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Catalogues for an entropic collection: losses, gains and disciplinary exhaustion in the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow

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Abstract. This essay takes the Hunterian Museum’s collections, and particularly the large collection of anatomical preparations, as a case study to isolate the role of collections in disciplinary consolidation and change. I examine a large, unstudied paper archive of catalogues and inventories that strive to organize and account for objects, but more often reveal the collection’s gradual transformation through continual losses and gains. This evidence indicates that while collections provide the material basis for object-based disciplines, the end of a collection does not necessarily support established or emergent disciplinary norms. As I show, it is in fact disorder in both the documentary archive and physical collections – and especially instabilities introduced by external circumstances that individuals can exploit but cannot control – that allows a collection to be mobilized, surreptitiously, for disciplinary ends.

There is a danger, which perhaps this essay has not avoided, of giving the impression that a system of authority is *something*, rather than the actions of living men ... The course of history is the result of a complex of human actions – purposive, accidental, sometimes determined – and it cannot be reduced to one transcendent purpose.¹

On 25 April 1912, Professor John Walter Gregory sent a letter to the Museum Committee of the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, enclosing a memorandum from Thomas Hastie Bryce, Regius Professor of Anatomy and curator of the archaeological artefacts and anatomical preparations. In the memorandum, Bryce noted the recent expansion of the anthropological and ethnological collections and the lack of space to display these collections. His solution: ‘the transference of the anatomical collection to the anatomical department which is so highly desirable in itself apart from all the other considerations provides the only means by which the new collections can be

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¹ Douglas Hay, *Albion’s Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, London: Pantheon, 1976, p. 54. I thank Gabriel Cervantes for drawing my attention to this passage.

shown'.² When this transfer came to pass, the anatomical core of William Hunter's collection was removed from the museum that bears his name, beginning a century-long series of dispersals: various parts of the collection were redistributed into the Zoology Museum (built 1922–1924); the new library building (opened 1968, Special Collections completed 1997); the Hunterian Art Gallery (opened 1980); and the University Archives (moved 1996–2000). After the 1912 split, the anatomy collections themselves were further subdivided, only to be later reunited: when I visited the Hunterian in 2011, I witnessed the reintegration of the pathology collections (previously housed in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary) into the Anatomy Museum, cases of hydrocephalus saddling up to sheets of mounted bladder stones, a carcinoma of the rectum jangling against foetal anomalies as carts rolled into a room of bare metal shelves.

Bryce's memo marks both end and beginning. The anatomical preparations came into their own as a spatially distinct collection, while the defining objects of Hunter's professional identity were physically and conceptually detached from what remained of his larger, wide-ranging eighteenth-century collection. That moment was, of course, part of a longer story of transformation: from their installation in the purpose-built museum in 1807, 'the' Hunterian collections evolved through loss, theft, relocation, planned and unplanned destruction, and deaccession; equally transformative, various forms of accession – gifts, bequests and the labour of generations of curators and faculty – grew the collections by inches and ells. In 1912, this largely invisible institutional history of gradual change was fractured by the removal of a set of objects, the anatomical preparations, defined by its relation to a professional group. In this essay, I examine the tangled relationship between these two histories of ending, gradual and catastrophic. My aim is to uncover the role of the paper archive – documents that categorize, organize and distribute, but also lose track of and mystify, objects – in mobilizing collections to stake out professional identities. The collection's paper archive, I argue, makes palpable the uneven and fraught development of modern disciplines over the course of the nineteenth century.

Through its fitful beginnings and recurrent endings, the Hunterian museum has never been loosed from its eponymous origin. William Hunter's wishes, tastes, motivations and professional identity have been deployed to support a slew of decisions over two centuries. However, by focusing on the bureaucratic ends to which a collection is put on paper, this essay diverges from a body of criticism focused on the individual collector with his attendant desires and neuroses.³ Instead, I advance recent scholarship on European collections as sites of de- and recontextualization of objects, as measures of institutional development, and as sites of the consolidation and evolution of disciplinary norms and conventions. As a figure for the collection's magnificence and value as much as its epistemological foundations, Hunter stands as a reminder of the collection's

2 'Letter from Professor J.W. Gregory to Convener of Museum Committee, enclosing memorandum by Thomas H. Bryce for rearranging of Hunterian Museum', GUA 3626 a, b, Glasgow University Archives, Glasgow.

3 See Susan Stewart, 'Objects of desire', in Stewart, *On Longing*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 132–169; and Jean Baudrillard, 'The system of collecting' ('Le système des objets', 1968), rpt. and trans. in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), *Cultures of Collecting*, London: Reaktion, 1994, pp. 7–24.

Enlightenment legacy of order in disorder, its pre-disciplinary logic of variety striving for synthetic unity.⁴ As Luisa Calè and Adriana Craciun suggest, ‘Enlightenment collecting and museums relied on the taxonomies and tabulas privileged in systematic visions, but such orders were constantly in motion.’⁵ Like the essays included in Calè and Craciun’s special issue on pre-disciplinarity, this essay investigates the ‘competing orders of the collector, the collection, and the latter’s institutional and epistemological rearrangements’ that enable but also destabilize the stories disciplines tell about themselves. In doing so, the essay reverses the received history of collecting: rather than tracking the shift from the perceived disorganization of the Renaissance cabinet of curiosities to the orderly episteme of the nineteenth-century museum, I argue that mechanisms of order – published and manuscript catalogues – lay bare the instability and disorder of nineteenth-century collections. The flux of objects coming and going over time – the collection’s changeling ontological status – foregrounds the unanchored epistemological ends of collections and the immense and often invisible labour of corralling them to serve institutional or professional ends.

In what follows, I employ the Hunterian Museum’s anatomical collections as a case study to isolate the role of collections in disciplinary consolidation and change. I am particularly concerned with the evolution of medicine and its subdiscipline of gross anatomy, which occupied a central place in early nineteenth-century medical science but gradually lost its authority with the ascendance of laboratory medicine in the final decades of the century.⁶ Within this broad historical shift, anatomical preparations were put to work for disciplinary ends in various ways that defy expectation: for example, what looks like a strategic move to consolidate disciplinary norms emerges as the very antithesis of contemporary trends in research and teaching. Likewise, even when an agent is capable of making objects do his – or her, although women are not well represented in my case study – bidding, the sticky particularity of things obtrudes in attempts to make collections serve disciplinary ends. These obtrusions are most clearly visible at moments of physical change – when collections are in transit, combined, or dispersed – but the continual unsettling of losses and gains forces us to re-evaluate established narratives of nineteenth-century discipline formation. Like the system of legal authority brilliantly analysed by Douglas Hay, disciplines are the product of a complex of human action, both purposive and circumstantial, constrained and free. This essay shows how much of that action tends toward entropy, ending by getting derailed, losing momentum, petering out, exhausting itself. Rather than an impediment to disciplinary consolidation, the entropic condition of managing objects in collections is, I will show, its necessary precondition: disciplines would not coagulate or evolve without the continual pull toward disorder and the inability of human agents to successfully manage or stay this tendency. The collection’s paper orders – its bureaucratic

4 Luisa Calè and Adriana Craciun, ‘The disorder of things’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (2011) 45, pp. 1–13.

5 Calè and Craciun, op. cit. (4), p. 4.

6 John Harley Warner and Lawrence J. Rizzolo, ‘Anatomical instruction and training for professionalism from the 19th to the 21st centuries’, *Clinical Anatomy* (2006) 19, pp. 403–414, 408; see also William F. Bynum, *Science and the Practice of Medicine in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

apparatus of catalogues, meeting minutes, accession books – are both a record of these failures and a generic expression of the entropic condition of modern disciplinaryity.

Paper orders: disciplines and collections

Disciplinary consolidation Europe and North America is conventionally lodged in the period from 1750 to 1900, depending on which discipline happens to be under consideration and the scholar's own disciplinary perspective.⁷ Definitions vary, but most scholars agree that disciplines don't simply cohere around a subject area or body of knowledge; rather, a discipline depends on the development of accepted (if multifarious) methodologies, 'a regularized set of practices' through which 'knowledge is acquired, confirmed, implemented, preserved, and reproduced'.⁸ Further, methods and practices definitive of disciplines are enacted within institutional frameworks, including university departments and professional societies that supply the means of communicating results of research through academic journals and professional publications, and which set the rules governing the conduct of research, what counts as credible evidence, and so on.⁹ For many disciplines, such institutional frameworks were historically tied to sites where material objects accumulated, what Bruno Latour calls 'centers of calculation' that shaped European science in the Enlightenment.¹⁰ Centres of calculation – universities, museums, archives, laboratories – function to systematize, classify and transform accumulated material through comparison, combination and abstraction. These processes distinguish one discipline from another by defining domains and organizing content conceptually.¹¹ With object-based disciplines – including botany, entomology, ornithology, zoology, medicine, archeology, art history, bibliography, library science

7 For example, Robin Valenza suggests that physics emerged as an intellectual discipline in the seventeenth century with Newton, while Caroline Cornish tracks the consolidation of economic botany as a discipline in the 1870s. Robin Valenza, *Literature, Language and the Rise of the Intellectual Disciplines in Britain, 1680–1820*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009; Caroline Cornish, 'Nineteenth-century museums and the shaping of disciplines: potentialities and limitations at Kew's Museum of Economic Botany', *Museum History Journal* (2015) 8, pp. 8–27.

8 James Chandler, 'Introduction: doctrines, disciplines, discourses, departments', *Critical Inquiry* (2009) 35, pp. 729–746, 732; Robert Post, 'Debating disciplinaryity', *Critical Inquiry* (2009) 35, pp. 749–770, 751. Chandler (p. 733) suggests that 'while disciplines are not reducible to beliefs, opinions, and subject matters, they do typically seem to require the thickening or quickening of such content functions to count as disciplines'.

9 Chandler, op. cit. (8), p. 734; Valenza, op. cit. (7), p. 6; Post, op. cit. (8), pp. 751–752.

10 Bruno Latour, *Science in Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, pp. 215–257. For the application of Latour's concept to Enlightenment scientific collecting see David Philip Miller, 'Joseph Banks, empire, and "centres of calculation" in late Hanoverian London', in David Philip Miller and Peter Reill (eds.), *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 21–37; Heike Jöns, 'Centre of calculation', in John A. Agnew and David N. Livingstone (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Geographical Knowledge*, London: Sage, 2011, pp. 158–170; and Dominik Hünninger, 'Inveterate travellers and travelling invertebrates: human and animal in Enlightenment entomology', in Sarah Cockram and Andrew Wells (eds.), *Interspecies Interaction: Animals and Humans between the Middle Ages and Modernity*, London and New York: Routledge, 2017, pp. 171–189.

11 Lee S. Shulman, 'Disciplines of inquiry in education: an overview', *Educational Researcher* (1981) 10, p. 5–12, 6.

and many more – this work happens, at least in part, through the organization, categorization and display of physical objects.

Following from this insight, scholars have shown how museums and collections provide the material basis for disciplines, and how rearranging collections reflects changing disciplinary norms. As Samuel Alberti suggests, disciplines ‘are constructed with buildings, tools, and objects of study’, and these material instantiations can reinforce existing configurations of knowledge (thus creating inertia) or signal disciplinary evolution and change.¹² Put another way, museums often make palpable the tension between the prescriptive work of disciplines – the entrenched, regularized practices of interpretation and classification, the accepted ways of doing things – and the wayward push and pull of circumstance that can upend norms and conventions. According to Christopher Whitehead, museum displays embody theories about ‘the proper ways of apprehending, studying, appreciating and even revering objects’, and of determining their relative values and thus ‘knowing’ them.¹³ In disciplines grounded in material objects, theories are enabled by ‘museological potentials (such as architectural space and display) and practices (such as documentation and classification)’, which often reflect ‘prescriptive’ forms of selection, categorization, narrativization and value judgement.¹⁴ Despite the potential for disciplining people, practices and potentials are regulated or ‘compromised’ (as Whitehead puts it) by circumstances, including space limitations, funding, donations, institutional politics, environmental conditions (including the decay or loss of buildings or the objects themselves) and ideological shifts in culture more broadly (public support for repatriation, for example).¹⁵

As this list indicates, neither museums nor centres of calculation more generally are stable or fixed; like the disciplines they support, they are fluid, open to negotiation and change. Objects come and go, and the meaning affixed to objects, and the knowledge articulated with them, mutate through reorganization and recontextualization as institutional goals, staff and finances shift. For example, drawing on Bernard Lightman’s approach to ‘site biography’, Caroline Cornish investigates the emergence of overlapping epistemic systems in the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew Gardens, identifying a ‘layered effect’ in the succession of museum displays.¹⁶ Taken together, the work of Alberti, Whitehead and Cornish demonstrates that institutional frameworks for disciplines remain ‘places of power’ where knowledge is fashioned, but museums are also sites where knowledge is subsequently and repeatedly refashioned through the actions of individuals and groups coupled with external circumstances and decisions that propel, hinder or redirect these actions. While much scholarship on this

12 Samuel Alberti, *Nature and Culture: Objects, Disciplines and the Manchester Museum*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 3.

13 Christopher Whitehead, *Museums and the Construction of Disciplines: Art and Archeology in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, London: Duckworth, 2009, pp. 24–25.

14 Whitehead, op. cit. (13), p. 40.

15 Whitehead, op. cit. (13), p. 39.

16 Cornish, op. cit. (7), p. 10; Bernard Lightman, ‘Refashioning the spaces of London science’, in David N. Livingstone and Charles W.J. Withers (eds.), *Geographies of Nineteenth-Century Science*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2011), pp. 25–50.

topic explicitly or implicitly attributes the work of refashioning to the actions of specific people – particularly curators and keepers who control the organization and display of collections – I’m emphasizing a more diffuse and messy combination of factors.¹⁷ Object-based disciplines make it apparent (as Jan Golinski puts it) that instead of the standard teleological narrative of professionalization as the driver of disciplinary consolidation in the nineteenth century, ‘change might be explained as the unintended outcome of the interaction of uncoordinated, even conflicting, forces’.¹⁸

While acknowledging that disciplines do not simply impose order on people or things, and limiting individual actors’ agency in the process of fashioning knowledge for disciplinary ends, most studies that take up the nexus of collecting and disciplinary consolidation focus predominantly on mechanisms of display.¹⁹ Exhibits of material objects may embody theories and allow us to mark out disciplinary norms and their refashioning over time, but this process depends on an immense apparatus of paperwork. Displays are underwritten, quite literally, by a paper (and now digital) archive, that vast repository of documentary records including museum registers, catalogues, inventories, accession logs, location indices, donation books, financial records, minutes of committee meetings and a host of other scribal and printed documents.²⁰ As Geoffrey Swinney argues, such documentary records are fundamentally ‘a technology, by and through which the museum is constructed and constituted, its collections disciplined and its objects arrayed’.²¹ This work depends on the formal elements of the genre. James Delbourgo and Staffan Müller-Wille point out that documents that list – catalogues, registers, inventories, logs – have a spatial logic; they draw things together by enumerating and abstracting, linking objects in non-syntactic formations that perform social, political and cultural functions.²² Like the regimes of paperwork characteristic of modern

17 For an explicit argument about the agency of museum keepers see Andrew Cunningham, ‘Quis custodiet ipsos custodiet? Or, what Richard Owen did to John Hunter’s collection’, in Rina Knoeff and Robert Zwijnenberg (eds.), *The Fate of Anatomical Collections*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2015, pp. 23–52. The essays collected in that volume, with several exceptions, tend to reflect the editors’ assertion that ‘the purpose, appearance, and meaning [of anatomical collections] continuously change according to the cultural and scientific ideas of their keepers’. Rina Knoeff and Robert Zwijnenberg, ‘Setting the stage’, in Knoeff and Zwijnenberg, *The Fate of Anatomical Collections*, op. cit., pp. 3–10, 5.

18 Jan Golinski, *Making Natural Knowledge: Constructivism and the History of Science*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 69. For Golinski (p. 71), this condition is usefully extrapolated from Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power as lodged neither in institutions nor in apparatuses, but rather comprised by a set of techniques, instruments, procedures etc. whose action is strategic and capillary.

19 There has been a wealth of scholarship on the epistemic and political aspects of display, including the essays collected in Sharon MacDonald (ed.), *The Politics of Display: Museums, Science, Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1998; and Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

20 Tricia Close-Koenig also makes this argument in ‘Cataloguing collections: the importance of paper records of Strasbourg’s medical school pathological anatomy collection’, in Knoeff and Zwijnenberg, *The Fate of Anatomical Collections*, op. cit. (17), pp. 211–227.

21 Geoffrey Swinney, ‘What do we know about what we know? The museum “register” as museum object’, in Sandra Dudley, Amy Jane Barnes, Jennifer Binnie, Julia Petrov and Jennifer Walklate (eds.), *The Thing about Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation*, Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 31–45, 32.

22 James Delbourgo and Staffan Müller-Wille, ‘Introduction: listmania’, *Isis* (2012) 103, pp. 711–712.

commercial and government bureaucracy, museum records comprise management systems for organizing and controlling the world of people and objects.²³ But like the displays described by Cornish, paper technologies also accumulate in layers that reflect changing epistemic goals and physical conditions; even as they marshal and control, they capture the dynamic and contingent process of disciplinary formation and transformation. Such contingency becomes palpable because the paper archive provides what is often difficult to pinpoint in collections on display, ‘a trace of those objects that, through decay, damage, theft or deaccession and disposal, are no longer materially present’, as well as the influx of new objects over time.²⁴ By virtue of their generic function of accounting for objects – to enumerate and keep track of but also to evaluate, explain, justify – these record-keeping technologies foreground how nineteenth-century disciplinary norms grew out of Enlightenment organizational techniques and epistemic structures that are often seen as their outmoded precursors. Further, the paper archive reveals that moments of apparent disciplinary consolidation – like that announced in Bryce’s memo – might actually run counter to, or undercut, a discipline’s developmental arc.

Catalogue disorders of the Hunterian Museum

William Hunter’s collections were vast and multifarious. His anatomy collections – which included anatomical preparations, a series of life-sized obstetrical casts of dissected torsos, and chalk drawings by Jan van Rymsdyk for Hunter’s lavish obstetrical atlas, *Anatomia uteri humani gravidi tabulis illustrata (The Anatomy of the Human Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures)*, published in 1774 – supported his research, teaching and practice as a surgeon and man-midwife. In 1768, however, Hunter wrote to his mentor and friend William Cullen, ‘I am now collecting in the largest sense of the word.’²⁵ Beyond objects connected to his profession, Hunter amassed 30,000 coins and medals; a collection of ethnographic objects from James Cook’s South Sea voyages; a select group of paintings and antiquities; and a library of 10,000 books and 650 manuscripts, including a substantive collection of incunabula, many of which are Latin and Greek classics published by Aldus Manutius at the Aldine Press. Hunter also bought other people’s collections at auction or by arrangement, including John Fothergill’s impressive collection of shells, corals and minerals and William Yeats’s entomological collections.

Johann Fabricius’s description of Hunter’s house and museum at Great Windmill Street in 1782 (the year before Hunter’s death) points to an integrated collection organized loosely by familiar categories. Like his famed predecessor Sir Hans Sloane, Hunter’s strategies for organization and display aligned with ‘encyclopedic Renaissance schemes for assembling the world in microcosm according to type of

23 For the bureaucratic and disciplinary function of paperwork see Ben Kafka, *The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork*, Cambridge, MA: Zone Books, 2012.

24 Swinney, op. cit. (21), p. 32.

25 Lawrence Keppie, *William Hunter and the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow, 1807–2007*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 18.

object'.²⁶ For Hunter and many of his contemporaries, such encyclopedic ambitions continued alongside new eighteenth-century systematics, as the 1785 Trustees Catalogue of Hunter's shell collection, organized by Linnaean binomials, indicates.²⁷ Like many collectors of the succeeding generation – including John Soane and Thomas Jefferson – Hunter created a galleried space to display his collection: books lined the ground floor, protected by an iron lattice; anatomical preparations and engraved plates for the *Gravid Uterus* were housed in the gallery halfway up the wall; weapons and horns hung from the gallery; mahogany cabinets stood in the centre of the lower level for displaying minerals. Shells and stuffed birds were removed to a room upstairs for lack of space, and more books and paintings were scattered over the house: in the bedroom, back room and front room, and in the museum proper.²⁸

After Hunter's death and the bequest of his collections to the University of Glasgow in 1783, his trustees (including his nephew Matthew Baillie) undertook to produce new catalogues of various discrete parts of the collection, including the printed books, manuscripts, coins and medals, insects, shells, minerals and anatomical material. By 1799 Baillie was advocating for the speedy removal of the collections to Glasgow, and in 1807, twenty-four years after Hunter's death, the whole lot was transported and installed in a purpose-built museum on the university campus. The first public catalogue of the museum, James Laskey's *A General Account of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow* (1813), foregrounds Hunter's legacy and Scottish heritage, casting the collection as the 'production of the labour and intelligence of one individual' that it was Scotland's good fortune to acquire (Figures 1–4).²⁹

The 'General analysis of the contents' provides a snapshot of collection's organization in the museum: you walk through the Anti-room to the Saloon, followed by visits to the Apartment on the Left, Apartment on the Right, Hall of Anatomy, Hall of the Elephant, Antique Room, Vestibule, Stair-Case, Medal Room, Gallery of Paintings, Library, Conchological Division, and finally Fossil Arrangement. The spatial organization is obvious, suggesting a domestic interior by designations of function: an anteroom leads to the larger saloon, the staircase takes you from one floor to another, the vestibule stands between the entrance and the interior room. Despite this gesture to its origins as a domestic collection, this catalogue's spatial organization also shores up divisions

26 James Delbourgo, *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, p. 260.

27 'Trustee Catalogue of the Shells. 1785', MR 22, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. Hunter had been 'ranging' the shell collection in 1781, as he notes in a letter to his friend Dr William Cuming. Helen Brock (ed.), *The Correspondence of Dr. William Hunter*, vol. 2, London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008, pp. 349–350. Hunter was not alone in combining encyclopedic and systematic, as Charles Willson Peale's attempts to sell his Philadelphia museum to the fledgling government of the United States make clear: by exhibiting 'all the varieties of animals and fossils' arranged according to 'the Linnaean method,' his museum would become 'a collection of everything useful or curious – a world in miniature!' Lillian B. Miller (ed.), *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and his Family*, vol. 2: *Charles Willson Peale: The Artist as Museum Keeper, 1791–1810*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988, pp. 9–12, 274.

28 For a translation of Fabricius's letter see Keppie op. cit. (25), pp. 25–26.

29 James Laskey, *General Account of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow*, Glasgow: John Smith & Son, 1813, pp. iii–iv.

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Figure 1a. James Laskey, 'General analysis of the contents', *A General Account of the Hunterian Museum, Glasgow*, Glasgow: John Smith & Son, 1813. University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

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CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS.	
Page 9, add to Case 1, Birds, No. 6, White-Billed Jacamar, Lath. Syn.	
Page 9, alter in Case 2, Birds, No. 2, White-Headed Heron, <i>Ardea Major</i> . Linn. which has been moved to Case 4, No. 7, page 18, and insert White-Headed Frigate Pelican, Lath. Syn. now No. 2.	
Page 15, add to Case 3, Birds, No. 9, Bare-Necked Crow, Lath. Syn.	
Page 18, add to Case 4, Birds, No. 8, Magellanic Goose, <i>L'Ore des Terres</i> <i>Magellaniques</i> , Buf. pl. Ent. 1006.	
Page 18, add to Case 4, Birds, No. 9, Tufted Shag, Lath. Syn.	
Page 18, add to Case 4, Birds, No. 10, Wood Ibis, <i>Tantalus Loculator</i> , Linn.	
Page 23, Case 5, line 1, No. 5, read <i>Scorpio Afer</i> , Linn.	
Page 25, Case 5, line 3. No. 27, "fur is made," read "is obtained."	
Page 29, line 35, read Professor Jameson.	
Page 32, Case A, line 1. No. 4, Moraminosa, read Foraminosa.	
Page 33, Case A, line 1. No. 13, Madrepóra Virginia, read Virginea, and omit <i>a</i> before Shrubby.	
Page 36, Case E, line 17, insert after "a large Bean Pod gathered from the Ragamahall Hills." Climbing Mimosa, <i>Mimosa Scandans</i> , Linn.	
Page 38, line 49, insert <i>a</i> before Stone, and next line, instead of "all that was preserved," read "part of what was preserved."	
Page 39, Case 4, line 44, alter "or becoming much lighter," to "more transparent."	
Page 42, line 9, alter "Saggy Mineral Pitch," to <i>Slaggy</i> .	
Page 43, line 54, erase "Coccolite from Arendahl in Norway."	
Page 47, line 38, read "transmits the blood to and from."	
Page 58, line 10, omit "corresponding" before "villous ridges."	
Page 66, line 43, read deltoid muscle.	
Page 69, line 3, omit "from side to side."	
Page 74, line 38, alter "Beak of an Albatross," to "Beak of a Pelican."	
Page 77, No. 16, line 7, after "that it is emblematic of the Clyde," add, "and of the great work in which they were engaged."	
Page 77, Vestibule, No. 1, read Pelicanus Onocrotalus.	
Page 82, Vestibule, add No. 19, Charlestown Pelican, Arctic. Zool. No. 507.	
Page 85, line 28, read "Gneius Pompeius."	

Figure 1b. Continued

of kind: anatomy, elephant, medals cordoned off from one another, typography mirroring walls, doorways in capital letters. Divisive descriptors absent in Hunter's more integrated house museum reinforce divisions of knowledge: paintings belong in a gallery, 'an apartment devoted to the exhibition of works of art'; a library demands Latin descriptors ('Auctores Classici et Antiqui'); fossils arrange themselves differently than living beings; shells constitute a 'Division', their own administrative zone consisting of a definite (if dizzying) company of types marshalled into order. The spatialized text of the catalogue thus performs the classificatory imperatives of sorting, setting like with like, limiting entanglements: each room a rubric, each heading a division of practice and method, space partitioned according to emergent disciplinary paradigms.

This picture is entirely too tidy and thus not true. What discipline mingles South Sea curiosities, fossils, stuffed reptiles, minerals and 'Antiquities and Miscellanies', as in the Apartment on the Left? The 'miscellaneous curiosities' of the Elephant's Hall sound all too promiscuous. We might say that Laskey's arrangement is looking forward to modern disciplinary divisions but has not quite made it there. I would argue that the catalogue's table of contents performs the semblance of order, typographically organizing on paper what remains disorderly in space and conceptual orientation. This pertains to the text as well. For example, the Saloon achieves coherence through a series of detailed descriptions of bird specimens, numbered and divided by colloquial names in bold and all capitals followed by italicized Linnaean binomials. In this section, Laskey represents a coherent field of knowledge characterized by specific, established methods and practices. These are both material (the practice of taxidermy and posing the specimen, for example) and textual: each description moves from precise measurements of size and weight to coloration, typical anatomical features provided in technical ornithological language ('scapulars', 'wing coverts', 'prime quills', etc.), geographic origin and habitat, and generation, including nesting habits and characteristics of eggs. This orchestrated stab at disciplining the objects on display, however, requires labelling the mineral collection housed in the room's centre cabinets as 'Miscell.' and downplaying its significance typographically as well as conceptually – that is, until Laskey returns to these cabinets as part of the 'Mineralogical Department' twenty-two pages later.³⁰ The Anti-room magnifies the miscellany that Laskey works to obfuscate in other parts of the catalogue: the text jumbles things together, skipping in a series of paragraphs (and sometimes within one paragraph) from *Papillio menelaus*, to nine-banded armadillo, to long-tailed manis, to Hercules beetle, to *Scarabaeus neptunus*, to a 'beautiful copy of the Koran', to a painting of a dwarf known as Leather Jack, to a painting of the agouti, to a facsimile cast of the antique stone found at Rosetta.³¹ Flipping between colloquial and taxonomic language, Laskey opens the catalogue by foregrounding the rare, singular, unusual and astonishing, harkening again and again to the variety and miscellaneity of a collection in which everything is elegant, admirable, handsome, beautiful, magnificent.³²

30 Laskey op. cit. (29), pp. 7–18, 40.

31 Laskey op. cit. (29), pp. 5–6.

32 Laskey op. cit. (29).

Laskey's text thus encapsulates the history of collecting as it has been told in recent scholarship, the Renaissance *Wunderkammer* giving way to Enlightenment classificatory systems, themselves a prelude to the disciplinary orders of the Victorian museum.³³ I want to make a different point.

Take out the adjectival flourishes and Laskey's catalogue of the Anti-room contents resembles the higgledy-piggledy manuscript inventory of items as they were packed for the move from London to Glasgow in 1807:

Box 22 Contents

War instruments from south

Sea islands 8–21–16

Various horns of animals

9 pr 3

head of a sea horse and ass and  
cheek

Intestines filled with hard plaster

55

Box 23 Contents 17 skulls

and a number of separated bones

a part of 3 setts of bones

horse head

six bones of sawfish

2 Elks Horns and a Elephant

Tusk 3 Whasps nest

2 pr of snow shoes

Box 24

large horns of an unknown animal

2 antelopes 2 sea cows

3 rhinoceros horns

lower jaw of an elephant

2 Fossil bones of D^o

9 or thereabouts varreios thing³⁴

33 For an example of this developmental narrative see Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 1999; for a consideration of the limitations of this dichotomy and the 'transitional period' of the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth see Sophie Thomas, "'Things on holiday': collections, museums, and the poetics of unruliness", *European Romantic Review* (2009) 20, pp. 167–175.

34 'Note of contents of boxes containing some of the natural history specimens for removal from London to Glasgow. 1807', MR 47/1, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.



MR 4711 Box 22 - Contains  
 wax putrescent from South  
 sea Islands - 8 - 21 - 16  
 various skins of mammals  
 9 pr 3  
 head of a grey horse and ass and  
 sheep  
 intestines of a whale  
 plaster  
 55

---

Box 23 Contains 17 skulls  
 and a number of separated bones  
 a part of 2 sets of bones  
 for the head  
 six bones of saw fish  
 2 Elks Horns and a Diphtheria  
 Tusk 3 Whales nest  
 2 pr of Snow shoes

19.0

Figure 2. 'Note of contents of boxes containing some of the natural history specimens for removal from London to Glasgow. 1807', MR 4711, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

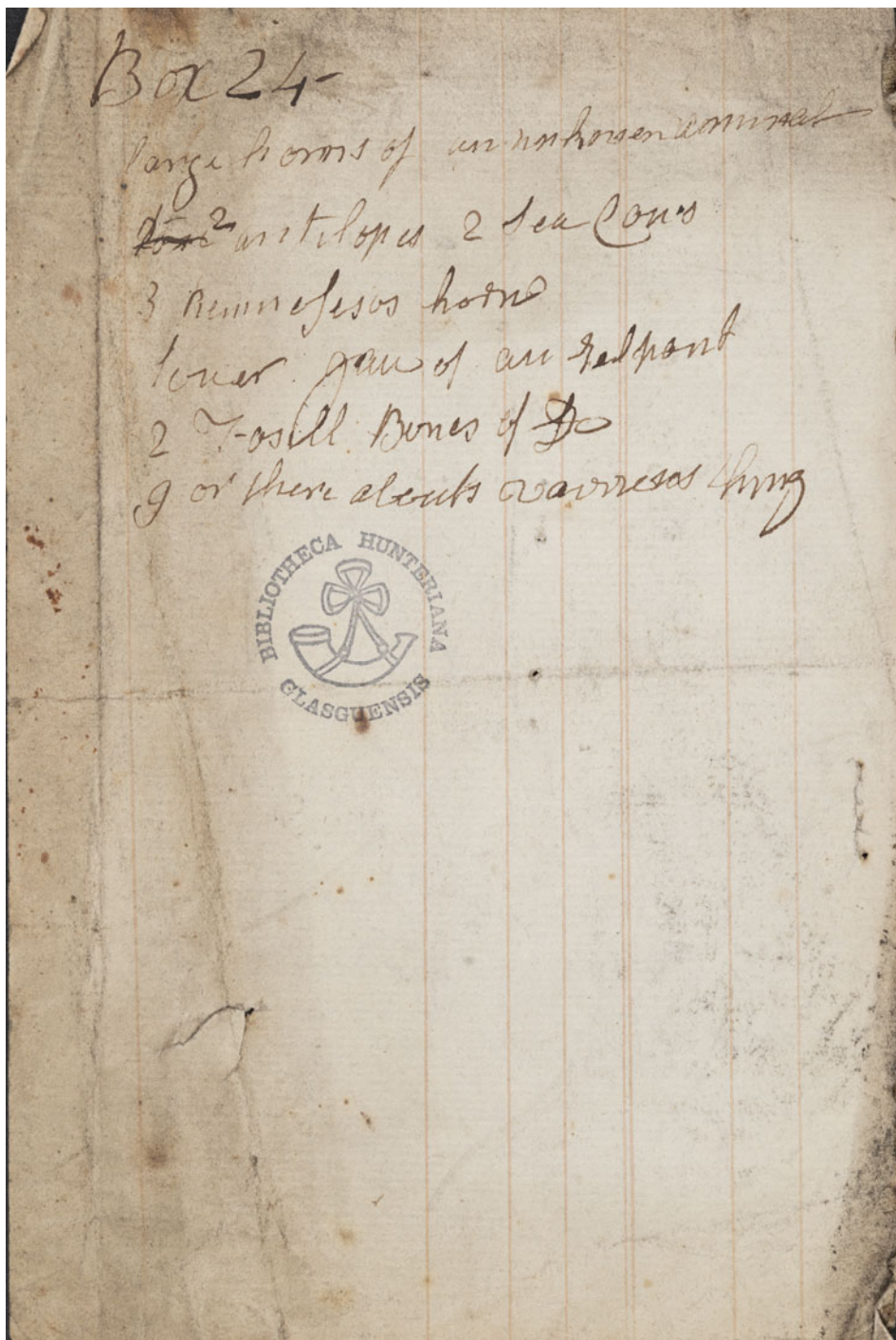


Figure 2. Continued



As one would expect, this inventory depends on what will fit in any given box; size and shape matter more than keeping like with like. Ethnographic artefacts lodge next to horns and heads, the elephant is parcelled by jaw and tusk, horns have lost their identity, detached heads abound, taxonomy be damned. In the catalogue, too, beetles are wanting their heads; the who, what and where of the prominently displayed terracotta bust is ‘unknown at present’; ethnographic artefacts have become detached from geography, use, name (here a spur ‘probably from Mexico’, there a fish hook whose operation is ‘difficult to comprehend’).³⁵ These examples of lost knowledge reiterate the lost things scattered throughout the museum’s paper archive: in 1813 a bar was placed between visitors and the medal cabinet to prevent any from ‘being carried out of the medal room’; in 1837 thieves made off with ‘sixteen or seventeen Roman emperors’ and ‘twelve silver Grecian coins’; in 1848 the daughters of Daniel Halloran, the museum under-keeper, were prohibited from entering the museum after the ‘abstraction’ of items.³⁶ Perhaps most obviously, in May 1824 the museum trustees decided ‘the stuffed Elephant skin was, owing to its original bad preparation, a discredit to the Collection of Natural History in the Museum, & therefore authorized the Keeper to have it destroyed’. (A year later in May 1825, Dr Couper called upon the trustees to investigate the ‘danger of dampness’ in the Elephant room, now *sans* elephant.³⁷) But unlike these omnipresent traces of lost things, the packing slip forces recognition of how much the appearance of typological arrangement is not a matter of the spatial display of objects in the museum, but rather of the verbal and visual grammars of the catalogue. Epistemic coherence is achieved by arranging a confused heap of plaster, bone and skin within the catalogue’s generic and typographic conventions.

Despite its disciplinary function, Laskey’s catalogue also foregrounds nascent disciplinary orders continually transgressed, a condition typical, even endemic, to the paper archive of the Hunterian Museum and many of its counterparts in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe and America. In the examples above, I’ve focused on loss – the misplaced, unnamed, separated, unknown – but the packing slip also reveals the destabilizing effect of contiguity. Museum catalogues of this period reflect the spatial organization of objects. The consequence is a striving toward the formalized expression of bounded areas of knowledge production – what would become modern disciplines – that is continually undermined by proximity. As Delbourgo and Müller-Wille point out, a list functions like a ‘conceptual propinquity engine’, linking and abstracting through procession of this, then this, then this.³⁸ A catalogue might produce coherent groups of birds or minerals, but the effect may just as easily be comic or ridiculous, as Buffon said mockingly of Linnaeus’s organization of

35 Laskey op. cit. (29), pp. 5, 19, 22. This ambiguity reflects the decontextualization of artefacts and their subsequent recontextualization in the museum order.

36 ‘Minutes of the Hunterian Museum Committee entitled “Hunterian Museum records”, 15 Sep 1809–24 Apr 1829’, GUA 11510, Glasgow University Archives. See also Keppie, op. cit. (25), pp. 72–73, 76.

37 ‘Minutes of the Hunterian Museum Committee’, GUA 11510.

38 Delbourgo and Müller-Wille, op. cit. (22), p. 711.

quadrupeds.³⁹ The issue here is not simply that one of these things is not like the other; rather, spatial proximity of object, text or image produces both juxtaposition and mingling, distinction and likeness, disjunction and conjunction. The catalogue is a genre of *convenientia*, what Foucault characterized as ‘a resemblance connected with space in the form of a graduated scale of proximity’:

Those things are ‘convenient’ which come sufficiently close to one another to be in juxtaposition; their edges touch, their fringes intermingle, the extremity of the one also denotes the beginning of the other ... This is why [*convenientia*] pertains less to the things themselves than to the world in which they exist.⁴⁰

For Foucault, the mingling effect of *convenientia* characterized the early modern world view more than the hardline classificatory schemes of the Enlightenment. This assumption, I am suggesting, is lodged within an intellectual history that disregards both material practices and the formal and generic conventions of record-keeping technologies like the museum catalogue. The catalogue is an epistemic genre – it makes objects knowable through its structure – but its material form is as unruly as the objects it represents. In its dual function of setting apart and linking together, the catalogue blurs boundaries even as it instantiates them. As a paper technology of order and system, it is also, irreducibly, a genre that exposes the gaps in human efforts to manage a series of aggregated objects.

This condition pertains to all of the Hunterian Museum’s paper archive, but it is more apparent in some documents than in others. For example, what takes some work to see in Laskey’s printed catalogue is obvious in the earliest donation books. As Laskey points out, both ‘public donation’ and the ‘munificence of the learned body’ that oversaw the museum made ‘valuable additions’ to the collections even in its first seven years.⁴¹ As the donation books and Museum Committee minutes indicate, each passing year expanded the collections. On 25 November 1808 the museum received one of its first donations, ‘A Stone / Turned up by the plough in the parish of Fenwick supposed to have been an ancient Instrument of War / Presented by / The Revd William Boyde Minister of Fenwick’.⁴² From 1809 to 1813, this was supplemented by an eclectic series of gifts:

A Rose Noble of Edward III of England

A Tooth of A Mammoth

Narrative of the Campaign of the British Army commanded by Sir John Moore, by James Moore Esq. Presented by Mrs. Baillie, London

³⁹ As part of his larger critique of artificial systems, Buffon claimed that Linnaeus’s organization of mammals in *Systema Natura* was ‘so gratuitous and bizarre that the Author must have made it that way intentionally’. George Louis LeClerk, Comte de Buffon, *L’histoire naturelle, générale et particulière* (1744–1788); Pietro Corsi (ed.), *Buffon et l’histoire naturelle: L’édition en ligne*, 2011, pp. 20, 39, available at [www.buffon.cnrs.fr](http://www.buffon.cnrs.fr). My translation.

⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p. 18.

⁴¹ Laskey, *op. cit.* (29), p. v.

⁴² ‘Donations to the Hunterian Museum, 1807–1820’, MR 49/2, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

- A Copper Coin in the reign of the Emperor Domitian  
Shells and some curious productions of the West Indies  
A fragment of Petrified Wood found in digging the Ardrossan Canal near Paisley  
A curiously ornamented Purse, made by the natives of America near Hudson's Bay  
The hollow bone of a Whale's Ear  
A plume made of glass, at Birminghame  
Two specimens of Meteoric Stones – one of which fell at Possil near Glasgow on the 5th of April 1804 (vide *Phil. Mag.*: 18th vol p. 371) – The other specimen is part of a meteoric stone that fell in Yorkshire on the 13th Decr 1795 sent to Miss Crawford of Possil by Mr. Sowerby. Both presented by Miss Crawford of Possil  
Three Betle nuts from the Island of Ceylon  
Cap worn by an African King who was sold for a Slave, presented by Mr. Robert Dick, Ironmonger, Glasgow  
A Hair Ball found in the Stomach of a Cow  
Elegy on the Death of Mrs. Mary Edwards written in 1684  
Specimen of true Aventurine, from the large mass found in the ruins of the Triumphal Arch of Julius Caesar, in the valley of Suse, in Piedmont. Presented by J. Laskey Esqr Captn 21st Militia  
Three stuffed birds & a Polecat⁴³

Like local museums established in the same period, in its early years the Hunterian took whatever came its way, from items of scientific interest like Miss Crawford's meteoric stones, to curiosities both local and far-flung, to antiquities and artefacts of dubious origins, to literary productions both contemporary and of antiquarian interest. The organizational principle of the donation book was temporal rather than spatial, the order of acquisition taking precedence over any other schema. The striking juxtapositions (king's cap and cow's hairball, Julius Caesar and a polecat) reflect Laskey's emphasis on the rare, singular, curious, unusual and astonishing. This radical miscellaneousness quickly overran the system adopted to keep track of it. The donation book indicates a gradual trend toward overabundance, even excess. In the first several years, each individual entry fills an entire recto, the versos remaining blank. By 1813, entries appear on both verso and recto and multiple entries are squashed onto each page; by 1817, there are as many as six entries per page, replicating the format of list of donations in a small notebook used for internal record keeping.⁴⁴ This change in format reflects both an upturn in donations – the overall number of items accessioned increases every year – and a concomitant lessening of each donation's prestige on the page. More entries per page amplifies the force of untoward juxtapositions, intermingling the fringes of global and local, rural life

43 'Donations to the Hunterian Museum, 1807–1820', op. cit. (42).

44 'List of donations to the Hunterian Museum, 1807–1822', MR 49/1, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

and industry, zoology and ethnography, science and literature, deep time and imperial history. In the donation book, the museum world is one without borders, unruly things loosed from system, method and theory.

If Laskey's early catalogue foregrounds the limits of its generic imperative to order, arrange and codify, accession records amplify these limits while revealing the emergence of techniques for managing the disorienting effects of proximity. A second donation book begun in 1813 opens with the same large decorative script and one entry per recto, but quickly devolves into a few scattershot entries from 1819, 1829, 1839 and 1845. Other surviving donation books are similarly fragmentary, often begun at moments of upheaval (like the university's move to Gillmorehill in 1870) and abandoned a few years later.⁴⁵ From this evidence, we might simply conclude that museum staff gave up on keeping track. This may be partially true, but the archive also reveals a shift in how accessions were recorded. An early nineteenth-century list in the hand of Robert Jameson of Edinburgh compiled soon after the collections arrived in Glasgow, for example, reorganizes the Trustees Catalogue of minerals to reflect the spatial layout of the museum.⁴⁶ As museum keeper James Couper's remarks in a separate document indicate, this list was designed as a bridge between the Trustees Catalogue (arranged taxonomically by class, genus and species) and the arrangement of specimens in the cabinets and drawers, which separated minerals according to size and cut (rough versus smooth, etc.).⁴⁷ Additions in a different hand and ink indicate that this spatial catalogue also functioned as an ad hoc record of accessions. At number 29, an asterisk in the numerical list on the verso points to 'a Box of specimens of Pyrope deposited by Prof^r Muirhead' and '29^a spec^m of Pyrope from [??] presented by Mr. Arch^d Reid' inserted on the recto. New specimens are also integrated into the list, distinguishable by a superscript letter (a, b, c) and donor information: 'N 436^a Granular Limestone – by Mr. McGregor 25th Sep^t,' 'Iron Glance 2 spec^m presented by Mr. Thos. MacGill, Glasgow.'⁴⁸

As this catalogue indicates, material that might have been entered in a general donation book is instead being integrated directly into discipline-specific catalogues and lists. This trend is especially apparent in parts of the collection in which the museum keeper or an individual university faculty member had a vested concern: with the mineral

45 'Donations, New buildings, 1870–1872', MR 49/5, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

46 'Catalogue of minerals. Early nineteenth century', MR 24, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. The Museum Committee asked James Couper to consult with Jameson about organizing the minerals on 29 October 1809. See 'Minutes of meeting of the Trustees of the Museum. 15 September 1809–15 April 1829', MR 48/1, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

47 As Couper explains, a spatially organized catalogue was necessary 'upon account of the very different magnitude of the specimens which would prevent the larger from going into the smaller drawers, & produce a feeling of incongruity' if the smaller were placed in large drawers. Couper's concerns were both practical and aesthetic: 'one rough, ill favoured specimen, may be highly necessary to complete the Class, Genus, or Species; yet if brought under the eye along with the more elegant & beautiful specimens, that belong to the same division would impair the beauty of the whole'. 'Thoughts upon the arrangement of minerals in a cabinet', MR 42/2, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

48 'Catalogue of minerals', MR 24, pp. 4, 24, 41.

collection, frequent donations were made by Lockhart Muirhead, the first Regius Professor of Natural History from 1807 to 1829, and by the museum's under-keeper in the second half of the nineteenth century, John Young, who was a member of the Glasgow Geologic Society. But even without these drivers, records indicate a gradual shift to specialized accession records across the collections. A list compiled in the second half of the nineteenth century organizes additions to the shell collection by donor, and two volumes labeled 'Catalogue of Shells in the Hunterian Museum' list specimens on the recto pages, reserving the versos for notes on how the item entered the museum (Lanfine Collection, Portland Natural History Society donors, names of individuals).⁴⁹ Extant lists and catalogues may differ in function and thus overarching organization (by geographic origin as with the 'List of British Shells', or by location in the museum), but the catalogues of shells produced over a hundred years replicate the identifying information – including geographic origin and references to publications that establish the genus and species – included in the Trustees Catalogue of 1785. In the context of the university museum, general donation books were repeatedly abandoned over the century because accessions became the province of specialized, discipline-specific record-keeping techniques. Specialized catalogues and records had parcelled up the museum collections long before physical separation began in the twentieth century, making manifest the *longue durée* of disciplinary consolidation. But while methods and practices – the proper way of apprehending a particular set of objects – may have remained stable since the eighteenth century, the paper archive also reveals how the Hunterian collection was disassembled materially through accession, competition and eventually superannuation.

### Anatomical scuffles: a collection of loose ends

In the previous section, I read the paper archive of collection records as a bureaucratic mechanism of order steeped in disruptive potential, characteristics that derive from the formal conventions of genres that list. Reading archival materials through their formal attributes rather than for the information they supply about objects – considering, as Swinney puts it, the museum register as itself a museum object – foregrounds the persistence of Enlightenment order and disorder in nineteenth-century disciplinary striving. My argument above implicitly splits agency between human actions and the paper technologies of record keeping that might thwart an individual's (or committee's, or institution's) aims as much as serve them. In what follows, I return to the part of Hunter's collections with which I began – the anatomical preparations – to reveal the animate life of the collection, a Darwinian scale of development that binds disciplinary adaptation to shifting external factors and competition among groups. The collection's evolution necessarily involves decisions by individuals (donors, the museum keeper, thieves, the professor of anatomy,

49 'List of shells, by John Young. Includes lists of shells presented by Revd Finlay, J.St.C. Gray, H. Dunbar 1871, E.B. Alston, Dr Dunbar', MR 44/6, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections; and 'Catalogue of shells in the Hunterian Museum', vols. 1–2, MR 44/9 and MR 44/10, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

the principle of the university) and aggregate bodies (the Museum Committee, the university faculty, the student body), but it cannot be pinned to the agency or will of any particular person or group. Beyond this, the evolution of the collection is not unidirectional; it does not march progressively toward increasing order that reflects professional and disciplinary norms as they were heralded by nineteenth-century professional societies or university departments. Collections remain messy, chaotic affairs, and the appearance of disorder coalescing into order is merely that – appearance. With this in mind, I now turn to the ways individuals and groups turn the moments of instability to their advantage for the advancement of specific professional goals. Counterintuitively, as I will show, it is the disorder of the documentary archive – and especially instability introduced by losses and gains – that allows a collection to be mobilized for disciplinary ends.

Before their move to the Anatomical Museum in 1912, the anatomical collections were the subject of an acrimonious back-and-forth between the Trustees of the Museum (represented by the Museum Committee and the keeper) and the faculty of the Anatomy Department. This contest ran throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, spurred by the importance of anatomy in medical research and training in this period. In the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, gross anatomy was the ‘queen of medical sciences’, and it was fundamental to any claim for the ‘scientific’ foundations of medicine.⁵⁰ Dissection and pathological anatomy ensured the empirical basis of medicine, thus confirming it as a scientific discipline. Access to and control of the anatomical preparations in the Hunterian Museum were thus a hot-button issue, as the records of the Museum Committee’s meetings indicate. On 1 August 1820 ‘the Museum Committee ... [was] instructed to appoint two or three respectable medical men, to inspect the anatomical preparations in the Museum & give a report on their state to the Trustees’.⁵¹ By May 1822, the trustees had decided that ‘no person shall be entitled to have any of the presses opened, for the purpose of examining the anatomical preparations, unless they have procured an order signed by five of the Trustees, of which Trustees there must be one of the Medical Professors at least.’⁵² This prohibition spurred a response: in 1824 ‘a Petition from certain Students of Medicine was laid before the Meeting requesting the Trustees to take under their consideration what farther liberty could be granted to them to inspect the anatomical preparations’. As borrowing records from 1808 to 1842 indicate, faculty could and did take preparations out of the museum for use in their teaching.⁵³ But in 1840 the Museum Committee decided that ‘the anatomical preparations in the Museum, should not on any account be removed

50 Bynum, *op. cit.* (6), p. 12. As historians of medicine have noted, there were many versions of ‘scientific medicine’ and what made medicine ‘scientific’ changed over the course of the nineteenth century. See Bynum, *op. cit.* (6), p. xi, and Mark W. Weatherall, ‘Making medicine scientific: empiricism, rationality, and quackery in mid-Victorian Britain’, *Social History of Medicine* (1996) 9, pp. 175–176.

51 ‘Minutes of the Hunterian Museum Committee entitled “Hunterian Museum records”’, GUA 11510, Glasgow University Archives.

52 ‘Minutes’, *op. cit.* (51).

53 ‘Register of anatomical preparations and minerals borrowed. 1808–1842’, MR 26, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. This register is first organized by organ borrowed, later switching to name of borrower.



from the room in which they are placed in the Museum'.⁵⁴ Despite this, in 1841 professors of anatomy were again granted permission to take preparations from the museum. This allowance appears to have provoked a response from the museum keeper, William Couper, who submitted 'that it would contribute to the security & usefulness of the anatomical preparations of Dr. Hunter as exhibited in the new room if they were protected by an Iron Trellice [*sic*], a pattern of which he presented to the meeting'.⁵⁵ In conjunction with this proposed new barrier, Couper reported that a thousand copies of a new catalogue of preparations had been published, which students of medicine could purchase for three shillings. Purchasing the catalogue would also grant them access to the museum (presumably to look at the preparations behind the trellis).

Similar disputes over how and where anatomical preparations ought to be used continued to resurface throughout the middle of the century. The spats pitted the rights of faculty and medical students to use the preparations for educational purposes against the museum keeper's duty to protect the collections from ending in disorder, damage and destruction. The terms of Hunter's bequest stood behind the debate: Hunter's London will explicitly states that his collections should be 'kept and preserved' by the university 'for ever', but also that they were bequeathed to the university for the 'improvement of knowledge' and specifically for 'the Improvement of the Students'.⁵⁶ This tension appears in the 'Minutes of the Museum Committee' from 25 April 1849, which records the request of Allen Thomson, professor of anatomy from 1848 to 1877, to hold classes in the Hunterian Museum, an indirect benefit of which would be 'the increased interest which the students might acquire in the collection, from obtaining some knowledge of its content, of which they may be said as a body to be at present entirely ignorant.'⁵⁷ Thomson's request was granted on the condition that the students were not to handle the preparations and he was to undertake at the same time a careful inventory and repair of the collection.

Thomson had already begun this process the previous year, when he started a 'Daily register of objects ... added to the anatomical museum'. Thomson began this specialized accession register to establish which preparations belonged to whom. He developed a system of labels as follows:

H. Hunterian Collection – or supposed to belong to it

J. From Dr Jeffrays Collection

T. From Dr. Allen Thomsons Collection

T.C. Preparations made and acquired by Dr. Allen Thomson since coming to Glasgow


54 'Minute book of the Committee of the Hunterian Museum, 2 Aug. 1820–31 Dec. 1842', GUA 11563, Glasgow University Archives. This appears to be a fair copy of MR 48/1, housed in University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. How these items ended up in two different archives is part of another, later story of disaggregation of the paper archive itself.

55 'Minute book', op. cit. (54).

56 'MS copy of William Hunter's will and codicil. 19th century', MS Gen 1000, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. Quoted in Keppie, op. cit. (25), p. 32.

57 'Minutes of meeting of the Trustees of the Museum. 1848–1883', MR 48/2, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Collection of Anatomical Preparations  
belonging to the late Dr. Jeffrey.



Wet Preparations.	
1. In turpentine. (renewed) ^{of prep. set up on}	73
2. In spirits. (renewed) ^{by Dr. Thomson}	260
3. In spirits. (sufficient) at present ^{in small stop room} held in Hunterian Museum	220
4. Ditto. (in a bad state) ^{behind} in the room.	162
Dry preparations in jars. principally calculi, diseased bones. &c	42
Whole Preparations in bottles.	757
Several more jars full, not tied up.	
-----	
Set of teeth, bones, calculi &c in glass frames	19
Lymphatic prepar ^{ns} in ditto	10
Series of Corrosions (in disrepair) ^{most of them in a state of decay &amp; irreparable}	10
Wax & plaster models	
Sections of Ear. & teeth. horns &c.	

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Figure 3. 'Daily register of objects ... added to the anatomical museum, 1848-1877', MR 49/4, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

- G. Preparations acquired by the College
- U. Preparations belonging to the University
- M. From Dr. Mackenzie

B. From the Burns Collection⁵⁸

As Thomson's list indicates, by 1848 some preparations had migrated from the Hunterian Museum proper to the Anatomy Classroom; it was no longer clear what had come from William Hunter's collection and what had been added later; and there had been a large influx of preparations, the provenance of which needed to be established. If no one knew what part of the collection a preparation belonged to, determining who should be allowed to use it, in what way and where would prove difficult. Two years after commencing this catalogue, Thomson's system had broken down: the tidy columns and labels disappear, items appear solely by date of accession, description becomes scanty or is amplified until the inventory begins to resemble research notes (as with a detailed list of brains specifying the name, age and cause of death for each 'donor'). The loss of provenance was further complicated by Thomson's work with existing collections: sometime after 1848, he recorded the number of existing skeletons he 'rearticulated' and noted that '112 Hunterian dried vascular preparations [were] cleaned painted & varnished / 20 laid aside as useless / These in the Museum adjoining the Anat. Classroom'.⁵⁹ Thomson's curation of the collection may have involved deaccessioning items deemed 'useless', but these items (and perhaps all the cleaned and repaired preparations) ended up in the classroom next to the anatomy theatre instead of in the Hunterian Museum.

Bryce's 1912 memo (with which I opened this essay) suggests that scuffles over the anatomical preparations were finally resolved by external circumstance: a large accession of archeological material spurred the relocation of the entire anatomy collection to the Anatomy Building. What actually happened, as Thomson's registers and lists attest, was far less sudden and dramatic, as an unknown but considerable number of preparations had already been removed from the Hunterian collection before 1912, probably in the decade after 1848 when Thomson took up his posts and began the inventory of origin and ownership. For example, the collection of Thomson's predecessor, Dr James Jeffray, was acquired by the university after his death in 1848, when it was recorded, assessed and curated by Thomson.

The records of this process begin by establishing what the newly accessioned collection contained and what Thomson had done toward conserving the preparations in it, with additional information added in pencil (here represented in brackets):

## Wet Preparations

1. In turpentine (renewed) 73  
[& prep set up anew by D. A. Thomson]
2. In spirits (renewed) 260  
[classroom]

⁵⁸ 'Daily register of objects ... added to the anatomical museum, 1848-1877', MR 49/4, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

⁵⁹ 'List of wet preparations acquired since October 1848, by Allen Thomson', MR 41/7, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. This item is misleadingly labelled, as it contains not only wet preparations but also dry preparations, casts in plaster, and 'work done last summer and autumn'.

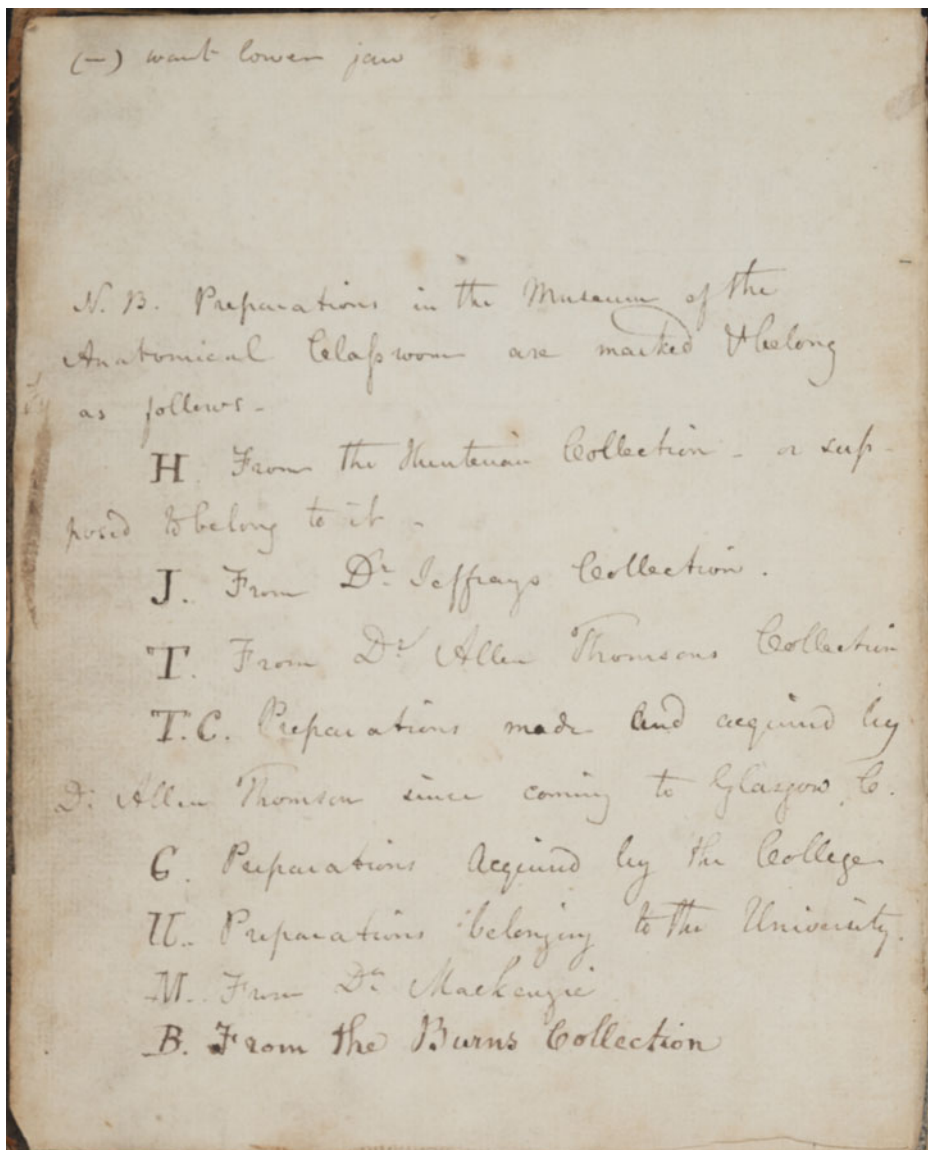


Figure 4. 'List of anatomical preparations belonging to the late Dr Jeffray, c.1848', in the hand of Allen Thomson, MR 41/6, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

3. In spirits (sufficient) at present  
[placed] in Hunterian Museum 220
  4. Ditto (in a bad state) 162  
[in the room behind the Hunterian Museum]
- Dry preparations in jars principally  
calculi, diseased bones, &c. 42

Whole preparations in bottles 757⁶⁰

While a large number of anatomical preparations were ‘placed’ in the museum, others were deposited in the anatomy ‘classroom’, a parsing explained in a long note on the back of the inventory:

The Professor of Anatomy stated it as his opinion that it was most desirable to ~~place~~ improve the condition of the Anatomical department of the Hunterian Museum ~~on as good a footing as~~ and that all valuable preparations illustrating healthy and morbid anatomy should henceforth be added to that Collection: but ~~that~~ as it is necessary that an illustrative set of specimens should be kept for the use of the Anatomy Class, he proposed that a selection ~~of the preparations~~ should be made from the collection purchased by the College ~~should be made~~ of those preparations which appeared proper to be placed in the Hunterian Museum, while those best adapted for illustration in teaching should be kept in the Apartment adjoining the Anatomy classroom. The professor farther stated that it was not his intention henceforward to retain any Anatomical Collection of his own, with the exception of a few preparations connected with researches in which he might be engaged.⁶¹

Here, Thomson attempts to negotiate between the competing claims of the faculty and the museum by pointing to financial investment. Rather than seeking to ‘borrow’ preparations from the museum as his predecessors had done, Thomson argues for acquiring ‘necessary’ preparations for the anatomy classroom by drawing on those ‘purchased by the College’. By pointing out who paid for a particular set of objects, Thomson promotes his own pedagogical interests without making a stand on the terms of Hunter’s bequest. His strategy here is clearly related to the ‘Daily register’ above, which distinguishes preparations owned by the college from those owned by the university, and both from those belonging to Hunter’s original collection. Thomson’s argument, recorded only on the back of an inventory, did not spur any official change, but the slow disaggregation of the anatomical collection continued unabated. Near the end of his tenure at Glasgow in 1877, Thomson was still adding to the teaching collection: on the reverse of a list of his own anatomical preparations and drawings, a note adds that ‘it was his wish they should be added to the *class* collection: the full use of the whole being retained by him’.⁶²

Thomson’s manoeuvring was enabled by a number of factors. Most obviously, Thomson stepped into Jeffray’s position as professor of anatomy after his death and oversaw the accession of his large collection of preparations. In this role, Thomson made decisions about the condition, appropriate use and value of the preparations, decisions that could support his argument that some were better suited to teaching than to museum display. Further, the accession of Jeffray’s collection came during a period when other kinds of instability rocked the museum. As detailed by Lawrence Keppie, 1848 was also the year that under-keeper Daniel Halloran’s daughters were caught steal-

60 ‘List of anatomical preparations belonging to the late Dr Jeffray, c.1848’, MR 41/6, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

61 ‘List of anatomical preparations’, op. cit. (60).

62 ‘List of Dr Allen Thomson’s collection of anatomical preparations, drawings, etc., c.1877?’, MR 41/11, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections. My emphasis.

ing minerals from the museum and just missed legal prosecution by the faculty.⁶³ Beyond this immediate distraction, after the death of Professor James Couper in 1836, Professor William Couper served as the sole museum keeper, a position he neglected; a new keeper was not appointed on his death in 1857, when members of the Museum Committee (including Thomson) took responsibility for parts of the museum collection corresponding to their specialized expertise until the appointment of John Young as keeper in 1866. Telescoping out further to the broader institutional context, the 1858 Universities Act transferred governance and financial responsibility for the university from the faculty to the Senate, a shift that consolidated the museum and university finances. The museum had been in trouble financially since 1841 when the Museum Trust exhausted its funds; it was only in 1858 that an annual financial grant from the college to the museum was proposed.⁶⁴ The ten to fifteen years at mid-century thus witnessed major accessions to the anatomical collections along with considerable instability in the museum's administration and financial footing, and this was accompanied by shifts in the power relations among the keeper, Museum Committee, faculty and college. Add to this the degradation of the museum building – in 1851 the outer walls required repair to stop the stones from crumbling, and in 1857 inadequate drainage threatened the basement – and the instability of this moment in the Hunterian's history comes into full view.

Thomson's gradual parsing of the anatomical collection in the service of training students in the regularized methods and practices of anatomy was not simply enabled, but actually propelled, by the disorderly state of the museum and its collections. The 'working collection' of anatomical preparations was mobilized for supporting and implementing discipline-specific norms precisely when the bureaucratic systems of the museum at large had been derailed. A host of factors – deteriorating buildings, theft and damage to the collections, changes in governance, finances, personnel – allowed the collections to be materially detached from the Hunterian Museum and spatially reorganized in the service of medical training and research. Crucially, this did not require Thomson's records to be complete or for his actions to be institutionally sanctioned. It was enough that circumstances provided an opening and his efforts – ending in a fizzled organizational schema, a few inventories, and two scrawled pronouncements – filled the gap.

## Conclusion

If the anatomical collections were being reorganized, somewhat surreptitiously, for disciplinary ends in the mid-nineteenth century, what propelled the removal of the remainder of this once hotly contested collection from the Hunterian Museum in 1912? Much had changed by the end of the century, both in museums' attitudes toward certain collections and in the standing of anatomy within the medical profession. As Bryce clearly recognized, public interest in ethnographic and anthropological material was

⁶³ Keppie *op. cit.* (25), pp. 76–7.

⁶⁴ Keppie *op. cit.* (25), pp. 76–7.



high in 1912 – the ‘museum period’ of anthropology is typically dated in the years between 1840 and 1920, although historians differ on the exact date range – and displaying these materials was likely to attract more visitors than a collection of anatomical preparations.⁶⁵ Further, control over the anatomical preparations was formally shifted to the Anatomy Department at the moment of the collection’s waning relevance. As historians of medicine have noted, gross anatomy gradually lost its centrality in medical research and training over the second half of the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ As Claude Bernard put it in 1865, ‘the true sanctuary of medical science is the laboratory’.⁶⁷ By the end of the century, gross anatomy was seen as ‘distanced from the methods, instruments, and subjects identified with precision, exactness, and the larger cluster of epistemological, professional, and aesthetic ideals the experimental laboratory was made to represent’.⁶⁸ While spurring the emergence of new subdisciplines within medicine, the rise of laboratory science also provoked changes in existing disciplines: at mid-century, physiology was reoriented from the study of organs (the province of gross anatomy) to focus on processes of living bodies, and by the early twentieth century tissue-based approaches and microscopy had become the standard research methods across medical subdisciplines.⁶⁹

This new focus is materialized in the catalogues of anatomical preparations donated by Thomson’s successor as professor of anatomy, John Cleland, whose 1901 *Catalogue of Anatomical Objects* concludes with a promise of further catalogues, one of crania (published in 1909) and another of ‘slides for the microscope’.⁷⁰ The year 1901 also saw the appointment of a ‘Lecturer on Embryology and University Assistant in Anatomy’ and the establishment of an Embryological Laboratory ‘in connection with the New Anatomical Laboratory’, an initiative funded by Thomson’s trustees.⁷¹ Even as it was overtaken and colonized by specialized disciplines that better fit trends in medical research, the new facilities meant that the Anatomy Department suddenly had space to house the anatomical collections.⁷² As these shifts indicate, what

65 Bill Brown, ‘Objects, others, and us (the refabrication of things)’, *Critical Inquiry* (2010) 36, pp. 183–217, 183–4, esp. n. 2.

66 Andrew Cunningham and Perry Wilson, ‘Introduction’, in Cunningham and Wilson (eds.), *The Laboratory Revolution in Medicine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 1–13, 3.

67 Claude Bernard, *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, trans. Henry Copley Greene, New York: Schuman, 1949, p. 146.

68 Warner and Rizzolo, op. cit. (6), p. 408.

69 Cunningham and Wilson, op. cit. (66), p. 3. See also Karin Tybjerg, ‘From bottled babies to biobanks: medical collections in the twenty-first century’, in Knoeff and Zwijnenberg, *The Fate of Anatomical Collections*, op. cit. (17), pp. 263–278; and Close-Koenig, op. cit. (20), pp. 224–226.

70 *Catalogue of Anatomical Objects: Constituting the Main Part of the Museum of Professor Cleland, Handed Over by Agreement for the Use of the Anatomical Department to the University of Glasgow, Subject to the Terms of a Signed Agreement between Him and the University Court*, Partick: Printed by John Thomlinson, Stanley Works, 1901.

71 Court Meeting Minutes from 12 October 1899, 14 December 1899, 13 December 1900, 28 March 1901, GB 248 GUA C1/1/6–9, Records of Glasgow University Court, Glasgow University Archives.

72 George Weisz notes that specialization took hold in Britain later in the nineteenth century than in France or Germany due to hostility from the medical establishment in London. George Weisz, ‘The emergence of medical specialization in the nineteenth century’, *Bulletin of History of Medicine* (2003) 77, pp. 536–575.

might appear as a calculated move to consolidate the place of anatomy within the discipline of medicine in 1912 actually ran counter to emergent disciplinary norms and practices. Instead of reinforcing the evolution of medicine as a discipline, the 1912 removal of the anatomical collection to the newly refurbished Anatomy Department was an 'outcome of the interaction of uncoordinated, even conflicting, forces', including public interest in other collections, lack and availability of space, and a sea change in anatomy's place in medical research and training.⁷³

Cleland's catalogues – a second volume was published in 1910, the year after he retired from his post – can be read as the last gasp of the squabbles over preparations that dominate the first half of the nineteenth century. Cleland's publications emerged from the same impetus as Thomson's attempts to establish ownership of preparations with lists. Cleland's title for the apparently self-published volume is *Catalogue of Anatomical Objects: Constituting the Main Part of the Museum of Professor Cleland, Handed Over by Agreement for the Use of the Anatomical Department to the University of Glasgow*, with the 1901 catalogue adding the phrase *Subject to the Terms of a Signed Agreement between Him and the University Court*. By incorporating the legal agreement into the catalogue's title, Cleland made absolutely certain his preparations would not be added to the Hunterian Museum. At precisely the same moment, the Hunterian Museum was supporting efforts to establish which anatomical preparations were part of William Hunter's original collection. In 1900, John Teacher, a Glasgow medical school graduate and under-keeper of the museum's anatomical and pathological collections, compiled the *Catalogue of the Anatomical and Pathological Preparations of Dr. William Hunter in the Hunterian Museum*. Teacher's renewal of interest in Hunter and his anatomical collections finds its corollary in museum keeper John Young's *William Hunter: Physician, Anatomist, Founder of the Hunterian Museum* (1901), which celebrates Hunter's achievements in the medical field. In sum, ten years before all the anatomical preparations finally became a fully accessible 'working' collection for anatomy faculty and students, a portion of those collections were simultaneously being transformed into a 'unique' collection through historical interest in Hunter and his bequest. Ironically enough, it was only when museum staff began to treat the anatomical preparations as historical objects, and these same objects had lost their centrality to medical research and training, that the collection was moved from the Hunterian Museum to a disciplinarily organized academic department.

The case of the Hunterian Museum and its anatomy collections points to the difficulties involved in deploying material objects for disciplinary ends. Collections may provide the material basis for disciplines, but the end of a collection does not necessarily reflect the confirmation or evolution of disciplinary norms. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, the scuffles over the preparations, Thomson's attempts to catalogue ownership, and the gradual redistribution of collections through curatorial work underscore the importance of anatomy to the scientific aspirations of the medical profession. The redistribution of the collections in 1912 signals the evolution of disciplinary norms – and particularly a shift in the practices and methods of inquiry that underwrote 'scientific'

73 Golinski, op. cit. (18), p. 69.

medicine – but not in the way we might imagine. The collections reflected where the discipline had been rather than where it was headed, and their material solidity – the need to house, curate and keep track of them – made them more embarrassments than riches.

Reading archival materials through their formal attributes rather than simply for the information they supply about objects demonstrates that the evolution of collections is not unidirectional.⁷⁴ Collections do not march progressively toward increasing order that keeps pace with and confirms professional and disciplinary norms. Catalogues and donation books in the Hunterian archive do, however, indicate a gradual shift to specialized, discipline-specific accession records across the collections, and discipline-specific record keeping was deployed to marshal the anatomical collection in support of disciplinary protocols in the mid-nineteenth century. That said, it is *disorder* in the documentary archive and physical collections – and especially instabilities introduced by losses and gains – that allows a collection to be mobilized for disciplinary ends. Reading the catalogues, inventories and lists, we grasp the entropic quality of managing collections, the incessant tilt toward disorder, the continual petering out of energy. These paper technologies reflect changing epistemic goals and physical conditions – the evolving ends of collections – and even as they fail to marshal and control objects, they evidence the dynamic and contingent process of disciplinary formation and transformation.

74 Swinney, op. cit. (21), p. 31.