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Rooms 2084

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Abstract
In September 2017 Room 2084 was installed at London College of Communication (LCC) to display a selection of objects from the personal archives and collections of staff and students in the Design School during the London Design Festival.

The aim of this display was to examine the role such objects play in the research and practice of the school and how these relate to the collection policies of the institution’s archives and special collections. To this end ‘trials’ were held throughout the durations of the show where members of staff would ‘defend’ their objects to a ‘jury’ who would determine if the items were worthy of inclusion the institution’s own archive to become the focus of study in the future.

Our paper offers a reflective evaluation of the value of performing to an audience, within an exhibition setting, an archive selection procedure based on criteria set by Schellenberg and Jenkinson. Our analysis was influenced by a number of interviews, post-event, with archivists and exhibitors that took part in Room 2084. We suggest that this activity moves the theoretical debate, concerning archives, towards an arena of performance and public perception of institutional archives whilst revealing some of the difficulties and friction in archival selection processes currently in use.
Room 2084 – Knocking on the Door of Room 101

The Request

In June 2017 the following information was circulated within the Design School at London College of Communication (LCC)

Time to give your archive an airing … calling all committed collectors, amateur archivists and habitual hoarders of visual and material cultures, be it books, badges, catalogues, postcards, puppets, posters, journals, stamps, monographs, albums, audio tapes, T-shirts or tools.

We’re currently looking for staff and students to exhibit a piece from their personal archive and present their selection to a jury with the aim of being included in a design archive of the future: Room 2084.

The antithesis of Orwell’s Room 101, Room 2084 considers our cherished archives of the near past, present and potential futures. Throughout the course of London Design Festival we will consider how and why we preserve the past and the present for future generations. There will be a number of ‘trials’ throughout the duration of exhibition where a jury composed of archive staff at UAL will debate the relative merits of each submitted object before an audience, with the aim of inclusion in our Room 2084.

‘Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’

George Orwell 1984
This seemingly innocent request would identify the kinds of objects collected within the school, determine the role these play in informing research and practice, and ultimately consider if they were worthy of inclusion in the institution’s own archive. To reference one of the central notions of Orwell’s 1984 this was an exercise in collective memory, as Assmann has noted ‘Control of the archive is control of memory ... one epoch’s trash is another one’s valuable information’ (2010, 344–46 quoted in Egger, 2018, 62). Of course archives are not infinite containers and since the early twentieth century the selection of items for inclusion, and considering which items to retain, has become an increasingly important aspect of archival practice, an aspect we embraced by instigating ‘trials’ by jury (Thylstrup, 2017).

The request resulted in twenty-two submissions from academics and PhD students in the school and librarians and technical staff across the college. Each participant provided an object representing their archive or collection, a photograph of the object and a short two hundred word statement to initiate the ‘defence’ of the object.

The Court

The submitted objects ranged from badges to bird’s nests and from magazines to masks, all displayed in a monochrome court at the heart of the building (Figures 1–3). Alternating stripes of dark and light grey on three sides of the court served to constrain the objects displayed on alternating angled and flat shelves. Alongside each object was a label containing the justificatory text, above each shelf was a black and white photograph of the object below stark against the wall.

On the fourth wall a raised stage contained a table and lectern behind which the owners would ‘defend’ their objects. Behind them emblazoned in the Futura typeface was the quotation from Orwell’s 1984 ‘Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.’ The stark keyhole logo on the table below the quote was constructed out of the letters O and A taken from the Futura typeface and again made allusions to Orwell by playing with the notion of peering into Room 2084. Adjacent to the stage was a projected ‘telescreen’ endlessly replaying the ‘trials’ where ‘defendants’ justified their own collections.1

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1 Siân Cook designed the labels and the keyhole symbol. Andrew Slatter designed the quotation and frieze texts.
Figure 2
Room 2084 Installation View (Photograph Graham Goldwater)

Figure 3
Room 2084 Installation View (Photograph Graham Goldwater)
The Organising Committee

The Organising Committee was responsible for the administration of ‘trials’, the organisation of the display and the text in Futura that ran in two friezes around the upper reaches of the court.

The Lower Frieze consisted of the following words: Disorganised, Fragmented, Forgotten, Incidental, Incongruous, Inconsequential, Insignificant, Minor, Muddled, Paltry, Transient, Trivial, Undeserving, Unknown, Unopposed, Unplumbed, Unpolished, Unqualified, Unrestricted, Unsystematic, Untold. These underline the condition of objects traditionally excluded from the archive.

The Upper Frieze, in contrast, included the following words: Appraised, Assessed, Audited, Cached, Catalogued, Chronicled, Classified, Documented, Evaluated, Filed, Inspected, Investigated, Judged, Logged, Preserved, Protected, Rated, Respected, Scrutinized, Stored, Valued. These signify the state of objects that cross the divide into the eternal embrace of the archive.

The words selected drew attention to the archival process emphasising the fact that ‘...the moveable and indeed unfixable borderline between value and worthlessness, between cultural waste and the cultural archive, is the effect of continuous decisions and negotiations’ (Assmann, 2011, 379 quoted in Ahmed and Crucifix, 2018, 6).

The Jury

Positioned on the balcony above the friezes a team of archivists, acting as both jury and collective judge, presided over the five ‘trials’ that determined the fate of the objects on display. According to Cook Appraisal is the critical archival task by archivists... As archivists appraise records, they are determining what the future will know about its past: who will have a continuing voice and who will be silenced... Underlying these stereotypes and mythologies was an earnest quest, by archivists and historians alike, for objectivity, for impartiality, for Truth, all extolled as self-defining professional virtues, but alas in reality, all an impossible dream in light of the inescapable subjectivity that any value-creating and value-enforcing activity such as archival appraisal must entail (2009, xv-xvi).

So what kind of jurists appraised and enforced the Truth of Room 2084? They were principally representatives of the institution’s own archives which are primarily devoted to the preservation of art and design objects. Therefore the objects submitted to Room 2084 were most likely to be admitted if they aligned with existing holdings and this archival impulse to specialisation potentially risked excluding those items that might be most valuable in the future.

The Judgement

Of the twenty-two objects submitted and displayed only ten were admitted to the fictional archive of Room 2084 and twelve were rejected. The factors leading to rejection were often disciplinary with a Heuer watch, a Chinese mask and a bird’s nest being refused because they did not directly connect with the institutional archives. Other objects such as condom packets promoting safe sex and a stock photographic image were declined because there are more suitable institutional repositories for them. One item, a specialist magazine, was eliminated because it was already held in the university library collection, but it could potentially belong in the archive and its exclusion highlighted the tension between these different institutional repositories.

1 The Organising Committee consisted of Siân Cook, Sara Ekenger, Ian Horton, Nela Milic, Andrew Slatter, Robert Urquhart.
2 The jury consisted of Sara Mahurter (Archives and Special Collections Manager), Richard Daniels (Senior Archivist UAL), Jaqueline Winston-Silk (Archivist UAL), Georgina Orgill (Archivist UAL), Kristin Hall [BA (Hons) Design Management and Cultures Alumni] and Tito Magrini (Independent Archivist).
Of the ten objects accepted into Room 2084 five were print-based. Two of these, a magazine by the Dutch graphic design studio Hard Werken and a prospectus for Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, related directly to the graphic design heritage of LCC and significant holdings of similar work already in the archive. A further two items, a Sex Pistols badge and a counter-cultural magazine connected to the fanzines in the archive while an American comic book from the 1930s linked to the extensive existing comic book collections.

Many of the objects submitted to Room 2084, both accepted and rejected, were produced by anonymous creators. In his examination of Edward Fuchs early 20th century collections of caricature and erotic art Walter Benjamin concluded that

> Whether devoting such attention to anonymous artists and to the objects that have preserved the traces of their hands would not contribute more to the humanization of mankind than the cult of the leader – a cult which, it seems, is to be inflicted on humanity once again – is something that, like so much else that the past has vainly striven to teach us, must be decided, over and over by the future (1937, 143).

Clearly the archival holdings of the institution already celebrate the work of anonymous creators but what of our future collections? In an increasingly digital environment the archive of the future will see changes to the gatekeeping role of archivists and an increasing engagement with ‘...citizen archivists, passionate amateurs and communities of enthusiasts’ (Theimer, 2018, 14). The resulting collective memories might result in a more egalitarian form of archival practice but there will always be someone in control of the present who shapes our understanding of the past.

**Room 2084 – The Evidence**

The images on the following pages are photographs of the exhibits and their corresponding labels.
Organizational Aesthetics

Contribution:

Joel Koromilch

Object:

Heuer Chronograph

1969 (18k yellow gold) (The model on which they based the Cosmograph in 1969)

Description:

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become real.” —Margery Williams, The Velveteen Rabbit (1922)

Recently a friend stopped me in the street and asked if I wanted to sell my watch, which she had been interested in for a while (this was not the first time this had happened). When I again declined, she reminded me of what they were going for now and that I should be careful wearing it out.

We both share an interest in watches, but she is a collector and dealer. I am not. I know many people that collect things that they never use, instead consigning them to a corner in their home. Collectors who have never lifted their boxes or others in their homes. Even some of the most dedicated collectors see no value in them.

Aside from toy cars, collectors pay the highest price for pristine toys and models in their original boxes. Yet such perfect items often only inform us of manufacturing details and the most sterile evocation. Conversely, every patch of rust, scratched windshield or ripped toy cover creates, generates, tells a story, a history, a narrative.

Collectors kill culture in the way entomologists pin insects to display boards. I would rather see the ephemeral fluttering of butterflies in the garden than neatly organized in a museum display case.
Every year, in my secondary school in Rome, we would occupy the school. This meant that we would have a student assembly in protest at one thing or the other (usually a school rule) which would lead to a vote to occupy the school. This meant that a bunch of 14 to 17 year olds would march around the building, bellowing and pelting outside the teacher and administrative staff offices until they left the building, declaring it occupied. These occupations would last between a few days to a month, with one week being usual. The students would then run the building and have alternative classes, concerts, events and general debauchery 24/7.

One year, a photographer from a newspaper came to the occupation. He was not interested in a centrally Rome school, and we used to put out press releases to invite them. Two of these photos featured me and ended up being included in several newspapers’ stock photo archive. For the next 10 years, whenever a school anywhere in Italy was occupied, my 15 year old self would be sharing out of the pages of la Repubblica or il Messaggero. My father has subsequently collected these appearances throughout the years.

This is a USB stick containing an SVG file of a scan of a Bridgeport Drill Press. This was captured using photogrammetry techniques for the Visual Island Extension Kit, a work contained within the Skewed Symposium project conducted at the Experimental Research Lab, Autodesk, San Francisco. Following its release and dissemination in 1996, the contents of the Visual Island Extension Kit were opened up to the public in 2002. The heavy industrial machine tools that had previously been used to build and repair workstations and subassemblies found their way into new hands and new users across the Bay Area.

For Skewed Symposium, we harvested a number of these machine tools, including the drill, and their new operators. Photogrammetry techniques and digital fabrication processes were used to capture them, allowing these large and complex machines to be seen, handled, and reproduced beyond the specific and pre-military workshop environments where they were used. The files were made freely accessible as part of the project.

Images for photogrammetry taken with an iPhone 5 and Panasonic Lumix DMC-G1. Mesh created with Autodesk Meshmixer / ReCap and edited with Autodesk Meshmixer.
Organizational Aesthetics

EVIDENCE

CONTRIBUTOR: Graham Goldwater

OBJECT: Spiritualist Publicity Cards

DESCRIPTION: Fake Spiritualists

That Vodoo... that you do, so well!

A collection of publicity cards handed out or found in the gutter in the last 15 years. The cards offer advice on spiritual healing, removal of curses, protection against evil spirits, sickness, mental problems, bad luck, jinxes, bad dreams, disobedient children, choice of lucky numbers, removal of witchcraft, money matters, politics, and eyes, palm readings, love, children, court problems, voodoo, witchcraft, job fortune, and boosting exams, jobs, and success, immigration problems.

Culturally, by far the most popular cards are aimed at Africans in the Indian community coming a close second. There is also the old Christian healer in amongst them. They all promise much the same, which is relief from the burdens and wrongs of living, to be replaced with a brighter, successful, and happier tomorrow. The claims get even more fantastic as they go on, frequently guaranteeing 100% success in all areas.

What they all have in common is that they pray on the most troubled and desperate people who are at such a low ebb in their life that they will have faith in anything that will improve the situation they find themselves in.
Urquhart, Horton

- EVIDENCE -

CONTRIBUTOR: Siân Cook

OBJECT: Shopping Safely Condoms and Lube for Gay Men
Healthy Gay Manchester for Men: G20, Manchester 1996. 65 x 105mm. Printed in colour both sides. Contents: 2x Bodywax (liquid) & 1x Coitex. Supersizing condoms

DESCRIPTION:

Condom pack acquired directly from Healthy Gay Manchester, September 1996. This is from a much larger personal archive collection begun in 1994 to record HIV/AIDS graphic ephemera produced in the UK. Over a 4 year period I contacted over 170 organisations across the country and amassed a wide range of printed matter.

It is significant that a product that was rarely seen before 1982 began to widespread use in the wake of the 1980's AIDS crisis. The image of the male body is of increasing importance in the 1990s, as AIDS awareness and sexual education for gay men increased. The design of the 'condom' image is striking, and the association with AIDS awareness is clear. The pack is presented as an 'essential' purchase for gay men.

Whilst coming from a time of uncertainty, fear and loss, this packaging may be seen as a new way of approaching sexual health in general, the new generation of community health professionals who helped to bring this change in attitude about and to a celebration of gay sexual identity.

- EVIDENCE -

CONTRIBUTOR: Tony Creedland

OBJECT: Smile Magazine issue 11 - Plagiarism special titled "Demolish Serious Culture"
UK-based gay men's magazine, publisher: L'oreal Blush

DESCRIPTION:

In 1999 I came across this copy of Smile magazine in my final year at Plymouth College of Art and Design, just before heading to London. On the back page was an article on the festival of Plagiarism happening in Glasgow that summer, to which I was really set off for a year and a half. I thought it was a really good idea. The festival was held in July of that year, and it was held as a kind of a social event, not just for artists. It was called the "Festival of Plagiarism" and it was a part of the "Festival of Art" that was happening that summer.

The festival was a really big event and it attracted a lot of attention from the press. It was also a really good way of promoting art and culture in the UK. It was a really nice way of bringing people together and it was a great opportunity to see new and interesting work.

The festival was held in a number of different venues across the city and it featured a wide range of different events. There were workshops, talks, exhibitions and performances. It was really well attended and it was a really nice way of promoting art and culture in the UK.

The festival was really well received and it was a really nice way of bringing people together and it was a great opportunity to see new and interesting work. It was also a really nice way of promoting art and culture in the UK.
**CONTRIBUTOR:**
Sara Ekeren

**OBJECT:**
Kuei Kung (Kuei Hsing 魯班), the God of Literature, Examinations & Bureaucracy

**DESCRIPTION:**

This mask is part of a collection of masks acquired through my travels and travels abroad. It includes masks from Asia, Europe, Oceania, Africa, and South America. My interest in masks is cultural, intellectual and multi-faceted. Masks are fascinating objects both for what they hide and reveal and the stories they represent.

The mask was given to me in 2010. It is a carved wooden mask depicting Kuei Kung (Kuei Hsing 魯班), the Chinese Taoist/ Daoist deity representing the God of Literature, Examinations & Bureaucracy. The type of wood and its precise origin are unclear and its contents are unknown, but can often be traced to the Guizhou, Fujian province area of China known for wood carvings.

Legend has it that Kuei Kung was a gifted scholar andwarted the highest rank on the Imperial Examinations. Usually such achievements would be rewarded by the Emperor, however Kuei Kung was unfortunately a very ugly, handicapdeed dwarf and his appearance shocked the Emperor to such a degree that he refused to reward him. Desperately poor that he had repulsed the Emperor and unable to receive his reward, Kuei Kung impaled himself on a high cliff into turbulent waters but was saved by a curl dragon and wedded to the heavens where he was appointed as the god of official examinations and imperial exams. At the moment this mask hangs outside in the garden, as my 5-year-old son finds it too scary and doesn’t want it inside.
CONTRIBUTOR:

John Fox

OBJECT:

Song Thrush Nest

DESCRIPTION:

Passerine intent

This is the nest of a song thrush. Unusually built by the female who constructs it in three weeks. The nest is made of moss, nest, straw and twigs. The centre of the nest is very smooth, of nest or down mixed with saliva so as to hold and protect the bird's bright blue egg. This nest is part of a massive collection of abandoned bird's nests that ranges from those of my goldfinches made of feathers, cotton and straw to the larger twenty constellations of blackbirds. The sculptural qualities of birds' nests, their overall shape, size, depth and range of materials contribute to the powerful sense of an onion aesthetic. Nests are specific to particular species – the size at their eggs, their immediate habitat and size of birds partly determine the shape of the nest. The process of making them is highly emergent in the sense that nesting materials appear to be carefully chosen. Even within species, nest design will vary depending on climate and rainfall levels. So we can ask, is this design?

Recent work in ecology and evolution would tend towards the answer: yes. The cognitive abilities required to build a nest include deciphering three from predictions, avoiding parasites, and providing a microclimate for egg resolution. Nest design is also thought to be a powerful pheromone signal – indicating an individual's genetic fitness through optimum use of materials. In other words, the way a nest is built is a decision not random.

If birds also design their nests by responding to local conditions; then there is good evidence that even individuals who build with similar materials can end up with very different nests. What then could we learn from them? How might human-designed environments develop similar responsiveness to environments? And what are the survival signals that the material conditions of bird's nests reveal?
Organizational Aesthetics

CONTRIBUTOR:
Iain Macdonald

OBJECT:
Genesis Concert Programmes

DESCRIPTION:
Alan "Fluff" Freeman somehow caught the attention of my Dad one Saturday afternoon in 1973, perhaps it was the classical neglect it led to Dad buying for the first Genesis album, Selling England by the Pound. I loved it, and I was only 9.

Since then I've pawed over the many cynical covers of the entire Genesis's oeuvre, singing along to the songs, and from 1980 attended every tour until the last farewell tour in 2007. My collection of their tour programmes actually started in 1971, with "And Then There Were Three" from Knebworth, their only UK gig too young to go. I could only modify my desire by buying the tour programme and t-shirt with a magazine coupon.

The collection includes a rare sealed and unmounted programme from the "Six of the Best" venture gig with Peter Gabriel at Knebworth on 2nd October 1980. Ten years ago I discovered eBay and bought earlier programmes from "Wind and Wuthering" (1976) and an even "The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway" (1979). Lately, the programmes became more local, celebrating the fiftieth, and the changing typographic rendering of their name that defined different periods of their music.

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CONTRIBUTOR:
Craig Burton

OBJECT:
Low
David Bowie 1977 (Ath trick cassette version)

DESCRIPTION:
Low is the eleventh studio album released by David Bowie. It is a collection of beautifully formed songs with stylistically idiosyncratic reference points and with radical musical structures that mix conventions of pop with idiosyncratic sounds from new electronic music. It introduced the arrival of ambient music.

Low sounds and looks wonderful (like New Musical Express said it sounded like "Stravinsky rendered by Morton Subotnick"). It's atmospheric, intriguing and soulful.

Low was originally released on vinyl and compact cassette in the UK. RCA also released it on a 12-track cartridge, a format that has yet to have a reissue. I own a copy of Low on a 12-track that has never been opened or played. It is the "Schindler's cat" in my music collection. I don't need it to be opened. Trouble is, I don't even know whether the tape has survived or shrunk, or whether it's blank or whether there was a mix up in the factory and instead of Low, what would actually play. I had a dream to play it on a Stevie Wonder's Songs in the Key of Life or Meat Loaf's Bat Out of Hell cassette. It was huge success at the time. Oh, it could be an ultra rare one-off tape containing the sound of David Bowie, taped out at 4am, in a bar in Berlin, talking to his launched about the Cold War and Berlin...
Evidence

Contribution:
Jaime Sánchez

Object:
Lint pack

Description:
Migration has reached our times. We have not seen such unprecedented movement of the peoples in Europe since the end of the 19th century and we are seeing it on a daily basis over various media platforms and through newspapers. The Mediterranean is carrying refugees and migrants from different continents to Europe, challenging the concept of the "West". Members of the EU who are in the presence of "the other" becoming uncertain. Their previous journey is also uncertain and for many depends on one object - a life jacket. This safety accessory is indispensable to anyone who travels in the West. It is frequently discarded for its quality and durability. It is not as far as the refugees and migrants, loaded onto the overcrowded boats. The ones who make it carrying the jacket also carry stories of war, hardship, hope and the jacket embodies them all. It is therefore, a symbol of our times.
Organizational Aesthetics

CONTRIBUTOR:
Roger Solkin

OBJECT:
Sex Pistols Badge
(Acquired Kings Road, London, 1977)

DESCRIPTION:

This silver plated badge seems enormous compared to later punks badges. Punks wear the badge is probably a topping, and clutched to the sleeve for their first single Anarchy in the UK (a spinnach union jack held together with bulldog clips and safety pin) and in its messages to their forthcoming single God Save The Queen. The design intent is that it’s Jamie Reid’s branding, incorporating the famous ‘famous name’ lettering. The Kings Road was the band’s stomping ground, and the centre of early punkism. Personal contact, my picture is a list of a list, because it’s a narrative andmakes me look cool, actually, as a spotty 13-year-old I was into newly discovered bands (Deep Purple, Black Sabbath) and my badge collection reflected that. On the same day I bought the Polish badges, I bought a Thin Lizzy one, but I never wore any of my badges because I treated them like trophies and stuck them on my wall with Blu-Tack. I suppose the Polish ones represented silly things, a slightly older addition to the collection, getting into a new scene, and growing up a bit.

CONTRIBUTOR:
Guy Lawley

OBJECT:
Famous Funnies no.8
March 1935

DESCRIPTION:

Famous Funnies, launched in 1934, was the progenitor of an enduring American institution: the comic book. Without it, the graphic novel may not have evolved. 21st-century Hollywood would lack a major part of its product — superheroes like Wonder Woman, Batman and the Avengers. Famous Funnies reprinted strips from Sunday newspaper comic sections. Competing comic books, coming in its wake, added new characters to the mix — like Superman, who began the first newspaper comic in 1938.

Famous Funnies no.8 illustrates other defining features of the US comic book. Despite what Roy Lichtenstein said, most early books did not use color; Ben Day dots through the Sunday newspaper sections still. The Ben Day method was too expensive for comic books, which is 1934 found a cheaper way to mix their colors. The resulting striped limited color palette, and cheap letterpress printing, helped define an influential comic book aesthetic. The comic book also known for its characteristic low-end advertising content. Famous Funnies was not financially successful until its seventh issue — the first to carry paid advertising on its back cover. Does we still sell, like the one seen here on p 8, persisted through to comics of the 1990s.
CONTRIBUTOR:
Ian Horton

OBJECT:
Hard Workers/Wild Pheasants
lecture No. 11 1981 (Acquired 2016)

DESCRIPTION:

For the past three years I have been researching the Rotterdam-based graphic design studio Hard Workers, best known for the 10 issues of the anonymous cultural magazine Hard Workers published in the Netherlands between 1979 and 1982. There are no archival resources relating to Hard Workers in the UK and initially I had to rely on the kindness of British and Dutch collectors for access to the magazine and ultimately spent time in the Rotterdam City Archives looking at Hard Workers’ exhibition designs for book covers, exhibitions, magazine, posters and the theatre. Through this process I began to realise the value placed on graphic design in the Netherlands and this highlighted the relative paucity of archival sources for the graphic design historian in the UK.

When interviewing the members of Hard Workers they began to loan and gift materials to assist with the research process. One of the earliest gifts was a signed copy of a pamphlet, edited by Wim Crouwel and published by the print firm Last Type, which contains Hard Workers with Wild Pheasants, a mostly politically motivated Dutch design collective. The cover image by Hard Workers, specially commissioned for this publication, is a striking example of their fontography and thirty-five years later still captures and intrigues the viewer.

The supporting photograph shows all of the other objects given as souvenirs by Hard Workers and the resulting collection provides a personal and particular snapshot of their design practice.
Organizational Aesthetics

As a child of the seventies, I played board games with my family. Memory was a favourite. A set of picture cards is laid face-down, in a grid. The cards consist of matching pairs, and the object of the game is to find them. Players take turns to turn over two cards and match the images; they then turn them back over. You have to remember where the pairs are, and then try and match them. The one with the most pairs at the end of the game wins.

What I remember most about the game is the pleasing size and weight of the cards, and the wonderful, evocative images. I was a bookish child, and the illustrations were similar to those in my Golden Books books. My favourite featured a little girl with yellow plimsolls and a yellow dress. I guess she reminded me of me. I had blonde hair as a child and my Mum would often plait it. My favourite party dress was long and yellow with tiny flowers.

I’ve always collected things, and have several memory games, including one made for me by my partner’s Mum. I also have one featuring the work of Edward Monk and another with Chella Hooper’s graphics. A few years ago, I made a gift for a friend’s 50th birthday. I love charity shops, and when I saw this in another version of the set; I had to buy it. With all the same cards, it brought back so many memories, and it had to join the collection.
Memories from Room 2084, London College of Communication (LCC), University of the Arts London, September 2017

Were we adding anything to Fleming’s Artefact Study: A Proposed Model as discussed by R. Elliot et al (1983) cited in Pearce (1994) by living it out in a ‘live’ performative environment? At the very least, on the nights of the trials, it would appear that the audience sat squarely with the ‘information supporting the artefact’ in Fleming’s model (1974). As it happens, our archivists chose to spar with Sir Hilary Jenkinson and Theodore R. Schellenberg’s methodologies on archival procedure, by using their classification techniques in deciding whether or not contributors to the exhibition made the ‘archive’, or not.

The choice of these two famous adversaries, with Schellenberg on the side of researchers whilst Jenkinson busied himself with the technical fundamentals of archival procedure, could be taken as the age-old struggle between fusty bureaucracy and innovation that institutions often find themselves caught up in. However, it’s what unites Schellenberg and Jenkinson that is more pertinent to this exercise. Both believed that archives are accumulated as part of our day-to-day work: Natural accumulation is part of our business as academics. What place does this have within an institutional archive? As Fleming noted, an archive assists with our process of self-realisation, again, something that rings true, when we consider the impact an archive has on status and understanding for an educational institution.

1 Editorial decisions, by the author, to include the opinions of selected contributors to Room 2084 in this article were based on the following rationale: Tito Magrini, as an external to UAL, archivist who was a judge throughout the performances and was therefore able to give an overview of the entire exhibition. Jacqueline Winston-Silk as an internal UAL Curator of Archives & Special Collections Centre at LCC and judge for one performance. Dr Mark Ingham as a detractor and vocal critic of the exhibition, Graham Goldwater as someone surprised that his ephemera was worthy of inclusion and Siân Cook as a dedicated collector of HIV/AIDS ephemera and as an exhibitor who had their collection turned away by the panel.
We aimed to create an antithesis of Orwell's Room 101, Room 2084. Instead we created our very own Ministry of Love. We thought it would be a cuddly Desert Island Discs affair. Cheekily, perhaps it was our collective senescence that brought the dust down from the attic: Were we inadvertently creating a death drive? Were we suffering from Archive Fever? (Derrida, 1995).

Perhaps our executioners block was the number of ‘trials’ throughout the duration of the exhibition, where a jury composed of members of the archive/staff at UAL and student alumni debated the relative merits of each submitted object before an audience.

As one of the judges, Tito Magrini, Archivist at the DACS Foundation Art 360, recalls

> From what I remember, it felt like a blown-up characterisation of the archival practice, an exaggeration of power and nonsense in the old-fashioned way. A despot decreeing the laws of the archival realm. We, the judges, passed the archival principles and measured them against the proposed collections. A playful farce without consequences and responsibilities (Urquhart, 2019).

Did we, the audience, at the performance, run in the opposite direction to R. Elliot et al (1983) and discard our preconceived notions about the artefact and instead focus on the artefact itself? The descriptions of the objects under the hammer were all clearly on display. We had ample time to view both the object and understand its origin, meaning, provenance et al. However, we were swayed by the majesty of the judging panel, who were positioned ‘in the gods’ of the performance, some 25ft. in the air, on a balcony.

**Zimbardo Fever**

Was this really a ‘playful farce?’ Or was it some kind of Zimbardo Stanford Prison Study (1971) played out? The comparison, here, to the famed social psychology experiment is a light-hearted one. Our prison guards were the archivists, our exhibitors, the prisoners. The release into the ‘archive’ was negotiated. By physically placing archivists aloft, allowing them to collude, were we allowing our archivists to bend the social norms of their positions? Did we inadvertently compromise their objectivity with newly perceived authority?

Dr Mark Ingham, Teaching and Learning Academic Lead for the Design School and participant notes

> The question was of exclusion and exclusivity and who judged the judges and the judging. Who was in the club of the archive and who was ‘black’ balled. The process reminded me of Animal Farm and the creation of a hierarchy that resembled what the initial revolt was against. The game of who was in and who was out was arbitrary and gave power to the judges that I think was abused, as often is the case when you give someone that power. The irony for me is that it fell into the trap of 1984 which meant that thought was controlled by a big brother process (Urquhart, 2019)

A bird’s nest, an 8-track recording of Bowie’s Low album, a refugee lifejacket, all earnestly raised aloft. How did other participants in Room 2084 take to the floor? How did they find the experience of defending and justifying their object and rationale for collecting?

Senior Lecturer at LCC, Siân Cook, whose HIV/AIDS collection of awareness paraphernalia did not make it into the ‘archive’ responds that the experience was

> …Interesting, because I have not directly defended it to the ‘academic’ design community before. The audiences I have mainly presented the project to have been in the HIV/AIDS or health promotion/charity sector. It therefore brought my passion (and more emotional motivations) for the subject back to the fore (Urquhart, 2019).

Whilst Graham Goldwater, technician at LCC, whose collection of Fake Spiritualist cards also made the ‘archive’ notes
I have to admit that I did feel rather pumped up at the idea of getting my objet-trouvé into the archive. I had been collecting them for ages and felt that this was their time to step out of the drawer and be recognised, I felt responsible for pleading their case and making sure that they got the recognition that they deserved (Urquhart, 2019).

Magrini sums up the offerings for Room 2084:

Most of the submitted examples reflected the professional life of the collectors; some form of printed record and its design, ideal candidates for collections. There were also some objects in the mix which seemed more about throwing the spanner in the machine, interrogations on the archival practice, I found them problematic objects because they fitted more in a museum rather than archives, they required a museological approach. Overall the submitted records stood more on the collection side, there was a certain intentionality and incompleteness in the submissions that as a matter of fact defy the archive. I see collections as driftwood hazardously gathered together, whereas the Archive pulls together, re-form the lost origin and wholeness. (2019)

Ingham takes a more direct method of response “As Gilles Deleuze (1980) exclaims, ‘A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason’ (the archive). Or it can be thrown through the window.’ (Which is what I wanted to do!) (Urquhart, 2019).

What is performance without sentiment and emotion? Perhaps we were only viewing a snippet of someone’s collection but, rooted together, our exhibition became an archive of sorts?

Magrini takes up the point by playing with a quote by Terry Cook (2011),

‘We are what we keep; We keep what we are’. I have experienced through my work that it is more appropriate for archives created by individuals to use the expression: ‘We are what we don’t keep, we keep what we are comfortable with’. Archives tend to document feats of achievements; that specific battle was won and that award was received, glorious facts after facts. I would like to see archives that document the inner self rather than surface activities. Archives that reflect the subjective private self, the fragility of human nature. Archival theory was developed around archival qualities like authenticity, accountability, transactionality and evidentiality. Sentiment and emotions are considered manipulative, unreliable and fallible, the enemies of the objective impartial truth (Urquhart, 2019).

**Doublespeak**

Why use Jenkinson and Schellenberg as guiding lights for judgement in a performative exhibition that touches on dystopia whilst light-heartedly sneaking a peek inside the dusty drawers of academics? Do we have Archive Fever? Are our archives and collections death drives? So many questions…


Jacqueline Winston-Silk, Curator of Archives & Special Collections Centre, University of the Arts London sums up the institutional response to it all:

By its nature, an archive is acquired and preserved as a whole. Its integrity comes through its completeness (and in retaining its original order), as a record of a person/organisations activities. An archive is formed as a by-product of a person’s or organisation’s usual activities (in essence, an archive is created ‘organically’ (for want of a better word). By comparison, a collection (as opposed to an archive) is formed through the deliberate act of choosing and collecting. Selecting interesting things which reflect a person/institutions passion or mission, and research interests. Items in a collection are
brought together for the purpose of creating a collection, for example to illustrate a specific type of object, or perhaps to illustrate a people or place (Urquhart, 2019).

In the eyes of the institution our offering: a collection, an exhibition to illustrate the acquisition, accession, and documentation of collections that seek an archive. The process of which is born, perhaps from an Archive Fever of sorts.

The gavel has fallen and the court is closed. The archive is archived and Room 2084, no more. Whilst the memory and emotions of the exhibition may have dimmed, our archive from Room 2084 remains, caught on film. Therefore, we may conclude with the final words of George Orwell in 1984, ‘The voice from the telescreen was still pouring forth its tale of prisoners and booty and slaughter, but the shouting outside had died down a little...’
References


Urquhart, R. (2019). Quick Recollections of Room 2084. [Email interviews with contributors to Room 2084 and archivists who judged the events].

About the Authors

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His writing has featured in numerous publications, on a regular basis, for Grafik, Etapes, Communication Arts, Dazed & Confused, IdN and Computer Arts. Besides working as a design journalist, he also works as a freelance strategist, helping to create the narrative for concepts.

His present research is focused on the relationship between creativity and the environment. Before working as a writer and educator he worked in children’s TV, ran an art gallery and worked in research for broadcast production.

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His book *Hard Werken: One for All (Graphic Art & Design 1979–1994)* [co-authored with Bettina Furnee] is the first academic study of this influential avant-garde Dutch graphic design studio and was published by Valiz in 2018. In 2014, along with Lydia Wysocki (Applied Comics Etc) and John Swogger (archaeological illustrator and comic book artist), he founded the Applied Comics Network. He is a founder member of the Comics Research Hub (CoRH) at the University of the Arts London, co-editor of *Contexts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge 2019) and *Representing Acts of Violence in Comics* (Routledge 2019) and is associate editor of the *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. 