specificities. In this way, he evoked that "what counts as a rational act at one time will not so count at another time, and this is dependent on the

[44] Danielle Rice, "Theory, Practice, and Illusion," in *Art and Its Public: Museum Studies at the Millennium,* ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 89.
[45] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge,* 4.

context of reason that prevails."[46] The plurality of meanings that may be injected in an object is generally negated by the context of the museum, for it often aim to reduce its various voices to a single subjective meaning. This manipulation of meanings may participate in the creation of national, cultural, or even political identities, but the truth is that there always exists as many meanings to a given artefact as there are viewers to interpret them. One of the great issues of modern museums as institutions is the annihilation of change they entail. Their attempt to conserve and display the past invariably comes to the cost of refuting the fleetingness of human experience, past and present. Societies and human behaviours are subjected to change, a concept that becomes impossible to articulate when confronted to the permanency modern museums seek to project. As Hooper-Greenhill, "if the aim is to show how things have remained the same, then how is change to be understood?" The denial of the possibility for change in the modern museum context forcibly brings about a misunderstanding of the present. The conditions presented by museums come to be perceived as immutable, "justified by a single, undifferentiated history." Likewise, the perceived impossibility for a shift in existing museum practices only reinforces this tendency, therefore altering and preventing these institutions' immense potential for critical reflection on the past and present.[47] This dismissal prevents the public's understanding that History, Sciences, Art, or any other topic a modern museums could be dedicated to are not fixtures but ever fluctuating disciplines. As such, what counts as knowing has varied across the centuries.

The Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art, and Natural History – as named on its website – evidently seeks to emulate the taxonomy of a Renaissance curiosity cabinet. While these have at times been characterised as a "disordered jumble of unconnected objects, many of which were fraudulent in character," this perception inherited from the Enlightenment era is erroneous and was widely spread as a way of justifying the superiority of systematic taxonomy over Renaissance ordering.[48] While artefacts were indeed not classified according to a universal taxonomy, they were nonetheless carefully placed in a way that made sense to their collector. While the "disordered jumble" and "fraudulent" aspect could, at first glance, hardly be more accurate than when applied to the VWM**,** once the initial overwhelming has passed, viewers realise there is in fact a semblance of order in there. In fact, the initial reaction of viewers to the Viktor Wynd Museum is probably similar to this a 21st century spectator would have were they to travel back in time and discover an authentic Renaissance curiosity cabinet – only a bit more

[46] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 9.
[47] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 8.
[48] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, 79.

horrifying, in the case of the VWM. The objects presented in the VWM are in fact classified in 21 "departments" – which is surprising for a museum that only contains two rooms – notably including such categories as "Magick & the Occult," "Fine Art," "Erotica," "Juvenilia," "Human Hair," "Dead Pets," "Dead People," "Dead Animals," and many more that effectively consist in even more dead things. While these diverse categories are physically represented throughout the museum, the line separating them is generally blurry. The first display case, dedicated to the "Dandy" department, effectively contains all sorts of dandy memorabilia. However, it also contains some pornographic images and a sign that reads "smile if you had sex last night." The fourth display case is purely dedicated to erotica, but the Victorian erotic engravings overflow into the second display, a large case containing a combination of skulls and skeletons, fetishes, parasites, medical models of fetuses, and many more, rendering the identification of this department impossible. The VWM thus simultaneously demonstrates a sense of order and disembodiment, suggesting the primacy of aesthetic ordering over rationality. As such, the VWM constitutes a faithful reflection of Wynd's dissatisfaction of Enlightenment ideology that "to understand the world, you divide it into a million different disciplines so that there are museums dedicate to all sorts of dead ends."[49] Furthermore, the application of the term "department" to the claustrophobic space that constitutes his museum translates Wynd's will to satirize the institutionalism of modern museums vocabulary.

The presence of a "Library" department further recalls curiosity cabinets. Visitors may be delighted to come across such literary gems as *Oral Sadism and the Vegetarian Personality, Sex Instruction for Irish Farmers, The Art of Faking Exhibition Poultry,* or still, *The English: Are They Human?*. Confronted with such intriguing titles, many visitors would hardly resist the temptation of flicking through these books pages. But it is impossible for the books are dispersed throughout the museum, placed in the displays cases alongside other artefacts. The case of the books perfectly exemplifies the occasional blurriness of Viktor Wynd's personal taxonomy. Indeed, while the category "Library" does exist in the list of his museum departments, it only exists as an abstract concept. The said library has no physicality, or at least not in its general sense. There is no bookshelf filled with a series of volumes organized in a certain manner.

A proper emulator of the Renaissance collector, Wynd has even taken the care of collecting specimens of two of the most en vogue fabled beasts in early museums, a unicorn horn and a taxidermized mermaid. Two staples of the Curiosity Cabinet, if you will. Taxidermised

[49] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 12.

mermaids, obviously fraudulent in character, were created by sewing a monkey torso to a large fishtail. A famous case of mermaid would be Phineas T. Barnum's *Feejee Mermaid*. A brilliant showman and money thirsty con artist, Barnum made a whole fuss about his sea creature, going as far as inviting professional scientists to come and verify the monster's authenticity for themselves. While the sensationalist Barnum, in the 19th century, was well aware of the fraudulency of the animal, many of the Renaissance collectors possessing this type of artefact were convinced of its authenticity. Wynd, for his part, *chooses* to believe it to be an authentic mermaid, or at the very least chose to label it as such**.** As for unicorn horns, these were in fact narwhals'. However, for those South Western collectors who ignored the existence of such animals, there could be no doubt these horns attested of the authenticity of the mythical equid. In the VWM however, the myth is taken to another level. With his *Self-Portrait as a Unicorn*, not only does he pay homage to Renaissance collectors, but he also becomes the fabled beast. And perhaps it is how a man such as Wynd, desirous to live free from all modern certainties, is to be perceived in today's society.

In the case of the Collection de l'Art Brut, there is little to be said about taxonomy, as no attempt at classification seems to be made whatsoever. Admittedly, a certain order is insufflated to the Collection through the grouping of each individual author's artworks. Generally speaking, neither medium nor chronology appear to play a role in determining the placement of the diverse bodies of work here, as opposed to modern art museums. As such, the artworks instead seem to be displayed according to a subjective aesthetic organisation. In this, way the CAB once again avoids to impose the following of a precise narrative, leaving viewers free to navigate and wander the exhibitions as they please**.** This absence of classification could arguably be a desire expressed by Dubuffet, who disliked the cultural limitations imposed by classification probably just as much as he despised intellectuals. As a way of demonstrating the subjectivity of taxonomy, he wrote:

> "(Categories)… vegetable, fruit, citrus, orange, are very arbitrary… Everybody gets used to them by force of habit, but we could have become very accustomed to other categories. For example, when one says that a swallow stabs the sky. Well yes, instead of grouping a swallow with a stork in order to establish a bird category one could have done otherwise, and classify a swallow with a dagger (in the category for sharp objects

and perforators) and a stork with an electric desk lamp (the category for things with long legs)."[50]

Finally, the Museum of Jurassic Technology does not seem to be employing any taxonomy either. In addition to the previously mentioned displays, visitors successively come across such exhibits as a strange diorama containing a hologram of a man imitating an American grey fox's howl, a series of letter addressed to Mount Wilson Observatory by private individuals, or the micromosaics of Henry Dalton, which he produced by assembling individual butterfly wing scales from different species under a microscope, and the list goes on. It is difficult to get a grasp of why all these should be exhibited alongside one another. What effectively demonstrates David Wilson's refusal to classify his exhibits is that some of them would absolutely make sense together. *No One May Ever Have the Same Knowledge Again,* the exhibit dedicated to Mount Wilson Observatory, could have for instance been put together with *Life of Perfect Creatures: Dogs of the Soviet Space Program* under the category "space." But the two exhibits are not even on the same floor. Instead, the Mount Wilson exhibit is put next to the display dedicated to amnesiac opera singer Madalena Delani and the series of space dogs portraits near a series of unusual music instruments. This all seems to suggest that, like Renaissance collectors, Wilson followed his own personal taste and logic in establishing his museum's structure. Despite this lack of systematic order most viewers may expect, visiting the MJT is a rather seamless experience. The labyrinthic shape of the building, the calm, dimly lit atmosphere contrasting so harshly with the boulevard the museum is located on, and the overall absurd undertones of the museum tend to encourage viewers to float through their visit without paying any attention to taxonomy – or rather, to the absence of it.

Conclusion:

It is tempting to laugh when coming face to face with the absurdity of labels describing artefacts as what they decidedly are not. Yet, this must have happened to all modern museum goers, and certainly more often than we might think. All the explanations experts are in position to produce can only ever be approximations or temporary truths, for every topic can be subjected to new interpretations and discoveries. One can only ever provide a subjective reading on an artist's

[50] Kent Minturn, "Dubuffet, Lévi-Strauss, and the Idea of Art Brut," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* no. 46 (Autumn 2004).

work, however much factual information is available. History exists only insofar as the evidences that have survived to our days allow interpretation. Sciences are a slow progress through a deep dark cave, and we have only started lighting the way. In essence, humanity does not know anything with absolute certainty, but modern museums are there to convince us of the opposite. Anti-museums are friendly reminders of this. Now, there is something one might find disturbing about the term "anti-museum." Surely they do oppose modern museums, but there is so much more to them than this reductive observation. This issue truly stood out during my conversation with David Wilson. When I asked him about his opinion on the concept of the anti-museum, he took a brief pause, before conceding a simple yet compelling "I don't like the idea of being 'against'."[51] The very absurdity of the term suddenly hit me as he expressed his disdain for it. Where the prefix "anti" bodes for something that would stand radically against an idea or concept, anti-museums at times constitute a celebration of modern museums and of the values these entertained in their early days. They seek to emulate in their viewers the feelings they would have felt upon entering these institutions two centuries ago. Spontaneously jumping to the conclusion that anti-museums constitute entities radically separated from our modern museums would appear as a sound interpretation, but they are not. Their title is deceptive, perhaps even deserving to their cause. They are distant cousins to a tradition they adopt and adapt in accordance to the vision they seek to put forward. In a society desperately attached to norms, they stand as buoyant proofs that things can function and exist differently without shedding any of their value. They are a powerful expression and application of our hopes. What matters most, I believe, is that they propose new and different ways of considering the modern museum. I would like to argue for an alternative definition of the anti-museum. While cultures' and societies' desire to possess repositories of knowledge that anyone can rely onto is totally understandable, modern museums' impersonality and so-called impartiality may render their message sterile. As such, the anti-museum concept may be considered not as an attempt to overthrow the modern museum, but rather as a complement to it, openly adapting its concepts according to the vision and desires of each and every collector. As contradictory as it may sound, this might potentially strengthen the message both modern museums and anti-museums seek to transmit. While the peculiarity of anti-museums may cause them to attract smaller audiences, the creative and personal aspects they reflect are susceptible of touching those sensitive to their vision on a deeper level. Anti-museums make the flaws of modern museums more comprehensible and digestible, allowing their audience to adopt a refreshed

[51] David Wilson, interviewed by Marie Sophie Danckaert, July 12, 2022.

gaze on modern museums and better appreciate their contents and message. They can coexist, anti-museums and modern museums feeding on one another. As such, while the Museum of Jurassic Technology does not define itself as an anti-museum, I would argue that it does nonetheless fit the definition of anti-museums I have just provided. By borrowing from pre-modern museums, anti-museums reject the absolutism of modernity and expose Bruno Latour's theory that humanity has never been modern.

Chapter 2: Collecting and the Generation of Wonder

In 1923, Clémentine Ripoche, a mentally ill factory worker, filled a notebook with hallucinatory images of cloud formations. These had spurred from visions which she thought to be portentous of a meteorological disaster. Solicitous of warning the authorities, she hurried to dispatch the ledger to the National Meteorological Office in Paris. It eventually landed in the hands of a then twenty-two-years-old Jean Dubuffet, on duty at the station as part of his national service. While the young artist had already long-entertained an interest for non-traditional art, this impromptu encounter prompted Dubuffet's fascination for what was to become his life-long pursuit: the discovery and collecting of Art Brut.[52] Each collector's story is unique, and each of them have different reasons for creating their museum. For Dubuffet, it was a case of finding the true creativity that he was deploring to be missing from traditional fine arts. On this day of 1923, with Ripoche's drawings in his hands, he discovered a form of art that would satisfy his longings.

By focusing on the particular collecting processes and backgrounds of Jean Dubuffet, Michel Thévoz, David Wilson, and Viktor Wynd, this chapter will seek to underline the subjectivity of that lies at the very heart of museum practices, while arguing that these collectors have achieved a return to wonder by borrowing pre-Enlightenment practices and emulating pre-modern collectors. In order to do so, this chapter will first seek to define collecting and its implications, before analyzing the meanings this activity may have for both collectors and viewers.

Material culture and its meaning:

The first step towards an understanding of the act of collecting would be to define what it is that collectors collect, and thus what the term material culture stands for. Many are the scholars who have employed Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the diacritical sign in order to explain it. If Saussure's theory was originally meant to outline de various elements forming language, it can however be transposed in order to provide a clear understand of material culture. According to him, the *langue* forms the overall system of codes and rules serving to structure any language, while the *parole* relates to the utilization of this system by an individual speaker. The diacritical sign, which serves as the basis of the *langue*, consists in the union of two

[52] J. C. Hallman, "The Shock of the Crazed: The hidden world of Art Brut," *The Baffler*, no. 32 (2016), 128.

components, the *signifier*, the acoustic image, and the *signified*, that is to say the concept expressed by the *signifier*. The linguistic sign bears no direct relationship to reality and cannot exist on its own. Instead, it gains meaning only insofar as it is "derived from the system in which it is constituted as different from other signs." Meaning therefore originates from the complex system of relationships existing between signs rather than in the signs themselves.[53] Transposed to the material world of objects, the categories provided by classification constitute the material equivalent of the grammar of language, while the range of possible meanings they may be attributed is equivalent to vocabulary. Material culture may refer to anything, artefacts, artworks, landscapes and the social structure they carry, animals, species, or even speech. It is thus not limited to human made objects. Instead, any type of cultural expression constitutes an integral part of material culture. Broadly speaking, material culture is composed of "selected lumps of the physical world to which cultural value has been ascribed."[54] A single object is thus capable of acting as a *signifier* to a wide range of meanings. It is polysemantic, for the signification one attaches to it is always a matter of subjective interpretaion. These objects, "movable lumps" of the cultural world, as Susan Pearce has characterised them, go through a process of careful selection from the part of the collector. It is through that same process of selection that a part of the natural world is turned into an object or museum piece. Through selection and display, it becomes part of the human system of values, a *signifier* which role is to embody the whole extent of a *signified* concept, and enters the realm of material culture. All objects, specimens or facts characterised as "natural" are in reality discursive facts, for nature is not something that exists in itself but a human, cultural concept.[55] The signification of an object, whether natural or manmade, resides neither in the piece itself nor in its realization, but in the combination of both. It is only once the viewer "carries out its realization" that the object achieves its meaning, one that will nonetheless differ for each visitor as it partially relies on their personal experience, background, culture, and on the specific impact the object produces on them. Through this complex convergence of interpretations, meaning is created. The complexity of the process is only heightened in the context of a museum as the object is generally simultaneously subjected to the interpretation of the collector, curator, and the viewer. In this way, the object's meaning is never fulfilled until the viewing subject fills in the gaps, a process through which other possible meanings are necessarily excluded. As the viewer looks,

[53] Christopher Tilley, "Interpreting material culture," in *Interpreting Museum Objects and Collections,* ed. Susan M. Pearce, (London: Routledge, 1994), 68.
[54] Susan M. Pearce, "Museum Objects," in *Interpreting Museum Objects and Collections,* ed. Susan M. Pearce, (London: Routledge, 1994), 9.
[55] Pearce, "Museum Objects," 9.

he "makes his own decisions about how the story is to be told of." [56] This process thus allows little space for the object to express their external reality, even though, according to Susan Crane:

> "It should be possible to view the whole diversity of artefact types and distinguish properties possessed by every artefact which are accessible to the appropriate mode of analysis and interpretation, and which, together, offer us a perception of the role of the artefact in social organisation."

Or, to put it in a simplified manner, viewers looking at an object should have the capacity of asking themselves "how, what, where, by whom and why," the sum of the answers then serving to achieve a constructive interpretation of the object.[57] There generally exists, in museum collections, a metonymic association between the object itself and the meaning it has been given: it stands as a representation of the whole which it is an intrinsic part of. A taxidermized chameleon, for instance, will be displayed not as an individual but as representing its entire species. Labels greatly participate in the viewer's incapacity to consider an object in its simple physical form and thus from drawing their own conclusions. The miniature casket presented in Wynd's museum as "containing some of the original darkness that Moses summoned upon Earth" draws its intensity purely from its description. Its reading immediately infuses the viewer with apocalyptic visions of mysterious catastrophes and the artefact with a certain occult power. Get rid of the label and all that is left is a small wooden box that would leave every viewers emitting different speculations regarding its content.

Why do collectors collect?

One might wonder, then, what is the aim of a collection? There is in truth a plurality of possible purposes, generally depending on the collectors themselves, their personality, their life story, their need, and their aspirations. Susan Pearce, in her paper "The Urge to Collect," proposes various definitions of the collection and the act of collecting. Her own personal one, perhaps the most exhaustive yet digestive one I came across, stands in these two words: a "non-utilitarian gathering." The two most essential characteristics of collecting are to be found here.

[56] Pearce, "Objects and meaning; or narrating the past," 26.
[57] Susan M. Pearce, "Thinking about Things," in *Interpreting Museum Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 126.

First, and the most fundamental one, the act of gathering. The accumulation of objects is, as oe could obviously expect, the basis of collecting. In this way, as the author goes on to explain, the collection constitutes an "entity greater than the sum of its parts," for it only exists as a whole and the term cannot be applied to a single object. Secondly, the "non-utilitarian" aspect of this accumulation. To collect objects is to remove them from their original context, thus stripping them out of their usefulness. Krzysztof Pomian ads an extra layer to this definition, characterizing the collection as a "set of natural or artificial objects, kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection in enclosed places adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display."[58] The display of one's collection to a viewing public thus constitutes an integral part of collecting. Just as in the Renaissance, modern collectors' possessions stand as evidences of their good taste, intellectual curiosity, wealth and generosity, thus bestowing their owner a certain prestige.[59] Collecting represents a form of play with classification, a private leisure detached from the obligations of everyday life, allowing the collector to develop their own idiosyncratic symbolic world. While the durability of the material object is just as fleeting as the collector's life, collections have long constituted an attempt at achieving immortality. The practice, common in the Renaissance and Baroque era, more often than not revealed itself inconclusive. Great collections, the works of one, single man, were systematically scattered and eventually disappeared, sometimes with the memory of their creator. As opposed to these, modern museums, in their quality of state sponsored institutions aiming towards resolute steadiness, have stood the test of time. However, these do not grant immortality to the authors of their collections, but rather rely on some noteworthy individuals to sustain their national narratives.

This illusion that the surviving of a collection grants its author a semblance of immortality has however been reinforced by the modern museum, as these constitute collective enterprises designed to stand the test of time. The objectifying of our environment and the transformations we exercise on it through our makings and creations allow us to remodel the ethereality of time into tangible space. Thus, unlike us who must die, the object is viewed as eternal. In this way, Jorge Luis Borges tells us that "time is the one essential mystery," and that our task is to "turn memory into beauty."[60] For some collectors, obsession with the possession and accumulation of rare and singular objects may be expressive of a desire for domination. We might for instance

[58] Pomian, "The collection," 162.
[59] Pomian, "The collection," 163.
[60] Brenda Danet and Tamar Katriel, "Not two alike: play and aesthetics in collecting," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 236.

cite the story of a Dutch merchant, owner of a black tulip bulb, who purchased the only other existing one only to crush it under his heel. The collector's quasi-obsessive need to possess is turned into codified desire, for the impossibility of "having it all" forces one to yield to selection, order and submission to hierarchies in order to satisfy their own impulses.[61] As Stephen Bann states, "the degree to which 'curiosity and personal obsessions' lie behind all forms of collecting, and hence all museums, is inevitably underplayed in all those museums of art that faithfully follow the historical paradigm."[62]

In his essay "Psychological aspects of art collecting," Frederick Baekeland draws an extensive list of motivations for collecting. After interrogating panel of collectors, he established that their motives generally include "vanity, the pleasure of buying a work from under the nose of a rival and the need to compete with him," as well as "emotionally empty lives at home, acquisitiveness, and the need for immortality."[63] Some scholars argue for a fetishistic, quasi erotic aspect to the act of collecting. Through ownership, the objects become uniquely the collector's to rearrange, to manipulate, to touch, to brush, to care for, or to gaze at. In short, they are theirs to possess. As such, collecting becomes a way for the collector to exist, or to give an existence to whatever it is they are lacking in the world surrounding them. There is an obvious parallel to be drawn between the idea of the collection as creation of a hermetic world and the museum as, in both cases, division remains firmly established between the "viewing subject as visitor" and the "collecting subjective curator."[64] But this division often decreases in the context of anti-museums. While the precise aim of these institutions is always unique to their creator, their intention is generally related in more explicit manners. Viewers are thus made aware of their subjective aspect. The division between collector and viewer is for instance evidently broken down in the Viktor Wynd museum. Not only does it bears Wynd's name, suggesting the representation of his own personal vision but, just like a Renaissance bourgeois showing off his curiosity cabinet, the collector regularly offers private tours of his museum, thus establishing a direct relationship with his audience.

[61] J. Clifford, "Collecting ourselves," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections,* ed. Susan M. Pearce (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 260.
[62] Bann, "The Return to Curiosity," 126.
[63] Frederick Baekeland, "Psychological aspects of art collecting," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections,* ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 206-7.
[64] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge,* 7.

Collecting and the creation of the self:

As an activity involving the refashioning of objects through manipulation of context, collecting could be argued to constitute a form of art. Its artistry lies in the relocation of objects in a new, made up context standing in a "metaphorical, rather than a contiguous, relation to the world of everyday life."[65] The acquisition of objects allows the collector to substitute creative production for consumption. Once placed within the landscape of the collection, the object becomes an integral part of the collector's imaginary world. It takes on the new meaning the collector wishes to impute onto it. In this way, to follow Susan Stewart's example, "stones and butterflies are made cultural by classification, and coins and stamps are naturalized by the erasure of labour and the erasure of context of production." The narrative of production is thus replaced by this of the collection, while the historical narrative is replaced with this of the collector.[66] Through the acquisition of objects, the collector replaces artistic production with object consumption.

Dubuffet's creative vision enabled him to recognise the immense potential of an art form that was until then considered as utterly illegitimate. David Wilson has, for his part, tried his hand at a variety of careers, until an "epiphany" brought him to invest everything he had into the Museum of Jurassic Technology. The grandest of all his creations, Wilson's museum is an artwork in itself, his masterpiece. He associated his creativity, savoir faire and boundless curiosity to make up and give credit to the unfathomable stories he collects and makes up together with the people working with him. Similarly, after years of struggling as an artist, Viktor Wynd's museum and the exhibition of his eerie collection enabled him to create a sort of alter ego in the form of a modern day bourgeois explorer. As such, collecting could be argued to participating in the creation of the self.

In Viktor Wynd's case, self-creation is in part reflected by his fascination for Sebastian Horsley and the figure of the dandy in general. In this way, Wynd describes the dandy as a "certain type of person who puts all their genius into creation of themselves."[67] From the few glimpses one can get of Wynd's life, he certainly made an attempt at impersonating the role of the dandy. From the fancy dress parties he used to launch – some costumes may be found in his museum – to Dalia, the pet snake he lets wandering the shoulder-pads of his corduroy suits, his exuberance is certainly up to the task. But it goes way deeper than that. When reading Wynd's

[65] Stewart, "Objects of Desire," 226-7.
[66] Stewart, "Objects of Desire," 256.
[67] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 115.

book, *The Unnatural Hitsory Museum,* we discover an individual far removed from the affected flamboyant character he first comes off as. Through the lines, one discovers an individual endowed with great sensitivity, a tortured soul crippled with melancholia and self-dissatisfaction. He described himself has someone "who has often been profoundly unhappy and dissatisfied, both with myself and the world around me, I had to do something to distract myself from the misery of being me."[68] In this same volume, Wynd wrote of the dandy:

> "He saw himself for what he was and us for what we are – unimportant. 'In the great sum of things,' he wrote, 'all man's endless grapplings are no more important than the scuttlings of a cockroach. The universe is neither friendly nor hostile. It is merely indifferent'."

It is no wonder, then, that he should have sensed a certain kinship with Horsley. Like him, Wynd attempted to transcend his malaise by creating a grandiose persona for himself, his own personal world, for what else is there to do when nothing matters? It is certainly not by chance if the first display of the VWM is Horsley's pink sequin suit. This self-creation is however not limited to the figure of the dandy, as in addition to this, Wynd has evidently achieved to personify himself as a sort of 21st century bourgeois collector. Not only has he, as we have seen this far, developed a world of his own, embodied by his museum and collections, but he has created his own travel agency which bears the comical name of "Gone with the Wynd." Through this, Wynd organizes expeditions to what Renaissance humanists would have thought of as the confines of the world. Whether in Benin, Gabon, or Papua New Guinea, Wynd travels to observe tribal rituals and voodoo ceremonies, much as many early savants did. As Paula Findlen argued, travel had, from the Renaissance onward, "become a credential" for collectors.[69] What pushes him on these voyages is not the classic, quasi-condescending modern Western man curiosity, but the fact it enables him to encounter people still discussing fairies and spirits with as much serious as pre-enlightenment westerners, people whose beliefs fit with the world he desperately wants to live in. Therefore, Wynd's is not simply a case of evolving as a person thanks to collecting, but rather one of creating an alias, a persona. As he himself expressed, "cats may have seven lives, but I suspect we can all do better than that, with multiple lives and personalities on show to different people at different times."[70]. As was the case for

[68] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 11.
[69] Findlen, *Possessing Nature,* 158-9.
[70] Wynd, *The Unnatural Hitsory Museum,* 8.

Renaissance collectors, Wynd's museum functions as a way of "constituting the self as an object of display."[71] His numerous self-portraits, alternatively presenting him under the traits of a unicorn, a goat, or even a hung man evoke Renaissance collector's fondness for the Ovidian metamorphoses, which evoked the "indeterminancy of human identity."[72]

Similarly, the collecting of Art Brut drastically influenced Jean Dubuffet by insufflating a new lease of life into an artistic career that had remained at a standstill for decades. Dubuffet had strong opinions on the fine art world of his era, scorning the academic constraints that he considered to smother true creativity. Whether these were sincere or simply the expression of a man's bitterness towards his original failure as an artist and his temporary reconversion as a wine merchant is probably up to interpretation. In any case, it is worth pointing out that the painter's late successful artistic career was very much influenced by the Art Brut pieces he spent decades collecting. His borrowing from Art Brut colourful and naïve visual aesthetic is brilliantly ironic coming from a man who had put so much passion into advocating that art should be the product of each and everyone's unique personality. Yet, rather than being cynical about this, we might consider that the frequentation of Art Brut had positive impacts on Dubuffet and participated in liberating his deepest creative impulses. As for Michel Thévoz, the curator who inherited the Collection, he has revealed to me during our interview that his years long dedication to the expansion and appreciation of Art Brut had had a life-saving effect on him by "positively destroying" the stern, bourgeois education he had received. [73] The discovery of Art Brut as a young man, notably his encounter with the works of Louis Soutter to whom he dedicated his PhD thesis, helped him shedding his educative conditioning. What he found in Art Brut was neither the delectation nor the admiration art is generally understood to provoke, but its liberation from the sacred realm it had been confined to for centuries. For Michel Thévoz, Art Brut is transformative for it brings us to wonder on human issues larger than art itself.

Collecting as a way of creating the world:

Whether it is the Collection de l'Art Brut, The Museum of Jurassic Technology, or the Viktor Wynd Museum, each of these anti-museums have achieved the feat of creating viable

[71] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 296.
[72] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 311.
[73] Thévoz, interview.

institutions presenting artefacts most people would not have deemed worth saving. That is, in part, what makes these museums so unique. In a sense, the world only exists insofar as man is there to consider it, and the collecting of objects allows for a connection between the visible and the invisible.[74] David Wilson's fables take on a corporeal materiality because they have been named, their stories have been told, the material objects that have been attached to them have provided them with visual and material tangibility. John Berger, in his book *Ways of Seeing,* relates the difficulty us humans have to make sense of abstract concepts on which we have no visual grasp. As he relates, the act of seeing comes before words, and it is seeing that enables us to get our bearings in the world surrounding us. While that world is explained through words, they can never "undo the fact that we are surrounded by it."[75] Yet, in the very same way that man participates in the construction of the world surrounding him, he constructs himself as the subject experiencing it. In this way, we put ourselves in "the setting of the world picture, the site from which the view of the world must be objectively constituted."[76] It is through naming, through the use of words that the MJT's stories become palpable. The same could be said of Art Brut, these pieces exist as art not only because Dubuffet has taken the stance of considering them as such, but also of naming them as such. In the CAB, labels and the words they read serve as a way of proving authors have earned their place in the collection. If not thanks to words, how could one understand these artworks, so different from everything we are used to seeing in a museum? Collecting is a way of creating a representation of the world, as artefacts are one of many ways of articulating the past. In a similar way as anecdotes can be used as a stepping stone into wider History, objects are used to establish historiographies. History being an abstract concept, artefacts constitute a tangible basis on which to construct our understanding of it. They are one of many ways of articulating the past that makes sense to us, that allow us to get a grasp of it. The careful selection of artefacts we collect and thus save for posterity imbues them with meaning, enabling a community or society to create the historical narratives that suits its social an political aspirations. The exploration of these may prompt an understanding of the way in which the present is inspired by the past. Physical objects have the power to summarise a large experience to a smaller scale in way that us humans are then able to comprehend. They transfer public events into the private sphere, making personal an otherwise impersonal experience, and to transport us in another times and place. In the context of the collection, artefacts take on the form of a souvenir insofar as described by Susan Stewart.

[74] Pomian, "The collection," 173.
[75] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 7.
[76] Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge,* 80.

The souvenir constitutes an integral part of a past experience and is charged with the power of transporting the past into the present, for it carries the power lacking from words, thoughts and experience: materiality. Souvenirs are intimate and bittersweet, imbued with the nostalgia of an event that will never repeat itself, with the longing for a meaningful past that can never be retrieved. Stewart however concludes her argument on the idea that souvenirs stand as representations of a single individual's past, thus rendering them worthless to anyone having not had first-hand experience of the memory attached to a given souvenir. One could however argue that, in the context of a collection, many are the artefacts that become souvenirs by appropriation or by procuration. Indeed, once at the hands of a collector, the past history of the object, the meaning it had to its previous owner, is substituted for this of the new acquirer and consequently becomes a souvenir for them.

Viktor Wynd's museum is more concerned with creating a reality that pleases him rather than living in the *real world*. The idea of collecting as the creation of an imaginary landscape is actually compellingly expressed by Wynd himself:

> "I wanted a museum that was mine. Not exclusively about me, but filled with everything that I liked: my magpie's nest. I wanted to build the sort of museum that the Tradescants would have built today. I wanted to create my own world, and that's what I've done. Part of it perhaps is perhaps a self-portrait, inasmuch as any work by any artist or writer is primarily about themselves. But more than that, it is a portrait of the world; the world inside my head."[77]

His interpretation of the Age of Enlightenment as the "beginning of the end" certainly participated in drawing his collecting practices closer to these of the Renaissance[78]. Indeed, like these early collectors, Wynd seems to give little attention to the history and origins of the artefacts he displays. Take the example of the *Pancho Villa's Trigger Finger* exhibit displayed in the VWM. A quick Google search suffices to find out this exact same artefact, label included, was originally on sale in a pawnshop in El Paso, Texas. The third Google result to be found is a Facebook post from the El Paso History Alliance begging for someone to purchase the mummified finger in order to submit it for DNA testing. The finger is displayed in the VWM in the same condition as this in which it was purchased, accompanied with the same label that reads that the artefact is "purported to be Pancho Villa's actual trigger finger," thus emitting

[77]Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum*, 12.
[78] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum*, 11.

doubts regarding its authenticity. Surely, Wynd never did run these DNA tests. What interests him is not whether or not the finger truly belonged to Pancho Villa, but the *possibility* that it may have. As such, willingly ignoring whether an artefact is authentic or not allows Wynd to create his own world in which fantastic potential matters more than boring factuality. Anything can become a reality in Wynd's museum, and his capacity to wonder is perhaps what brings him closest to Renaissance collectors. Wynd attempts to be as little concerned with the real world as possible, preferring the creation of his own:

> "I do not want to live in a world where people know everything there is to know, and explain everything there is to explain. I do not want there to be any experts who can tell me where I am wrong. I want to live in a world of darkness, pinpricked by light, gleaming jewels. I want to be in love. I want to look at a plant and see the plant, not its Latin name, its evolutionary history, what it looks like chopped up under a microscope."[79]

The creation of his museum thus constitutes an obvious attempt at creating his own personal world, far removed from the so-called real one encapsulated by the modern museums he abhors. If museums are repositories of objects to which cultural value has been ascribed, then the simple fact of placing an object in a place that bears the name museum suffices to inject value into it. Wynd is thus assigning value to parasites, porn, children toys, manmade monsters, and frankly ridiculous objects such as a bar soap which packaging's offer the grand promise of given their virginity back to its user. Surely the very existence of an object such as this one is only a supplementary proof humanity has hit rock bottom. But it mattered enough for Wynd to include it in his museum. As much as we dislike the idea, these objects are just as telling of human culture as any other.

As for David Wilson, the discretion he generally shows makes it difficult to draw any conclusion as to how the now over 35 years of existence of the Museum of Jurassic Technology shaped his world and person. Upon my last visit to Los Angeles, he was kind enough to invite me to spend the night in the 50s trailer he reserves for guests in the museum's yard. He greeted me for tea in the Oriental patio located on the museum roof, showed me his private dovecote, pointed out with a certain tenderness how ridiculously bad these birds were at building nests, before taking me on a full tour of the extensive MJT's backstage. What struck me most as I was

[79] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 11.

following him through this seemingly endless labyrinth was the way he interacted with the place. From the moment he descended the stairs leading from the patio to the museum before me, his hand virtually never stopped brushing the wall he was walking by. It felt as if the space constituted an integral part of his person, as if him and the MJT were two parts of a same entity. Wilson has effectively created his own world, his nest, and with more brio than any of his doves ever did.

Collecting stories:

Just as Renaissance collectors and naturalists would refer to Aristotle and Pliny the Elder to better understand nature, anti-museums can rely on centuries of museum tradition to draw inspiration from. In the Renaissance and Baroque eras, choice and combination of models served as a form of legitimization of individual collectors and naturalists. Following the examples of famous men who had preceded them in their quest to understand nature and whose "words and deeds constituted the moral canon of Western Culture" established a noble foundation to Renaissance collectors' endeavours. As such, to "practice those great souls of the best ages" was to create the self "in relation to ideal images."[80] While this reliance onto ancient references is often reflected in anti-museums, notably in the MJT and VWM, the tendency has shifted. It is no longer Antique thinkers that are held as examples, but the very collectors who sought to emulate these ancient influences. References to early museums and museum history are indeed to be found everywhere in the Museum of Jurassic Technology, as seen notably in the *Fruit-stone Carving* exhibit. Upon entering the museum gallery, directly to their left, visitors come across a diorama containing a mobile of Noah's Ark. The label describes it, in glowing terms, as the most complete collection of natural history of all times. Except it never existed. While this dubious declaration could serve as a first indication of the MJT's true nature, this exhibit is not there by chance. It is in fact a direct reference to the Renaissance and Baroque era belief that the Ark constituted the "greatest edifice to pure knowledge ever built, greater even than the Temple of Solomon and more successful than the infamous tower of Babel."[81] To many early naturalists, Noah's represented humanity's first attempt at collecting nature in its entirety. As such, his endeavour served as an example to collectors and intellectuals all over Europe, who debated "the numerous – and infinitely delightful – paradoxes that the

[80] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 297.
[81] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 88.

circumstances of the Ark engendered."[82] The Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher, a prominent Baroque figure and proprietor of one the first public museums in the Roman Jesuit College, was a firm believer of the Ark's theory. The *Athanasius Kircher Hall* of the MJT pays homage to him through a series of replicas of his most unlikely inventions, from his botanical clock to the *Propagation Horn*, a speaking trumpet that was used as a mean of communication between the public and private rooms of his museum. The introductory slideshow presents the broad history of museums, from the Alexandrina museum to our day, as to assert the MJT's legitimacy as a dignified heir to the museum tradition. Amongst the stories cited figures this of Charles Willson Peale's famous Philadelphia Museum. An American painter and naturalist, Charles Willson Peales founded his own museum in the early 19th century with the aim of providing the population with a form of "rational amusement."[83] One of the very first institutions of this kind and a pioneer in the United States, the Peale Museum was to become an inspiration for many of the museums that were yet to be founded. Rooted in the revolutionary thoughts of philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau, Peale's museum was opened to everyone, "including children and the fair sex." Peale was an earnest believer that teaching and the ingestion of knowledge were fundamental to human happiness, values that, as quoted in the MJT, were to be insufflated by leading the learner "always from familiar objects towards the unfamiliar – guided along, as it were, a chain of flowers into the mysteries of life." But Peale's strong attachment to rationality eventually caused his downfall, as imitators sprung all around the country. Understanding that collections of oddities were more profitable than rationality, these new rivals progressively abandoned the educational aspect in aid of sensationalism. This tendency eventually reached its peak with Phineas T. Barnum who "in the end obtained, scattered, and ultimately incinerated, the Peale collections," the introductory slideshow informs us. Through this strong interest in Peale's noble enterprise and the obvious disdain expressed towards Barnum's deceitful schemes, the MJT decidedly locates itself on the "good side." While some people would certainly be tempted to establish a link between Barnum's fraudulent enterprise and the MJT's few fictitious exhibits, the MJT never indulges in the type of hollow sensationalism that made Barnum so despicable. As such, the introductory slideshow serves not only to establish the MJT's seriousness, but Barnum's mention also serves to demonstrate the earnestness of its activities, ensuring that they could not be more estranged from the likes of Barnum.

[82] Findlen, *Possessing Nature*, 88-91.
[83] Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder,* 29.

A pioneering figure in museum history, Charles Willson Peale also served a source of inspiration to Viktor Wynd. Indeed, the image generally used to advertise Wynd's private tours of his museum is in fact a parody of Peale's famous self-portrait, *The Artist in His Museum.* Representation of collectors as great men of the past was somewhat frequent practice in the Renaissance period. We may for instance cite the example of Bolognese collector Aldrovandi, depicted under the traits of Aristotle in a 1599 portrait.[84] In this case, however, Wynd's imitation falls more under satire than admiration for Peale. The original painting represents the aging Charles Willson Peale standing in his museum, his eyes resolutely turned to the viewer. Lifting a red velvet curtain to reveal the inside of his museum, everything in his attitude, from his gaze to the subtle gesture of his free hand, suggests an invitation to follow him into the depicted gallery. In the background, four visitors – including a woman and a child – enjoy the sight of an impressive series of taxidermized birds enclosed in large display cases, as the father of the child visibly provides him with information on the species surrounding them. The woman's attention however seems caught by the imposing skeleton partially dissimulated by the curtain on the right-hand side – an elephant, perhaps? In the foreground, the body of a dead turkey resting atop what appears to be a dissection kit, the remains of a presumably prehistoric animal, and the artist's palette serve to showcase Peale's interests and pursuits. The painting suggest an attempt at demonstrating the exhaustivity of Peale's natural history collection, whether in its geographic aspect – the specimens go from the bald eagle to the emperor penguin – or in its temporality – as inferred by the depiction of both recent specimens and fossils. Wynd's version of the painting, *Self Portrait Posing as The Artist as a Young Man: The Museums Proprietor,* is in all points identical, except for two details. Peale's face has been replaced with this of a young Viktor Wynd, and the left hand, which used to be open and inviting, holds a human skull. While it could stand as a visual interpretation of the first words of his book, "I would like to invite you to look inside my mind," the skull in his hand could be interpreted as a more radical message.[85] Having spent a lot of time in modern museums in his youth, Wynd has drawn an uncompromising conclusion from these experiences: he hates them. As mentioned in the introduction of his book *The Unnatural History Museum,* Wynd considers these institutions as having been "captured in the main by narrow-minded academic cliques who bring an entirely manmade construct, the metanarrative, to the museum," and limiting personal freedom by educating their audience in their post-Enlightenment beliefs.[86] As such,

[84] Findlen, *Possessing Nature,* 310-1.
[85] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 8.
[86] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 12.

the skull could refer to the death of imagination provoked by museums such as Peale's, or, more radically, the death of modern museums Wynd wishes for. In total opposition to Peale's, Wynd's museum is one of irrational amusement. But the satire can be taken even further. Knowing Peale considered alcohol consumption as a waste of time, let us remember one thing: the entrance to the Vikto Wynd Museum is made through a bar. There is no doubt Peale would have hated the VWM, a fact that must rejoice Wynd.

Fig. 10: Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in his Museum*, 1822, oil on canvas, 262.9 cm × 203.2 cm, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia.

Fig. 11: Viktor Wynd, *Self Portrait Posing as The Artist as a Young Man: The Museums Proprietor,* 2019, print, Private collection.

Finally, the Collection de l'Art Brut is a rather unsettling case. Far from borrowing from past influences, it sought to radically detach itself from them and create a brand new form of museum. Therefore, it is not from Renaissance nor Enlightenment ideals that it drew inspiration from, but from the models Dubuffet had himself created. "We believe, contrary to the classic notion, that the impulses to create art, far from being the privilege of exceptional individuals, are in bountiful supply in any passer-by, but that they are usually held in check, counterfeited, adulterated or counterfeited out of concern for social alignment and in deference to received myths."[87] These words, written by Jean Dubuffet in his essay "In Honour of Savage Values," relate his vision of art. Dubuffet believed that to be face with Art Brut pieces had the potential of providing the myriad little eyes we possess within us with the ability to see the world like never before.[88] Dubuffet was a fervent defender of the idea that education and culture separate us from our instinct, that they atrophy it. He was terribly acerbic towards well-read individuals,

[87] Maclagan, *Outsider Art,* 50.
[88] Jean Dubuffet, "In Honour of Savage Values," trans. Kent Minturn, *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 46, Polemical Objects (Autumn 2004), 259.

viewing them as "less original, less alive and less open than others; people who are all uniformly similar and struck in the same mold."[89] This resentment stemmed from the belief that the attention and efforts put into the learning and internalizing of cultural values could lead us to become oblivious the values he held essential – the "savage values." Those savage values, in his opinion, could be learned exclusively from life itself and were to be explored through the most mundane of conversations, the simplest interactions. By all accounts, Dubuffet was quite the character. Crippled with contradictions, he dreaded intellectuals but admired Claude Lévi-Strauss and befriended the likes of André Breton, George Bataille, and Le Corbusier. He was an avid reader but ripped off pages after pages of the books consumed to throw them on the floor next to his bed.[90] He despised academia and traditional museums, but entrusted Michel Thévoz, a PhD candidate at the École du Louvres and curator at the Musée des Beaux Arts de Lausanne with his cherished collection.

Ruing the treatment of art as a marketable good and as an object of speculation, Dubuffet was solely interested in creations stemming from those who were estranged from specialized circles and protected from all outside influences. He considered cultural works of art to be hollow and empty, worthless parodies of true art susceptible of provoking "intimidation, discouragement and inhibition, the paralysis and death of true art, everywhere it might have had any desire to show itself."[91] In this way, artworks produced by professional artists emerge as "devoid of spontaneity, immediacy, and an intimate and personal character which seem indispensable to any production of art." The painter considered that the creation of true art required a solitude and focus that were utterly incompatible with the modern artist's social life. In this way, it is only through total isolation and boredom, when man feels the need to create himself, that the truest creative impulses may occur, that genuine art may flourish. "I believe that art would do far much better in our country if no one paid attention to it or cared very little for it."[92] This stance is expressed through Dubuffet's creation of the word "enculturé," which, funnily enough, remarkably resembles an obscene French insult – which, considering Dubuffet's personality, I frankly doubt to be a coincidence. This term, which could be related to the English word "enculturation," took on an extremely negative connotation in Dubuffet's vocabulary. Served to express the negative opposite of "anti-cultural." Despite his decisively anti-cultural stance, Dubuffet's theorization is far from flawless, as the case of Augustin Lesage may reveal. Miner

[89] Dubuffet, "In Honour of Savage Values," 260.
[90] "Le Grand Entretien : Michel Thévoz, un regard, une voix," RTS, recorded April 10, 2016, https://www.rts.ch/audio-podcast/2021/audio/michel-thevoz-un-regard-une-voix-25429045.html.
[91] Dubuffet, "In Honour of Savage Values," 261.
[92] Dubuffet, "In Honour of Savage Values," 262.

from a family of miners, followed this career until his thirthy-fifth year, when he heard a voice predicting he would become a painter addressing him from the depths of the mine.[93] Similar messages reached him in the following months, until he finally decided to submit to this unexpected omen. The aesthetic and picturesque quality of Lesage's monumental works is indisputable and utterly impressive, especially considering he was a complete autodidact. However, if we were to play the devil's advocate, Lesage deliberately chose to become a painter. Admittedly, a potential mental instability – or spiritual epiphany – was involved, suggesting that his faith as an artist was dictated rather than deliberately chosen. Yet, the recurring presence of cultural motifs in Lesage's works further contradict Dubuffet's theories. Not only is their overall aesthetics reminiscent of Byzantine decorum and Christian icons, but most of his works make direct cultural references. *Composition Symbolique, Amour pour l'Humanité* **(fig.)** figures a crucifixion in its centre, surrounded by representations of saints on three of its sides. Many Lesage's other works depict reference to Ancient Egypt, notably with the inclusion of the famous Nefertiti bust. As such, the intricate motifs of his painting, constituted of touches of gold and other colours evoking semi-precious stones, may recall the refined ornaments of Ancient Egypt.

[93] "Lesage, Augustin," Collection de l'Art Brut, accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.artbrut.ch/fr_CH/auteur/lesage-augustin.

Fig. 12 : Augustin Lesage, Composition symbolique, amour pour l'humanité, 1932, oil on canvas, 97 x 70 cm, Collection de l’Art Brut, Lausanne.

Collecting as a way of restoring wonder:

Collecting generates wonder both for the collector amassing objects and the viewer witnessing its product. As we have seen, the act of collecting offers a possibility for the creation of a personal imaginary landscape. In addition to offering an opportunity to escape or wonder for its collectors, it further bears the potential of transporting its viewers, for it opens an infinite array of possible meanings. Wonder is thrilling, fraught with fear and desire. It is, as Descartes put it, "a sudden surprise of the soul."[94] Albert Magnus, in his *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle,* makes an attempt at framing the dynamics of wonder. Magnus characterizes wonder as a "constriction and suspension of the heart caused by amazement at the sensible appearance of something so portentous, so great, and unusual, the heart suffers a systole." The effect wonder produces on an individual is thus comparable of this of experiencing fear. Resulting from the wish to understand the cause of the unusual and the foreign, wonder is unstable by essence, it is the "movement of the man who does not know on the way to finding out, to get at the bottom of that at which he wonders and to determine its cause."[95] While the philosophy of wonder was rejected by Enlightenment savants for its so-called relation to amateurism, anti-museums advocate for a return of wonder. The MJT, the CAB, and the VWM function to provoke astonishment by intentionally instigating confusion in the audience's intellect. For David Wilson, wonder relates to the feeling of losing one's whole cognitive apparatus in the face of something.[96] The Museum of Jurassic Technology "generates wonder in its own indiosyncratic manner," it astutely plays on viewers expectations by adopting the traditional forms and cues of the modern museum to present unfathomable facts and displays in a way that undermines their sensationalism.[97]

A common feature to be noted between the founders of the three cases studies examined in this thesis is their fidelity to the inner child we all bear within us, the act of collecting being itself often linked to childhood. If seemingly no information may be found about Dubuffet in relation to potential collecting activities in his childhood, David Wilson's and Viktor Wynd's life stories evoke the image of two kids who never stopped collecting while growing up, or, in a way, never grew up at all. The childish awe they express about the world is infectious, and is bound to generate wonder in at least part of their audience. David Wilson, during our conversation,

[94] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions,* 20.
[95] Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions,* 81.
[96] Wilson, Interview.
[97] Downing, "So Boring It Must Be True," 50.

counted me the initial revelation he had regarding modern museums. As a six-year old on a trip to London, he got lost in a science museum and separated from his family. "I was in the main entry space of the museum and I was not frightened," he relates, "I remember this sense of awe at the place and I think it burned deep into my psyche."[98] This passion and fascination remained central to Wilson's life throughout the years. A few years later, now a young teenager living in Denver, his weekends were filled with day trips to art and science museums, always accompanied by a friend. Wilson's story is quite beautiful in its simplicit. A life long admirer of museums, his strongest desire was to possess his own, a dream that he achieved with the creation of the Museum of Jurassic Technology in 1988.

Wynd's story constitutes quite the opposite of Wilson's: because he always detested museums, he wanted to create his own in a form that he would enjoy. While the positively childish aspect of Wynd's collecting methods is already made obvious by the playful aspects of his displays, it is only strengthened by his words:

> "To be an artist in most cases is to be a child who has not grown up, who behaves like a child to the world around it professionally and privately. (…) Most adults are dull and boring, and I don't want to know them."[99]

Wynd's relation to childhood and imaginary worlds is further intensified by an installation which used to be located at the entrance to the museum. Indeed, during the first months of the Viktor Wynd Museum's existence, visitors had to "squeeze through a wardrobe full of old fur coats" to access the staircase leading to the displays, the erotico-morbid brush of the furs against the viewer's face serving as an eloquent prelude to what the exhibits would offer. The reference that inevitably comes to mind is C. S. Lewis's famous *Chronicles of Narnia*, a series of novels in which a group of children travel from the real world to the fantastic realm of Narnia precisely by squeezing through a wardrobe. Viewers were thus forcibly endorsing the role of those curious children transitioning from the real world to an imaginary one, from the real world to Wynd's twisted universe. While there are neither friendly fauns nor evil witches to be encountered at the VWM, Wynd's goat-headed self-portrait and extensive collection of occult objects are certainly close enough. While this installation thus offered a clear demarcation between those two worlds, it is now a thing of the past. After just a few months, Wynd got "fed

[98] Wilson, Interview.
[99] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum,* 149.

up with squeezing in and decided it was a little affected," as if the rest of the museum was not.[100]

Such activities from the part of collectors forcibly invoke an element of play. This appeal to the child within us is incredible powerful. Some of us, most of us, have lost touch with the kids we used to be. Our younger self has become a blurry memory, it has been marginalized, pushed to the background like a distant relative we have not heard of in years. Some would say it is better this way, yet so many of us can feel melancholic of this era of our lives. What a relief it is to know that the apparent bluntness of adulthood is not a fatality, that our childish capacity for wonder subsists within us. It is there, only waiting to be provoked, and the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Collection de l'Art Brut and the Viktor Wynd Museum are formidable tools to help us doing so.

Conclusion:

Understanding the nature of collections constitutes a means of exploring our relationship with the physical world they are a part of. The material comes as part of an ideological context involving both humans and the material world. The formation of collections belongs to the relation existing between subject and objects, "conceived as the whole world, material and otherwise," lying outside of human beings. Through their acquisition, organisation, and valuation, collections therefore constitute a fundamental element of our effort to construct the world.[101] The immutability of modern museums is only illusory for, while the artefacts and specimens they collect and exhibit may remain identical throughout the years, our interpretations and this that institutions impute onto them are in constant evolution. This is one of the reproaches Wynd blames on the modern museum. Museums are thus subjected to change, in part because it is the public that makes them. As Susan Stewart tells us, museums imply transformation of objects into their "own impossibility," loss, and the "simultaneous experience of a difference."[102] The viewer reconstitutes this impossibility to a certain extent, basing their interpretation of the artefact on their own experience and knowledge. Whether it is the MJT, VWM, or CAB, these anti-museums all bear the potential of providing viewers with a deeper

[100] Wynd, *The Unnatural History Museum*, 8.
[101] Susan M. Pearce, "Collecting Reconsidered," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (London: Routledge, 1994), 194.
[102] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 135.

understanding of the implications of collecting. By showcasing this activity as subjective and participating in the construction of one's personal world and person, anti-museums may strengthen the public's critical eye towards modern museums and institutions.

Chapter 3: Public Reception

"I was embarrassed. I had been duped."[103] These were the words of museologist Susan A. Crane following her first visit to the Museum of Jurassic Technology. There is something almost reassuring in knowing that a professional of her stature has fallen for it just like any of us. Her initial confusion is only fair, and frankly a rather common reaction to this type of institutions.
The audience is central to the museum enterprise, for it is through our engagement with them that they achieve their purpose. As David Wilson has stated of the MJT, "we feel that eventually what we are doing is maybe not even half of the work. We present things and then the visitors, the patrons to the museum, do the lion's share of the work, the construction."[104] That is a fact many museum professionals seem to be oblivious of. The role of the public might be more essential in the context of anti-museums, as it is through their enactment of the regular modern museum rituals that they mark their separation from these. As such, the difference between viewers expectations and what they actually find in anti-museums prompt a certain type of reaction from their part, something that is expected by anti-museums. Anti-museums may achieve this by playing with visitors expectations (VWM), by showing them something different (CAB), or even by willingly deceiving them, as in the case of the MJT.
The standards anti-museums create for themselves, their separation from modern museums visitors are so familiar with, raise the question of viewers reaction in the face of this difference. In order to answer this interrogation, this chapter will start by examining viewers' expectations in modern museums, what it is they look for in a visit and what they believe museums should and should not do. Over a second phase, we will take a closer look at visitors' reaction to the examined case studies by relying notably on Tripadvisor reviews. Reactions will first be examined through the prism of confusion and revolt, before focusing on the wonder that might be generated by anti-museums.

Viewers expectations and behaviour in modern museums:

In order to recognise what anti-museums might bring to their visitors, it is worth beginning by examining what it is viewers look for in modern museums, as these are the institutions that serve as their point of reference. Visitors surveys are rare, most of the existing ones dating back

[103] Crane, "Curious Cabinets and Imaginary Museums," 64.
[104] Wilson, Interview.

to the 80s, when interest in museology peaked in the academic milieu. Over the last decade, the tendency has moved towards a democratization of the museum experience, as museums of all sorts, all over the world, have multiplied efforts to create a more approachable experience. The observations made here will thus rely on Nick Merriman's remarkably complete survey, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," which primarily focuses on British institutions. It is thus essential to bear in mind that, while some of the information provided in this survey remain truthful today, some aspects have evolved since the late 1980s. Furthermore, despite the survey focusing on Great Britain, the general tendency for museum-goers appears to be rather uniform within the West. Also of note is the fact the survey concerns museums altogether, regardless of their type. According to Merriman, then, the general lack of information on museum visitors renders difficult the comprehension of "how people use museums and whether they assimilate their messages, intended or unintended."[105] As a consequence , institutions generally ignore whether or not they meet visitors expectations. The first information Merriman notes is the growing popularity of museums, as well as the widening of their audience. Despite this diversification of museum public, however, regular visitors continue to be of "high status, to have received a tertiary education, and to be students or in work." On the contrary, those who rarely attend museums tend to be of low status, to have left school at a young age, or the elderly. As Franklin expressed, "given that art museums were widely founded in the nineteenth century precisely to encourage *everyone* to enjoy the benefits of art, and not just the social elite, the modern art museum project might be judged a failure on its own terms."[106] The survey further suggests that most museums goers on account of a specific interest in "the subject of the museum or in one of the exhibitions in it, or because of a general interest in, for example, museums, history, or art." Furthermore, the social aspect of museum visiting is non negligible, for an important percentage of the interviewed subjects with "others." The survey however demonstrates general agreements regarding some aspects of the museum. For instance, whether regular or rare visitors, 58 percent of respondents concur that museum displays can be bland – a number that has certainly decreased in recent years as a consequence of museums modernizations. Likewise, 21 percent of visitors, regardless of type, consider that explanatory labels in museums are too lengthy.[107] These information infer that, however committed to museums, visitors are still capable of exercising a critical eye in relation to their museum

[105] Nick Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," in *The New Museology* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 149.
[106] Franklin, *Anti-Museum,* 2.
[107] Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," 152-5.

experience, yet only to a certain degree, as we shall see. To most visitors, the museum is reminiscent of either a library or a monument to the dead. Interestingly, "the more frequently respondents visit museums, the more likely they are to associate it with a library; the less frequently they visit, the more likely they are to associate it with a monument to the dead," which indicates that the idea of museum-as-mausoleum is still very much present in collective minds.[108] As Merriman points out, this image of the library could be interpreted as both positive and negative. While it hints an atmosphere of contemplation and learning, the comparison certainly downplays the entertaining aspect of museums. One answer to the survey that is particularly revelatory is the fact the "strongest factor in museum visiting is whether an individual feels that the past is worth knowing about." The survey moreover demonstrates that one's view of modern societies strongly influence their museum attendance, for the more positive this view, the more likely one is to visit a museum. Merriman argues for museum visiting as incarnating, to a certain extent, a way of manifesting cultural affiliations in the present.[109]

To Bourdieu, however, whether or not one is keen on visiting a museum relies in part on what he has termed the "cultural capital." This capital is built on elements such as aesthetic mindset and connoisseurship, which may solely arise through an important investment from the part of an individual's parents and teachers. This investment in education, Bourdieu argues, participates in the creation of a "cultural consensus," which has per impact of perpetuating hierarchical social relations wrongly considered as natural and well-founded by societies. A certain education is thus supposedly required to decipher the messages museum artefacts and artworks are supposedly imbued with. Bourdieu thus considers aesthetic appreciation to be socially determined rather than "appreciated for its own sake by the untutored eye." Hence, the quality of the museum experience supposedly depends on how competent the viewer is at mastering the required cultural codes. He argues that "in the slightest details of their morphology and their organisation, museums betray their true function, which is to increase the feeling of belonging for some and of exclusion for others."[110] Thus, while important efforts have been made over the last decades to make modern museums more accessible, these struggle to meet the Enlightenment aim of addressing all classes of population. But Bourdieu's insistence on class distinction causes him to put aside some other essential aspects of the museum experience and to negate and to downplay their viewers capacity to understand and

[108]Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," 155.
[109] Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," 157-8.
[110] Merriman, "Museum Visiting as a Cultural Phenomenon," 161.

exercise a critical eye on these institutions. One of the roles of anti-museums is to rectify these tendencies. Wilson for instance believes that, while his museum is more prone to resonate with a certain audience, this has nothing to do with their social milieu. Instead, as he explained:

> "That group of people is really complicated to define. If you think of strata of culture, of society, in its typical form of economic privilege, I think there's also a strata that runs perpendicular to that. Across all those typical strata are other kinds of division and there is a kind of person for whom the work that we do has meaning."[111]

In the Museum of Jurassic Technology, as well as in most anti-museums, viewers' appreciation is thus more a matter of personal sensitivity than economic or cultural status. Foucault for his part characterised the museum as a *heterotopia*, that is to say a utopia embodied by a place outside all places and which location can be identified in the physical world.[112] According to Foucault, while such places may exist in every culture, their principles and representations differ, for these always meet a precise function defined by the society it exists in. The heterotopia might evolve as history unfolds, "for each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another."[113] Further recalling the institutional functioning of the museum is the idea that the heterotopia is prone to a juxtaposition of a diversity of incompatible sites in a single existing place. This concept is intimately linked to this of *heterochrony*, which consists in an "absolute break with traditional time" happening through the combination of various slices of time in a same space at a given time. Museums belong to this category of heteropias, for not only do they "indefinitely accumulate time" through the artefacts and histories they assemble, but they merge a variety of geographic areas in a single place. As such, museums have achieved the feat of creating the illusion the assembling of, for instance, a 14th century brass head of a king of Ife and an Ancient Greek amphora dated 540-530 BC in a same space makes perfect sense. To enter a heterotopia often requires a certain set of behaviours from the part of the individuals penetrating these spaces. This is the case in museums, in which the viewer is paradoxically "forced to aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own, because it is only by leaving behind the familiar world of his own experience that he can take part in the excitement which

[111] Wilson, Interview.
[112] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring: 1986), 24.
[113] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 25.

objects offer."[114] Museums hence mainly constitute a space for spare time, a place of recreational activity for most visitors. Many of them see education in museums, with "its overtones of possibly-tedious-but-a-least-good-for-you." Most viewers, when their interest is peaked, are able to exploit information and educate themselves, inasmuch as it is offered in a clear, appealing, and non-condescending manner.[115] Lee Drapper insists on the social aspect of museum visiting and argues that it constitutes, at times, "an unconsciously performed self-exploration." According to him, only 5 to 25 per cent of visitors come to museums on their own, while 75 to 95 per cent are accompanied by friends or family. The museum experience is thus a fundamentally social one, however much importance one attributes to its aesthetic aspect. This leisure-time activity has become a "search for personal identity and affiliation." For visitors, the social aspect of museum visiting is tightly interwoven with education, the opportunity of sharing and exchanging with loved-ones being an integral part of museum appreciation.[116]

Kenneth Hudson has established a list of three assumptions that should be addressed by museums regarding their viewership:

> "First, that visitor has come because he wants to, that he is genuinely interested; second, that he does not see the museum in terms of problems and difficulties and, third, that he knows nothing about the subject when he arrives and expects to receive value for money during his visit. He considers himself as good as the next man, and the museum does nothing to discourage the idea."[117]

The truth is that, based on the few available studies, we know little about what it is that attracts people to museums and what they receive from them. The accessible information seem to suggest that visitors have a "fairly low expectations of museums," which explains their relatively uncritical stance. My suggestion is that viewers indeed do not expect much from a museum visit, in part they have long known what they are supposed to get out from such an experience.

The absence of viewers' feedback in regard to their museum experience raise a number of inadequate assumptions. Curators tend to perceive the public as a "uniform mass of people,"

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[114] Pearce, "Objects as meaning; or narrating the past," 26.
[115] Philip Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museum," in *The New Museology,* ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 130.
[116] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museum," 132.
[117] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museum," 134.

like-minded to those running museums. Consequently, curators may interpret the absorption of information and sights offered by the museum as the sole aim of visitors. Finally, the general assumption is that the public is "satisfied whit what is on offer and therefore implicitly cannot or will not cope with more challenging subjects or ideas."[118] Perceptions of the public as compact, undifferentiated mass began truly shifting in the 1990s, as the idea began emerging that viewers were indeed active performers of "meaning-making practices within complex cultural sites." Modern discourse characterizes museums as institutions exercising a social responsibility, as empowered to produce and sustain an amelioration of the human condition. A study published by the American Association of Museums in 2002 introduces museums as "sites that can exert greater influence on society, as places where values are generated and as incubators for change," which at once constitutes a reality and a contradiction with modern museums' strong attachment to the past. Even though probably to a lesser extent than in the past, museums certainly still hold the power to influence societies. This statement however brings us to wonder how 21st century visitors perceive the museum's authority and legitimacy to influence societies.[119] Finally, we might notice that, in accordance with the ideal modern museums were originally meant to incarnate, the question of wonder is not mentioned in any of these surveys, at any point.

Just as it is the case with most modern museums, no visitor surveys have been pursued about any of the case studies examined in this thesis – at least not that I have found out. But one can surely venture a few guesses. In the case of the Viktor Wynd Experience, it would be safe to consider most viewers expect an out of the ordinary experience, prompted by the excitement and curiosity that sometimes accompanies the morbid. Things are different when it comes to the Collection de l'Art Brut. Knowing what Art Brut stands for prior to actually viewing the Collection is not sufficient to prepare oneself to the emotional shock one can feel when faced with the works in the dark womb of the museum. In addition, its definition is rather vague, in a way. While it is easy to understand the CAB gathers the works of people living on the margins of society, liberated from cultural influences, this does not provide any information on the aesthetic form that this supposedly "true art" might take. That is why the entrance of the Collection bears these words by Dubuffet:

> "L'art brut c'est l'art brut

[118] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museum," 143.
[119] Fiona Cameron, "Moral Lessons and Reforming Agendas," in *Museums Revolutions: How museums change and are changed,* ed. Simon J. Knell, Suzanne MacLeod and Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 330.

Et tout le monde a très bien compris.
Pas tout à fait très bien ?
Bien sûr, c'est pour ça justement
Qu'on est curieux d'y aller voir."

Which could be translated into:

"Art brut is art brut
And everyone has understood that very well.
Not very well?
Of course, that is precisely why
We are curious to go and see it."

This curiosity the CAB instills in its viewers is a forceful rationale for exploration. Dubuffet's text infer that, contrary to the general belief that museum viewers need some cultural prerequisites to understand artworks, Art Brut works are comprehensible to anyone curious enough to go and view them with their own eyes. It is accessible to all visitors for it demands neither explanation nor a certain level of education. Indeed, it is susceptible of speaking to all of us, as we can all identify with the artists on a human level, even if "much of it is strange and personal and from unknown times and places."[120] As for the Museum of Jurassic Technology, viewers expectations vary depending on whether or not they are aware of the "hoax" prior to their visit. Visitors who do not know, as was my case, naturally expect a standard museum experience, a combination of leisure and educational experience. Those aware that part of the MJT's exhibits are fictional may be either drawn by curiosity or by the desire to feel the wonder described by those who found out *while* visiting. Unfortunately, I would argue that knowing about the MJT's aims prior to experiencing it may diminish its wondrous aspect. Finally, there is a third category to be considered: visitors who know about the MJT and believe the entirety of its exhibits to be fake. In that case, the experience expected must be closer to this anticipated in the VWM.

Confusion and Revolt:

[120] Franklin, *Anti-Museum,* 25.

Fiona Cameron's is one of the rare articles I came across during my research which truly gives a voice to museum viewers. Through a variety of quotations, visitors' opinions of what the museum should and should not do are clearly outlined. The apoliticality of museums emerges as a fundamental value to the majority of the survey participants: "museums have a reputation like university professors, you expect them to show things which have the backing of scientific method. It is not just propaganda, it is a well thought out established viewpoint."[121] This apoliticality so strongly whished for is asserted on the basis that a museum's voice should be non-biased and purely neutral in its representations. In this way, another participant stated: "In principle, museums should deal with something confrontational in a non-judgmental way. (…) It's not there to manipulate, it's simply there to say 'here it is'." The idea of impartiality is one of entertaining a non-judgmental position where the ability for audience to self-regulate has primacy. For one participant, this implies that "museums give a non-biased view and allow people to form their own opinion," thus that museums should be distanced from public opinions and emotions.[122] Cameron does not specified whether or not they are satisfied with the current state of museums. The modern museum, with its sequenced galleries, carefully curated lighting and architectural grandeur supply "both the stage set and the script" for viewers to enact a sort of performance.[123] Historically speaking, it was expected that museums, along with schools and libraries, would participate in lifting "moral and intellectual refinement of 'all classes of the community' and the formation of 'common principles of taste'."[124] They were invested with the power to shape public opinion in relation to so-called political and social necessities. Whether it is the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Viktor Wynd Museum or the Collection de l'Art Brut, all three of these anti-museums are susceptible of creating a certain uneasiness in the viewer.

Wynd's museum is subjected to a surprisingly little amount of critics, considering some of the atrocities it displays. The reason for that may be simple, and it is that visitors to the VWM know exactly what to expect upon entering its premises. While some of the artefacts might still be shocking, it is likely what viewers are looking for precisely: satisfying their appetite for the odd and the macabre. The VWM awakes in its viewers the morbid fascination we all bear within us but would generally rather keep buried at the back of our brain, the very same one that attracted

[121] Cameron, "Moral Lessons and Reforming agendas," 331.
[122] Cameron, "Moral Lessons and Reforming agendas," 332.
[123] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 12.
[124] Andrew McClellan, "A Brief History of the Art Museum Public," in *Arts and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millenium,* ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), 8.

crowds to Barnum's itinerant freak show in the 19th century. "Are these really the front bottoms of a Victorian Prostitute?" you may wonder after reading a label, squinting at the shapeless protuberance floating in a jar. You might sigh in relief realising it is actually a piece of plastic, but it is too late. Your gaze lingered on the atrocity because you were too curious to know. The VWM bears the strange power of making viewers feel terrible about themselves. While it is somewhat reassuring knowing that some of the artefacts are fraudulent in character, it changes nothing to viewers' original impulse and their reactions. If people laugh when coming across the Iris Godwin braid, it is not because it is comical that a young woman should have survived the most famous nautical catastrophe in history only to die of a flu shortly after. Rather, this sort of reaction results from the sort of nervousness the VWM instills in its viewers. Because the museum manages to sustain viewers' shock and surprise throughout the visit, playing on the fact one cannot possibly expect *everything* in a museum to be that sordid, this feeling continuously grow.

One newspapers article written about the Viktor Wynd Museums recounts the journalist's own visit. Intrigued by the pitch his boss had made of the museum, presenting Wynd as the "keeper of rare and exotic beasts" and a "purveyor of hallucinatory liquors," Tim Jonze felt the need to verify these declarations. Originally dubious of the VWM and suspecting Wynd to be a simple charlatan, Jonze eventually fell under the museum's spell, and even found himself pondering whether this could be the place where "the world's true magic and wonder reside."[125] This brief moment of wonder was however short-lived, for the horrifying sight of what he describes as a "semi-rotting human figure" rapidly put an end to it. Upon further inspection, he describes "the left half was unmistakably that of the bass baritone and political activist Mr Paul Robeson. But the right side … well that was … no … surely not … a topless and fishnetted Ms Pamela Anderson." Noticing his shock, Wynd elusively explained "Ah yes, the Pamela Anderson and Paul Robeson Unification Cake."[126] The article ends with the journalist escaping from the oppressive depths of the *Wunderkabinnet* – "I knew I had to leave while I still could" – as Wynd gestures towards him, begging for him to stay and take a look at his taxidermized mermaid.[127] Of course a lot of this ending must be about the sheer drama of it, it is a newspaper article, after all. But Viktor Wynd certainly seems like an unsettling character to be around, and his museum, a faithful reflection of his persona, must elicit such feelings in some viewers. It is simply too

[125] Tim Jonze, "Viktor Wynd: 'I was offered a mummified arm – but I didn't have 2000€ on me'," *The Guardian*, March 16, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/mar/16/viktor-wynd-collector-museum-of-curiosities-unnatural-history.
[126] Jonze, "Viktor Wynd."
[127] Jonze, "Viktor Wynd."

much to take in for some people. One reviewer insists on how uneasy he felt as a consequence of the immense amount of porn, erotica, and sex related objects. Not to mention the profound disgust most people must feel when confronted with such "artefacts" as a jar of used condoms supposedly found in Mick Jagger's hotel room. The VWM contains artefacts referring to nearly any possible domain that could provoke discomfort – sex, death, the occult, colonization, self-harm… The list could go on but, in essence, all is done to make the viewer uneasy. It goes as far as Wynd having hung a bronze mould of his own buttocks on the toilet door, which one is irremediably condemned to brush against upon entering. Upon climbing up the stairs at the end of the visit, one of the bar staff systematically asks viewers emerging from the depths of the museum what they thought of it. From what I have witnessed, the answer seems to often consist in a confused grunt – which was my answer too, in all fairness.

In the case of the Collection de l'Art Brut, the critique is often one that Michel Thévoz mentioned to me: "my four year old son could have made that."[128] It is true that, when coming across such works as Hidenori Motooka's childish train drawings (fig. 9), one may feel that these should not have their place in an art collection. Many Art Brut pieces do not fit our usual aesthetic standards, but is it not fantastic news? If a four year old can do it, so can any visitor to the Collection. Instead of considering these works to not be good enough, the takeaway should rather be a greater understanding of Dubuffet's utopian yet truthful view that all humans bear within themselves the potential to be an artist. The most venomous Tripadvisor review to be found concerning the Collection de l'Art Brut, entitled "It is… Art?" goes as follow:

> "You will not have photos since it is forbidden to take any photos! And for good reason… At the Picasso Museum in Paris, you can take photos of all the works because it's art and art is for everyone! Here, you wander through the brains of psychopaths who modulate things as therapy… That's fine for their therapy, no doubt, but it's not art. This place is not worth the detour, let alone being ranked number one on Tripadvisor."[129]

Two aspects stand out from this review: the presumed inferiority of Art Brut to what one could name "official" art, in the sense of art that has been widely recognized as such by society, and

[128] Thévoz, Interview.
[129] "Collection de l'Art Brut," Tripadvisor, accessed June 30, 2022, https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g188107-d215386-r579969244-Collection_de_l_Art_Brut-Lausanne_Canton_of_Vaud.html.

the discomfort provoked by being faced with mental illness. While this visitor's ignorant leap that all mental instability equals psychopathy – which does not even constitute a clinical diagnosis anymore – is frankly infuriating, it is nonetheless compelling. In the midst of all this, there is one sentence that particularly stands out: "… art is for everyone!", to which we might be tempted to answer "Yes! That is the whole point!" This review may serve as an eloquent illustration of what Michel Thévoz dreaded when the Collection de l'Art Brut first opened its doors in Lausanne. It was in prevention to this kind of reactions that, for the first few years of the CAB's existence, Thévoz and his counterpart Lucinne Peiry held weekly discussions with the public. Despite its hyperbolic judgement, this review acts as an illustration that the general public has not yet fully accepted Art Brut as a valid art form. In a world where public awareness to mental health is rising increasingly, many still struggle to accept that is part of our human condition. It is only natural, for it is frightening knowing we could all be subjected to it. As such, a certain discomfort might arise from being confronted to Art Brut pieces, as it is often the case when one is faced with difference, with something foreign. In the context of Art Brut, it is probably safe to consider that it is the reflection of our deepest human self that is prone to invoking this feeling. As Adrian Franklin stated, "there is something otherworldy and overwhelming about the carnivalesque art one encounters upon first entering the CDLAB. There are no dull moments, nothing is ordinary."[130] The Collection outright produces a "highly charged emotional atmosphere, secret expression, exposure revelation, shock, poignancy, sadness, anger." It reveals what is hidden within us, what is normally kept secret, what we do not even dare confessing to ourselves. The works of Art Brut authors establish a deep connection to some people's lives that are, for most of us, totally estranged from ours. They relate shocking experiences, consciousness that have been altered under extreme and painful circumstances beyond one's control. At the contact of Art Brut, time freezes, the everyday is suspended. Viewers find themselves in the presence of a radically other, and realise that is otherness lies just as vivid within themselves. Going back to this acerbic review, the viewer's comparison with the Picasso Museum in Paris is demonstrative of both a lack of awareness regarding the influence modern museums exercise on culture and an incapacity to form a truly personal opinion. The point of this argument is not to negate this visitor's personal taste, it is only natural that some people would find Art Brut aesthetic unpleasant. Rather, it is interested to point out that this particular opinion appears to be fully based on a comparison with what they have been educated and influenced by society to consider as "true art." Art museums tend

[130] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 30.

to display so-called historical sequences of rooms filled with artworks, often without any explanation nor gaps pointed out. Thus, the so-called coherency of art museums displays is only illusory. Once hung in a public collection or museum, artworks are infused cultural value. Because of the status inferred by this inclusion in cultural institutions, this can be enough to convince many less-informed viewers that these artworks are "of good quality and worthy of attention."[131] There exists the widespread fantasy that artistic taste and preference is a personal matter that "each individual experiences art in a unique manner, and that this occurs randomly, regardless of social background."[132] This stance is refuted by most studies, which have instead found out that one's experience of art conforms to the social background and attributes of their respondents, such as their occupation, family background or education. The combination of these characteristics shapes visitors' experience, for it determines both their perception of it and their degree of comfort in museums. As such, what this particular viewer truly exposes through his review is a miscomprehension of the wide range of possible meanings the art world has to offer. It is interesting to take a closer look at the forces at play here. One may dislike Art Brut because of their personal, subjective taste, but there is something deeper expressed by this review. It appears as though this viewer's blind attachment to culture is what prevents them from appreciating anti-cultural art, and this is made obvious by the opposition they spontaneously establish between Art Brut and what is commonly designated as "true art." Thus, Art Brut does not fit the artistic standards the viewer has previously absorbed in museums and he is too *enculturé* – to use Dubuffet's term – to appreciate it.

[131] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museums," 126.
[132] Vera L. Zolberg, "An Elite Experience for Everyone: Art Museums, the Public, and Cultural Literacy," in *Museum Culture: Histories, Discoveries, Spectacles,* ed. Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994), 57.

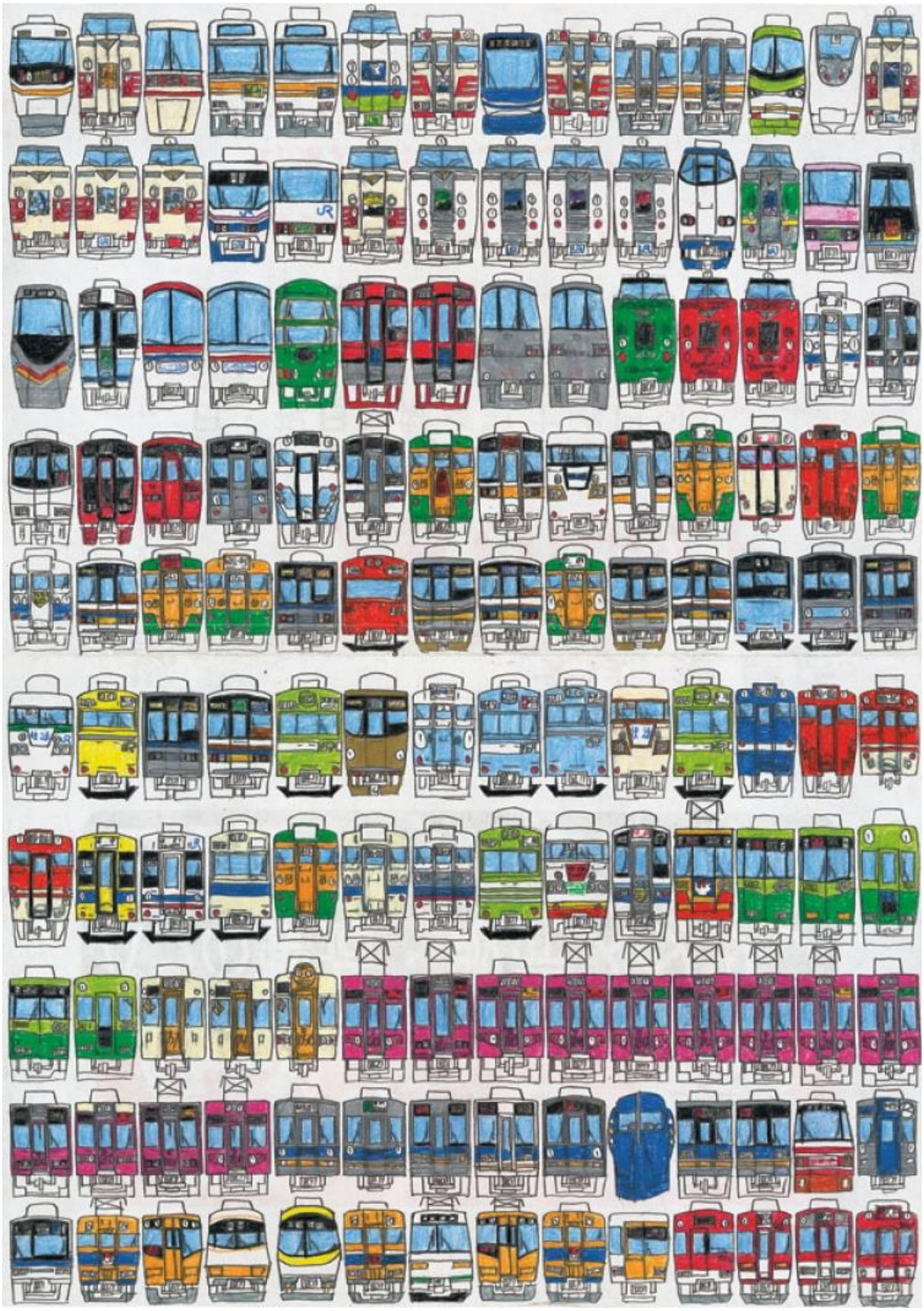

Fig. 13: Hidenori Motooka, Trains 3, 1995, graphite and colour pencil on paper, 36,5 x 26 cm, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne.

Of course Picasso has largely deserved his status in the grand history of art. But would have this viewer appreciated his work as much, had it been confined to the CAB instead of displayed in some the renown museums around the world? I doubt it, particularly considering that Picasso's aesthetics are not necessarily easily digestible. Likewise, would have their reaction to Art Brut been any different had they first encountered it at the temporary Art Brut exhibition that took place at the Musée d'Orsay in 2014? The context impacts viewers reactions, and I suspect the status of the Musée d'Orsay as a reputable art institution would have positively impacted this viewer's reaction to Art Brut. As such, this case is extremely telling of the influence and authority modern museums exercise on our culture and society. Another review goes:

> "We have visited the museum without knowing what "Art Brut" means. It is a nice collection but we probably did not understand the meaning of most of the 'disturbed' pieces. There were very few pieces that I really liked. Oh well!"[133]

This viewer who, while having not fully understood the exhibited pieces nor having truly appreciated them, recognizes that their lack of comprehension might have affected their experience of them. Most prominently, while confusion was certainly part of their experience, they leave no place for revolt. The "Oh well!" concluding the review effectively summarises that this is only their personal opinion and experience, thus not drawing any negative conclusion on the value of Art Brut. As opposed to the previously analysed review, this one does not establish any comparison with other forms of art they are already familiar with, thus fully embracing the legitimacy of Art Brut as existing outside of the circuit of "official art."

This sense of amateurism and out-of-placeness however appears to be a critique commonly applied to anti-museums. Looking at the worst Tripadvisor reviews written on account of the Museum of Jurassic Technology, Wilson's museum is alternatively characterised as "Tourist Trap," a "Must-Miss Museum," as "Quirky Rubbish," or as a "Museum of Random Crap."[134] A particularly compelling review, entitles "Monomania writ large," concludes "I came out and greeted the daylight with a sense of relief to be back in a world peopled with many

[133] Tripavisor, "Collection de l'Art Brut."
[134] "The Museum of Jurassic Technology," Tripadvisor, accessed June 12, 2022, https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g32272-d105176-Reviews-or10-Museum_of_Jurassic_Technology-Culver_City_California.html.

viewpoints."[135] It is an understandable statement to make, and a proof that the mechanisms employed by the MJT, even when understood, do not charm everyone, which is only natural. David Wilson has never tried sensationalizing his museum exhibits. Ironically enough, as much as Barnum gained his reputation by boasting sensationalism, Wilson earned his by keeping it quiet. Part of the MJT's success reside in its mystery. People wander inside, not knowing what to expect. It functions on the postulate that an individual entering a place calling itself a "museum" comes in prepared to believe all the information presented to them, for the very status of these institutions suffices to breed authenticity. As one would expect, the full effect of the MJT may only be felt when one does not know the slightest thing about its peculiar endeavour, when the spectator is virgin from any expectations other than these of a typical museum visit. A well-rounded analysis of this may actually be found amongst the museum's Tripdavisor reviews. Entitled "An elaborate joke, better read about than visited," it perfectly summarises the way in which the MJT has adopted a pedantic tone in order to provoke the sublime. As the author justly puts it, "to appreciate the joke requires a long process most people will not wish to endure." This comment relates to an aspect museum visiting occurring in all types of institutions, which is that most viewers never read labels in full, and for good reason: it gets exhausting. Museum fatigue and the accompanying decrease of attention often sets in soon during a museum visit, generally leading visitors to end their experience on a "quasi-drunken ambling past the final displays." This phenomenon is largely caused not only by the effort required for the reading of lengthy explanatory labels, but also by the uniformity of display patterns and the "at times obsessive symmetry of 'hangs'." The typical "curatorial inattention to high and low points in significance" further intensifies this phenomenon, as if viewers were meant to enter each new room with a "fresh, invigorated eye and no one to get in the way of their viewing."[136] David Wilson's choice to play off this and ignore museum fatigue was a risky bet. "I got bored and frustrated much to fast to even get close to the joke's abstruse punchline, much less to enjoy it," the author of the review goes on to explain.[137] The truth is, there is no *punchline*. Or rather, if one should insist on considering the MJT as a joke, the punchlines are everywhere. It is a matter of each viewer's sensitivity and perception to catch one of them, and at what point in the visit it shall happen. The great irony of this review is that its author half-heartedly admits the very reason why he did not enjoy the MJT and why they have rated it so poorly: they knew. As such, this viewer's expectation for something grandiose

[135] Tripadvisor, "The Museum of Jurassic Technology."
[136] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museums," 138.
[137] Tripadvisor, "The Museum of Jurassic Technology."

killed the subtlety of the MJT's displays. Once viewers indulge into an experience they expect to be out of the ordinary, the lack of surprise is bound to dull the experience. The MJT needs to catch its viewers off-guard to fully function. That is why David Wilson, when publicly speaking about his museum, never reveals the twist, why its aficionados keep it quiet, why my friend remained so cryptic in his explanation. Most importantly, that is why the fictional nature of some of the exhibits is not revealed anywhere in the MJT. David Wilson explained to me that the publication of Lawrence Weschler's *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* greatly influenced this type of viewership, and even prompted the apparition of a new kind of audience. Indeed, Weschler's in-depth search for the truth and systematic undermining of the MJT's tales pushed many readers and journalists to believe the integrality of the exhibits to be fake. Eventually, more journal articles were written finding their source in this postulate, thus further spreading this erroneous interpretation. This belief certainly altered the experience of many visitors, sadly undermining the brio and imagination David Wilson and his team have put in the creation of such well-rounded fables. I am well aware that I have sort of followed on Weschler's path throughout this thesis, and there certainly is a kind of thrill to finding answers, to tracing back the inspirations for the stories that the MJT presents us with. But to focus on playing the sleuth is to miss the point of the Museum of Jurassic Technology. It has become a sort of game to me, over the past few years, the recount the story of the *Deprong Mori* in full details to people. More often than not, my interlocutor would seem surprised, slightly confused, and frankly amazed that such a creature could exist. They would believe it almost every time. The beauty of was not to try and dupe them, but to find out how keen each and every one of them were on believing the extraordinary.

Interestingly, some viewers' accounts relate a complete misunderstanding of the MJT. Indeed, it appears that a portion of visitors enter the museum, it appears as if a portion of visitors enter the MJT, spend a bit of time in there and then simply leave without having seized its strangeness in the slightest. "Don't go if you are not fond of ancient history, especially European history," warns a review.[138] There is something almost tragic in the fact that one would be so candid as to believe everything displayed in the Museum of Jurassic Technology is real. Yet the truth is, they cannot be blamed. It seems to that it is not so much about the sheer naïveté of these viewers, but rather about the problematic relationship we, in the Western world, entertain with museums and their reputation as immutable authoritative institutions. If museums have come to be increasingly seen as sites of leisure in recent years, the idea that they ought to be vessels of empirical knowledge,

[138] Tripadvisor, "The Museum of Jurassic Technology."

that a museum visit is synonymous with intellectual enlightenment, is still very much tied up in our culture. Nothing strange, then, about the fact that upon entering a space named *Museum*, paying an admittance fee, and being immersed in an environment fully mimicking this of an "actual" museum, one would feel safe from not questioning its veracity. We all are just as credulous as any upon starting our visit. If something is worth being exhibited, then there must be a reason. The artefact must have historical significance, be valuable, or be a conveyor of knowledge. But we forget that the criterions for this selection have been made by humans just like us, incapable of pure objectivity. One of the great advantages of anti-museums is that the public, if a minimum informed, already knows it is biased before even entering its premises. By all accounts, while it appears the educative aspect of these institutions still counts as one of the major reasons for visitors interest, the entertainment aspect seems to play a central role nowadays. I would argue that people still, to some extent, expect to draw some type of inspiration from a museum visit. I will not go as far as talking of being wonderstruck, or experiencing a brush with the sublime, but a certain portion of viewers certainly expect something *bigger* than the simple acquisition of new knowledge. The role of museums might be comparable to this of an artwork, as expressed by Alejandro Jodorowski. According to him, the fundamental purpose of any work of art is to change life. That is not to say visitors should exit a museum completely anew or a better person, but rather that a museum visit should be just as life-changing as a good film or book. Most of the time, when we say "this book changed my life!", what we truly mean is that it touched us on a deep level, that, for the time we were engaging with it we were transported elsewhere. Perhaps it even stuck with us a little, and a certain feeling of it subsists somewhere at the confines of our mind. Museums have the potential of awaking a similar impression within us. Yet, nowadays, it appears as anti-museums might be the ones most prone to provoking and entertaining this magic.

Wonderful surprises :

As mostly everyone, I was tricked by the Museum of Jurassic Technology. My story with anti-museums began on a sunny January morning in Los Angeles. I was sitting at my friend's kitchen table, deciding on the program of the day, when he mentioned the MJT. "What is it?", I asked, my curiosity piqued by the absurdity and anachronism of the name. A cheeky smile stretched onto his face as he simply retorted "You're gonna love it." That was the extent of the information I could obtain from him. So be it. A couple cups of coffee later, we were on our way to Culver City, and I soon found myself roaming the museum's dimly lit galleries. It is

only about one third into the visit that I started realising something was off. Funnily enough, it is while reading Athanasius Kircher's extensive biography that doubt truly started creeping its way into my mind. I was well aware that this genius Jesuit Polymath was indeed a historical figure. I had heard of his extraordinary feats, of his Renaissance museum in the Roman College, of the prodigious amount of literature he had produced over his life-time. The endless paragraph unrolling before my eyes described him in glowing terms as an "inventor, composer, geographer, geologist, Egyptologist, historian, adventurer, philosopher, proprietor of one of the first public museums, physicist, mathematician, naturalist, astronomer, archeologist, author of more than 40 published works."[139] In the context of the MJT, this all suddenly appeared to be too much. I was just finishing reading the part of Kircher's biography where he had miraculously survived a confrontation with a whole cohort of bloodthirsty cavalrymen attempting to hang him from a tree when it hit me. That "wait a second…" moment, as Downing has characterized it.[140] "Do you realise what this place is?", I heard my friend whisper. His cheeky smile was back. That was all the confirmation I needed. For a brief moment, I felt stupid. But this feeling faded away at quickly as it had come, leaving in its place a sort of exalted wonder. There was something fabulously refreshing in realising this was all a finely curated joke, in suddenly taking in to laugh whole-heartedly in a museum context. I remember stepping out of the museum as dusk was wrapping its warm colours around the city. Perhaps it was the singular beauty of it all, or perhaps it was the MJT, but in this moment, and for the hours that followed, the world seemed gloriously boundless. It was the17th century and I was a bourgeois naturalist exiting Athanasius Kircher's marvelous museum.

While this may sound cheesy, this is the effect such a museum may have on its visitors. Literature on the MJT is filled with accounts of wonderstruck authors – "The beauty of it all was that it seemed as if everything I came across could be real." – and the reaction of most "standard" visitors, while it may take different forms, goes along the same path. our discussion, David Wilson recounted the story of a young man in his early twenties. A regular visitor to the MJT, he once came up to Wilson saying that the museum had on him the impact he should feel when going to the synagogue.[141] An impression thus comparable to this felt by Goethe on his very first museum visit, as mentioned in the first chapter. These instances might bring us to wonder why this spiritual aspect, this surrendering, appear to have disappeared from modern

[139] "The Life of Athanasius Kircher," The Museum of Jurassic Technology, accessed January 13, 2022, https://mjt.org/exhibits/kircher/Knots.html.
[140] Downing, "So Boring It Must Be True," 47.
[141] Wilson, Interview.

museums. Perhaps it is to do with the force of the habit, with centuries of being quasi-effortlessly granted access to some of the world greatest marvels. Or, more so, that the accompanying explanations and sets of behaviours imposed to viewers in museums have dimmed their wondrous impact, while humanity has draped itself in the wishful illusion that there is little point in taking interest in what museums present us with because we *already know.* The MJT inverts this tendency by standing as a concrete expression of the fact we take knowledge for granted. It wraps the questionable in the fantasy of authenticity, thus stimulating further curiosity. By making the outlandish plausible, by prompting viewers to believe the unimaginable, the Museum of Jurassic Technology questions whether one can believe everything one sees, and whether authenticity truly matters in the end. In the MJT, the "know-it-all becomes the know-nothing," and visitors ca, only resort to learning anew the value of wonder.[142] About his visit to the MJT, Spencer Downing notes "more importantly, I felt, was wether or not I had the capacity to drop my defenses, to simply be free to wonder."[143] This, perhaps, is the element that determines whether or not one will appreciate the experience of the MJT, or of any anti-museum, for that matter. These institutions require us to surrender, to drop the barrier of what we hold for truth and let the novelty flood in. If each and everyone's subjective taste plays a role in one's appreciation of an anti-museum, reluctance to venture into the foreign territory they represent can only be considered comprehensible. Modern museums are still more or less unconsciously considered as pillars to our societies' most fundamental values. However outdated these might be, no one enjoys their cultural foundations being shaken down.

If people wander inside the MJT without knowing what to expect, Wilson, for his part, does not expect anything from his viewers. He believes this stance to be essential in order to leave space for them to do their share of the work and live a meaningful personal experience. He however pointed out the fact many visitors seem to laugh uncontrollably throughout their visit, and that he does not quite understand what it is they find so funny.[144] This declaration was baffling to me as, once I had let my barriers down upon my first visit, I could not help but continuously laugh at the exhibits. Surely, many of them are hilarious in their absurdity and ludicrous aspect, but there was something way deeper to this reaction. It seems as if the emotional response to the MJT may be so profound, the provoked wonder so intense, that some viewers can only resort to laughing. It is one physical manifestation of the intensity of wonder as any other, and

[142] Downing, "So Boring It Must Be True," 60.
[143] Downing, "So Boring It Must Be True," 47.
[144] Wilson, Interview.

it is actually rather fitting with Wilson's definition of wonder as loss of one's cognitive apparatus. And after all, as he expressed, "muse," the root word of "museum," is only one letter short from "amuse."[145]

The process of the museum visit is "not restricted to the acquisition of factual information, but needs to foster the growth and development of the complete person," something anti-museums generally tend to achieve. The fact they manage where most modern museums fail is most likely due to the fact anti-museums seek to be more profoundly in touch with both visitors' feelings and the world surrounding them. Roy Hattersley suggests that showing viewers that institutions are controlled and structured by people rather than the other way around and helping them analyzing the decisions and processes through which "aesthetic and other value judgements are made" is a way of encouraging them to act with awareness.[146] That is precisely what most anti-museums do. Instead of simply letting visitors wandering from one display to the other, from one room to the next, absorbing information advertised as essential, they open on the very postulate that their endeavour is purely subjective – except in the case of the MJT, obviously. This provides visitors with the tools to work out independent opinions, to make sense of their experience and of the information they are taking in. Carol Duncan argues that "to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and it highest values and truths." This role grants them the ability to shape the status of individuals in a given community or society, meaning that those equipped to perform that those equipped to perform the museum ritual find their identity confirmed by the institution and are thus elevated.[147] But what happens when a particular museum does not offer any of the usual cues, when the ritual performance is undermined? The status of visitors is shuffled, the trend inverted, and the general rules of museums give way to a new form of freedom. Suddenly, it is not a matter of who is educated enough anymore, but rather who can transcend the unusual.

The Viktor Wynd Museum certainly is a special case in regard to wonder. Indeed, while it is likely not the kind of museum that might suffuse its viewers with poetic awe, it appears to mostly receive laudatory reviews. Despite its questionable aspects, the wondrous feeling of being transported in another era and, most importantly, in another person's strange mind is definitely to be felt in the VWM. Its marked off, heterotopic environment and shocking sights force the normal laws of humanity to exercise differently. The most horrid of artefacts eventually lose of their power, for there rapidly comes a point where one becomes aware of

[145] Wilson, Interview.
[146] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museums," 135.
[147] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 8.

their fraudulent character. As a consequence, the unusual, the alien, the outrageous that is to be encountered in Wynd's *wunderkabinnet* becomes almost comical. Anti-museums such as the VWM allow for the emergence of a space in which visitors can "step back from the practical concerns and social relations of everyday life and look at themselves and their world with different thoughts and feelings."[148] Allow a sight of the pre-Enlightenment world, not necessarily a faithful representation of what real cabinets of curiosity would look like, but close enough to our modern view of them. As a result, the VWM might encourage viewers to cultivate their inner world.

Andrew McClellan informs us that the public's confidence in forming aesthetic judgments "decreases beyond a museum's walls," which can only be interpreted as a compelling expression of viewers' blind trust in museum guidance. Providing cues constitutes one of the museum's essential roles and it would appear that, more often than not, viewers are simply content to follow these.[149] Despite its lack of cues, reactions to the Collection de l'Art Brut generally seem to be suffused with a certain tenderness and admiration. The encounter with Art Brut is a profoundly moving one, for it establishes an intimate relationship between author and viewer in which one is confronted with what may possibly constitute the most earnest expression of humanity, with the immense joys and unimaginable sufferings it implies. Because Art Brut is honest like no other form of art is, it offers a peep into worlds that are norammly concealed, to such an extent that the experience is at once profoundly other and personal. As Franklin as stated of his visit to the CAB, "*we feel* the churning emotion and experiences in their lives in a still vivid and fresh form, we feel some level of involvement and common humanity." Sympathy might indeed emerge as strong feeling in the context of the CAB. The Collection was rather deserted on my first visit, but I remember an interaction with another visitor that resembled nothing I had ever experienced in a museum. I was so absorbed by a video depicting Vahan Poladian showcasing his collection of heavily ornamented handmade costumes that I did not immediately realise a stranger had joined in. The author, whose 16 years spent in the Armenian Home in Saint Raphael were "characterised by autistic withdrawal and creative enthusiasm," was suffused with great joy as the video showed him climbing down the stairway of the Home, sporting another one of his creation on new each floor. His giggles were contagious and, as the video faded to black, I met the other viewer's gaze. We were both smiling with great tenderness. I picked up a deep feeling of mutual comprehension, not just between

[148] Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 11.
[149] Andrew McClellan, "Introduction," *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millenium*, ed. Andrew McClellan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), xiiii.

the two of us, but the *three* of us. Her, Polodian, and I. This to me was an eloquent example of the realization that might strike us at the contact of Art Brut, which Franklin has brilliantly phrased: "we are not completely outside looking in. It might be outsider art, but it makes everyone appreciate the extent to which we are all outsiders, potentially. Insiders, only until further notice."[150] Their art prompts us to respond on an emotional level, a reaction that, whether positive or negative, is inevitable. It forces us to reflect on questions cruelty and barbaric injustice. It grants us an insight into "mental ill health and its connection to individual biographies; it gives new angles on behaviour once thought depraved and unnatural; it warns of the dangers of societies that are not empathetic and loving." Reviews generally characterize the institution as "moving," "bold," or "poignant," while the aesthetic qualities of the artworks are generally perceived as "exotic," "unusual," even constituting "some of the most intricate work of art" one viewer has ever seen.[151] One visitor relates having spent 4 hours slowly ambling through the Collection's galleries, absorbed by the artworks and taking in the authors' stories which he considers as a fertile ground for introspection and self-reflection. Art Brut belongs to the "possible worlds we create; it derives from them, and it is a part of them." We can only sympathise and empathise with its authors as we relate to their art on a profound level. As a consequence, viewers exit the CAB not with the sensation of having improved their cultural capital, but of having been "emotionally engaged with its artists and their lives and circumstances in a much broader and possibly more valuable experience." [152] For Michel Thévoz, the experience of Art Brut is prone to revealing a suppressed creativity in the viewer. It is a psychologically powerful experience, for it reveals the frustrations that culture, education and social norms have forged within us, thus prompting visitors to review their value system. More than an art museum, the curator considers the Collection de l'Art Brut as a museum of fundamental human experiments, relating to the benefits and frustrations brought to us by culture.[153] The weekly debates with visitors held in the early days of the Collection only confirmed this. During these exchanges, not only would viewers not reject Art Brut nor consider it "crazy art," but those seances would often lead to fundamental philosophical questions. In the end, Thévoz found out, the only real "issue" – if one may name it as such - most visitors ever had with Art Brut was never its legitimacy, but the deep questioning it sparked within them. I mentioned to Michel Thévoz the fact I had been surprised to discover a temporary

[150] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 37.
[151] Tripadvisor, "Collection de l'Art Brut."
[152] Franklin, *Anti-Museum*, 30-1.
[153] Thévoz, Interview.

exhibition of Art Brut had taken place in the Musée d'Orsay, temple of artistic culture par excellence, since this idea seems fundamentally opposed to Dubuffet's principles. His answer was that the time finally had come when Art Brut had gain its legitimate place in the art-world. While the institutionalization and marketisation of Art Brut is progressively happening but Michel Thévoz believes that, far from impacting its authenticity, he considers this as an achievement and the proof that the value of Art Brut is finally truly recognized. To him, Art Brut remains "perfectly intact," and the growing success of its authors has not affected the genuineness of their productions.[154] He cited the example of Robillard, author of a famous series of riffles made from discarded objects and some of the most famous pieces displayed in the CAB. Recently, at the occasion of the author's 90th birthday, they informed Robillard that a riffle they had bought from him for 300 Swiss francs some decades ago had now reached an estimated value of 30.000 Swiss Francs. Thévoz expected some sort of indiganation, but Robillard's reaction was one of pure jubilation. As the ex-curator insisted upon, the issue, if there ever was one, would be the way in which capitalism and wider historical narratives appropriate Art Brut. The authors' intentions however remain as pure and profound as ever.

According to him, Art Brut is generally more appreciated by viewers equipped with an average or even little knowledge of the art world rather than by "intellectuals". It is particularly the case when these visitors happen to entertain a relation to craftmanship, whether it is through their job or personal interest. Because the pieces exhibited are often remarkable pieces of craftmanship. In essence, their appreciation of the mere craftmanship of the pieces is whole as it is less polluted by cultural standards. Vera L. Zoldberg, in her essay "An Elite Experience for Everyone: Art Museums, the Public, and Cultural Literacy," relates that "poorly educated blue-collar" and rural workers generally feel intimidated and distressed in the solemnity of the museum environment. They feel "unprepared for the esoteric qualities of the works and unable to understand poorly marked directions, inadequate labels, and seemingly hostile guards."[155] Interestingly, however, this portion of the public shows more appreciation for folkloric and marginalized art – produced by social and ethnic minorities – for a variety of reasons. For one, the scholarly discourse that is purportedly required to understand art here becomes inexistent. In addition to this, such artworks embody handicrafts and refinements such visitors could relate to.[156] That is one of the aims of Art Brut: transcending a popular public through popular art.

[154] Thévoz, Interview.
[155] Zolberg, "An Elite Experience for Everyone," 57.
[156] Zolberg, "An Elite Experience for Everyone," 58.

Conclusion:

Reactions to anti-museums are bound to be ambivalent. For one, as this thesis has sought to highlight, they most often are the produce of a single collector's mind and ideal. Even though a sort of community develops around each of these institution, growing the teams behind their exhibitions and thus creating a multiplicity of profiles, this subjectivity may have per effect to create a rather "niche" experience for viewers. Yet, the beautiful thing is that they are susceptible of speaking to anyone, regardless of one's social status or education. As Kenneth Hudson has pointed out, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'visitors were admitted as a privilege, not as a right, and consequently gratitude and admiration, was required of them, leaving little space for criticism. This attitude persisted long after the widespread establishment of public museums in the modern sense."[157] This might in part explain the revolt some viewers may feel upon visiting anti-museums. One could indeed consider that the wide success of traditional museums is in part caused by the illusion of neutrality they reflect, an aspect that is utterly absent in the context of anti-museums. The second reason should be obvious by now, for it stands as the very definition of the anti- museum. They exist in order to undermine the functioning of traditional museum. As such, they are bound to shake their viewers base, to precipitate them for a dive into the unknown. Each anti-museum is, by definition, new and different. Novelty and difference can be frightening to us viewers. As human beings we are profoundly attached to the fixture of our societies. We despise having our certainties shaken just as much as we loathe questioning all we take for granted. But it is essential.

[157] Wright, "The Quality of Visitor's Experience in Art Museum," 123.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, museums exist in part to "acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects, artefacts, and works of art of various kinds." By emphasizing the creative aspect of collecting, this thesis has sought to demonstrate the subjectivity that lies at the very heart of the museum enterprise. Their collections are none other than the product of years of careful selection, of amassing of artefacts, artworks, and specimens that were, at some point in the past, deemed valuable and worthy of being conserved and displayed to the gaze of others. Museum collections thus only constitute a curated interpretation of the past, and their so-called objectivity is none other than widely agreed upon interpretation. This is a reality viewers should be aware of. Luckily, the anti-museum project, in its wide scheme, aims at institutional demystification. While uniformly opposed to the standards of traditional museums, anti-museums cannot stand as an undivided antagonism. This has been clearly demonstrated by the fundamental differences existing between the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Collection de l'Art Brut, and the Viktor Wynd Museum. While the MJT is susceptible of reintegrating its patrons to wonder by prompting them to believe astonishing stories, it also raises questions the importance of authenticity in traditional museums. The CAB's status as a site of disruption derives from the very nature of the art it exhibits. While it may be unsettling, it surely breathes hope in its viewers by revealing the reality that all of us are capable of freeing and expressing ourselves through creation. Finally, the VWM allows its public to embark on a strange journey through Wynd's imaginary world, at once transporting viewers through time and perceptions while enabling them to satisfy their morbid curiosity.

By rejecting the framing and limitations of traditional museological conjunctures, anti-museums open new doors for a myriad of possible alternatives to rise and develop. Transposition of their point of focus from the conventional academic and nationalistic interests of traditional museums allows them to take part in political and artistic practice all the while breaking links with "the conventional museum as an institution of cultural political governance." These evolutions in museum conventions correspond with the ever changing worlds of the visitors they seek to address. Through the adoption of shifting paradigms coinciding to the public's sensitivity, anti-museums refuse to take on an authoritarian status and set themselves on equal footing to visitors, thus creating a deeply democratic experience.[158]

[158] Pearce, "Collecting Reconsidered," 202.

One aspect that truly differentiates anti-museums from most modern ones it their trust in visitors' intelligence. Anti-museums are not interested in didacticism nor instruction, they reduce the mediation of visitors' gaze to its strict minimum. No attempt is made at reproducing the modern museum authoritarian status nor at taking on the role arbiter of taste. Instead, they seek to provide viewers with an experience in which they are not solely receivers of information but active performers.[159] According to Franklin, the restriction of labelling to its strict minimum in most anti-museums participates in the reduction of museum fatigue, but also produces a higher engagement from the part of visitors.

New Museum director Lisa Phillips about anti-museums: "they are not a place for preserving and recording history, but a place where history is made."[160] They are exciting places to discover as they directly participate in the shifting relationships between audience and institution and witness the expansion of museum practices. As Franklin argues, by "being more politically, culturally, socially and publicly facing, active and embedded spatially, many of these anti-museums have created new and embryonic art publics among those that had remained relative strangers to the conventional art museum."[161]

It is interesting to consider the ways in which the concept of the anti-museum might impact viewers on a larger scale. By developing the public's critical eye, they might prompt an intellectual deconstruction of traditions as societal foundations. Through the borrowing of traditional museums practices, codes, and display methods, anti-museums entertain the potential of prompting viewers to interrogate the museum function and status. The discovery and experience of anti-museums might constitute an unsettling experience for all of us. Feelings of confusion and revolt are, as we have seen, likely to emerge as one is faced at once with the familiar and the alien. But most visitors are likely to find this novelty attractive and to indulge into it. Once this takes place, anti-museums come to stand as a threshold leading into a world of boundless possibilities, in which visitors are susceptible of realising there is much more to be considered than museums care to show. Thus, by refuting the widely agreed upon myth according to which museums breed legitimacy, anti-museums encourage systemic critique from the part of viewers. The development of the public's critical eye appears as essential in our age of information, particularly when issues such as the one we are facing today are at stake. As such, the role of anti-museums certainly is not the overthrowing of the modern museum model, but rather the demonstration that there exists more than one and only way of presenting the

[159] Franklin, Anti-Museum, 126.
[160] Franklin, Anti-Museum, 121.
[161] Franklin, Anti-Museum, 123.

world around us. The fact the conceptualization of traditional museums has been adopted for centuries does not make them the only viable way of presenting history, nor is it immutable. By developing the public's critical eye, they might prompt an intellectual deconstruction of traditions as societal foundations. In essence, the hope is that the frequentation of anti-museums may provoke a mental application of Julian Spalding eloquent quote "instead of encouraging their visitors to believe everything they see, it would be better if museums hung over their doors banners reading 'Doubt all you who enter here'."[162] Hence, anti-museums explore our open-mindedness, or rather our lack thereof. Museums certainly are not the first enemy to tackle, but they might serve as an effective starting point for those sensible to these institutions.

By focusing on anti-museums, this thesis has thus sought to show they can teach us that making use of our critical sense is fundamental, but that it may also prompt us to revive the wonder that occupied a central role in the Renaissance and that still plays a much needed role in our lives. Marvels are all around, our task is simply to pay attention. The sad truth is that we constantly need to reinvent new ways of generating wonder. Because we are human beings, we get used to the marvelous. We get weary even in the face of the grandest wonders. Anti-museums however provides us at once with a renewed comprehension of the fabricated aspect of our modern principles and a mean of retrieving the poetry that is still to be found all around us. As such, the Museum of Jurassic Technology, the Collection de l'Art Brut, and the Viktor Wynd Museum are imbued with the power of restoring wonder.

[162] Spalding, The Poetic Museum, 25.

Appendix:

Conversation with Michel Thévoz :

Marie Sophie Danckaert : J'imagine que trouver un lieu et un contexte appropriés à l'exposition d'une collection ayant pour fondement même une sorte de rébellion à l'égard des musées traditionnels a dû être un certain challenge ?

Michel Thévoz : C'était problématique parce que le fondateur de la Collection de l'Art Brut, Jean Dubuffet, voulait un lieu qui marque bien le caractère anti-culturel et anti-muséographique de sa collection. Donc malgré des invitations prestigieuses, reçues notamment de la part du Centre Georges Pompidou, il préférait un lieu modeste. Il voulait même éviter la France. Il avait dans l'idée que la Suisse était un pays moins « enculturé », pour reprendre son expression, que la France, et surtout moins que Paris. Il haïssait le parisianisme. Il estimait donc que pour une collection d'art modeste Paris aurait été le dernier lieu concevable. Alors, étant donné l'idée qu'il se faisait de la Suisse, et notamment du Canton de Vaud, et comme il se trouvait que j'étais moi-même suisse, en relation avec lui, et que j'étudiais l'Art Brut, il s'est dit que ce serait sympathique que cette Collection aille dans un lieu très modeste. Il pensait d'abord à un petit bourg dans le Canton de Vaud, donc il m'a demandé de prospecter de ce côté-là. Tel était l'état d'esprit, et le problème qui se posait, effectivement, était d'éviter des lieux hyper culturels, branchés, et d'aller là où la Collection devrait se sentir le mieux.

MD : Le lieu adopte pourtant les codes du musée, est-ce qu'il était comme ça à l'ouverture ? Je veux dire avec tous ces éclairages, ces installations…

MT : C'était comme ça mais il y a peut-être eu quelque chose d'un malentendu providentiel, bénéfique. C'est-à-dire que Dubuffet n'imaginait même pas un musée mais un petit institut, ouvert seulement aux personnes vraiment très initiées, ou à ceux qui s'intéresseraient à l'Art Brut, à cet art des exclus et de ceux qui étaient rejetés par la société… Un petit institut où les gens informés de l'Art Brut viendraient étudier, un lieu quasiment clandestin. C'est un peu l'idée qu'il se faisait de cette institution. Alors j'ai prospecté, en vain, parce que trouver un petit bourg dans le Canton de Vaud qui accueillerait la Collection de l'Art Brut c'était mission impossible. Tandis qu'à Lausanne, où j'avais des ouvertures, où il y avait quand même des gens

informés de l'Art Brut, là j'ai pu trouver un lieu. Et un lieu vraiment inattendu, qui allait au-delà de nos espérances. En tant que conservateur de musée, j'ai eu le réflexe de faire aménager les lieux techniquement, en respectant les normes de sécurité d'hydrométrie, de température, d'éclairage, etcetera... Les normes qui sont celles d'un musée. Donc pour cet institut j'ai essayé à la fois d'éviter le symbolisme « musée », c'est-à-dire le temple des muses, et de bien respecter les normes techniques d'un musée. Le propos c'est de conserver et de montrer dans les meilleures conditions possibles, alors ça j'ai essayé de le respecter, d'où ce que vous notez. Effectivement la Collection de l'Art Brut répond aux exigences muséographiques normales.

MD : Évidemment, tout cela est indispensable à la conservation des œuvres.

MT : Sans aucun doute. Surtout pour des objets fragiles, souvent faits dans des matériaux insolites. Donc il fallait que toutes les conditions soient spécialement réunies techniquement.

MD : J'ai lu à plusieurs reprises que la Collection de l'Art Brut était définie comme étant un « anti-musée ». Ce terme interroge le statut des musées traditionnels et évoque un point de vue critique envers ces institutions. Comment définiriez-vous un « anti-musée » et dans quelle mesure pensez-vous que la Collection de l'Art Brut appartient à cette catégorie ?

MT : Dans la mesure où on a affaire à une expression qui en elle-même est contestataire par rapport à l'idée que nous nous faisons de l'Art, à l'Institution artistique. C'est même une mise en question fondamentale du concept même de musée et c'est ce qu'il y a de paradoxal. Le musée, au fond, est né du fait qu'on a réuni dans un lieu très solennel, une sorte de temple, la production exceptionnelle d'artistes, c'est-à-dire de gens qui ont cultivé cette faculté, qui est pourtant celle de tout un chacun, qu'ont tous les enfants, de créer. Les enfants chantent, dansent, dessinent, etcetera. Mais dans notre culture l'éducation consiste certainement à développer la pensée intellectuelle ainsi que la pensée visuelle et à inhiber le reste. De sorte que ce qui est inhibé est toujours tabou, solennisé. On le sacralise parce que c'est quasiment interdit. Au fond le musée est né de ça, de montrer des ouvrages qui sont devenus exceptionnels dans notre culture. Quand on reprend leur histoire il s'agit d'un simple transfert de ce qui était sacré, religieux, magique, dans un lieu d'exposition qui conserve néanmoins ce caractère de sacralité. Le musée, au fond, est né dans l'Antiquité grecque, dans ces temples qui étaient surchargés d'ex-votos. Finalement, ces temples ne parvenaient plus à contenir tous ces objets sacrés, de sorte qu'on les a mis dans des dépôts. Il s'est trouvé des concierges qui ont fait visiter ces dépôts

et des gens sont allés les voir non plus dans un esprit de religion mais pour voir des choses belles. Mais cette beauté conserve encore de cette sacralité. L'histoire du musée continue, le simple transfert d'objets dans des musées d'objets qui proviennent d'églises ne leur fait pas perdre leur côté sacré. Il y a, dans le musée, cette idée de sacralité. Et la Collection de l'Art Brut va à l'encontre de cette idée de sacralité, la conteste. Le propos de la Collection de l'Art Brut c'est de faire ressortir que les impulsions artistiques, visuelles, ou autres, sont aussi partagées que le bon sens. Simplement, il s'agit de les réveiller, de remettre en cause cette sélection et ce détournement de l'activité artistique. Surtout aujourd'hui. Je pense que le Musée de l'Art Brut est plus contestataire que jamais dans une époque où l'art fait l'objet d'une sacralité nouvelle, puisqu'aujourd'hui qu'est-ce qui est sacré, c'est le capital, c'est l'argent !

MD : Oui, les sommes énormes dépensées dans l'art contemporain en attestent.

MT : Oui c'est ça, aujourd'hui ce qui a détrôné Dieu c'est le dollar. Enfin je retarde un peu, je devrais aller dans les monnaies chinoises. Mais, aujourd'hui, il y a un détournement de l'art donc le fait de montrer une collection de gens qui n'ont pas en tête la mercantilisation, la marchandisation de leur activité c'est une contestation de ce qu'est devenu l'institution artistique dans notre société.

MD : J'ai entendu dans un entretien sur la RTS que vous considériez la visite de l'Art Brut comme pouvant être une expérience existentielle personnelle pour les spectateurs. Pourriez-vous m'en dire plus ? Est-ce que c'est justement parce que c'est un art que nous n'avons pas l'habitude de voir et qu'il nous révèle quelque chose par rapport à nous-même, à notre propre créativité ?

MT : Oui, je le pense, d'après les réactions que j'ai pu percevoir de la part des visiteurs. Effectivement, il y a peut-être cette réaction primaire de « mon fils de quatre ans en fait autant ». Et, finalement, oui. Si le fils de quatre ans en fait autant, eh bien, pourquoi ne pas poursuivre ? Ça réveille peut-être une créativité qui a été refoulée, c'est quelque chose de presque un peu psychanalytique je dirais. À savoir que ce musée montre quelque chose dont nous avons été frustrés par une éducation, par des valeurs, par des normes. C'est un retour du refoulé, c'est en cela que c'est une expérience psychologiquement forte. Les gens voient ce dont ils ont été privés et qui peut-être les incitent à revoir leur système de valeurs. Donc, ce n'est pas simplement un

musée d'art, c'est un musée beaucoup plus global d'expériences fondamentales sur notre culture, sur ce qu'elle nous a apporté mais aussi sur ce dont elle nous a frustré.

MD : Est-ce que vous pensez que l'Art Brut puisse être dans une certaine mesure une création de la culture « mainstream » afin d'échapper à ses propres limites ?

MT : L'Art Brut, économiquement et aussi socialement, c'est le fait d'une production étrangère au marché de l'art, étrangère aussi au vedettariat, aux modes de communication que nous avons instaurés… Il réveille chez tout un chacun quelque chose de perdu, c'est l'objet perdu.

MD : J'ai visité l'Art Brut quelque fois et j'ai remarqué que certaines personnes semblaient soit ébahies soit un peu mal à l'aise devant les œuvres exposées. Je me suis demandée si cela était dû à l'inconfort d'être mis face au trouble mental d'un individu ou s'il s'agissait justement d'une sorte d'inconfort existentiel.

MT : Oui, on devrait même pouvoir mesurer ça. Dans un musée généralement on mesure son succès au nombre de visiteurs. Mais on devrait aussi pouvoir analyser la qualité de la visite, le mode de communication. Le fait est que, dans les musées traditionnels, la réaction est plutôt d'admiration, de dévotion, de révérence devant quelque chose de surhumain, de transcendant. Au musée de l'Art Brut, non. Je pense que c'est beaucoup plus problématique, ça amène à se poser des questions. Au départ, nous proposions régulièrement de petits entretiens pour informer les gens, et nous nous sommes aperçus que non seulement ils ne rejetaient pas ça comme un art des fous mais qu'en plus ça leur posait beaucoup de problèmes. Ces petits entretiens se prolongeaient pendant des heures, ça amenait des questions essentielles, des questions philosophiques sur le sens de la vie, sur les valeurs, des choses comme ça. Donc, nous nous sommes aperçus que, effectivement, on n'avait pas affaire au même mode de communication que dans le musée qui montre de l'Art, avec un « A » majuscule. Là, c'était une production sans majuscule. C'était la production de gens humbles, plutôt incultes, qui n'avaient pas ces réflexes d'évaluation marchande de l'Art. Donc ça c'est déjà une contestation très forte, surtout aujourd'hui, alors que l'art est devenu un domaine d'investissement majeur.

MD : Il y a un aspect très culturel aussi dans la réaction aux musées traditionnels. On apprécie souvent les œuvres des grands maîtres, quelle que soit l'époque ou le mouvement auquel ils

appartiennent, parce qu'on nous a inculqué l'idée que c'était du génie, sans faire appel à notre propre sens critique.

MT : Tout à fait. La réaction à l'Art Brut c'est « J'aurais pu le faire, pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas fait ? », tandis qu'on ne se dit pas ça devant un Rembrandt, effectivement.

MD : J'ai découvert une histoire assez absurde dans mes recherches, celle d'un artiste d'Art Brut qui faisait des reproductions de gravures d'Albrecht Dürer. Les lignes en étaient assez abstraites et son psychiatre avait décrété qu'il souffrait de distorsion de la réalité parce qu'il n'était pas capable de les reproduire correctement. Là on se dit, mais qui d'entre nous est capable de le faire ?

MT : Évidemment. L'art tel que nous l'avons institué est intimidant, et ça ne devrait pas être sa fonction. La fonction de l'art devrait être au contraire de communication. C'est assez curieux d'ailleurs, cette religiosité parce que… écrire, tout le monde écrit. On écrit des factures, des offres d'emploi, etcetera. Et ce n'est pas parce que vous écrivez qu'on dit que vous faites de la littérature, alors que dès que vous vous mettez à dessiner on vous dira « Ah vous faites de l'art, on a peut-être un Picasso dans la famille ! ». Tout de suite, on passe à un plan de transcendance qui est regrettable. L'art devrait être aussi répandu que le simple fait d'écrire. Il y avait un graffiti en Mai 68 qui disait « l'Art naîtra quand le dernier artiste sera mort. » Ça signifie que, quand on aura enfin désacralisé cette posture d'artiste et qu'on aura entrainé tout le monde à s'exprimer, c'est là que véritablement un art authentiquement communicatif naîtra. C'était de la contestation mais ça pourrait figurer au fronton de l'Art Brut.

MD : Est-ce que vous croyez que certains visiteurs pourraient interpréter le fait d'exposer les travaux de gens qui ne sont pas toujours en pleine capacité de leurs moyens comme un abus ?

MT : C'est une question très problématique mais le fait est que, quand au lieu de garder en soi des fantasmes ou des impulsions on les couche sur le papier, que ce soit par l'écriture ou par le dessin, ça signifie qu'il y a une adresse. Chez ces auteurs d'Art Brut, notamment quand ils sont dans des hôpitaux psychiatriques, ils ne s'adressent pas au musée, au public ordinaire de l'art, et c'est justement ça qui les rend intéressants. Donc il faut les recevoir dans cet esprit-là, justement. Ça serait un abus que d'aller les placer à côté de Matisse en disant « c'est aussi beau que Matisse. » Ça serait paternaliste, ça serait de la condescendance et ça serait une trahison. Il

faut bien inventer un mode de communication, il faut se faire à l'idée qu'une production ce n'est jamais une chose comme un citron est jaune ou du plomb est pesant, c'est une relation, toujours. Comme le fait d'écrire, c'est une relation qui se fait à deux. C'est Montaigne qui disait « un livre est fait par moitié de celui qui l'écrit et par moitié de celui qui le lit. » C'est une relation donc il s'agit de trouver le mode de réception le plus respectable par rapport à ces œuvres. Et c'est ça le propos de la Collection de l'Art Brut, c'est de changer la mentalité, de refuser le mode de sacralisation, d'inventer un autre mode de réception de l'art, un mode qui se veut plus démocratique. Et puis moi je constate d'ailleurs parmi les visiteurs, parce que j'aime bien écouter leurs réactions, que les intellectuels, les familiers du Musée, se posent toujours de grandes questions en se disant « est-ce que c'est vraiment de l'art ? Est-ce qu'on a le droit ? » Les gens moins cultivés, qui ont des métiers manuels, s'intéressent tout de suite à la facture, comment c'est fait, avec quoi, quel est le procédé de construction. On voit qu'ils ont plus de familiarité avec ces œuvres parce qu'ils ont une familiarité manuelle, une familiarité de fabrication. Au musée de l'Art Brut il y a très peu de peintures à l'huile ou de sculptures en marbre. Il y beaucoup d'assemblages, de bricolages, qui requièrent un savoir manuel et parfois un travail considérable. Ça n'est pas aussi spontané qu'on le dit, c'est souvent le fait de gens qui ont à temps plein bricolé et perfectionné leur bricolage. Et ça, ça parle aux gens du commun. Alors qu'aux intellectuels ça leur pose des problèmes. Je dirais qu'au fond le public populaire comprend mieux l'Art Brut que les intellectuels.

MD : C'est compréhensible vu la nature des œuvres. Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec vous mais je vous pose la question parce que je me demandais si justement certains intellectuels étaient parfois choqués.

MT : Oui, tout à fait. On nous a reproché, par exemple, de donner des renseignements d'ordre médical. Quelqu'un a été interné, est-ce que ça n'est pas privé ? Est-ce qu'on a le droit de mettre ça sur une étiquette à côté de l'œuvre ? Nous, notre propos a été de livrer toutes les informations, de n'en retenir aucune, et puis de faire entendre que le seul message à délivrer c'est qu'on a pas de message à délivrer. On montre, on donne tous les renseignements qu'on a, et c'est au spectateur d'inventer sa relation. C'est, au fond, une question de loyauté. C'est assez bizarre parce qu'il y a eu parfois de la suspicion. Le fait, par exemple, de peindre le musée en noir. On nous a accusés de théâtraliser, de dramatiser les œuvres. Alors que le noir obéissait à une raison purement technique, à savoir que, quand on arrive dans un milieu noir, l'œil se sensibilise. On a besoin de moins de lumière pour voir. Donc le musée noir permet, très paradoxalement, de

baisser la lumière pour des travaux qui en souffrent plus que d'autres. C'est souvent des tissus ou des matériaux comme ça pour lesquels on doit justement baisser la lumière. Donc le noir avive la sensibilité visuelle et ça permet d'économiser les rayons X.

MD : Vous parlez du fait de donner des informations sur la vie des artistes. Est-ce qu'accompagner les œuvres de biographies qui souvent racontent une vie assez tragique est utile pour mieux comprendre les créations ? Ou bien s'agit-il juste de fournir des informations objectives ?

MT : Là aussi c'est difficile de répondre, parce que toutes les interprétations sont possibles. Mais le fait est qu'il y a une complémentarité entre des travaux qui sont tout à fait étrangers à la tradition artistique, aux modes artistiques, qui sont extravagants et extraordinaires et le fait qu'ils sont produits par des gens qui eux-mêmes ont une vie marginale. Très souvent, le fait de produire des œuvres de ce genre a aggravé leur marginalité. Réciproquement, et c'est comme l'effet larsen en musique, la résonnance exponentielle, plus ils se marginalisent, plus ils font des travaux extravagants, de sorte qu'on a une intensité croissante. C'est intéressant de montrer ces deux composantes, expressive d'une part et existentielle d'autre part. Se marginaliser et produire des travaux qui nous marginalisent, c'est une interférence qu'il est intéressant de communiquer. On peut en faire ce qu'on veut de cette interférence, on peut la déplorer, se dire que c'est dommage et que ces gens auraient très bien pu se normaliser comme vous et moi. La question est ouverte mais, encore une fois, par loyauté, on livre toutes les informations, et puis au spectateur d'inventer son accueil.

MD : J'ai lu des textes assez critiques par rapport à cet aspect-là, qui justement interprétaient la présence de ces biographies comme quelque chose de voyeuriste, comme une justification que l'artiste mérite bien sa place dans l'Art Brut.

MT : La réponse que je donnerais c'est de responsabiliser le spectateur. Si un spectateur vient et trouve que c'est du voyeurisme c'est qu'il est voyeur. Vous pouvez faire la même chose, regarder une image de Balthus, vous pouvez la regarder parce que vous êtes pédophile et que ça vous excite, ou bien vous pouvez la regarder comme une merveille de peinture. C'est la responsabilité du regardeur. Là on répondra à ces personnes que c'est le regardeur qui fait le tableau et, s'il le voit en voyeur, on n'y peut rien.

MD : Étant donné qu'une majorité des œuvres d'art produites par des gens en marge de la société correspondent plus ou moins au concept de l'Art Brut, sur quels critères les œuvres sont-elles sélectionnées pour la Collection ?

MT : Là on est forcément dans un certain arbitraire. Il y a des cas limites, c'est sûr. Le fait est que l'Art Brut est défini comme un art hyper individualiste, où la rupture est très marquée. Il se repère au fait qu'il n'y a quasiment pas, ou très peu, d'héritage culturel. Ce sont les auteurs qui ont inventé leur propre figuration, leur propre technique. C'est sûr qu'« enculturé » on l'est tous un petit peu, parce qu'on a été éduqué. On se lave, on parle, on ne tue pas les gens quand on ne les aime pas. Mais on est plus ou moins cultivés, et il y en a qui développent leur culture personnelle, autonome, autiste, je dirais, sans mettre une acception morbide ou péjorative en terme d'autisme. Ce sont dans une grande mesure des autistes qui ont inventé leur propre sensibilité, leur propre mythologie personnelle. Effectivement il y a des cas limites. On a résolu les cas limites en créant cette catégorie intermédiaire qu'on appelle Neuve Invention. C'est toujours un peu arbitraire mais ça c'est la condition humaine.

MD : Dubuffet a exprimé l'idée que les individus isolés de la culture mainstream ont un meilleur accès à leur « monde intérieur » et sont donc d'avantage en mesure d'accéder à cette créativité que nous avons tous en nous. Pensez-vous que dans le monde actuel il est toujours possible de s'isoler cette manière alors que les médias et réseaux sociaux sont devenus omniprésents ?

MT : Sans aucun doute. Le fait est qu'on a tous des moyens d'isolement. On invente chacun ses procédés d'isolement, ça c'est peut-être vrai de l'art en général. Il y a un livre de Wittkower qui s'appelle « Les Enfants de Saturne » et qui montre que, depuis les origines, l'art est toujours le fait de gens qui ont des conduites extravagantes et qui effectivement s'isolent. Cet isolement est mental, même dans un monde hyper conditionné et hyper informatisé comme le nôtre. Peut-être même que c'est déjà une épreuve de vérité que de réussir à résister à des objections pareilles, ça met bien les choses au point.
Je cherche à percevoir s'il y aurait des caractéristiques nouvelles de l'Art Brut, de ces conditions d'isolement dans un monde hyper informatisé comme le nôtre… Une des réponses que j'aurais c'est que la pauvreté est une isolation encore majeure aujourd'hui. Aujourd'hui, dans ce monde où le standing est tellement important, le fait d'être pauvre, d'être rejeté, c'est une isolation encore plus grave que l'isolation des auteurs d'Art Brut de jadis. Donc peut-être qu'il y a une

aggravation de l'isolement par rapport à cet univers du standing, de la médiatisation. C'est ça qu'on pourrait répondre. Le fait est que, moi, les auteurs que j'étudie aujourd'hui, c'est leur cas. Ce sont des marginaux qui passent à côté de la grande richesse, de l'arrogance. Ça accroit leur sentiment d'exclusion et donc les stimule encore d'avantage dans des expressions contestataires.

MD : Est-ce qu'il y a une différence entre Art Brut et Outsider Art ?

MT : C'est simplement des distinctions terminologiques, je dirais. Outsider Art c'est un terme générique à extension très large qui comprend beaucoup d'expressions marginales, populaires ou folkloriques. Tandis que l'Art Brut est d'avantage restreint, c'est vraiment l'art de ceux qui ont été complètement coupés de la culture. Outsider Art ça impliquerait aussi par exemple une forme d'art très marginale qui ne rentre pas dans l'institution comme le street art, les graffs, les choses comme ça. C'est intéressant de créer hors du cadre traditionnel de l'art, hors des supports traditionnels de l'art. Ça entre dans l'extension de l'Outsider Art sans être de l'Art Brut proprement dit. Il y a une culture des graffs, il y a des échanges entre les graffeurs. On reconnait le style graff même si il y a beaucoup de singularité et d'individuation. Alors que l'Art Brut est complètement individualiste. Mais il y a parenté, et cette parenté est coiffée par le terme Outsider Art.

MD : Ça n'a pas grand-chose à voir mais les graffs suisses me font énormément rire, ils sont toujours incroyablement polis et politiquement corrects, très axés sur l'environnement, les droits LGBTQ, toutes des choses comme ça.

MT : Mais heureusement, vous avez raison, les graffs suisses sont très suisses dans ce sens-là. Mais je voyais encore l'autre jour passer un train cargo qui passait, qui provenait probablement du Sud de l'Italie, de Yougoslavie, quelque chose comme ça, et qui transporte ces œuvres avec lui, de sorte que les graffs, en plus du désencadrement de l'art, ont un support mobile. C'est l'exposition dans son sens le plus communicatif possible. Donc ça pour dire que même si en Suisse on est prisonniers de notre suissitude on bénéficie quand-même de graffs plus délurés.

MD : Il a fallu un certain regard à Dubuffet pour reconnaître le potentiel artistique des œuvres d'Art Brut. Le fait de collectionner des œuvres d'art est-il un acte créatif en lui-même ?

MT : Je pense parce qu'il a inventé un mode de relation avec l'expression individuelle différent, j'y reviens, de l'admiration, de la révérence traditionnelle. C'était son problème à lui, personnel. Il voulait devenir artiste et il a été extrêmement désappointé par les écoles des Beaux-Arts, par la grégarité, le manque de créativité. Quand il a découvert des expressions totalement marginales ça a résolu son problème. Il s'est dit que la véritable expressivité était là. Donc il a inventé une relation nouvelle. J'avais un ami, grand lecteur, qui disait « je ne lis que les livres qui parlent de moi ». C'est vrai vous voyez, avec le livre vous établissez une relation. Si le livre résout vos problèmes personnels vous avez un rapport au livre qui répond parfaitement à l'impulsion de l'auteur lui-même. Ça ne peut que ravir l'auteur, c'est une véritable communication. C'est un peu le mode de relation que Dubuffet a inventé. Pour répondre à votre question je dirais que, oui, collectionner de cette manière ça fait encore partie de l'intention artistique. Encore une fois, les tableaux sont faits par moitié de ceux qui les font et par moitié de ceux qui les regardent. Parfois il y a un regard inventif.

MD : Et est-ce que pour vous le fait d'étoffer cette collection a eu un impact sur votre créativité personnelle ?

MT : Moi personnellement, disons que dans le milieu bourgeois cultivé qui était le mien, avec des normes assez rigoureuses, la découverte très jeune d'auteurs comme Soutter a été pour moi heureusement destructrice. Ça m'a aidé dans mon développement, dans le fait de me libérer un peu de mes conditionnements éducatifs. Pour moi ça n'était pas de l'art au sens de la délectation, de l'admiration. C'était vraiment des objets qui m'aidaient à m'en sortir. Alors je pense que c'est peut-être ça la grande qualité de l'Art Brut, c'est de nous amener à nous transformer, à nous poser des problèmes bien plus larges que ceux de l'art spécifiquement. C'est vraiment un désencadrement de l'art. Moi j'ai beaucoup étudié le cadre, c'est contemporain du capitalisme de marché, de l'objet d'art en tant qu'objet commercialisable. Et en même temps de la solennisation de l'art. L'Art Brut agit comme un désencadrement, comme une libération de cet art qu'on a trop enfermé dans une enceinte sacrée.

MD : Aujourd'hui l'Art Brut s'est largement intégré au marché de l'art, est-ce que vous pensez que cela lui a fait perdre de son sel, de son authenticité ?

MT : Non, il reste parfaitement intact. On vient de fêter le quatre-vingt-dixième anniversaire de Robillard, l'auteur des fusils. On lui a dit « vous savez que ce fusil qu'on vous a acheté 300

francs à l'époque vaut maintenant 30.000 francs ? », ou quelque chose comme ça. On s'attendait à ce qu'il saute en l'air, qu'il s'indigne, mais il a dit « fantastique », il jubilait ! Il est resté intact, les auteurs d'Art Brut c'est souvent comme ça. C'est vrai que le capitalisme s'empare de l'Art Brut, mais je trouve même qu'il ne le commercialise pas encore assez. C'est encore sous-évalué. Mais s'il faut s'en prendre à ça il faut s'en prendre au capitalisme, pas aux auteurs d'Art Brut qui résistent très bien, ça il faut leur faire confiance. C'est même une épreuve de vérité, peut-être. On voit ce qui véritablement est Art Brut si l'argent n'est pas leur valeur, ce qui est le cas des auteurs. Ils restent indemne de tout intérêt financier.

MD : Qu'est-ce que vous pensez du fait que des œuvres d'Art Brut se retrouvent exposées dans des musées traditionnels et culturels tels que ceux auxquels Dubuffet cherchait à s'opposer à travers sa Collection ? Je pense par exemple à l'exposition « Sade : Attaquer le Soleil » à l'occasion de laquelle plusieurs œuvres d'Art Brut avaient été prêtées au Musée d'Orsay.

MT : Les choses ont changé. Dubuffet craignait ça, il voulait éviter toute confusion. Aujourd'hui on peut dire que l'Art Brut s'est bien défini, que dans l'esprit des gens il n'y a plus de risque de confusion. Il faudrait vraiment être illettré pour ne pas voir la différence. Donc il y a moins de danger à exposer de l'Art Brut dans un musée traditionnel. Je crois que le public déterminera immédiatement que ça été fait dans une autre conception, dans une autre disposition de communication que l'art culturel. Les gens comprennent très bien, je crois, la distinction. Les choses ont changé.

Conversation with David Wilson:

Marie-Sophie Danckaert : What was the original inspiration to create the Museum of Jurassic Technology?

David Wilson : I think, like you, I like museums. I actually grew up loving museums. I grew up in Denver, and Denver actually had some wonderful museums such as a really wonderful museum of natural history and a very beautiful art museum downtown and we'd spend pretty much every weekend taking the bus to every museum and we would just essentially spend the day in the museum. I very much grew up in that kind of, I don't know… the love of the place, of the museum. I remember that once, when I was quite young, six years old or something, I was with my family at a science museum in London. I got separated from them. I was lost, you know. And I was in the main entry space of the science museum and I wasn't frightened. I remember this sense of awe at the place and I think that burned deep into my psyche. I remember thinking as a kid that, we were maybe 12, 13, and the best place in town, which was free and opened to everyone, basically the museum and the library, the absolute best places that were opened to everyone, they were deeply meaningful to me. And so, you know, I did undergraduate work in biological science, studying entomology with this very special fellow. But I realised during my undergraduate that I didn't want to do that, I didn't want to spend 20 years working in someone else's laboratory and so I kind of went out into the world for a number of years. After, I don't five, or six years, I went back to study filmmaking and so I had, it was kind of as I was being split between these two things that I loved. One was natural sciences and the world of display and presentation and motion picture but also all kinds of way of presenting things to the world. I even tried, for a period of time, of doing scientific films but, you know, it felt pretty daunting being up against other scientific films. I could tell it wasn't viable doing that. And one day I realised the thing I wanted most in the world was having a museum. Rather than go to work some other's institution I just thought it would be much more interesting to just start a museum.

MD : Where did the original collection come from?

DW : I mean, I'd say there really wasn't one. Most museums, small, home grown museums come from people who have collected and everybody tells them "oh, you should open a

museum" and then they open a museum. But, actually, we didn't begin that way. We began more out of that love of presenting things to the world. We began the original exhibit by just making exhibits that were sometime presenting narratives, but material culture narratives, and presenting it to the world being very conscious of how things were presented. We had an original set of 8 to 12 exhibits that we travelled as an itinerant museum for four or five years. That travelled mostly in the Western US, all within driving distance. All the exhibits would unbolt and go in crates. We'd drive them to a new location and set them up. It would take several hours to do that, and then pack them all back up, drive back, and wait for the next possibility. But then that got so tedious because we kept adding new exhibits to the collection. Until it became apparent that it was just too complicated. We actually did an exhibition in San Francisco, we drove everything up there and I got pneumonia, and it just came to the point where it was very arduous to continue to do this work. It was time that we'd start bringing people to the museum rather than trying to bring the museum to people. At that point, I started looking for a place to set up the museum. We were looking all over Los Angeles. I was working in the film industry at the time. That was essentially funding this whole nonsensical endeavour. I would go working, working, working, make some money, and go spend it all on filling the exhibits. I don't know if you remember Los Angeles at all but I and another friend had a small film studio here in Culver City, and just on my way home one day, I saw a "for lease" sign on a building and called the fellow that managed it, then went over and saw it. This place was like, two blocks or a block and a half to where our small film studio was and it was great. They said we could have it for a year and that they would tear the buildings down but that we could have it for a year. The place was essentially a mess, it took us nine months to get the space ready to open. It had been nine out the 12 months, we paid 1000$ a month and we were going to be open for a couple of months and then have to clean up and then get out. It was just craziness. But somehow, at the end of the year, we didn't have to move, we could stay. And, after maybe five years, this funny story happened. We were actually doing some work on one wall, we moved a panel and found a door. We asked Phil where that door led. He said "funny you should ask, it goes to another 1600 square feet, we just moved out of it." You know, all of this place had been a forensic laboratory before we moved in and they had just moved their office offshore someplace. So he said "that space is available, do you want it?" It was literally to that month that my film industry work basically dried up. I had been doing what's called "model and miniature cinematography." It was motion control cinematography, robotic cameras using miniatures. That was in the early 90s, and at that point that work was just being viably replaced by computer generated graphics. Either that business I was part of was going to have to retool

and start doing computer generated work or… I knew what I wanted to do. It was just closing it all down, so we did. All of a sudden there was no visible support at all, because this work in the film industry had been the sole funding mechanism for the museum. All of a sudden, that was gone, and Phil proposed this new space. It was another 1000$ a month. And we said "sure, we'll take it." And over time we expended more and more into all of these buildings. We had no idea when we took this first building that it connected to three other buildings. It's miraculous. It just felt like, how fortuitous. So slowly we expended into more and more space as we were, you know, not really able, because we were already beyond what we were able to do by quite a bit. But somehow we'd manage to survive. Then at one point Phil came to us and said "you have to move now because they're going to sell the building." It was actually owned by this construction thing who had hired Phil to manage the building and the forensic laboratory. Phil was great. I remember him coming in in the early days of the museum, looking around and saying "I don't know what you're doing but I can gather it has something to do with the wisdom of the Ancient and I like it." Somehow, he was really on our side and went in to arrange with the owners of the building to be able to buy it for a really reasonable price. We started raising money, we didn't get nearly enough but we raised enough to get our foot in the door. Somehow, through another series of strangely fortuitous events, we were able to make it happen.

MD : I feel like this whole chain of events really fits with the museum itself.

DW : Yeah! It does, it really does. And all of that kind of goes into the walls of the place and, somehow, emanates from the walls to the visitors. I mean, probably not everybody, but to a certain kind of person who's attuned to these things.

MD : Your museum presents a very eclectic range of interests and mediums. I'm curious to know on what kind of criteria you decide whether or not an exhibition is worth putting on display?

DW : We have a motto, which is to… I don't actually know whether it's written any place in the museum, but it essentially means "nature as metaphor." And that to us becomes the sort of theme by which… We were essentially spinning off from the model of historic museums, when museums weren't museums of any particular things. And, you know, we don't think all museums should be that, but we think there is certainly a place for that kind of museum, even

today. That leaves a very broad range, that leaves everything. So how do you call from everything what is meaningful? Essentially, not even consciously but I think on some levels we hold very much that notion of nature as metaphor internally. What that means to us is that we're interested in phenomena, whether it's natural, or man-made, or man-made as part of nature. I mean, human is fundamentally part of nature. When you look at the natural order, you can, especially with certain incidencies, see examples that make you realise there are gaps, just like there are echoes, or there are ripples, that come out from looking at or thinking about this particular phenomenon. Those are the kind of things, I think, we're most interested in putting into the world. Essentially, it is the filter through which we try and call all of the ideas that we have. Because there's constantly a number of ideas within the group of the museum that could be an interesting exhibit, but it's a matter of finding the mysterious process through which one particular thing really takes on meaning. And each one is different, the process is never really the same twice. Is that enough of an answer?

MD : Yeah, yeah it is! It's fascinating hearing you talking of all this after I spent so much time reading about your museum.

DW : Yeah. Have you found good things to read?

MD : Obviously I've read Lawrence Weschler's book…

DW : Ren's book, right. Which we have, you know, a little bit mixed feelings about.

MD : Really? Why is that?

DW : Well, he is a friend. We see him a few times a year, whenever he's in town he always comes by. But actually his book first came out as an article in The Atlantic magazine. It's a very good magazine. I think he was a writer for The New Yorker at the time, he was writing about us for the New Yorker but the editor didn't like it, she was looking for more topical issues to increase their readership. So he took it to The Atlantic and they published it. When we read it with the group of people who were involved with the museum at the time, I thought it was focusing so much on the verifiability of certain kinds of facts. Which was like a journalistic window, which I completely understand, you need to have a vehicle in which you write and that was his. But it focused so much attention on that, on whether or not this or this narration

is verifiable. Amongst the group of ourselves we were very concerned about this other level of things that we were trying very much to put into the world. It ended up being almost as if the museum was about trickery. That was kind of the opposite to what we thought we were doing. So we were very open with Ren about it. We thought it would only be out there for a month. By that time, quite a number of things had been written from our perspective on the museum. But he wrote it in a way that was cross-purposes from what we were doing. Ralph Rugoff wrote about us in the very early days of the Museum and it felt like he understood what we cared about in a way that it was reinforcing rather than undermining what we were trying to put into the world. But coming back to Ren, I remember him calling and saying "great news, we have a book deal!" I thought "oh no, now it's gonna be a book." We asked if we could rephrase some of it, and I think he ended up changing three words out of the whole manuscript. But that being said, without Ren's writings we arguably might not be here today. When he wrote in the mid 90s, which was almost exactly the same time as when Phil came and said "you have to move now," and we had to raise funds to buy the building, Ren having published that book gave the museum a visibility without which it would have been much harder to raise the fund. Things worked out, and even though we're still not fond of that book… I mean, I don't know how many copies of that book have been produced,10.000? Maybe 25.000 at the most? We get 3-5.000 people come to the museum every year, what percentage of people have read that book that was written nearly 20 years ago? Probably not that many, so I don't think it really has an influence now.

MD : I think that if you read the book first it kind of ruins the experience, too.

DW : Exactly! I would think so too. I mean, in a funny kind of way, in the way that such things work. I remember, I was in London doing a talk on the microminiatures. It was really inspiring to me being able to talk about these things, it was very scripted, with complicated visuals. And there was a writer from the London Times, I think. Afterwards he came up to me and asked if I minded he wrote about this, I said "no, of course." He wrote a whole page, and that was actually wonderfully detailed description of the world of microminiatures and at the end he said "and if you would believe this, you would believe anything." He was drawing on what Ren had put into the world, that we were somehow a museum of fiction. So, this writer was assuming that all of this material that I was detailing, the works of Hagop Sandaldjian, and a number of microminiature traditions, were essentially fiction. So, for people who do read the book , they come into the museum with a certain mindset and I think that mindset, in the current

stage of things, work in an interesting way to create an experience because they're so set on seeing all of this as a fictionalization that it creates ever greater confusion as they go through the various exhibits. Does that make sense?

MD : Yeah, it's really interesting because I was going to ask you about viewership later on. You know, I was in Los Angeles to visit my boyfriend who used to live there and one day he asked me if I wanted to go to the Museum of Jurassic Technology. So I asked him "what is it?" and he just told me "you're gonna love it." Nothing more.

DW : *laughs* Nice.

MD : A typical definition of the museum would be that they exist in order to acquire, safeguard, conserve and display objects, artefacts, and works of art of various kinds. Do you agree with this or do you think there is more to it?

DW : I mean sure, absolutely. I think you know, we're concerned about material culture and conservation. Do you remember The Garden of Eden? It was that exhibit, collection from trailer parks. Well that's very much about collecting and material culture, who collects and why. About fighting against the inevitable disappearance of all things. Those are enormously interesting things to think about to me, to explore. This morning they released images from the James Webb telescope, unthinkable images of deep, deep, deep, deep space. Of deep time. Seeing things that are 13 billion years old you wonder about this notion of collecting, preserving, keeping. I mean, it's all very complicated, in the most wonderful kind of way.

MD : Do you think that collecting as a creative side to it? Is play an element of collecting?

DW : Sure. I think almost everything can be creative. People sometimes ask if the museum is an art project, and well, it is in the same way that my mechanic, who does beautiful work, is an artist. I think anything can be creative, for sure. Including collecting.

MD : I'm very interested in this aspect of collecting because I'm also writing on the Collection de l'Art Brut, I don't know if you've heard of it. It's a collection that was originally created by Jean Dubuffet, the French painter, and it's all art that has been created by people living on the margin of society. He was really interested in art produced by people who were not influenced

by culture and their raw individual expression. When he started gathering this collection in the 40s, everyone hated it. He really had to have a creative eye to see the potential in this kind of art. It's huge now, it's widely recognized.

DW : Do me a favour, send me a link to this collection. I want to see it. Was it Wölfli who was part of this?

MD : Yes, his work is part of the Collection, he was discovered by Dubuffet.

DW : We have a friend actually, a wonderful woman, who was the director of the Santa Monica Museum here in Los Angeles. Before that she was in Pennsylvania and she ran a small museum, or maybe a gallery, and she was one of the first people in the US, in the 50s or the 60s, to start exhibiting Oustider Art, or whatever it's called. I think she had the first exhibition of Wölfli in the US, before it became such an industry.

MD : Yeah, I think the whole collection travelled to the US with Dubuffet at some point in the 50s.

DW : That may have been to our friend's gallery, that would be interesting knowing if that was the same iteration.

MD : Now, that's really just for my own curiosity, but how did you come across the fruit-stone carving?

DW : There was actually a collection that was essentially given to us in the early days, that came to us through a woman here in Los Angeles named Mary Rose Cannon, who was a friend. When we said we wanted to start a museum, she told us she had something we would maybe be interested in. It was a collection, a very odd collection, of curios. Her adopted grandfather had been a collector in Western Nebraska, in the 20s or even the 10s. He just collected a number of very curious and wonderful things and she donated that to the museum. When I said we didn't have a collection actually that's not true because actually we did have this very strange collection of oddities that she had given us. The fruit-stone carving was in that group of things. We had, between the mid 90s to maybe 2005, a branch of the museum in a small town in Germany, kind of between Kohl and Dusseldorf. Someone that we met fortuitously was

running the museum in that town. He had the original building of the museum, designed by a Flemish architect, but he wasn't using the space. He asked if we wanted to set up a museum in that space. Most of the Mary Rose Cannon collection went to Germany, but then, unfortunately we lost them in the vicissitude of time. But that particular exhibit, the fruit stone carving, came from her.

MS : I am extremely interested in the question of audiences. What kind of reactions do you expect from your audience? How do viewers generally react to your museum?

DW : We don't expect anything, and it's good that we don't. We feel that eventually what we are doing is maybe not even half of the work. We present things and then the visitors, the patrons to the museum, do the lion's share of the work, of the construction. In a very so dramatic way from person to person. This has happened a number of times, but I remember one fellow, quite young, in his early twenties maybe, coming up to me and saying "I keep coming back here because I get from this place what I think I was supposed to get from going to the synagogue." That is one end of the spectrum. The other hand are some people coming in and start to laugh, they laugh at every exhibit. It's just uncontrollable laughter and we don't have a clue what they're laughing about. But there's nothing wrong with laughter. There's a line between the root word of museum being "muse," you know, the idea of the museum as a place for the muses – which I think really remains our primary focus, that's really our desire. If we have a goal, if we want people to have a certain kind of viewing experience, I think, somehow, it's related to that notion of the museum as place to commune with your own muses. But I was saying, it's interesting in term of laughter that if you just add an "a" to the beginning of "muse," you get "amuse." Which is what some people find I our museum, and that's not that far off.

MD : I quite like this idea. At first, when I came to your museum, I was quite serious, as one is in a museum. But once I realised it wasn't a museum like every other I started laughing, a lot.

DW : Did you?

MD : Yes, but it wasn't just a matter of finding things funny. It was the fact being faced with something so unexpected, freeing and wonderful that you just let your barriers down. You become incapable of controlling your own reactions.

DW : So laughter is an expression of that? Yeah, I see, I definitely know that experience. I'm thinking of the final days of our film studio, when it was closing down. It'd be hard to explain it, but there was this situation with a person I was very fond of. He always had six or eight cameras strapped on his person, he was constantly buying cameras at thrift stores but he never took pictures. He had an enormous beard and he wore fitting vests with a hundred pockets on it, all filled with films and this kind of things. I remember him coming in and sitting down in the conference room, he was talking to me about this vest and I was overwhelmed by this crazy kind of joy. I started to laugh uncontrollably and he thought it was wonderful, he was laughing too. My business partners just felt that maybe I needed help, that I needed to see someone. But it is that kind of laughter that is so telling of something.

MD : Do you think it is more prone to resonate with a specific viewership?

DW : I do. But I think that group of people is really complicated to define. I think that there are… If you think of strata of culture, of society, in its typical form of economic privilege, of wealth pyramid, I think there's also a strata that runs perpendicular to that. Across all those typical strata are other kinds of division and there is a kind of person for whom the work that we do has meaning. I think's it's spread over all those economic strata, but it's not everyone by any mean. Let's say, if you think in term of spectrum, it's only people in the ultraviolet range for whom there is meaning in the work that we do. Actually, I think that over time that part of the spectrum has become broader. All sorts of people visit. It's not what we do, we're just born to that as well and we're trying to do our part to make that manifest. Some people can resonate with that and see it, and some other people don't.

MD : In his book Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder, Lawrence Weschler quotes you as saying that "Part of the assigned task of the museum is to reintegrate people to wonder." How is wonder important to you?

DW : Do you know something, I don't know if I ever said that. Maybe I did. During the period of time after Ren's article came out, … There is this extreme focus on wonder. I understand,

and I don't object to that. Honestly it's related to Weschler's other book, Seeing is forgetting the name of the thing one sees? So, to really see is to forget, to not know the name of the thing you see. I may be wrong about this, but I thought it was actually a Japanese concept from hundreds of years ago. Regardless, I don't know for positive what wonder is. But, for me, that losing your whole cognitive apparatus to an experience. Stripping away all your cognition to an immediate experience, maybe that's what you call wonder. There's clearly nothing wrong with that. Those are gifts. But that's it. Ren, in his writing, talking about reintroducing people to wonder… I don't think people need to be reintroduced to wonder, maybe, I don't know.

MD : It's interesting because what I felt personally was something I could only call intense wonder, and it's so rare.

DW : Yeah, I mean that's good. That's arguably the goal. I'm not sure I would phrase it the way he did, but that's true. I'm very happy you were able to have that kind of experience. It's a collective project. A profoundly essential collective project.

MD : What do you think of anti-museums?

DW : I don't know. I don't think being against is necessarily a good thing. I don't think this should be seen in a two dimensional way, things are much more complex than that. To be against things is rarely the way forward.

MD : Yeah. I'm writing a whole thesis on anti-museums but I feel that the idea is rather to create something that is different from the traditional museum, not something that totally rejects it.

DW : Exactly. That term does make sense and there is meaning in that, but I think it's not the way to go.

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