Preface / A Reader’s Guide

Hoard and Collections: This thesis as cumulative

This practice-based research presents a perspective on accumulation that re-contextualises existing and emergent knowledge of the psychopathologies of hoarding in the contexts of collection and urges to collect. My work straddles Fine Art and the developing area of Medical Humanities through engaging with disorder as a culturally produced phenomenon, in parallel to its clinical counterpart, and suggests its uses to knowledge production within the fields of Fine Art and critical theory. This research is based on the premise that collation produces subjects and that, in the overlaps or faultlines between materials, critical interdisciplinary convergences occur.

The overlapping terms, collecting and hoarding / collection and hoard, are already found rubbing up against each other across disciplines. The terms can be located in critical studies of contemporary Fine Art practices, in cultural studies on waste and ecologies, in psychiatric and psychoanalytic histories and research, and in sociological research into human behaviours in relation to objects, waste and domestic space. My research brings these, often disparate, fields together and, through their own collation, interrogates interdisciplinarity as a further mode of accumulation.

This is collage.

Collage is both the methodology and the subject of this research. I am testing relationships and overlaps between materials - through discourse analysis, through practice and through producing a thesis that ultimately combines visual practice and various forms (and weights) of text. The form of the research is inherently reflexive of its subject and, in reaction to/reflection of the research, serves as its metaphorical equivalent.

In this way the PhD research asks a question of itself and of practice-based research more generally: Can traditional academic modes of writing be adapted to reflect and sustain practice-based enquiry? And, can an adaptive,
reflexive, practice-based academic text contain the argument and theoretical weight necessary for the doctoral award?

In asking what happens to ‘stuff’ and its classification when it is (over)accumulated and in asking where these accumulations are situated and how they occur, I am also questioning collation as a meaning-filled practice and locating new meanings emerging from joined-up things as they occur within assemblage. This is, I am proposing, how new interdisciplinary knowledge is formed – in the binding together of things – both purposefully and accidentally. Comings-together of terms (such as hoard and collection) are therefore essential to this research – as a part of resolving and assessing what happens in accumulation.

As a tool to assess accumulations/composite images as new wholes I sometimes use temporal line drawing in response to collage - regathering disparate cuttings into more homogenous pencil-drawn composites, which then fade or are eradicated. These drawn spaces (which are often drawn onto the walls of actual space and therefore back into relationships with objects) are not illustrations of objects in space but are drawn from collages. Collage is therefore where all the practice-based work in this thesis begins and ends.
Projectile (2010) Details of installation
Pencil drawing on wall; defunct projector; paper beam; filing cabinet; paper collage. Detail of installation at Galerie 37, Haarlem, The Netherlands.

Via the slow growth of a meticulous, busy image and its subsequent erasure I try to iterate the transient nature of object attachments, collections and
hoards: The putting up, clearing up, re-arranging and ‘churning’ (Frost, 2010 p: 27). This temporality – real or implied through an investment in precariousness – is a feature of all the works in this PhD by practice. This includes my work of fiction, *The Detroit Project*, where it is reflected in the itinerant nature of the city-in-flux and an interpretation of ruin as something recorded at a point in its demise but still potentialised and, as yet, unfixed.

Popular opinion presumes the polar existences of psychopathology (hoarding) or a seeming rationale (collection). On this spectrum the hoard can be viewed as a spatialisation of mental disorder and the collection as a rational, orderly, aestheticised pursuit. Looking into the condition of Hoarding Disorder, I found it to be the only mental health condition diagnosed spatially and unearthed critical theoretical implications embedded in the tools of its diagnosis and then convergent histories of other psychiatric diagnoses. Photographs of staged spaces form the basis for clinical diagnosis of a hoarder and are pointed to during treatment to ascertain severity of the condition. Discovering that these diagnostic tools embedded visual imagery and evolved from staged constructions of spaces, I found them useful to knowledge production within Fine Art practice and critical theory. I applied spatial theory and ideas around object attachment and assemblage to the construction/reading of psychiatric diagnostic tools.

This PhD questions the spatialisation, performance, aestheticisation and display of diagnostic criteria inherent to psychological definitions, via this discovery of how the hoard (and its image) is used as a surrogate for the hoarder in diagnosis. It also questions (similarly diagnostic) symbolic values or psychoanalysing of (art) objects mounted or collated in public, museological or private space.

In locating the coexistence of image-making/installation/performance across the disciplines of Fine Art and psychiatry I found myself investigating the visual and performative formations of criteria surrounding a condition as a practice. The hoard itself therefore becomes a collagist methodology - its
overlaps and problematising of space implicated in the reading of a condition, the reading of place and the psychological readings of assemblage.

I do not re-classify ‘hoard’ or ‘collection’ in this thesis but, through discourse analysis, examine how order can itself be subject to perception and that overlaps, slippages and separations occur and recur, problematising the desire to seek clarity from any mono-disciplinary standpoint. Throughout the thesis I examine these terms, their relationship to the formation of diagnoses and their usages across disciplines, assessing how knowledge is shared or contradicted. Ultimately, the research question is methodological, asking **what the uses are of collage as a practice, towards an understanding of the psychologies and spaces of accumulation.**

**Contents:**

This practice-based PhD contains three interconnected sections:

2. Textual art practice: *The Detroit Project* – a theoretical fiction
3. This academic written thesis

**Methodology:**

**Reflections:**

This practice-based PhD is inherently reflexive – mirroring its subject and content through its own structure and materials. It is in several parts and is made up of varied materials and voices so that it reflects the accumulation and collagist methodology of the central question. In this way, academic research and art practice are one and the same – making a case for an indistinction in validity and reflexivity between a thesis in one medium and one in another.